

Carnarvon Wildlife District—A Big Country

by Clifford Young



One of the first things that strikes you about the Carnarvon wildlife district is its sheer size. Although it is by no means the largest in Western Australia it still covers an area of 137 153 square kilometres or about twice the area of Tasmania.

The Carnarvon district, encompassing the Shires of Carnarvon, Shark Bay, Exmouth and Upper Gascoyne, boasts a rich wildlife through a staggering variety of habitats ranging from semi-desert to sub-tropical, and a coastline hundreds of kilometres in length. Several major offshore islands including Dirk Hartog and Bernier and Dorre Islands complete the picture.

Once you come to terms with the size and complexity of the district, the second surprise awaits you. Responsibility for patrolling the whole district, as is the case with all Western Australia's wildlife districts, lies with one man. Wildlife Officer Kevin Marshall has been stationed in the Carnarvon district for the past two years after having gained extensive wildlife management experience throughout much of Western Australia. Prior to this appointment he was stationed at Mt. Magnet and at Esperance.

Besides regularly patrolling the

countryside carrying out bird counts and general wildlife and flora surveys, Kevin is responsible for policing the actions of the district's many licenced kangaroo shooters,

and also has to be continually on the lookout for nest-robbers—a growing threat to the State's native wildlife.

The Carnarvon area is particularly well-endowed with parrot species, the main target of nest-robbers. Although the district is large and seemingly difficult to police

▼ Wildlife Officer Kevin Marshall during a regular radio schedule with Departmental officers in Perth. — Photo C. Young





Branches of a stately River Gum overhang a pool on the Lyons River in the Upper Gascoyne. — Photo C. Young.

effectively, Kevin knows the country well and has documented most of the major bird breeding areas. As most nest-robbers operate during only a relatively short period each year—when the young fledglings are still in the nest—the patrol areas to be covered are considerably reduced. Nevertheless, Kevin still spends a great deal of his time on the road. In the first six months of this year he clocked up more than 12 700 kilometres patrolling both inland and along the coast.

In addition to his other duties, Kevin also carries out occasional aerial wildlife surveys. A recent aerial survey of the islands off Carnarvon showed a problem developing which demanded immediate attention. A growing herd of feral goats on Bernier Island, a Nature Reserve, was posing a threat to the island's fragile vegetation and, in turn, the survival of the native wildlife. Two important species of hare-wallaby, the Western Hare-wallaby and the Banded Hare-wallaby, occur on Bernier Island and their survival is very important as the species have almost completely disappeared from the mainland. As a result of the survey, an eradication programme is now underway against the goats.

Although Kevin spends much of his time on patrol, he has few regrets. The variety of the country and its wildlife keep his interest and enthusiasm for the job high. A large percentage of his time is also spent on public relations work throughout the district, discussing all aspects of wildlife and vegetation with local station owners and Shire officials. Without local assistance, and co-operation a wildlife officer's job would be almost impossible to carry out effectively.

Despite Kevin's distance from the Department of Fisheries and Wildlife's headquarters in Perth he is not isolated from up to the minute advice and information. All the Department's Wildlife Officers, Fisheries Inspectors, field researchers and headquarters staff are in constant communication with one another via an elaborate state-wide radio network. Besides its



▲ Red-tailed Black Cockatoos are a distinctive feature of the Carnarvon Wildlife District. — Photo K. Marshall.

▼ A male Carpet Snake, about one metre in length, seen in a hollow log in the dry Yannarie River bed, north of Carnarvon. — Photo K. Marshall.





▲ Mt. Augustus, one of the largest rock formations in Western Australia, looms over the surrounding countryside as it is lit by the early morning sun. — Photo C. Young.

▼ An adult Emu at the nest. — Photo Copyright A.G. Wells



obvious value for passing information, the radio network also serves as a safety precaution. As most of the wildlife officers in particular operate alone for long periods in the bush, the radio schedules allow them to seek help if stranded by mechanical problems or ill health.

In addition to his radio reports, Kevin also sends frequent written reports detailing his wildlife observations made while on patrol. The following is an extract from a recent report outlining patrols made during May, June and July this year:

“The following pastoral leases were traversed—Jimba Jimba, Lyons River, Eudamullah, Minnie Creek, Gifford Creek, Cobra Station, Mt. Augustus, Landor, New Forrest, Meeberrie, Billabalong, Wooleen, Muggan, Mt. Narryer, Byro and Yaringa. Weather conditions have ranged from fine to extremely wet with temperatures mainly in the low 20's. Wildlife observations throughout the district have been above average almost



certainly as a result of this year's good rainfall in contrast to the past four years of near drought conditions.

"Waterbirds, in particular, have been among the first to benefit from the improved conditions. Among those which appear to have increased in number are the Straw-Necked Ibis, Grey Teal, Black Duck, Wood Duck, Pink-eared Duck and Mountain Duck. Cockatoos and Parrots and birds of prey (of which 18 species occur in the Gascoyne Region alone) have also showed some increase in numbers and many are breeding for the second time this year. The Plains Turkey or Bustard also seems well established in parts of the district, particularly to the north and east. Abundant food and ideal conditions have no doubt contributed to attracting these nomadic birds to the region. Personal observations have ranged from individual birds to eleven in one flock.

"Red Kangaroo numbers are also showing an increase which will be welcomed by the district's professional shooters. At present, many shooters are averaging between 25 and 35 kangaroos each night, and most are in excellent condition with a surplus of body fat on many carcasses.

"The 1981-82 season in the Carnarvon district looks like becoming one of the best for nearly a decade, for both wildlife and the pastoral industry. Good rainfalls along with the recent flooding of the Gascoyne River and its tributaries have meant ideal conditions throughout the region including the normally dry Upper Gascoyne. Vegetation and wildflowers are flourishing."

The Carnarvon wildlife district has never looked so good.



▲ A flock of Little Corellas (*Cacatua sanguin*) photographed within the Carnarvon town area. — Photo K. Marshall.

▼ Red Kangaroo joeys seek shelter during the heat of the day. — Photo K. Marshall.

