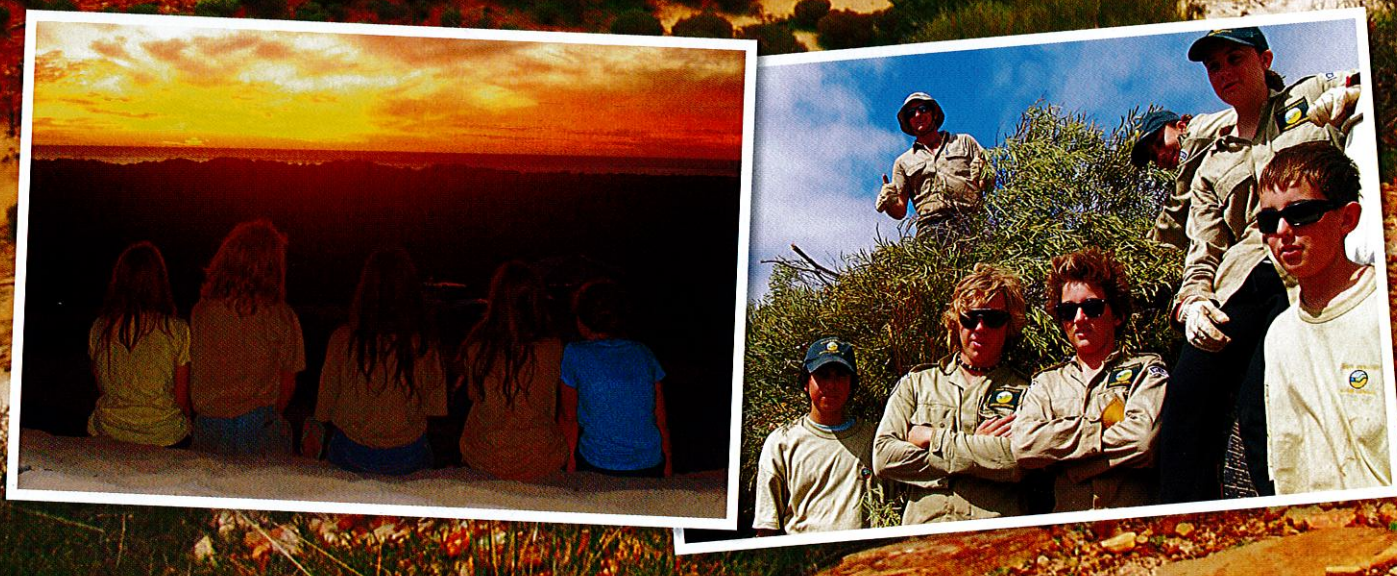


# Bush Rangers celebrates 15 years

Bush Rangers Western Australia's 15th birthday provides an ideal time to reflect on what the program has achieved in helping high school students learn about the environment by working towards its conservation firsthand.

by Arlene Moncrieff



From modest beginnings as a pilot program in 1997 with two schools and 25 participants, the Department of Environment and Conservation's (DEC's) Bush Rangers Western Australia program has gone from strength to strength. Since its official inception in 1998, thousands of young people aged 13 to 17 have taken part in the program, amassing more than 3.4 million volunteer hours to conservation and community projects. In this, its 15th year, the Bush Rangers program has much to celebrate.

## What is Bush Rangers?

Bush Rangers is a voluntary program that supports young Western Australians to take an active role in conserving the natural environment and gain a better understanding of the mechanisms for its management. It is part of the

Department for Communities' broader Cadets WA program, which aims to give secondary school-aged youth the opportunity to take part in activities that promote practical life skills, enable leadership and encourage community responsibility and service. Bush Ranger units are located throughout WA, across a range of educational settings in metropolitan, regional and remote schools, education support units and Indigenous community schools.

In its role as the host organisation for Bush Rangers, DEC provides statewide coordination and support for the program. This includes the development and provision of a comprehensive training program, complete with learning outcomes and support materials to develop skills in leadership, teamwork and problem-solving. The program also seeks to improve students' understanding

of the natural environment while encouraging and rewarding community responsibility and service. The flexible nature of the program enables it to cater to the individual needs of cadets. Success is not defined by the level of academic competence achieved, but by the personal growth and development Bush Rangers gain from their involvement. Program endorsement by the School Curriculum and Standards Authority (formerly the Curriculum Council) means that successful completion of training levels by Bush Rangers in years 10, 11 and 12 helps them meet requirements for the WA Certificate of Education.

## Working in the field

DEC staff have embraced the program, providing participants with the opportunity to draw from the





richness and diversity of experience and expertise within the department. As a result, Bush Rangers have the opportunity to work alongside many highly skilled practitioners who willingly share their passions, knowledge and skills in managing the conservation estate. For example, Bush Ranger cadets may work directly on biodiversity measures linked to *Western Shield*, threatened species conservation, national park management and visitor interpretation.

Through these experiences, Bush Rangers have the opportunity to work in some extraordinary landscapes and locations including Shark Bay World Heritage area, Perup Forest Ecology Centre, Kalbarri National Park and Dryandra State Forest. Camps and excursions into the natural environment are a major highlight throughout the

year and provide invaluable experience in developing skills and knowledge while also fostering a passion for nature conservation and protection of the environment. At the same time, these excursions succeed in getting young people out into nature and enabling them to experience the multiple health and wellbeing benefits this provides.

### Projects for positive change

Bush Ranger cadets undertake a broad range of projects that operate at the school, local community and regional level. The projects range from establishing native and kitchen gardens and setting up aquaculture systems, to implementing sustainability measures including water and waste reduction initiatives at school. Bush Rangers have also got their hands dirty harvesting termites for the numbats at

**Main** Bush Ranger cadets set out on the Loop Walk in Kalbarri National Park.

*Photo – Andrew Paul*

#### Insets

**Far left** Cadets watching the sunset at Cape Range National Park, near Exmouth.

*Photo – Holly Richards*

**Left** Cadets with a trailer load full of cut brush for rehabilitation at Bottle Bay camp site in François Péron National Park, Shark Bay.

*Photo – Hannah Hampson*

**Top** Snorkelling on Tantabiddi Reef in Ningaloo Marine Park.

**Above** Taking a rest on the Ancient Empires Walk at the Valley of the Giants near Walpole.

*Photos – Andrew Paul*

Perth Zoo, working with landcare and catchment groups in salinity action, planting wildlife corridors for the Carnaby's cockatoo, working to restore bushland on internationally recognised





### Feedback for Bush Rangers

"This program is wonderful as it allows our students to excel ... it allows them to develop valuable skills and knowledge about environmental issues and it tends to engrain these due to the practical nature of the program."

*Albany Secondary Education Support Centre*

"There is no doubt that the program has raised the profile of conservation and caring for the environment. We have found that there has been a significant increase in students wanting to undertake work placements in the areas related to Bush Rangers."

*Kolbe Catholic College*

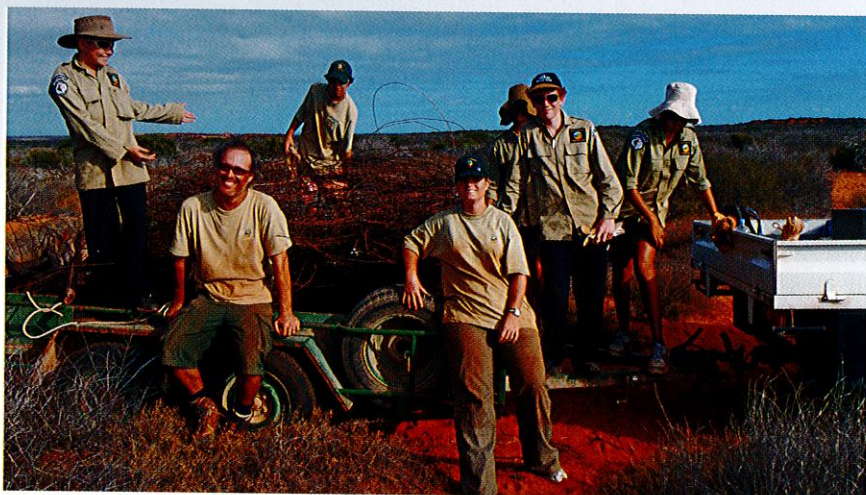


**Above left** Planting seedlings on a sand dune in Grey, south of Jurien Bay.

*Photo - Gary Thirlwell*

**Above** A cadet helps set traps for woylie research at Perup.

*Photo - Arlene Moncrieff/DEC*



**Left** Cadets with a trailer load of old fencing they removed from François Péron National Park, Shark Bay.

*Photo - Hannah Hampson*

Ramsar wetlands and rehabilitating coastal dunes, to name just a few of the many projects at the broader community level.

### Benefiting more than youth

The Bush Rangers program would not be possible without the commitment, support and passion of a range of people including school principals, teachers, parents and other community members who volunteer

their time to coordinate activities and events. Unit leaders and instructors are the backbone of the program. Their energy, creativity and willingness to source active and engaging project activities for their cadets ensures that the program thrives and grows. Not only do they organise and coordinate the various activities, they also take part in them. In the case of camps this often involves weekend work and time away during the school holidays.

Such supporters are also instrumental in establishing and maintaining the many community partnerships which have developed since the program's inception. External groups and agencies, including community groups and state and national organisations, have been involved in the program, with many of them benefiting from the hours of community service Bush Rangers have provided. However, the benefits are mutual, with cadets being exposed to many opportunities to draw upon the skills and expertise of people working within these organisations while volunteering their time and effort.





## Feedback for Bush Rangers

"Denham is a small town in the magnificent World Heritage area of Shark Bay. Just 76 kilometres from the town is a homestead where we stayed for a week and worked with the park rangers. Over five days, three groups worked at Monkey Mia with the dolphins. These determined cadets also helped native animals by coiling barbed wire and pulling stakes out of the ground to stop animals from hurting themselves. Another group did some wood collecting and brushing at Bottle Bay and around the homestead and spread the wood along trails to discourage visitors from walking off the paths. On day four, two cadets helped rangers with a trapping project for monitoring native mice and, more importantly, rare quenda populations. The rangers have released the quendas at the national park to try to repopulate the area. The cadets found seven quendas, almost quadruple the previous months' record of two per day. Needless to say, the ranger, cadets and instructor were quite excited.

Parents of the cadets were kept up to date by an online discussion set up by a cadet instructor and a daily newspaper called *Shark Attack* was also created to highlight the achievements and anecdotal moments of the adventure.

Two-minute showers, red dust, makeshift freezers and fridges, hot mineral spa baths, meeting wonderful rangers and creating lasting friendships are our memories from the trip.

Thank you to ranger Roger Whitelaw and his colleagues."

*Bush Ranger cadet from Duncraig Senior High School*

**Above** Sunset at Kalbarri National Park.

**Right** Cadets feeding a wallaby as part of DEC's *Project Eden* project in Shark Bay.  
Photos – Andrew Paul

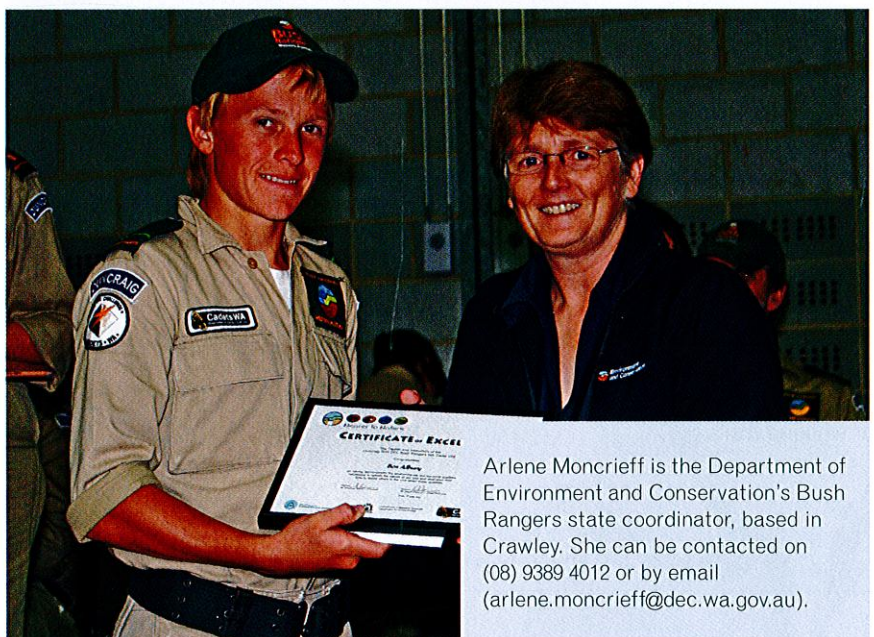
**Below right** DEC's Arlene Moncrieff presents a Certificate of Excellence to a cadet from the Duncraig Senior High School Bush Ranger unit.  
Photo – Gary Thirlwell



## Coming together

Each year DEC coordinates and facilitates an annual conference for Bush Ranger unit leaders and instructors, which provides an important opportunity for a diverse group of people to come together, share ideas and take part in professional learning activities. This, coupled with the presentation of annual Instructor Awards for Excellence, also provides an opportunity to celebrate and reward the time, effort and dedication that unit leaders and instructors contribute to the Bush Rangers program.

As we reflect upon the program's significant achievements over the past 15 years, we're reminded of the need to celebrate and honour these. To this end, Bush Ranger cadets, unit leaders and instructors, DEC staff and program partners will come together at the Annual State Conference in April 2013 before embarking on the next stage of Bush Rangers' exciting journey.



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