



Places of National Importance

by John Hunter

The concept of preserving areas of significant scenery and natural diversity is generally accepted the world over. But where did this idea originate and how successful has it been in Western Australia?

The national park concept is generally accredited to the American artist George Catlin. On a trip to the Dakotas in 1832, he worried about the impact of the USA's westward expansion on native American civilisations, wildlife and wilderness areas. They might be preserved, he wrote, 'by some great protecting policy of government . . . in a magnificent park . . . a nation's park, containing man and beast, in all the wild and freshness of their nature's beauty!'

Catlin's vision was partly realised in 1864 when the US Congress donated Yosemite Valley to California for preservation as a State park. Eight years later, in 1872, Congress reserved the spectacular Yellowstone country as 'a public park or pleasuring ground for the benefit and enjoyment of the people'. It was looked after by the Department of the Interior as a national park—the world's first area so designated. The famous 7th Cavalry was given the task of developing the park and protecting it against hunting, grazing, timber cutting and vandalism, and they did their best to serve the visiting public.

While the USA had set a monstrous pace of exploration and exploitation of its own resources, it had also realised that human cultures, wilderness habitats and wildlife species, vast as they were on the north American continent, were a finite commodity. For the sake of government regulation and management, it was envisaged that business enterprise and



conservation could work hand in hand to advantage national parks. And so started a utilitarian conservation preservation system, which realised that tourism was a conservation tool that helped to protect natural reserves, while promoting the economic value of parks as tourist and scientific meccas.

The fledgling nation of Australia soon followed the USA, with the declaration, in 1879, of its Royal National Park in NSW, the second national park in the world. In November 1900, Western Australia followed suit by reserving a small area on the edge of the Darling Range, which is now part of John Forrest National Park. It was set aside as a 'public utility', with scenic views to Perth City. Serpentine Falls was reserved for 'public recreation' in the same year.



Previous page

Top: Rudall River National Park.

Photo – Marie Lochman

Centre: Fitzgerald River National Park.

Photo – Gordon Roberts/CALM

Bottom: Deep River, Mount Frankland National Park.

Photo – Chris Garnett/CALM

Left: Yosemite National Park, in California. The area was donated by US Congress as a State park in 1864.

Photo – Cliff Winfield/CALM

Below: Serpentine Falls was reserved for public recreation in 1900.

Many other countries followed the American example in establishing national parks, but their significance varied greatly from country to country, and in many instances they provided little protection for either the environment or wildlife.

INDIFFERENCE AND EXPLOITATION

When the early explorers first arrived in Australia they, like the American settlers, embarked on a journey of indifference and exploitation. They found an inhospitable land inhabited by Aboriginal people and supporting a profusion of strange plants and animals.

Soon, the unique Australian fauna had misleading names like 'native cat', 'native porcupine', 'magpie' and Tasmanian 'tiger'. Homesick colonists applied their energies to improving the 'savage silence of the Australian bush' by introducing starlings, thrushes, larks, blackbirds, pheasants and partridges, together with deer, rabbits, hares, trout and foxes. It was even suggested that the central deserts be seeded with all kinds of melons, oranges, lemons, guavas and grains of many sorts. Displacement of unique Australian species had begun.

For many years, the colonists took little interest in Australian wildlife, unless it damaged agricultural crops or livestock, or presented an opportunity for direct exploitation. The Australian fur seal, the koala and the platypus were massacred for their pelts, and lyrebirds and egrets were slaughtered for their breeding plumes. While the first conservation legislation attended to

Right: In August 1905, the State Government reserved 5,640 acres (2,283 hectares) at Yanchep for 'Protection and preservation of Caves and Flora'.

Below and below right: The State Gardens Board was established in 1920 to run 10 small park, garden and foreshore reserves, including the Matilda Bay Reserve at Crawley.



licensing of game species, it had no effect on the long-term welfare of unique fauna. Soon, the koala was exterminated from South Australia and decimated in Queensland.

Fortunately, as naturalists' clubs and conservation groups grew more influential and other concepts of ecology and habitat became better understood, rules and laws on wildlife and habitat protection were gradually strengthened or invoked. The first Western Australian reserves, comparable with today's national parks and nature reserves, were eventually established under the Colonies Land Regulations of 1872. However, it was not until the passing of the Reserves and Parks Act in 1895, the Land Act of 1898 and the Permanent Reserves Act of 1899 that such reserves had an acceptable degree of security.

The Permanent Reserves Act provided for three classes of reserves with varying degrees of security. The purpose of a Class A Reserve could not be changed except by an Act of

Parliament. The purpose of a Class B Reserve could be changed by proclamation in the Western Australian Government Gazette, after the Minister for Lands had given reasons to both Houses of Parliament. The Governor could change the purpose of a Class C Reserve by proclamation in the Western Australian Government Gazette. Present day reserves are still classified in the same manner.

Until the passing of the National Parks Authority Act in 1976, most reserves in WA were created and controlled under the appropriate sections of the Land Act of 1898 and 1933, and the Parks and Reserves Act 1895-1955. However, in the absence of any coordination mechanism, there was a proliferation of independent Boards and some confusion as to their respective functions.

EARLY PROTECTION

The Caves Board was established in 1902 to manage cave reserves at Yanchep and in the Yallingup-Margaret

River area. Many of these caves later became part of national parks. In 1914, the State Hotels Department took over the control of caves and two other reserves, one of which was the popular Serpentine Falls.

The State Gardens Board was established in 1920 under the Parks and Reserves Act of 1895. The first lands managed by the Board were 10 small park, garden and foreshore reserves around Perth, including the Matilda Bay Reserve in Crawley. While the Board had no rating base and no ability to borrow funds, donations from philanthropist Sir Charles McNess enabled facilities to be built in Yanchep and John Forrest National Parks in the 1930s, using sustenance labour. Lands acquired by the Board between 1919 and 1939 included the Yanchep wetlands, Serpentine Falls, the Porongurup Range, the Darling Range National Park and the Nornalup Inlet National Park, which was managed by the Nornalup Reserves Board until 1947.



In the southern karri forest, the Pemberton Parents and Citizens Association requested the hillside opposite the town (including the caravan park and swimming pool) as a recreation area and in May 1930, the Pemberton National Parks Board was created. Soon, the Warren National Park, Brockman Forest and Beedelup National Park were also placed under the Board's management.

Other bodies involved in early parks and reserve management were the Abrolhos Islands Board, established in

1929, Rottnest Island Board formed in 1917 and the then Kings Park Board (formerly Perth Park) established in 1896. The last two are still successfully managing their assets.

In 1956, the National Parks Board of Western Australia superseded the State Gardens Board and was made responsible to the Minister for Lands. The Board had biologists appointed to the staff, and was the vesting body for national parks and other reserves.

At about this time, the Australian Academy of Science made major recommendations to the Commonwealth and State Governments of Australia that would turn the tide of what was now seen to be an inadequate inventory and management system of Australian conservation areas. In 1958, the Academy appointed a Committee on National Parks and Nature Reserves and, in turn, established State sub-committees. In short, the brief was:

'to review the past . . . to establish that at least the most important environments and habitats (terrestrial and marine) be set aside as national parks and nature reserves . . . that the science and profession of park management be accorded greater recognition . . . that Governments in Australia review legislation and provide considerably increased finance'.

At last, serious thought and action was

beginning to be applied to wildlife conservation and park management in Western Australia.

In 1969, the State Government appointed the Reserves Advisory Council to consider all matters relating to national parks and additional ways and means of protecting natural scenery, but it did not make formal recommendations concerning legislation. In 1972, a National Parks Review Committee was appointed. This time, proposals were accepted to implement the National Parks Authority Act in August 1976, which provided for wide representation on the Authority with *ex officio* appointments from the Departments of Lands, Fisheries and Wildlife, Forests and Tourism, and special consideration for Primary Industry, Local Government and Conservation. Within a few years, several large national parks, including Hamersley Range (now Karijini), Cape Arid, Chichester Range, Fitzgerald River and Drysdale River, were added to the Board's estate.

During the 1970s, the State Government also established the Conservation Through Reserves Committee to recommend a comprehensive system of reserves throughout the State, which, if suitably managed, would conserve examples of the principal environmental and scenic



Top: Warren National Park was declared in December 1915.
Photo - Jay Sarson/Lochman
Transparencies

Above: The State's national parks protect native ecosystems, plants and animals such as this echidna.
Photo - Marie Lochman

Right: The Tree Top Walk is one of the world class facilities provided in WA's national parks.

Photo – Dennis Sarson/Lochman
Transparencies

Below right: The State's first marine park was declared in 1987 at Marmion.

Photo – Dick Beilby/Lochman
Transparencies

variety of Western Australia. The comprehensive reports produced by this committee became a 'blueprint' for Western Australia's national park system, and numerous national parks and nature reserves recommended by the committee were established in the ensuing years.

In March 1975, the National Parks Board was transferred from the Department of Lands to the Department of Conservation and Environment. In 1976, the Board became the National Parks Authority, with a full-time professional Director, Departmental status, additional professional staff and the added power to lease and permit development by private enterprise. By the end of its first year, the Authority had 48 National Parks and 19 other reserves under its control—a total of 3,871,505 hectares.

UNDER ONE UMBRELLA

With wildlife protection (flora, fauna and nature reserves), national park management and State forest management still under three separate agencies, the Government decided to amalgamate the three into one Department of Conservation and Land Management (CALM) in 1985.

The challenge of providing quality experiences for visitors, while ensuring that areas are better conserved, has seen the completion of innovative nature-based tourism developments. These include the Penguin Experience Island Discovery Centre on Penguin Island, the Tree Top Walk and Ancient Empire in Walpole-Nornalup National Park, and numerous other world-class facilities.

CALM was also instrumental in establishing a number of marine parks in the State. The State's first marine park at Marmion was declared on 13 March 1987, and the Department's Marine Conservation Branch began working on establishing a system of



marine parks that will ultimately protect all of the State's major marine habitats. Planning for a proposed marine park at Jurien is well under way.

The 67 national parks cover 5,074,858 hectares of the State's terrestrial conservation estate, and the six marine parks cover about 1,261,900 hectares of the State's waters. They are the jewels in the crown of conservation reserves in Western Australia, set aside for wildlife and landscape conservation, scientific study, preservation of features of archaeological, historic or scientific interest, and for enjoyment by the public. They have national or international significance for scenic, cultural or biological values.

In this centenary of national parks in Western Australia, humankind is beginning to realise that it is just part of the fabric of life on Earth—neither separate nor above. We are another species needing a place of natural wonder and solitude. Our parks are a heritage for all to share and enjoy.

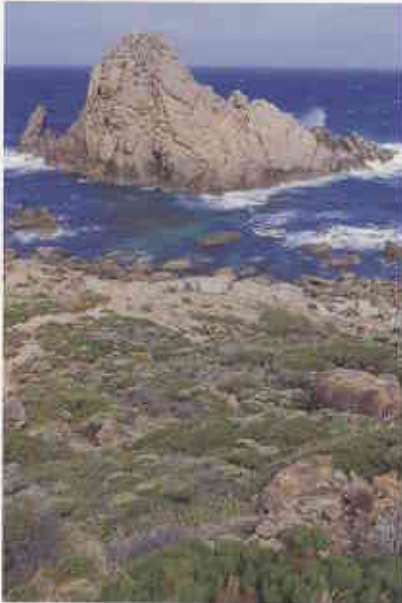
John Hunter, well known to *LANDSCOPE* readers as the author of *Urban Antics*, is Public Affairs Officer at CALM's Corporate Relations Division. He can be contacted on (08) 9389 8644 or by email (johnh@calm.wa.gov.au).



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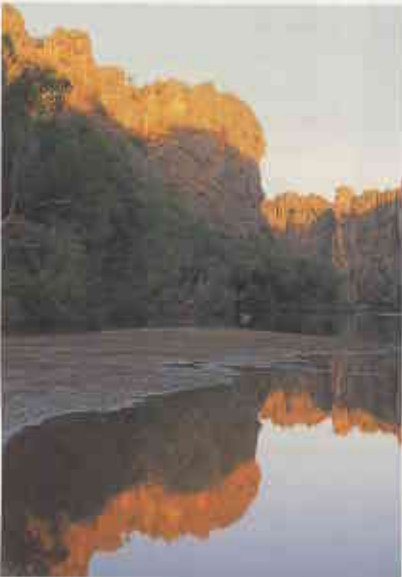
Sugarloaf Rock is just one of the many features that make Leeuwin-Naturaliste National Park the most visited park in WA. (See page 10.)



Premier Park: John Forrest National Park is Western Australia's oldest park, celebrating its centenary year. (See page 22.)



Pinnacle of Parks: These unusual formations make Nambung National Park well known the world over. (See page 36.)



Windjana Gorge National Park holds important clues to the evolution of fish. See 'Old Fossils' on page 28.



William Bay National Park displays a miniature version of karri forest flora. (See page 42.)

FEATURES

FEAST FOR THE SOUL

NEIL TAYLOR, JANE SCOTT, CAROLYN THOMSON-DANS & ROGER BANKS.....10

PLACES OF NATIONAL IMPORTANCE

JOHN HUNTER.....17

PREMIER PARK

GEORGE DUXBURY.....22

OLD FOSSILS

JOHN LONG.....28

PINNACLE OF PARKS

KEN McNAMARA & CAROLYN THOMSON-DANS.....36

KARRI FOREST IN MICROCOSM

NEVILLE MARCHANT.....42

THE WAY AHEAD

MANDY CLEWS, JIM SHARP & WAYNE SCHMIDT.....48

REGULARS

BUSH TELEGRAPH.....4

ENDANGERED

HEATH COMMUNITY ON NOONDINE CHERT HILLS.....35

PARK ANTICS.....54

COVER

With 67 national parks spread across the State, park rangers are often the first contact that visitors have with the Department of Conservation and Land Management (CALM). Apart from providing visitors with information and guidance, they perform a vital role in the day-to-day management of their local environment.



Cover illustration by Gooitzen van der Meer, Western Australian artist and a graphic designer with CALM.

Executive Editor: Ron Kawallilak

Editors: David Gough and Carolyn Thomson-Dans

Story Editors: Caris Bailey, Mandy Clews and Verna Costello

Scientific/technical advice: Andrew Burbidge, Keith Morris, Paul Jones and staff of CALM Science Division

Design and production: Tiffany Abern, Maria Duthie, Gooitzen van der Meer

Illustration: Ian Dickinson, John Long, Gooitzen van der Meer

Marketing: Estelle de San Miguel ☎ (08) 9334 0296 Fax: (08) 9334 0498

Subscription enquiries: ☎ (08) 9334 0481 or (08) 9334 0437

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