

RESEARCH

SALINITY ACTION PLAN - BIOLOGICAL SURVEY OF THE AGRICULTURAL ZONE

by Greg Keighery

*A major study just starting will increase our knowledge of wheatbelt flora and fauna. Would you like to know what's happening in your area? Or be involved yourself? Perhaps you have a piece of bushland that might qualify for a survey? Register your interest now!*

OVER the next three/four years, the Community Conservation Section of CALM's Science Division will be co-ordinating and undertaking a major site-based survey of the wheatbelt as part of the Salinity Action Plan. The major aim of the survey is to identify a series of recovery catchments for the conservation of bio-diversity, establish long term monitoring sites and to obtain a regional overview of the flora and fauna of the wheatbelt. As well, species of plants will be carefully documented as to their ecological preferences (eg:

waterlogging and/or salinity tolerance) and this information will be made available widely via a carrier such as the REX Database.

Plants and animals (mammals, birds, frogs, reptiles, various invertebrates - spiders, scorpions, centipedes and millipedes) will be inventoried at several hundred terrestrial sites spread across the wheatbelt, with a bias towards areas low in the landscape, that are most likely to be affected by hydrological and salinity changes. There will also be a survey of aquatic plants, birds, frogs and invertebrates. A monitoring program for wetlands is also being established, covering rivers, fresh and naturally saline lakes and wetlands.

The program has started with extensive aquatic and flora studies being undertaken on the Lake Muir - Unicup Wetlands, a nominated recovery catchment. By the end of

June we will have obtained a known flora and fauna list for the wheatbelt from existing studies and Museum and Herbarium records. A bibliography of previous site-based studies (either quadrats, sites, bush blocks or reserve) is being compiled. The first season's sampling sites will be in the central wheatbelt and selected in July. Sampling will start there in spring 1997.

Most of these sites - there will be over 1,000 in total - will be on public lands. However, they will occur throughout the wheatbelt and the results should be of interest to any landholder in the area. If people have any queries at this early stage I can be contacted on (08) 9405 5100.

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*The sort of site likely to be surveyed, carrying Salmon Gum woodland.*