



DEC staff and whales to hit TV screens

A NEW documentary showcasing the work of DEC's wildlife officers involved in whale disentanglements and rescue missions will hit TV screens next week.

The documentary, *Whale Patrol*, will screen on ABC1 at 8.30pm on Thursday 15 October.

The documentary was the brainchild of DEC Marine Wildlife Officer Doug Coughran and filmmaker Leighton De Barros.

Two-and-a-half years in the making, the film follows the life of these wildlife officers during one whale migration season.

"This is whale rescue as it really is. It was a great opportunity to tell our story from our perspective," Doug said.

The whales get tangled and trapped in abandoned fishing gear, not only from lobster fishing but forgotten or 'ghost' nets, discarded rope, floats and general marine debris.

These colossal mammals pose life-threatening risks to the rescue team who also need to consider sharks,

which are attracted to the debilitated whales, large swells and diminishing sunlight.

Doug said the trick to successful disentanglements was being able to read the mammals' signs.

"If a whale doesn't want to let you near them, then you don't get near them, it's all about managing the risk.

We are working in the 'kill zone' where, if the whale hits you, you're dead," he said.

The film takes viewers through multiple whale

rescue missions from receiving a call to attending the scene and deciding what course of action would be best, including the possibility of euthanasia.

"Euthanasia is never easy. It is almost unbearable emotionally and it's hard not to lose sleep over those decisions," Doug said.

"It's very hard work – it's my passion at work but it is also my passion in my personal life. We learn from each rescue and it is very satisfying."

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After being alerted to a stranded whale calf, Doug Coughran (pictured above) travelled to Rottnest Island last week with a team of DEC wildlife officers, DEC media officer Tania Durlik and Perth Zoo veterinarian Simone Vitali in Nature Protection Branch's new boat Pseudorca III. An assessment of the three-metre pygmy right whale found it was in poor condition and its health was deteriorating. At only weeks old, the whale was distressed and had suffered deep cuts to its body after being dragged across the reef. Given the whale's poor condition and the unlikelihood it would survive without its mother, a decision was made to euthanase the animal and end its suffering.

Miriuwung Gajerrong Rangers do their bit for protecting Australia

A TEAM of DEC Miriuwung Gajerrong (MG) Rangers has helped the Australian Quarantine Inspection Service (AQIS) monitor for avian influenza in the Ord region near Kununurra.

MG Operations Officer Andy Reid said it was the second year the rangers had been involved in assisting AQIS as part of the annual bird surveys.

"Working on a project like this with AQIS is really important to the community and enables us to play our part in the bio-security of northern Australia," he said.

As part of the project, more than 300 magpie geese and whistler ducks were captured using cannon nets. The birds were released after blood samples were taken by AQIS vets and analysed for avian influenza.

AQIS Vet John Curran said that MG Rangers were one of most professional ranger groups he had worked with.

"The rangers have got the catching and processing of the birds down to a fine art. We are talking very early starts and long days but the boys just take it in their stride."

Andy said that the annual project had provided the rangers with a number of skills and demonstrated what the group could achieve as a team.

"Working at this time of year and the location we were working in threw up a whole series of challenges, from



Acting MG Operations Officer Andy Reid Assisting AQIS Vet Beth Cookson.

working in the heat of the day to keeping one eye on the crocodiles that were eyeing off the geese," he said.

"You never know what you could be doing from one week to the next when you are an MG Ranger. Last week we were working on protecting our community from avian influenza, this week we are helping build a new bird hide out at Parry Lagoons Nature Reserve. Each day brings new challenges."

The MG Rangers will be responsible for the day-to-day running of the six new conservation reserves that are to be jointly managed by DEC and the Miriuwung Gajerrong Corporation.

Community partnership saves rare flora

A DEC partnership with the Blackwood Basin Group is providing recommendations for the future recovery of five rare flora species in the south-west.

The three-month project, funded by the South West Catchments Council, involved monitoring, promoting and protecting five species – Wagin banksia (*Banksia oligantha*), *Banksia murcronulata* supsp. *retrorsa*, Narrogin bell (*Darwinia carnea*), *Hemigenia ramosissima* and *Adenanthos velutinus*.

Great Southern District Conservation Officer (Flora) Marie Edgley said the project carried on from work done by DEC and the community during the past few years. This work included population monitoring and weed and rabbit control, with plans for seed collection, habitat rehabilitation and community awareness activities.

"Some of these species are hanging on by the barest of margins so it is important that this work continues into the future," Marie said.

The Blackwood Basin is the largest catchment area in the State's south-west

and covers about 22,000 square kilometres.

Marie said the Blackwood Basin Group was made up of many smaller Natural Resource Management groups in the area, including Wagin/Woodanilling Landcare.

"One of the great benefits of this project is that we now have much better liaison and contacts with these community groups," she said.

Marie said the Wagin/Woodanilling Landcare group had been particularly keen on taking on the Wagin banksia as a local town icon in order to promote the plight of the species.

"Promoting the plight of threatened flora through community awareness tools such as declared rare flora posters and continued liaison with community

groups will be a central part of protecting these species," Marie said.

"It is most important that the local community is aware of how important the species are and what they can do to help protect them for future generations."

Blackwood Basin Group Manager Greg Hales said it had been a great experience working with DEC on this project.

"We hope that the work we are undertaking will be of benefit to these species," he said.

"However, I believe the key to their long-term recovery will be active and ongoing partnerships between DEC, community and local landcare groups to raise awareness and undertake on-ground remediation activities."

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A tourism ambassador in our midst

INDIGENOUS Tourism Trainee James Spurgeon, a first-year tour guide at Yanchep National Park, has been named the Young Tourism Ambassador in recognition of his commitment to training and the tourism industry.

James was nominated for the award by Tourism WA and FutureNow and has been supported by Tourism WA's Aboriginal Employment Program.

A year after leaving school James was unsure of what he wanted to do for a career. After seeing the success of his sister, who completed a traineeship in tourism, James applied to become a trainee tour guide at Yanchep National Park.

"I get to work out in the open with animals and experience interesting things that not many

people have the opportunity to experience on a day-to-day basis," James said.

Since completing his traineeship, James has obtained full-time employment at Yanchep National Park.

James was accompanied by his parents and Yanchep National Park Manager Alison Pritchard to the launch of the 2009 ambassadors where the Minister for Training, the Hon Peter Collier MLC, presented him with a certificate.

Alison was also recognised by the Department of Education and Training with a certificate of appreciation for DEC's contribution to the program and support of WA's workforce.

James is one of 48 ambassadors chosen to represent different vocations in Western Australia.



James Spurgeon in a Yanchep National Park cave.

Eradicating rodents on WA islands

DEC has received \$890,000 in Federal Government funding to eradicate rodents on six islands off the coast of WA.

Exotic rodents are known to have inhabited at least 69 islands off the State's coast and, since the 1980s, successful eradication programs have been implemented on more than half of these.

The new funding will target introduced rodents such as house mice, black rats and Polynesian rats on Long, Sunday, Three Bays, Faure, Adele and Direction islands off the Shark Bay, Pilbara and Kimberley coasts.

A search will also be made of Dirk Hartog Island to establish the distribution of house mice and to determine if black rats occur there.

DEC Senior Principal Research Scientist Keith Morris said introduced rodents threatened biodiversity values on the islands, some of which were located in the Shark Bay World Heritage Area.

"The six islands being targeted in this program are of significant conservation value, with threatened mammals, nesting seabirds and nesting turtles needing protection from the damage done by invasive rodents," he said.

"The introduction of exotic rodents to islands around the world has led to extinctions or declines of many native plant and animal species, as well as adverse changes to island ecosystems, while rodents can also serve to support populations of other pest species such as feral cats.

"The effective, humane eradication of these rodents through a baiting program will help conserve several threatened species and ensure that healthy island ecosystems are restored."

One of the biggest challenges of the project will be the eradication of house mice on Faure Island, near Monkey Mia, where the Australian Wildlife Conservancy has been successfully establishing populations of threatened mammals.

Keith said the eradication program would be supported by ongoing monitoring, an education program and quarantine protocols to prevent the re-invasion of exotic rodents.

"The islands will be monitored through

the use of traps, remote cameras, hair tubes and tracks in the sand to determine the success of the baiting program," he said.

"For islands that are regularly visited, such as Direction Island in the Cocos-Keeling group, a series of surveillance barriers will be established that will collectively reduce the chance of re-introduction of exotic rodents to very low levels."

Indigenous communities will be consulted before eradication is undertaken, and will be involved in monitoring and quarantine programs.

The four-year project is being funded by the Federal Government's Caring For Our Country program.

DEC spreads conservation message at Royal Show

DEC helped spread the conservation message at the Perth Royal Show.

It featured a display in the Landcare *Water is Life* exhibition showcasing the work of the department, with a particular emphasis on Parks and Visitor Services and the Bush Rangers WA program.

DEC Director General Keiran McNamara opened the exhibition, which also included stands from groups such as the Department of Agriculture and Food, Forest Products Commission Woodshed, WA Birds OF Prey Centre and River Guardians.

DEC Public Affairs Officer John Hunter, who organised DEC's display, said the Royal Show provided a great opportunity for the department to showcase its work to the public.

"It provides the chance for us to spread the word about the importance of biodiversity conservation

and let people know a little bit about the work we are doing," John said.

In addition to the corporate display of DEC banners, campground hosts were on hand to help visitors and talk about national parks, and Bush Ranger cadets provided information about the Bush Ranger WA program while learning about the various sustainability programs in the exhibit.

The exhibit also formed part of a 'yellow brick road', which encouraged school-aged children to journey around the show grounds answering educational questions about different displays and pavilions.

This year's display was held in a new permanent pavilion for the second year running.

The 'Conservation and Landcare Pavilion' features a flowing waterway and stream and is positioned north-west of ringside on the second tier near the Heritage Machinery exhibit.



Show-goers check out the DEC exhibit at the Perth Royal Show.

Congratulations to the 2009 Environment Award Finalists

DEC has announced the finalists for the 2009 Environment Awards.

Judging of the 104 entries across 11 categories recently was completed by category judging panels. The panels' recommendations were endorsed by an Executive Judging Panel, which also had the task of choosing the 2009 Environment Awards overall winner.

The winners will be announced at an Awards Presentation Dinner at the Hyatt Regency Hotel on Friday 27 November 2009.

The finalists for the 2009 Environment Award categories are:

Corporate Business Leading by Example

Wesfarmers Premier Coal (The Ngalang Boodja Mine Lake Aquaculture Project), St John of God Health Care, CSBP Limited (Expansion of CSBP Limited's nutrient-stripping

wetland at its Kwinana industrial complex to reduce the level of nitrogen in process effluent stream and minimise environmental impact on the local marine environment).

Government Leading By Example

City of Stirling (Smart Parks), City of Fremantle (Carbon Neutral Project), LandCorp (Regional Sustainable Infrastructure Decision Mode), Town of Cambridge (Wembley Golf Complex ISO 14001 EMS Implementation), Synergy's Carbon Permit Supply Agreement with the Forest Products Commission.

Small Business Leading by Example

Seadragonz, Jack in the Box, Tranen Revegetation Systems, Integral Development.

Biodiversity Conservation

Australian Wildlife Conservancy (Woylie Project), Eddy Wajon, Birds Australia (Carnarby's Black Cockatoo Recovery Project), Mike Whitehead.

Bush, Land and Waterways

Greening Australia/Alcoa of Australia/Harvey River Restoration Taskforce (Nell's Block: restoring a landscape for wildlife on the Swan Coastal Plain Damplands), LandCorp (Januburu Six Seasons Residential Estate, Broome), The Chattering Landcare Centre, Esperance

Regional Forum (working with the community to protect and maintain the Lake Warden Wetland System), Kooro Retreat (Koorarawalyee Water Reserve Restoration).

Coastal, Marine and Estuarine

CVA and Woodside Perth Coastal Conservation Program, Port Bouvard Ltd (Port Bouvard Foreshore Management Program).

Environmental Education and Communication

Perth Region NRM (Improving the Environmental Performance of Small Business), Environment House, Derby District High School (Fishing Line Recovery Bin Project), Yvonne Sitko, Western Australian Chapter of Australian Association for Environmental Education (Education for Sustainability Programs).

Resource and Waste

Care For Hedland Environmental Association (Cash for Trash), CSBP (Expansion of CSBP Limited's nutrient-stripping wetland at its Kwinana industrial complex to reduce the level of nitrogen in process effluent stream and minimise environmental impact on the local marine environment), Riverside Primary School (Stretch Festival Trans-Cube-ation Recycled Art Project), Synergy (Compact Fluorescent Light Globe Recycling Project),

ECU Small and Medium Enterprise Research Centre.

Community Energy Efficiency

Environment House (Our \$WaP Project), Green Light Schools Fundraiser, Serpentine Jarrahdale Shire (Switch your thinking!).

Community Achievement Metropolitan

Kanyana Wildlife Rehabilitation Centre, Nature Reserves Preservation Group, Alliance for a Clean Environment, Jonathon Thwaites, CVA and Woodside Perth Coastal Conservation Program.

Community Achievement Regional

Kalgoorlie-Boulder Urban Landcare Group, Tangaroa Blue Ocean Care Society, Shell EcoVolunteers, SmartBurn.

The 2009 Environment Awards are proudly sponsored by the Waste Authority, Sustainable Energy Development Office, Western Power, Edith Cowan University, Publishers National Environment Bureau, Packaging Stewardship Forum, Royalties for Regions and Whiteman Park.