

TOYOTAS AND BUSHTUCKER: LAND USE BY MARTU IN THE  
GREAT SANDY DESERT, WESTERN AUSTRALIA

Fiona J. Walsh, Dept of Botany, The University of Western  
Australia, Nedlands W.A. 6009.

Many Aboriginal communities are situated in spinifex hummocklands where people continue to re-establish selected components of their traditional lifestyle. Hunting and, to a lesser extent, gathering activities are again becoming a part of daily life. Economic, health and educational benefits may accrue from hunting and gathering. Increasingly, these subsistence activities are encouraged by some government agencies and Aboriginal organisations.

Little is known of the extent of resource collection by Aboriginal communities in arid Australia. therefore, it is difficult to identify the influence of subsistence activities on wildlife populations. Recently, a data base that collates information on hunting and gathering was established. Twenty-eight parameters were recorded for foraging trips and events undertaken by Martu in the vicinity of two communities in Rudall River National Park. The location, route, habitat, distance, time, species returns and fires lit on trips were recorded qualitatively and quantitatively. Factors that influenced the frequency of trips were separately recorded. These factors ranged from the number of operating vehicles in the community to the motivations and objectives of individuals.

It is suggested that conservation and Aboriginal agencies consider the value of recording similar data because of its scope to:

1. Monitor the effects of Aboriginal activities on wildlife populations.
2. Provide biological information on wildlife populations.
3. Provide information relevant to the 'sustainable' use of resources.
4. Document Aboriginal mobility and activity patterns so they may be accommodated into appropriate management strategies.
5. Provide a topic on which meaningful cross-cultural collaboration may be based.

This information could be recorded on regular visits by suitably qualified employees who collaborate with community residents and, if possible, liaise with complementary programs operating within the community.

For this proposal to be effective it must be presented at workshops based in Aboriginal communities where people can then decide to reject it, modify it or develop alternatives that they consider appropriate.