IN BRIEF

Salinisation of the Blackwood River – implications for the inland fish fauna

THE Blackwood River is one of the few river systems in southwestern Australia in which all of the fish species endemic to this region occur. However, a recent study of the Blackwood and its tributaries has identified that salinity has caused a massive decline in, or extinction of, populations of native fish in much of their original distribution. In addition, competition from the introduced species Gambusia and the predatory trout and Redfin Perch has contributed to the decline.

The naturally-vegetated, non-saline tributaries contain most of what remains of the original native fish biodiversity. The protection of these unique fish relies upon the preservation of their remaining habitat. The authors conclude: "The example of the salinisation of Blackwood River highlights the need to act cautiously when removing large expanses of native vegetation, particularly in arid countries such as Australia".

For the full story, read: Morgan, D.L., Thorburn, D.C. and Gill, H.S. 2003. Salinisation of southwestern Western Australian rivers and implications for the inland fish fauna – the Blackwood River, a case study. Pacific Conservation Biology **9**: 161-71.

Two useful leaflets:

"Introduced freshwater species in Western Australia".

"Native freshwater fishes of south-western Australia"

Obtainable free from Fisheries Western Australia, ph: 9482 7333, email: headoffice@fish.wa.gov.au

Australian Heritage Council established

LATE last year, the Federal Government passed new heritage legislation and, as part of that, has established a new independent advisory body, the Australian Heritage Council. This body will be responsible for assessing the "National Heritage List" and will also provide advice to the Federal Government on heritage matters.

To help, there is a new funding programme called "Distinctively Australian". People are encouraged to nominate places to this list around three themes: a wide and ancient land; building a nation; and the Australian spirit. For more information visit the website at www.ahc.gov.au

Can Echidnas disperse fungal spores?

MYCORRHIZAL fungi are essential for orchid seed germination, thus the distribution and dispersal strategies of the fungi must be understood for the regeneration of endangered orchid populations. Leah Feuerherdt investigated whether echidnas spread these fungi in the Mt Lofty Ranges, SA, and also whether the animals were significant soil disturbers. The answer was yes to the soil disturbance, but no direct evidence of their actually carrying spores in a field situation was recorded, though in the lab they held spores on their feet or fur for at least 45 minutes.

Since the importance of mycorrhizae in the health of our bushland is well known, and since echidna are the only medium-sized soil-disturbing animal left in many wheatbelt remnants, it is interesting to note that they may be inadvertently involved in spreading spores. Another plus for having an echidna on the place!

Ref: *The role of echidnas in dispersing mycorrhizal fungi associated with the endangered* Caladenia behrii *north of Adelaide and distribution of these fungi at Warren Conservation Park, South Australia.* Leah Feuerherdt. Honours thesis. School of Environmental and Recreation Management, Uni. S.A., Adelaide.