A QUESTION OF INTRINSIC VALUE

It is commonly agreed, nowadays, that biodiversity should be conserved and protected. There is, however, no universal agreement on why this should be done.

Some argue in favour of emphasising benefits to the human race, relying on the logic of economic utility, stressing usefulness to humans, to society, to science. Others argue for nature's "intrinsic" value, that the complex set of relationships that make up our natural environment have a right to exist and are not simply natural resources for the use of humans.

So, is this apparent ambivalence between saving nature for future use and saving nature for its own sake really an issue?

The Department of Conservation and Land Management recently amended it's mission statement to include the words '... for their intrinsic values':

> In partnership with the community, we conserve Western Australia's biodiversity, and manage the lands and waters entrusted to us, for their intrinsic values and for the appreciation and benefit of present and future generations.

This reflects the fact that biodiversity conservation is based not only on good science, but also on sound ethical judgments where the needs and desires of humans should not be the only basis for ethical decisions. Indeed, biodiversity needs to be conserved for the benefits this diversity confers on all species, irrespective of their perceived values to one species or another.

In this issue of LANDSCOPE *we continue to explore some the State's rich diversity of native plants, animals and natural ecosystems.*

Western Australia's south-west is renowned around the world for its wildflowers. Less known is the fact that its fungi are even more diverse. In 'Forest Fungi', Richard Robinson examines an amazing range of fungi—with an incredible variety of forms, colours and lifestyles—found in the jarrah, karri and tingle forests.

In Australia, organisms have been exposed to fires for millions of years and have evolved special adaptations to cope with them. In 'Australian Fire-Beetles', researchers Helmet and Anke Schmitz provide insight into the phenomenon of two little-known species that are actually attracted to bushfires and, when a large bushfire is raging, approach the fire in sometimes unbelievable numbers.

Since European settlement, 22 species of mammals have become extinct in Australia. Innovative conservation programs, such as the department's Western Shield program, have led to a resurgence in remnant mammal populations in WA. In 'Kanyana to the Rescue', Mitzi Vance describes the volunteer efforts of June and Lloyd Butcher who are working alongside the department and playing a vital role in the conservation of Australia's threatened mammal species.

And in 'For the Times They are A-Changin', recently-retired Deputy Director of Biodiversity Conservation, Andrew Burbidge, looks back on an illustrious career working on biodiversity conservation in the State, describes some of the changes he has seen, pays tribute to the work of many of his colleagues and looks forward at what must be done to ensure WA has a world-class biodiversity conservation program.

So back to the question of why should biodiversity be conserved? I've given you my answer. Now, what's yours?

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

Ra Kawalilak

Ron Kawalilak
Executive Editor

A NEW BABY AT YANCHEP

A birth is finally announced of one delightful female koala to Euca at Yanchep National Park, north of Perth.

News of the birth, which took place in November 2001, was not released by the Department of Conservation and Land Management, which manages the park, until the joey had survived the critical first seven months.

The as-yet-unnamed offspring began to venture outside her mother's pouch in May, and Euca is showing every indication of being a thoroughly worthy mum. There are no doubts about paternity—Gumnut is the joey's dad.

Euca is one of the twins that made history, in 1996, when they were born at Yanchep National Park. It was the first twin-koala birth recorded in Western Australia, and the second set of twins in the world to have survived in captivity. The other twin—also a female—was named Lyptus, and the pair is thought to be unique in having survived infancy together.

Ranger-in-Charge John Wheeler said that Euca, Lyptus, Gumnut and the joey were part of the park's 17-strong koala colony.

"The new family—along with the rest of the colony members—can be seen every day at the park," John said.

Koalas *(Phascolarctos cinereus)* breed during the summer months, and females generally produce a single young each year. After a pregnancy of about 35 days, the young koala, which is about a centimetre long and weighs about half-a-gram, crawls into its mother's pouch and attaches itself to one of her two nipples for five to six months.

The department has launched a competition for Western Australian children to name the new joey and two additional koalas that were recently brought to the park from Tasmania.

If you would like further information about the competition or the koala colony, please phone (08) 9561 1004 or email yanchep@calm.wa.gov.au.

Photo – John Wheeler

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

LANDSCOPE

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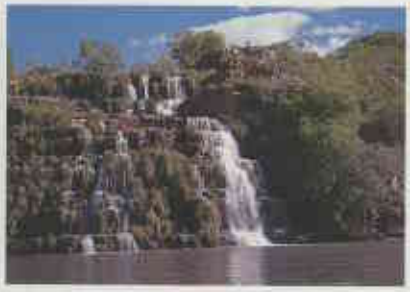
Discover some amazing lifestyles of the little-known fungi of our south-west forests. See 'Forest fungi' on page 10.



One of WA's longest serving wildlife researchers looks at changes to nature conservation in the State. See 'For the times they are a-changin' on page 20.

Two unusual beetles are attracted to large bushfires. But why, and how do they find the fires and avoid getting burnt? See 'Australian fire-beetles' on page 36.

Two wildlife rescuers recently received Queen's birthday honours. See 'Kanyana to the rescue' on page 42.

What do wildlife officers do when a large whale weighing up to 80 tonnes becomes entangled? Turn to 'When nature calls...for help' on page 42.

COVER

The dugong is the only living species in the Family Dugongidae, and is more closely related to elephants than it is to whales and dolphins. One of the largest and most secure populations of dugong grazes on the extensive beds of seagrass in the shallow marine environment of Shark Bay. An estimated 10,000 dugongs, representing 10 per cent of the world's population, live in the bay. A new study, involving collaboration with local Aboriginal people, is discovering more about their movements in the bay. See page 28.

Cover illustration by Phillipa Nikulinsky

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