

urban antics by John Hunter

Quendas in the park

The national forum, 'Parks and Protected Areas Forum: a sense of place, for all people, for all time' in September provides the chance to re-evaluate our conservation assets and to perhaps discuss the need to look to, or manage for, the future with a reduced carbon footprint.

Our conservation reserves increasingly provide homes for species that have been suffering with the spread of urban development.

An urban mammal that is currently finding new life in our parks and protected places is the quenda or southern brown bandicoot (*Isoodon obesulus fusciventer*). This rat-like marsupial about the size of a rabbit has markedly declined in numbers in the south-west of the State since European settlement and is now suffering badly in the suburbs of Perth.

Once found as far north as Jurien Bay and west of a line between Moore River and Jerramungup and east on the coast to Israelite Bay, quendas are now restricted to the coastal plain area between Guilderton and Esperance.

The major threat to the quenda has been the loss of habitat through land clearing, predation by foxes, cats and dogs and competition from rabbits and stock animals.

With the introduction of the *Western Shield*—the Department of Environment and Conservation's (DEC's) wildlife recovery program—the quenda population across the south-west has rebounded and the animal has now been removed from the threatened species list. However, recent housing and industry expansion demands within the



Perth metropolitan area are taking a heavy toll.

Quendas, until recently, have enjoyed a somewhat secretive existence in their most favoured outer suburban habitat of banksia-jarrah woodlands and wetland margins with thick and varying scrub understorey.

With recent extensive clearing of these outer urban areas, quendas are now more than ever frequenting home gardens where tolerance for disturbing lawns with their little conical holes in search of grubs and other invertebrates is at times low. Along with predation by family pets and increased road traffic, these bold little marsupials that often approach a human

hand for a feed of fruit, grain or pet food are at extreme risk.

Over the past 11 years some 600 quendas have been translocated to 13 State and other areas protected by the *Western Shield* baiting program.

While the quenda population has generally increased within the south-west of the State, fox and feral cat eradication programs must never falter.

Unfortunately, the direct human pressures of urban expansion and development, plus feral animal predation within city bush parks, will in the future probably see the disappearance of the animal altogether from within the suburbs.

DID YOU KNOW?

- Western Australian Museum observations once noted that the quenda used a rapid scrambling and patting movement of the forefeet to kill scorpions and centipedes, then separated the relevant poison tips and heads from the bodies with razor-like incisors. There is also a record of a mouse being pounced on and completely consumed.
- Quendas do not climb, but nest in a bundle of grass and straw material in a depression within dense thicket. Their gestation period is only about two weeks.
- For more stories like this, get a copy of *URBAN ANTICS*, which brings 68 of the best Urban Antics together, from bookshops, DEC offices or online through DEC's NatureBase website (www.naturebase.net/shop).

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