

# Dryandra Woodland

## Western Wheatbelt wonder

Less than two hours' drive south-east of Perth, Dryandra Woodland is the largest remnant of bushland in the western part of the Wheatbelt region. This precious area is set to become a national park, which will formalise the current management practices for the area and protect it, and its native residents, for generations to come.

by Greg Durell, Chris Stewart and Ray McKnight





A short drive from Perth lies the 28,000-hectare Dryandra Woodland – a literal treasure-trove of native plants and animals and an easy, family-friendly getaway. This western wonder can be a weekend getaway destination, or a stop on a more comprehensive visit to the Wheatbelt. The drive from Perth is beautiful and, once out of the city and east of the main forest belt, takes in the rolling agricultural landscape, before hitting what is considered nowadays to be a large tract of native bush. After the hustle and bustle of city life, this is good for the soul.

## PLANNING TO STAY

Boasting a range of family-friendly accommodation options for small and large groups, Dryandra Woodland has been the subject of upgrades in recent years, making it more popular than ever (see 'Parks for People: Dryandra Woodland', Winter 2015). Gnaala Mia – which is Nyoongar for 'Our Home' – provides camping for 17 caravan sites and 12 tent sites. Each campsite is separated by 20 metres, giving campers the feeling of isolation while still having the convenience of four toilets and two camp kitchens. Each campsite has its own campfire, and wood is available during the cooler months. Congelin Campground caters to groups and provides 10 sites for group and caravan campers. This site has a more open-plan design and the two barbecue stations and toilets provide a fantastic communal setting for groups.

For those visitors who prefer the comfort of solid walls around them at night, the Lions Dryandra Woodland Village offers affordable and comfortable accommodation for small and large groups. This facility is managed by Lions as part of a lease with Parks and Wildlife – an arrangement that has been in place for 40 years.

## ONCE THERE

Once there, visitors are spoilt for choice for things to do and see. Picnic areas at Old Mill Dam, the Arboretum and associated Ochre Trail, Congelin Dam, Contine Hill and Lol Gray are all delightful



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**Main** The stunning Dryandra Woodland.

*Photo – Judy Dunlop/Parks and Wildlife*

**Inset top** Malleefowl.

*Photo – Jiri Lochman*

**Inset centre** Group tour at the Barna Mia

Nocturnal Wildlife Experience.

*Photo – Parks and Wildlife*

**Inset bottom** *Calytrix leschenaultii* flowers in spring.

*Photo – John Lawson*

**Above** Ochre Trail.

*Photo – Parks and Wildlife*

**Above right** Dryandra Woodland is an important breeding ground for numbats.

*Photo – Jiri Lochman*

**Right** There are number of accommodation options at Dryandra Woodland.

*Photo – Neil Wallace*

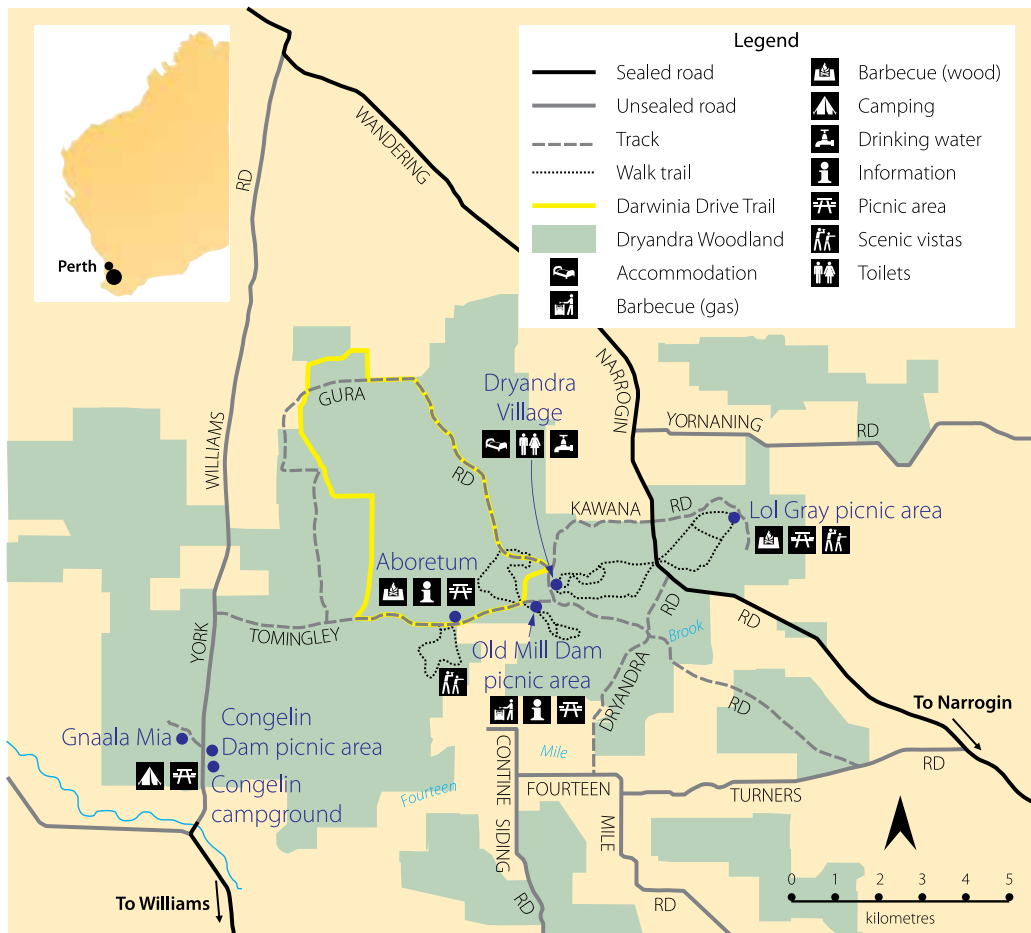
places to enjoy lunch and many of these are included on the area's walk trails.

The network of trails extends from an easy, 15-minute walk to explore two historical fire towers, to a four-hour 12-kilometre trek that takes in views over Dryandra, with outstanding scenery on the way. The woodland's 10 trails cater to a range of abilities and fitness levels and provide a variety of experiences. For example, the two-hour, five-kilometre Ochre Trail leads walkers on a journey to discover some of the local Nyoongar culture, while the Congelin Siding Walk is a 1.6-kilometre return walk along the



old Pinjarra to Narrogin railway line, which provides clues into the European use of the area. Breakaway Walk, which leaves from Contine Hill picnic car park, leads walkers through various plant communities and, if this year's rainfall is any indication, this area (like most of the park) will be awash with colour come spring.

Darwinia Drive provides an opportunity for visitors to cover more ground. Interpretive information at five pull-over bays helps visitors get a greater appreciation for the natural and cultural values of the north-west part of the park.



Discover more about Dryandra National Park

Scan this QR code or visit Parks and Wildlife's 'LANDSCOPE' playlist on YouTube.

### Greater Dryandra numbat-woylie project

The Greater Dryandra numbat-woylie project started in 2015 with the aim of maintaining a sustainable woylie and numbat population while determining the impact of management activities on introduced predator levels and the response of native fauna.

The project focuses on the control of introduced predator species and includes baiting, trapping and monitoring. At the same time, reintroductions of numbats and woylies are undertaken to bolster numbers.

Another focus for the project is working closely with neighbouring farmers. Many successful partnerships have been formed with neighbours and partnerships have been strengthened by the involvement and support of the Peel Harvey Catchment Council and Project Numbat.

The persistence of good quality thickets of low shrubs, including many species of poison plants is also a critical factor in the survival of woylies and numbats in the future. Parks and Wildlife is undertaking a series of operational-based studies to determine the optimum time for regeneration using prescribed fire. This autumn, a prescribed burn was carried out to study the success of a new generation of plant understorey.

Learn more about numbats

Scan this QR code or visit Parks and Wildlife's 'LANDSCOPE' playlist on YouTube.

For those who are after an enhanced cultural experience, local Nyoongar guides have recently started offering cultural tours, which will provide a range of Wailmen Nyoongah culture experiences, including tool making, story telling and guided walks.

### NATURAL ICONS

However, the area's biggest drawcard is the Barna Mia Nocturnal Wildlife Experience – a fantastic facility where threatened animals can be seen in a natural habitat. The four-hectare enclosure is lit by special red-filtered spotlights, and provides a unique nocturnal experience where marsupials such as bilbies (*Macrotis lagotis*), boodies (*Bettongia lesueur*), mala (*Lagorchestes hirsutus*), woylies (*Bettongia penicillata*), quenda (*Isoodon obesulus*), western barred bandicoots (*Perameles bougainville*) and possums (*Trichosurus vulpecula*) hop, scuttle and climb through the bushes and around the ankles of delighted visitors. A team of dedicated guides is on hand

to share interesting facts about these charming animals as well as the history and land uses of the area. A recently updated interactive display in the visitor centre provides additional information about these species and the work that's being carried out to conserve them.

The species found in Barna Mia are representative of those found in the area prior to European settlement. While the area is still rich in native animal species, the abundance and occurrence of the surviving species was once wider spread as their livelihood has been challenged by the extensive clearing of the area for agriculture, and the introduction of exotic animals, plants and disease.

Thanks to Parks and Wildlife's wildlife recovery program *Western Shield*, measures such as baiting for foxes and feral cats has been carried out throughout these ecologically important woodlands. Nowadays, more than 25 mammals, including those showcased at Barna Mia, can be found in the area. Significantly, the woodlands, continue to be an important



stronghold for the critically endangered woylie and numbats (*Myrmecobius fasciatus*) – of which up to 30 per cent of the State’s population are thought to live in Dryandra. Numbat numbers have recovered to such an extent that this population is being used to repopulate other areas of the State. Quenda have also re-appeared at Dryandra Woodland in recent years after being presumed extinct from the area. This highlights the importance of having remnant bushland in areas that have been extensively cleared for agriculture to provide secure habitat for native animals.

As many as 141 species of birds also occur in the area, including malleefowl, rainbow bee-eaters and rufous treecreepers. Closer to the ground, 50 reptile species can be spotted if you know where to look. Including carpet pythons, monitor lizards, dragon lizards and thorny devils. Eight species of frogs have been recorded in the woodlands, including the golden-flecked burrowing frog. Additionally, the quiet achievers of the woodlands – the invertebrates – perform a crucial role in nutrient recycling and maintaining soil structure, but are not well surveyed in the area.

Dryandra Woodland has a staggering 800 identified native plant species which include the iconic wandoo, kwongan (the Aboriginal name for heath and shrublands), mallee, sheoak thickets as well as plantations of brown mallet. At the right time of the day, or after rain, the mallet appears to shimmer, giving the woodlands an amazing ethereal glow.

The area is also famed for its beautiful springtime wildflower display. Everlastings blanket the bush, while attractive species such as holly-leaved honeysuckle, tassel grevillea, pingle and blue smokebush can be spotted. In normal years, the area received 500 millimetres of rain but the unseasonally wet start to 2017 dumped 200 millimetres from January to March. Needless to say, the 2017 wildflower season is sure to be a bumper one.

## MANAGEMENT

Dryandra was first reserved in 1926 by the Forests Department for the production of tannins from the local brown mallet. Eight thousand hectares of mallet was planted in the 1920s and 1930s. After 30 years the demand for tannins no longer existed, but Dryandra endured as State forest. In 1970, a company owned by media tycoon Rupert Murdoch bought land, which included Dryandra Woodland, planning to mine it for bauxite. Well-known naturaliste Dr Vincent Serventy, who had a particular affinity for Dryandra Woodland, wrote to Mr Murdoch and enclosed his

**Above** Western spotted frogs are found in the area.

Photo – Jiri Lochman

**Left** Carpet pythons are one of 50 reptile species found in Dryandra Woodland.

Photo – Marie Lochman

book *Dryandra – The Story of an Australian Forest*. After reading it, Murdoch agreed that mining the forest would destroy a place of natural value and he instructed the company to relinquish any mining claims.

The current plans for Dryandra Woodland to become the first national park in the western Wheatbelt will offer it improved management opportunities and increased protection. The mallet plantations will remain as State forest to allow the continued use of brown mallet timber products, as it was initially intended.

This management arrangement will ensure the area remains a safe haven for wildlife and a major nature-based tourism destination that families, groups and those wanting an easy getaway can enjoy for generations to come.

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For more information about the wildflowers of the Dryandra Woodland, grab a copy of Parks and Wildlife’s *Wildflowers of Dryandra Woodland*, which is available for \$6.95 from Parks and Wildlife offices, the online shop ([shop.dpaw.wa.gov.au](http://shop.dpaw.wa.gov.au)) or from bookshops and visitor centres.

