



# ENDANGERED!



## Camerons Cave ecological community

Detailed research conducted by a combination of local cavers and scientists from the Western Australian Museum has discovered some remarkable assemblages of animals living in the caves and groundwater of the Cape Range peninsula. Many of these animals are genuine troglobites; that is, they are restricted to caves and adapted to the special conditions within them.

Camerons Cave, in Exmouth, contains one of the most remarkable of these assemblages. It supports both terrestrial and aquatic species, and both vertebrates and invertebrates (animals with and without backbones respectively). This ancient and scientifically interesting community relies completely on Camerons Cave for survival. Most of the species are known from nowhere else. Indeed, some are only known from a few individuals and four are listed as threatened fauna in Western Australia. These include an ancient spider-like animal with large

chelicerae ('teeth'), with the imaginative scientific name of *Draculoides bramstokeri*!

Some of these small cave residents are descendants from ancient times—some five million years ago, when the surface of the area was cloaked with rainforest. Since then there has been a gradual drying of the climate, which is now quite arid. Some of the rainforest inhabitants were able to find refuge in the humid environment of caves, where they adapted to the total darkness, often losing their eyes.

The importance of this assemblage of miniature cave animals as a threatened ecological community was recognised during a project funded by the Natural Heritage Trust, and it is now classified as critically endangered.

Large-scale development is occurring in Exmouth, and the

potential for damage to the community of Camerons Cave is therefore increasing. Until recently, there was no coordination of management of the cave, which was inappropriately gated and largely unprotected. Recently, two steps have been taken that will help provide long-term protection to Camerons Cave.

Firstly, an Advisory Committee has been established to coordinate management and conservation of cave and groundwater-dwelling species and communities throughout the peninsula.

Secondly, the construction of a new gate for Camerons Cave, was funded by the BankWest LANDSCOPE Conservation Visa Card Trust Fund. Darren Brooks, a local cave expert, liaised with CALM District staff and oversaw the construction of the new gate. It is lockable, much less conspicuous and is a significant step towards conserving this remarkable ecosystem for another few million years.

**John Blyth and Val English**  
Photos – Douglas Elford



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

# LANDSCOPE

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How many seals or sea lions are there around WA's coasts? See 'A Tale of Two Seals' on page 42.



"What I wasn't prepared for was the magic of the experience." See 'Desert Impressions' on page 35 for the story of a LANDSCOPE Expedition.



The malleefowl has declined to 46 per cent of its former range. Read about the combined effort to save it on page 17.



Enjoy the WA environment—and don't get hurt! See 'Balancing Act' on page 23.



Traditional owners are working with CALM and other agencies to manage the land. See page 10.

## FEATURES

<b>COMMON GROUND</b> ROB THOMAS, KEITH NOBLE & MANDY CLEWS.....	10
<b>SAVING THE MALLEEFOWL</b> SANDRA MCKENZIE & JOHN BLYTH.....	17
<b>BALANCING ACT</b> IAN HERFORD, JOHN IRELAND & MANDY CLEWS.....	22
<b>WONDERFUL KALBARRI</b> ALAN THORNE.....	28
<b>DESERT IMPRESSIONS</b> MARIANNE LEWIS.....	35
<b>A TALE OF TWO SEALS</b> NICK GALES.....	42
<b>THE DEFIANT SEED</b> ANNE COCHRANE.....	49

## REGULARS

<b>BUSH TELEGRAPH</b> .....	4
<b>ENDANGERED</b> CAMERONS CAVE ECOLOGICAL CENTRE.....	53
<b>URBAN ANTICS</b> TWINKLE, TWINKLE LITTLE STAR.....	54

## COVER

The white-breasted sea-eagle is one of the many natural attractions of the mid-west. See page 28 for a story on one of the region's most famous places—beautiful Kalbarri National Park.



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