





New parks for **old** growth

Western Australia's network of 69 national parks is set to increase dramatically, with the creation of 29 new parks in the State's South West forests. The proposal for a thirtieth new park at Tone Perup has been amended to create a new nature reserve, as a result of public comments.

The new parks—and other additions to the conservation reserve system—stretch from the forests on Perth's doorstep to those that will be part of the vast Walpole Wilderness Area on the south coast.



by Caris Bailey and Daniella Hant

New national parks across the South West forests will add nearly half-a-million hectares to the conservation reserve system and include a diverse range of landscapes from old-growth forests of karri, jarrah, marri and tingle to wandoo, granite outcrops, tea tree flats, and swampy banksia woodlands (see box on page 16). They are inhabited by an equally diverse range of wildlife, and are a focus for nature-based recreation and tourism.

The new parks, created under the State government's *Protecting our old-growth forests* policy, were priority actions under the Forest Management Plan 2004–2013. Legislation to create the new parks was passed in November 2004.

The management plan also carries forward earlier proposals to add another 200,000 hectares to the existing conservation reserve system.

Scenic and natural values

With increasing public awareness about the need to conserve WA's unique environment, and growing trends for people to want to explore natural areas in their home state, the creation of almost 30 new national parks is very timely. Many of these areas have had basic picnic sites, lookouts and campsites for decades, but only those in the know



currently use them. This is likely to change when the new parks are created, and the Department of Conservation and Land Management (CALM) is getting ready for increased visitor numbers to these areas.

At present, few national parks have extensive areas of wandoo, but under the new parks initiatives WA will gain the Wandoo National Park, an area of 46,493 hectares in the Shire of York, east of Perth. This park has attractive, open woodland through which walktrails lead to panoramic valley views across to Mount Dale. When the area's profile increases, visitors will discover a new hide (provided with

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Main Mount Frankland in the Walpole Wilderness Area.

Photo – David Bettini

Insets from top *Hibbertia unicum*; the Perup Forest Ecology Centre.

Photos – Cliff Winfield

Mount Observation upgrade, in the proposed Wandoo National Park.

Photo – Daniella Hanf

Left A totem pole created by high school students for the Golden View Trail in the proposed Mundaring National Park.

Photo – Michael Phillips

Below Fernhook Falls, in the Walpole Wilderness Area.

Photo – David Bettini

help from the WA Naturalists' Club) enabling them to view birds and other wildlife along a creekline, an upgraded picnic site with new furniture, toilets and extended walktrails. The new national park will also be extremely important from a nature conservation perspective, as the wandoo has suffered widespread decline and death over the past 20 years, to the point that a Wandoo Study Group has been set up to investigate the reasons for its decline and outline what needs to be done to help reverse it.



New resources and jobs

Under the *Protecting our old-growth forests* policy, the State government allocated a massive \$25 million over four years from 2001 for management and capital works in the proposed new national parks.

This has already funded new picnic and camping furniture, upgraded walktrails, toilet blocks, interpretation, and maintenance and revegetation work in many proposed parks across the South West. One example is the Lake Muir Observatory in the Lake Muir Nature Reserve, 60 kilometres east of Manjimup, which will be adjacent to the proposed Lake Muir National Park. Here, new parks funding has enabled a travellers' stop to be created off Muir Highway, where a bird hide and 120-metre-long boardwalk with a viewing deck has been built. Visitors can learn about the significance of this Ramsar wetland and its international importance for bird migration. Interpretation also describes conservation work undertaken as part of the State Salinity Strategy. New picnic tables (two of them under cover), barbecues and a composting toilet will enhance visitor amenity.

South Ledge, in the proposed Mundaring National Park, was a fairly low-profile picnic area with a walktrail leading to a spot with beautiful views over the Helena Valley and Mundaring Weir. South Ledge is now an outstanding gateway to Golden View, a lookout funded by a grant from the Commonwealth Department of Tourism and Regional Services to the Shire of Kalamunda. With new parks funding, the walktrail to the lookout has been widened, resurfaced and stepped using retaining rock walls. A section of the Bibbulmun Track has been diverted to allow track walkers to enjoy the new walktrail and its views. Tall engraved totems by local high school students have been installed to help visitors interpret the area's natural values and their significance to people. The picnic area has been completely revamped and roads realigned to provide safer entry to the site. Toilets and furniture have been upgraded and now total six tables and five barbecues.

Proposals to place such a large area of forests in national parks led to



Above Wandoo woodland in the proposed Helena National Park.
Photo – Chris Garnett/CALM

Right The walktrail to access 'Golden View' lookout platform has been upgraded with new parks funding.
Photo – Daniella Hanf

significant reductions in timber harvesting quotas, so new parks funding has also been used to employ dozens of former timber workers displaced by these changes. There were 25 displaced timber workers on the payroll in October 2004 and up to 60 employed in total (some were on short-term contracts as seasonal firefighters).

The new parks will also receive a large share of a further \$35.7 million over four years recently allocated for capital works in conservation reserves throughout the State. An additional \$1 million has been allocated for visitor facilities in the Walpole Wilderness Area, at Mount Frankland, the Valley of the Giants and Swarbrick forest north-west of Walpole.

Walpole wilderness

Four of the new parks will combine with the existing Shannon, Mount Frankland and Walpole-Nornalup national parks to form the 363,000-hectare Walpole Wilderness Area between Walpole and Denmark. In the



west, it will border D'Entrecasteaux National Park to create a massive conservation reserve network across the south coast from Augusta to Denmark. The Walpole Wilderness Area also encompasses cultural heritage sites, including 26 Aboriginal sites registered by the Department of Indigenous Affairs, and many nature-based tourism and recreation attractions, including the Tree Top Walk and part of the Bibbulmun Track.

Essentially, wilderness is an area substantially unchanged by European intervention, sufficiently large and

Economic value of WA parks and forests

Curtin University's Sustainable Tourism Centre, in collaboration with researchers from Murdoch and Edith Cowan universities, has conducted an assessment to provide data on the value of natural areas for tourism and recreation to help manage these areas sustainably. Two areas known for their unique natural attractions were chosen for the case studies: the Gascoyne coast and the southern forest region.

Visitors to the southern forest region—the area around Manjimup, Pemberton and Walpole, including the Valley of the Giants and its Tree Top Walk—were surveyed during the April 2003 school holidays and the responses analysed to determine factors such as where visitors came from; how long and where they stayed in the region; how much they spent; and the importance of forests in attracting visitors to the region. The study authors, Jack Carlsen and David Wood, reported that about 88 per cent of all visitor expenditure in the southern forest region was due to national parks and forests. This expenditure is estimated at \$61.9 million a year, but could be as high as \$70.5 million, since they argued that national parks and forests were likely to provide a secondary reason for visiting the region. Significantly, the study found that while visitors may be attracted to the southern forest region for other reasons, \$5.7 million a year would be forgone in tourism income if the national parks and forests were not there.



remote to enable long-term protection of its biodiversity and natural systems, and with ecological processes that remain essentially intact.

Approximately 20,000 hectares of the new national parks in the Walpole Wilderness Area that meet these criteria are scheduled to be the first wilderness classified under the *Conservation and Land Management Act 1984*. The area has very high species richness, including species that are living links to Gondwana, the great southern continent in the Mesozoic era (230 to 65 million years ago) that later broke up and drifted apart to form Africa, India, Australia, New Zealand, South America and Antarctica. Some of these survivors from cooler, wetter Gondwanan times include the sunset frog (*Spicospina flammeoacantha*), tingle trapdoor spider (*Moggridgea tingle*) and three species of large tingle trees, which, appropriately,

Top background Part of the proposed 363,000 hectare Walpole Wilderness Area.
Photo – Cliff Winfield

Centre left Sunset frog.
Photo – Grant Wardell-Johnson

Left Red-flowering gum (*Corymbia ficifolia*), Walpole-Nornalup National Park.
Photo – Alex Bond

Right Slopes covered with moss and wild geranium (*Pelargonium australe* subsp. *drummondii*) in Mt Frankland National Park. Photo – Alex Bond

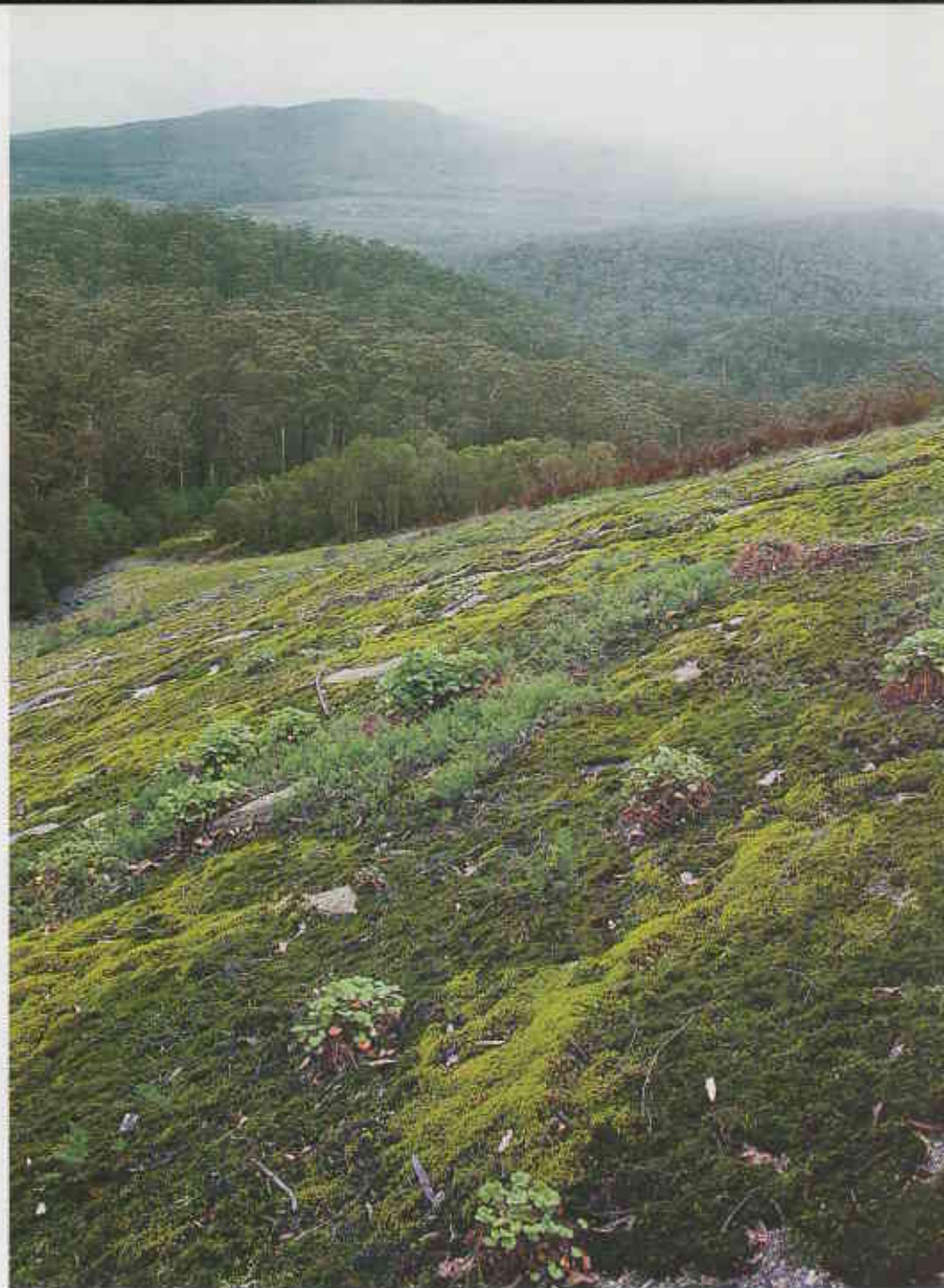
have an other-worldly appearance. The entire tingle forest formations, consisting of red tingle (*Eucalyptus jacksonii*), Rates tingle (*E. brevistylis*) and yellow tingle (*E. guilfoylei*), as well as red-flowering gum (*Corymbia ficifolia*) and *E. virginia* ms only occur within the Walpole Wilderness Area.

Altogether, the Walpole Wilderness Area contains about 1500 species, subspecies or varieties of native flowering plants, with 500 to 600 species per square kilometre in some areas. This represents about 80 per cent of the native flora of the Warren biogeographic region. Centres of considerable floral diversity occur in the Mount Lindesay area, the southern flats, Walpole-Nornalup National Park and granite monadnocks. Walpole-Nornalup National Park is one of the richest areas for ground orchids in Australia, and the moist high-rainfall area of the Walpole Wilderness Area also supports the highest number of mosses in the State.

Threatened animals in the Walpole Wilderness Area include the chuditch, western ringtail possum, quokka, western bristlebird, Baudin's black-cockatoo, Carnaby's black-cockatoo, sunset frog, western archaeid spider (*Austrarchaea mainae*) and tingle trapdoor spider.

The Walpole Wilderness Area is the site of recovery and translocation programs for a number of species, including the woylie into the Valley of the Giants, Mount Lindesay and Thames forest block (about halfway between Walpole and Denmark) areas; the tamar into the Thames area; the chuditch into the Mount Lindesay area; and the western bristlebird into Walpole-Nornalup National Park.

Baiting for European foxes and feral cats, followed by successful reintroductions of native animals, has become regular practice in locations around the State. CALM's *Western*



Shield program involves regular baiting of around 3.5 million hectares of conservation lands, with more than 800,000 poison baits used each year. The research that established the link between rising fox numbers and declining wildlife, and then proposed a solution, had its beginnings less than 30 years ago in the forest at Perup, east of Manjimup.

Perup

Perup forest has long been recognised as one of the most important sites for mammals in Western Australia, and has been managed as if it were a conservation reserve since 1972. Altogether, 22 native mammal species have been recorded at Perup, one of the highest numbers recorded in any reserve in the

South West. Given the presence of so many native species, the public consultation process to finalise the boundaries of the proposed Tone Perup National Park also invited comments on the most appropriate reserve classification for the area. The response was strong endorsement for a nature reserve, which has the primary purpose of flora and fauna conservation.

As a result, this significant area is now to become the Tone Perup Nature Reserve and will cover about 56,000 hectares, nearly double the area proposed as a nature reserve in the early 1990s. It has benefited enormously from new parks funding, which has allowed CALM to redevelop the old Perup Forest Ecology Centre to provide additional environmentally-friendly accommodation and other

New parks



Proposed national parks	Area (hectares)
1 Blackwood River National Park	20,477
2 Boorara Gardner National Park	11,008
3 Boyndaminup National Park	5439
4 Bramley National Park	3892
5 Butler National Park	11,645
6 Canning National Park	2492
7 Dalgarup National Park	2377
8 Easter National Park	2985
9 Forest Grove National Park	1379
10 Greater Beedelup National Park	19,270
11 Greater Dordagup National Park	6408
12 Greater Hawke National Park	14,004
13 Greater Kingston National Park	21,092
14 Greater Preston National Park	12,665
15 Helena National Park	12,255
16 Hilliger National Park	16,962
17 Jane National Park	6863
18 Lake Muir National Park	9625
19 Milyeannup National Park	18,692
20 Mt Frankland North	22,053
21 Mt Frankland South	42,283
22 Mt Lindesay National Park	39,541
23 Mt Roe National Park	127,726
24 Mundaring National Park	4617
25 Pickering Brook National Park	6344
26 Wandoo National Park	46,493
27 Wellington National Park extension	14,429
28 Whicher National Park	6343
29 Yelverton National Park	729

Names for the new parks are still to be finalised, with the exception of two along the Blackwood River, where it has been decided to honour two men who died in the area fighting a bushfire. John Wiltshire-Butler and Johannes Hilliger both worked for the former Forests Department and were called out to fight a fire at Barlee Brook in 1958. Forest blocks were named in their memory after they died, parts of which will be incorporated into the proposed Butler and Hilliger national parks.



facilities (see 'Possum magic', *LANDSCOPE*, Spring 2004) to cater for a wide range of visitors. The new facilities use passive solar design principles and include a visitors' cottage that caters for small groups, ranger and volunteer houses with kitchen facilities, rainwater tanks and furniture and a new laboratory/classroom with sinks, work benches, courtyard and linking path network.

Connections

A feature of the proposed additions to the network of forest conservation reserves is the number of strong linkages that will be created, such as that between the new Walpole Wilderness Area and D'Entrecasteaux National Park. Other examples include five new parks along the Blackwood River; five new parks in the Perth hills; four new parks to the west and east of Shannon National Park; and the reserves north of the Walpole Wilderness Area that link through to the proposed Greater Kingston National Park, north of Manjimup.

The new parks are being connected in other ways too. One of the most significant achievements that has resulted from new parks funding is the establishment of the Karri Forest Explorer Drive (see 'Stay... just a little bit longer', *LANDSCOPE*, Autumn 2004) in the tall karri forest in and around Pemberton. This 86-kilometre winding drive links iconic recreation sites in established parks such as Beedelup, Warren and Gloucester with the proposed Greater Beedelup National Park and with local businesses



Above A karri tree in the proposed Greater Hawke National Park.

Above left Karri Forest Explorer interpretive information.

Opposite Old-growth karri forest. Photos – Cliff Winfield

Right Walpole spider orchid (*Caladenia interjacens*), Long Point, Walpole-Nornalup National Park. Photo – Alex Bond

along the route. It uses signage and oral histories (transmitted via car radios) to engage visitors with stories about people whose lives have been shaped by the forest.

The new parks—and the new funding for them—are all about creating new environmental experiences, while protecting environmental values. It is an initiative from which all Western Australians can benefit.



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