May '91

Wanted Alive

Endangered Species (WA) is hosted by the Conservation Council of WA Inc. and is a component of the National Endangered Species Program

Newsletter May 1991

FUNDING FOR NETWORK INCREASED

Increased funding for the National Threatened Species Network was recently announced by the Federal Minister for the Arts, Sport, the Environment, Tourism and Territories, Ros Kelly.

Commonwealth funding to the Network, under the Endangered Species Program, will increase from $110,000 to $135,000. This will be supplemented by $127,000 from non-government organisations.

Community support is essential for effective protection and conservation of endangered species. The Network's links to conservation groups and government can mobilise country-wide support and encourage appropriate action to save them.

In its first year of operation, the Network has recruited the support and participation of over 800 organisations and individuals. The Network also has played a major role in advancing proposed endangered species legislation in Tasmania and New South Wales.

As part of its community education program, the Network has held public information sessions and distributed materials on Australia's endangered species.

A public opinion survey initiated by the Network found that 73% of Australians strongly agreed that threatened species should be protected.

LET THERE BE SPACE

Areas recommended by the Environmental Protection Authority under System Six as regional open space, are often under-utilised as a resource by the local community and schools.

Ecoplan is a project initiated by the EPA and various conservation groups which aims to use community support for managing these areas for conservation and/or recreation. Information on the location and status of these areas is to be made available to schools and other interest groups in the areas in which they occur. Schools will be encouraged to use the areas as a resource in various education programs.

Many of these areas of open space are extremely important as they provide the only viable habitat for native species of flora and fauna in areas otherwise devoted to urban development. In protecting these habitats, our wildlife species - many of which are threatened with extinction - may survive and flourish for all of us to enjoy.

For details of Ecoplan, contact Fiona Keating at the EPA on 222 7000.

SEALS ON THE MEND

Research data collected from two New Zealand fur seal pup colonies affected by the Sanko Harvest oil spill off Esperance will contribute to a benchmark study and add to information previously collected on the species. Several visits have been made to the two islands since the pups were released, although researchers have been careful not to disrupt the bonding process between mother and pup.

Dr Nick Gales believes the subsequent documented growth rate and health of the surviving pups is an encouraging sign. Of the 38 seal pups affected on Hood Island, Dr Gales has put mortality of the two-week to two-month old pups at between 4 and 12 animals (10.5 and 31% of the initial population).

Blood samples taken from the animals during the monitoring visits have been sent to scientists who worked on the Exxon Valdez oil-spill in Alaska for special analysis on hydrocarbon levels. CALM will continue to monitor the populations over the next year.

RARE AND ENDANGERED SPECIES THREATENED BY HOMESWEST

The Brixton Street, Kenwick site is a rich area floristically. It contains 3 declared endangered flora species under the Wildlife Conservation Act. These are *Aponogeton hexatepalus, Hydrocotyle lemnoides* and *Drosera occidentalis.*

The 19 ha site itself is significant for a number of reasons. It consists of a series of interconnected claypans which are surrounded by higher ground, with sandy clay or lateritic soil. Not only is there rare flora present, but the habitat itself is considered to be rare. Melaleuca lateritia swamps and claypans were once common on the poorly drained flatlands of the northern Swan Coastal Plain, however almost all of this habitat has been cleared. Brixton Street is one area which has so far survived.

No fauna survey has been carried out, however the site could be suitable for re-establishing the Western Swamp Tortoise, now the subject of a captive breeding program by the Perth Zoo in conjunction with CALM. There are currently only 2 sites in reservation which could be used for the relocation of the Rare and Endangered Western Swamp Tortoise. This is insufficient to ensure long-term survival of the species.

Recent sightings of the Southern Brown Bandicoot (*Isodon obesulus*), has confirmed the site's importance for fauna. Field visits showed evidence of recent diggings indicative of a resident colony of bandicoots. The Brown Bandicoot or Quenda, has recently been gazetted under Schedule 1 of the Act as being rare, and "likely to become extinct".

The site is truly remarkable - it contains 7 vegetation complexes and has 307 plant species recorded (49 of which are naturalised aliens).

Calectasia cyanea/*C. grandiflora* (Star of Bethlehem) are found co-occurring on the site. This is the only location where this has been recorded. A number of species have hybridising populations, including *Tribonanthes australis* and *T. brachypetala*; *T. australis* and *T. variablis* (Flannel flowers); *Anigozanthus manglesii* and *A. bicolor*, and *A. manglesii* and *A. viridis* (Kangaroo Paws).

The grim news is that this area is now under threat. It is currently owned by Homeswest who wish to develop the area for medium-density housing. CALM is keen to acquire the land, and the possibility of a land swap was being explored, but now seems to have been abandoned by Homeswest.

A Consultative Environmental Review (CER) was released for public comment. The submission period closed on March 15, and the proposal is currently with the EPA awaiting consideration.

THE PROPOSAL

The proposal by the Homeswest consultants is that 8 ha be set aside for conservation and the remainder be totally cleared and filled with approximately 0.6 metres of sand. No account has been taken of
- the rare habitat type
- the significant flora (which will be removed)
- the rich botanical values of the site
- the importance of the site as an area to relocate the Western Swamp Tortoise
- the fact that two small areas, totally surrounded by medium density housing will not be viable over time as a conservation reserve
- that this wetland was assessed under EPA Bulletin 374 and fell into the highest category - 'H' - for management
- that all remaining wetlands need to be protected.

If this area is lost it will be a very serious setback for conservation of endangered species and habitats. The effectiveness of the current legislation in providing protection for threatened species would have to be questioned.

A lack of basic management by Homeswest has facilitated rubbish dumping, squatting and opened up many tracks. This has necessitated action by the Waterbird Conservation Group to provide interim management of the site. A number of clean-ups have been held, including the removal of some car bodies. There will be on-going management of the site by the Group.

Conservation groups conducted a series of wildflower walks in 1990 and will be arranging further walks during the winter and spring of 1991.

Drosera occidentalis

Have your say:

Voice your concern, write to:

Premier Carmen Lawrence
Capita Building,
197 St Georges Tce,
Perth 6000

Minister for the Environment,
Mr Bob Pearce,
77 St Georges Tce,
Perth 6000

Leader of the Opposition,
Mr B. McKinnon,
Parliament House
Perth 6000

Ask for;
- more money allocated directly to saving endangered species
- greater priority for saving/preserving natural areas (habitat)
- increased funding/resources for control of feral animals
- increase in public education about the need for conservation and environmentally sound activities
- stronger legislation to protect endangered species.

Our Say

WHAT HERITAGE VALUE?

The Australian Heritage Commission identifies and protects parts of the natural or cultural environment which have 'aesthetic, historic, scientific or social significance or other special values for future generations as well as for the present community' (Australian Heritage Conservation Act 1975 (Cth) Section 4 (1)).

Hepburn Heights, an attractive area of bushland in a region planning to cater for a population of some 500,000 over the next 30 years, is unique. Its special qualities mean the site is eligible for Australian listing, and the Commission is to assess it in June 1991.

Hepburn Heights is unique because it contains 4 major vegetation types, supporting 244 species of flowering plants. One of these (*Cartonema philyroides*) is listed by CALM (1990) as a priority species of flora, and also appears in Rare or Threatened Australian Plants (Briggs and Leigh, 1988). A species of pigface, previously unrecorded in the metropolitan area, has also been found on the site. Forty four species of birds have been identified amongst this wealth of flora. Local schools have been using the area for field studies.

However, the potential heritage values of this 53 hectare site may not last until June 1991 when assessment is due to take place, for the bulldozers have already moved in and begun clearing. Cleared land has little heritage value to recommend it and those 'special values for future generations as well as the present community' are to be replaced by a $10,000,000 Government housing development.

The local people have been fighting to keep Hepburn Heights from development since 1987. You can support them. See "Have your say".

WE NEED INVERTEBRATES

Invertebrates make up the largest component of our fauna in terms of species and biomass. Compared to around 6000 species of vertebrates, there are an estimated 100,000 named species of invertebrates in Australia with a possible 200,000 species as yet undescribed. Soil invertebrates alone may constitute a mass of some one tonne per hectare. Marine invertebrates provide between 9 and 10 million tonnes of food for human consumption each year. Invertebrates also provide us with resources which are used in foods, medicines, industry and crafts for making jewellery.

Invertebrates have adapted to a diverse range of habitats, both marine and terrestrial. They play an invaluable role in the maintenance of ecosystems by degrading both plant and organic matter thus releasing and recycling nutrients which improve soil fertility. Burrowing insects and earth worms aid in aerating soils and many plants rely on insects for pollination.

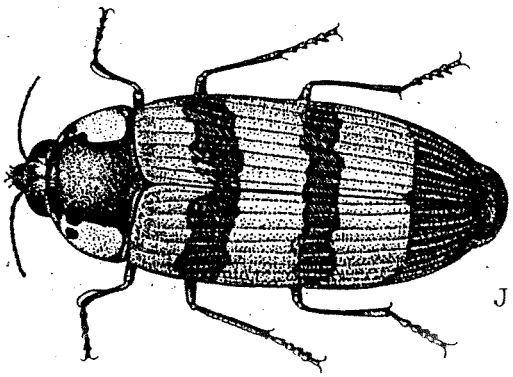
Much research, and stringent controls, are necessary before any biological control mechanisms may be introduced into a system. However, biological control often occurs naturally and limits the density of invertebrate or other pest species. In spite of their importance to our welfare there is little information available on the distribution or biology of the invertebrate species of Australia. Some species may have disappeared without ever having been recorded and many other species may be endangered.

Land clearance and degradation are the major threats to intertebrate survival. Whenever topsoil is lost, so are invertebrates. Still more species are lost through the action of chemical fertilisers, herbicides and pesticides.

Provision exists in the Wildlife Conservation Act 1950 to protect Western Australia's invertebrates. However only 2 taxa are currently protected - the jewel beetles (Family Buprestidae) and the ant genus Nothomyrmecia. This legislation was introduced as a means of controlling the collection of these species rather than in directly conserving them. Little provision has been made to research their biology, distribution or conservation of their habitat.

The importantance of invertebrates in the maintenance of ecosystems, and thus to the ultimate well-being of mankind, is slowly being recognised. Work is underway in Tasmania and NSW to ascertain the conservation status of their invertebrate fauna; and a conservation policy for invertebrates has been prepared in Victoria. Some research into invertebrates has been carried out in the rainforests of WA.

In light of the many invaluable roles played by invertebrates in maintaining the environment, it is essential that further research be conducted into their conservation in WA. Those species in danger of extinction should be gazetted rare or endangered by the Department of Conservation and Land Management and be thus protected under the provisions of the Wildlife Conservation Act 1950 in the same manner as flora and vertebrate fauna. Funding also needs to be allocated to this important work.



Jewel beetle

FEEDBACK

This space has been allocated to your letters and correspondence.
Write to us with any stories or anecdotes you would like to share.

Dear Peta,

Your last issue partially focused on the disappearing wallabies and the current danger to small colonies in the vicinity of Leda.

I draw your attention to the fact that two more colonies are in grave danger at Yangebup & Bibra Lake areas.

These wallabies are of two types which are apparently 'brush' and 'black' gloved. They are beautiful little animals threatened by an ever decreasing habitat of relatively thick Banksia, Tuart and Jarrah bushland which is earmarked for short term industrial and residential development.

The Yangebup Progress Association and myself have drawn some attention to the plight of these native animals to the EPA, DPUD, CALM and the Conservation Council.

We seek immediate preplanning for a sensitive, professional relocation of these wallabies into the adjoining proposed Beeliar Regional Park, particularly around Thompson Lake where there may be adequate food sources for them.

The actual relocation time would have to be the subject of discussion with the developers owning the land (Homeswest and a private developer). At the moment, the wallabies appear to have been able to maintain their numbers despite disturbance from wood cutters, four wheel drivers, rabbit/bird shooters, dogs and recent efforts by a fire bug which diminished some of their habitat.

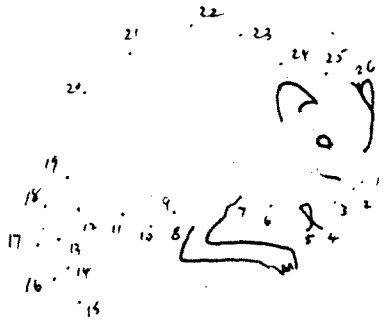
The response we have received from the authorities has been negligible and fairly apathetic.

If the slowness in getting the Beeliar Regional Park formed and properly managed is any guide, protection and relocation of these wallabies, if left to Government Departments, is in critical danger of a worst case outcome. I hope CALM and the EPA will take the opportunity to greatly enhance their image in this community by preparing a suitable plan and acting on it in sufficient time to contribute to saving these species.

There will be an anguished outcry from this relatively environmentally sensitive community if they are allowed to be slaughtered by neglect.

Yours faithfully
JEFF A SPENCER
YANGEBUP

JOIN THE DOTS



KID'S CORNER

Dear Peta,

On behalf of the senior class at Useless Loop Primary School I would like to explain to you the project that we, the community, are undertaking, called the Useless Loop Community Biosphere Project.

Our main aim is to re-introduce the burrowing bettong back onto the mainland from Bernie and Dorre Islands.

We started last year by putting a high-tech electric fence across Heirisson Prong. At the start of this year the A.P.B. came and baited the Biosphere area and an area south of the fence to kill all the foxes, feral cats, and rabbits.

As soon as all the foxes, cats and rabbits are gone they are going to bring in the first of the bettongs from Bernie and Dorre Islands. These animals will be put into a four hectare breeding enclosure before being released into the fenced off area of Heirisson Prong.

The children of Useless Loop have assisted in the construction of the fence and have gone on field trips with the many visiting scientists.

Our school science camp last year was a great success allowing us to study some of the local reptiles, small mammals, insects and plants of the area with the help of CALM and CSIRO personnel.

We hope this information is of interest to your readers of 'Wanted Alive'.

Yours Sincerely,
Leanne Tarpey
Student
Useless Loop Primary School