

Safe passage for cygnets



Thomsorts Lake, one of 19 lakes in Beellar Regional Park, supports more than 10,000 waterbirds, including the State's bird emblem—the black swan. A vermin-proof fence, erected to protect the swans from predators, was creating problems for migrating cygnets last summer. But measures are being taken to ensure they have a safe passage into adulthood.

by Joanna Moore

The elegant, long-necked black swan (*Cygnus atratus*), first noted by Europeans on Western Australia's Swan River in 1697, is our State's bird emblem. Each summer, Thomsons Lake, just 34 kilometres south-west of Perth's CBD, dries out, leaving its juvenile swans to seek water elsewhere. Their destination is usually the deeper and more permanent waters of Kogolup Lake, about half-a-kilometre to the north.

A vermin-proof fence that surrounds Thomsons Lake, however, complicates their seemingly short migration. The water-starved cygnets can become trapped inside the boundary of the fence and, unless

helped to a release point on the northern boundary, risk death. In the early summer of 2004-05, officers from the Department of Conservation and Land Management (CALM) found cygnets in just these dire circumstances on the perimeter of Thomsons Lake Nature Reserve.



Saving swans

To protect these cygnets, CALM produced a Cygnet Management Plan for Thomsons Lake Nature Reserve: its goal to reduce possible deaths in cygnets trapped by the vermin-proof fence. In the monitoring period between late November and late December 2004, 103 cygnets were found along the internal fenceline. CALM staff ushered most of these young swans—less than five months old—to a temporarily opened release gate, and they safely made their own way to Kogolup Lake. A small number of cygnets were so exhausted that they were carried right to the water's edge. These cygnets, often very young ones, would most certainly have died had they not been rescued.

Ironically, the vermin-proof fence surrounding Thomsons Lake, which blocks the young swans' summer journey, was constructed for their own protection. Used in conjunction with CALM's *Western Shield* baiting program, which has been carried out in the area since 1993, the fence is necessary for the safety of many native birds, and other animal species in the reserve. The ongoing baiting program has been highly successful, significantly reducing the number of foxes from within the fence, and thereby increasing the successful breeding of swans and other waterbirds. However, cats—both feral and prowling domestic ones from nearby residences—continue to cause concern.



Previous page

Main A black swan with her cygnets.

Photo – Michael James/CALM

Inset Kogolup Lake, Thomsons Lake Nature Reserve.

Photo – Jiri Lochman

Above left Vermin-proof fence between Thomsons and Kogolup lakes, at Thomsons Lake Nature Reserve.

Photo – Marie Lochman

Left Black swans with cygnets.

Photo – Jiri Lochman

Right Thomsons Lake.
*Photo – Dennis and Jay Sarson/
Lochman Transparencies*

Below right A black swan and cygnets at
Beeliar Regional Park.
Photo – Michael James/CALM

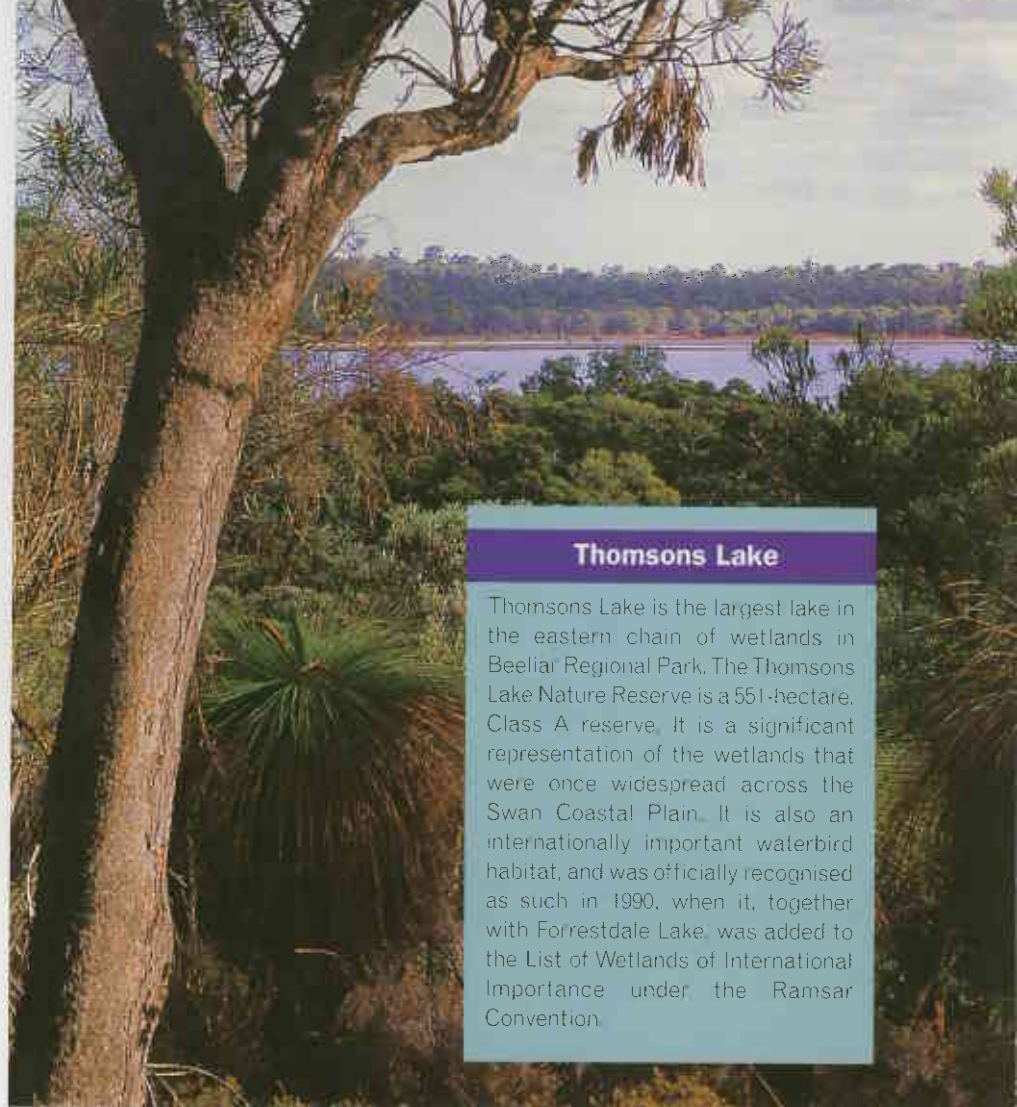
Not just swans

It is not just the graceful black swans, iconic of the Swan River foreshores and urban lakes in Perth, that use the lakes of Beeliar Regional Park for habitat, refuge and breeding sites. Thomsons Lake is a highly significant wetland habitat, supporting more than 10,000 waterbirds across 69 species. The reserve's proximity to urban areas means it also provides recreation opportunities for city dwellers seeking some solitude in a natural setting.

Unfortunately, the close proximity of Thomsons Lake to rapidly growing urban developments has impacted on the lake and its inhabitants. The wetland ecosystem, its surrounds and water regimes affecting the reserve require careful monitoring by CALM and other State government agencies, as well as the support of the local community who can enjoy the nature appreciation opportunities provided by the reserve.

The ability of Thomsons Lake to support waterbird populations relies on the presence and quality of the water. When full, the open water of the lake covers some 150 hectares. Despite this winter vastness, Thomsons Lake had essentially dried out by late December 2004, and the cygnets were forced to look for more water. In addition to long-term climatic conditions, which have become increasingly dry since the 1970s, modified land use within the catchment, water usage and drainage have decreased groundwater levels. All of these things have significant impacts upon the fragile wetland ecosystem of Thomsons Lake Nature Reserve.

The cygnet rescue effort may be needed again this summer. If this is the case, CALM staff and community volunteers will be busy patrolling the reserve's fences in the lead-up to Christmas.



Thomsons Lake

Thomsons Lake is the largest lake in the eastern chain of wetlands in Beeliar Regional Park. The Thomsons Lake Nature Reserve is a 551-hectare, Class A reserve. It is a significant representation of the wetlands that were once widespread across the Swan Coastal Plain. It is also an internationally important waterbird habitat, and was officially recognised as such in 1990, when it, together with Forrestdale Lake, was added to the List of Wetlands of International Importance under the Ramsar Convention.



CALM management plans, such as the one for Thomsons Lake Nature Reserve, guide CALM personnel and the community in helping to conserve native animals. They facilitate the continual monitoring and honing of management practices and community involvement. CALM's charter of conservation, its successful partnerships with the community and the measures brought about by these will hopefully help these icons of our State—even in their 'ugly duckling' form—to develop into beautiful swans.



Joanna Moore is a final-year Professional Writing and Presentation student at Curtin University of Technology. She really enjoyed her work placement experience at *LANDSCOPE*, where she could creatively bring together her love of writing with her appreciation and concern for the preservation of the natural environment.

- 48 Bald Island getaway for Gilbert's potoroos
A 'holiday' for two critically endangered potoroos provides new information for scientists hoping to improve the status of the species.
- 56 Discovering Walpole's spineless wonders
Local community members unite with scientists in an inspiring research project at Walpole.

Regulars

- 3 Contributors and Editor's letter
- 9 Bookmarks
The best of the South West
Gogo fish!
Rica Erickson – A Naturalist's Life
- 18 Feature park
D'Entrecasteaux National Park
- 20 Endangered
Western ringtail possum
- 62 Urban antics
Lice, mites, ticks and crosses.

Publishing credits

Executive editor Caris Bailey

Editors Carolyn Thomson-Dans, Rhianna Mooney

Contributing editor David Gough

Scientific/technical advice

Kevin Kenneally, Paul Jones, Chris Simpson, Keith Morris

Design and production Tiffany Taylor,

Maria Duthie, 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

Phone (08) 9334 0481 or (08) 9334 0437

Prepress and printing Lamb Print,

Western Australia

© ISSN 0815-4465

All material copyright. No part of the contents of the publication may be reproduced without the consent of the publishers.

Please do not send unsolicited material, but feel free to contact the editors.

Visit NatureBase at www.naturebase.net

Published by the Department of Conservation and Land Management, 17 Dick Perry Avenue, Kensington, Western Australia.

