

INVESTIGATION IS WORTH ITS SALT



A salinity investigation is under way at Mogumber Nature Reserve to support conservation efforts for the critically endangered western swamp tortoise (*Pseudemydura umbrina*)—the world's rarest tortoise and one of Australia's most endangered species.

The Department of Conservation and Land Management has commissioned the investigation, to ensure that saline surface water flowing into part of the reserve from the Darling Plateau is not affecting the western swamp tortoise habitat.

The \$10,000 investigation is expected to provide the department with much-needed information on the groundwater processes at work in the reserve, and will significantly help in planning conservation management. This investigation follows a preliminary assessment by a consultant, commissioned by the department to establish whether or not salinity was

a threat to the tortoise's habitat. Funding from the State Salinity Strategy has now allowed the department to implement the recommendations outlined in the consultant's report.

The investigation will include the installation of monitoring bores, as well as other research aimed at recommending any measures needed to maintain groundwater quality.

Consideration may also be given to the installation of a groundwater-production bore that will help to supplement swamp water levels in times of extended dry periods. This will help to maintain suitable habitat for the western swamp tortoise and benefit its conservation.

The western swamp tortoise recovery team, comprising people from the department, The University of Western Australia's Zoology Department, Perth

Zoo, Curtin University's School of Biomedical Sciences and the World Wide Fund for Nature Australia, has developed a comprehensive recovery plan for this threatened species that is well under way. After releasing captive-bred tortoises at Twin Swamps Nature Reserve at Warbrook for several years, the recovery team decided to concentrate on Mogumber for the next few years, as long as the habitat proves suitable.

Six western swamp tortoises were released into Mogumber Nature Reserve in 2000. The results were positive enough to follow up with the release of an additional 25 individuals in

Western swamp tortoise.

Photo – Babs and Bert Wells

August 2001, and further releases are planned this year.

The wetlands into which these animals were translocated were purchased and added to the nature reserve recently, with funding from the State government and under the National Reserve System, part of the Commonwealth Government's Natural Heritage Trust.

Recent monitoring shows a high survival rate. If the translocations are successful, the Mogumber population will be only the third wild population of this species in the world.

ERRATUM

The article on 'Mundulla Yellows: a new tree-dieback threat' in the Winter 2002 issue of *LANDSCOPE* incorrectly referred to *Phytophthora* as a slime mould. *Phytophthora* is, in fact, a water mould. We apologise to the authors for this editorial error.



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.

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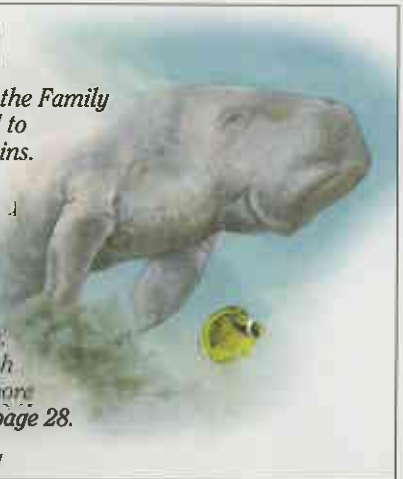
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COVER

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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