

RARELY SEEN BLUE WHALE ATTRACTS UK ATTENTION

A whale beaching at the Leeuwin-Naturaliste National Park excited great interest a few months ago. The animal was a blue whale (*Balaenoptera musculus*)—the largest living animal on Earth. The event even came to the attention of the BBC in London, and resulted in a phone interview with Brad Commins, Acting District Manager at the Department of Conservation and Land Management's Busselton office.

The beached female whale weighed 80 tonnes, measured 23.8 metres long, and had a six-metre-wide tail. It was left on the beach to decompose naturally. Removing the carcass was

not an option because of its size and the environmental damage that would have been caused during such an exercise. Signs were erected at all nearby beaches to warn visitors of the potential hazards of sharks attracted by the rotting carcass.

Blue whales may live for 80 years or more. Although they have an average length of 25 to 26 metres, females can reach more than 30 metres and weigh more than 160 tonnes at the end of the feeding season. When seen from the air, their streamlined, slender shape is obvious. They also have a broad, flat U-shaped head, with a central ridge in front of the blowholes, and



Above: The beached blue whale.

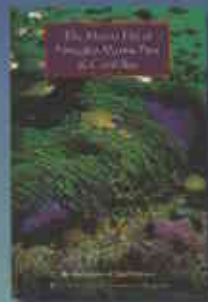
slender pointed flippers. Their blow is vertical and may reach up to nine metres high. The large, notched tail flukes are sometimes raised when they dive.

Blue whales are rarely seen near the WA coast, but they

have been sighted off Perth, Geographe Bay and Albany.

A blue whale research project, supervised by John Bannister of the WA Museum, is under way off the WA coast.

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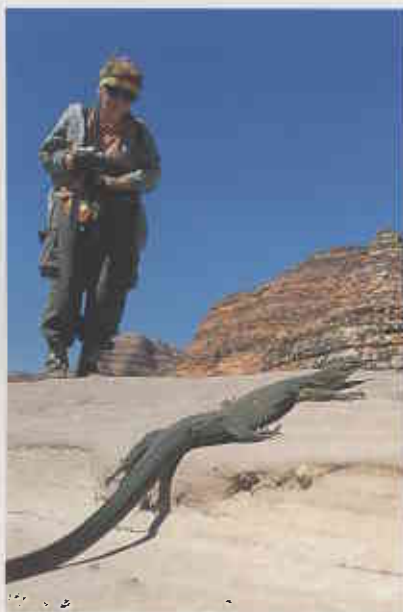


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LANDSCOPE



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During the past decade more than 500 people have contributed to science projects in WA by joining a LANDSCOPE Expedition (see page 34).



Since the 1960s Barrow Island's animals have shared their island paradise with the oil industry. Read how the mammals are being monitored and protected. See page 18.



Georgiana Molloy made a major contribution to the early botanical knowledge of the south-west. Read about this remarkable woman on page 43.



The Goldfields Woodlands National Park protects the region's best examples of eucalypt woodlands (see page 28).



Collecting seeds is one way in which we are helping to conserve biodiversity. Join the 'Hunters and Gatherers for Conservation' on page 49.

FEATURES

ECOEDUCATION: WINNING OVER SCHOOL COMMUNITIES
NICOLE BAILEY AND LIZ MOORE.....10

BOUNTIFUL BARROW
KEITH MORRIS AND ANDREW BURBIDGE.....18

PATTERNS IN AN ANTIPODEAN COASTLINE
CLIFF WINFIELD AND SUE OSBORNE.....25

GOLDFIELDS WOODLANDS NATIONAL PARK
BRAD BARTON AND BARRY HOPPER.....28

10 YEARS OF LANDSCOPE EXPEDITIONS
KEVIN KENNEALLY AND JEAN PATON.....34

GEORGIANA MOLLOY: A REMARKABLE WOMAN
SUSAN PATRICK.....43

HUNTERS AND GATHERERS FOR CONSERVATION
ANNE COCHRANE AND ELLEN HICKMAN.....49

REGULARS

BUSH TELEGRAPH.....4

ENDANGERED UNDERGROUND ORCHID.....42

URBAN ANTICS
DRAGONFLIES.....54

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COVER

There's something going on in our schools. Students are voluntarily taking an active interest in conserving their local environments. They are visiting forests, beaches and wetlands to study native wildlife. And they are having fun! What is happening and why? See 'EcoEducation—winning over school communities' on page 10.



Cover illustration by Ellen Hickman

