



October 2008

Ecofire the winner at WA Environment Awards

THE AUSTRALIAN Wildlife Conservancy and Rangelands Natural Resource Management (NRM) Coordinating Group took out the top prize at the 2008 WA Environment Awards' presentation night on Saturday 11 October.

As well as receiving the Overall Winner's Award, they won the Community Achievement Award for their Ecofire program.

Ecofire, which started in 2007, showed outstanding achievement in reducing and preventing wildfires in the central and northern Kimberley.

Environment Minister Donna Faragher said the project had helped to significantly improve fire management processes.

"Ecofire brings together land owners, managers, Indigenous communities and government and non-government organisations with diverse interests to deliver coordinated, regional fire management over 14 properties covering almost five million hectares of the central and northern Kimberley," Minister Faragher said.

"Project participants plan and implement a regional prescribed burning program which is dramatically reducing the extent of mid-to-late dry season fires, and thereby significantly improving the conservation management of catchments and biodiversity in the region."

The Minister said Ecofire was an outstanding example of strong leadership, exemplary stakeholder involvement and excellent environmental outcomes.

Now in its seventh year, the WA Environment Awards have been successful in providing recognition to organisations, community groups and individuals that are setting new benchmarks in environmental care. Forty-eight finalists were selected this year from a record 107 entries.

Category winners in the 2008 Western Australian Environment Awards were:

Corporate Business Leading by Example

Kwinana Industries Council – Kwinana Industries Synergies Project

Government Leading by Example

Shire of Wyndham East Kimberley – Key Management Actions for Lake Kununurra

Small Business Leading by Example
Beat-A-Bug and Wildly Important Eco Offset Services

Resource and Waste Management
East Metropolitan Regional Council – Hazelmere Timber Recycling Centre

Energy Efficiency
Solex – Solex Carnarvon Solar Farm

Coastal, Marine and Estuarine

Department of Fisheries – *MarineDiscoveryWest* Initiative

Environmental Education and Communication

Kalgoorlie–Boulder Urban Landcare Group – 'Better Environment-Better Lifestyle' Communicate-Educate-Participate

Prevention of Littering and Illegal Dumping

Tangaroa Blue Ocean Care Society – South West Marine Debris Project

Bush, Land and Waterways

Talbot Brook Land Management Association – Making a difference in the western Wheatbelt

Biodiversity Conservation (Joint winners)

Dieback Working Group; Australian Wildlife Conservancy – Returning Faure Island's Mammal Diversity

Community Achievement

Australian Wildlife Conservancy and Rangelands NRM Coordinating Group – Ecofire: Coordinated fire management in the central and northern Kimberley

Individual Achievement

Jenna Brooker



The three-way partnership in action: (from left) Georgie Colebrook from the Northern Agricultural Catchment Council, landholders Peter Phillips and Pam Toster and Land for Wildlife Officer Fiona Falconer. Photo – Penny Hussey.

Land for Wildlife reaches major milestone

MORE than 250,000 hectares of land are now registered as Land for Wildlife sites.

Through DEC's *Land for Wildlife* program, these areas of privately owned property are managed with nature conservation as the main priority and are a major adjunct to Western Australia's conservation reserve system.

The milestone of reaching 250,000 hectares was celebrated on the farm that crossed the special mark – Hallswood Park in Badgingarra, the property of Pam Toster and Peter Phillips. More than 60 people attended.

"This major achievement is a wonderful demonstration of just how much Western Australians are prepared to do to conserve our biodiversity," *Land for Wildlife* Coordinator Penny Hussey said.

"As a comparison, 250,000 hectares is more than twice the area of the Stirling Range National Park.

"Many of the *Land for Wildlife* sites are in the highly cleared agricultural region of the south-west and so are particularly valuable."

The event aimed to highlight the three-way

partnership that supports the program. This involves landholders with good bushland working with DEC, which provides ecological knowledge and best-practice management suggestions through *Land for Wildlife*, and natural resource management groups with funding programs to support the management actions.

The Northern Agricultural Catchment Council is the overarching natural resource management body in the Badgingarra area. Council staff helped DEC's *Coorow Land for Wildlife* Officer Fiona Falconer organise the event and the council chairman, Chris King, outlined the role of natural resource management.

DEC Midwest Regional Manager Kelly Gillen spoke about the importance of private land to biodiversity conservation, before naturalist Eric McCrum led people through some of the excellent woodland on the property.

Penny said the day exemplified what *Land for Wildlife* was all about – bushland management in the company of friends.



Environment Minister Donna Faragher (third from left) with representatives from the Australian Wildlife Conservancy and Rangelands NRM Coordinating Group. Photo – DEC.

Energy Smart report released

DEC has taken part in the Energy Smart Government program, achieving an improvement in energy efficiency over the past five years.

When established in 2002, the program's target was a reduction in total energy use of 12 per cent by 2006–07.

DEC did not meet the overall reduction target, but did reduce its energy use for each full-time equivalent employee by 26.9 per cent.

Members of DEC's *DECcrease* committee attended the report release,

where they found out about carbon offsets, the Government's commitment to buy 20 per cent renewable energy by 2010, green leases and the system used to collect and report on energy use and emissions across Government.

"While DEC staff should be congratulated for reducing energy use per full-time equivalent employee, there is still much work to be done," *DECcrease* Senior Project Coordinator James Milne said.

"The best goal is still for outright reduction in energy consumption."

Community day in Esperance

ABOUT 100 people attended a community open day in Esperance in September to find out more about the management of problems related to lead and nickel in the area.

The informal session also helped bring residents up to speed on plans for the removal of the remaining lead at Esperance Port and DEC's revision of the port's licence.

Manager of DEC's Licensing and Permitting Branch Peter Skitmore said representatives from several different organisations were on hand to talk to residents. They included DEC, the Department of Health, the Department of Consumer and Employment Protection, Esperance Shire, a local community group, Esperance Port Authority, Magellan Metals, Norilsk Nickel, BHP Billiton Nickel West and Xstrata Nickel.

Representatives from Golder Associates, the consultancy group that recently completed the first phase of an ecological and human health risk assessment of lead and nickel in Esperance, also attended.

"I think people really appreciated that they could come to one place to meet a host of different agencies in an informal setting," Peter said.

DEC staff also met with the Esperance Port Authority, Esperance Shire and key environment and community groups.

"It was great to meet face-to-face with these groups to help address concerns over this issue," Peter said.

"After all, we are all working towards the same goal – ensuring that the health of the Esperance community and the environment is protected."

Working Together

There is a lot of attention on financial issues at this time. The global financial situation is the subject of intense political focus, as well as media coverage, on a daily basis. I am a biologist not an economist, and don't have a crystal ball, so the only thing I can say with certainty is that we face uncertainty!

As staff will know from media coverage, the State Government has decided to apply a 3% efficiency dividend to agency budgets with effect from 1 January 2009. This is a decision that has been made to achieve better management of the overall State budget and to make funds available for the Government's high priorities, and the decision originated well before the global situation that has now emerged.

I am well aware that this cut will have an effect on the Department and its staff, however it is the prerogative of the Government to reallocate funds to deliver on its priorities. As I outlined in last month's column, the Government has made a number of election promises in the environment area including some extra funding.

Given that we have driven efficiencies over quite a number of years, I do not take the view that there are large "chunks" of our work that we can just stop. The approach that Corporate Executive is taking to achieving the efficiency dividend will be guided by principles such as concentrating on statutory functions; concentrating on service delivery; maintaining service delivery in regions as much as possible; minimising risk (eg. in environmental regulation, wildfires, park visitor safety); maintaining delivery of approval processes; maintaining core functions of biodiversity conservation and land management as much as possible; and driving efficiency and simplicity in internal processes.

Achieving the required dividend will not be without its challenges, however my aim is to avoid across-the-board percentage budget reductions in doing so.

Keiran McNamara,
Director General



Weed control on Houtman Abrolhos

DEC is a step closer to successfully removing the invasive weed African boxthorn from the Houtman Abrolhos Islands west of Geraldton.

DEC staff spent five days visiting 18 islands to undertake weed control work as part of a control plan which has been carried out for the past three years through the 'Stop the Rot' project.

The weed control involved removing the invasive plants from the ground and poisoning any unremoved plants at the stumps.

African boxthorn (*Lycium ferocissimum*) is an introduced weed that significantly impacts on native plants and animals on the islands.

The plant has big spikes and has the potential to trap birds, particularly fledgling seabirds such as the rare lesser noddy. The weed also competes with native vegetation and its presence can discourage Australian sea lions from using their traditional resting areas.

African boxthorn was identified on the islands in 1989 and monitoring, management and removal work began that year.

DEC Operations Officer Craig Tuesley said only five of the 18 islands visited still had the live weed on them, indicating that previous eradication programs had been successful.

"Eradicating weeds is a difficult and lengthy process – thorough survey is vital to ensure that all plants are found and that the seed is not set," he said.

"Once the plant sets its seed, you are back at the beginning of the cycle again as most weeds

have seed that lasts for years in the soil.

"In future, we will only need to carry out surveillance to identify new seedlings and ensure no new plants have established themselves."

'Stop the Rot' is carried out by DEC and funded by the Federal and State governments through the Northern Agricultural Catchments Council. The project aims to protect the biodiversity values of the northern agricultural region by addressing major threats such as feral animals, weeds and dieback.



Conservation Employee Paul Robb demonstrates the importance of removing the total root system of African boxthorn.
Photo – Craig Tuesley

A focus on vegetation mapping in WA

By Joanna Moore

A RANGE of stakeholders have met to discuss vegetation mapping in Western Australia.

Vegetation mapping systems are databases that capture information about vegetation types, characteristics, structure and quality. The two-day workshop focused on how to develop an improved system to meet the varying needs of government, industry and other groups.

DEC Biogeography Program Leader and Partnerships Manager Stephen van Leeuwen said the workshop was a significant event in the history of vegetation mapping in the State.

"Vegetation mapping systems in WA are out of date and not meeting current needs, or they are being used beyond their capabilities," he said.

"One of the main systems, known as Beard's, was developed 40 years ago.

"Some of the issues include the scale of mapping being too large and the huge changes that have occurred to WA's vegetation through fire, *Phytophthora* dieback, clearing, fragmentation and the end of old-growth logging."

Stephen said the aim of the workshop was to gather views from agencies, industry and the community about the need for a new WA vegetation map and how such a product could best be developed.

Following the expert perspectives



(Back, from left) Goldfields Region Conservation Officer Wendy Thompson, Professor of Botany at Stellenbosch University in South Africa Laco Mucina, Principal Ecologist Val English, Manager Species and Community Branch Ken Atkins, Director Science Division Neil Burrows, Senior Principal Research Scientist Dave Coates, (front, from left) Stephen van Leeuwen, Richard Thackway (Commonwealth Government) and David Keith (New South Wales Government). Photo – Joanna Moore

of international and interstate visitors, presentations from WA people aimed to build up a picture of what is needed here in a vegetation mapping system.

DEC regional staff and senior staff from the Species and Communities, Nature Protection, Environmental Management, Native Vegetation Conservation, Environmental Analysis and Review and Fire Management Services branches helped to illustrate the wide-ranging

requirements in the department.

Stephen said the second day of the workshop was more interactive and aimed to provide a framework for a way forward.

"The findings of the workshop showed that any new system which is developed will need to be flexible to cater for a wide range of uses," he said.

"It was also discussed that a new system would need to capture the large volumes of data generated by the resources industry and

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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

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their consultants as part of the environmental approvals and assessments process as well as incorporating information from non-government organisations."

Attendees included representatives from DEC, mining companies including Rio Tinto and BHP Billiton, State natural resource management coordinators, universities, environmental consultancies, Greening WA, the departments of Agriculture and Food and Industry and Resources, Wilderness Society of WA, Swan Catchment Council, Conservation Commission of WA, Wildflower Society of WA, Environmental Protection Authority and Botanic Gardens and Parks Authority.

Field station restored at Montebello Islands



At the upgraded field station (from left) DEC Marine and Coastal Ecologist Alan Kendrick, Regional Marine Program Coordinator Cath Samson, contractor Ken Lewis, Department of Fisheries officer Clint Wadley and Marine Ranger Rob Connell. Photo – DEC

DEC Pilbara staff joined forces with the Department of Fisheries and the North West Water Police to upgrade and repair the DEC field station at the Montebello Islands, 120 kilometres offshore from Dampier.

The field station was established in 1992 as a base for the Montebello Renewal Project – an operation to eradicate feral cats and rats from the islands. Visits to the field station decreased after the project was successfully completed in 2001 and time and the salt laden winds were eating away at the metal structures.

DEC Pilbara Region Marine Program Coordinator Cath Samson said the field station was restored to enable a cost-effective and regular management presence in the Montebello/Barrow

Islands Marine Conservation Reserves.

"DEC and Department of Fisheries staff visit the Montebello/Barrow Islands Marine Conservation Reserves regularly for management purposes including education, compliance patrols, research, monitoring and infrastructure maintenance," she said.

"Since the gazettal of the conservation reserves in 2004, there has been a dramatic increase in the number of private and charter vessels visiting the area."

The first stage of the restoration involved demolishing some old structures, stock-piling old materials and measuring up the remaining buildings for refit. A building contractor and a barge service contractor joined the team for the second stage of restoration work.

DEC Marine Ranger Rob Connell

said the main tasks included removing the old roofs from the field station, recladding the walls, installing a 5,000-litre water tank and setting up a small fuel depot. Custom-built padlock protectors were fitted to the main hut and containers and a new fridge and freezer installed.

"The logistics of bringing together three government departments and two contractors to an offshore island, combined with the volume of material and equipment required, were formidable," Rob said.

"All involved were delighted when it all came together and the winds didn't blow too hard."

The field station is now operational as a base for extended marine and terrestrial operations at the islands.

Keep Australia Beautiful Week a success

THE Keep Australia Beautiful Council (KABC) WA congratulates everyone who took part in a highly successful Keep Australia Beautiful Week this year and scored points for the environment.

The 'score points for the environment' challenge encouraged people to take simple actions to improve and conserve our environment while at the same time working their way towards 100 points, which they recorded on the KABC website.

Activities included recycling mobile phones and printer cartridges, switching to green energy, designing and improving sustainable gardens, community clean-up events, zero waste lunch days and much more. Western Australia made up 195 of 1,050 participating

groups Australia-wide.

KABC Community Education Officer Kate MacRae said the actions helped tackle climate change and protect natural resources.

Some of the groups involved included Kambalda Primary School, East Narrogin Primary School, Santa Maria College, Keep Busselton Beautiful, the Shire of Esperance and Main Roads WA.

Kate said Kambalda Primary School was a Water Wise, Waste Wise and Solar School and Keep Australia Beautiful Week was an opportunity to reinforce their great work.

"They held a Zero Waste lunch day; recycled mobile phones in a MobileMuster; hosted a Cartridge World recycling box; recycled paper, cans and plastic; fed food

scraps to the school worms; turned lights off at the end of each day; brainstormed ways to save water and ran a clean-up," she said.

"In their very busy week they scored a whopping 160 points!"

Celebrity ambassadors joined in the 100-point challenge including the West Coast Eagles football team. Some of the participants who reached the 100-point goal received a call from radio and TV personality John Blackman.

Kate said it was great to see the positive environmental contribution made across the community during Keep Australia Beautiful Week through simple actions in our daily lives. DEC also took part with 10 offices running MobileMusters during the week.



KABC chair Mel Hay and West Coast Eagles player Matt Priddis. Photo - DEC

Staff roll up their sleeves for planting day



Project partners (left to right) SERCUL Project Officer Tom Atkinson, SERCUL chairperson Pat Hart, Drainage Nutrient Intervention Program Manager Peter Adkins and environmental contractor Martin Penny. Photo - Amy Kimber

SWAN River Trust staff joined more than 100 community volunteers to celebrate Planet Ark's National Tree Day.

In a mammoth effort in wet conditions, they planted more than 7,000 local native seedlings in the new Wharf Street Wetland and Civic Parkland in Cannington. It marked the first major planting event for the new

water quality improvement project.

The \$1 million artificial wetland and parkland will filter stormwater from the Wharf Street main drain along a 600-metre flow path before it enters the Canning River.

Swan River Trust Drainage Nutrient Intervention Program Manager Peter Adkins said the project targeted a known priority

catchment and would filter nutrients and other pollutants from the water.

"While its primary aim is to improve stormwater quality, the project has also allowed for the creation of large areas of public open space which include a temporary stage area, seating, shelters, barbecues and a viewing platform and river access point," he said.

The Wharf Street Wetland is located less than one kilometre downstream from the award-winning Liege Street Wetland, where monitoring shows nutrients entering the Canning River have been reduced by up to a third.

It is planned to plant 130,000 local native plants at the Wharf Street Wetland site including rushes and sedges along the river, and open woodland species.

DEC staff at the Swan River Trust are undertaking the project in partnership with the City of Canning and South East Regional Centre for Urban Landcare (SERCUL).

SERCUL Project Officer Tom Atkinson said the planting event went off without a hitch, with volunteers coming from engineering firm KBR, Worldwide Online Print and the Two Rivers Catchment Group.

Waste and Recycle Conference

MORE than 400 delegates attended the annual Waste and Recycle Conference held over four days in September.

Four internationally recognised keynote speakers provided participants with the latest information on sustainable business practices, the economics of waste management, extended producer responsibility and commercial organics and composting.

Six DEC staff presented papers on issues such as construction and demolition wastes, composting, illegal dumping, the new Waste Avoidance and Resource Recovery Act and Regulations and waste education programs.

The conference also included workshops on developing strategic waste management plans, landfill management, best practice kerbside recycling, a citizens' Jury on the National Packaging Covenant and a public forum on the changes to the amount of levy paid on waste disposed to landfills.

Tours were well attended, in particular a visit to the new Western Metropolitan Regional Council DiCOM alternative waste treatment facility in Brockway.

There was also a breakfast session where participants could meet the Waste Authority chairman Barry Carbon and members.

Biodiversity hotspot reveals rare species

DEC has noted a range of threatened species discovered at an area of remnant vegetation near Badgingarra for protection.

The 350-hectare biodiversity hotspot at Hi Vallee farm in the West Midlands area contains 38 priority flora species and four declared rare flora species. Thirty-six animal species were recorded as a result of four trapping sessions that registered 614 animals.

DEC Moora District Conservation Officer Kathy Himbeck said two of the priority flora species known to occur on the remnant had not been recorded anywhere else in the Moora District.

"It's become clear from other surveys being conducted in the Moora District that *Petrophile nivea* and *Dryandra cataglypta* are known only to occur on the remnant site, and these two species may possibly be reclassified as threatened flora in the near future," Kathy said.

Recovery actions including weed control, fencing, habitat rehabilitation and seed collection are taking place to protect the abundance of flora species.

Flora surveys are continuing on the site but the fauna surveys have finished, with a higher than expected number of animals recorded.

"The number of species found in such a small remnant is quite impressive - in fact each trapping session added at least one new species to the remnant's overall species list," Kathy said.

The information gathered during the past two years has been used to produce biodiversity management guidelines for the important biodiversity hotspot.

Neil retires after 45 dedicated years

By Joanna Moore

WHEN you visit DEC's regional parks there is a good chance the boardwalk or viewing platform which helps make your visit enjoyable was built with input by long-time DEC employee Neil Osman.

At his retirement on 4 September, Neil had been with the department for 45 years. In the past 10 years, his work has focused on building recreation structures and major revegetation projects involving the re-establishment of fringing wetland vegetation.

Neil started work with the Forests Department in September 1963, soon after emigrating from England. His first position was as a forest worker at Tallanalla, east of Harvey, where his tasks included pruning, planting and firefighting. In 1971, Neil transferred to Yanchep where he continued in this role until being promoted to overseer.

In 1999, Neil was employed by the Regional Parks Unit as an overseer managing conservation and recreation projects in the regional parks of the Swan Coastal Plain and later as works coordinator for Herdsman Lake and Yellagonga regional parks.

Neil recalls the construction of the 140-metre Olive Seymour Boardwalk near the Wildlife Centre at Herdsman Lake as a memorable event in his career.

"It was one of my first big construction projects and it felt like a real achievement, though of course I've built many other structures since then," he said.

Another memorable project was the New Work Opportunities program in which Neil was involved at Yanchep National Park in 1995. His role was to manage four overseers

and their teams of people on the 'dole' who worked at Yanchep doing conservation activities.

"We had about 80 people working at Yanchep through the program and, while there were some good workers amongst them, it was often a real eye-opener," Neil said.

He said he had enjoyed the various aspects of his career, particularly its outdoor focus, and the people he had worked with during his time with the Forests Department, CALM and then DEC.

"Every crew I've worked with has been good - there's a great mateship about them - and this is also true of the fire teams, which I have been a part of every summer until recent years," he said.

Another highlight of Neil's career was receiving the National Fire Medal for 15 years service in 1988. He was awarded a clasp for 10 years further fire service in 1998.

An event was held at Yanchep Inn on Friday 5 September, where Neil's colleagues farewelled him and wished him all the best for his retirement.

Manager Community and Regional Parks Branch Jayson Puls has known Neil since 1990 and has worked closely with him since 2000.

"I have worked with Neil on a wide range of construction jobs as well as on many major revegetation projects at Herdsman Lake and Yellagonga regional parks. He is always a pleasure to work with," Jayson said.

"Neil has great respect among his peers, is a hard worker and an excellent overseer. He is calm under pressure - whether it's in a firefighting situation or balancing the unexpected and widely ranging needs of managing our parks - and he has a dynamic skill set which has been invaluable in setting up Herdsman Lake and Yellagonga regional parks.

"He is a top bloke who will be greatly missed."



Neil Osman with his certificate for long and meritorious service to the department. Photo courtesy of Sun City News.

Hills come alive with Bibbulmun Track celebration

By Leanne O'Rourke

STAFF from DEC's Parks and Visitor Services Branch braved cold and windy weather in Kalamunda on Saturday 13 August to join hundreds of walking enthusiasts and their families celebrate the tenth anniversary of the Bibbulmun Track.

The crowd gathered at the northern terminus to welcome nine hikers who began an end-to-end journey along the track in Albany two months earlier. More than 100 walkers joined them along the way to complete smaller sections of the track.

Recreation Activities Coordinator Stuart Harrison said the atmosphere was exciting.

"It was really great to see so many people there to commemorate this important event and greet the end-to-enders together with sectional walkers, dignitaries and local scouts who completed part of the journey with them," Stuart said.

"The 965-kilometre Bibbulmun Track is the result

of years of hard work and investment from many people since the idea was first conceived by Geoff Schafer in the 1970s. These generous contributions are continuing today."

The Bibbulmun Track, which is managed by DEC in partnership with the Bibbulmun Track Foundation staff and volunteers, was upgraded and extended from Walpole to Albany in 1998.

"The world-class track is something DEC's Recreation and Trails Unit and DEC's South West Region staff, and others, are really proud of," Stuart said.

"It's a spectacular tourist attraction that traverses some of the most beautiful parts of south-western WA and passes through some wonderful towns including Albany, Dwellingup and Northcliffe.

"The track encourages interaction with nature, which is all about having healthy parks that help us to be healthy people, and I encourage all staff to take the opportunity to check it out whenever they can."

For more information, contact the Recreation and Trails Unit at Kensington on 9334 0599.



(Left to right) Bibbulmun Track Foundation Chair Mike Wood, Acting Assistant Director Visitor Services Tracy Shea, Assistant Trails Coordinator Kerstin Stender, walk leader Steve Sertis, Recreation Activities Coordinator Stuart Harrison and Trails Coordinator Megan Graham. Photo - Leanne O'Rourke.

Western swamp tortoises released

DEC has released critically endangered western swamp tortoises bred at Perth Zoo.

Twenty-four tortoises were released at a site at the Moore River Nature Reserve and another 20 tortoises were released at a site at the Mogumber Nature Reserve.

DEC Senior Research Scientist Dr Gerald Kuchling said the translocation was part of the Western Swamp Tortoise Recovery Plan which aimed to bring the species back from the brink of extinction.

"The western swamp tortoise is one of the world's rarest tortoises or turtles," Gerald said.

"Since they started in 1990 the Western Swamp Tortoise Recovery Team has made significant headway in increasing the numbers of the animals in the wild in Western Australia.

"Since 1994 more than 380 individuals have been released with the oldest now reaching breeding age. The tortoise has a long life, but is a slow breeding species.

"Rainfall levels this year have produced favourable conditions for the release of the tortoises at both reserves."

DEC has modified the habitat at the Moore River site to improve conditions for the tortoise and provide resilience to drier climatic conditions.

"We'll continue to monitor the tortoises and habitat to determine if the site is suitable to sustain a wild population," Gerald said.

DEC coordinates the recovery program in partnership with Perth Zoo, Natural Heritage Trust, Swan Catchment Council, World Wide Fund for Nature and Friends of the Western Swamp Tortoise.

"Perth Zoo has run a successful breeding program



DEC Nature Conservation Officer Sean Walsh releasing two western swamp tortoises. Photo - Emma de Burgh

since 1988 to produce more than 430 captive bred tortoises for release into the wild," Gerald said.

"We're all really looking forward to seeing these tortoises prosper in their new environment."

Robert recalls tortoise rediscovery

FIFTY-FIVE years ago the western swamp tortoise was presumed extinct.

Visiting Perth Zoo to see the creature he helped remove from the depressing list of vertebrate extinctions, artist Robert Boyd recalls the winter day in 1953 when, as a 15-year-old schoolboy, he saw his first 'extinct' tortoise.

"I've always been very involved with natural history and wildlife and my cousin would often find an odd thing that would interest me. On this occasion, he found the tortoise travelling north across Warbrook Road at Bullsbrook," he said.

The tortoise was about 15 centimetres long, with a smooth, well-worn carapace. Even to Robert's relatively untrained eye, it looked old. He had no idea at that stage what it was.

"I took it to show-and-tell at the WA Naturalists' Club, of which I was a member, and no-one there knew what it was either. It didn't raise any eyebrows, actually. There were a number of naturalists there but they really brushed it off as an introduced species, probably from another state," Robert said.

Not long after, Robert's cousin picked up another slightly smaller specimen in roughly the same place. It seems likely that the tortoises were moving between wetlands in search of food.

Robert took the tortoises along to the next naturalists' meeting, at a wildlife show that used to run at Perth Town Hall.

"That started a kind of investigative rumpus among all the naturalists that were there," Robert said.

"They thought it was a new species, even to the point that they came up with a name for it. We thought it should have been *Emydura boydii* or *gatesii*. But it didn't get a name because, in fact, it had already been identified and documented in Vienna."

J.A. Ludwig Preiss sent the first specimen of a western swamp tortoise to the Vienna Museum of Natural History in 1839. It was 1901 before it was scientifically described and named *Pseudemydura umbrina* by Siebenrock.

Since its rediscovery the tortoise has come close to disappearing again but now, through the Western Swamp Tortoise Recovery Program led by DEC, chances of their recovery are improving.

Central to this is a breed-for-release program being run at Perth Zoo, as well as the support of the Friends of the Western Swamp Tortoise group, which carries out a range of on-ground and educational functions.

Robert was impressed by the work done to help the species recover.

"I think it's wonderful - the facility at the zoo is amazing and so is the incredible amount of research that's been done into the species to support the release and monitoring activities," he said.

EcoEducation takes teachers to Ningaloo

By Joanna Moore

THIRTEEN high school biology teachers explored the magnificent outdoor classroom of Ningaloo through DEC's EcoEducation program.

The teachers took part in a professional development opportunity with the theme 'Be a nature conservation officer for a (long) weekend' and had the opportunity to meet DEC scientists and staff working in the area.

From their Exmouth base, the educators visited sites in Ningaloo Marine Park and Cape Range National Park such as Charles Knife Canyon, Yardie Creek, Mangrove Bay Sanctuary Zone, Turquoise Bay, Milyering Visitor Centre, Tantabiddi Sanctuary Zone and Jurabi Turtle Centre to find out about the diverse reef environment and terrestrial threatened species.

EcoEducation Senior Project Officer Elaine Horne said one of the highlights of the trip was the black-footed rock wallaby presentation given by the President of the Cape Conservation Group, Kate Macgregor.

Another popular activity which involved life-sized toy turtles on the beach was topped off by the arrival of two real green turtles in the water nearby. The teachers were also able to go out

in a glass-bottomed boat and enjoy the opportunity to snorkel.

DEC Whaleshark Conservation Officer Emily Wilson inspired some of the group to use data from research at Ningaloo to produce an education resource for their classes.

Elaine thanked Acting District Manager Roland Mau, Nature Conservation Officer Brooke Halkyard and other staff at DEC's Exmouth District Office for their help organising the visit. Exmouth teacher and community environment group representative Cathy Levett also provided her time and local knowledge.

"Nature Conservation Officer Tegan Gourlay did a wonderful job of hosting the group," Elaine said.

"She organised hands-on activities and the sharing of scientific expertise to create a wonderful learning experience.

"The trip not only enabled the teachers to translate what they experienced into activities for their classrooms but provided the opportunity to find out where they can take students on excursions."



The teachers in Exmouth in front of a model whaleshark with DEC Nature Conservation Officer Tegan Gourlay (front row, second from right) and WA's then Chief Scientist Professor Lyn Beazley (front row, far right). Photo - Elaine Horne

DECstars join crowds at City to Surf

ABOUT 85 DEC staff and friends took part in the City to Surf event this year, joining a record-breaking number of participants on Sunday 30 August.

The department's team was called 'DECstars' and they came from DEC centres including Kensington, Wanneroo, the Atrium, Hyatt Business Centre, Mundaring, Fremantle, Dwellingup and Bunbury.

This year, 36,825 people took part in the annual fun run event which raises research money for the Activ Foundation. They completed either a half marathon, a 12-kilometre run or walk from the city, an 11-kilometre wheelchair race, or a four-kilometre walk or run from Perry Lakes to the finish line at City Beach Oval.

The results of the race were published in *The West Australian* on Thursday 4 September and are available online at the City to Surf website.

The Risk Management Section promoted the event in DEC as part of the department's health and fitness program. Corporate Health Officer Robyn Polini led the DECstars team.