



ecoeducation news

DEC's South West Region

Term 4 November 2010 No 28

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

Dear colleagues,

Well I don't think I'm going to start the newsletter with celebrations of rain this time. Up at Wellington we have had the driest year anyone can remember with only 350mm of rain so far instead of our normal 1000mm, though Margaret River had pretty close to average rainfall and the wildflowers there this spring have been stunning.

As usual September and October have been very busy for EcoEducation, being a great time of year to be out and about in the forest and the lack of rain means we've had some great weather for excursions.

This year we launched two new programs in the South West: Sustainable Forestry, developed to fit the new Geography Unit 2B and Caring For Places, which look at management issues surrounding our national parks and gives students a chance to be involved in the rehabilitation of degraded areas.

In 2011 we hope to add a coastal ecosystem program at Leschenault Peninsula to our offerings. This is a great location to see three very distinct ecosystems in a very small area.

During the school holidays we finally managed to schedule a prescribed burn for the Wellington Discovery Forest which will offer some great learning opportunities over the next few years about fire management in the South West. We will be able to see some new understorey growth next spring.

Congratulations to my predecessor Hannah Hampson who has been appointed program coordinator for DEC's Bush Rangers and will be working out of the Bunbury office next door to EcoEducation. This is a great opportunity for these two branches of DEC's schools programs to work closely together in the South West and increase students' understanding of and appreciation for our unique environment.



I would like to wish you all a Merry Christmas and an enjoyable and relaxing summer break.

Regards,

John Anderson,
Project Officer SW,
EcoEducation, DEC

Sustainable Forestry Officer Tony Raudino helps students with a tree inventory at WDF



DEC staff from Wellington District start the burn

Prescribed burn at Wellington Discovery Forest

On Monday 4 October 2010 Wellington District conducted a prescribed burn at Wellington Discovery Forest. Despite some initial concerns of too much moisture in the leaf litter, the burn was extremely successful.

The area burnt had a 21-year-old fuel load so we have been keen to get this burn done for a number of years. The dual purposes of the burn were strategic: the protection of our infrastructure and the protection and enhancement of biodiversity in the area by creating a mosaic of areas with different burn histories.

Many of our native plants, in particular lower storey shrubs and annuals, require fire for successful germination of their seed so it will be interesting to watch the growth in this area over the next few years. This prescribed burn also offers exciting opportunities for students to observe first hand the results of fire on the jarrah ecosystem and to learn how a prescribed burn is conducted. It will also make our excursion Fire – A Force of Life particularly informative at this location over the next few years.

Fire – A Force of Life is ideally suited to students studying Geography Unit 2B or Biology Unit 3A. For teachers bringing classes to the Wellington Discovery Forest over consecutive years, it is a great chance to collate data over time to measure things such as regrowth and the rate of leaf litter build-up.



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Addressing 'Nature Deficit Disorder'

'Nature Deficit Disorder' is a term coined by Richard Louv in his 2005 book *Last Child in the Woods*. It is used to describe the idea that a lack of routine contact with nature can adversely affect the academic and developmental growth in children.

It is not a medical problem, rather it is a description of the human costs associated with the alienation from nature. It refers to the trend of children spending less time outdoors and more time indoors in front of screens. There are many causes for this, including increased litigation, preference to spend time inside due to electronic media and parental fears about safety outdoors, which are often exacerbated by the media.

Studies in the USA have shown that environmental education can have measurable benefits for children. Those who learn and play outdoors and have opportunities to connect with

nature demonstrate longer attention spans, more creativity, higher levels of self-confidence, greater academic success and significant improvements in cognitive development, self-discipline, imaginative and creative expression, language skills and social interaction. Children who are exposed to nature at an early age are also more likely to develop a life-long conservation ethic.

So not only can an EcoEducation excursion address your curriculum outcomes and give you a great day out of the classroom, it will also make your teaching easier and more effective!

Two websites with more information on NDD and steps you can take to address it are:

www.education.com/topic/nature-deficit-disorder and
<http://richardlouv.com>

Wellington Forest Cottages

As I mentioned in an earlier newsletter, Wellington Forest Cottages adjacent to the Wellington Discovery Forest are now under new management. The new lessees, Wendy and Ben Perdon, have been doing a lot of cleaning up and renovating and I have had several reports of the improvements from a number of teachers who have brought

their classes up to stay overnight this year. By early next year they expect to have all the cottages repainted inside and out, as well as welcome small touches such as mattress covers and pillows.

For more information visit their website: www.wfcc.com.au.



Newly painted accommodation at Wellington Forest Cottages





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Professional learning for 2011

For many of our programs, particularly those aimed at upper school, there is an enormous advantage for teachers in attending our professional learning (PL) days. Many issues in forest ecology and management are quite complex so an in-depth understanding by teachers of the material covered can give students significantly more prior knowledge, allowing them to get more out of each excursion.

In 2011 we will be offering the following PL days:

- Fire – A Force for Life at Wellington Discovery Forest Friday 1 April 2011
- A Night with Nature – *Western Shield* trapping at Wellington Discovery Forest, 2 and 3 September 2011

- Sustainable Forestry at Wellington Discovery Forest Friday 3 June 2011
- Investigating Tuart Woodlands at Ludlow Forest/ Wonnerup House in conjunction with the National Trust

Date to be advised

Please register your interest at any time with EcoEducation South West using the contact details given below. We can also organise departmental or whole-of-school PL's or on request for particular excursions or to present our entire range of programs. These may either be at your school or at any of our centres.

Trapping weeks in 2011

The *Western Shield* Marsupial Trapping excursion allows students opportunities in May and September to take part in trapping of marsupials at Wellington Discovery Forest to gather data for DEC's *Western Shield* program.

Students are given a brief introduction to the different aspects of *Western Shield* in the afternoon and then help to set cage traps at specific locations around the forest. In the morning they help to inspect the traps and make measurements of any animals caught.

It is a great experience for students anywhere from Years 5 to 12 to be able to take part in real life conservation projects such as this. Trapping may be conducted for up to four consecutive nights in each of these months so it is possible for up to eight groups to take part in this great program.

The optimum time for trapping is when there is a new moon, so in conjunction with existing bookings the following dates are currently available:

May bookings:

- **Week 4 of term 2 (Monday 23 May until Sunday 29 May)**

September bookings:

- **Week 4 of term 3 (Monday 29 August until Sunday 4 September).**

If you wish to book this excursion it is advisable to do so as early as possible. 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.



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

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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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