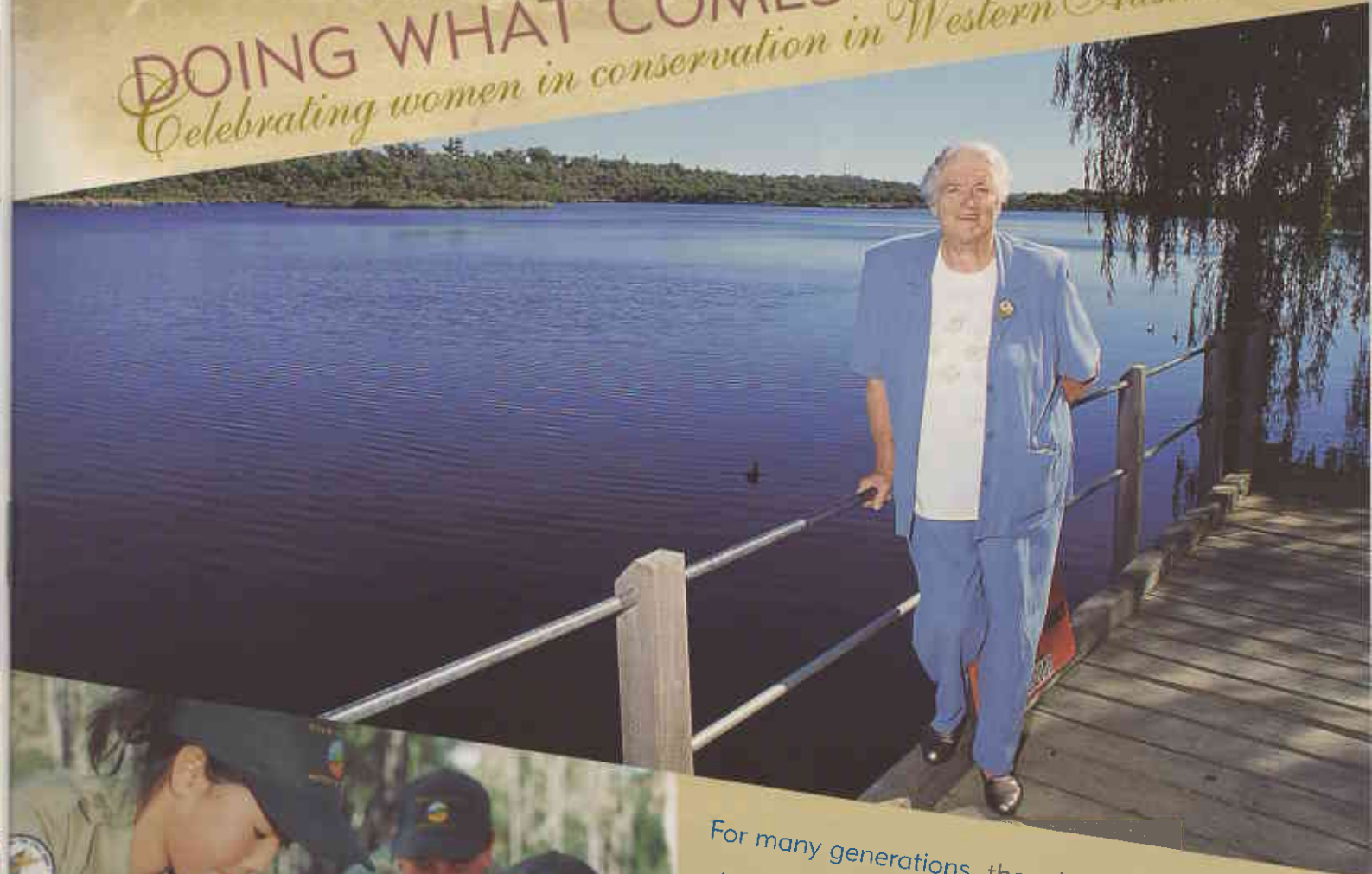


DOING WHAT COMES NATURALLY

Celebrating women in conservation in Western Australia



For many generations, there have been thousands of women in Western Australia for whom conserving, studying and managing the environment has been a way of life, a crusade, a means of self-expression, a career, or any combination of these. We pay tribute to a notable few of them.

by Tammie Reid, Suzanne Curry and Mandy Clews

This year, Western Australia celebrates 100 years of women's suffrage. At the same time, we celebrate the achievement of women in conservation and land management, a constant factor in the face of monumental social change.

The story of conservation ethics in this State belongs as much to women as to men. Long before Europeans arrived, Aboriginal women were gathering plants for food and medicine. During and after colonisation, women worked on the land through agriculture, botanical collection and illustration, conservation and politics. All through history, women's presence in the landscape has been as constant, their practices as influential, and their contribution to knowledge and sound environmental practices as significant as men's. Here, in a series of short 'snapshots', we pay homage to just a few Western Australian women who have shaped the way we understand and interact with our environment.

Above right: Wedding portrait of Georgiana Molloy, painted in London just before she emigrated to WA. Photo courtesy of the Bunbury family and in memory of their own daughter, Georgiana

Below: (Main) Opening of Kings Park terraces by Lady Margaret Forrest. (Inset) Photo portrait of Lady Margaret Forrest. Photo courtesy of Don Forrest

Below right: A beautiful glimpse from one of the Kings Park grottos, showing Melville Water and the Canning River in the distance. Photo courtesy of Kings Park archives



GEORGIANA MOLLOY: A LONELY PASSION

In 1830, when delicate, cultured Georgiana Molloy left behind the comforts of wealthy society in England to settle in Augusta, on the south-west coast, with her husband Captain Molloy, she would have had no idea of the hardship and loneliness that lay ahead. With few other families around, she was left to cope alone for long periods while her husband attended to business in Perth. She bore seven children, buried two of them, and suffered hunger and sadness through year after year of poor harvests and social isolation. It was Lady Stirling, wife of Governor Stirling, who came to her rescue by suggesting to her cousin, amateur botanist Captain James Mangles, that he write to Mrs Molloy proposing an exchange of botanical specimens. Over the years, collecting and describing specimens and seeds to send to Captain Mangles in London became a passion. By the time her life was tragically

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Top: A view through one of the Kings Park grottos to the Swan River.

Photo courtesy of Kings Park archives.
Centre: Brenda James, wife of retired National Park Ranger Jack James.
Photo – Chris Garnett/CALM

Below: The CALM Bush Rangers program looks set to inspire a whole new generation of women in conservation.
Photo – Rolf Perey

cut short by the privations of pioneer living, Georgiana Molloy's enthusiasm and talent for botany had made Western Australia's remarkable floral heritage known throughout the world.

MARGARET FORREST: QUALITY OF LIFE

Although history credits Western Australia's first Premier, Sir John Forrest, with the proclamation of Kings Park, anecdotal evidence shows it was a decision strongly influenced by his wife, Margaret. Certainly, Margaret Forrest believed strongly in the role of nature in civilising a community; in the importance of having parks where families could seek recreation and contact with the environment. Although she was a skilled botanical artist, her ongoing contribution to Kings Park was more intellectual than practical; she took the opportunity of frequent trips to England to gather ideas for the landscape architecture of the Park.



MAY HOLMAN: FOREST COMMUNITIES

Politics and trade unions were flowing in May Holman's veins when she became the first Labor woman to be elected to Parliament in Australia. She succeeded her father in 1925 as the Member for Forrest, a federal electorate in south-western Western Australia, having served as his confidential secretary when he had been General Secretary of the Timber Workers' Union. She knew intimately the way of life of the small timber towns in the south-west forests, and understood, perhaps better than anyone else of her time, the place of communities in the forest and the delicate balance of social needs and natural resource management. Within her first year of entering Parliament she introduced the Timber Industry Regulation Bill, enacted in 1926, which improved the conditions of workers in the timber industry.

JUNE CRAIG: A STRONG COMMUNITY COMMITMENT

Another 50 years were to pass before Western Australia appointed its first female minister with a forestry-related portfolio and its second-ever female cabinet Minister, June Craig. It was June's life in the rural town of Dardanup, as a mother, farmer and employer of new migrants, that brought to her attention the disturbing lack of community support, both materially and emotionally, for migrants and rural women. In 1972, June established the Citizens' Advice Bureau and Good Neighbour Council in Bunbury. In 1974,



she became the Liberal member for the former seat of Wellington and went on to become Minister for Lands and Forests in 1977-78. During this time, she was responsible for the development of the General Working Plan for State Forests in Western Australia No. 86. This Plan represented a milestone in the history of forestry in WA. For the first time, the whole range of forest land-use objectives, together with the policies and management strategies designed to achieve them, were stated in a single document and made public. Her strong community involvement continues to this day and has included her becoming Australia's first female national president of the Save the Children Fund. In 1994, June was awarded an AM (Member in the Order of Australia) to honour her contribution to community and charities.

BESSIE RICHSBIETH: THE CRUSADER

It was a cold winter's day in 1964 when 89-year-old Bessie Richsbieth hitched up her skirt and waded into the Swan River to confront bulldozers in protest against further reclamation of land to complete the Narrows Bridge. Since her youth, she had been devoted to campaigning for women's and children's rights, and a few years earlier had led a successful fight to preserve Kings Park from a recreational aquatic centre development. But nothing captured the public imagination more than this simple and powerful display of an elderly woman's will and determination. Although attempts to stop the reclamation of the land were unsuccessful, her gesture set a whole generation of Western Australians free

Above right: In the 1920s, May Holman travelled extensively along bush tracks and forest roads within her timber industry based electorate.

Photo courtesy of the Australian Labour Party

Above far right: Bessie Rischbeith, pioneer feminist and environmental activist, confronting the bulldozers at Mounts Bay in 1961.

Photo courtesy of the West Australian Newspaper Archives.

Right: June Craig in her role as Minister for Lands and Forests 1977-78. Seen here in 1978 at a gift exchange of an agile wallaby from the Perth Zoo to Japan's Meno Zoo.

Photo courtesy of June Craig





Above: Magda Wittwer was inspirational to all those who came in contact with her in appreciating and understanding WA's native flora.
Photo courtesy Brian Moss

Left: *Darwinia wittwerorum* named in honor of Magda.
Photo - Bob Dixon



to express their passion for the environment through activism. In 1994, the Conservation Council of Western Australia created an award in her honour: the Bessie Richsbeith Conservation Award is presented annually to celebrate and acknowledge the efforts of people working to protect Western Australia's environment.

MAGDA WITTWER: A QUIET ACHIEVER

Shy and reclusive by nature, botanist Magda Wittwer made an enormous contribution to Western Australian conservation through the survey and mapping work she carried out as assistant to then Director of Kings Park, J.S. Beard, in the 1960s. But perhaps her greatest gift to the State was through her voluntary work in training people to propagate native plants and helping schools to set up native plant nurseries. Her quiet dedication and determination were inspiring to all who met her. Many credit her with introducing and establishing in Western Australia the novel concept that there is value in cultivating native plants in their own environment, and appreciating their intrinsic rather than their exotic value. Fittingly, her name is commemorated in a beautiful Western Australian plant, *Darwinia wittwerorum*. It was on a field trip to the Stirling Range to continue work with her husband, collecting, studying and identifying the remarkable Darwinia species, that Magda suffered an untimely and fatal aneurysm.

MARION BLACKWELL: FLYING HIGH

For many, the name of Marion Blackwell is synonymous with conservation in Western Australia. Her achievements demonstrate that women can make an esteemed career in conservation and be at the centre of decision-making and policy direction. Marion established herself as a

Left: Marion Blackwell in the Chinese Garden, part of the award-winning landscapes she designed for Murdoch University. Her particular interests have centred around the appropriate use of adapted plant species in landscape design to increase quality of life.
Photo - Chris Garnett/CALM

professional botanist, landscape planner and designer, as well as a well-respected academic, before being appointed a member of the State Environmental Protection Authority and an inaugural member of Western Australia's National Parks and Nature Conservation Authority, of which she is deputy chair. She has brought her botanical expertise and broad background knowledge of the State, in particular the arid areas, to many boards and advisory bodies in Western Australia and Australia, including the West Australian Flora Industry Advisory Committee, the Western Australian Threatened Species and Communities Consultative Committee, the State Salinity Council, the State Gravel Council, and the Western Australia Weed Strategy Steering Committee.

RICA ERICKSON: INSPIRING OTHERS

The many books written or illustrated by prominent botanist, author and artist Rica Erickson have inspired hundreds of amateur and professional Western Australian flora enthusiasts. Rica has produced many publications, from technical papers to glossy books, not least among them the orchid-spotter's bible, *Orchids of the West*, and the seminal *Flowers and Plants of Western Australia* (co-authored with A.S. George, N.G. Marchant, and M.K. Morcombe). Rica is also a mother, historian, farmer's wife, sportswoman, naturalist and Country Women's Association (CWA) activist. She has been awarded an honorary doctorate from the University of Western Australia for history, the Order of Australia, and WA Citizen of the Year prize for 1980. Dr Erickson's name has been commemorated in at least three species of plants in Western Australia (including the orchid *Caladenia ericksonae*), and more recently in part of Western Australia's conservation estate: the Rica Erickson Nature Reserve is located in the Moora District, about 15 kilometres south-west of Calingiri.

EILEEN CROXFORD: SELF-TAUGHT RIGOUR

A fascination with the wildflowers that grew around her house, near the airport in Albany, led florist Eileen Croxford to teach herself the botanical



Above: Eileen Croxford shares her commitment to flora with daughter Hazel Dempster. Hazel is the manager of a large nursery and has always advocated the propagation and value of native plants. Photo courtesy of Hazel Dempster

Right: Eileen Croxford reflects on the humble beginnings of the Regional Herbarium she was instrumental in establishing. Photo – Barbara Madden/CALM



specifications of much of the south coast regional flora. She organised the opening of a new Albany Wildflower Society Branch and developed a regional herbarium. Although she had not been formally trained, the rigour of her method of collecting and recording gave the collection a scientific integrity that led to a partnership with the State Herbarium. That partnership is now coordinated by the Department of Conservation and Land Management (CALM), where more than 7,500 of her collections are now housed.

A WAY OF LIFE

From the earliest days of rural enterprise in Western Australia, a tradition has evolved of women on the land, because farming is not a one-man show. Rural women's consciousness of

Above: (left to right) Penny Hussey (CALM's Land for Wildlife Coordinator), Dr Neville Marchant (CALM Herbarium), Dr Rica Erickson and Angela Kellsall (Victorian Plains Shire) at the naming ceremony for the Rica Erickson Reserve. Photo – Penny Hussey/CALM

environmental issues is evident from very early times. The inaugural Country Women's Association Conference in 1925 resolved, among a list of initiatives to improve social conditions for women and children, 'that CWA views with alarm the wanton waste of timber now going on and urges upon those in charge of forests and agricultural departments the need for drastic action to stop the waste'. The advocacy tradition continues today, with broad representation from women on Land Care District Committees around the State.



SUSANNE DENNINGS: MALLEEFOWL'S FRIEND

Another example of a committed rural conservationist, fourth generation Ongerup farming descendant Susanne Dennings believes passionately in grass-roots action, working at the community level to address local conservation issues.

Her concern for the malleefowl, endemic to the area but under threat from loss of habitat and introduced predators such as foxes and cats, led her to join the inaugural meeting of the Ongerup-based Malleefowl Preservation Group in 1992. Her drive and enthusiasm have seen the group's membership build to more than 1500 people, who collaborate with CALM, other agencies and sponsors to protect the malleefowl.

Susanne's leadership of the group sets a prime example for conservation partnerships that can be developed between government agencies, sponsors and people on the land.

BRENDA JAMES : RANGER COMMUNICATIONS

Historically, botanical collection, illustration, and even public advocacy have been well suited to the passions and position of many women. However, for others, working with nature came about through the traditional partnerships they shared with men. Marriage, for example, was at one time a preferred condition of employment for National Park Rangers, because it was understood that the job could not be done without someone to coordinate the 'home base' while the Ranger covered his beat. Many hundreds of women filled the role of 'ranger's wife'—operating radios, communicating with the public, providing the domestic and social backup for one of the State's loneliest jobs—their share in the

responsibilities went unacknowledged.

Among these women was Brenda James who, as a Mobile Ranger's wife in the 1970s, voluntarily started a regular newsletter to establish a communication network with all the State's rangers and their families. Called *Papa Delta Data*—named after the radio call-sign for general all-ranger broadcast—the newsletter kept track of who was where, reproduced articles from environmental journals, gave good botanical and fauna references, and circulated handy bush hints, recipes and other information. With editorial and administrative support from the National Parks Authority, *Papa Delta Data* was published and distributed quarterly from 1976 until the proclamation of CALM in 1984. It was often used as the basis for national parks brochures. The Jameses retired in 1984, travelled and worked around the State, and now live in Yanchep, where Brenda is a community member of the Yanchep National Park Advisory Committee.

WOMEN'S WORK

As more and more women around Australia have been able to take up positions as rangers and in other field-based jobs in their own right, it has become apparent that field-based work



Above left: Susanne Dennings at a malleefowl mound, near Ongerup. Photo – Barbara Madden

Above: Brenda and Jack James look over some of the original *Papa Delta Data* newsletters that she voluntarily wrote and produced with the help of the then National Parks Public Affairs Officer, John Hunter (right). Photo – Chris Garnett/CALM

is a life-style commitment, beset with difficulties for women seeking balance between paid work and family. Slowly, these barriers are breaking down, as workplace culture continues its slow catch-up to the feminist revolution.

Accompanying that catch-up has been a growing understanding of the way employee diversity and inclusive workplace policies benefit not only women, but the community as a whole. The story of women in conservation has, after all, been one of doing what comes naturally; setting examples, using their fundamental influence to shape the way society deals with the environment. The capability, passion, and potential for community leadership demonstrated by women in the environment have always been there. Their acknowledgement is long overdue.

Tammie Reid's extensive career in forestry has led to her current position as a CALM forester in community education, with particular interests in environmental education and interpretation. She passionately advocates that the task of conserving our natural environment must be based on creating understanding and support, sharing knowledge and encouraging community involvement. She has recently been appointed to the National Parks and Nature Conservation Authority.

Suzanne Curry works as CALM's External Funding Coordinator responsible for the administration of grants and sponsorship. She is also involved in developing CALM's initiatives for the Government Plan for Women 1998-2000. In her spare time, Suzanne's keen interest in natural history and background in botany has led to her co-authoring a significant work on botanist-explorer Allan Cunningham.

Mandy Clews is a qualified health researcher, freelance journalist, and musician who has lived and travelled widely in Western Australia since migrating here from Canada in 1984. She leads a busy life which juggles a young family with a career in health planning, frequent editorial work for *LANDSCOPE*, and weekly rehearsals with a chamber ensemble she co-founded in 1997.

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

LANDSCOPE

VOLUME FOURTEEN NUMBER 4, WINTER 1999



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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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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 Colour Separation by Colourbox Digital
 Printed in Western Australia by Lamb Print
 © ISSN 0815-4465. All material copyright. No part of the contents of the publication may be reproduced without consent of the publishers.
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Published by Dr S Shea, Executive Director
 Department of Conservation and Land Management,
 Dick Perry Avenue, Como, Western Australia