

Magenta moments

by Rohan Swan



Lake Magenta Nature Reserve, one of the largest nature reserves in the Wheatbelt, is rich in plant species and an important habitat for native animals. Largely undisturbed by logging and land clearing, and part of the Department of Environment and Conservation's *Western Shield* wildlife recovery program, it is an ideal location to conduct research into the region's wildflowers and wildlife. For participants of the 'Magenta Magic' *LANDSCOPE* Expedition, this will be both a rewarding and enjoyable experience.



The 108,000-hectare Lake Magenta Nature Reserve lies in the south-eastern part of the WA Wheatbelt, and 40 kilometres south of Newdegate. The shallow, saline Lake Magenta, which generally only holds water during winter or after summer rains, covers 20 per cent of the reserve. To its north and south are a number of smaller lakes that make up a larger lake system. About a third of the reserve falls into the UNESCO Fitzgerald biosphere reserve buffer zone, making it a vital part of the overall biodiversity of the region.

Natural residents

Lake Magenta Nature Reserve has populations of three threatened plant species, plus an additional 24 species on the Department of Environment and Conservation's (DEC's) Priority Flora list. The vegetation is mainly mallee heath on sandy soils interspersed with areas of salmon gum woodlands. The reserve is connected—via large areas of unallocated Crown land—to the mallee shrublands to the east of the Wheatbelt.



The reserve provides important habitat for a number of native animals, including brushtail possums, chuditch, Mitchell's hopping-mice, heath mice, western mice, ash grey mice and red-tailed phascogales. Another 30 species of reptiles and frogs have also been recorded. Forty chuditch were released into the reserve as part of the *Western Shield* program in 1996. The associated fox baiting program significantly reduced the number of foxes in the area, allowing native animals to survive and thrive in the reserve. The chuditch population has now established, but at lower densities than hoped for. Some other medium-sized mammals such as quenda and woylies have also declined despite ongoing fox control and reintroduction efforts.

The richness in some species, and the lack of sustained recovery in others, has seen it and the nearby Dunn Rock Nature Reserve recently become the focus of a research program examining the reasons for limited wildlife recovery in the Wheatbelt. This is part of a much larger research program being undertaken by DEC scientists into the interactions between foxes, feral cats, feral dogs and native predators.

Threatened bird species found at Lake Magenta include Carnaby's black-cockatoos, malleefowl and western whipbirds. Malleefowl populations are being monitored by the Malleefowl Preservation Group. Spotted pardalotes, Gilbert's whistlers and wedge-tailed eagles are also often seen in the reserve.

The expedition

A *LANDSCOPE* Expedition to Lake Magenta and Dunn Rock nature reserves is planned for November 2006. Expedition members will visit the reserves each day for 10 days, where they will conduct biological surveys—identifying and recording animal species—to determine current population densities. This will help to determine which animals live in the reserves and allow scientists to estimate their numbers, as part of a wider project that looks at why some animals are not recovering, and monitors the presence of introduced predators, in particular foxes and cats.

Expeditioners will also search for threatened plant species with Anne Rick, a local botanist and member of DEC's Great Southern District rare flora recovery team. Anne will lead the botanical surveys into Lake Magenta and Dunn Rock nature reserves.



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Main Sunsets at Lake Magenta provide visitors with a glimpse of the area's many moods.

Inset Salmon gum woodlands.

Above left Torrential rains in January 2006 inundated large areas of the reserve and surrounding farms.

Left A western pygmy possum captured at Lake Magenta.

Photos – Brent Johnson



Above This ice formation was on a puddle near Lake Magenta on a chilly morning.

Above right Although it is seasonally dry, Lake Magenta reached record levels in 2006.

Right LANDSCOPE expeditioners will undertake hands-on wildlife monitoring. Photos – Brent Johnson

Below Freshwater snails near the lake edge. Photo – Michael James/DEC



As well as undertaking these daily collecting and research tasks, expeditioners will have an opportunity to work with scientists in the field. Accommodation will be under the stars in tents and swags. All the while, expeditioners will be conducting important and often groundbreaking research. This valuable contribution of time and funds makes the research possible, and adds to the overall knowledge of the biodiversity of WA's environment and its special areas.

LANDSCOPE Expeditions are non-profit, self-supported study and research projects offered by LANDSCOPE magazine in association with UWA Extension, a department of The University of Western Australia. The expeditions answer the need for research to protect the environment, while responding to the demand for first-class interpretation by scientists and specialists.

In 2006, there will also be LANDSCOPE Expeditions to Francois Peron National Park, in the Shark Bay World Heritage Area, and Cape Arid National Park, east of Esperance, to conduct similar research into the wildflowers and wildlife of each area.



For more information about this, and the other LANDSCOPE Expeditions planned in 2006 and early 2007, contact DEC's Kevin Kenneally or Rohan Swan on (08) 9334 0561 or by email (Kevin.Kenneally@dec.wa.gov.au or Rohan.Swan@dec.wa.gov.au).

Rohan Swan has spent much of 2006 acting in the position of LANDSCOPE Expeditions Coordinator. Before taking up this role, Rohan worked with the Nearer to Nature program at the Perth Hills National Parks Centre as its Program Coordinator.

Rohan would like to thank Keith Morris, Brent Johnson and Mitchell Davies of DEC for their assistance in the preparation of this article.

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Phone (08) 9334 0481 or (08) 9334 0437.
Prepress and printing Advance Press, Western Australia

© ISSN 0815-4465

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Published by the Department of Environment and Conservation, Locked Bag 104, Bentley Delivery Centre, Western Australia 6983.



Department of Environment and Conservation

