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.