

# DECcrease project committee announced

DEC's new *DECcrease* Project Committee will guide and facilitate the department's work to minimise the environmental impact of its diverse activities across Western Australia.

Acting Director Sustainability Michael Kerr will chair the *DECcrease* committee which met for the first time in April.

Ten DEC staff were selected from

By Joanna Moore

26 nominations to form the committee.

Michael said the committee members were selected from a strong field of nominees and reflected the breadth of DEC's main functional areas and workplaces.

The committee members are Waste Management Branch Senior Project Officer Chantelle Noack, Air Quality Management Plan Manager Robert Hughes, EcoEducation Officer Hannah Hampson, Administration Officer Anne Lille and Senior Ranger Jeff Kimpton (shared membership), Operations Officer Kirsty Dixon, Coordinating Ecologist Jeff Richardson, Programmer/Analyst Navaz

Dakin, Climate Change Community Educator Julian Ilich and Communications Officer Joanna Moore.

One of the committee's first tasks is to work with *DECcrease* Senior Project Coordinator James Milne to prepare a Strategy and Action Plan for the roll out of the *DECcrease* project.

For more information about *DECcrease*, contact James on 6467 5454.



*DECcrease* committee members at their first meeting. (back row, from left) Jeff Richardson, Robert Hughes, Anne Lille, Kirsty Dixon, Chantelle Noack, Julian Ilich, (front row) Project Coordinator James Milne, A/Director Sustainability and Chair Michael Kerr, Joanna Moore and Hannah Hampson. Photo - Kylie Mould

## DEC switches off for Earth Hour

WHEN DEC staff across the agency left work on Friday 28 March, they were urged to make a special effort to turn off lights and computers in their workplace in preparation for *Earth Hour*.

Running between 8pm and 9pm on Saturday 29 March, the aim of *Earth Hour* was to have all non-essential electrical items – especially lights – turned off for an hour as a symbolic gesture to show that simple changes can collectively have a big impact on reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

*Earth Hour* originated in Sydney last year when 2.2 million individuals joined government and businesses in switching off their lights for an hour.

This year more than 30 cities, 9,500 businesses and many more individuals worldwide took part in the event. Iconic structures including Sydney's Harbour Bridge and Opera House, San Francisco's Golden

Gate Bridge, Chicago's Sears Tower and Coca Cola headquarters in Atlanta all switched off for the hour.

DEC took the lead in embracing *Earth Hour* as part of its new *DECcrease* initiative.

"While largely symbolic, our involvement in *Earth Hour* aimed to focus attention on a significant issue and facilitate long-term behaviour change within the agency, consistent with our goal to *DECcrease* our impact on the environment," said *DECcrease* Senior Project Coordinator James Milne.

"Staff were also encouraged to participate in the event at home."

Western Power monitored the use of electricity across Perth during *Earth Hour* and reported a significant reduction in consumption. The 60 megawatt hours' reduction across the network was the equivalent of lighting up to 100,000 households at that time of night.

## Environment wins as Simon reaches great heights

THE infectious enthusiasm for the natural environment of DEC Technical Officer Simon Cherriman was recognised when he won the environment category of the Western Australian Youth Awards 2008 in April.

Twenty-four-year-old Simon works with DEC Principal Research Scientist Dave Pearson helping with baseline frog surveys and research into the potential impacts of cane toads on native animals in the Kimberley.

He has a passion for birds – and wedge-tailed eagles in particular – which began at a young age. He started research on the iconic raptor species in high school and has recently completed an honours thesis and produced a public education DVD about the birds.

"Nothing's as good as wedgies," he said.

"I have been filming wedge-tailed eagles for about three years and so had dozens of hours of footage. It just needed editing.

"It's been great how much interest there's been in the DVD and I am currently producing a big batch of copies so more people can see it."

Simon completed his Bachelor of Science in Environmental Biology at Curtin University of Technology and, after some work with DEC, returned to complete his honours project on the territory size and diet of wedge-tailed eagles in the Perth region.

Simon's project was awarded the best honours study at Curtin in 2007 and also received the Serventy Memorial Prize awarded by the WA Naturalists' Club for the best natural history-based project.

Simon thanked his honours supervisors Professor Stephen Davies at Curtin and south-west region ecologist at the Australian Wildlife Conservancy Dr Jacqui Richards, for their support and encouragement, and Curtin environmental biology staff members Jane Sneesby and Phil Groom, who nominated him for the WA Youth Awards.

By Joanna Moore

When not collecting reptiles or identifying frog calls near Kununurra, Simon works at Karakamia Wildlife Sanctuary near Chidlow. Here he enjoys sharing his enthusiasm and knowledge with others through guided observation tours.

"I often say to visitors that coming to the sanctuary – where pest animals have been

removed and woylies, bandicoots and other native species reintroduced – is like going back in time," he said.

"It's a chance to experience the bush as it would have been before European settlement."

DEC has sponsored the environment category of the WA Youth Awards since its inception in 1999. The awards recognise outstanding Western Australians aged 13 to 25 years in the categories of active achievement, leadership, citizenship (individual), citizenship (group), inspiration and environment.



Simon Cherriman with a yellow spotted monitor. Photo - DEC

## KABC helps students learn about litter

THE campaign to promote a cleaner Western Australia has been taken into classrooms with the launch of the Keep Australia Beautiful Council's (KABC) new student learning package.

Environment Minister David Templeman launched *Learning About Litter* on Thursday 20 March at Attadale Kindergarten.

KABC Community Educator Kate McRae said the program had been designed to highlight in a fun, interactive way a serious problem that affects us all.

"This valuable tool contains information for teachers, a series of curriculum activities linked to the Western Australian Curriculum Framework, an appendix of games and a recommended reading list," she said.

"Students will learn about what litter is, its impact on the environment and what we can do to prevent litter and littering behaviour."

The resource package was trialled in 15 schools in Term 3 last year.



Environment Minister David Templeman helps kindergarten students Lewis Jameson and Cohen Gifford reuse materials to make artwork. Photo - Joanna Moore

Speaking at the launch, KABC Chair Mel Hay thanked the teachers who had helped in the trial for their enthusiasm and support.

"At Attadale, kindergarten teacher Renie Allen and Year 5 teacher Gillian Green were particularly proactive in trying out and providing feedback on the resource," Mel said.

"We were pleased that they found the resource informative and valuable.

"Each activity in the program is designed to teach the value of environmental responsibility and this will encourage students to develop respect and concern for the environment."

Mr Templeman thanked KABC and DEC for the work put into producing the educational package.

He also tried out some of the hands-on activities in the learning package with the Year 5 and kindergarten students from Attadale Primary School, including creating artwork from reused materials, sorting rubbish and investigating water pollution with a storm water drain experiment.

Mr Templeman encouraged the students to lead everyone in learning about litter and changing their behaviour.

"I challenge you not just to reduce, reuse and recycle at school, but to keep doing this throughout your life," he said.

# Working Together

The month of May is when the Government announces its budget for the next financial year. DEC will receive increases in funding in several priority areas. One is in major development approvals, to address the continuing flow of development proposals in a booming economy. An extra \$2.2 million in 2008/09 will result in new staff in Environmental Impact Assessment, Nature Conservation and Regional Services as well as the Appeals Convenor's office, aimed at maintaining strong environmental protection standards while also meeting timelines for dealing with proposals.

In the environmental regulation area, there is an ongoing additional allocation of \$1.3 million for inspection and compliance monitoring. Coupled with 2008-09 being the second year of a two-year phase-in of increased licence fees, the Department's environmental regulation function is now well placed, in terms of resources and initiatives in restructuring and staff training, to deliver the necessary services and standards across the State.

The budget also provides an extra \$4.7 million per annum for fire management. As well as some extra investment in communications and equipment, there will be 20 extra positions (including 13 conservation employees) across the forest, South Coast and Midwest regions, and new funding for our fire preparedness responsibilities on unallocated Crown land from the Kimberley to the South Coast. While the 20 extra staff are being employed to ensure the Department meets critical staff level requirements for wildfire response, importantly they will work on nature conservation and park/reserve management functions when not performing fire duties.

While these increases are most welcome, I recognise that continuing cost increases and demands in the fields of conservation and environmental protection will continue to place budget pressures on the Department and many of its individual work areas. A continuing focus on efficiency and improving business systems and performance measurement will be crucial in ensuring we provide the best service that we possible can.



Keiran McNamara, Director General

## 'You're Welcome' initiative continues

STAGE two of the 'You're Welcome' initiative to survey all wheelchair accessible facilities and audit the accessibility of DEC sites is almost complete.

During 2007, Clint Van Roon, who is a paraplegic as a result of a car accident, and his assistant Gail Haworth did a survey and audit of seven of the Swan Region's recreation sites for disability access.

The second stage of the project was made possible by \$15,000 funding from each of DEC's Swan Region and the department's Disability Access and Inclusion Committee.

The \$30,000 has enabled another 69 sites to be audited across the Swan Region as part of the region's partnership with the Disability Services Commission's Access Initiative.

Swan Regional Manager Alan Sands said that sites might be described as 'wheelchair accessible' but had not been tested. Or they might, for example, offer wheelchair access to a toilet but not to the main attraction.

"We need to test our claims that sites are wheelchair accessible as well as assess the opportunities to enjoy the whole location," he said.

Stage two of the You're Welcome initiative was completed by Justin Newman and his assistant Natalie Zapantis.

To assess the accessibility of park facilities for people in wheelchairs, Justin checked the widths of doorways, the heights of pedestals and sinks and manoeuvrability within toilet facilities, the steepness of ramps and the firmness of surfaces.

"It's important to gain a realistic impression of how wheelchair-friendly a recreation site is, without being too critical," he said.

"The fact is we are still in natural spaces and sometimes have to rough it a bit or get some assistance from a friend."

Justin said undertaking the audit had been a great opportunity for him personally.

"Visiting national parks and other recreation

By Joanna Moore

sites has really taken me outside of my comfort zone," he said.

"I have an eight-year-old son and have been pleased to find out about places I can take him by myself, despite being in a wheelchair."

Alan said the information from the survey and audit would form part of a compendium of information that people with disabilities could access to help them move throughout Western Australia.

"The information will also be communicated to visitors to DEC managed lands through our publications and NatureBase website so they can determine for themselves their options for accessing DEC recreation sites," he said.

For more information about the You're Welcome initiative contact Manager Recreation Planning and Interpretation Branch Stev Slavin on 9334 0574 or email [stev.slavin@dec.wa.gov.au](mailto:stev.slavin@dec.wa.gov.au).

The You're Welcome initiative is a strategy included in DEC's Disability Access and Inclusion Plan 2007-2012 which was endorsed in June 2007.

Director Corporate Services and Chair of the Disability Access and Inclusion Committee John Byrne said the plan explained what the department would be doing to improve access to its services, information and facilities for people with disabilities.

New strategies in the plan also include the development and implementation of disability awareness training and participation in the Australian Standard Outdoor Access working group to develop national standards.

The plan is available on DEC's website [www.naturebase.net](http://www.naturebase.net) or on request in alternative formats including large print, electronic format (CD or emailed) and audio.

## More money for conservation work on Bush Forever sites

DEC's *Saving our Species* biodiversity conservation initiative has provided a second year of funding for urgent conservation work on Perth's *Bush Forever* sites.

Almost \$330,000 is going towards continuing priority conservation work at nine *Bush Forever* sites throughout Perth, including Burns Beach bushland and Neerabup National Park near Joondalup, Hawkevale Nature Reserve near High Wycombe and Brixton Street wetlands in Kenwick.

DEC Project Officer Brian Inglis said *Bush Forever* sites retained key parts of Perth's beautiful natural bushland and it was important their high conservation value was protected.

"In 2007 DEC undertook urgent conservation work at these sites, many of which had previously lacked sufficient on-ground management," Brian said.

"The second stage of work will include weed control, removal of illegally dumped household and building rubbish, closure of unused tracks, vegetation rehabilitation and installation of signage and fencing."

Brian urged people using *Bush Forever* sites to respect the bushland by not using vehicles, except on authorised tracks, and not leaving

any rubbish.

"At Burns Beach and Neerabup National Park we are undertaking work to restrict four-wheel drive and motorbike access into the bushland - including closing tracks and maintaining and installing fences," Brian said.

"This is necessary to help reduce the spread of weeds, the dumping of rubbish and the damage to coastal vegetation and dunes being caused by vehicles."

Seed collection and propagation of native species and the removal of the invasive weed Patterson's curse are also being undertaken at Burns Beach.

At Neerabup National Park, rehabilitation work includes weed control on a large population of castor oil plants as well as control of giant bamboo, veldt grass and Patterson's curse.

Replacing damaged fence lines and upgrading fencing and gates as well as removing rubbish and weeds and undertaking firebreak maintenance are key priorities for Hawkevale Nature Reserve.

Work at Brixton Street wetland will involve removal of the weed fleabane and rubbish removal. This will support the conservation work by the Friends of Brixton Street Wetland.

## DEC hosts whale rescue workshop

WHALE disentanglement experts from around Australia met at Hillary's Boat Harbour in Perth during April for the National Large Whale Disentanglement Workshop.

DEC Senior Wildlife Officer Doug Coughran, one of Australia's leading whale rescue experts, coordinated the workshop which focused on the latest whale rescue techniques.

"We've come a long way from where we were 20 years ago and we're improving all the time as our equipment and rescue measures become more specialised," Doug said.

One of the highlights at the workshop was a demonstration of new whale rescue equipment.

Doug said in 2006, 18 whales became entangled in ropes and nets off the coasts of Australia. Eight were successfully disentangled by rescue teams, one died and the fate of the other eight was unknown.

"Following that year we asked a knife manufacturer in the United States to create a specially-designed knife that would cut effectively and efficiently through large diameter rope which had entangled the whales. We needed to reduce the time our teams were near large, highly stressed and dangerous whales," he said.

Since he began his career with the department 29 years ago, Doug has been involved in more than 50 whale disentanglements in WA, Australian, New Zealand and United States waters. Last year he was involved in three disentanglements in WA.

"The workshop aimed to help rescue teams operate more safely and also to reduce the possibility of whales becoming entangled in ropes and nets as they migrate along our coast," he said.

Employees from conservation, fishing and risk management areas were among those who attended the workshop.

"The fishing industry is proactive and supportive in efforts to reduce the probability of large whale entanglements and many people within that industry attended the workshop," Doug said.

"I'm pleased to say the fishing industry has adopted world's best practice in making changes in the way it operates."

Respected US whale expert Bob Bowman, formerly of the Massachusetts Centre for Coastal Studies, was the workshop's keynote speaker.

The workshop was sponsored by the Federal Department of the Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts.



Delegates at the National Large Whale Disentanglement Workshop. Photo - DEC

## Public comment helps determine new Narrogin feedlot licence

DEC has issued a new licence to Narrogin Beef Producers' cattle feedlot which sets conditions to help overcome problems with odours and waste.

DEC Environmental Regulation Director Robert Atkins said the division had been working closely with the Wheatbelt and South West regions to resolve the matter and it was a great example of what could be achieved with good teamwork across the department. The new licence was issued

after a three-week comment period during which the public could make submissions on the proposed licence.

Robert said DEC received 64 submissions on the proposed licence and thanked the community for its input.

"The process to issue the new licence to the feedlot operator has been very open and detailed," he said.

"A Community Liaison Group, established in July last year, has enabled key stakeholders to have

an input into solutions to odour problems from the feedlot that have affected the amenity of Narrogin and surrounding areas.

"That group, which comprises representatives of the Town and Shire of Narrogin, Narrogin Beef Producers, community representatives and DEC, along with other government agencies, has played a key role.

"As well, there have been on-ground inspections of the facility by officers from DEC and the Department of

Agriculture and Food.

The new licence covers a range of aspects in relation to the feedlot's operations including control of air, water and solid waste and wastewater management.

Robert said the licence proposed that the maximum number of cattle in the facility at any one time be limited to 6,000 head, with time allowed for the operator to reduce cattle numbers from the current 10,000 head to 6,000 head by the end of May.

## Environment and Conservation News May 2008

Published by the Department of Environment and Conservation's Strategic Development and Corporate Affairs Division, Cygnet Hall, (cnr) Mounts Bay Road and Hackett Drive, CRAWLEY, Western Australia 6009

Managing Editor: Kaye Verboon

Editor: Rhianna King

Contributing Editors: Joanna Moore, Samille Mitchell

Design and Production: Peter Nicholas

Telephone: (08) 9389 8644

Facsimile: (08) 9389 8296

Printed on 100% recycled paper

## Public comment sought for Northern Yilgarn Conservation Reserves

DEC is preparing a draft management plan for the Northern Yilgarn Conservation Reserves, a complex of reserves north and north-east of Southern Cross and Koolyanobbing.

As part of the preparation of the plan, an issues paper has been released which highlights the key values, issues and threats to the area.

Planning Officer Kym Pearce said public participation was a key component in preparing the plan.

"All comments and suggestions regarding the management direction of the area are welcome and will be considered," she said.

The management plan will define objectives and strategies that will guide the day-to-day management of the reserves and planning area during the next 10 years.

The Northern Yilgarn Conservation Reserves are located 70 to 200 kilometres north-east of Southern Cross and encompass areas including the Mt Manning Range, Helena and Aurora Range, Jaurdi and Mt Elvire former pastoral stations (proposed

conservation parks) and nearby banded ironstone hills and other proposed reserves.

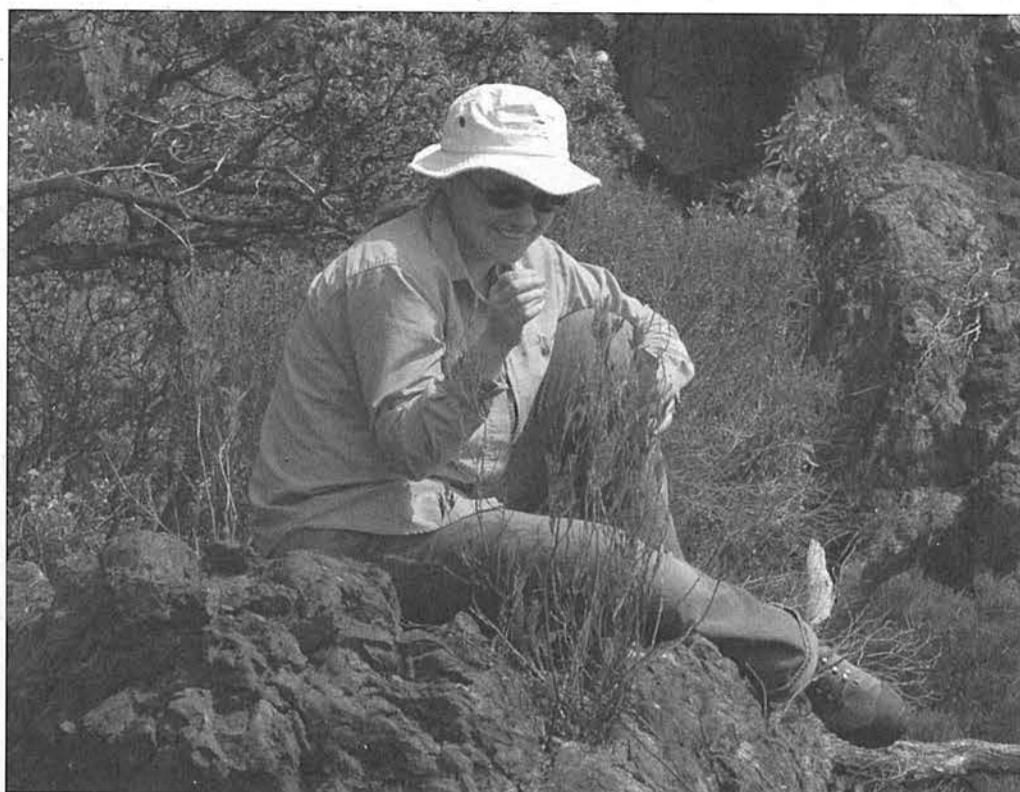
Kym said the area was known for its outstanding beauty, with visually impressive ranges and unique woodlands.

"It is a popular area for camping, day use visits and four-wheel drive trips," she said.

"It has significant natural values including high biological diversity, rare flora and fauna and many cultural sites.

"It is also valued for the mineral resources it contains particularly in the banded ironstone formations with several current mines and further mining proposed."

The issues paper, newsletter updates on the planning process and information on how to comment are available at [www.naturebase.net/haveyoursay](http://www.naturebase.net/haveyoursay) or by contacting the DEC Goldfields Region office in Kalgoorlie on 9080 5555. Public workshops will be held to discuss the issues paper and management directions. Dates are yet to be released.



Conservation officer Wendy Thompson studying declared rare flora *Leucopogon spectabilis* on the Helena and Aurora Range. Photo - Anne Cochrane

## DEC fire experts help South African foresters

TWO DEC specialists in pine plantation fire management visited South Africa to train local plantation managers in prescribed burning.

Mike Cantelo, Fire Coordinator based at Wanneroo, and Peter Gibson, Fire Coordinator at Collie, each spent two weeks in South Africa in March and April.

Fire Management Services Branch Manager Rick Sneeuwjagt said the South African Government-owned Komatiland Forests Company had asked DEC for help to develop skills in pine plantation prescribed burning and other fire prevention programs.

"DEC's approach to fire management in the pine plantations north of Perth and in the Blackwood Valley is highly applicable to the Komatiland plantations that extend over 128,000 hectares in the north-east of the country," Rick said.

Wildfires destroyed 17,400 hectares of the company's plantations last year. A total of 80,000 hectares of plantations throughout South Africa were lost in fires in the same year.

"DEC has had an extensive 'under pine' burning program for many years," Rick said. "This annual burn program has been highly effective in minimising the loss of publicly owned pines as a result of wildfires."

"This is an exceptional record, considering there are up to 150 deliberately lit fires in the pine plantations north of Perth each year."

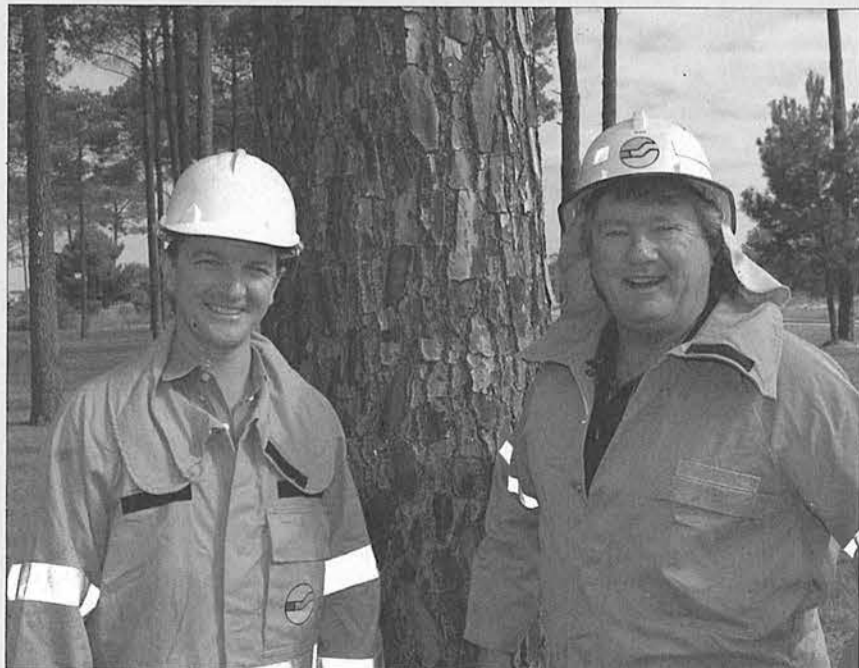
Mike said the plantations in South Africa were very similar to those in WA with the exception that they were not 'fuel reduced' by fire.

"The topography was similar to the Blackwood Valley but the under-canopy fuels were very high - in excess of 50 tonnes per hectare," Mike said.

"Under pine burning in Komatiland was started two years ago and has covered about 6,000 hectares but the burning has been done with little scientific basis or strategic planning."

"Peter and I helped the foresters develop a strategic plan for burning across six locations and showed them how to measure fuel tonnages, rates of spread and surface moisture contents."

"It was also determined that aerial ignition could be used by Komatiland foresters in the not-too-distant future because the plantations are so vast and the fuel loadings so high."



Peter Gibson and Mike Cantelo on their return from South Africa. Photo - Joanna Moore

## A year rich in learning

IT IS 12 months since Javier Martin Morena Meijias started work with DEC - he thought for just a couple of months - and both the young Spanish forester and the department have gained greatly from the experience.

Fire Management Services Branch Manager Rick Sneeuwjagt said he was pleased that the department could provide opportunities for people from other countries to learn about fire control in WA and that DEC staff could learn in return.

"We are always keen to see how others deal with fire management and always willing to learn from others," he said.

"The best way to learn is to work with us."

DEC Swan Coastal District Sustainable Forest Management Coordinator Owen Donovan said Javier had done just that.

"He's fought as a seasonal firefighter with DEC's Wanneroo office, helped undertake experimental burns with Science Division's fire research team, compiled maps in preparation for the fire season with fuel ages and high hazard areas, participated in fire training courses and controlled burns, helped with fuel reduction burns in pine plantations and has been at some of the big 'campaign' fires of the season," he said.

Rick said WA and Spain had a lot in common with respect to the Mediterranean fire climate and vegetation fuels.

"However, there are significant differences in the ownership of land as WA has big tracts of public lands, while in Spain most vegetated areas are on private lands. As a result there are



Owen Donovan, Javier Martin Morena Meijias and Rick Sneeuwjagt. Photo - Joanna Moore

differences in the way fire is managed," he said. "We have had the opportunity to learn from the issues confronting Spanish foresters and fire managers - such as the high urban interface they experience through villages being scattered between forests."

## Joint effort in Project FuSE

DEC has taken part in one of the most comprehensive bushfire studies in Australia, as part of Project FuSE.

DEC Fire Planning Research Officer Nicki Warnock joined almost 100 bushfire researchers and fire agency personnel from around Australia and overseas at the South Australian Ngarkat Conservation Park to take part in fire experiments for the project.

Nicki said the researchers carried out a series of controlled burns in the mallee and heath shrublands of the park in order to gain information to describe fuel dynamics and fire behaviour in the two fuel types.

"The opportunity to participate provided me with a chance to observe high intensity fire behaviour in dry mallee and heath fuels under very high fire danger weather conditions," she said.

Nicki said the knowledge she gained during the study would greatly benefit the department and assist in improving suppression strategies for future bushfires and prescribed burning programs in these vegetation types.

"The research will contribute to a fire behaviour guide to be used across Australia by fire practitioners during wildfire suppression and prescribed burning," she said.

The results from 16 experimental fires carried out by DEC Principal Research Scientist Lachie McCaw will also contribute to the model, which will include results from some 80 fires in total.

The field guide will be distributed across DEC regions with mallee and heath landscapes, including the South West, Goldfields, South Coast, Midwest and Wheatbelt. It is due to be completed towards the end of this year.

Project FuSE is a research collaboration between the South Australian Department for Environment and Heritage, CSIRO Forest Biosciences and the South Australian Country Fire Services through the Bushfire Cooperative Research Centre.

The research is being led by Jim Gould from CSIRO Forest Biosciences and the Bushfire CRC. The project's name comes from its focus: Fire Experiments in Scrub with attention to wind 'u' and slope.

# Rare skink thrives in new home



Back from the Brink Technical Officers Sonja Creese and Michelle Swann measuring Lancelin Island skinks. Photo – Renée Hartley

DEC surveying of the rare Lancelin Island skink on Favorite Island has revealed translocated skinks are surviving and breeding in their new home.

The Lancelin Island skink, listed as vulnerable in Western Australia, was once only found on Lancelin Island.

However, since 2002, 179 individuals bred at Perth Zoo have been translocated to Favorite Island off Lancelin.

DEC Conservation Officer Renée Hartley said the skink was one of only a handful of reptiles in the world to be translocated for conservation purposes.

"Favorite Island was selected due to the suitable habitat it provided and the absence of the threats and pressures found elsewhere on the mainland, such as cats and foxes," she said.

"Ninety per cent of female Lancelin Island skinks captured were pregnant, some carrying up to three eggs."

In addition, DEC monitoring in March on Lancelin Island has revealed the natural population is also continuing to breed successfully.

The Lancelin Island skink was first discovered in 1961 and was recognised as a distinct species in 1972. It was named *Ctenotus lancelini*, after its island home.

This small skink of up to 22 centimetres in length and 10 grams in weight feeds on insects and spiders found among leaf litter.

Its habitat is very sensitive to disturbance and visitors can help by staying on the beach and not walking through the vegetation.

For more information contact Renée Hartley on (08) 9652 1911 or email [renee.hartley@dec.wa.gov.au](mailto:renee.hartley@dec.wa.gov.au).

# New licences allocated for Ningaloo operators

SWIMMING with whale sharks in Western Australia's world-renowned Ningaloo Marine Park will be sustainably managed through 14 commercial licences which were recently allocated.

DEC regulates and grants the 15 available whale shark interaction tour licences.

The new licences were allocated after a call for expressions of interest on 1 August 2007. Applicants were assessed against a range of environmental, social and economic sustainability criteria.

DEC Tourism Branch Manager Rod Quartermain said the iconic tourism attraction was extremely popular and drew people from all around the world.

"Interactions with whale sharks need to be managed sustainably to protect this magnificent species," he said.

Twenty-two applications were received for the 15 available licences.

"As a result of the extensive selection process, it was determined that only 14 applications met the required standards," Rod said.

"One licence will remain vacant for three years, when the situation will be reviewed."

By Samille Mitchell

The new licences will be effective from 1 January 2009, when the current licences expire, and are valid for up to five years with the possibility of renewal for a further five years.

The licences specify conditions and operators will be independently audited each year to make sure the standards are maintained and moving towards world's best practice.

The licensing process also requires all operators to install GPS-based electronic logbooks, which allow them to input interaction information. An automatic track capacity enables information to be transmitted back to a central database.

"This will allow accurate and timely collection of data – an important management tool for DEC to learn and understand more about whale sharks and the marine environment of the park," Rod said.

"We hope to expand the use of this sort of technology across the State to help in conservation management."

# Hamel Nursery entered on heritage register

By Steve Raper

HAMEL Nursery, which played an important role in the development of the forest industries in WA, has been permanently entered on the State Register of Heritage Places.

The nursery is on DEC land just south of Waroona and comprises remnants of the original nursery which was established in 1897, the present day nursery which was established in 1917 and the original arboretum and bridge over the Sampson Brook which was built in 1900.

The nursery also includes plantings of pine and cork oaks which were planted in 1929 and 1930. In 1956 an inland native species arboretum was established.

Culturally, Hamel Nursery's significance stems from the fact it is the oldest surviving nursery in Western Australia and includes the first arboretum of native and exotic plants.

The nursery was also the first outstation established for the Fremantle Gaol for short-term and near release prisoners.

The nursery played a significant role in the development of the State's forest industries, especially pine growing which started in 1897 and continued through to the 1980s. It is an important site in the history of DEC and its predecessors the Department of Conservation and Land Management and the Forests Department.

Until recently the nursery has been leased to a commercial operator using the site as a tree farm nursery. It is currently vacant and options are being considered for its use.

# Counting corellas

By Samille Mitchell

DEC has enlisted the help of the community for a survey of the endangered Muir's corella.

About 60 people took part in the Muir's corella count in February.

DEC Fauna Conservation Officer Marnie Swinburn said the group counted 11,200 birds on 34 properties in the Donnelly, Frankland, Blackwood and Great Southern districts.

"This was an increase in numbers compared with our first survey last year when we counted 9,350 corellas," Marnie said.

"The increase in birds counted this year is most likely due to the increased survey effort as the number of properties surveyed

increased from 22 in 2007 to 34 properties this year.

"The aim for future counts is to increase the number of properties surveyed yet again."

Marnie said the surveys played an important role in determining the conservation status of the endangered bird.

Muir's corella is endemic to south-west WA. It once occurred across most of the south-west and is now confined to a single population near Lake Muir, Boyup Brook, Perup River, Frankland and Rocky Gully.

The project was made possible thanks to funding from the South West Catchments Council.

# New boardwalk at Stones Brook



Wellington District Conservation Employees (from left) Jeff Allen, Shawn Atherton and Kelly Bennett on a boardwalk they recently constructed near the Stones Brook camping area in Wellington National Park. Stones Brook, the campfire-free camping opportunity near Honeymoon Pool along the Lower Collie River, has many beautiful large blackbutt trees. Through a visitor risk management process, these have been identified as potentially dangerous to visitors as they have many big dead branches. However, to remove these would greatly impact the trees. The new section of boardwalk gives visitors the opportunity to see the magnificent trees from a safe distance and it also protects the brook's edge. Photo – by Bev Gardiner