

PUTTING THE FINGER ON FROG FUNGUS

Research into a major potential threat to Western Australia's unique frog species has received a \$20,000 boost from the Department of Conservation and Land Management (CALM).

The fungus—named *Batrachyrium dendrobatidis*—has been identified as a possible cause of significant local extinctions of frogs in eastern Australia and central America, and was identified in WA for the first time late in 1998.

The research will involve examining tissue samples from frogs to determine the distribution of the fungus, and an assessment of its potential conservation significance.

Key steps include:

- investigating samples from frogs and tadpoles already in collections, with priority to be given to species currently classified as threatened;
- field sampling of threatened species; and
- screening of tadpoles currently sold in pet shops.

Early follow-up work was undertaken by the WA Museum, with assistance from CALM, staff from James Cook University (Townsville), The Australian Animal Health Laboratory, and members of the Alcoa of Australia Frogwatch Program.

In February, CALM established a working group to plan conservation actions. The group comprises experts from CALM, WA Museum, The University of Western Australia and the WA Quarantine and Inspection Service.

Among the key recommendations of the working group were:

- the study into the distribution of the fungus;
- implementation of a wetland quarantine program, involving restrictions on field research, survey licences issued under the Wildlife Conservation Act, and promotion of a standard quarantine protocol to all people working in and around south-west wetland areas;
- continuing the moratorium on the sale of tadpoles in WA pet shops;
- seeking Federal Government sponsorship of a national workshop on management of the threats posed by the fungus;
- awareness campaigns, targeting fruit and vegetable importers, seeking notification of frogs detected in stock shipments; and
- developing a program of fungus-susceptibility trials for key frog species.

All recommendations are being implemented and the study is expected to be completed before the end of 1999.

It is estimated that there are about 80 frog species in WA, about half of which are found only in this State.

Scientists involved in the research would like the whole community to work with them in limiting the spread of the fungus. People can help by not releasing frogs or tadpoles into the wild, and those who have them as pets could



phone CALM's Wildlife Branch on (08) 9334 0455 or the WA Museum on (08) 9427 2826 for advice.

People finding dead frogs are urged to report their location to the WA Museum or CALM's Wildlife Branch as soon as possible. The public is also asked not to transport wet soil or other material from one wetland area to another.

Copies of the quarantine protocol are available from CALM or via the Internet at: <http://www.jcu.edu.au/school/phtm/PHTM/frogs/ampdis.htm>

Above: *Motorbike frog (Litoria moorei)*, sometimes known as *green and gold bell frog*.

Photo – Babs & Bert Wells/CALM

Winner of the 1998 Alex Harris Medal for excellence in science and environment reporting.

LANDSCOPE

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What does the future hold for our karri forest? Research provides some interesting insights. See page 18.



The photographic excellence of WA team Babs and Bert Wells was driven by a love of the job. See page 10.



'Growing Gnangara Park', on page 35, continues the story of WA's largest proposed outer suburban native parkland.



Many WA women have played important roles in the conservation of our natural resources. Some of them feature in our story on page 41.



Partnerships are important. Many private sector businesses and individuals are active partners in protecting our natural heritage. See page 47.

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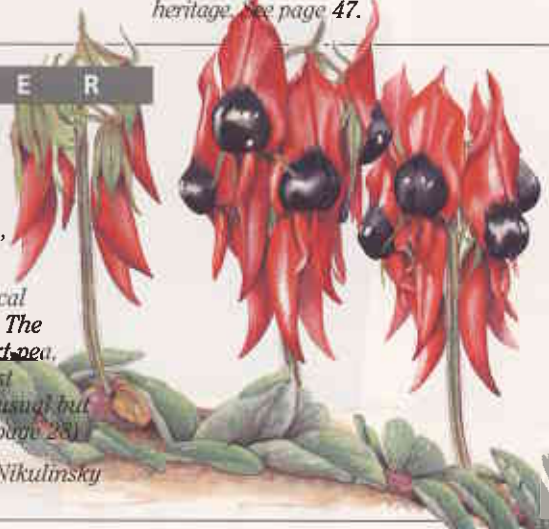
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COVER

The Dampier collection returns briefly to Western Australia for an exhibition at the WA Museum. The specimens' scientific interest is limited, but their historical significance is immense. The illustration is of the *Sturt-pea*, and Dampier was the first person to collect this unusual but magnificent plant. (See page 28)

Illustration by Philippa Nikulinsky



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