

IT started quite simply with a man who thought before he did. When his dam dried out this summer he was going to get it cleaned, however there were about 15 "tortoises", that he'd counted, living in it. What was going to happen to them?

Herang the Toodyay Naturalists' Club and the fun and games started. The club talked to some experts, contacted Peter Lambert in Wildlife Protection at DCLM, sent off for permits to move the animals, got back permits, got in touch with Jacqui Giles, a Western Long-necked Tortoise expert and picked a day.

This was all something of a rush because if the dam dried out too far the tortoises might dig in to wait out the summer. If this happened we would never find them and they stood a good chance of being crushed when the dam was cleaned.

The day came, Jacqui came up from Perth, club members, many of whom are also *LFWers*, came and as many kids as we could lay our hands on were dragged along to do their bit. We all met, before heading off to the dam for the final assault.

It wasn't a big dam, about the size of a tennis court, it didn't have much water, not even knee deep, we could see lots of somethings moving in the water, but the one thing we were sure of was, there was plenty

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The Great Relocate

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of mud. We looked, we considered and finally we found "volunteers" to wade in.

Jacqui had actually come equipped with waders, so she volunteered, the boys had been bought along especially for this task and our lone girl and a couple of the braver adults showed great daring in risking the sucking ooze.

Method number one was wading in and grabbing them, you sank in the mud, and the turtles swam away. We sat on the bank for a while considering the alternatives.

Method number two was to drag a length of shadecloth across the dam to try and herd the turtles to the edge. This worked a little better and one was caught, but the turtles disappeared through the ooze and ducked under the net. I was sent off for sheets of tin, etc to do something about the sinking feeling only to come back to find the problem solved.

There in the middle of the dam with bucket was Jacqui grabbing the turtles as the boys with the shadecloth herded them past her. The turtles were then passed along to the people on the shore, who washed them and put them in a shady spot to await weighing and measuring. By the time we gave up we had 38 turtles waiting for new homes and two people that needed a great deal of help to get out of the mud.

We measured, weighed, and where possible sexed the animals recording the information as we went in preparation for delivering them to their new homes. The smallest turtle captured weighed a mere 70 gm, less than a bar of soap, while the largest was a grand old lady weighing in at 1.6kg.

We'd come, we'd seen and we'd done what we had set out to do. There were still some turtles in the dam we hadn't managed to catch; the owner will keep an eye out for them, but the majority is going to be safe.

Some went to other dams on *LFWer's* properties and some went to council reserves that still had water. The largest specimens went into Toodyay Brook, which wasn't far from the dam they were being rescued from. All bar two of the locations were part of the same

local catchment, the remaining two sites still on the same river system. We were concerned that if they all went to one place there wouldn't be enough food for them and anything that was already in residence. But the biggest mystery to my mind is what were they all doing in a small dam in the middle of a paddock in the first place.

Kim Bendtsen is a LFW Landholder in Toodyay.

