NATURE'S INTERPRETERS

"Human kind cannot bear very much reality," wrote T.S. Eliot. I think what he meant was that when myths and mysteries have filled our minds for so long, they become an investment that is most easily protected by buying more of the same.

For many people, living in big cities on our coastal fringe, nature has been, for so long, an impenetrable mystery and the doses of reality have been small and infrequent. The question this raises for a conservation agency is that if the wider community does not understand and appreciate the natural environment, how can it be an active participant in protecting and using it wisely?

Interpretation of the environment, history and culture of an area is one significant way to enrich peoples' experiences, appreciation and support for management. In debunking the myths with a participatory role for everyone, and in an atmosphere of guided discovery, interpretive programs in our parks educate visitors about park values and natural ecosystem processes, and are an integral part of the park experience.

The Department of Conservation and Land Management has 29 locations throughout Western Australia where guided activities are offered by staff and others. In this issue of LANDSCOPE, *Senior Interpretation Officer Gil Field reports on how the guided experience is at the core of nature-based tourism in the State. In "The Guided Experience: A New Journey", Gil documents the importance of the craft of designing and providing enriching experiences for others in this State, and offers a vision for its continued growth.*

In "Beneath the Busselton Jetty", regular LANDSCOPE *contributor and underwater photographer Ann Storrie explores the wonders of the underwater landscape and the remarkable inhabitants beneath the longest timber jetty in the southern hemisphere. For the non-diver or non-snorkeller, her photography and her word pictures are the next best thing to being there. She writes: "Imagine wandering through a forest, where thousands of flowering plants grow on every tree, and large flocks of birds fly in and around the branches ...." I can.*

Tree hollows in our forests provide animals with a secure and comfortable place to nest and rear their young. There are 42 species of birds, mammals and reptiles that use hollows in standing trees in Western Australian forests. Seven mostly use hollows on the ground. Adaptive management of our forests is contributing to a promising outlook for these hollow-dependent species and, in "Forest Hollows: Wildlife Homes", Kim Whitford examines the expanding base of scientific knowledge that is underpinning this management.

From high in our forests, we take you beneath the Earth's surface, to the caves of Yanchep National Park. Within these caves is a system of shallow streams that are home to an amazing community of night fish, gilgies, leeches, beetles, mites, microscopic worms, snails and crustaceans. In "Threatened Wildlife of the Yanchep Caves", John Blyth, Edyta Jasinska, Lyndon Mutter, Val English and Paul Tholen write about the threat that declining water levels is posing for this critically endangered community, and the actions being taken to save it.

Enjoy the read and we'll see you again in spring.

Ra Kawalilak

Ron Kawalilak
Executive Editor

TOOLIBIN LAKE WINS NATIONAL SALINITY PRIZE

An integrated engineering approach to conserving an important wetland area in the Western Australian Wheatbelt has been recognised with a National Salinity Prize for innovation in engineering.

The Toolibin Lake Recovery Team and Technical Advisory Group received the $30,000 prize, sponsored by the Institution of Engineers Australia, for innovative development of new technologies and practical solutions that address the problem of salinity in rural and urban Australia.

The Toolibin Lake Catchment covers an area of 48,000 hectares in the headwaters of the Blackwood River in the Wheatbelt. Forty-two waterbird species have been recorded at Toolibin Lake, making it one of the most important wetland systems in the area.

The system is one of six natural diversity recovery catchments in WA under the State Government's Salinity Strategy.

In 1995, a structure to divert low volume, high saline surface runoff water from Toolibin Lake into a nearby saline lake was constructed. Since then, around 4000 tonnes of salt have been diverted from the lake. Since 1997, twelve groundwater pumps have been installed at the lake that remove around 750,000 litres of saline groundwater every day.

Thousands of deep-rooting oil mallees and biodiversity seedlings have also been planted across the catchment, to help consume excess water. In addition to combating salinity, the oil mallees provide a potential economic return to local farmers.

(Left to right) Richard George (Department of Agriculture), Audrey Bird (farmer) and Ken Wallace (Department of Conservation and Land Management) with the National Salinity Prize.

Photo – Adam McLean/Canberra Times

The Toolibin Lake recovery project is managed by the Department of Conservation and Land Management and is dependent on the support of local Landowners and government agencies. The Toolibin Lake Catchment Group, Edith Cowan University, Department of Conservation and Land Management, Department of Agriculture and Water and Rivers Commission are represented on one or both recovery groups.

While there is no one definitive solution to Australia's salinity problem, innovative developments such as those found in this project help restore nature's balance and overcome the effects of salinity.

The $30,000 prize will be reinvested into the Toolibin Lake Salinity System and will provide the Recovery Team with the opportunity to develop new facilities and programs in the area.

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

LANDSCOPE

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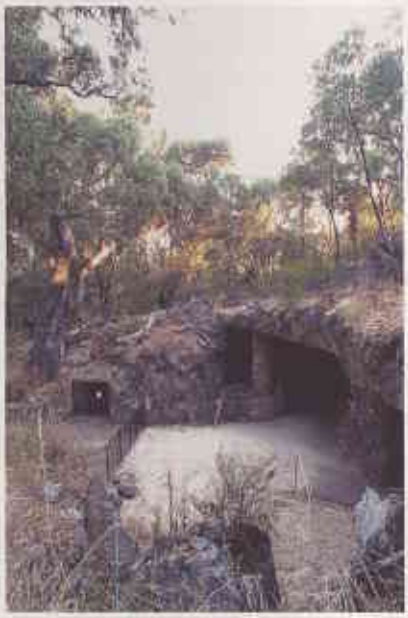
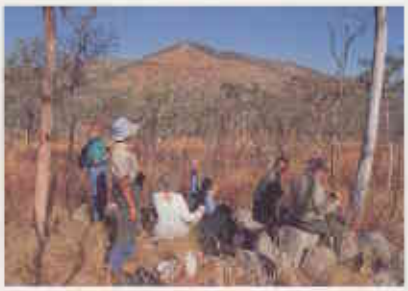
An exciting range of recreational opportunities are being offered in some national parks, creating employment for locals. See page 28.

Native animals need tree hollows and people need wood. How are these conflicting uses managed? See page 20.

The search to find out the cause of a new tree killer known as Mundulla Yellows. See page 41.



Declining water levels threaten a remarkable community of cave-dwellers in Yanchep National Park. Turn to page 34.



Re-discovering the long-forgotten memoirs of a Kimberely pioneer. See page 48.

FEATURES

REGULARS

COVER

Leafy seadragons are occasionally seen in the seagrass around the Busselton Jetty (see page 10). They are in the same family as seahorses but, unlike seahorses, they have leafy appendages that make them almost invisible in their surroundings. The male carries the eggs in the skin beneath his tail. After hatching, the young swim off to fend for themselves.

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