



Captivating Canning

Regional Park on the River

Canning River Regional Park, located nine kilometres south-east of central Perth, extends for some six kilometres along both sides of the Canning River, from Shelley Bridge in Shelley to Nicholson Road Bridge in Ferndale.

Covering 266 hectares, it is one of few places left in the heart of the metropolitan area that provides a haven for native plant and animal species.

by Christine Silbert

Drive along the glaring bitumen of Leach Highway, Albany Highway and Nicholson Road and you would scarcely imagine the wealth of bird life and tranquillity found in the nearby Canning River Regional Park.

The park had its beginnings in 1989, when the State Government approved the establishment of the Canning River Regional Park and the preparation of a management plan. The Western Australian Planning Commission has continued to acquire land to realise the goal of a riverine regional park.

HISTORY

There is a strong Aboriginal history associated with Canning River. The wetlands were important to indigenous people as a source of food and materials for shelter and artefacts.

Few people realise that the Canning River once played an important role in the early development of the State's timber industry. In the 1850s, Perth businessman Benjamin Mason began to

Below: The Canning River still has some wild, inaccessible sites between Riverton Bridge and Kent Street Weir.
Photo – Michael James/CALM



Previous page
The Kent Street Weir, built to regulate the flow of salt water from the estuary into the Canning River, is a popular picnic area.
Photo – Michael James/CALM

Left: Family groups of the engaging purple swamphen are reasonably common in some parts of the park.
Photo – Bill Belson/Lochman Transparencies

fell jarrah trees along the Canning River. The timber was then transported via the river to Perth and Fremantle, where building materials were in great demand. In 1861, a boat landing was built along River Road and dubbed Masons Landing, and the entire Cannington district was soon cleared of trees, with the logs being carted on bullock-drawn wagons down to the boat loading area. Here they were cut up in several nearby sawpits.

By 1864, there was little suitable nearby timber left, and Mason obtained a lease to cut timber in the Darling Range, about nine miles (15 kilometres) away. A steam-driven saw was installed at Masons Landing and the little community based around the site included a blacksmith, baker, wheelwright, a school and a number of workers' cottages. Bullock teams were still carting the timber to the boat landing, but Mason began to search for



a less expensive alternative. He joined forces with an architect, Francis Bird, who designed and built a timber railway from the hills east of Bickley to Masons Landing. The railway spanned several brooks and was completed in 1872.

SNAGS AND MUDFLATS

Mason and Bird experienced several problems with transport along the river, including accidents and constant snags due to debris being washed downriver every winter. The mudflats at Riverton and Shelley were another obstacle to boat traffic. To deepen the channel through these shallows, convict gangs drove stakes into the riverbed to build a dam of branches, twigs and reeds and scooped mud from the channel by shovel or bucket and deposited it beyond the dam. The State's best known bushranger, Moondyne Joe (see 'Bushranger Country: Avon Valley National Park' *LANDSCOPE*, Summer 1998-99), helped to build the 'convict fence', remnants of which can still be seen in the Canning River today.

When the new Government railway to Midland was completed during the late 1870s, it reduced the cost of transporting timber to such an extent that Mason and Bird could no longer compete with other timber millers and the operation eventually folded. However, relics of this fascinating history can still be seen at the Woodloes Museum, the former homestead of Francis Bird, and at Masons Landing, where a plaque and memorial commemorates Mason and his mill. Today, they form two important recreation sites within the Canning River Regional Park. Woodloes Homestead, built in 1874, is run by volunteers from the local Historical Society and is open on Sundays from 2 pm - 5 pm. The homestead is built of stone and brick with a shingled roof. It was fully restored between 1973 and 1978, and furnished with genuine period furniture donated by the area's pioneering families.

CONSERVATION VALUES

Today, the Canning River Regional Park contains some of the best estuarine vegetation in the entire Swan-Canning River system, with a wide diversity of habitats that includes

saltwater estuary and deltine islands; salt marshes and riverine environment; freshwater environment; billabong; modified forest; and woodlands on the floodplain. The park is listed on the Register of the National Estate for its conservation values. Within the park, there are five important wetlands: Wilsons, Adenia Reserve, Nicholson Road, Masons Landing Lagoons and Greenfield Street Footbridge.

The park is an important refuge for birds and other wildlife. A total of 97 bird species has been observed in the park, including 44 waterbirds. Some of the most common waterbirds to be seen on the river or its nearby wetlands include Australasian grebes, black swans, Pacific black ducks, Australian shelducks, Eurasian coots, wood ducks, great cormorants, pied cormorants, little black cormorants, darters and



Above: Woodloes Homestead is a reminder of the links of the Canning River Regional Park to the early days of timber cutting.

Photo - Michael James/CALM

Australian pelicans. The occasional great egret may be seen stalking prey. Flocks of ibis graze on nearby grassy areas. Family groups of the engaging purple swamphen are reasonably common. Dusky moorhen are abundant in the park, which is one of the most important sites in the State for this species.

The remaining natural vegetation includes flooded gums, paperbarks and sheoaks, woollybush, wattles, zamia, dodder, grevilleas, sedges and rushes. Weeds pose the greatest threat to the natural environment and are the primary focus of the Department of Conservation and Land Management's



(CALM's) work plans. Part of the strategy is to limit vehicle and pedestrian access to reduce rubbish dumping, fires, and soil disturbance—all of which encourage weeds to establish.

MANAGING FOR THE FUTURE

In conjunction with the City of Canning and the local community, CALM developed and released a Regional Park Management Plan in 1997. The overall vision for the park is that it is recognised as an important natural resource of lands and waters, where sustainable habitats and ecosystems are protected, where a wide range of appropriate recreational activities can take place and where degraded areas are restored and protected.

Sections of the park are managed by the City of Canning, and CALM works closely with them to support the efficient and effective implementation of the management plan. The Canning River Regional Park also falls within the area managed by the Swan River Trust (SRT), whose role is to coordinate and implement activity associated with the Swan and Canning rivers. Any developments affecting the river must therefore be approved by the Trust. CALM's Regional Parks Unit helps to coordinate everyone's efforts in managing the park, and to prepare and implement plans for recreational use, specific site development and rehabilitation.

VOLUNTEERS

Unfortunately, if you walk for any distance along the banks of the Canning River Regional Park, you will see evidence of alteration and disturbance. Dense and thorny blackberry thickets threaten to strangle the native vegetation, while other weeds choke it out. Such extensive weed problems can only be tackled by intensive work put

Top left: The Canning River Regional Park, between the Riverton Bridge and Kent Street Weir.

Photo – Michael James/CALM

Centre left: Black swans are often seen in the Canning River Regional Park.

Left: Flocks of ibis perch on low branches and feed on grassy areas along the river bank.

Photos – Jiri Lochman



in by large numbers of people. Fortunately, the park is also blessed with a band of hardworking, organised volunteers who provide the lifeblood of the regional park.

One group, Canning River Regional Park Volunteers, started back in 1986. Founding member, Jo Stone, still spends four to six hours a day, six days a week on five designated rehabilitation projects. She and others have created a green corridor at Eastfield Court, where a corps of four volunteers has weeded the wet area, and revegetated and planted a grove of eucalypts that is bringing back the birds. They have transformed a drain into a 'living' stream and revegetated an adjacent fenced-off area, and rehabilitated both sides of Banksia Hill. Jo also organises wonderful nature walks for the public, such as the Orchid Walk and Nesting Bird Walk coming up in September, the Bikes, Birds and Bridges walk, and walks for school groups.

Russell Gorton, of the Wilson Wetland Action Group, lived next to a wetland in another suburb and saw it disappear—but not his memories of playing there. The pleasure his five-year-old son Matthew gets from working beside his dad, and Russell's joy from seeing him experience nature, is his catalyst to try to 'do something that is good and does good'. At the Miller Street Main Drain, the Group has undertaken extensive bank restoration over the past 12 months, covering 250 metres of stream. They have been 'block sedging', that is, planting blocks of



various types of vegetation with rhizomes that dominate weeds and push them out.

The Canning River Regional Park Community Advisory Committee has been providing advice to the land managers from the beginning. Appointed by the Minister for the Environment and Heritage, the community representatives come with varying backgrounds, and all have a passion to advance and protect the park.

BAFFLING WEEDS WITH TECHNOLOGY

A combination of technical expertise, strategic planning and old-fashioned manual labour is being used by CALM in a new approach to solving the serious weed problem.

Ecoscope, a consultancy involved

Top: Canoeing is popular in the regional park, where launch sites are provided.

Above: Cormorants fish along the Canning River and then find nearby vantage points to dry their plumage.
Photos – Michael James/CALM

in environmental science, landscaping and mapping, was enlisted to provide an accurate and systematic plan of attack to return what is considered to be one of the best examples of riverine vegetation on the Swan and Canning rivers, to pristine condition. By using the GPS (geographical positioning system) and then translating this through the software of their GIS (geographical information system), Ecoscape has created a series of overlay maps with a two-metre accuracy level.



Above left: Japanese pepper trees are removed from less accessible areas of the Canning River wetlands by boat to minimise the impact on the environment. Photo – Michael James/CALM

Above: Dianne Frylinck shows Cameron Valentine 'the smallest tree leaf in the world', during the Canning River Regional Park Wetlands Welly Walk. Photo courtesy of Jo Stone



Above: Canning River foreshore, in the vicinity of Riverton Bridge. Photo – Michael James/CALM

Technology, however, cannot change the fact that the only access to some of the wetland areas is water transport and that work has to be done by hand. Workers have to be ferried in by boat and huge piles of harvested weed are loaded and taken out to be mulched for use in domestic gardens.

ATTRACTIONS

The beautiful riverine system found in the Canning River Regional Park incorporates passive and active recreation. CALM has prepared a Recreation Master Plan in consultation with the local Community Advisory Committee that indicates the access and recreation areas within the park, such as trails (including shared paths), walk paths, picnic sites and car parks.

Fishers may spend a few peaceful hours along the densely vegetated river banks in pursuit of the wily black bream. They mostly pass their time with few signs of other people apart from canoeists

negotiating the waters of the Canning. Others prefer to cycle or walk along the long lengths of shared paths provided. Some of these walks are described in CALM's book *More Family Walks in Perth Outdoors*. Picnic areas are a great drawcard, with Kent Street Weir being the most popular spot, together with Masons Landing and Riverton Bridge.

The Castledare Miniature Railway is open on the first Sunday of every month, attracting 200 to 300 people. They flock to enjoy, not just one but multiple rides, where they can observe the birds nesting, spring wildflowers, and smell the genuine aroma of a coal-fired steam engine. The Castledare Miniature Railway Club's voluntary members spend much of their spare time maintaining five or more kilometres of track, which traverse five bridges that

straddle lagoons and inlets, and they are currently building a new bridge. They offer activities for the whole family, and volunteers are always welcome. With a retirement village about 50 metres away, a growing number of residents, grandchildren and 'big kids' wander over for a ride. A nearby picnic area is provided with barbecues that are always ready-stacked with wood.

With so much to do and a wide variety of things to see, the Canning River Regional Park is a place to appreciate fine company in beautiful settings surrounded by the natural beauty of Australian bush in the suburbs.

Christine Silbert is a freelance writer on contract to CALM's Regional Parks Unit. She can be contacted on (08) 9388 2002.

If you would like to become a volunteer, you can phone Jo Stone from the Canning Regional Park Volunteers on (08) 9458 3669, Julie Roberts of the Bannister Creek Catchment Group on (08) 9458 6746, Russell Gorton from the Wilson Wetland Action Group on (08) 9451 1354, John Parker of Woodloes Homestead on (08) 9451 8538 or Ken Belcher of the Castledare Miniature Railway Club on (08) 9375 1223.

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

LANDSCOPE



VOLUME SIXTEEN, NUMBER 4, WINTER 2001



Western Australian botanists are taking part in a global plan to store seed from 10 per cent of the world's flora by 2010. See page 23.



Mushrooms the size of a dinner plate can appear within 48 hours of a fire in the karri forest. Read about forest fungi on page 48.



Discover the rich bird life and tranquility of the Canning River Regional Park on page 17.



The Pilbara's numerous islands are rich in history, wildflowers and wildlife, with prolific marine life in the surrounding waters. See page 34.



Many of WA's threatened marsupials can be seen in the south-west for the first time in decades. Read about their return to Dryandra Forest on page 10.

F E A T U R E S

RETURN TO DRYANDRA
TONY FRIEND, CLARE ANTHONY & NEIL THOMAS10

CAPTIVATING CANNING
CHRISTINE SILBERT.....17

OUR FROZEN FUTURE
ANNE COCHRANE.....23

SEA ANEMONES
ANN STORRIE.....28

PEARLS OF THE PILBARA
DORIAN MORO & FRAN STANLEY.....34

LINKING THE LANDSCAPE
PETER WILKINS.....41

FRUITS OF FIRE
RICHARD ROBINSON.....48

R E G U L A R S

BUSH TELEGRAPH.....4

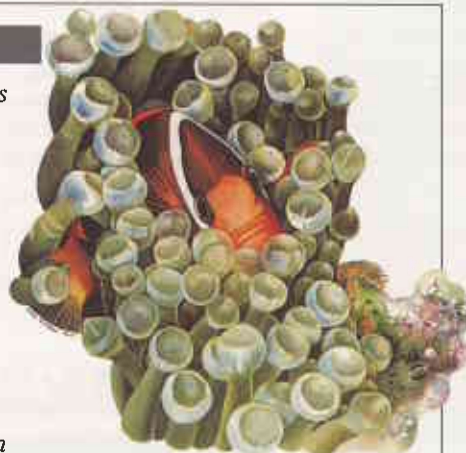
ENDANGERED
VINE THICKETS ON DAMPIER PENINSULA.....47

URBAN ANTICS
WHICH BANKSIA?.....54

C O V E R

Paradoxically, the stinging tentacles of sea anemones—a group of carnivorous invertebrates that sometimes resemble colourful flowers—can also provide a safe haven for many underwater creatures. Anemonefish gain immunity to the stinging cells and live primarily in sea anemone tentacles. Other animals, such as crabs, carry a protective anemone on their backs. Turn to page 28.

Cover illustration by Ellen Hickman



Executive editor: Ron Kawailak
Editors: David Gough, Carolyn Thomson-Dans
Story editors: Verna Costello, Sue McKenna
Advertising copy and editorial assistance: Caris Bailey
Scientific/technical advice: Andrew Burbidge, Chris Simpson, Keith Morris, Paul Jones and staff of CALMScience Division
Design and production: Tiffany Aberin, Maria Duthie, Gooitzen van der Meer
Illustration: Ellen Hickman, Ian Dickinson, Gooitzen van der Meer
Cartography: Promaco Geodraft
Marketing: Estelle de San Miguel ☎ (08) 9334 0296 Fax: (08) 9334 0498
Subscription enquiries: ☎ (08) 9334 0481 or (08) 9334 0437
 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 the consent of the publishers.
 Please do not send unsolicited material to LANDSCOPE, but feel free to telephone the editors.
 Visit NatureBase at www.naturebase.net

Published by the Department of Conservation and Land Management, Dick Perry Avenue, Kensington, Western Australia

DEPARTMENT OF
Conservation
AND LAND MANAGEMENT
Conserving the nature of WA