

25 years of Mondays

Andrew Paul has been leading Mount Lawley Senior High School's *Bush Rangers WA* cadet unit since 1998, and his passion and excitement to explore, share and protect the beauty of Western Australia with his students has not waned in 25 years.

by Marnie Giroud and Lauren Cabrera



Touched by nature



When Mount Lawley Senior High School Chaplain Andrew Paul caught wind of a new conservation cadet scheme for WA youth—*Bush Rangers WA*—he stopped the school principal halfway down the stairs to put his hand up to be the Cadet Unit Leader for the school.

Twenty-five years later, Andrew still proudly holds the position, and has grown the Mount Lawley *Bush Rangers WA* cadet unit from nine cadets to 125.

“What started as something that people didn’t understand has become a cadet unit with a fantastic and vibrant reputation within our school community,” Andrew said.

“Since 1998, we’ve been meeting every Monday after school for two hours to learn about camping and the environment, and to plan our next trip.”

The *Bush Rangers WA* cadet program is part of the wider *Cadets WA* program facilitated by the Department of Communities. The program is coordinated by the Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions (DBCA) and empowers young people in high school to explore and discover the importance of conserving Western Australia’s unique natural biodiversity.



Bush Rangers was established in 1998 alongside the Emergency Services Cadets, Police Rangers, Air Force Cadets, Army Cadets, Navy Cadets and Surf Life Saving Cadets. This year, Bush Rangers is proudly celebrating 25 years of empowering young people to play an active role in conserving WA’s natural environment, through practical hands-on experiences. Today, schoolteachers from more than 70 cadet units around the State dedicate time to the program, most of it voluntary, in addition to their regular teaching or assisting duties.

MAKING A DIFFERENCE

Cadets participate in a range of activities that develop leadership and life skills, and a sense of community responsibility and service, with tailored experiences for students with a range of abilities, giving them an opportunity to take part in conservation projects that make a real difference.

“The early days were tentative,” Andrew said. “The whole process was new. There was funding, so we started to buy some basic camping equipment—



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Main Walking the Camel Trail in Millstream Chichester National Park, 2020.

Photo – Andrew Paul

Inset above background left to right

Environment Minister Reece Whitby, Andrew Paul and Clodagh Guildea at the 25th anniversary event, 2023.

Photo – Shem Bisluk/DBCA

Inset Camping at Millstream Chichester National Park.

Photo – Andrew Paul

Inset below A group of instructors returning from Millstream Chichester National Park, 2021.

Above Andrew with the first camp to have more than 100 attendees, Contos Beach, 2015.
Photos – Mount Lawley Bush Ranger Cadets

Left Ready to cover sandy dune areas with brush, Francois Peron National Park, 2022.
Photo – Andrew Paul



Hear more from Andrew Paul about cadets

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tents and rucksacks—and developed the start of our camping program.”

The benefits of the program go beyond conservation, by also making a positive contribution to the development of young community leaders.

“It is a chance for our senior cadets to practise their leadership skills, because they do most of the teaching,” he said.

“In preparation for the camps, senior cadets are in charge of the food, packing the equipment, organising our tents and making sure that everyone has a place to sleep at night. It means that they really do

get to practise leadership, and they pass on their roles to the new cadets before they leave.”

HANDS-ON CONSERVATION

Students complete tasks ranging from revegetation, rubbish collection, wildlife monitoring and fencing, both in their schools and in other areas.

“On the camps, cadets participate in a range of community service and conservation activities,” Andrew said.

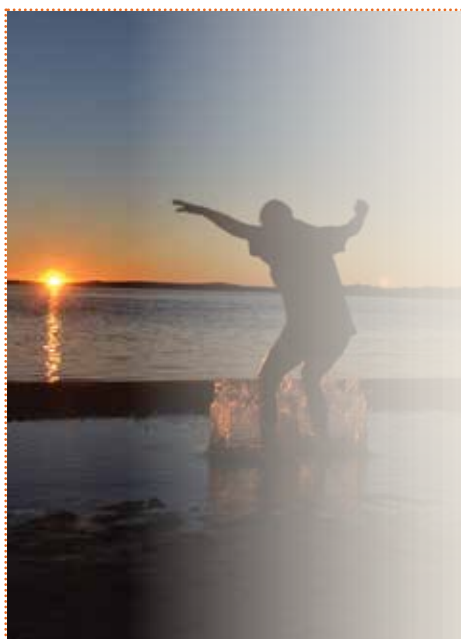
“We have brushed out tracks in Shark Bay, weeded in so many places I can’t

Above Finished! Sweeping debris from the Munda Biddi Trail near Pemberton, 2015.

Below Fun in a tidal pool at sunset, Big Lagoon in Shark Bay, 2017.
Photos – Andrew Paul

remember, helped to fix walking trails, cleaned marine debris from beaches, built new fences and removed old fences.

“We have worked in national parks as far afield as Francois Peron, Cape Range, Leeuwin-Naturaliste



Cadets WA



“The *Cadets WA* youth development program is funded and administered by the Department of Communities with goals to enhance the wellbeing of young people, plus develop a sense of community service and civic responsibility.

The program is delivered in partnership with host agencies that provide the curriculum, training and support to units operated by government and non-government schools.

Cadets participate in activities designed to develop self-confidence, knowledge, leadership, and life-skills to prepare them for the transition to adulthood. A recent program review confirmed that *Cadets WA* has a positive impact on the lives of young people involved and that it achieved most of its intended outcomes, such as community connection and personal development.

Through a strong and collaborative partnership between DBCA and Communities, Bush Rangers is the largest program type across all *Cadets WA* programs.

The success of Bush Rangers is evidenced by the fact it has the highest proportional levels of participation among female students, Aboriginal students, and students with a disability.”

Brad Cusworth – Cadets WA



“Personally, Bush Rangers has been a wonderful journey that has taken me all over the State.”

and D’Entrecasteaux national parks, learning about the areas and the specific environmental concerns.

“Through it all, the cadets have worked diligently, proud of the efforts they have made to help the environment.”

Cadet coordinators play a key role in supporting individual schools.

“It was the people who built our cadet unit,” he said. “It was the instructors, mostly teachers, who volunteered their time after school and at camps. They

encouraged and taught the cadets, which led them to see parts of Western Australia that they had never dreamed of.

“And it was the cadets as well, who quickly took a sense of ownership over the program and their part in it.”

SUPPORTING CADETS

A recent count showed there were nearly 2900 students supported by more than 320 unit leaders and instructors across WA. School teachers from cadet units volunteer their time to lead and support Bush Ranger cadets. These dedicated individuals give many hours to the program, most of it voluntary, in addition to their normal duties.

“I am indebted to the wonderful instructors who have helped me to build this wonderful cadet unit—people like

Vick, Kevin, Bill, Tanyuska, Sharon and Aimee. But best of all, we have been able to share it with the next generation, and to help them to appreciate and be inspired by our amazing environment,” Andrew said.

Bush Rangers WA still holds the title for the highest participation numbers from Aboriginal cadets, female cadets and students with disability across all the cadet programs in WA.

“Personally, Bush Rangers has been a wonderful journey that has taken me all over the State,” Andrew said.

“I have cleaned the weeds from Jindawurrunha Pool at Millstream, marvelled at the gorges of Karijini, swum with turtles at Turquoise Bay at Ningaloo, walked the beaches in the south-west, visited the enormous rocks of the Wheatbelt and looked across the stunning views from countless hilltops.”



Above Hauling marine rubbish in D’Entrecasteaux National Park, 2011.

Left A big day removing old station fencing in Francois Peron National Park, 2010.

Photos – Andrew Paul



BEYOND THE BUSH

River Rangers WA cadet program is also coordinated by DBCA and is aimed at primary aged students with an emphasis on understanding and helping rivers, estuaries and waterways.

“DBCA’s Parks and Wildlife Service has given the program a focus that has been nothing short of outstanding. The investment of their time in people influences the way that cadets see and enjoy the environment,” Andrew said.

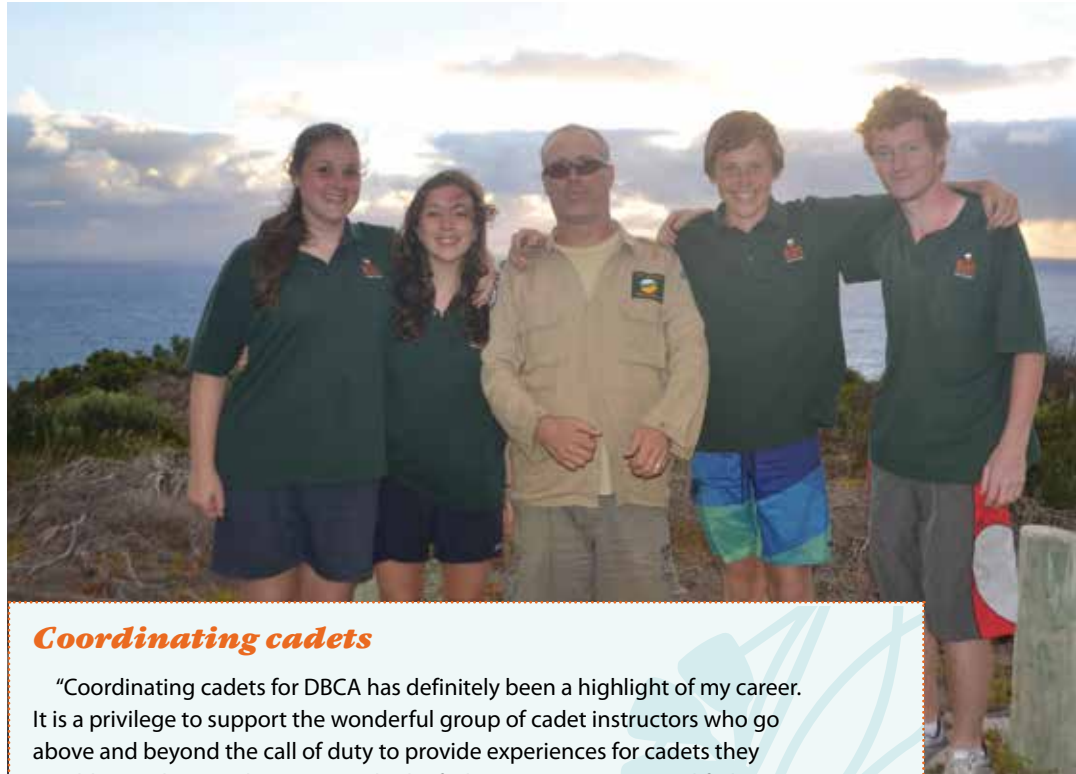
The program continues to help students understand how properly managing the natural environment can help ensure WA’s natural biodiversity assets are conserved and protected for future generations.

“It has been a busy 25 years, but extremely satisfying. We still meet up every Monday afternoon, and we still look forward to our next trip.”

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Top left Paddling on the Avon River, 2004.

Above right Andrew (centre) with year 12 students, D’Entrecasteaux National Park, 2013.
Photos – Mount Lawley Bush Ranger Cadets

Right Celebrating fun and friendship, Gladstone Lookout, Shark Bay, 2019.
Photo – Andrew Paul



Coordinating cadets

“Coordinating cadets for DBCA has definitely been a highlight of my career. It is a privilege to support the wonderful group of cadet instructors who go above and beyond the call of duty to provide experiences for cadets they would not otherwise have. I can’t think of a better way to inspire a life-long commitment to conservation in young people than the immersion that Bush Rangers provides through camps, exploring our wonderful landscapes and giving back to their communities and the environment.”

Richard Olive – DBCA Cadets Coordinator

“Bush Rangers and River Rangers cadets participate in some incredible on-ground conservation actions across WA including fauna monitoring, habitat restoration, clean ups and learning how to care for Country with Traditional Owners in their areas. The kids and teachers involved in these programs are inspirational and they support the department in our goal of ensuring that the natural assets of Western Australia are conserved, protected and valued. The future of WA’s natural environment is in good hands thanks to the Bush Rangers and River Rangers cadets programs.”

Marnie Giroud – DBCA Acting Cadets Coordinator



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For more information on the Bush Rangers cadet program visit dbca.wa.gov.au. For information on DBCA’s Aboriginal Ranger Program, please visit dbca.wa.gov.au