



# ecoeducation news

South West Region

August 2010 Number 27

2010 International Year of Biodiversity and EcoEducation's 250,000th learner

## Dear colleagues,

It seems like the half year mark came around quickly and finally some rain to get things growing.

The big news for EcoEducation this term was the nomination of Elaine Horne, Stephen Crane, from the Perth Hills Discovery Centre, and our own Hannah Hampson, as one of three finalists in the 'Promoting Understanding of Science' section of the national Eureka Science Awards presented annually by the Australian Museum.

This reflects well not only on the excellent work of Elaine, Stephen and Hannah, but also on the professionalism and enthusiasm of all our leaders and the support of schools and teachers.

This was a great vote of confidence for DEC and particularly our education programs conducted in the natural environment. More information can be found at <http://eureka.australianmuseum.net.au>.

Term two was reasonably quiet for us in the South West Region but it looks like being a busy August and September. Julie-Anne Oliver, a favourite with the young kids, is doing some work this term for DEC's Nature Conservation Branch which will give her a great opportunity to learn about the work DEC does in responding to wildlife incidents reported by the public and pass this on to your students.

Luckily Julz is still available to us as needed so the younger children will still get to enjoy her irrepressible antics on excursions.

Regards,

**John Anderson, Project Officer SW, EcoEducation, DEC**



Julie-Anne Oliver in action



Trapping at WDF

## Monitoring Marsupials

There are still limited places available in the week beginning 30th August to get your class involved in live animal trapping with our Monitoring Marsupials excursion.

This program, which allows students a rare opportunity to be part of DEC's *Western Shield* research, is offered for a very limited time only each year at Wellington Discovery Forest. Under the supervision of a DEC Nature Conservation Officer, students mix bait, set traps in the evening and return early the next morning to measure and release marsupials. The data collected is submitted to our Nature Conservation Branch as part of ongoing wildlife monitoring.

Any work with native wildlife is subject to very stringent conditions and we are lucky to have two opportunities, in May and in September each year, to set traps for up to one week. We can have up to five excursions during the week; however, the exact weeks during which this program will be conducted will be determined by the first booking we get.

If you would like to offer your students this unique experience, it is advisable to book this excursion well in advance. Accommodation is available at the adjacent Wellington Forest Cottages.

We would like to encourage teachers who would like to use this as a professional learning opportunity to contact us to arrange to join a currently booked group.



## Wonderful Woylies (*Bettongia penicillata*)

The woylie, also known as a brush tailed bettong, is a small rat-like kangaroo which grows up to about 350mm long and 1.5kg. The woylie lives mainly in open forest and woodland with a dense low under story of tussock grasses and woody scrub. It is nocturnal and spends its days in an elaborate grass or bark-lined nest that it builds by carrying material in its prehensile tail. It is this trait that gives them the name woylie, which is the Nyoongar word for 'stick carrier'.

Woylies were once abundant and widespread across Australia south of the tropics, but by 1975 there were only three known natural populations remaining, all in south-western Australia in areas with healthy stands of poison gastrolobium peas. The main causes of their decline were foxes and feral cats. However conservation efforts by DEC were successful and saw the woylie removed from lists of threatened species and populations have been established at various locations in WA as well as South Australia and New South Wales.

Due in part to disease, in particular toxoplasmosis carried by feral cats, woylies are once again endangered so new efforts are required to ensure the survival of these marsupials.

Research suggests that woylies do not eat any green plant material or drink water. They eat a variety of bulbs, tubers and invertebrates and also bury caches of seeds and fruits. But their favourite food is truffles, the underground fruiting body of certain fungi. These fungi play an essential role in the ecosystem of the forest through a symbiotic relationship which provides around 25 per cent of the nutrients that eucalypts need to grow.

The woylies spread the spores of these fungi in their droppings helping to maintain the health of the ecosystem.

In the process of feeding, woylies dig a lot. A single woylie can turn over five tonnes of earth a year which has additional benefits for the soil. As well as aerating the soil and turning in surface litter which returns valuable nutrients to the soil, their digging breaks up the water repellent crust of the soil allowing better infiltration of rainfall into the soil.

An important gardener indeed.



## Professional learning – Investigating the Tuart Woodlands

Tuarts are the largest eucalypts growing on the coastal plain and are host to an enormous number of marsupials, reptiles and invertebrates.

Tuart woodlands once stretched from Jurien down to Busselton in a strip 5–10 kilometres wide but have been almost entirely lost to urban development. A few isolated trees remain in some older suburbs of Perth but remaining woodlands are confined to a few small reservations including the Ludlow Tuart Forest and the Leschenault Peninsular. They are an important habitat for the endangered western ringtail possum and carpet python.

Investigating the Tuart Woodlands is a program which looks at this special ecosystem. EcoEducation South West will be hosting a professional learning evening on Monday 11 October at Wonnerup House in the Ludlow Tuart Forest. This is a great chance to learn about our tuarts and other programs offered by EcoEducation. It will also include a chance to look at the heritage-listed Wonnerup House, an important link to our colonial past, as well as a possum walk when the sun goes down.

Attendance is free and includes afternoon tea. To register your interest, please contact us using the details on page 3.



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## FloraBase Plant of the Month



Sturt pea

*Swainsona formosa*

See what's flowering each month

[www.dec.wa.gov.au/florabase](http://www.dec.wa.gov.au/florabase)

## Eco Education opportunities in Walpole

In June, Frankland District Interpretation Officer Christie Mahony and her team of guides from the Valley of the Giants came to observe and learn the Ecosystem Explorers excursion which they will be offering from now in the tingle forest. It is great to see EcoEducation expanding to new areas to give more students the chance to learn about the forces that have shaped our unique environment.

Christie said "We found the excursion very inspiring and are excited to be able to offer this activity at the Valley of the Giants. We were very appreciative to have had the opportunity to observe the activity in action at the Wellington Discovery Forest, and for John's time to answer our questions and offer advice. We will be working with local camp schools and accommodation facilities to offer packages to schools visiting the Walpole region."

This will be a fantastic opportunity to combine a great learning experience with the famous Tree Top Walk. Bookings can be made by calling 9840 0400 or emailing [Walpole@dec.wa.gov.au](mailto:Walpole@dec.wa.gov.au).



Christie Mahony, Claudia Simpson and Charmaine Brown at WDF learning about Ecosystem Explorers

## ECU professional learning weekend

Recently we had a group of second year Bachelor of Education students from Edith Cowan University attend a professional learning day at Wellington Discovery Forest. The student teachers learnt about the programs we offered and had a chance to try out some of the hands-on activities which children experience during excursions, including the Sense-ational trail and an invertebrate search.

It was great to see that the wonder hasn't faded for these older 'kids'! Not only did they have a great day but they learnt a lot about biodiversity in the jarrah forest and, most importantly, they learnt about the great opportunities EcoEducation offers for getting school children out into nature.

It is great to have new teachers going out into the schools knowing this resource exists and being aware of the learning their students can take from it.

We are happy to arrange whole school professional learning activities or short visits for staff meetings to raise awareness of what EcoEducation can do for your class.

If you are interested in any professional learning opportunities, please feel free to contact us on 9725 4300.

## Contacting EcoEducation in the South West region

For any enquiries and bookings for excursions or PLs please contact Bonnie Patience, Administrative Assistant at DEC's South West Regional Office.

Phone: 9725 4300

Fax: 9725 4351

Email: [swecoded@dec.wa.gov.au](mailto:swecoded@dec.wa.gov.au)

For the development of programs and educational liaison please contact John Anderson, Project Officer at DEC's South West Regional Office.

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