



World Wetlands Day conference

ON Wednesday 2 February, staff from across the department attended the seventh annual WA Wetlands Management Conference held at the Cockburn Wetlands Education Centre in Bibra Lake.

World Wetlands Day marked the 30th anniversary of the signing of the intergovernmental treaty known as the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands of International Importance.

Wetlands Section Senior Environmental Officer and steering committee member Melissa Rogers chaired the morning session of the event.

"The conference was aimed at everyone from community members, volunteers and students to local and state government environmental officers and industry representatives," Melissa said.

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

The international theme for World Wetlands Day 2011 was *Forests for water and wetlands*, in support of the United Nations declaration of 2011 as the International Year of Forests.

The conference also featured keynote

speakers from Department of Water, Edith Cowan University, Murdoch University and The University of Western Australia.

"The keynote sessions were followed by poster presentations and workshops," Melissa said.

"Presentations from DEC staff included the ecophysiology and hydrology of Toolibin Lake, the *Lake Mealup adaptive management plan*, wetland mapping in the Moora District, the *Healthy Wetland Habitats* program, Pagnoni swamp and the Lake Muir–Unicup catchment.

"It was a wonderful opportunity for wetland practitioners to share information, exchange ideas and network and as always, was a fantastic day.

"Community attitudes towards conserving wetlands are very important, particularly as some nationally and regionally important wetlands in WA occur on private property, pastoral lease or lands designated for other purposes."

DEC community programs such as *Healthy Wetland Habitats* work to support and assist private landholders to conserve the wetlands on their property.

For more information on DEC's role in wetland management and protection please visit www.dec.wa.gov.au/wetlands or contact Melissa Rogers on 9219 8710.



Wetland Section staff member Anne Shanahan with her poster on wetland mapping in the Moora District.



Cane toad's free ride to Collie halted

DEC officers are currently investigating how an individual cane toad made its way to the Collie area.

DEC Wildlife Officer Allan Madgwick said after being discovered by a contract worker the cane toad was then transported to the WA Department of Agriculture and Food in Bunbury where the species was confirmed.

"This is the first time that a hitchhiker cane toad has been found near Collie," he said.

"We are conducting an extensive search of the area to locate any other possible cane toads. We have also set up cane toad traps on the site and these will be checked daily over the next few weeks.

"It is possible that the cane toad may have been inadvertently transported here by a vehicle that has passed through a toad infested area either interstate or in northern WA.

"Cane toads are very good at hiding in small spaces so it's important for people to remain vigilant and do thorough checks of their vehicles, caravans and camping equipment if they are heading over from areas where cane toads are known to live.

"We would also advise people to take care when travelling or receiving commercial freight from infested areas."

The department applauded the vigilance of the contractor who alerted authorities to the find but encouraged people not to kill suspected cane toads until they had been positively identified, in case the animal turned out to be a harmless native frog.

Allan said the discovery and quick response by authorities to the hitchhiker cane toad reflected the continuing work that was being delivered through the *State Cane Toad Strategy for Western Australia*—not just through the frontline work in the Kimberley but also through educational activities across the state.

Anyone who suspects they may have found a cane toad should isolate the live animal and report the sighting to the cane toad hotline on 1800 084 881 (free call).

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

Nearer to Nature school holiday activities delight

A sensational summer of fun-filled, hands-on activities was enjoyed by all who attended the Nearer to Nature school holiday program.

A diverse program was on offer with activities running from forest, riverine and marine locations.

Nearer to Nature Program Coordinator Jill Francis said the program kicked off in Marmion Marine Park with one of the most popular summer programs, *Eco pirates*.

"Captain Sam Sharksword and his trusty sidekick Swashbuckling Suzie led the children on an adventure searching for lost 'eco' treasures of the sea," Jill said.

"After unearthing the buried treasure map, the children followed the captain on a trail where they discovered the importance of looking after the marine environment. The session finished with a close-up encounter with some of the captain's trusty sea friends, Smiling Sea Star Jack and Nervous Nudibranch Nellie, to name a few."

Faerie Cara also took on a marine theme as she guided the children through the enchanted marine world.

"During *Sea creatures great and small* the children discovered just how big and small our largest and tiniest creatures on Earth really are and how they, and every species in between, are all important," Jill said.

"Moving inland, Matilda Bay came alive to the sounds of *Wildlife ark* and our magnificent *Birds of prey* activity. And at Canning River Eco Education Centre, a Nearer to Nature army of *BrilliANTS* carefully worked together as a team to construct their colony."

Jill said a joint effort between the

Nearer to Nature team and the Men's Shed in Mundaring resulted in some great looking nest boxes for the *Home amongst the gum trees* activity.

"The Men's Shed had the initial project of cutting, drilling and putting into kit form 32 nest boxes—no small feat! The kit boxes were then re-assembled by the children during the activity and taken home," she said.

"The seasonal camp-out at the Perth Hills Centre took on an extraterrestrial theme and resulted in full moon mayhem when the children took part in team challenges to discover

interesting facts about our closest celestial neighbour and its relationship to life on Earth."

The summer program was finished off in style with the adults-only annual event, *Darlings of the range*. Beelu National Park was the romantic venue for this Valentine's special, where couples discovered the beauty of our forest areas, met native wildlife and enjoyed an all-Aussie movie at the Kookaburra Cinema. It was the perfect way to celebrate Valentine's Day for 2011, the United Nation's International Year of Forests.



Faerie Cara and enthusiastic participants of *Sea creatures great and small*.



Summer fun in the Walpole Wilderness

SCHOOL holiday activities were also a great success in the Walpole Wilderness this summer, with both visitors and locals exploring the fascinating environment and ecosystems of the area through a range of activities.

Valley of the Giants Manager Julie Ross said the program, which ran from 29 December to 21 January, had a particular emphasis on exploring Walpole and Nornalup Inlets Marine Park.

"Adults could explore the marine park while children could learn about the environment through the *Estuarine investigation*, *Fish for the Future* and

Kids on the beach activities," she said.

"With 15 years experience in running the summer programs, we have a good idea of what keeps parents happy and children occupied while enjoying the holidays.

"The school holiday activity program also provides the department with a valuable opportunity to educate families about the importance of protecting our natural environment as well as the vital role we play in managing our parks and reserves for future generations.

"If we can educate our young people about becoming responsible guardians for our natural environment through

our activities, we will have achieved much!"

Julie said the team was looking forward to coordinating the Easter holiday program and welcoming more families taking part in the activities.

Acting Interpretation Officer Claudia Simpson said the activities provided a lasting and rewarding experience for kids of all ages.

"The program included old favourites such as *Forest by night*, which featured a moonlit tree top walk, as well as *Kids twilight antics*, where kids can visit the tingle forest at dusk, play games and learn about the unique nocturnal animals found here."



Young participants enjoy the Estuarine investigation and Kids on the beach activities held during summer in the Walpole Wilderness.



Taking part in the Little critters activity.

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Call to apply for Environmental Community Grants 2011

ENVIRONMENT Minister Bill Marmion has called for applications for the third funding round of the state government's four-year \$6 million Environmental Community Grants Program.

"Local community groups do extremely valuable environmental work and the Liberal-National Government is supporting their efforts through this program," Mr Marmion said.

"For the past two years, the government has provided more than \$3 million in grants for a wide range of projects and activities

and \$1.53 million is available again this year. "Many projects that would not otherwise have been undertaken have been funded through this program and these are providing ongoing conservation benefits to the community.

"There are eight categories of grants including biodiversity conservation, sustainable catchment management, rescue and rehabilitation of injured or incapacitated fauna, interpretation and sustainable recreation in natural areas, regional parks, *Bush Forever* sites, support for major conservation/environmental organisations,

and protection of high-value areas by landholders on private land."

The state government will also support the many dedicated wildlife rehabilitators who provide a vital service to the community, with grants of \$500 available for individuals and up to \$5,000 for incorporated groups.

"Funding will be available for projects which rehabilitate, conserve, enhance or restore natural areas or values, as well as for activities that raise public awareness for nature conservation at a local level," Mr Marmion said.

"Priority will be given to projects sponsored by community and not-for-profit organisations and local governments will also be eligible to apply for funding under the program."

Preference will be given to projects which establish new, or strengthen existing, partnerships with local governments, state government agencies, community groups and organisations.

Application forms can be downloaded from www.dec.wa.gov.au, or obtained by phoning 9442 0300. Applications close 7 April 2011.

DEC monitors Ningaloo sea temperatures

CORAL bleaching has recently been discovered by DEC marine rangers at Ningaloo Reef, as a result of higher-than-average water temperatures recorded last October.

DEC Marine Science Program Leader Dr Chris Simpson said the department used satellite technology to assess water temperatures over the past few months as part of DEC's marine monitoring program for Ningaloo Marine Park.

"Temperatures have been about three degrees Celsius above long-term monthly averages since October, but in the past two weeks, temperatures have been recorded above 29 degrees Celsius—the trigger level for bleaching to occur in the most susceptible coral species," he said.

"By continually monitoring the reef, we can look at changes over time and determine the significance of temperature-induced bleaching events."

Chris said most corals lived in a symbiotic relationship with single-celled algae, which live within the coral tissue, providing an array of colours to the coral form.

"Coral bleaching is a phenomenon which results in the expulsion of these algae because of stress, leaving the coral's bright white skeleton behind," he said.

"Initial reports related to sea surface temperature

indicate that water temperatures in the Ningaloo area have been elevated to levels that may cause bleaching in some coral species," he said.

"These temperatures are not expected to drop for at least two to three weeks because of the cyclonic activity over the Pilbara and Kimberley, restricting flushing and causing the heating of lagoon waters.

"While this is of concern, there is some good news. Ningaloo has an exceptionally high diversity of corals with more than 300 species and it is this diversity that will provide some resilience to bleaching as different corals have different tolerance levels to bleaching.

"So there will still be many colourful displays of coral all along its 300-kilometre length.

"Coral reefs can recover from bleaching events although it can be a decade or two before full recovery occurs.

"One of the important things for recovery is the presence of source reefs to generate new larvae along with good water quality, suitable substratum for new coral recruits and strong herbivorous fish populations to prevent algae colonising the reef."

DEC is asking for all Ningaloo Marine Park visitors to be on the lookout for coral bleaching. If bleaching is spotted,

people are asked to note the location of the coral and, if possible, take a photograph. People with reports of coral bleaching can contact DEC's Exmouth Marine Park Coordinator Heather Taylor on 9947 8000.



Coral bleaching at Ningaloo Marine Park as observed by marine park rangers.

