

endangered

by John Blyth and Brett Molony



The hairy (Margaret River) marron

Over the last 15 or so years, fisheries officers and zoologists working on Western Australian freshwater crayfish realised that marron in the Margaret River (from which the type specimen had been collected) had a consistently hairier carapace and several other structural differences from other marron (commonly known as 'smooth' marron). It became common practice to refer to it as a separate subspecies (the Margaret River or 'hairy' marron). However, it has recently been described as a separate species, based on morphological and genetic differences and minimal hybridisation in mixed populations with the smooth form.

During that time it was recognised that the hairy species had been joined in the Margaret River by the widespread smooth species, probably accidentally released, and the distribution and abundance of hairy marron was declining.

The hairy marron is now only found in the unmodified upper reaches of Margaret River, within State forest. In the middle and lower reaches, only smooth marron

are present and it seems that hairy marron are being outcompeted by smooth marron in degraded sections of the river, where riverside vegetation has been lost or modified. In addition, degraded sections of river are often adjacent to farmland containing dams, many of which may have been seeded with smooth marron that may 'leak' into the river.

In March 2003, the WA Threatened Species Scientific Committee recommended that the hairy marron be classified as Critically Endangered.

The departments of Fisheries and Conservation and Land Management are developing and implementing an interim recovery plan for the hairy marron, with Fisheries being the lead agency. This follows precautionary changes to the marron fishery in 2003 to protect the remaining hairy marron, and the establishment of a captive breeding population at Pemberton, in case active re-establishment is required.

Threats to the hairy marron include clearing of the catchment and introduced species, including yabbies, mosquito-fish, carp and smooth marron, in the river and private dams. Actions to recover the hairy marron will benefit

other endemic species in the Margaret River and complement ongoing restoration projects in the catchment.

Community support is critical to the success of the recovery program for hairy marron and a public workshop in Margaret River late last year canvassed public interest. Community groups and members of the public are keen to assist in recovery projects, and provided many ideas at the meeting. These ideas are being drafted into an Interim Recovery Plan, and a Recovery Team will be established shortly.

We can still reverse the decline in hairy marron. The species may be used as a local icon and monitoring tool for Margaret River, and as a flagship species for river and catchment restoration and management. Furthermore, the recovery project will provide an example of a whole of Government approach to managing natural resources. Our two agencies will work closely with the Margaret River community and other agencies and non-Government organisations to recover the hairy marron.

Photo by Brett Dennis/Lochman Transparencies

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Scientific/technical advice

Kevin Kenneally, Paul Jones, Chris Simpson, Keith Morris.

Design and production Tiffany Aberin,
Maria Duthie, Natalie Jolakoski,
Gooitzen van der Meer.

Illustration Gooitzen van der Meer.

Cartography Promaco Geodraft

Marketing Estelle de San Miguel

Phone (08) 9334 0296 Fax (08) 9334 0432.

Subscription enquiries

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