

Research and operations: stronger links

AN integral part of DEC's future will be a greater integration of research and operational management to underpin good decision-making for biodiversity conservation.

DEC Acting Assistant Director of Nature Conservation Keith Claymore told delegates at the Science Division's biennial meeting recently that a heightened effort was needed to address the decline in the State's biodiversity, and that conservation initiatives needed to be better coordinated and targeted.

"The recent development of nature conservation plans following workshops across nine DEC regions was the first time biodiversity planning had been undertaken by the Department at a regional scale," he said.

"One of the main aims was to achieve a common understanding of biodiversity

conservation requirements over the next three years across the Science, Regional Services and Nature Conservation divisions."

The process involved the participation of 75 staff with expertise in biodiversity planning, research and management.

Keith praised the participation of everyone involved in the workshops which led to the development of detailed and costed three-year nature conservation service plans for the nine regions.

"Cost estimates showed that an additional \$136 million was required during the next three years to significantly slow the decline of biodiversity," he said.

He added that about 40 per cent of this amount was needed to get over an information hump so that programs aimed at feral animal control, *Phytophthora* dieback mitigation and the

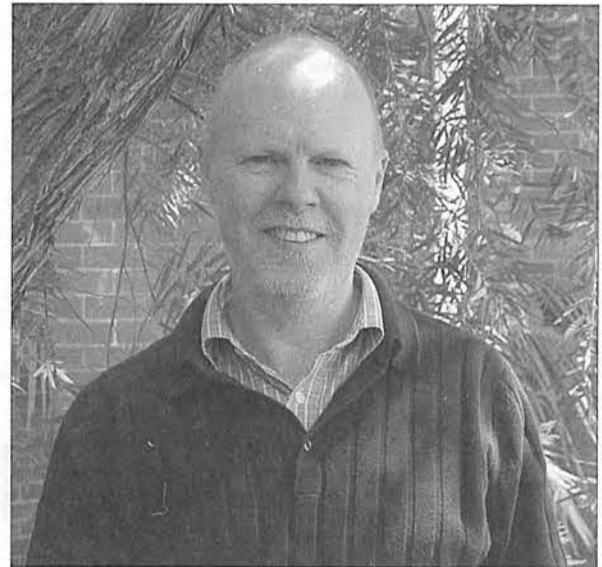
recovery of threatened taxa and ecological communities could be strategic and more cost-effective.

"More research is needed to determine the composition and conservation status of the State's biodiversity assets, especially in the rangelands," Keith said.

"The nature conservation plans have empowered staff and given them the confidence to deliver a more integrated and targeted approach between divisions to address major problems facing the State.

"The plans will form the basis for a better business case for biodiversity conservation at the State level and will help target future priorities for biodiversity conservation," he said.

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Keith Claymore. Photo - Sue McKenna/DEC

New \$1 million partnership to benefit conservation



Pictured at the launch were (from left) Chief Executive of Rio Tinto Iron Ore, Sam Walsh, Chairman of Conservation Volunteers Australia, Neil Jens, and Environment Minister Mark McGowan. Photo - DEC

TEAMS of volunteers, including international tourists, locals and corporate employees, are undertaking a range of projects to conserve biodiversity throughout Western Australia as part of a new \$1 million partnership to benefit conservation.

The partnership between Conservation Volunteers Australia (CVA) and Rio Tinto, will see the commitment of \$1 million over three years for projects on lands managed by the Department of Environment and Conservation (DEC). The partnership is being supported through a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between Rio Tinto, CVA and DEC.

In addition to hands-on volunteer involvement, the partnership will enable community capacity building through the delivery of volunteer management training covering areas such as risk management and health and safety.

Projects in the Kimberley and Pilbara regions that will be carried out under the MOU include:

- weed removal, feral animal control, visitor facility upgrades and track/trail work at Purnululu, Tunnel Creek, Geikie Gorge and Windjana Gorge national parks and King Leopold Range Conservation Park;
 - the identification and control of date palms in Millstream-Chichester National Park and Gregory Gorge with satellite technology to map infestations accurately and improve conservation of ecological communities; and
 - clean-up programs for beaches in the Dampier Archipelago, including the Burrup Peninsula, and at Ningaloo Marine Park.
- Projects to be carried out in regional parks will be aimed at restoring degraded areas, erosion control and improving site amenity.

The MOU working group met in Perth this month to map the year's work program which has already included CVA volunteers travelling to Millstream-Chichester and Karijini national parks for weed mapping, weeding, track repairs and building new steps.

Five CVA volunteers and an Indigenous Trainee Team Leader are carrying out turtle monitoring, including tagging, this month as part of DEC's first systematic survey of a turtle nesting site at Cape Domett in the Cambridge Gulf.

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Waste management Bills released for comment

TWO waste management Bills have recently been released for public comment.

DEC's Waste Management Branch Manager Michael Kerr said the Waste Avoidance and Resource Recovery (WARR) Bill and the associated WARR Levy Bill were significant pieces of legislation introduced to manage waste.

"Having the two Bills reach this stage of being approved by Cabinet for public review is very promising," Michael said.

"A huge amount of work has gone into the main Bill, not only by Departmental officers over the past nine years, but by hundreds of important stakeholders.

"These include the Waste



Michael Kerr. Photo - DEC

Management Board, the WA Local Government Association, the Conservation Council of WA, the Chamber of Commerce and Industry, the Chamber of Minerals and Energy and many government departments."

Michael said the WARR Bill featured a number of measures

to reduce the amount of material going to landfill and increase the rate of recycling.

"It also features mandatory extended producer responsibility measures to be used when voluntary industry-initiated product stewardship schemes are inadequate," he said.

The main features of the Bill include:

- the establishment of a statutory waste authority with non-regulatory functions and powers including strategic policy and planning for the transition towards zero waste in WA;
- regulations to promote waste avoidance and resource recovery in WA; and

- methods to significantly reduce 'priority wastes'.

Waste Management Board chairman Noel Davies said the WARR Bill would give much needed attention to driving resource efficiency in WA.

"It will also move us towards the vision of zero waste to landfill by 2020," he said.

DEC will be responsible for administering the regulation, compliance and enforcement of the new legislation.

The two Bills are available for public review and comment until 27 November. Both are on www.dec.wa.gov.au.

For more information call John Ottaway on 9222 7058 or Michael Kerr on 6467 5301.

Working Together

September began with an appearance before a Senate Committee inquiry into Australia's national parks and other protected areas. Reading through transcripts of evidence given by others across Australia to the inquiry illustrates a diversity of community views about our parks system and how well management agencies like DEC perform. As an agency we tend to assume that people support and value our national and marine parks and other conservation reserves, but that is not always the case and we need to have an ongoing focus on community engagement across all that we do.

One key area of community engagement is providing quality experiences to our millions of park visitors. The Minister for the Environment has established an independent review of nature-based tourism and DEC is working closely with the reviewer to identify and pursue improvements that we can make. I have met with the reviewer and I am confident that we can continue to build on the support that nature-based tourism generates for conservation, as well as continue to position our parks and forests as a key component of the State's tourism industry.

September also saw a number of significant events in progressing environmental and conservation initiatives, including the successful Waste Management and Recycling Conference held in Fremantle and the release of the formal 'Capes' (Geographe Bay/Leeuwin-Naturalist/Hardy Inlet) marine park proposal at Busselton. There was also a successful gathering of regional staff from around the State to discuss a range of environmental protection issues, and the end of the month signalled the completion of the third Regulatory Officers Training Course at the Joondalup Police Academy.

Keiran McNamara, Director General



New \$1 million partnership from page 1

In October volunteers will travel to Lake Gregory and work with the Mulan Aboriginal Community to create walk trails, bird hides and interpretive signs in the Tanami Desert. The CVA volunteers will work alongside DEC staff, gaining valuable skills in conservation projects as well as exposure to Indigenous culture and values, by working with traditional owners to care for country together.

Officiating at the signing of the MOU in Broome, Environment Minister Mark McGowan said the Rio Tinto/CVA 'Future Volunteers' partnership would fund CVA to undertake projects on lands managed by DEC

during the next three years.

"This partnership is an excellent example of how governments, businesses and community organisations can work together to benefit the State's biodiversity," he said.

"The Future Volunteers partnership is a major conservation and volunteer program that will see projects undertaken in the Kimberley and Pilbara regions, as well as regional parks in the metropolitan area.

"It will enable more conservation projects to be undertaken in WA, benefiting both the environment and the increasing number of visitors to the public conservation estate.

"We hope to expand this in the future with other areas managed by DEC, such as Yanchep National Park and Gngangara, becoming part of the program at a later stage."

The Minister said DEC, CVA and Rio Tinto Future Fund had already identified 16 important projects which would be carried out under the MOU during 2006-2007.

Kimberley MLA Carol Martin said CVA volunteers did a fantastic job working on projects throughout the Kimberley region.

"Already this year, CVA volunteers have been involved in a number of projects, in particular working on improvements to visitor facilities in Geikie Gorge, Windjana Gorge and Tunnel Creek national parks," Mrs Martin said.

"It is wonderful to see the CVA volunteers getting support from Rio Tinto in this way."

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Managing Editor: Sue McKenna
Contributing Writers: Rhianna King, Alison Blake, Tracy Peacock
Design and production: Natalie Jolokoski
Telephone: (08) 9389 8644
Facsimile: (08) 9389 8296
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Foreign exchange

FOUR young professionals from US conservation agencies have just completed the Department's first work exchange trial with United States' conservation agencies.

It is hoped the international conservation exchange will form a key part of future staff development.

The working guests – Collin Shephard, Dominic Di Paolo, Emily Palmquist and Wendy Sicard – arrived in WA earlier this year from freezing temperatures in the US.

They were stationed at Dwellingup, Geraldton, Esperance and Manjimup respectively. They carried out animal monitoring, plant and animal translocations and other conservation activities. They also had the chance to see different landscapes and vegetation.

Scientist Dominic Di Paolo said he was "blown away" by the concept of DEC.

"It's amazing to have a State land agency which preserves biodiversity and puts conservation above all else," he said.

"Both our countries have a significant slice of biodiversity which is being pressured by the increasing world population. We must

by Rhianna King

impress on our leaders and others that conservation is the most noble of endeavours."

Dominic thanked DEC for the exchange experience on behalf of the US team.

DEC Director General Keiran McNamara said this visit was a trial that he hoped would lead to a long-term exchange program between the US Bureau of Land Management and its affiliated agencies such as the US National Parks Service, and DEC.

"We can learn a lot from other conservation agencies in different environments in the same way that our staff can share their world-class knowledge and experience," he said.

"We're planning to send DEC staff to the US in March 2007 and expect they will return with new skills and expertise that can be applied to their work in WA.

"DEC has a culture of encouraging its staff in further learning through formal study and once-in-a-lifetime opportunities such as this one."



Pictured at the farewell ceremony were (from left) DEC Director General Keiran McNamara, exchangees Collin Shephard, Emily Palmquist, Dominic Di Paolo and Wendy Sicard, US Consul General Robin McClelland and DEC's Organisational Learning and Development Manager Alan Byrne. Photo – Robin Lukosius

The first exchange group was officially farewelled at DEC by WA's US Consul General Robin McClelland. DEC's training staff and the exchangees' mentors attended.

"These educational academic exchanges make up the fabric of the US-Australian alliance and I am sure the students have learned many valuable points about conservation," Ms McClelland said.

Boat facilities advised to improve handling of anti-fouling products

DEC has held a workshop to educate Perth's boating industry on environmentally responsible maintenance practices.

DEC Pollution Response Unit (PRU) manager Ken Raine said the workshops alerted owners of ship building and maintenance facilities, yacht clubs and boatlifts about proper management for activities involving anti-fouling paint.

"Anti-fouling paints are used to prevent barnacles and other marine life attaching to boat hulls, but the active compounds in the paint are toxic to marine life if released in an uncontrolled manner through spills or debris from maintenance," Ken said.

"Owners were reminded that many anti-foulants are either restricted or banned in Australia and were informed of their legal obligations under the Environmental Protection Regulations, the

Unauthorised Discharge Regulations and the Contaminated Sites Act.

"The PRU will be conducting unannounced spot checks to ensure facilities are complying with all applicable regulations and enforcement action will be taken if facilities are found to be out of compliance."

Ken said the workshops were needed after preliminary results from a Swan Catchment Council survey of sediment and water within Perth coastal waters found elevated levels of biocides and heavy metals associated with anti-fouling paints at boat facilities around Fremantle, Cockburn Sound and the Swan River.

"The findings point to poor boat maintenance practices, and possible illegal use of tributyltin (TBT) and Irgarol," he said.

Swan River Trust General Manager Rod Hughes said that sep-

arate to the survey, the Trust had conducted environmental audits of all yacht clubs and marinas on the Swan and Canning rivers.

"Hardstands and slipways were areas of particular concern," Rod said.

"Where necessary, the Trust has required the relevant clubs to advise the Trust formally about what they are doing to upgrade the club's operations.

"This is part of the broader requirement for clubs to have appropriate environmental management systems in place.

"Where possible, the Trust is making these management systems a condition of approval for any proposed works in the clubs."

The Department of Health advises against the recreational collection of wild shellfish in uncontrolled, urbanised areas as the safety of these shellfish cannot be guaranteed.

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"The regional nature conservation service plans drew up research priorities which will focus on large scale cross-divisional projects, ensuring that they tie in with what the Department is trying to achieve. The plans also provide information for successional planning for the Science Division to determine future staff requirements."

He said the plans also brought to light the need to better evaluate conservation management, changes to biodiversity and the introduction of systems to monitor conservation activities.

Significant effort was needed to ensure the recovery of threatened species but more attention should be given to prevent relatively intact landscapes and ecosystems from becoming degraded.

"Work should be done to maintain biodiversity on islands off WA's coast and more research is needed on the distribution and densities of introduced animals such as feral goats, pigs and camels so that operational control programs start to make a difference," Keith said.

"We also need better scientific information to underpin conservation reserve system design and the selection of lands and waters for reservation to ensure that these areas are representative of biodiversity and that the reserve system is comprehensive and ecologically adequate."

Environment and Conservation News is the monthly newsletter published by the Department of Environment and Conservation (DEC), which came into being on 1 July 2006 with the amalgamation of the Department of Environment and the Department of Conservation and Land Management.

Plans for marine parks launched

INDICATIVE management plans have been released for two proposed marine parks along the Western Australian coast.

The coastal waters between Capel, north of Busselton, and Augusta have been proposed to become the Geographe Bay/Leeuwin-Naturaliste/Hardy Inlet (Capes) Marine Park. The inlets and parts of the rivers around Walpole have been proposed to become the Walpole and Nornalup Inlets Marine Park.

The formal planning process for the proposed marine parks started about three years ago with advisory committee and focus group meetings of local, industry and recreational stakeholders.

The public has three months to comment.

Capes

The Department's Marine Policy and Planning Branch Acting Manager Peter Dans said the indicative plan for the 124,500 ha Capes Marine Park proposed 17 sanctuary zones comprising about 11 per cent of the proposed park.

There would also be recreation zones at Cowaramup Bay and Hamelin Bay, where commercial fishing activities would not be permitted.

The general use zone – covering about 88 per cent of the park – would allow all types of recreational and

commercial fishing, subject to the usual bag and size limits, and gear restrictions.

Walpole

Peter said the proposed Walpole and Nornalup Inlets Marine Park was of particular importance.

"It's the first proposed marine conservation reserve on the State's south coast," he said, adding that the indicative management plan proposed the entire park be zoned for recreation.

"Commercial fishing was already prohibited in the area so a lot of the issues in terms of minimising impacts of zoning on existing uses while preserving biodiversity weren't there," he said.

The proposed Walpole and Nornalup Inlets Marine Park covers an area of 1450 ha and includes two connected inlets and the tidal reaches of the Frankland, Deep and Walpole rivers. The area provides suitable habitats for about 40 mostly marine fish species.

Public comment on the indicative plan for the proposed Walpole and Nornalup Inlets Marine Park closes on 1 December, while comment on the indicative plan for the proposed Capes Marine Park closes on 15 December.

Copies of the plans are available from the Department's offices in Kensington, Fremantle, Bunbury and Busselton or from www.naturebase.net/haveyoursay



DEC's team of graphic designers (from left) are Grant Fuller, Natalie Jolakoski, Gooitzen van der Meer, Maria Duthie and David Abel. Inset: Tiffany Taylor. Photo – Sue McKenna/DEC

Awards for LANDSCOPE magazine and calendar

TWO quality DEC products have won awards at the 2006 Printing Industries Craftmanship Awards of Western Australia (PICA).

The 2006 *LANDSCOPE* calendar, entered by Scott Print, won the bronze award in the calendar category, while the winter 2006 issue of *LANDSCOPE* magazine won a silver award for Advance Press

in the category of saddle-stitched booklets.

Both products are developed and designed by DEC's Strategic Development and Corporate Affairs staff.

DEC Senior Graphic Designer Tiffany Taylor, who designed the calendar, said SDCA was delighted to see its products win awards.

"It's great recognition of the high quality products we

produce," she said.

The *LANDSCOPE* calendar won a PICA silver award in the calendar category in 2004, while *LANDSCOPE* magazine has won numerous State and national print awards over a number of years.

The PICAs acknowledge excellence in the print, packaging and visual communication industry in WA.



Steve Irwin waves at DEC Public Relations Officer John Hunter while filming for snakes on Carnac Island in 2003. He was accompanied by Marine Rangers John Edwards and Chris Mather on the left. Photo – John Hunter

Farewell, Steve Irwin

MARINE Nature Conservation Officer John Edwards and I were gob-smacked. Steve Irwin was dead?

We were both thrown back to March 2003 when we accompanied Steve, his wife Terri and film crew to film tiger snakes on Carnac Island.

Our first reaction to the original request was: 'Oh no, how embarrassing. How can we put him off? Not a good look for the Department'. But his friend and manager John Stainton assured us all safety would be above board and rules adhered to, with no damage or disturbance to the island wildlife.

It was a beautiful morning heading for a warm 35 degrees, Marine Rangers John Edwards and Chris Mather briefed everyone and Steve then headed 'bush' with cameraman and rangers struggling to keep up.

The exuberance of the man was something else, chest-high scrub and prickly heath were no impediment, stop-

by John Hunter

ping here and there to search the ground or thrust an arm into a crevice, the only goal in mind to find, expose and describe before the camera, one of our deadliest snakes.

That day Steve Irwin failed in his attempts to find one tiger snake. It was so hot by noon that they had all 'gone underground' and by late afternoon a bedraggled, bruised and bleeding Irwin was, while still 'chaffing at the bit', happy in the knowledge that he could get to Rottnest before dark and start filming quokkas.

Australia has lost an iconic communicator. Like his style or not, he was a 'true blue entertainer' doing what he did as a kid and with the same childlike enthusiasm. Above all, he was taking Australia to the rest of the world and the rest of the world was looking, listening and learning.

Perth's air quality being tested

A PILOT program to reduce the harmful effects of vehicle emissions to improve Perth's air quality is already testing part of the city's bus fleet.

DEC's CleanRun program, which was launched in August and will run over three years, will see a number of initiatives introduced to improve air quality in WA.

CleanRun Project Manager James Forrest said the vehicle emission testing would be implemented in two phases with the first phase testing 110 Public Transport Authority buses and 25 other buses.

He said the initial results were pleasing.

"In terms of the testing program it allows us to say that the bus fleet is running to the standards it should be," James said.

Testing of the PTA buses and 25 private buses is expected to be completed by early October.

New South Wales-based company Diesel Test Australia is conducting the testing for the pilot program. The testing is to the national DT80 test standard.

James said the second phase of the program, expected to start in mid 2007, would see 425 private vehicles tested.

He said vehicles were a significant contributor of air pollutants in WA.

"With the continual growth of Perth's vehicle fleet and the distance vehicles travel continuing to increase, we want to do everything we can to reduce vehicle emissions as much as possible," James said.

Vehicle emissions contain chemicals that can harm human health and the environment. They are a major source of carbon monoxide, oxides of nitrogen and volatile organic compounds, which react with sunlight to produce photochemical smog.

A comprehensive communication/education strategy has been developed to show the benefits of a well-maintained vehicle to the community and industry.

DEC has also established an MOU with Swan TAFE to incorporate emissions testing, pollution control maintenance and apprentice training into the program.

"Apprentice mechanics will undergo training in the TAFE emissions competency standard unit," James said.

"DEC has provided funding to Swan TAFE to purchase emissions testing, control and abatement equipment to enhance the training offered."

Walpole Wilderness Area being established

PUBLIC comment is being sought on the draft management plan for the Walpole Wilderness Area and adjacent parks and reserves.

The draft management plan for the area, covering 325,000 ha between Walpole, Denmark and Mt Barker, was released last month by Environment Minister Mark McGowan.

The launch, at the Walpole Country Club, was attended by about 80 key stakeholders and community members.

DEC Parks and Visitor Services Division's Acting Management Planning Coordinator Denam Bennetts said the three-month public comment period would close on

1 December 2006.

"Following the public comment period, the planning team will analyse the public submissions and, if necessary, modify the draft management plan," he said.

"The plan, along with the public submissions, will then go to the Conservation Commission of WA before the Environment Minister provides final approval."

The draft management plan for the Walpole Wilderness Area and adjacent parks and reserves covers three existing national parks (Mt Frankland, Walpole-Nornalup and William Bay), five new national parks, 11 existing nature reserves, State forest and other reserves.

The creation of the area is part of the State Government's *Protecting Our Old Growth Forests* policy and contains half of the south-west's old growth forests.

DEC Planning Officer Paul Roberts said the development of the WWA draft management plan was characterised by extensive consultation across the community with groups including the Walpole Wilderness Area Stakeholder Reference Group, various environmental, recreational and community groups, government agencies and local government.

"The consultation has involved many aspects such as management of wilderness

areas, strategies for combating dieback, key fire research projects and recreation opportunities like the Walpole Wilderness Discovery Centre and sites at Mt Frankland, Swarbrick and the Tree Top Walk," he said.

Denam acknowledged the work done by Planning Officers Paul Roberts and Clare Anthony, the DEC planning team and the Walpole Wilderness Area Community Advisory Committee on the draft management plan.

Copies of the plans are available from DEC offices in Walpole, Pemberton, Manjimup, Kensington and Fremantle and on the Department's parks and conservation website at www.naturebase.net/haveyoursay.

Walpole area's fire patterns studied

THE Walpole Wilderness Area is being studied by DEC experts to analyse how the frequency of fire affects the environment.

The study is part of a seven-year \$110 million Australia-wide Bushfire Cooperative Research Centre (CRC) program to investigate fire suppression, fire in the landscape, community self sufficiency, protection of people and property, and education and training.

The Bushfire CRC has brought together experts including WA's DEC and Fire and Emergency Services Authority, as well as universities, the CSIRO, the Bureau of Meteorology and other organisations.

The State Government has given \$5 million to the program, including \$1 million in cash contributions and a commitment for a further \$4 million in resources.

DEC conducts prescribed burning in State forests, national parks and other conservation areas to prevent bushfires taking hold in hot, dry summers and threatening towns and communities.

Successive short fire intervals and successive long fire intervals in the Walpole Wilderness Area's karri, heath, granite and shrubland country will be analysed.

Research will ensure land management and fire authorities can

work with the community to deal more effectively with these fires and make our communities safer.

Thirty Walpole Wilderness Area sites have been chosen for field research. The patterns of fungi, vascular (leafy) plants, vertebrate and invertebrate presence, and forest structure, will be analysed.

Results will help answer questions on the fire history of the forests dating back 50 years.

Similarities or differences in species richness, assemblages and abundance in areas where there have been contrasting fire regimes will be studied in order to better understand the long-term effects of various fire regimes on biodiversity.

The project will make a major contribution to the development of appropriate fire management strategies for the Walpole area and will provide a framework for undertaking this type of investigation in other ecosystems across Australia.

A similar study in a WA woodlands area of 100 million ha will ascertain how the structure of vegetation is affected by bushfires.

The Director of DEC's Science Division Neil Burrows is part of the CRC reference group while DEC's senior Fire Ecologist Lachlan McCaw is the team leader of the Fire in the Landscape research program.

South-west forests monitored

AN integrated and synchronised forest monitoring program comparing logged and unlogged forests in the south-west is in its sixth year.

The extensive biodiversity study is part of the forest monitoring activities associated with the Forest Management Plan 2004-2013.

DEC Research Scientist Richard Robinson leads the program and said the surveys provided comprehensive information.

Initial sites were established in the Donnelly region near Manjimup and have since been extended to the Perth Hills, Collie and Blackwood Plateau areas.

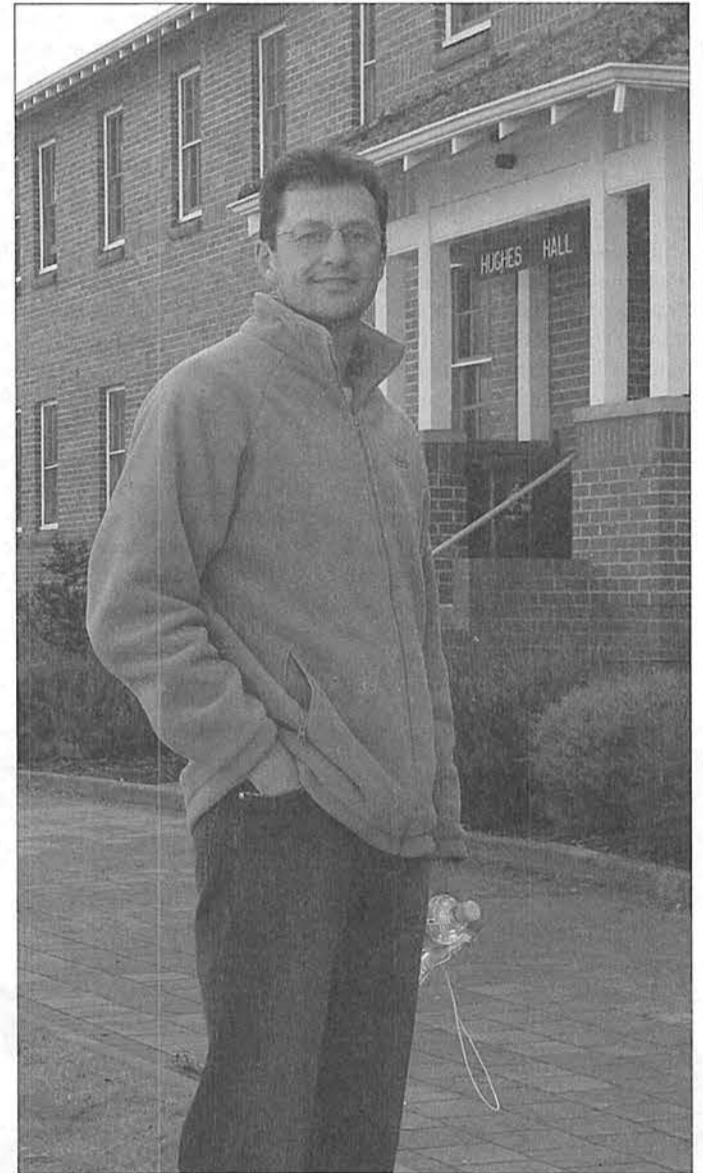
Richard and his team now monitor 48 sites, each two hectares in size. Most sites are in State forests with some established in national parks and conservation parks.

Richard said the data were analysed annually and after five years of monitoring the results would be published as a complete set of papers in a scientific journal.

"Each grid has major points describing the stand, structure and species composition of the dominant forest tree species.

"We measure the contribution of the mid-storey species and determine soil disturbance, coarse woody debris and litter levels. We also monitor elements of biodiversity such as the presence of other vascular flora, reptiles, fungi, lichens, mammals, birds, invertebrates and herpetofauna," he said.

Fourteen people work on the project which has annual funding of \$375,000, including \$200,000 contributed by the Forest Products Commission for operational expenses.



Richard Robinson. Photo - Sue McKenna/DEC

Long term safety awards at Manjimup

by Roy Wittkuhn

DEC's Donnelly District and Manjimup specialist branches recently marked their long-term safety achievements.

The day celebrated five years of lost time injury (LTI)-free for the Manjimup specialist branches (Manjimup Region, Science Division and Forest Management Branch) and 12 months LTI-free for the Donnelly District.

Staff were presented with awards to recognise the achievement of one or more years LTI-free.

Special mention was made of Tom Lindley for notching 40 years LTI-free, as well as Peter Keppel (39 years), Ian Marshall (38), John Steele (38), Rod Simmonds (37), Peter Taylor (36), Brian Whitred (36), Colin Ward (35), Bruce Ward (35), Wolf Tiedemann (34), Carl Cicchini (32), John MacDonald (32), Wayne Kitson (32), Danny Blechynden (31), Paul Davies (31) and Greg Simpson (30).

Chris Vellios, who was overseas on annual leave at the time of the awards ceremony, has also achieved 40 years LTI-free.

An award was presented posthumously to John Webb, who had served 36 years LTI-free before passing away this year. John was a member of the safety committee, representing the Forest Management Branch in Manjimup, and is greatly missed.

The safety achievement of all groups is impressive given the varied and often hazardous work conditions encountered.

In addition, the Science Division has coordinated an extensive volunteer program over the past five years without incident. More than 240 volunteers have been involved and contributed more than 8000 hours without incident.



Pictured at the safety presentation (from left) were Ian Rhodes, Sid Sepkus, Dean Johnson and John McKenzie. Photo - Manjimup-Bridgetown Times.

Woylie decline a mystery

ABOUT 60 woylies are being fitted with small collars that each have a radio transmitter as part of a comprehensive investigation into the decline of up to 90 per cent of the species in some south-west forests.

DEC Research Scientist Adrian Wayne said the survival and death rates of radio-collared woylies would be monitored in this year's \$626,000 research program.

Woylie density and demographics will be studied using live trapping every two months in search of clues into the possible causes of the declines.

"The causes may include predators, lack of resources, disease or direct human interference," Adrian said.

He added that of the 36 woylies that had been collared in the past month, three had been killed by predators.

"A feral cat is likely to have been responsible for at least two of these deaths. We are working hard to catch and collar more woylies but it is becoming increasingly more difficult as the woylie numbers become increasingly scarce in the study areas," he said.

"The activity of predators such as feral cats, foxes and native predators will be measured using a network of sand pads throughout selected forests that enable us to

identify each species by their characteristic footprints."

Community groups and volunteers had also helped with area searches to find the remains of woylies which might provide forensic evidence of the cause of the declines.

"We are looking at woylie diet, which is largely underground fungi, food resources and vegetation health, which may have changed as a result of a number of factors including climate change."

He said woylies were being screened to gain a better understanding of what role disease played in the decline. This was made possible by the close collaboration between Murdoch University, the Perth Zoo and the Australian Wildlife Conservancy.

"Given the speed at which the declines are occurring, we have about 12 months to find the answer," he said.

He said the DEC taskforce appointed to coordinate the research – the Woylie Conservation Steering Group – was helping to facilitate research and management responses.

"The pattern of this woylie decline is different to other declines," he said.

Eleven areas in the upper Warren near Manjimup will be studied to establish the patterns of the woylie's decline.



Adrian Wayne. Photo – Sue McKenna/DEC

THE woylie (*Bettongia penicillata ogilbyi*) is a small kangaroo-like native mammal that was once widespread across southern Australia.

It now occurs naturally in the wild in the south-west of WA and in four reintroduced populations in South Australia and New South Wales.

In late 2005, DEC research on native mammals in the forests near Manjimup and Collie detected substantial declines in woylies.

Monitoring completed in April 2006 showed the overall declines as high as 90 per cent in the Manjimup area, 88 per cent at Dryandra Woodland and 70 per cent in Batalling, east of Collie.

Perup forest east of Manjimup, and Dryandra Woodland and Tutanning Nature Reserve in the wheatbelt, supported the last remaining natural populations of woylies before broad-scale fox control and reintroductions occurred under DEC's wildlife recovery program *Western Shield*.

Western Shield's success in controlling introduced foxes has seen the resurgence of several species of small native mammals, including woylies, which were removed from the Commonwealth and State threatened species lists in 1998.

Good sports at DEC

DEC staff recently demonstrated their commitment to their health and wellbeing by taking part in two big events.

The annual City to Surf on 27 August saw 51 staff and friends join the crowd of more than 26,000, while 38 DEC walkers registered to take part in WA's Giant Walk on 1 September.

DEC Risk Management Section's Corporate Health Officer Mikayla Orzanski said the Department was well-represented in both the running and walking sections of the City to Surf.

"A lot of our registered participants took part in either the 12 km run or the 12 km walk and they enjoyed the beautiful conditions on the day," she said.

DEC staff in the City to Surf race were provided with specially-designed green tee shirts promoting the fight against cane toads.

Mikayla said those participating in the Giant Walk on 1 September were part of an attempt to break the Guinness World Record for the most number of people walking one kilometre simultaneously (multi-venue).

"The course was around the DEC Kensington offices and the starting point for the walk was outside the Kensington cafeteria," she said.

WA has nation's biggest butts



Litterbugs... Photo – DEC

CIGARETTE butts make up nearly half of Australia's litter and are the biggest litter contributor in WA, the latest National Litter Index has found.

WA's Keep Australia Beautiful Council (KABC) Chair Mel Hay said WA topped the nation for the greatest proportion of cigarette butts in its litter.

"WA had an overall increase in litter items but the significant rise in cigarette butts is a great concern," he said.

"The proportion of butts rose from 42 per cent to 53 per cent over a six-month period and they were mostly dropped along highways, closely followed by car parks and industrial and retail sites."

Mel believed this highlighted many people's attitudes to littering.

"The trends tend to show that people don't place a great deal of value on keeping these public areas clean and they see them as someone else's problem," he said.

"Clearly, we need greater awareness of the effects of littering and for more disposal facilities to be made available to the public."

He added that such facilities were needed more than ever following the recent ban on indoor smoking in public areas.

Other items high on the list of dropped materials were paper, tissues and snack or confectionary wrappers. For the first time, shopper dockets made the nation's 'dirty dozen' list.

In terms of volume of litter in WA, illegally dumped materials remain the greatest problem.

Plastic materials topped the list at 39 per cent, closely followed by paper and paperboard at 22 per cent.

Mel said the proposed tougher penalties for illegal dumping would help to address the problem of illegal dumping and send a clear message to potential offenders.

"Members of the public can also play a part in reporting people who litter or illegally dump rubbish through the KABC Litter Report Scheme," he said.

KABC will use the National Litter Index results to guide litter prevention initiatives in WA.

Keep Australia Beautiful WA is supported by DEC.

Healthy Wetlands Habitats program conserves Swan coastal wetlands

A NEW program to conserve Swan Coastal Plain wetlands is offering technical and financial help to landowners to protect wetlands on their properties.

The Healthy Wetland Habitats Program will work with landowners to develop management plans for their wetlands. The program also makes available funds for key management actions such as fencing, weed control and revegetation that are designed to mitigate threats to the wetlands and protect their important biodiversity values.

DEC's Acting Wetlands Coordinator Holly Smith said Healthy Wetlands Habitats would help protect species threatened by urban development, land clearing and weed invasion, and provide links to other conservation programs to preserve a network of wetlands supporting plants, animals and natural

communities across the coastal plain.

"Swan Coastal Plain wetlands are threatened ecosystems which need to be conserved if they are not to be lost forever," Holly said.

"Land clearing and the introduction of predators such as foxes and cats, and animals such as the rabbit, have contributed to the extinction of 18 fauna species, 15 flora species and three ecological communities across WA in the past 100 years."

Environment Minister Mark McGowan said wetland protection would continue to be a priority consideration in the development approval process, with assessment by the Environmental Protection Authority if environmentally sensitive wetlands were involved.

"The Government will also use the full force of the existing

law if wetlands are harmed in any way without authority in breach of those laws," he said.

Mr McGowan said the Government would continue to prepare a non-statutory wetland register that mapped the precise location of high conservation wetlands on the Swan Coastal Plain to give clarity and certainty to the community and development industry.

"Where important wetlands occur on private property, the Government will provide targeted assistance to landowners to help them manage their wetlands. We will also seek to reach voluntary agreements with landowners to improve wetlands management," he said.

The program will be coordinated by DEC's Bushland Benefits Coordinator Anthea Jones.

Briefly...

In brief

INTERESTED people are being selected for positions on community advisory committees for Perth's regional parks.

There are 11 regional parks in Perth – Beeliar, Canning River, Herdsman Lake, Jandakot, Rockingham Lakes, Woodman Point, Yellagonga and four in the Perth Hills.

Regional Parks coordinator Emma Reksmiss said the committees were established by DEC to provide a regular forum to hear public opinion and exchange advice on management issues.

Call Emma on 9431 6500 for more details.

Relay for Life

KEEP your eyes peeled for the Department's social activities to raise funds for cancer research.

The Department has entered a team in the WA Cancer Council's Relay for Life event to be held in March next year. Team members will walk around Perry Lakes stadium for 24 hours.

Earlier this year the Department raised more than \$8000 in six weeks.

Events such as corporate bowls nights, BBQ breakfasts, takeaway food drives, a cake stall, morning teas and raffles will be held.

The Relay for Life event attracts about 180 corporate teams each year. Last year more than \$500,000 was raised for cancer research.

There are still a couple of spots left on the team so if you're interested, phone Sue McKenna on 9389 8644.

Wildlife conference

Native Arc, the native animal rehabilitation centre at Bibra Lake, will host a wildlife conference on 4 October.

The conference aims to provide expert advice to WA wildlife carers, as well as the chance to share case histories and network.

Six experts in treating native birds, mammals and reptiles will address the conference.

Delegates will also be given the opportunity to discuss case histories.

The conference, to be held at the Cockburn Wetlands Centre, Bibra Lake, costs \$35 and starts at 8am.

For a registration form email nativearc@aapt.net.au or call Native Arc on (08) 9417 7105.

Acacia expert goes international

AUSTRALIA's acacia expert Bruce Maslin's passion for the wattle – Australia's national plant emblem – has hit the international scene.

A story about Bruce and his lifelong search for new wattle species, recognising the glory of what he describes as "the green and gold", appeared in the August issue of the Qantas in-flight magazine.

"I'm absolutely thrilled," Bruce, a DEC Senior Research Scientist based at Kensington but often found out in the field, said.

The Qantas connection started when Bruce was interviewed by Brunette Lenkic, a freelance writer working for Robe River Mining.

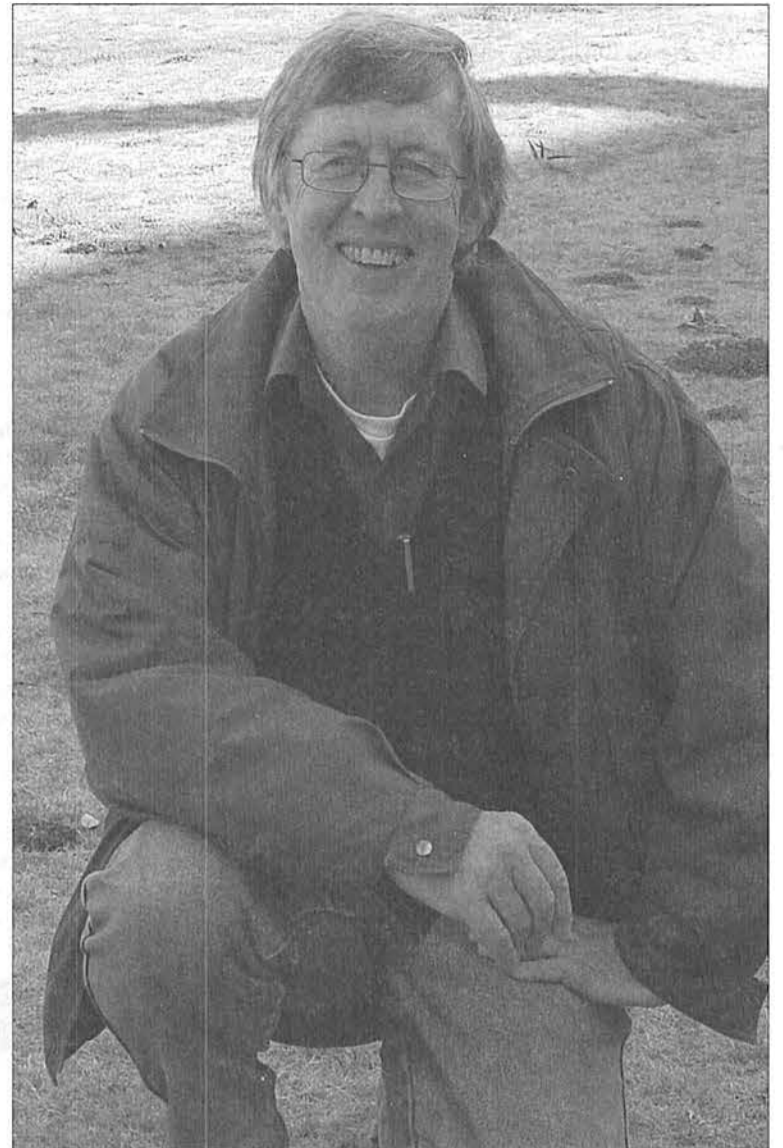
Stories about Bruce and his team-mate, Research Scientist Stephen van Leeuwen, and their discovery of seven new wattle species in the Pilbara early this year, had already hit national radio, so a story for Robe's newsletter was arranged.

"Brunette said that it would probably be suitable for the Qantas magazine, so we agreed that she should write one," Bruce said.

"We were surprised when we got a call to say the story had been accepted, and that they wanted more information and photographs."

The result is a two-page colour feature about Bruce's inspiration from "the green and gold" with information about the website he developed, www.worldwidewattle.com.

In the past 40 years Bruce has written scientific papers, four books and two CD ROMs, and was recently involved in action to keep the name acacia for Australia, following international discussion to change it.



Bruce Maslin hits the international travel scene. Photo – Sue McKenna/DEC

November showdown for Big Brook Relay



David Meehan, Big Brook Relay organiser and competitor for two decades, at Big Brook with some of the competitors' equipment. Photo – DEC

AFTER 20 years of inter-departmental rivalry the Pemberton Big Brook Relay may be about to have its final showdown.

This year's event on 11 November is the twentieth year of competition and could well be its last.

Donnelly District Parks and Visitor Services Coordinator and relay organiser, David Meehan, says it's time to give the relay a break for a while.

"My philosophy is that we'll put the relay file on the shelves after this year's event but we can pick it up at a later date if we want to," he said. "It's time to get out while we're still on top."

David's links to the relay, which is based around the Big Brook Dam near Pemberton and involves running, cycling, canoeing, cross-cut sawing and swimming, date back to the first time the day-long event was held.

by Tracy Peacock

"I've been involved from its inception in 1987 as a competitor and as an organiser since the early 90s," he said.

"It's been a fantastic event for the Department and it's been great for morale, fitness and bringing everyone together to catch up with friends and colleagues."

About 20 teams of seven people compete in the annual event which has also featured volleyball games and a tug-of-war followed by an evening function at the Pemberton Social Club.

David has issued a challenge for as many teams as possible to register for this year's relay. This year he's asking for teams to have "a uniform of some description" to add to the colour and spectacle on the day.

"We want to finish the event with a record number of teams," he said.

"I'd also like to specially invite staff from the former Department of Environment and the graduate recruit program to form teams and come to Pemberton."

"We're also looking into the idea of a 'little' Big Brook to entice past competitors who are no longer able to complete the full competition course but who wish to take part at a different level."

David acknowledged the work of Donnelly District staff who have organised the relay over recent years and colleagues including Alan Sands, John Asher and Rod Annear for their involvement over the years.

Details of the Pemberton Big Brook Relay are available on the former CALM intranet (go to "New on the Server") or by emailing David (davidme@dec.wa.gov.au).

Tough task for Tidy Towns judges

OUR Tidy Towns Awards regional judges have been out and about to inspect the towns entered in this year's competition.

DEC's Tidy Towns State Coordinator Lauren Holst said regional judges were impressed with the quality of this year's entries and said they would have a difficult task picking their regional winners.

"We've been really impressed with all the submissions received this year," she said.

"Some of these towns have put in a lot of hard work and made some big changes to their communities."

"Tidy Towns are judged not just on how clean their community is, but the efforts it puts into preserving the local society and culture and celebrating community achievements."

After being named a regional winner last year, the town of Collie went on to win the State and national awards.

Altogether, 45 WA towns have entered this year, one less entry than last year.

State winners will be announced on 1 December.