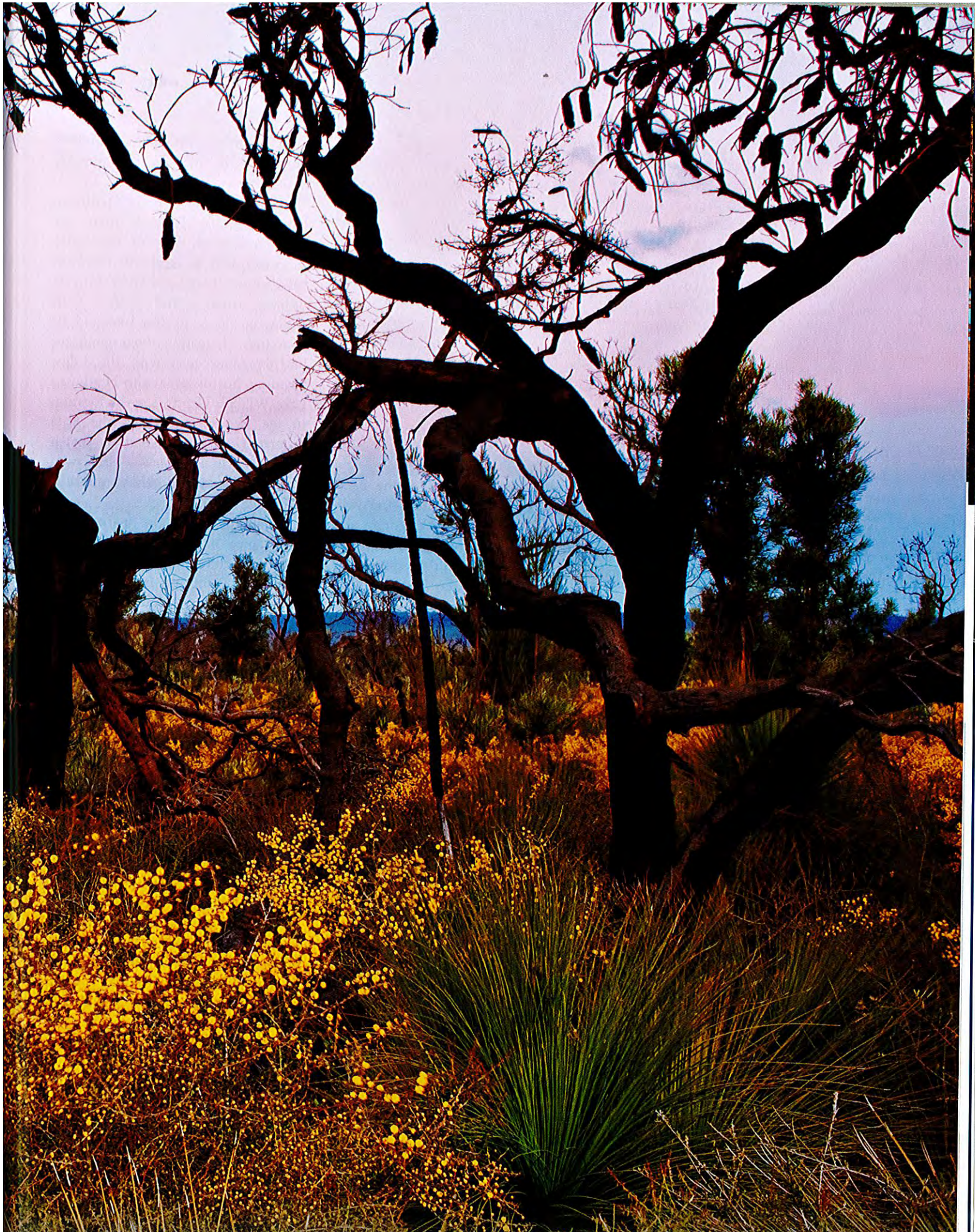


Nature in the  
city: Perth's regional parks



Citizens of Perth, and its many visitors, are reaping the benefits of a complex planning process that brought the vision of regional parks to reality.

*by Brendan Dooley, Alan Pilgrim and Karla Forrest*

On a walk through the understorey of the jarrah and marri forest in Wungong Regional Park, the view overlooking the beautiful Canning River valley at Roleystone is worth pausing for. A light mist hangs above the rich green trees in the valley, providing a stunning visual treat for early morning bushwalkers. Perth's 11 regional parks, including Wungong Regional Park in the Darling Range, are the perfect escape from hectic city life. All located in and around the metropolitan area, the parks provide welcome relief to those seeking more of the outdoors in their lives. A relaxing place to visit for leisure, sport, sightseeing or appreciating nature, the parks are the result of a complex planning process that began more than 50 years ago.

### Park features

The regional park network extends from Joondalup in the north to Rockingham in the south and inland to the Darling Range. Currently almost

73,000 hectares, or 10.4 per cent of the Perth metropolitan area, is 'Region Open Space'. Regional parks comprise a significant part of this network, providing ready access to natural areas for Perth's rapidly growing population. Seven of the parks—Yellagonga, Herdsman Lake, Canning River, Woodman Point, Beeliar, Rockingham Lakes and Jandakot—are located on the Swan Coastal Plain. Another four parks—Wooroloo, Mundy, Banyowla and Wungong—are located in the Darling Range.

Entry is free, with the parks providing some of the most accessible natural areas for people living and recreating in Perth. All of the parks can be visited year round. Banyowla, Mundy, Wooroloo, Wungong and Jandakot regional parks are ideal places to visit in spring with their spectacular displays of wildflowers adding colour to the landscape. Mundy Regional Park also provides magnificent views of the city and coastal plain. Woodman Point Regional Park, located on the

coast about 10 kilometres south of Fremantle, is ideal in the summer months.

Closest to the city is Herdsman Lake Regional Park, a mere six kilometres north-west of the CBD. A great place to keep fit, the park has dual-use pathways which provide walkers, runners and cyclists with a pleasant view of the lake and its surrounds. The park is also a significant bird breeding area, with the Olive Seymour boardwalk at the Herdsman Lake Wildlife Centre a great location to see waterbirds such as the little bittern (*Ixobrychus minutus*), marsh harrier (*Circus approximans*), black swan (*Cygnus atratus*) and dusky moorhen (*Gallinula tenebrosa*).

A number of the parks have significance in Aboriginal and other Australian cultures. The landscapes at Woodman Point and Beeliar regional parks feature in Nyoongar creation stories. Woodman Point also has an interesting history as a former quarantine station (established in the 1880s) and as the site of World War II munitions bunkers. Nearby Rockingham Lakes Regional Park is of special scientific and educational interest as it contains thrombolites—examples of the earliest forms of life on Earth. Colonial historic sites are also present in a number of the other parks, such as Woodloes Homestead and Mason's Landing at Canning River Regional Park, Luisini Winery and Perry's Paddock at Yellagonga Regional Park and Settlers Cottage at Herdsman Lake Regional Park. In Wungong Regional Park, the Churchmans Brook Botanical Walk Trail follows the remains of an old disused airstrip which was built in the 1960s to aerially top dress and seed the surrounding hillsides.



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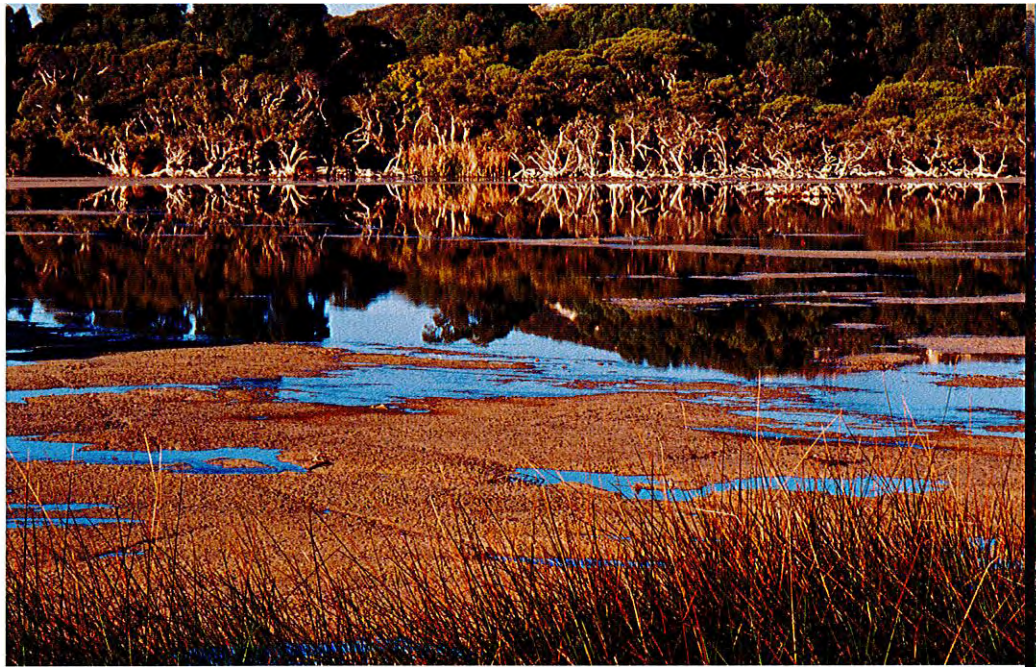
**Main** Spring wildflowers in Jandakot Regional Park.

Photo – Sallyanne Cousans

**Left** Woodman Point Regional Park.

Photo – Marie Lochman

**Right** Mount Brown and Lake Mount Brown in Beeliar Regional Park.  
Photo – Sallyanne Cousans

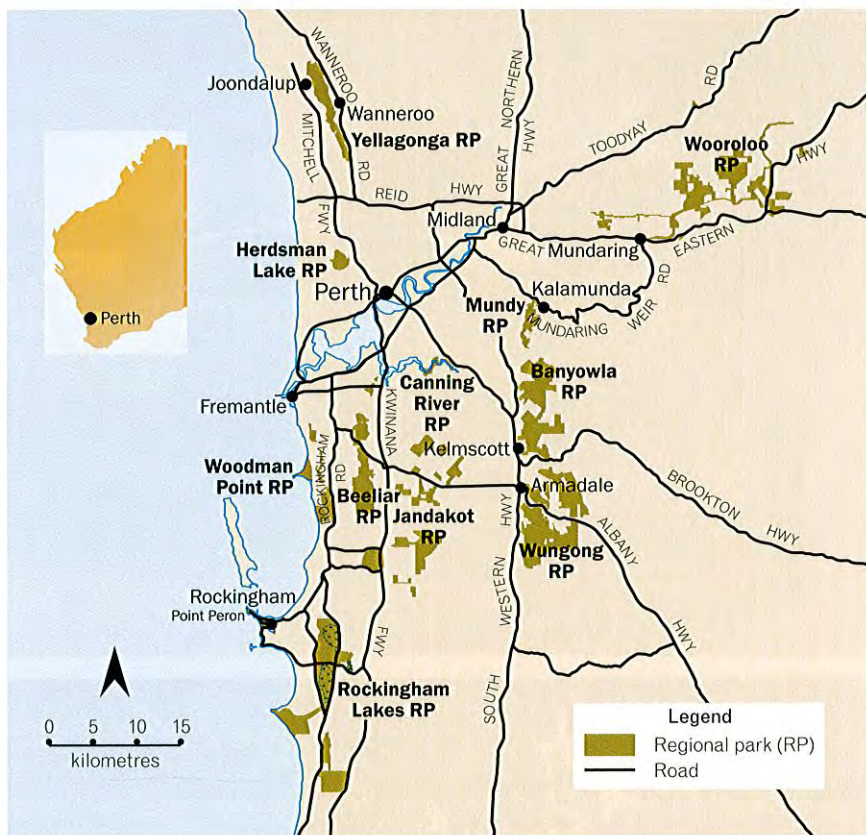


The parks are ideal destinations for picnics, with several having grassed areas, barbecue facilities and play equipment for children. There is also horse riding at Jandakot Regional Park and canoeing in Canning River Regional Park, where paddlers can relax on the calm waters of the Canning River and move between dense stands of riparian vegetation.

### History of the parks

The process that led to the formation of Perth's regional parks began with the release of the *Plan for the Metropolitan Region, Perth and Fremantle, 1955*. The plan recommended areas be set aside as 'Region Open Space', including ocean beaches, water courses, river foreshores, nature reserves, as well as areas for campgrounds and other recreational facilities. Following the introduction of the Metropolitan Region Scheme in 1963, parcels of land were reserved for 'Parks and Recreation' with the state government agreeing to acquire areas of privately owned land. Much of this land is now managed as regional parks.

By the 1970s there was growing public awareness of the need to better protect and manage Perth's environmental assets, as urban development had led to the loss of significant areas of native vegetation. This included, even as early as the 1960s, the loss of about 50 per cent of wetlands in the Perth metropolitan area. The establishment of the Western Australian Environmental Protection Authority in 1971 saw the commencement of a statewide review of national parks and reserves in WA, with the objective of identifying natural areas that would provide a comprehensive and representative set of reserves for long-term conservation of the state's flora and fauna. The report recommended identifying specific areas of open space within metropolitan Perth to be designated as regional parks.



*Metroplan*, released by the state government in 1990, included a system of proposed regional parks and identified the need for regional park development as part of new urban areas. In the mid-1990s, amid growing community support for the protection of large tracts of urban bushland, the state government started planning to create the first three regional parks; Yellagonga, Canning and Beeliar. In 1997, in a major undertaking to bring regional parks to reality, the state

government announced a commitment to give regional parks legal standing and vesting in the National Parks and Nature Conservation Authority, now the Conservation Commission of WA. The coordination of management of the eight metropolitan regional parks was progressively transferred to the former Department of Conservation and Land Management, with the transfer of management responsibility completed in 1999. In 2008, Darling Range Regional Park was divided

**Right** Mount Brown and Lake Mount Brown in Beeliar Regional Park.  
Photo – Sallyanne Cousins

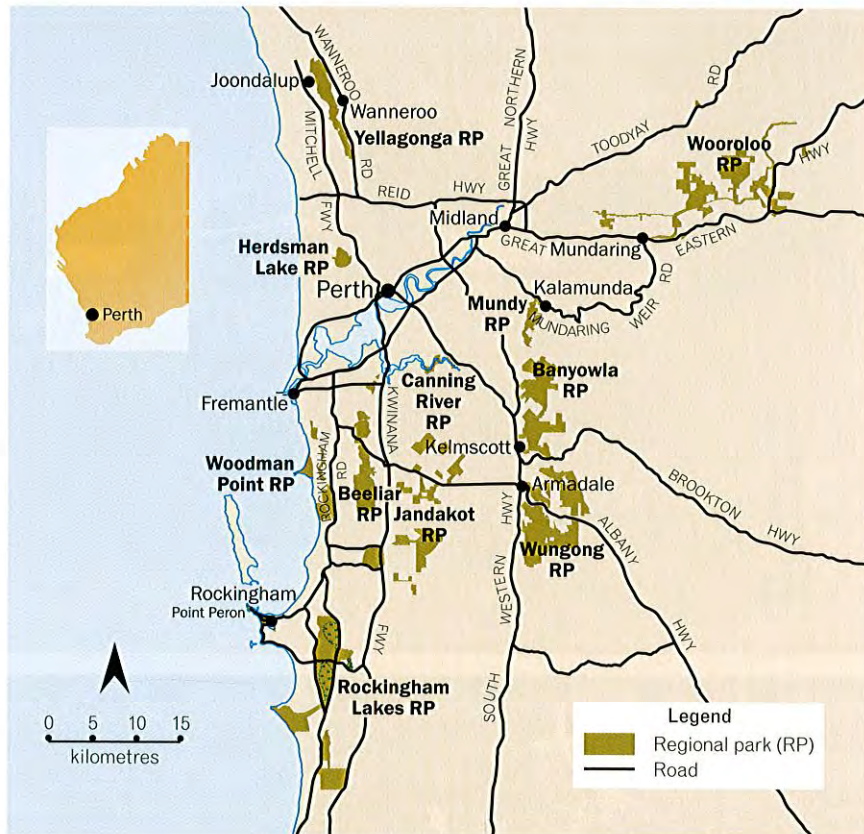


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into the four regional parks now called Wooroloo, Mundy, Banyowla and Wungong. The Department of Environment and Conservation (DEC) has responsibility for coordinating ongoing management of all 11 regional parks in Perth. The WA Planning Commission has retained responsibility for acquiring land and including it in the regional parks system in consultation with DEC.

### Why protect regional parks?

As well as being spaces for humans to relax and recreate, regional parks are also significant conservation areas. WA is home to many endemic plants and animals—that is, species that occur nowhere else in the world. Regional parks are an important part of securing the future of these species. Without protection, these large areas of native bushland would almost certainly fall victim to Perth's rapid urban development.

While the parks have undoubtedly high ecological value and are very popular for recreation, they are at the same time beset by a number of critical management issues, such as widespread weed invasion, feral animals, frequent bushfires, vandalism, illegal dumping of rubbish and unauthorised vehicle access. It is only with the community's help that DEC and the other managing agencies in regional parks can overcome these problems.



### Management and community engagement

Perth's regional parks are managed to be enjoyed by people, while at the same time protecting natural values. Management of the parks is largely a joint effort between DEC, local



**Top left** Settlers Cottage at Herdsman Lake Regional Park.

**Centre left** John Graham Reserve is a feature of Woodman Point Regional Park. *Photos – Marie Lochman*

**Left** Clematis entwined with a grass tree in Wungong Regional Park. *Photo – Sallyanne Cousans*



**Above** Herdsman Lake Regional Park.  
*Photo – Jiri Lochman*

government and the community, with the public's support playing an important role in the ongoing protection and enhancement of the parks. Actively involving the community creates a sense of ownership and helps build a positive relationship with the environment. The regional parks all have a community advisory committee comprising community representatives, DEC staff, other state government representatives, local government officers and councillors and an independent chairperson. The committees meet regularly to discuss issues affecting the parks, and ways in which management can respond.

Management plans written by DEC in conjunction with the other managing agencies outline the basis for the future direction and upkeep of the parks. Because regional parks are often fragmented and have a number of different land managers, constant communication and integration of works is vital for good on-ground outcomes. Currently, the land tenure arrangements in regional parks is complex and involves a mixture of Crown and private lands, so it is important to have a single, comprehensive park management plan in place to which all stakeholders can refer. This partnership approach has seen some very positive results with many local governments working closely with DEC to complete works such as constructing pathways, boardwalks,

canoe trails and undertaking weed and feral animal control programs.

Many of the parks have a rich history steeped in Aboriginal culture. It is therefore important that Aboriginal people are consulted about the management of the parks. Aboriginal elders worked with DEC to identify Nyoongar names for the regional parks in the Darling Range (see 'What's in a name? Parks of the Darling Range', *LANDSCOPE*, Summer 2008–09). Yellagonga Regional Park is named in honour of a leader of the Mooro Aboriginal people, while Beeliar Regional Park was named to recognise the Beeliar people who inhabited the region immediately south of the Swan River at the time of European settlement.

Much of the day-to-day management of the parks comes down to the generous support and work of volunteers. In 2009–10, more than 40 volunteer groups contributed almost 7,500 hours to regional parks through weed removal, planting native vegetation, cleaning up rubbish and conducting guided tours. Some of this work is supported by the Environmental Community Grants scheme, whereby community groups apply for funding to help with conservation, recreation and education projects. Numerous projects are funded each year, with great benefits to the parks and an increased sense of community ownership.

## Education

What school-aged child doesn't enjoy getting out of the classroom and into nature? Regional parks provide great opportunities for children to learn about the local environment and develop a positive attitude to nature.

The parks also host initiatives such as DEC's *Nearer to Nature* program which is designed for kids to learn in the environment. Additionally, the *Bush Ranger* program, established in 1998, encourages secondary school students to develop practical life skills, leadership, teamwork, initiative and community responsibility. This DEC program, run as part of Cadets WA, benefits parks across the state, including regional parks. Students work on conservation projects in their local area by helping to construct and maintain recreation facilities and monitoring native plants and animals.

DEC's *Healthy Parks, Healthy People* program is also active in regional parks and promotes the mental and physical health benefits of exercising in natural environments. Friendly staff organise guided walks, catering to a range of fitness levels. The program has received a positive response, with participation by both locals and tourists. A morning walk through Canning River Regional



**Above** Marsh harrier.  
Photo – Rob Drummond/Lochman  
Transparencies

**Left** Visitors enjoy a picnic in Mundy Regional Park.

**Below left** Lake Goollelal in Yellagonga Regional Park.  
Photos – Marie Lochman

Park, for example, is a fantastic way to get active as well as learn about local native flora and fauna.

A number of the regional parks, including Rockingham Lakes, Beeliar, Herdsman Lake and Canning River, have environmental education centres established and maintained through a collaborative effort between local government, community and DEC. The centres provide well-researched interpretive information for visitors, promote volunteering opportunities and serve as venues for workshops, seminars and conferences.

### The future of regional parks

It is now more than 50 years since the concept of regional parks was introduced and more than 10 since the parks were established. Valuable work has occurred to restore and re-vegetate

degraded areas as well as provide new facilities to improve recreation opportunities and appreciation for the areas. There is a view to expanding the park network in years to come, with areas such as east Wanneroo lakes, the lower Serpentine River and the upper Canning River among possible new regional parks in Perth.

There are also opportunities and community requests for regional parks in regional areas such as Mandurah, Bunbury and Moore River, with the government recently releasing a proposal to establish the Preston River to Ocean Regional Park in Bunbury.

Regional parks are important community assets for a continually expanding city. The accessibility of the parks means people can appreciate and interact with the natural environment without travelling beyond the

metropolitan area. Community groups and government agencies have played a major part in securing and managing the land, with great benefits to people and the environment. Perth's 11 regional parks are well worth visiting for sport and recreation, or just to wander about, enjoy and learn more about some of the unique flora and fauna of south-western Australia—Australia's only globally recognised biodiversity 'hot spot'.



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### Publishing credits

**Executive editor** Madeleine Clews.  
**Editors** Joanna Moore, Samille Mitchell.  
**Scientific/technical advice**  
 Kevin Thiele, Lachie McCaw, Keith Morris, Chris Simpson.  
**Design and production** Tiffany Taylor, Peter Nicholas, Natalie Jolakoski, Gooitzen van der Meer, Sonja Schott, Lynne Whittle.  
**Illustration** Gooitzen van der Meer.  
**Cartography** Promaco Geodraft.  
**Marketing** Cathy Birch.  
 Phone (08) 9334 0296 or fax (08) 9334 0432.  
**Subscription enquiries**  
 Phone (08) 9219 8000.  
**Prepress and printing** GEON, Western Australia.

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 September 2011

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ISSN 0815-4465

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

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

Visit DEC online at [www.dec.wa.gov.au](http://www.dec.wa.gov.au) to search the **LANDSCOPE** catalogue.



Department of Environment and Conservation

