



# Woylies in the Woodland

The opening of Woodland Reserve in Perth's popular Whiteman Park created a new home for woylies and quenda. The 50-hectare reserve—a sanctuary in which these species can breed—will also play a role in educating the public about the importance of protecting regional biodiversity.

by Karla Forrest



The 50-hectare Woodland Reserve has been specially designed as a breeding site for Western Australia's threatened fauna, including the critically endangered woylie or brush-tailed bettong (*Bettongia penicillata*). It is enclosed by electric fencing to keep out predators and features guided walks and other initiatives to provide the community with insights into threatened fauna and flora, and the importance of their conservation.

### Renewed hope for resilient woylies

The woylie has been the focus of a number of conservation efforts over the past 20 years. The nocturnal herbivore was once widespread across southern Australia west of the Great Dividing Range, but numbers steadily fell due to a combination of factors. Populations then began to recover in response to fox control and translocations beginning in the 1970s, prompting its removal from state and federal threatened species lists in 1996 (see 'It's back: the return of the woylie', *LANDSCOPE*, Autumn 1996).

However, optimism from this success was short-lived. Research in the early 2000s showed another severe population decline and woylies were listed as critically endangered in 2008. But thanks to the new reserve at



Whiteman Park and other conservation projects, such as the woylie enclosure at Perup (see 'The jewel in the crown: Perup and the Upper Warren' on page 10) and Karakamia Wildlife Sanctuary near Chidlow (see 'Bringing back the animals', *LANDSCOPE*, Autumn 2009), woylie populations may rise once more.

Four breeding pairs of woylies, along with a number of quenda or southern brown bandicoots (*Isodon obesulus*), were released into Woodland Reserve in 2010. Within just six months, numbers had increased with the birth of at least six woylie joeys and four quenda joeys. The breeding habits of both woylies and quenda allow them to reproduce swiftly. Encouraged by

these early successes, staff at the reserve now plan to reintroduce other species such as the tammar wallaby (*Macropus eugenii*).

### Designing the safe haven

Woodland Reserve is the result of more than three years' planning. Funded by the Western Australian Planning Commission, the construction of the reserve was based on the vision of returning the area to a condition imitative of pre-settlement—before human disturbance. The two-metre-tall electrified fence is specially designed for local conditions such as the sandy soils of the Swan Coastal Plain. The state-of-the-art fence makes it near-impossible for predators such as foxes (*Vulpes vulpes*) and feral cats (*Felis catus*) to get inside and prey on the vulnerable animals, and also prevents the native animals escaping into the unprotected surroundings. Baits containing the 1080 toxin have also been used as a safeguard against introduced predators.

There is also the ever-present threat of bushfires around the fringes of the metropolitan area. A fire suppression



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**Main** Whiteman Park bushland.  
Photo - Dennis Sarson/Lochman  
Transparencies

**Inset** Woylie.

Photo - Sallyanne Cousans

**Above** A visitor watches a woylie in the soft-release enclosure in Woodland Reserve.

**Left** A woylie and a quenda at a feed station within the soft-release enclosure.

Photos - Sarah Stevenson/Whiteman Park



reticulation system has therefore been installed, consisting of a powerful sprinkler system which drenches vegetation in a fire emergency. If the threat is extreme, there are also remotely operated gates that will be opened to provide an escape route for the animals.

The reserve also contains a smaller internal soft-release enclosure. Used for the release of new arrivals, the one-hectare enclosure acts as a transitional habitat so staff can monitor the animals' behaviour and supplement their diet.

### Engaging the public

As Woodland Reserve is located in the popular Whiteman Park in Perth's northern suburbs, it is easily accessible to visitors. Staff here hope the reserve will not only stimulate population growth of endangered animals, but also help to educate the public about the importance of protecting regional biodiversity. There are plans to provide an interpretive facility for the public and opportunities for people to learn about the ecology of the reserve while seeing conservation management in action.

Tours play an important role in educating visitors, with nocturnal tours running during the summer and autumn and day tours in the cooler months. The 'Nocturnal Woylie Walk' on Friday nights includes a guided tour of the greater reserve as well as the soft-release enclosure, which provides the opportunity to spot animals up close. Special lighting has been installed for this tour, which gives off a red glow to enable visitors to see the animals without disrupting them.

Day visitors can enjoy walks in the greater reserve along a graded walking track suitable for prams and

**Right** Feral-proof fence.

Photo - K Morley

**Below right** Visitors on the 'Nocturnal Woylie Walk' at Woodland Reserve.

**Bottom right** Woylie.

Photos - Sarah Stevenson/Whiteman Park

wheelchairs. The walk trail showcases banksia woodland and melaleuca damplands scattered with majestic jarrah (*Eucalyptus marginata*) and marri (*Corymbia calophylla*) trees. Large grasstrees (*Xanthorrhoea*) remain from pre-settlement times and provide perfect cover for the woylies, quenda and other small animals.

There is something interesting to look at all year round, with signage highlighting specific features applicable to every month of the year. In December, the reserve is coloured by the vibrant orange blossoms of the Christmas tree (*Nuytsia floribunda*). Of the five species of banksia in the reserve, at least one is always in flower. You might spot a threatened Carnaby's black cockatoo (*Calyptorhynchus latirostris*) or, in autumn and spring, the white-cheeked honeyeater (*Phylidonyris nigra*), when these distinctive birds are busy building their nests.

Woodland Reserve provides an opportunity to look back in time and get a sense of what the bush and its animals were like in and around Perth before it was settled by non-Aboriginal people. The reserve is also an important conservation effort in the breeding and protection of some of the state's rarest and most threatened flora and fauna species, in particular, the embattled woylie.



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To find out more about Whiteman Park's guided tours of Woodland Reserve, visit [www.whitemanpark.com](http://www.whitemanpark.com). Bookings are essential and can be made on (08) 9209 6000 or [bookings@whitemanpark.com](mailto:bookings@whitemanpark.com). There is no cost for these tours, but donations are appreciated.



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