



DEC staff celebrate World Wetlands Day

STAFF from across DEC attended the sixth Annual WA Wetlands Management Conference, on World Wetlands Day on 2 February.

The international theme for World Wetlands Day 2010 is 'Caring for Wetlands: an answer to climate change'.

Wetlands Section Senior Environmental Officer Melissa Rogers said the DEC-sponsored conference featured keynote speakers from CSIRO, Bangladesh Conservation Committee and universities.

She said a number of DEC staff provided poster presentations at the conference.

"The conference is aimed towards community members, volunteers, students as well as local and State Government environmental officers, and industry representatives," Melissa said.

"The aim of the one-day event is to raise awareness about the importance of wetlands and the vast amount of work that is going on in WA to conserve,



Assistant Conservation Officer – Toolibin Lake Raymond McKnight and Great Southern District Recovery Catchment Officer Natalie Nicholson at the WA Wetlands Management Conference on World Wetlands Day.

manage and restore our precious wetlands.

"It is a wonderful opportunity for wetland practitioners to share information, exchange ideas and network."

Melissa said community attitudes towards conserving wetlands were very important, particularly as some nationally

and regionally important wetlands in Western Australia occur on private property or pastoral lease or lands designated for other purposes. DEC community programs such as the *Healthy Wetland Habitats* work to encourage and assist private landholders to conserve the wetlands on their property.

Eradicat beats ferals

DEC scientists have developed a new bait that has proved successful in reducing feral cat populations.

DEC Senior Research Scientist Dave Algar said the bait, *Eradicat*, was being used at a number of sites in arid and semi-arid regions of Western Australia and was developed as part of the department's *Western Shield* project.

"Feral cats are a significant threat to fauna conservation in Australia as they prey on native fauna and have the potential to spread diseases. They are also a major obstacle to fauna reintroduction programs.

"The development of *Eradicat* will help us effectively control feral cat populations across big areas, opening the door to a number of fauna reintroductions and helping to build resilience in the populations of many native species."

The bait has already been used to eradicate feral cats from several islands, including Hermite Island in the Montebellos and Faure Island in Shark Bay where, following the eradication, a number of native species had been successfully translocated.

"Cat-control programs using ground-based baiting have also been established on the Cocos and Christmas islands and a feral cat eradication campaign is being planned for Dirk Hartog Island," he said.

It is also being used at a number of mainland sites, including former pastoral lease Lorna Glen.

A recent collaborative project between DEC, Australian Wildlife Conservancy and the Invasive Animals Co-operative Research Centre in the southern rangelands has gone a long way to demonstrating that the sustained control of foxes and wild dogs can also be achieved using this bait.

"*Eradicat* is most effective in late autumn–winter, a time cats are hungry because of a shortage of live prey," he said.

"Under the right conditions, we have reduced feral cat densities by more than 80 per cent."

The bait, which is injected with a toxin, resembles a small sausage and contains kangaroo meat mince, chicken fat and flavour enhancers to attract feral cats.



Multi-agency response to chemical clean up

DEC Pollution Response Unit (PRU) staff met with staff from the Fire and Emergency Service Authority (FESA) and the Department of Mines and Petroleum in January to discuss strategic issues arising from a multi-agency chemical clean up on the Cocos (Keeling) Islands last year.

The chemical clean up was required at a hazardous material (HAZMAT) incident caused by some old chemicals stored in a shed on a former farm.

The issue came to the attention of the local shire when construction workers on the nearby new wharf on Cocos West Island started to be affected by an offensive chemical odour emanating from the shed.

The Cocos (Keeling) Shire contacted an Indian Ocean Territories (IOT) environmental officer Leah Straford who contacted DEC's PRU for rapid response.

DEC Environmental Hazards Manager Ken Raine said it took a lot of work behind the scenes to set up the inter-agency state, local and federal arrangements to respond effectively to the incident, which was holding up a major federal project.

"DEC coordinated a multi-agency plan that addressed the needs of the island while respecting the control of the Federal Government," Ken said.

"As a result, advice was given to the local volunteer fire brigade to isolate the spillages and evacuate the area."

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PRU officer Grant Hymus was deployed with FESA HAZMAT officer Stuart Palmer to the Cocos (Keeling) Islands and, after conducting a job safety assessment, and donning chemical resistant boots, gloves and self-contained breathing apparatus, entered the farm shed.

With the help of local FESA volunteers, they undertook air quality monitoring and an evaluation of the various containers and receptacles found in the shed, many of which were rusted, disintegrating or leaking. They included pesticides, herbicides, fertilizers and sundry hazardous chemicals.

Their plan for containment was soon carried out, along with the safe cleaning and neutralisation of the spilled chemicals in the area and disposal of the various dangerous chemicals which had been found.

The rapid response enabled the stalled wharf project to recommence and get back on track.

An audit was also planned to prevent any further possible contamination events occurring on the island, which was discussed at the recent meeting.



PRU officer Grant Hymus and FESA HAZMAT officer Stuart Palmer in their chemical-resistant boots, gloves and self-contained breathing apparatus investigate the cause of the offensive chemical odour.



Caris Rego with Licensing Unit Leader Kate Reading.

Dux award for Caris

DEC school-based trainee Caris Rego has been awarded the dux prize of the Vocational Educational Training (VET) program.

During the past almost two years, Caris has become an integral part of the department's Parks and Visitor Services Marketing Unit.

During this time she has balanced working two days a week with DEC as a school-based trainee, finishing years 11 and 12 of high school and the additional study and assessments to complete a Certificate II in Business. She graduated high school with an astounding seven As and one B.

In recognition of Caris's dedication, motivation and determination, she was awarded both the dux of the VET Program and Most Outstanding Achievement Award.

With the help of DEC Recruitment Coordinator Sue Oakman and DEC Manager Organisational Learning and Development Meredith Johnson, DEC has been able to retain Caris and further her development by offering her a full-time Certificate III in Business traineeship.

DEC Park Pass Coordinator Stefanie McBurney, who acted as Caris's supervisor, said Caris had actively listened, learnt and demonstrated flexibility and initiative in her work.

"Caris works with speed, loyalty and dedication to extremely high standards, well above her years and experience," she said.

DEC's Marketing Unit is expecting a new school-based trainee to start in February.



Cane toads discovered in the Kimberley

TWO adult cane toads have been discovered by a local resident at Mud Springs Aboriginal community, about 12 kilometres east of Kununurra in the Kimberley.

DEC State Cane Toad Initiative Program Coordinator Corrin Everitt said the cane toads were found near a barramundi aquaculture pond.

"We searched the area extensively with assistance from the local community for signs of breeding, but no other toads were located," she said.

"We believe these two cane toads arrived in the area under their own steam and were not brought here inadvertently on vehicles or freight.

"Unfortunately this shows that despite our best efforts, with the wet season under way and more heavy rainfall expected, they are likely to continue their march towards Kununurra."

Corrin said two days before the invasive pests were found at Mud Springs, a dead cane toad was sighted adjacent to Victoria Highway nine kilometres east of Kununurra.

"We have also notified residents at Crossing Falls community, near Mud Springs, about the latest cane toad

sightings to ensure they remain vigilant," she said.

"We have provided local residents with information to help them distinguish cane toads from local native frogs and recommendations for keeping the invasive species out of their backyards."

DEC will continue to work with community groups and local residents to slow the advance of cane toads towards Lake Kununurra and to minimise the impact on landowners.

Cane toad technical officers will also continue to carry out surveillance work to monitor and map cane toad populations at the frontline.

In December last year, the State Government allocated \$340,500 to the Kimberley Toad Busters as part of a \$1.2 million election promise to support the fight against cane toads.

If you find a cane toad call the DEC Regional Cane Toad Team on 9168 4200 or report it to the cane toad hotline 1800 084 881 (freecall).

For more information about cane toads visit www.dec.wa.gov.au/canetoads.



DEC state Cane Toad Initiative Program Coordinator Corrin Everitt.

Extreme weather likely cause of bird deaths

HEAT stress remains the most likely cause of death for more than 200 native birds in Hopetoun and Munglinup on the State's south coast.

The birds perished during extreme weather conditions on Wednesday 6 January, when temperatures reached 47°C in the Hopetoun area with strong, hot northerly winds, while temperatures of 50°C to 53°C were reported by landowners in Munglinup.

At least 115 dead Carnaby's black cockatoos were found at the Hopetoun golf course, and a further 37 Carnaby's cockatoos, six regent parrots, two galahs, three mudlarks, three ravens, four yellow throated miners and one kestrel were found to have died on the same day at Munglinup about 75 kilometres east of Hopetoun.

DEC Senior Wildlife Officer Kevin Morrison said laboratory

tests had not revealed any obvious cause of death.

"The Department of Agriculture and Food's Animal Health Laboratories conducted examinations and tested samples for infection and a range of diseases such as avian influenza. These results were negative," he said.

"The examinations of tissues found no significant changes, although this process was hampered by the degree of decomposition that had already occurred due to the extreme weather conditions.

"Tests conducted by the Chemistry Centre on tissue samples from the dead birds have ruled out pesticides and chemicals such as organophosphates, organochlorines and heavy metals as possible causes of death.

"The process of ruling out possible causes enables us to narrow down what may have killed the birds, as there

is no definitive test that can be done to establish whether heat stress was the actual cause. Therefore the cause of the bird deaths remains inconclusive."

Kevin said this was not the first time an event such as this had occurred.

"A similar bird death incident occurred in February 2007 between Yealering and Cunderdin when more than 200 ringneck parrots are believed to have died of heat stress caused by high temperatures (45°C) and strong winds," he said.

Carnaby's black cockatoos are an endangered species with up to 40,000 birds remaining in the wild in WA. Numbers have declined dramatically over recent decades due to habitat decline, illegal shooting and wildlife trafficking.

Australia kept beautiful at Australia Day Skyworks



Members of Scouts WA prepare to distribute more than 30,000 litter and recycling bags to patrons at the 2010 Skyworks.

KEEP Australia Beautiful WA joined forces with Scouts WA to distribute free litter bags at the Australia Day Skyworks.

Keep Australia Beautiful Skyworks Coordinator Adam Woodhead said littering at the Perth and South Perth foreshore during the Australia Day Skyworks was significantly less than in previous years thanks to a total ban on alcohol consumption.

"In previous years the foreshore has been trashed with litter, a large portion of which was glass beer bottles and cans and other alcoholic beverage packaging," he said.

"It was not only terrible to see but it was dangerous and the clean-up effort was extensive.

"It was great to see this year a more relaxed environment and patrons really making the effort to protect the environment and the river and making sure their litter goes in the bin."

Adam said Keep Australia Beautiful staff and Scouts WA handed out litter and recycling bags to encourage families and groups to dispose of their litter responsibly.

He added that since the introduction of recycling at the Skyworks event in 2008, tonnes of recyclables have been collected and saved from landfill.

"More and more event organisers are seeing the value of providing recycling facilities, which is wonderful to see and has significant litter reduction and environment benefits."

Former DEC staffer recognised with Australia Day honour

THE work of one of the department's best-known alumni was honoured this Australia Day with a Public Service Medal.

Wayne Schmidt began working with the then Forests Department in 1971 and completed his career with DEC in 2008.

A former DEC employee, and long-time colleague of Wayne's, Richard Hammond, said Wayne had made an outstanding contribution to managing the overall coordination of the department's Parks and Visitor Services program.

"In his role as Landscape Architect and Recreation Planner, Wayne helped to lay the foundations for the provision of new recreation areas and visitor facilities in State forest in the late 1970s and early 1980s and subsequently across WA's vast network of parks and reserves when CALM was formed," he said.

"At the time this was innovative and controversial but is now something we all take for granted.

"Wayne gave more than his time. He gave of himself, his very essence, his spirit, to all those who needed him, anytime, every time."

Recreation and Landscape Unit Coordinator Tracy Churchill said while Wayne's career achievements were significant, his presence as an outstanding leader, an innovator, an educator, a role model, colleague and mentor to many earned him a significant amount of respect.

"A self-effacing individual, Wayne has never sought recognition for himself, preferring to honour the achievements of others he had nurtured," she said.

"Some achievements are part of 'expected duties' as a public servant but Wayne's achievement far exceed what

could be expected of any public officer."

Wayne said he was humbled by his nomination and admitted he was stunned when he received the award.

"While I appreciate that the Australia Day Honours System is intended to acknowledge the work and contributions of individuals, this award is one that most definitely deserves to be shared by the whole department," he said.

"For it recognises and celebrates the collective efforts and achievements of a great many present and former operations, specialist and corporate colleagues who have been involved with the planning and management of WA's parks and reserves for public use and enjoyment over the past three to four decades.

"I consider myself extremely fortunate to have been employed in positions that have enabled me to explore and work in some

of the most beautiful and biologically diverse landscapes on the planet and to get paid for the privilege of doing so.

"However, nothing has been more rewarding or memorable profession wise than spending the majority of my career working alongside such a talented, affable and result-oriented group of colleagues that share a 'can do' attitude."

Wayne's integrity, knowledge and professional application and his contribution to the department has been recognised through the establishment of the Wayne Schmidt Award. This award, available to staff in the department's Parks and Conservation Service, comprises the 'Wayne Schmidt Prize', a 12-month placement of a painting in the recipient's work centre, and \$3,000 to go towards the pursuit of individual or collective achievement.

