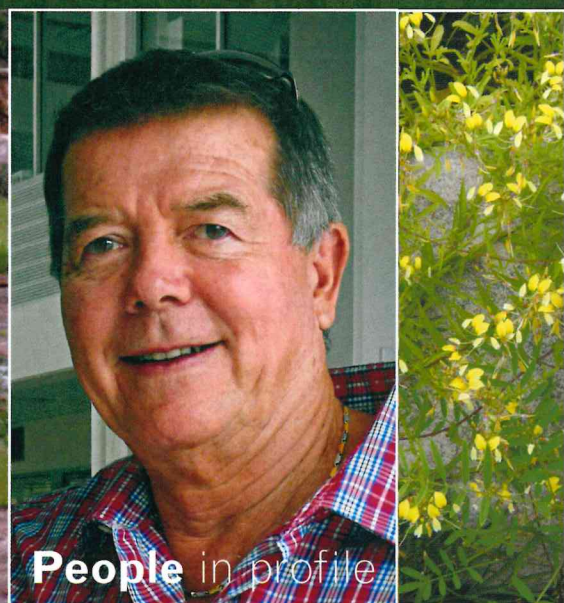




# Kevin Kenneally

During a career that spans more than 50 years, Kevin Kenneally has sought to foster an appreciation of the natural environment in others. In doing so, he has touched the lives of thousands of Western Australians and conducted important science along the way.



**People** in profile

Story by Rhianna King



As far as good yarns go, Kevin Kenneally has got more than a few. But it's not just his aptitude for storytelling that makes them great. It's the diversity of the work he's done, the places he's been and, in particular, the colourful people he's met along the way that make his experiences special, and very entertaining.

Despite always having an interest in the environment and knowing from a young age that he wanted to work in conservation, Kevin treasures the 'people' aspect of his work above all. His work and affiliation with various organisations has seen him directly and indirectly touch the lives of thousands of people: local and overseas colleagues, those he's met through 17 years of *LANDSCOPE* Expeditions, and members of the community, many of them young and many of them in the remote Kimberley Region.

Kevin believes that successful conservation relies on developing and nurturing partnerships and sound community education, as well as fostering community appreciation for the environment, particularly in youth. And it's been his life's work to achieve this in a range of contexts across Western Australia. But, like all good stories, Kevin's also include a raft of hilarious anecdotes, a good dose of fascinating science and even some crime and intrigue. If you're concerned you might feature in one (or some) of his



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**Top** Kevin Kenneally and Daphne Edinger at the Sale River, Kimberley, in 1986.

Photo - Kevin Coate/DEC

**Bottom** Kimberley botanical survey, Mitchell Plateau, 1981. (Left to right) Quentin Richards, Kevin Kenneally and Edward Schneider.

Photo - Bruce Maslin/DEC

**Inset** *Cleome kenneallyi* a Kimberley plant was named after Kevin.

Photo - Greg Keighery/DEC

**Left** Kevin making his first plant collection.

stories, don't worry, he's too much of a gentleman to disclose actual names. Most of the time.

### Start of a career

As a young boy, Kevin was captivated by the natural world and he knew he wanted to study and work in the environmental field. He recalls that at Hollywood High School he met lifelong friend Ken Adcock, who later became president of the WA Palm and Cycad Society. They shared an interest in pigeons and show poultry as well as in native plants. This time spent learning about WA's flora probably formed the foundations for what has been described by others as Kevin's 'encyclopedic knowledge' of WA's flora, vegetation and natural history.

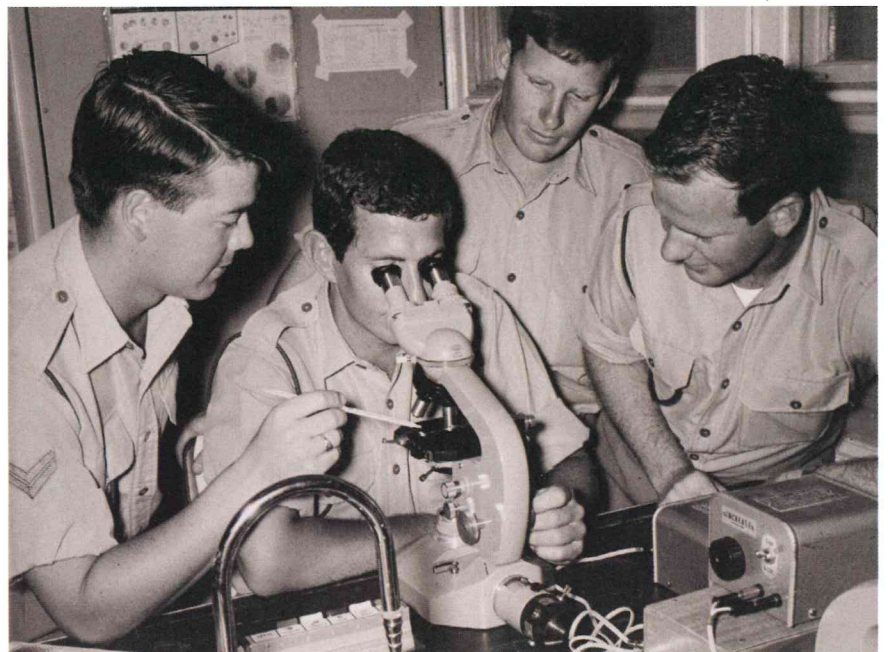
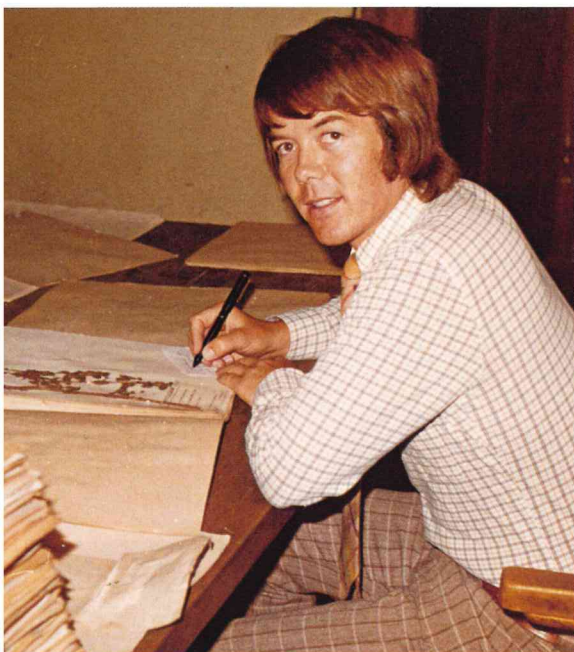
After leaving school, Kevin worked for 18 months as a laboratory assistant in a private industrial laboratory looking

**Below left** Studying historical WA plant collections at the Geneva Herbarium in 1975.

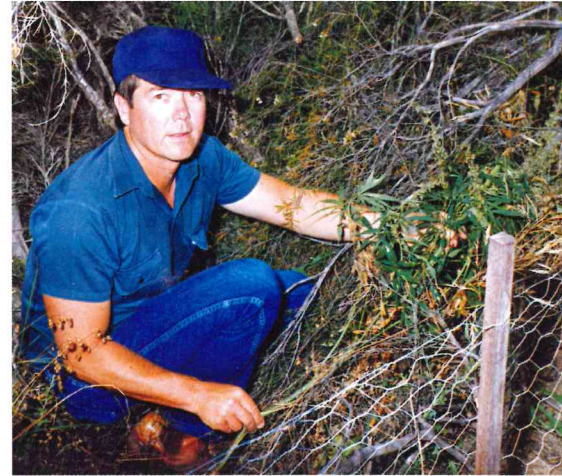
**Below** Kevin (far left) instructing students in clinical pathology.

Photos - Courtesy of Kevin Kenneally

at flour milling and stock feed. In 1963 he was appointed to a research assistant position at The University of Western Australia's (UWA's) Medical School, which was located at Royal Perth Hospital, working in the Microbiology Department under Professor Neville Stanley, father of eminent Western Australian medical leader Professor Fiona Stanley. In 1964, Kevin moved to UWA's Botany Department where he worked under Professor and mentor Brian Grieve. Brian—who wrote *How to*







know *WA Wildflowers*, an important series of books that provides illustrated keys to the vascular plants of southern WA—fostered Kevin’s interest in WA’s botany. He also facilitated Kevin’s completion of part-time studies while working. Kevin said this provided an opportunity for an apprenticeship of sorts, where he gained practical experience on the job while learning the theory behind the science in lectures.

In 1967 Kevin was called up for National Service during the Vietnam War. For the next two years, he served with the Royal Australian Army Medical Corps and was posted to Queensland as an instructor in clinical pathology, where he trained staff for hospital laboratories in Vietnam on how to diagnose tropical infections and diseases.

Then, on his return to WA, Kevin resumed work at the Botany Department before being appointed to a botanist position with the WA Herbarium in 1973. This role saw him work on a number of biological surveys, including ones throughout the Kimberley. It also required him to work with a team of people to identify illicit drugs under the Misuse of Drugs Act. This led to Kevin being called out to identify plants *in situ* and give evidence as an expert witness in trials. According to Kevin this work was thoroughly interesting but had a few ‘hairy’ moments, particularly one occasion when evidence was stolen; evidence that had his name and signature all over it, identifying him as the certifying officer. Fortunately the

loot was recovered and Kevin’s safety was not compromised.

### Exploring the Kimberley

Kevin first visited the Kimberley in 1974. He spent a month there as part of a biological survey of Prince Regent River Nature Reserve during which time he fell in love with the area. He has since taken part in every major biological survey of the Kimberley, which he numbers vaguely at ‘dozens’, across most of the region. For many of these trips he was involved in organising and coordinating the logistics, which required him to negotiate the challenges presented by the Kimberley’s remoteness and the expense of carrying out surveys there.

It was in the Kimberley that Kevin developed a deep appreciation for WA’s Indigenous cultures. He spent considerable time building partnerships with Aboriginal communities and, in doing so, developed an admiration for them.

“We always tried to include the communities of the areas we were surveying, even before it was common practice to do so,” he said.

“Over the years we’ve spent a lot of time talking to elders to find out what’s appropriate and what’s not. They’re always happy to tell you things and share their knowledge with you. We can learn, and have learnt, a lot from these communities, which are the oldest cultures in the oldest landscape. In particular we can learn about resilience and attachment to the land.”

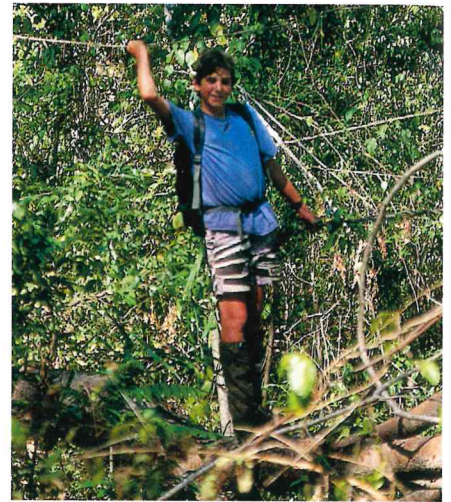
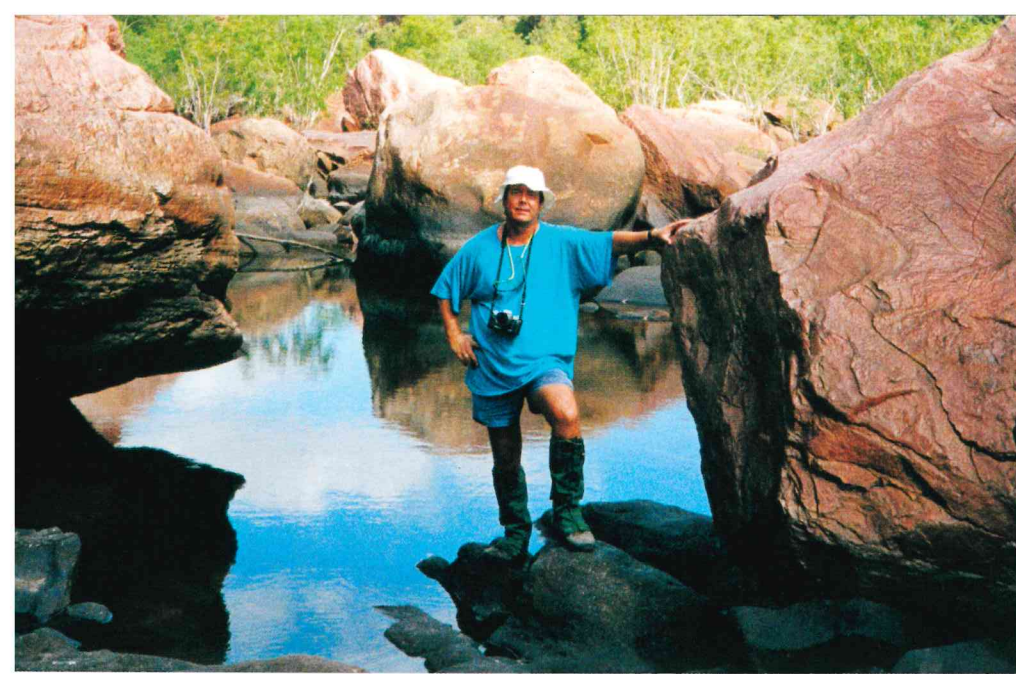
**Top left** Kevin (centre left) with environment conservationist Dr Dom Serventy (centre right) leading a junior naturalists’ excursion at Alfred Cove in 1978.

**Top** Kevin identifying a cannabis plant. Photos – Courtesy of Kevin Kenneally

**Above** (Left to right) Kevin Kenneally, Daphne Edinger and Tim Willing receiving the 1996 CSIRO External Medal for Excellence in Research Achievement. Photo – Irene Ioannakis

Of all his accolades, which includes an Order of Australia and a Pride of Australia medal, Kevin names the CSIRO External Medal for Excellence in Research Achievement as the one of which he’s most proud. He received this in 1996 with long-time volunteer Daphne Edinger and Broome Botanical Society member Tim Willing for their work on the Dampier Peninsula. Spanning 10 years, this work included biological surveys of the area, the development and publication of *Broome*





**Above left** Kevin in the Kimberley.

**Above** Tony Raudino took part in a *LANDSCOPE* Expedition which fostered his interest in conservation.

*Photos - Courtesy of Kevin Kenneally*

**Left** Kevin Kenneally (centre) with the 1984 Purnululu National Park botanical survey crew.

*Photo - Daphne Edinger*



and *Beyond* and extensive work with local Aboriginal people.

### **LANDSCOPE Expeditions**

Another of Kevin's greatest career achievements was setting up and running the Department of Conservation and Land Management's (CALM's) *LANDSCOPE* Expeditions. Kevin ran this pioneering program for nearly two decades, first with CALM and later with the Department of Environment and Conservation (DEC). Marrying science with tourism, the program was a highly successful venture that saw 82 expeditions, involving more than 1,000 volunteers, achieve important research for science.

Unlike anything offered by commercial tour operators, *LANDSCOPE* Expeditions gave

paying volunteers the opportunity to contribute their time and money to a range of science projects around the state. These volunteers made significant contributions to fieldwork in a number of studies, working alongside local, national and international scientists. And their financial contributions facilitated work that would otherwise not have been possible. In particular, the expeditions were responsible for the discovery of various new species and research work that formed the basis of a number of published scientific papers. The program even formed the foundation for two doctoral theses into nature-based tourism. In addition, the venture provided the opportunity to introduce the lay person to science and the work of the department. In some cases it even led to volunteers

pursuing a career in science. DEC land management officer Tony Raudino is one such example.

Tony took part in an expedition to the Kimberley as a 15-year-old where his desire to work for the then CALM was solidified. "The expedition opened my eyes to the variety of work that the department did," he said. "It also exposed me to national parks other than those found in the Albany and Denmark area where I lived. The work we carried out on the expedition was awesome experience for me and counted towards my Year 10 work experience and towards my Bachelor of Science at university." Following his studies, Tony joined the department's Graduate Development Program and has held a number of roles around the state.

Kevin credits the willingness and interest of all the volunteers for the success of the program, and says it was an example of the benefits that could be achieved when members of the community get involved with science. "*LANDSCOPE* Expeditions attracted people from all walks of life. We had farmers, builders, dentists,



**Right** Daphne Edinger.  
Photo – Bruce Maslin/DEC

doctors and veterinarians, just to name a few professions, from WA, other parts of Australia and other parts of the world,” he said.

“There was a diverse range of backgrounds as well as personalities but it’s amazing how quickly people weld into a team when there’s a common purpose. They shared a passion for the environment and a desire to get involved in science, and generally everyone worked well together. In fact, some long-term friendships have come out of the trips. Of course we had a few interesting discussions at night over the campfire from time to time.”

### Getting in early

Fostering an appreciation for, and interest in, the natural environment has underpinned many of Kevin’s professional undertakings. In 1979 Kevin was awarded a Churchill Fellowship, which enabled him to travel for five months to Britain, Europe and North America to investigate techniques to involve children and amateurs in collecting scientific data. The insight he gained formed the basis for him establishing the WA Herbarium’s volunteer program, which continues to operate and provide as many as 1,625 hours, from 32 volunteers, each year.

Kevin believes the key to fostering support for science and conservation is to get people involved, and particularly from a young age. As the President of the WA Gould League for the past 27 years, and an honorary life member of the WA Naturalists’ Club, Kevin has seen first-hand the benefit of engaging young people.

“It’s so important to open young people’s eyes to nature’s wonders. We need to capture them when they’re full of enthusiasm and their minds are open. The idea isn’t to convert everyone into a scientist—it’s to promote curiosity and interest. This way, when they’re making decisions later in life, they’re doing so armed with an appreciation for the natural environment,” he said.

### Timeless teamwork



A very regular character in Kevin’s anecdotes, and one whose name he’s not afraid to disclose, is his long-serving volunteer Daphne Edinger. In fact, when asked what he considers his greatest professional achievement, Kevin says it was finding Daphne and convincing her to work with him because, he says, he would never have been able to achieve all he has without her.

Kevin and Daphne first met in 1983 when Daphne was a newly retired science teacher. She first worked with Kevin as a full-time volunteer with the WA Herbarium and, after a few years, was offered an honorary research scientist position. It was during this time that

Daphne and Kevin undertook a decade of intensive fieldwork in the Kimberley. Daphne has also undertaken botanical surveys of former pastoral stations acquired under the Gascoyne Murchison Strategy and has contributed to 4,000 plant collections to the WA Herbarium and processed thousands more.

During their years working together, Kevin and Daphne forged a productive working relationship and a strong friendship. Kevin credits Daphne’s goodwill and good humour for making her such a valuable team member.

“She inspires everyone who meets her with her tireless enthusiasm and she is very highly regarded among all those who have had the pleasure of working with her,” he said.

“While Daphne has reduced her work these days, she still remains a good friend.”

Kevin says school programs and groups such as the Naturalists’ Club and the Gould League, which engages 7,000 students each year, and education and community-based programs run by DEC serve an important role in achieving this. He also agrees with concerns held by Australian Chief Scientist Ian Chubb that not enough people are studying science at school and university, which is jeopardising the nation’s supply of researchers and investigators. However, Kevin acknowledges that the science community must also make itself available to avenues, such as the mainstream media, if it wants to be heard and impact young people. To this end, Kevin has authored, edited and contributed to several books, including *Broome and Beyond*, *Under a Regent Moon*, *A history of the Kimberley*, *Rock Art of the Kimberley* and *A botanical journey: The story of the Western Australian Herbarium*.

### Onwards and upwards

In 2008 Kevin was appointed an Adjunct Professor with the Institute

for Regional Development at UWA where he has the opportunity to work with and inspire undergraduate and postgraduate students. He continues to work with DEC’s Flora Conservation and Herbarium Program and the WA Museum as a Honorary Research Associate. Kevin is currently involved in a collaborative research project in the USA studying the anatomy of native fern species with Professor Ed Schneider at the University of Minnesota and Dr Sherwin Carlquist at the Santa Barbara Botanic Gardens. His commitment to sharing his enthusiasm for the natural world with the community at large is unwavering, as is his willingness to share a tale or two about his journey along the way.

Rhianna King is a Department of Environment and Conservation editor and features writer who has contributed many LANDSCOPE articles and to numerous departmental publications.



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