

RARE BIRDS SURVIVE NUYTS FIRE

At least seven rare western bristlebirds have survived a fire in the Nuyts Wilderness, in Walpole-Nornalup National Park on Western Australia's south coast. A lightning strike at the beginning of autumn 2001 started a severe wildfire that raged for five days and burnt about 2,700 hectares of the wilderness area under dry conditions. The wildfire also killed numerous quokkas, bandicoots and western ringtail possums.

Department of Conservation and Land Management scientists had been concerned that 15 western bristlebirds, translocated to the area in 1999 and 2000, had been lost in the fire. The translocation had been carried out as part

of the recovery efforts for this threatened species.

Allan Burbidge, a senior research scientist with the department's Science Division, visited the area last spring with other departmental staff and volunteers, and recorded calls from seven of the birds. Most of the birds were in a strategic buffer zone the department had prescribe-burnt in 1998. The buffer had helped contain the fire along its western flank on the Thompsons Cove walk track.

Allan said the birds were four kilometres from the site near Mt Hopkins where they had been initially released. The fire had a severe impact on Mt Hopkins.

"Western bristlebirds aren't strong fliers," he said.

"They can fly in short bursts

from bush to bush, but generally they spend most of their time in low bushes or on the ground.

"The birds were translocated to the Mt Hopkins area because it contained heathland vegetation that hadn't been burned for a long time, possibly 40 years or more.

"The fact we detected them in an area burned just three years earlier indicates that they can survive in younger vegetation types."

Allan said the birds' calls had been taped and would be compared with the tapes of calls recorded when the birds were first released.

"We're trying to see if we can identify specific birds and the timing of their release.

"There's a possibility that

some of the surviving birds may be progeny of those released earlier. If this is so, it's great news for the recovery of the species."



The western bristlebird is found only in WA.

Photo - Simon Neville

EVERYONE WINS EXCEPT FERAL CATS



Conservation has joined forces with an organisation employing people with disabilities to manufacture a device that helps to trap feral cats. The device makes 'miaow' sounds and, when used in conjunction with a pungent bait, is irresistible to the feral cats.

Westcare Industries, which manufactures and sells the devices to the department and other outlets around the world, provides employment for more than 175 people, including 120 with disabilities, in the printing, packaging, embroidery, safety clothing

Feral cats such as this will need more than their usual cunning to avoid capture.

Photo - Ray Smith

and electronics industries. Manufacturing the devices will help the 16 people with disabilities in Westcare Industries' newly acquired electronics division to continue with their valuable work.

The cat-trapping technique was invented by Department of Conservation and Land Management Research Scientist Dave Algar and his research team, and is being used as part of the department's Western Shield program, which includes an extensive state-wide feral cat control research program.

Dave said that the success of the joint venture with

Westcare Industries was important to the department's nature conservation programs.

"Western Shield relies heavily on our ability to control fox and cat numbers before we can reintroduce native species," he said.

Westcare Industries' Chief Executive Richard Elsey said the devices would be manufactured at the organisation's factory in Bassendean.

"We'll be making a significant effort to promote it and increase sales because it will generate regular income," he said.

"It's also gratifying to know that our workers are gaining satisfaction from knowing they're doing something useful and beneficial to the community."

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

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DEPARTMENT OF
Conservation
 AND LAND MANAGEMENT
Conserving the nature of WA



Thirteen years in the making, the Cape to Cape Track offers a unique view of WA's most popular national park. See page 28.



Karijini's new visitor centre provides a cultural and environmental focus point for visitors. See 'Karijini Calling' on page 10.



Dirk Hartog Island is our largest island. It has a fascinating history and a valuable biodiversity. Find out why on page 17.



'Landscape at the Heart' is an account of the first LANDSCOPE Expedition to the Carnarvon Range at the edge of the Little Sandy Desert. See page 40.



Does the delicate work of Western Australia's botanical artists have a place in the high-tech world of science? See page 23.

COVER

Aboriginal names have always been part of Australia's history, and many of the well known names for Australian animals are in common use today. 'Ancient animals, ancient names' (page 35) makes a case for adopting more Aboriginal names for our native mammals. The brush-tailed phascogale, for example, was known to Nyoongar people as the 'wambenga'.

Cover illustration by Philippa Nikulinsky

