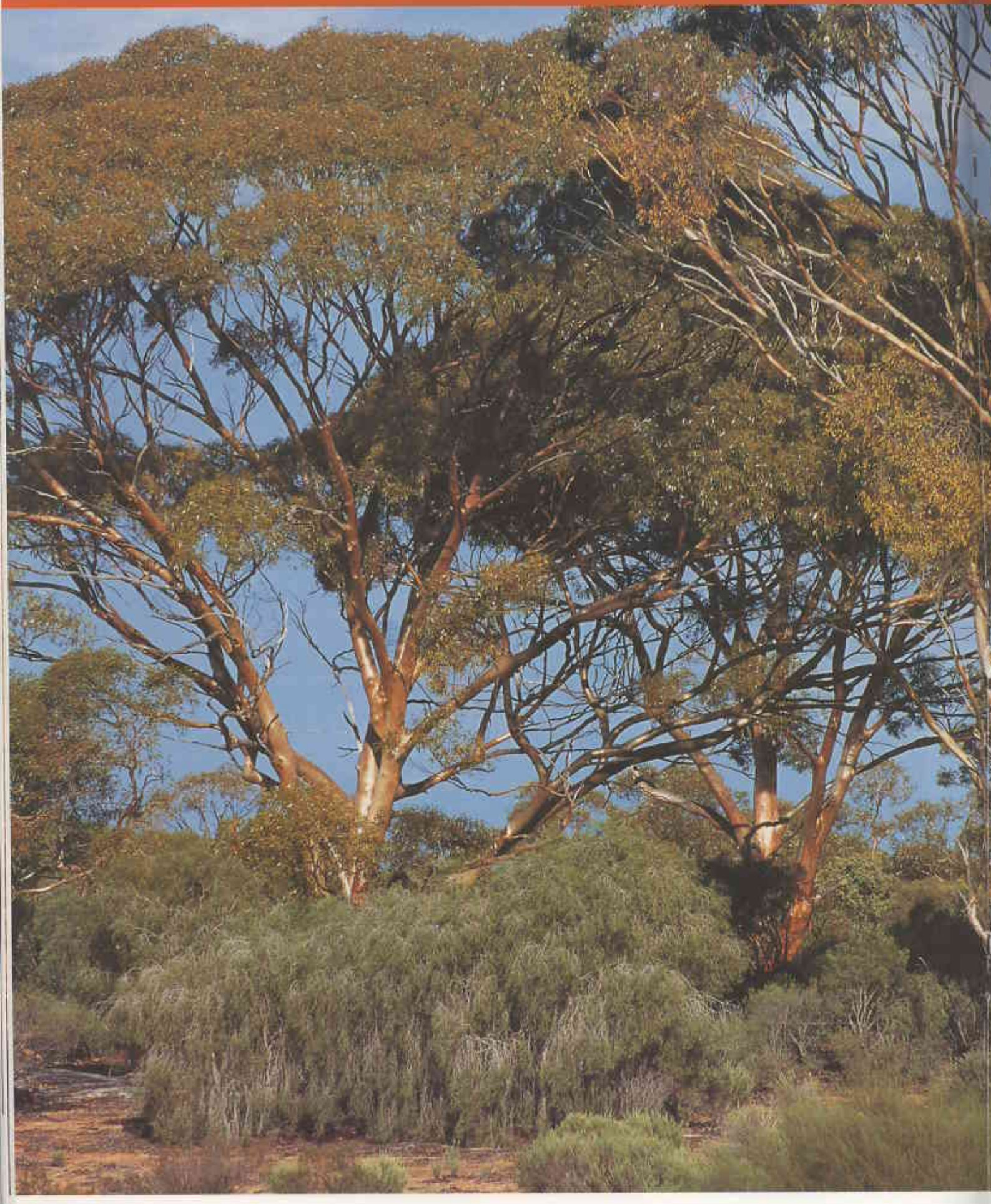


Goldfields Woodlands

National Park

by Brad Barton and Barry Hooper

The Goldfields region of Western Australia is best known for its gold and mining. Few people know of the extent and complexity of the region's eucalypt woodlands. Nowhere else in the world will one find such a diversity of tall trees in such an arid climate. These woodlands helped shape the history of the Goldfields, and some of the region's best examples are protected in the new Goldfields Woodlands National Park and adjacent conservation reserves.

The Goldfields Woodlands National Park, created in July 2000, is an integral part of a 311,000-hectare conservation reserve system in the eucalypt woodlands of the Goldfields. The new national park and the existing Boorabbin National Park combine to form an area of 238,000 hectares. A 40,000-hectare conservation park and a 33,000-hectare 'management area' complete the reserve complex.

Also incorporated into this reserve complex is the Victoria Rock Nature Reserve. John Holland named this granite rock outcrop for Queen Victoria in 1893. It was first gazetted as an experimental timber supply reserve in 1903 and vested in the Western Australian Wildlife Authority as a nature reserve in 1969.

The Goldfields Woodlands National Park has a fascinating history that parallels the discovery and development of the Goldfields region itself. The park contains representative examples from each development era, offering remote and interesting sites to visit and opportunities for future development and interpretation.

EARLY HISTORY

Long before European settlement, the eucalypt woodlands of the Goldfields were of immense importance to Aboriginal people. The granite

outcrops, such as the one at Victoria Rock Nature Reserve, were important catchments for water, while the surrounding woodlands were rich in wildlife and provided an abundance of food during good seasons.

The Department of Conservation and Land Management recognises this traditional link, and recently signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Goldfields Land Council—the first such agreement between the department and a representative Aboriginal body in Western Australia. It forms the framework for discussions and agreements relating to Aboriginal culture and rights over land managed by the department in the Goldfields region.

Native Title claimants for the area covered by the Goldfields Woodlands National Park will participate in management discussions and development planning for the park. Not only does this recognise their ties to the land, it also adds to the interpretation and cultural opportunities that can be developed in the park over time.

As the development of prospective agricultural areas to the east of Perth increased in the mid-1800s, explorers increasingly cast their eyes eastward.

Between 1864 and 1866, Charles Cook Hunt surveyed a track from Southern Cross to east of Kalgoorlie. Hunt's Track, as it become known, followed a series of granite rock outcrops where he had established wells to provide water for travellers heading into the interior. An excellent example of one of Hunt's wells can be found at Gnarlbine Rock on the eastern edge of the Goldfields Woodlands National Park, 25 kilometres south-west of Coolgardie.

GOLD DISCOVERED

In 1892, the discovery of gold at Fly Flat (now Coolgardie) ignited the Western Australian Goldrush. Soon afterwards, additional strikes were made by Hannan, Flannigan and Shea near what is now Kalgoorlie, leading to the development of the famous 'Golden Mile'.

The following year, with ever increasing numbers of prospectors seeking their fortune in the Goldfields, John Holland developed a 500-kilometre track through the woodlands from Broomehill to Gnarlbine Rock. This track formed a short-lived alternative route to the Eastern Goldfields for transporting goods and supplies, and for boatloads of goldrush hopefuls disembarking at the port of Albany.

After 1930, the northern part of the Holland Track fell into disrepair through lack of use, following the development of alternative road and rail networks, particularly through the Wheatbelt areas, to the Goldfields.

Over the last decade, four-wheel-drive enthusiasts and historical researchers have slowly rediscovered parts of the Holland Track, and it is poised to become an important attraction within the Goldfields

Previous page
Main: Regrowth salmon gums in Goldfields Woodlands National Park.

Left: Hunt's Well at Gnarlbine Rock.
Photos – Steve Sadler

Right: Part of the original Holland Track in sandplain vegetation through the Goldfields Woodlands National Park.
Photo – Barry Hooper

Below right: The Goldfields water supply pipeline.
Photo – Steve Sadler

Woodland National Park. The department is forming a partnership with the Toyota Landcruiser Club and the Association of 4WD Clubs of WA (through the Trackcare program). Members of the club and of those in the association will assist with the maintenance and upkeep of the track.

RAILWAYS

The construction of the railway from Southern Cross to Coolgardie was the next major event to impact on the woodlands. Completed in 1896, the railway provided relatively quick access to the Goldfields, taking over from the camel and horse teams that had been used to transport goods and supplies for many years.

Steam trains, settlements and sidings, associated with the development of the railway, all required water—a significant problem in this semi-arid environment. The problem was solved through the construction of catchment dams. These rock dams were established to store the rain water runoff from the granite outcrops. The water was channelled into the dams through a series of rock walls and rock-lined channels constructed from slabs of granite prised from the catchment rock. These ingenious catchment systems can be seen at Koorawaylee and Boorabbin and, within the national park, at Boondi and Woolgangie.

On the eastern fringes of the park are the remnants of narrow-gauge railway lines (known as woodlines) built to transport timber to the developing mining town of Kalgoorlie. The wood, mainly cut from the numerous eucalypt species, was used to power the steam-driven winders that hauled gold-bearing ore to the surface of the mines, and to heat furnaces in which the gold ore was roasted. Structural timber was also required to line and support the hundreds of kilometres of mine shafts.

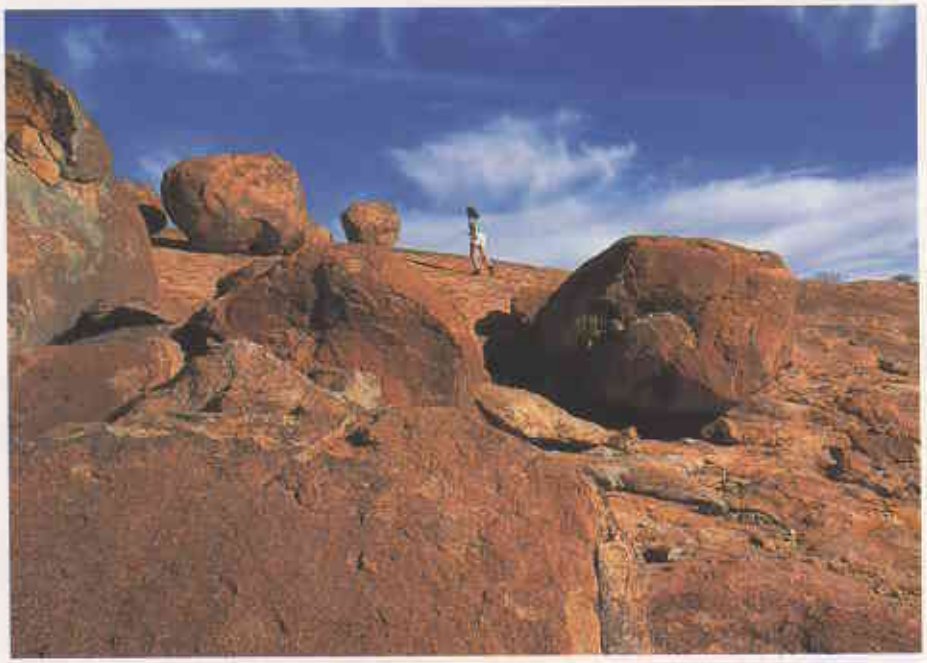
The original woodlines that operated in this area from 1920 to 1925, although often hard to find, remain as a relic of the past (see 'Gimlets and Gold', *LANDSCOPE*, Autumn 1987). Timber cutting associated with the woodlines in the park area ceased in the mid-1920s. Since then, there has been substantial eucalypt regeneration throughout the park and its surrounds. The regenerating woodland contrasts with the uncut woodland further to the west and south.

THE PIPELINE

Having solved the problem of water supply for the trains, the government then had to consider the supply of water to a rapidly increasing population. The catchment dams were too small and most of the bores were saline. Without water, the expansion of the Goldfields was limited.

The Goldfields water supply pipeline, running for 560 kilometres from Mundaring to Kalgoorlie, was built a little more than 100 years ago and remains a monument to the vision and energy of those responsible for its construction. C Y O'Connor, the man responsible for the concept of the pipeline, was appointed as Engineer-in-Chief for the Colony of Western

Australia in 1891. O'Connor visited the Goldfields in 1892 to ascertain the Eastern Railway corridor, and he saw first hand the need for an adequate water supply for the railway and to solve the Goldfields water famine. During the next few years, O'Connor sought Government support and funding for the project, but it was not until 1898 that the Coolgardie Water Supply Bill was passed, providing approval to begin the scheme. During the next four years,



Left: Regrowth woodland of ribbon-barked gum (*E. sheathiana)* and redwood (*E. transcontinentalis).*
Photo – Ian Kealley

Below left: Spectacular rock formations at Victoria Rock, south of Coolgardie.
Photo – Steve Sadler

O'Connor oversaw the development of his vision. Unfortunately, he took his own life in March 1902, after the appointment of a Royal Commission to investigate the Goldfields Water Supply Scheme. On 22 December that year, water flowed from the pipeline at Coolgardie, and in January 1903, water from Mundaring Weir flowed into the Mt Charlotte Reservoir in Kalgoorlie. O'Connor's solution to the water famine for the Goldfields was accomplished.

Now, through the National Trust and the Golden Pipeline Project, many areas of significance along the pipeline route have been identified in plans for refurbishment and interpretation. These include sites such as Boondi and Woolgangie inside the Goldfields Woodlands National Park. Development at these sites will include the provision of information and refurbishment of the railway dams, giving future park visitors the chance to learn about the rich history of the woodlands.

WILDLIFE AND ECOSYSTEMS

The Goldfields Woodlands National Park and surrounding conservation areas protect a wide variety of landforms, vegetation types and ecosystems. There are granite outcrops, natural salt lakes, freshwater swamps, sandplains and the unique and diverse eucalypt woodlands from which the park gets its name.

The Goldfields woodlands contain one of the most diverse ranges of eucalypt species in Australia, many of which are found nowhere else. Around 80 species grow in the woodlands, with many being present in the national park. Common species include the salmon gum (*Eucalyptus salmonophloia*), with its bright, waxy green leaves and sensual salmon-coloured bark, gimlet (*E. salubris*), redwood (*E. transcontinentalis*) and yorrel (*E. gracilis*).

The undulating sandplains that bisect the reserve support low-lying heaths comprised of *Allocasuarina, Acacia, Callitris* and *Banksia* species. Mallee eucalypt species on these sandplains include tall sand mallee (*E. eremophila*) and tammin mallee (*E. leptopoda*). Another important species occurring on the sandplains within the reserve is the threatened species *Daviesia purpurascens.*

Granite rock complexes throughout the woodland areas support distinctive suites of vegetation. Areas such as Yerdanie and Woolgangie rocks are surrounded by thickets of rock sheoak (*Allocasuarina huegeliana*), jam (*Acacia acuminata*) and sandalwood and quandong (*Santalum* spp.). The declared rare flora granite poison (*Gastrolobium graniticum)* is restricted to several granite rock complexes in a confined area around Coolgardie.

The flora and fauna of the Goldfields woodlands were sampled extensively during the Biological Survey of the Eastern Goldfields, in the 1970s and 1980s. More than 1000 species of flowering plants, 17 native species of mammals, four frogs, 52 reptile species and 51 bird species were recorded during the survey, which was conducted for the Biological Surveys Committee by members of the committee and a series of consultants. The committee consisted of scientists from the then National Parks Authority, the Western

Australian Wildlife Research Centre, the Western Australian Herbarium (all now incorporated into the Department of Conservation and Land Management) and the Western Australian Museum.

The most commonly sighted native mammals included western grey kangaroo (*Macropus fuliginosus*) and echidna (*Tachyglossus aculeatus*). Also recorded in the park were four dasyurid marsupials; wongai ningaui (*Ningaui ridei*), fat-tailed dunnart (*Sminthopsis crassicaudata*) and hairy-footed dunnart (*S. hirtipes*) and an additional *Sminthopsis* species—most likely *S. dolichura*. Three species of native rodents—Mitchell's hopping-mouse (*Notomys mitchellii*), sandy inland mouse (*Pseudomys hermannsburgensis*) and Bolam's mouse (*P. bolami*)—and five species of bats were also recorded.

The woodland areas of the Goldfields would also have supported other mammal species prior to the spread of the European fox. These would have included the chuditch (*Dasyurus geoffroii*), brushtail possum (*Trichosurus vulpecula vulpecula*) and the State fauna emblem, the numbat (*Myrmecobius fasciatus*). These animals will be seen in the woodlands of the Goldfields again when the Western Shield fox and feral predator control program is extended to this region.

The known reptile fauna of the woodlands consists of nine species of geckoes, four of legless lizards, 15 species of skinks, two of monitors and five of snakes. The park has a significant diversity of dragon lizards, with nine species—the richest array of dragons that was recorded during the Eastern Goldfields Biological Survey.

Fifty-one species of birds have been recorded in the Goldfields Woodlands National Park. Species such as the shy hylacola (*Sericornis cautus*), blue-breasted fairy-wren (*Malurus pulcherrimus*) and the rufous tree-creeper (*Climacteris rufa*) are habitat specific, requiring the semi-arid thickets and woodlands that are present in the park. The area also has excellent habitats for other species such as Gilbert's whistler (*Pachycephala inornata*).

RECREATION

Although the park has no facilities at present, planning is well under way to identify potential recreation sites within the park and along the Great Eastern Highway. There is also scope to investigate and, if feasible, develop alternative tourism routes to incorporate different biological and historic features within the park, such as the distinctive rock catchments of Boondi and Woolgangie.

Many visitors to this area have a strong interest in the history of the pipeline, woodlines and historic access tracks that serviced the Goldfields. The creation of the Goldfields Woodlands National Park has provided an opportunity to provide facilities that can showcase this diverse natural environment and interpret the rich history of the region.

The attractiveness of the landscape, the history of engineering feats and the tales of other human endeavours in those heady goldrush days are reason enough to visit this part of Western Australia. But add to this the fact that the park straddles the major east-west highway and road link to the eastern states, and you have the potential to provide a huge range of nature-based tourism opportunities for visitors to experience the unique woodlands and discover some of the fascinating history of the Goldfields.

Above: Rufous treecreeper.
Photo – Bill Nelson/LochmanTransparencies

Below left: The common brushtail possum was found in the Goldfields woodlands before the arrival of the fox.
Photo – Jiri Lochman

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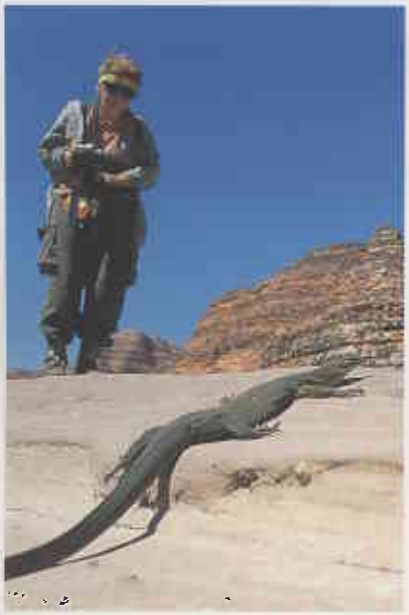
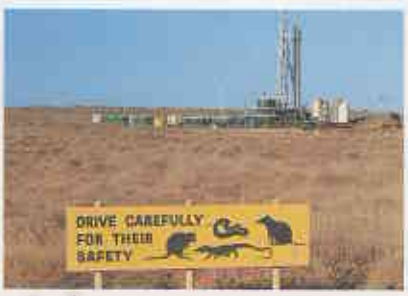
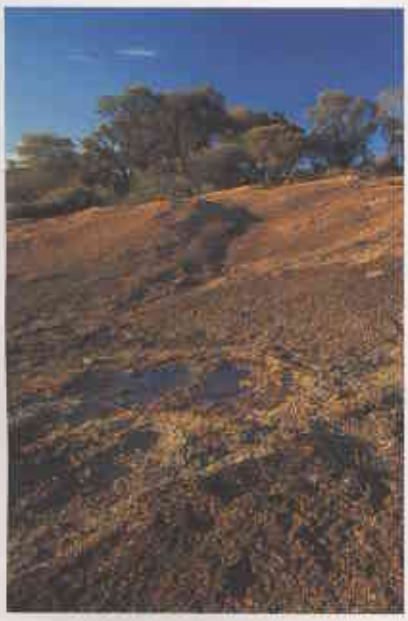


During the past decade more than 500 people have contributed to science projects in WA by joining a LANDSCOPE *Expedition (see page 34).*



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

REGULARS

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.

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