WATSNU

DEPARTMENT OF CONSERVATION AND LAND MANAGEMENT

The Newsletter of the Western Australian Threatened Species & Communities Unit

Volume 2 Issue 2 ***October 1995***

REPORT OF THE SCIENTIFIC RANKING PANEL

As a result of CALM Policy Statement No 50, released in August 1994, a Scientific Ranking Panel was set up by CALM to assist in setting priorities for the conservation of Western Australia's threatened flora and fauna. As well as ranking all declared threatened taxa, it also ranked taxa recommended for declaration by the Endangered Flora Consultative Committee during its meeting in February 1995 and by the Threatened Fauna Scientific Advisory Committee during its meeting in March 1995. The Panel met for two days in April this year. It reviewed scores developed for each taxon prepared by WATSCU staff following procedures laid down in CALM Policy Statement No. 50. Then, using the scores as a guide, it allocated each taxon to the new IUCN Red List Categories. In all, around 370 threatened taxa were allocated to the categories.

The members of the Panel were:

- Dr Andrew Burbidge, CALM, WATSCU, Chair
- Dr Ken Atkins, CALM, Wildlife Branch
- Andrew Brown, CALM, WATSCU
- Dr Allan Burbidge, CALM, SID
- Dr Mark Harvey, WA Museum
- Dr Stephen Hopper, Kings Park & Botanic Garden
- Dr Ric How, WA Museum
- Dr Jonathon Majer, Curtin University of Technology
- Libby Mattiske, Mattiske Consulting Pty Ltd
- Susan Patrick, CALM, SID

The Report of the Panel was released by the Environment Minister Peter Foss on 24 September 1995. The Minister also announced an immediate injection of $300,000 to fund programs to conserve species listed as critically endangered.

Inside this Issue

List of Critically Endangered WA Taxa	*3*
Ecological Communities update	*4*
Status of Kimberley Rock-wallabies	*6*
Malleefowl Recovery Plan	*7*
Report on Lake Toolibin	*8*
Update on the Night Parrot	*9*

BACKGROUND

The Policy Statement allowed for modifications to be made to the categories as they were developed by IUCN. In November 1994, IUCN Council adopted IUCN Red List Categories Version 2.2. This differed from the version current at the time the Policy Statement was prepared by renaming the 'Critical' category 'Critically Endangered' and by subsuming 'Susceptible' into 'Vulnerable' as well as changing some of the criteria used to evaluate taxa. Version 2.2 was used by the Panel.

ALLOCATING TAXA TO IUCN CATEGORIES

The Panel viewed the overall descriptions of Critically Endangered, Endangered and Vulnerable as being more important than the actual criteria provided by IUCN, which were used as a guide, as provided in the Policy Statement.

For example, IUCN's definition of Critically Endangered is "A taxon is Critically Endangered when it is facing an extremely high risk of extinction in the wild in the immediate future as defined by any of the criteria A to E". In some cases taxa met one of the criteria (eg, Criterion D, less than 50 mature individuals) but clearly are not facing an extremely high risk of extinction in the immediate future. Examples include *Eucalyptus graniticola* (meets IUCN Criteria as "Critically Endangered", a single sterile plant in State forest, no existing or projected significant threats,

categorised by the Panel as "Endangered") and *Villarsia calthifolia* (meets IUCN Criteria as "Critically Endangered", a single population in a restricted area, no existing or projected significant threats, categorised by the Panel as "Endangered").

The biology of all species was also taken into consideration. For instance, some plants that are known only from a low number of individuals are not immediately threatened because of their relatively long life, eg, mallees. However, such species need monitoring to ensure that sufficient recruitment does take place. Disturbance opportunists were often difficult to assign - the Panel usually took the view that species that have relatively short life spans and exist in the environment as seed were not highly threatened so long as the environment they inhabit was in good condition. Such taxa that occur only or mostly in heavily disturbed sites, eg, weed-infested road verges, were considered highly threatened.

For some taxa, mostly animals, there was insufficient available information concerning number of populations, population size or area occupied for the IUCN criteria to be applied.

In these cases the score calculated via the scoring sheet was used as a guide to allocate the taxon to a threat category. Some taxa did not meet the IUCN criteria for threatened but are believed to be Endangered or Vulnerable and these were allocated to categories on a comparative basis. In some of these cases, reference was also made to the Action Plans prepared for many Australian vertebrate groups over the past few years.

Strategy 5.2 of CALM Policy Statement No. 50 states that CALM will list and prioritise each population of taxa categorised as Critically Endangered and Endangered. This task is now carried out for Critically Endangered taxa.

CONCLUSIONS

It is clear that many WA taxa are facing a high risk of extinction. The Panel ranked 46 taxa as "Critically Endangered" and 78 taxa as "Endangered". A considerable allocation of resources will be needed so as to "Ensure that all taxa identified as Critically Endangered are conserved, through the preparation and implementation of Recovery Plans or Interim Wildlife Management Guidelines" and to "Ensure that conservation action for taxa identified as Critically Endangered commences as soon as possible and always within one year of endorsement of that rank by the Minister" as provided in Policy 4.2 and Policy 4.3 of the Policy Statement.

The Panel emphasises that the conservation status of many taxa is very fluid with numbers of individuals and populations changing rapidly. For this reason, it is important that taxa are ranked at regular intervals.

The ranking exercise revealed some taxa that appear not to be threatened. The Panel recommended that they should be reviewed by the relevant Committee. These taxa are:
Pultinaea pauciflora Narrogin Pea
Daviesia purpurescens Purple-leaved Daviesia
Eucalyptus cerasiformis Cherry-fruited Mallee
Chamelaucium erythrochlorum Wicher Wax Flower
Asterolasia drummondii Gairdner Range Starbush
Gastrolobium tomentosum Woolly Poison
Banksia tricuspis Lesueur Banksia, Pine Banksia
Baeckea arbuscula Albany Baeckea
Laxmannia jamesii James' Paperlily
Verreauxia verreauxii Spindly Verreauxia

The Panel noted that two species of threatened flora are threatened only in Western Australia, but are not threatened overall, being relatively common in other parts of Australia. These taxa should, perhaps, not be listed, since they are secure. They are:
Asplenium obtusatum Shore Spleenwort
Pittosporum mollucanum Dampier Pittosporum

The list of Critically Endangered Western Australian taxa is provided on page 3. If you wish to receive the full list which includes Endangered, Vulnerable and Conservation Dependent please contact Jill Pryde at WATSCU.

RECOVERY TEAM MEETING DATES

Details of November dates set down for Fauna Recovery Teams are as follows:

Venue: University of WA Zoology Department
Western Swamp Tortoise Tuesday 14

Venue: CALM's Hills Forest Centre, Mundaring Weir Road, Mundaring
Chuditch Wednesday 15

Numbat Thursday 16

Woylie Thursday 16

Venue: CALM District Office, Margaret River
Orange- & White-bellied Frogs Friday 17

Venue: Two Peoples Bay Nature Reserve
Gilbert's Potoroo Monday 20

Noisy Scrub-bird Tuesday 21

Western Bristlebird Wednesday 22

There are currently 11 threatened flora recovery teams, consisting of 6 Region/District teams and 5 species teams.

Proposed meeting dates for these teams are as follows:

Merredin District	2 Nov 95
Swan Region	9 Nov 95
Wongan Trigger Plant	5 Dec 95
Central Forest Region	8 Dec 95
Albany District	20 Dec 95

The Matchstick Banksia and Southern Forest Region teams will meet in December 1995, date to be advised.

The Rose Mallee, Corrigin Grevillea, Wyalcatchem Foxglove and Geraldton District teams will meet in early 1996.

CRITICALLY ENDANGERED WESTERN AUSTRALIAN TAXA

Acacia pygmaea ms	Dwarf Rock Wattle
Caladenia bryceana subsp. *bryceana*	Dwarf Spider Orchid
Caladenia busselliana ms	Bussell's Spider Orchid
Caladenia elegans ms	Elegant Spider Orchid
Caladenia viridescens ms	Dunsborough Spider Orchid
Caladenia winfieldii ms	Majestic Spider Orchid
Calytrix breviseta subsp. *breviseta*	Starflower
Chamelaucium griffinii ms	Griffin's Wax Flower
Conostylis micrantha	Small Flowered Conostylis
Darwinia carnea	Mogumber Bell
Daviesia bursarioides ms	Three Springs Daviesia
Daviesia euphorbioides	Wongan Cactus
Daviesia microcarpa ms	Norseman Pea
Drakonorchis drakeoides ms	Hinged Dragon Orchid
Dryandra ionthocarpa ms	Kamballup Dryandra
Dryandra montana ms	Stirling Range Dryandra
Eremophila caerulea subsp. *merrallii*	Bruce Rock Eremophila
Eremophila nivea	Silky Eremophila
Eremophila veneta	Metallic-flowered Eremophila
Eucalyptus phylacis	Meelup Mallee
Eucalyptus rhodantha var. *petiolaris*	Rose Mallee
Geopsittacus occidentalis	Night Parrot
Grevillea maxwellii	Maxwell's Grevillea
Grevillea mccutcheonii ms	McCutcheon's Grevillea
Grevillea pythara	Pythara Grevillea
Grevillea scapigera	Corrigin Grevillea
Hemiandra gardneri	Red Snakebush
Hemiandra sp. (Watheroo)	Colourful Snakebush
Lambertia echinata subsp. *echinata*	Prickly Honeysuckle
Moggridgea sp. BY Main 1990/24	Stirling Range Moggridgea Spider
Myriophyllum lapidicola	Chiddarcooping Myriophyllum
Petrogale lateralis ssp. nov. (Sthn Kimberley)	Black-footed Rock-wallaby (Kimberley subspecies)
Pezoporus wallicus flaviventris	Ground Parrot (western subspecies)
Pityrodia scabra	Wyalkatchem Foxglove
Potorous tridactylus gilbertii	Gilbert's Potoroo
Prostanthera carrickiana	Carrick Mintbush
Pseudemydura umbrina	Western Swamp Tortoise
Pterostylis sp. (Northhampton)	Northampton Midget Greenhood
Rulingia sp. (Trigwell Bridge)	Trigwell's Rulingia
Tetratheca deltoidea	Granite Tetratheca
Teyl sp. BY Main 1953/2683	trapdoor spider, no common name
Thelymitra dedmaniarum	Cinnamon Sun Orchid
Verticordia albida	White Featherflower
Verticordia fimbrilepis subsp. *fimbrilepis*	Shy Featherflower
Verticordia spicata ssp squamosa	Scaly-leaved Featherflower
Zyzomys pedunculatus	Antina (Central Rock-rat)

IDENTIFYING AND LISTING THREATENED ECOLOGICAL COMMUNITIES IN SOUTHWESTERN AUSTRALIA

This project is now in its second year, and since the last report in *WATSNU* Volume 2 Issue 1, much has been achieved.

The Threatened Ecological Communities database is now operating, with many thanks to Consultant Simon Woodman, who developed a system for handling the extremely complex data and quite exacting requirements of this project in a way which should ensure the long term usefulness of the database. Over thirty ecological communities have already been entered.

The end result of the project will be a list of all identified threatened ecological communities in the Southwestern Natural Region, ranked in order of the degree of threat and of the need for recovery action. For critically endangered communities, recommendations will be made as to the most urgent recovery actions. However, it is already clear that some communities are critically endangered and that recovery actions cannot wait the eventual rank ordering and setting of priorities. Thus some actions are already being put in train for such communities, which will clearly be of the very highest rank when the priority list is completed.

Perhaps the most critically endangered and interesting ecological communities identified are the Tumulus Springs (organic mound springs) of the Swan Coastal Plain north of Perth. The two remaining examples of this community type are both only a few hectares in extent. The best of them, the Egerton Spring, are in very good condition, with a diverse plant community (and probably invertebrate community, although no work has been done on this). It is on land due for development in the near future. Negotiations on the future management of the Egerton Spring is in the hands of the EPA, and CALM has made a submission to them on this occurrence.

The second of the two remaining occurrences of Tumulus Springs on the coastal plain is on a property at Muchea. The occurrence is somewhat degraded by grazing and trampling by cattle and, very recently, by fire. However, it still retains a healthy overstorey of Melaleuca and other swamp trees and the morphological and hydrological features of these sorts of mound springs. Negotiations with the landowner, who is keen for the mound springs to be preserved, are currently in train.

The threatened ecological communities project receives excellent support from many people within CALM, including scientists, and regional and district staff, and seems likely to continue to generate actions for the conservation of critically endangered communities well before its completion.

John Blyth

PRESUMED EXTINCT WILDFLOWER RELOCATED

Another of the State's presumed extinct wildflowers, the Lake Darlot Hemigenia or *Hemigenia exilis*, has been rediscovered on a pastoral station in the Goldfields.

The species was found east of Leonora by a botanist undertaking a flora survey in the area for a mining company.

While the identity of the plant was not immediately apparent, it was an uncommon species in the area, and a sample was taken to the Western Australian Herbarium. CALM botanists were excited to confirm that it was the presumed extinct species, and have sought to have the population protected through the cooperation of the pastoralist and the mining company.

The Lake Darlot Hemigenia, a member of the mint family of plants, was first collected by Spencer Le Marchant Moore, an "unofficial scientific worker" with the British Museum, who collected plant specimens in the Eastern Goldfields between 1894 and 1896. Moore collected the plant from near Lake Darlot exactly 100 years ago, and it had not been seen since, despite growing to a height of one metre and having purple flowers!

Only twenty plants of the Lake Darlot Hemigenia were found growing in *Acacia* shrubland during the initial survey. Although a follow up survey has increased the number of known plants to about 100, the species is still one of the rarest of the State's flora. Further surveys, between the rediscovery site and its original collection site near Lake Darlot, will be undertaken to determine if further populations are to be found.

Arrangements are also underway to collect propagating material to grow the species, and store seed to ensure that the species does not again become 'presumed extinct'.

Mike O'Donoghue

This is another presumed extinct *Hemigenia*. Little is known about this Wheatbelt species, but if you think you know of it, please let Andrew Brown of WATSCU or the WA Herbarium know!

NEW RECOVERY TEAM for the Western Ringtail Possum!

Although Ringtails are not high on CALM's list of priorities for recovery teams and recovery plans, (rated Vulnerable under the new IUCN Red List Criteria) the species has a high public profile with its presence in urban areas, especially Busselton and Albany. With its habitat rapidly diminishing, mainly for urban development, the need to develop a strategy to oversee this species is essential. It was agreed that a Recovery Team should be formed and one of the first tasks of the team is to prepare an Interim Recovery Plan.

The Recovery Team includes: Ric How from the WA Museum, representatives from CALM's Swan (Paul Brown), South Coast (Peter Collins), Central Forest (Kim Williams) and Southern Forest (Bob Hagan) Regions, (Paul de Tores) Science & Information Division and WATSCU (Andrew Burbidge). Other people may be asked to join the Team soon.

DIBBLER RESEARCH UPDATE

Since this program commenced in January this year, approximately 13,000 trap nights have been achieved on the south coast. Unfortunatley no dibblers have yet been caught. The trapping program so far has included a mixture of Elliotts and pits and will soon include hair tubes. Fox scats have also been collected from the study areas to see if Dibbler hair turns up.

The two island populations have also been monitored. The last trapping there occured in September (amidst 40 knot winds). The less than perfect weather was made worth braving since we found that a large percentage of the adult male dibblers had survived the autumn breeding season and were in excellent condition. Previously it had been documented that each year the islands experienced a total male die-off. Reasons for this change in life history is not yet clear, it may be a response to lower numbers of females in the population.

Trapping on the islands will continue and documentation of individuals should prove very interesting for the next breeding season.

The desperate search for animals on the south coast will continue over summer until next winter. The focus will still be on past capture sites in the Fitzgerald River National Park, Waychinicup National Park and Torndirrup National Park.

Although the trapping results so far have not been encouraging, there is still a lot of bush on the south coast to hide in if you are a dibbler.

Natasha Baczocha

WELCOME EMMA, KIM AND FELICITY

WATSCU welcomes Emma Holland and Kim Kershaw who have been contracted to write Interim Recovery Plans for 21 critically threatened plants. Emma and Kim have been employed as part of CALM's initial $300 000 commitment to recover all critically endangered plants and animals.

In April 1995, a specialist scientific ranking panel, using CALM's Policy Statement No 50, *Setting Priorities for the Conservation of Western Australia's Threatened Flora and Fauna*, listed 38 plant taxa as critically endangered. This was the first time that a comprehensive review of the status of all WA's threatened plants and animals had been made at the same time.

Recovery Plans and Interim Recovery Plans have already been prepared for six of the critically endangered plant taxa and are in draft form for another 11. However, the ranking panel highlighted a further 21 taxa which need urgent recovery actions. Emma and Kim's role will be to prepare draft Interim Recovery Plans for these 21 taxa (for the list of taxa, see page 3).

In 1991 Emma graduated from Curtin University with a BSc in Biology. She then worked on a three month contract seed collecting for ALCOA of Australia and, after a year's break travelling Australia, was employed for two years as a contract Botanist with a consulting company.

Kim graduated from Murdoch University in 1989 with a BSc in Biology. He then gained extensive experience in terrestrial plant ecology whilst working for 5 years as a research officer for a Perth based environmental consulting company. Kim has a keen interest in entomology and herpetology.

Both Emma and Kim will be working from CALM's Wildlife Research Centre at Woodvale and can be contacted on 4055172.

WATSCU also welcomes Felicity Bunny who will start on 1 November 1995. Many of you will know Felicity from her work on *Phytophthora*. Felicity has a BSc in Biology and is currently completing her PhD in Plant Pathology. Felicity will also be working from CALM's Wildlife Research Centre at Woodvale and can be contacted on 4055 167.

Felicity will be coordinating recovery actions for the 38 critically endangered plant taxa. In this role she will enlist the cooperation of CALM Regional/District staff, scientists, local authorities, landholders, and the public in the challenge to bring our critically

endangered plants back from the brink of extinction.

The project is jointly funded by CALM and the Australian Nature Conservation Agency (ANCA).

WATSCU's Andrew Brown will be supervising the above projects and can be contacted on 4055166 for further information.

BANKWEST *LANDSCOPE* CONSERVATION VISA CARD TRUST FUND

BankWest donates a proportion of every transaction made using the card to a Trust Fund, which is used for the conservation of threatened species and ecological communities. A recent accumulation of funds has allowed CALM to call for new projects for funding. CALM has developed the following guidelines for these projects:

- Projects should cost no more than $3,000. Projects that cost less than $2,000 will be preferred.
- Projects should directly and clearly benefit a species or ecological community currently considered to be Critically Endangered or Endangered, or produce information that is of immediate value to their conservation.
- Projects should produce short to medium term measurable results.
- Money will not be allocated to jobs that are routine ones that CALM or another agency carries out as part of its normal works programs. Money will be allocated to achieve results that would otherwise not be possible.

An announcement on funded projects is expected shortly.

Positive results have already been achieved through the use of BankWest *Landscope* Conservation Visa Card Trust Fund grants. One such project was a survey organised by David Pearson of CALM's Science and Information Division of the Kimberley subspecies of the Black-footed Rock-wallaby. This subspecies was allocated to the 'Critically Endangered' category by the Scientific Ranking Panel in April this year.

David's report appears in full below.

SOUTH WEST KIMBERLEY ROCK-WALLABIES

The Black-footed Rock-wallaby, *Petrogale lateralis*, was once widely distributed but now occurs only in a few widely scattered locations in Western Australia, South Australia and the Northern Territory. Predation by foxes, and habitat changes caused by rabbits and goats, have led to serious population declines and local extinctions of this once widespread species.

A separate race or subspecies of the Black-flanked Rock-wallaby occurs in the remote Edgar Ranges in the south-west Kimberley. A recent appraisal of its status suggested that it might be Critically Endangered, but more information on its status was needed. Concerns that this population might be suffering a similar decline to those further south, resulted in the organisation of a survey. It aimed to assess the status of the Edgar Range population, to search for other rock-wallaby populations and to establish their conservation requirements.

In addition, it was planned to trap rock-wallabies to collect blood for genetic testing by Macquarie University researchers. The particular habitat preference of rock-wallabies means that one population is often distant from the next, and this reproductive isolation permits rapid evolutionary change. As a consequence, there are now a number of distinct genetic races of Black-footed Rock-wallabies.

The survey took place over two weeks in July 1995. Scientists visited pastoral properties and Aboriginal communities seeking information on the location of rock-wallabies. A report of rock-wallabies in the St George Range was investigated, but none were found. However, inspection of the Erskine Range and Done Hill area on the main highway between Derby and Fitzroy Crossing revealed a thriving population of in excess of 100 rock-wallabies.

Populations in the Edgar Range were visited and rock-wallabies were found to be abundant. Trapped females were carrying advanced pouch young. Measurements and blood samples were taken prior to their release. To the scientists' surprise, a new population was discovered in the Grant Range, while a Camballin pastoralist reported that rock-wallabies survived on a nearby outcrop. Many local land-holders also reported sightings of the threatened Bilby, *Macrotis lagotis*.

Blood samples collected from wallabies in the Edgar Range, Erskine Range and at Done Hill have now been analysed. All the animals were found to have similar genetic characteristics and belong to the West Kimberley subspecies. They are distinctly different from rock-wallaby populations in areas further south.

This short survey has shown that Black-footed Rock-wallabies in the south-west Kimberley are more widespread than previously believed, and remain reasonably abundant. A likely explanation is that foxes have been unable to effectively penetrate much of the Kimberley and cause problems for these rock-wallabies. Future management recommendations arising from the survey include searching for other populations in potential habitat and a monitoring program to detect any future changes in the conservation status of known populations.

WATSCU will appraise the results of this study and may recommend to the next meeting of the Panel that the Kimberley subspecies of the Black-footed Rock-wallaby does not now warrant listing as Critically Endangered.

MALLEEFOWL RECOVERY PLAN

The Malleefowl (*Leipoa ocellata*) was originally distributed widely in mallee shrublands and other similar habitats across the southern third of Australia. It has declined throughout its range, especially in the eastern and western wheatbelts and the far north of its range, having become extinct in the Northern Territory. The Malleefowl is listed under the Commonwealth Endangered Species Protection Act 1992 in Schedule 1, "Species that are endangered", while the Action Plan for Australian Birds (1992) classifies them as vulnerable nationally.

Because the Malleefowl's habitat is most fragmented throughout its range in New South Wales, Victoria and South Australia, and it is facing more obvious threats there than in Western Australia (where its range is still comparatively large), recovery action for it is considered more urgent in the eastern States. For these reasons the recovery team is convened by the Victorian Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (CNR). A recovery plan has been written by Joe Benshemesh, also with CNR, and a recovery team has has been appointed and has met three times to date. The recovery plan is yet to be fully adopted and may require considerable modification. For instance, identification of how the considerable costs are to be met, and an adequate Western Australian perspective, are yet to be added to the recovery plan, and such additions will be the responsibility of the recovery team.

Although the Malleefowl in Western Australia appears to be declining throughout much of its range, it is still very widespread and allocating major resources to it cannot be given as high a priority as many other species which are more threatened. Nevertheless, Western Australia is represented on the recovery team, with John Blyth of WATSCU recently replacing Allan Burbidge as the State's representative. In addition, originally independent but now coupled with the national recovery plan, actions to benefit the Malleefowl are already underway in Western Australia.

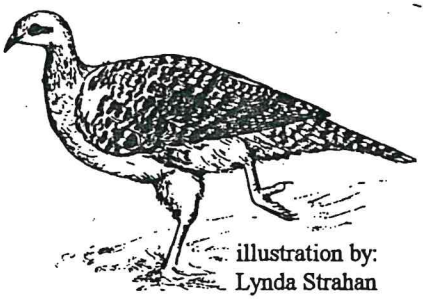


illustration by: Lynda Strahan

The Malleefowl is an excellent example of a 'charismatic' species; it is a large, attractive bird with a remarkable and interesting lifestyle, which readily captures the imagination of the public. It is well known in a number of local communities on the southern, eastern and northern fringes of the Wheatbelt, where it still occurs in many patches of remnant vegetation on farms, and its continuing decline is a source of concern to those local communities.

It has become the focus of a very active recovery effort around Ongerup and Gnowangerup, with the formation there of the Malleefowl Preservation Group. (The local Nyoongar name for the malleefowl is gnow and this is incorporated into the name Gnowerangerup, for which it is the faunal emblem.) Although the Malleefowl Preservation Group receives some assistance from larger community organisations such as the Royal Australasian Ornithologists Union and the National Threatened Species Network, as well as from CALM and the Perth Zoo, it is very much a grassroots organisation with most of its members being farmers on whose properties malleefowl presently or potentially occur.

The Malleefowl Preservation Group has been active since 1992 and has a membership now of over 150 local people. The Group has made many significant achievements in that short time. These include developing a very high level of support within the local community for the conservation of the malleefowl; a regular fox-baiting program by local landowners across 200 permanent bait stations; surveying, gridding and monitoring several areas where malleefowl mounds occur; and the production of a wide and imaginative range of material promoting the conservation of the malleefowl and the remnant vegetation it depends upon. One of the promotional initiatives has been the construction, with the involvement of local school children and other members of the local community, of a replica of a malleefowl mound at the local museum.

All of this work, and much more, depended largely upon landholders themselves and members of the local community, although volunteers from all parts of the State have been involved, especially in the various surveys and gridmarking projects.

Thus, through the initiative of a relatively small number of people in a particular rural community, the status of the malleefowl there has already improved considerably. The significance of this activity for conservation efforts in general can hardly be overstated! If this model came to be widely adopted throughout rural Australia in relation to 'flagship' species significant to each region or locality, it would act as the backbone of recovery efforts for each of those species. It would also automatically contribute greatly to wider conservation aims, including the conservation of remnant vegetation in general, and the sustainable use of agricultural lands.

Other communities, including Wubin/Dalwallinu and Ravensthorpe, in whose areas populations of malleefowl still exist, are expressing the wish to imitate the Gnowangerup/Ongerup initiative. If these efforts become widely distributed throughout the range of the malleefowl in agricultural areas, much of the Western Australian contribution to the national recovery plan for the species could be based on them.

To help coordinate the effort to conserve malleefowl in Western Australia, and through the national recovery plan, the W. A. Malleefowl Recovery Group has been formed. This group has representation from WATSCU, the Malleefowl Preservation

Group, the North Central Malleefowl Preservation Group, the National Threatened Species Network, Perth Zoo, the Australian Trust for Conservation Volunteers and the W.A. Group of the Royal Australasian Ornithologists Union. The W.A. Malleefowl Recovery Group has met three times and at the last meeting it was decided to make application to both State and Federal agencies for funds to employ a coordinator to promote, advise on and coordinate activities (especially controlling feral predators) for the conservation of the malleefowl and other threatened species in the Western Australian wheatbelt. So far these efforts have not been successful.

The last meeting of the National Recovery Team was held in Adelaide in September and was associated with a much broader two day workshop with many members of local communities involved in Malleefowl conservation present. John Blyth, Suzanne Dennings of the Malleefowl Preservation Group and three other Western Australians attended the workshop, and it is clear that community interest and involvement continues to grow both in Western Australia and eastern states.

TOOLIBIN LAKE

Toolibin Lake is the last remaining example in the WA Wheatbelt of perched wetlands containing extensive stands of living sheoak and paperbark across the lake floor, and the first threatened ecological community in Western Australia for which a recovery plan has been written. Implementation of the plan is well under way, with 1995 seeing the completion or beginning of all of the most urgent and important actions.

While the lake remained dry this year all of the earthworks associated with the separator and the outlet works, designed to separate low volume flows of poor quality water from the lake and divert them downstream to the degraded Lake Taarblin, were completed, with a significant injection of funds by CALM. This was a major project, with input from hydrologists from the Water Authority and Agriculture WA, non-stop work from the private contractor, a heavy commitment by CALM's Narrogin District staff and the generous assistance of family landholders all required for its successful completion before winter.

This arrangement has already been shown to achieve its aim, as some heavy rain in winter provided flow of highly saline surface water in Northwest Creek, which was captured by the separator drain and diverted downstream. The large earth bund along the floor of the lake on the degraded western side will also provide an ideal opportunity to test the effectiveness of creating artificial mounds in the floor of the lake on which it is believed better survival of newly established tree seedlings is likely.

In addition, the Recovery team and funding organisations agreed to a modified design for the first stage of the pumping program in the bed of the lake. The new design, hoped to achieve the same result with fewer pumps than recommended in the recovery plan, is based on results of the airborne magnetics survey conducted by Agriculture WA hydrologists in 1994. The bores in the bed of the lake are now in place; pumps will be established on them and pumping of saline ground-water is planned to begin shortly, following further discussions with downstream land-holders and the commencement of an appropriate monitoring program.

Impressive progress has also been made in the land management activities required in the catchment of Toolibin Lake to ensure long term protection both of the lake itself and valuable low lying agricultural land on the Toolibin Flats. First, the Toolibin West Catchment drainage works were completed this year with funding and work by Alcoa, ANCA, Agriculture WA and CALM. In the long term this is expected to decrease waterlogging on the Toolibin flats, have a positive effect on surface salinities, and result in long term decreases in the volume of water entering the lake.

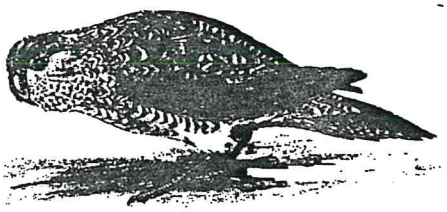
Secondly, significant steps towards catchment revegetation were taken and are summarised below.

- In 1995, in the oil mallee project funded under the CALM-Commonwealth Forestry Program, 120,000 oil mallee seedlings were planted in the Toolibin Catchment. The planting has been on freehold land and is a cooperative project with land-holders. Land-holders have also undertaken other revegetation, and actions to protect remnant vegetation.
- Also in 1995, a total of 36,000 seedlings were planted on two freehold properties as part of CALM's Toolibin Alley Farm Trial. This ongoing project will research alley layouts for sustainable agriculture involving local and regional species.
- The Toolibin Catchment Group, made up of farmers with properties in the Toolibin catchment, was successful in winning a grant under the National Landcare Program to fund a revegetation strategy for the catchment. Work on the strategy commenced in 1994, and officers from Agriculture Western Australia and CALM are involved along with land-holders. This is an important project and the final product will provide revegetation strategies for land-holders with regard to particular land units.
- The Toolibin Catchment Group, with significant assistance from Alcoa, completed or begun a number of other initiatives, including the fencing of remnant vegetation, revegetation with deep rooted plants including tagasaste, and the west drainage project including the establishment of grade banks.

It will take many years before the final success of recovery actions at Toolibin Lake can be assessed. Nevertheless, it is clear that the

interactions between the technical advisory group, the recovery team, various government agencies and the local community are very positive and the implementation of the recovery plan is proceeding well. Perhaps most significantly, the rather daunting levels of funding required so far have been met from a variety of sources; there is now every reason to believe that key actions of the plan will be funded as required.

UPDATE ON THE NIGHT PARROT



Since the article *The Night Parrot: no longer presumed extinct* in Vol 1 Issue No. 2 of *WATSNU*, there have been no further confirmed sightings of the Night Parrot, but a number of actions have begun within CALM in an attempt to find and conserve this most elusive of Australian birds.

First, during an appraisal of the status of all gazetted threatened vertebrate species in Western Australia, the application of a ranking system based on international standards and adapted within CALM for Australian conditions, resulted in the Night Parrot being ranked as Critically Endangered.

Secondly, an Interim Recovery Plan for the Night Parrot is now in draft form with public comment to be sought shortly. This is consistent with CALM's Policy Statement No. 50 *Setting priorities for the conservation of Western Australia's threatened flora and fauna*, (see *WATSNU* Issue No. 3) which requires the production and beginning of implementation of an Interim Recovery Plan within one year of a species being listed as Critically Endangered.

Thirdly, a publicity campaign was launched in July 1995 seeking input from members of the public who believed they had seen Night Parrots anywhere in Western Australia. Coloured leaflets were distributed to roadhouses along inland highways, major trucking lines working inland routes, pastoralists (by mail), and landcare groups, kangaroo shooters, APB 'doggers', and mining companies with interests in the appropriate areas. There have also been articles in *The Western Australian* newspaper and appropriate newsletters, and a number of interviews on both Perth and regional radio.

Since the beginning of this campaign, over twenty possible sightings have been reported, stretching from the 1930s to September 1995. Six of these reported sightings were from within the last twelve months.

Of these recent reports, two have been followed up with field searches for the birds on pastoral stations in the Goldfields. One of these was that reported (giving an incorrect location) in the June 1995 issue of the RAOU newsletter, Wingspan, and the birds seen proved to be Elegant Parrots. The other Goldfields' report was also from an area where Elegant Parrots are present this year; habitat which, on current knowledge, one might associate with Night Parrots, was present but limited. A few days of spotlighting and other searching for Night Parrots on this property was unsuccessful.

The most unexpected result from this project so far has been the cluster of six reported sightings, from the 1930s to August 1995, from the Lake King/Varley area, within a radius of less than 50km. Not all of these reports are particularly convincing in themselves, and the area is not one anyone would have predicted, being several hundred km south of the nearest previous reports in WA. Nevertheless, at least three of the six reports cannot be dismissed lightly, and the likelihood of six reports, all quite unrelated, being false and being from such a small area by coincidence seems low.

Brief inspections of habitat have been made in the Lake King/Varley area, and near the Yarra Yarra Lake system in the northern wheatbelt, also the location of a recent report.

While the habitat near the reported northern wheatbelt sighting seems unlikely to harbour a population of Night Parrots, there is considerable habitat which could be suitable in the chain of nature reserves along the Holt Rock to Lake King Road. In addition, there is a historical report from Ghost Rocks south of Lake Ballard (Storr 1986), and a current rather convincing one from the northern end of Lake Cowan. Considering the vast amount of unpopulated salt lake and 'saltbush' country around Lakes Johnston, Hope and Tay, we could postulate that the potential distribution of Night Parrots extends from more inland salt lake systems north of Kalgoorlie to the salt lake country of the southern Goldfields and southeastern Wheatbelt. Both the nineteenth century stronghold of the species in the Gawler Ranges in South Australia and an accepted 1950s record from northwestern Victoria (Menkhorst and Isles 1981) are considerably further south than these wheatbelt sites.

More detailed current information will be sought from local people in the planning of possible field surveys attempting to find populations of Night Parrots around these southern salt lake systems.

While there are also many sightings reported from the Eastern Pilbara, and northern Goldfields over the last thirty years (and based on previous knowledge they seem more likely to harbour Night Parrots) there are really no recent reports, and no obvious clusters of sightings which give a clear guide as to where to start looking. Further, given the isolation and harshness of this country, any field trips to these areas will be more expensive and logistically demanding than to either of the two referred to above. The planning of such expeditions will await the receipt of more definite and current sightings.

John Blyth

NEW RECOVERY PLANS PUBLISHED

Three new publications have been published in the Wildlife Management Program series:

No 14 *Rose Mallee Recovery Plan* by AE Kelly & DJ Coates
No 15 *Wongan Triggerplant Recovery Plan* by Helen M Stace & DJ Coates
No. 20 *Declared Rare and Poorly Known Flora in the Albany District* by Christopher J Robinson & DJ Coates

Editor: Jill Pryde
WA Threatened Species & Communities Unit
CALM, Wildlife Research Centre
PO Box 51, Wanneroo WA 6065
Ph: 9 405 5128 Fax: 9 306 1066
E-mail jillp@wood.calm.wa.gov.au