

# WESTERN SWAMP TORTOISE



There's a little fellow at Bullsbrook, Upper Swan, who is "walking-the-plank" of life but he doesn't know it. Mind you, he's been doing it for perhaps thousands of years, but as we know from the story of "The Tortoise and the Hare", the tortoise will probably make it—with a little help from his friends.

With the establishment of a satellite colony of 13 young and 8 adults at the South Perth Zoological Gardens and the protection and management of the

Size comparison  
of adult and  
young Western  
Swamp Tortoise.



tortoise's natural habitat, the Department of Fisheries and Wildlife is trying to prevent the extinction of this rare reptile.

The situation at present, however, with respect to the future survival of the species, is grave.

Population estimates at the Twin Swamps Nature Reserve suggest that the species is declining in numbers. It is thought that about 40 animals could be the present population at this reserve.

In the 1976 winter, only 3 animals were captured compared with 66 in 1966.

The reason for this decline lies basically with the series of poor winters in recent years. Research has shown that two wet years in a row are needed before the species recruits successfully. The only time this has happened since the study of this species commenced in 1963 are 1963-64, 1964-65, 1967-68 and 1973-74.

The 1976-77 drought years have cast extreme doubt on the animal's future.

The population on the Ellen Brook Nature Reserve seems a little better off. In 1976 nine tortoises were captured, of which 3 had been previously marked. Because of low numbers accurate population estimates are impossible but it is noteworthy that the population breeds and recruits most years.