



## South West Region

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Dear colleagues

Terms 2 and 3 came and went in a flash at the south-west EcoEducation centres.

The consistent rains in June and July led to a fantastic flush of fungi in the forest. The fungi of WA are still relatively under studied, they belong in a Kingdom all of their own, with some plant-like characteristics and other animal-like characteristics.

They are treated as Protected Flora under the Wildlife Conservation Act, along with all other flora native to WA. The protection of fungi is well deserved as they play a vital role in ecosystem functioning – in other words they can fill in many of the links in food and energy webs.

Many fungi are recyclers, breaking down leaf litter and decaying the logs they are often found on. This releases nutrients into the soil for other plants to



*Russula persanguinia* – one of a number of *Russula* species found at WDF this year. *Russula* stems make a distinctive 'pop' when snapped. Photo by Hannah Hampson

use. Some fungi live in a symbiotic relationship with plants and help the plant with nutrient uptake, which is especially helpful in many of the nutrient-poor soils of WA. Fungi provide food for many of the native mammals, which, in turn, help to spread the fungal spores.

Some fungi appear to be detrimental to the ecosystem in which they live – such as wood-decaying fungi that rot trees – but this produces hollows for many species of bird and mammal. Decaying limbs also provide further opportunities for colonisation by insects and other invertebrates.

So fungi and their fascinating array of sizes, shapes, textures and colours account for much of the biodiversity of the forest ecosystem, but also promote conditions to support a whole web of other organisms. Read on for more resources on biodiversity and other EcoEducation opportunities.

I look forward to seeing you in the south-west and wish you all the best for the end of the year.

**Hannah Hampson, Project Officer,  
DEC**

## Join EcoEducation for a PL about WA's tuarts

The mighty tuart – the giant of the Swan Coastal Plain – plays an important role in Western Australia's natural environment. The uncouth giants in the southern end of the tuart's range tower above the middle storey peppermint trees with branches heading off in all directions and shaggy bark clinging loosely to the trunks. They are a great haven for wildlife including western grey kangaroos and brushtailed and ring-tail possums. Spotlighting can be very rewarding – have you tried the 'possum paths' walk trail on Layman Road? It has reflective trail markers to follow in the dark.

This year, Bunbury Catholic College kindly agreed to be our guineapig group for the new Exploring Tuarts excursion. The secondary excursion investigates the northern end of the Leschenault Peninsula Conservation Park, looking at the change in vegetation and associated fauna from the inlet and paperbark swamp to the peppermint and tuart woodland. After lunch, a short bus trip south on the peninsula takes students to the old settlement of Belvedere, with an interpreted walk taking students back in time to various periods of settlement. Exploring Tuarts will be offered in Terms 2 and 3 only.

For primary students, excursion activities are offered at both in Leschenault Peninsula Conservation Park and in Ludlow Forest in partnership with the National Trust. Students tour Wonnerup House then head up Layman Road for activities in the tuart woodland and Vasse-

Wonnerup wetland, from the safety of the bird hide. Ask about the new teaching resource 'Tuart Dwellers' by Jan Ramage, which is beautifully illustrated by Ellen Hickman.

If you would like to learn more about tuarts and our excursion activities or to pick up multimedia resources to help with teaching about tuarts, then come to the PL:

**Date:** Monday 1 December

**Time:** 9am to 3pm

**Place:** Bunbury Regional office

Corner of Dodson Road and SW Highway



*Tuart tree.*



## Herbarium helps new climate change program

Thanks to all the DEC volunteers who work on the regional herbarium and on the invertebrate project. The volunteers have collected samples and are preparing a herbarium for use at Wellington Discovery Centre. There is also a photographic record of fungi from the Wellington Discovery Forest.

The herbarium will assist with the new long-term project 'Climate Change – Measuring Baseline Biodiversity' program. Schools can get involved by measuring a baseline at Wellington or Margaret River discovery centres during a day excursion. They take the skills back to school, and can create their own school herbarium and undertake other 'phenology studies'. This could be looking for first bud burst on flowers, arrival or passing of migratory animals or other seasonal indicators. Information like this from schools could help scientists understand how the native flora and fauna are adapting to the changing environment.

A Year 9 class from Harvey District High School was the first group to measure the baseline transect at Wellington, including completing a first 100 invertebrates study, with assistance from DEC nature conservation staff, scientists and invertebrate project volunteers.

## Caring for Places

By Jake Kerr (student)

On Friday 4 July a group of Year 10 and 11 students took part in a Caring for Places excursion – including volunteer work at Wellington Discovery Forest.

Some of the things we learnt about were:

- Aboriginal facts like:
  - soap bush – used for washing hands when dirty
  - the Aboriginal 'shop' (the bush) that has a food, medicine and hardware section
  - the six seasons of the year.
- Tree boxes help bats and other animals by supplying a place to live.
- The healthy forest – healthy people motto.
- Fungi and their importance in the forest.
- 1080 baits are only toxic to some animals and native animals are resistant to them.
- How forest managers protect the trees (and buildings from fire) with certain techniques, with a tool called a rake-hoe.
- The native trees to the area such as the jarrah tree and the king jarrah and how to identify them and other trees.

The day was mostly enjoyed by all with almost everyone going to sleep on the bus on the way home. Another student, Deb Hoare, commented that she "Can't wait till next year".



Students pull out a pile of silver and black wattle trees during 'Caring for Places' excursion. Photo – Franz Auernhammer

## Monitoring Marsupials

This year, increased animal activity has been noted around Wellington Discovery Forest – there have been quenda (southern brown bandicoot) diggings gradually growing and undermining termite mounds. Certain fungi have been dug out of the leaf litter, before even breaking through the surface, leaving only crumbs for herbarium volunteers later in the day. More possums have been noted more frequently during nightwalk spotlighting.



*This mardo was caught in an area of dense undergrowth of acacia and hibbertia – a flowering sea of yellow.*  
Photo – Hannah Hampson.

The Monitoring Marsupials program confirmed the evidence, with a large male quenda dropping in for dinner in the cage traps every night in trapping week. We also caught the tiny marsupial carnivore – the mardo (pictured above) and a new (untagged) nervous female with a baby.

## Contacting EcoEducation in the South West Region

For any enquiries, bookings for excursions or PLs and for the development of programs and educational liaison please contact Hannah Hampson, Project Officer at DEC's South West Regional Office.

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Visit [www.dec.wa.gov.au](http://www.dec.wa.gov.au) for more information about DEC's EcoEducation programs.