

# VOLUNTEERS RALLY BEHIND THE

*THE biggest rat eradication program ever mounted in Australia is underway in the Montebello Islands, and its success will allow the reintroduction of native animals which have long disappeared from the archipelago.*

Volunteers - most of them employees of the Department of Conservation and Land Management (CALM) - are giving up two weeks of their holidays to lug strings of bottles, toxic bait, glue guns and other paraphernalia around the 100 or so islands, laying bait stations over a 50 metre grid. The first group of workers left for the islands in late May, and the project is scheduled to be completed by the end of August.

Called "Montebello Renewal", the project is the most recent in a series of CALM initiatives under the Western Shield campaign (see box).

Project leader Andrew Burbidge, who is the Director of CALM's Threatened Species and Communities Unit explained the scale of the job.

"We are laying 12,000 bottles with bait over 100 islands - the largest island measuring 1000 hectares. Each one of these baits has to be visited three times - that makes 36,000 visits to bait stations."

Black rats and feral cats (the latter will be targeted for a second Montebello eradication program in August) were probably introduced from shipwrecks or careening pearling vessels some 100 years ago. The introduction of these foreign species caused the local extinction of at least four native animals: the spectacled hare wallaby, the golden bandicoot, the black and white fairy wren and the spinifex-bird.

The environmental devastation continued in the 1950s when a number of nuclear devices were exploded during Britain's Operation Hurricane atomic testing program.

Until 1992 the islands were officially a prohibited area under Commonwealth legislation. They are now a declared conservation park, managed by CALM.

In preparation for the Montebello Renewal, CALM developed a bait station made from a plastic bottle with holes cut in the sides. The design permits rats to enter the bottle to take the bait, but does not allow access to birds.

The bottles are baited with commercial anti-coagulants which cause the rats to die within a few days of consuming the baits. Each volunteer is required to walk up to 15 kilometres per day carrying as many as six kilograms of gear. On their daily rounds the volunteers secure the bottles to the ground using spikes or glue.

On one of the islands, which still has low-level radioactivity from the nuclear testing, volunteers are required to wear face masks and must wash their clothing at the end of the working day.

"The cold salt water showers worked really well," said CALM volunteer Jill Pryde. "A small reverse osmosis water purification plant provides the only fresh water on the island, so workers have to be careful with fresh water consumption.

"We would use only a little of it as a final rinse so our clothing would not smell too awful."

The volunteers are living in tents next to a transportable hut which provides ablution and cooking facilities. Dried and tinned food was delivered to the camp prior to the start of the project and a WA Petroleum (WAPET) helicopter brings fresh fruit and vegetables on a regular basis.

The volunteers supplement their diet with seafood caught during free time. "The natural environment on the islands is fantastic," said wildlife artist Jane McRae. "At this time of year it's quite green and there is an abundance of wildflowers, birds and marine life - including dugongs, dolphins and sharks - to look at."

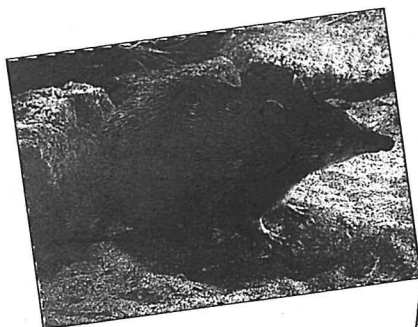
## Western Shield Brings Endangered Species Back from the Brink

*Western Shield is the name given to CALM's campaign to expand predator control and then reintroduce native animals to former habits. The project has an annual budget of \$1 million and will cover nearly five million hectares in the state.*

*Up to 30 native fauna species which are close to the brink of extinction are expected to be considerably more abundant in a few years' time, thanks to Western Shield initiatives.*

*Other Western Shield projects are:*

<i>Operation Foxglove</i>	<i>Northern and southern forests</i>
<i>New Dawning</i>	<i>Centre forest and Leeuwin-Naturalist National Park</i>
<i>Coastal Storm</i>	<i>Reserves from Augusta to Cape Arid National Park</i>
<i>Nature Restored</i>	<i>Stirling Range and Wheatbelt reserves</i>
<i>Desert Dreaming</i>	<i>Goldfields Dreaming</i>
<i>Project Eden</i>	<i>Peron Peninsular, Shark Bay World Heritage Area</i>
<i>Cape Crusade</i>	<i>Cape Range National Park</i>



*Back from the brink: The golden bandicoot and spectacled hare wallaby will reclaim their former habitat.*

# BIGGEST RAT-HUNT OF ALL

During the initial stage of the project, which concentrated on the islands more distant from the camp, the volunteers were flown to work by helicopter. For the nearer islands they are transported by boat.

CALM scientific adviser John Blythe said one of the most amusing moments was the arrival of tourists off a cruising vessel.

"They came on to the island to look at the ground zero site from the nuclear testing," said John. "They saw a line of CALM volunteers, all fitted out with face masks and carrying loads of bottles and buckets, and wondered what on earth was going on.

"One of the volunteers asked a tourist if he would like to help us lay the baits. The offer was not taken up."

Because the black rats can swim between islands, it is essential that all islands be treated within a short time frame. Andrew Burbidge said that next year the islands will be checked to ensure that both the rats and the feral cats have been eradicated.

No doubt returning the rightful heirs to this unique island wilderness will be one of the most satisfying aspects of the Montebello Renewal project.

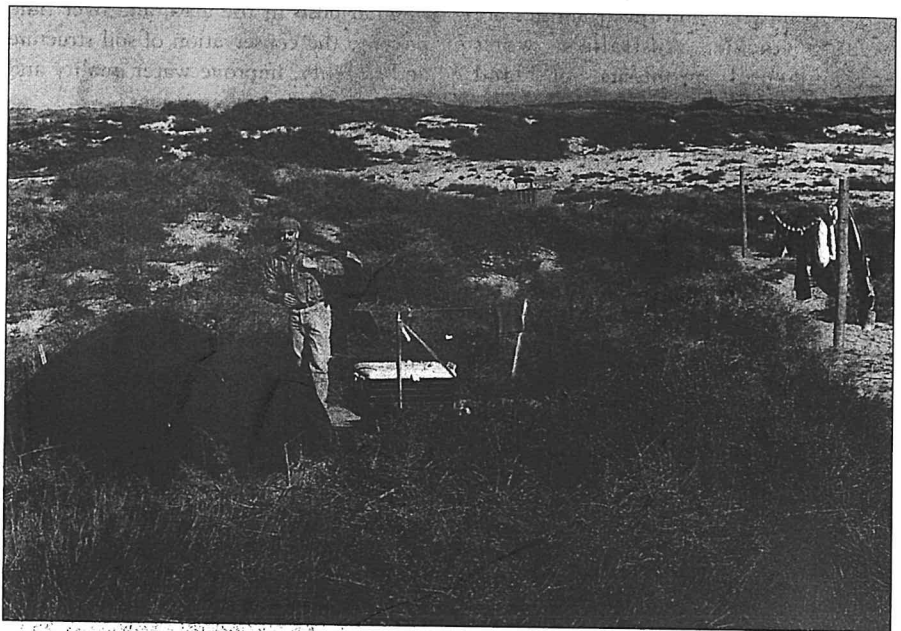
## PRIVATE SECTOR SPONSORS

*In addition to the team of volunteers, the Montebello Renewal is being helped by a number of private sector organisations.*

*West Australian Petroleum (WAPET) is providing a barge for heavy equipment transport as well as air transport for volunteers and staff from Perth and Karratha to Barrow Island.*

*Apache Energy is providing fresh food and the transport services to get the food to the Montebello camp, as well as helicopter support.*

*ACI Plastics Packaging supplied the plastic bottle bait stations and shrink wrap, while ICI Crop Care provided Talon G rodenticide at a discount price.*



*Home, sweet home: The volunteers sleep in tents near the transportable hut.*

## Quality Conference

24 - 26 November 1996

The State Training Board of Western Australia and the Western Australian Department of Training have great pleasure in inviting you to the 1996 Quality Conference at the Hyatt Regency Perth Hotel. The theme of the Conference is "Quality Training Creating the Competitive Edge".

### Objectives:

- To showcase best practice in relation to quality training in Western Australia, nationally and internationally;
- To highlight the benefits of quality training to industry and training providers;
- To provide practical demonstrations of the application of quality in industry and training organisations; and
- To demonstrate the links between the current workplace reforms taking place internationally and in Australia, and the provision of quality training.

For further information or registration of interest please contact the Conference Organisers:

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