

From weeds to whales – Pilbara research meeting

By Valerie English



From left to right Welcome to Country. Paperbarks at Millstream Pools. Discussing management issues. *Photos – Valerie English*

In late June 2014 a meeting was held in the Pilbara to discuss current and planned research in the region. The venue was Millstream Chichester National Park, an area that has significant weed and water management issues. The meeting was attended by specialists from Parks and Wildlife's Science and Conservation Division and Pilbara Region, as well as the CSIRO. The meeting was opened with a Welcome to Country performed overlooking the Millstream pools by traditional owners from Parks and Wildlife's Karratha office.

Major management issues at the site including control of date palms and *Passiflora foetida* (a weedy passionfruit species), and managing the erosion along the river pools, and the Millstream aquifer were discussed during a walk alongside the stream. This important aquifer feeds the rare permanent pools and is a water source for local towns and industry, as well

as providing habitat to stygofauna and many birds, mammals and other fauna. A new order of crustaceans for Australia – Spelaeogriphacea – was identified from the Millstream aquifer and represents an ancient lineage of stygofauna perhaps up to 200 million years old. The presence of this important group, and a suite of other important stygofauna led to the listing of the aquifer habitat as a Priority Ecological Community.

Other research discussed included management of threatened mammals, fire management, control of feral animals and weeds, monitoring and management of Pilbara islands, marine fauna issues, using genetic signatures to help guide management of rare flora, and managing impacts of development in the Pilbara. Many of the projects discussed are supported through funds from offsets for industrial and mining developments in the region.

The Pilbara is dominated by grasslands and two important types were examined and discussed on the journey between Millstream and Karratha. There are eight priority and one threatened grassland types in the region. These grasslands are often highly impacted by grazing and development, and more research into the flora that comprise them, and distribution and condition is a priority, with a view to seeking to protect the best areas.

The knowledge shared and networks established will greatly facilitate the future management of important marine, island and mainland areas in the Pilbara and the important flora and fauna that they support.

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