



Great Victoria Desert reveals more new species

TWO plant species not previously known to science have been discovered during a flora survey in the Great Victoria Desert.

The two species, *Grevillea ilkurlka* ms and *Dicrastylis* sp. Ilkurlka, were collected as part of a survey in the Ilkurlka area, a relatively unknown region about 150 kilometres west of the WA border. The survey was carried out by DEC and the Spinifex People, in partnership with the WA Museum, Adelaide Zoo and Museum Victoria.

DEC Conservation Officer Jennifer Jackson said despite just 30 collections existing at the WA Herbarium for the Ilkurlka region, the survey established that there were more than 200 species of plants growing in the area.

"This survey demonstrates that desert flora in WA is extremely diverse, yet we know so little about what is actually out there in the western desert, and no doubt there are many more new species yet to be discovered," she said.

"It has helped us establish an inventory of the biological assets of the area, which is still one of

the most pristine and undisturbed regions in Australia."

Grevillea ilkurlka ms is a prostrate shrub with large golden flowers, and was found growing in several populations on sand dunes within a five-kilometre radius, south of the Ilkurlka Roadhouse.

Dicrastylis sp. Ilkurlka was collected east of the roadhouse, with the small shrub consisting of purple flowers. Just one population with several hundred plants was found growing on a sandy flat between dunes.

"*Grevillea ilkurlka* ms is currently being formally described at the WA Herbarium, and *Dicrastylis* sp. Ilkurlka has been listed as priority one flora, which means it is in urgent need of further survey," Jennifer said.

A further two species are currently being studied by botanists at the WA Herbarium and are also expected to be new species.

Two species that were previously only known to exist outside WA were collected, and several species known in WA were collected in the Great Victoria Desert for the first time.



DEC Conservation Officer Jennifer Jackson with the newly discovered *Grevillea ilkurlka* ms.



Reforms deliver improved environmental approval timelines

RECENT data released by DEC reveals a continuing reduction in the time taken to obtain environmental approvals.

Deputy Director General Robert Atkins said over the past two years DEC had successfully reduced the average processing time to assess works approval applications for major resource projects from over 60 working days in September 2008 to 45 days last quarter.

"DEC continues to meet the target timeframe of 60 working days to process works approval applications, with only one application not meeting the timeframe in the past 24 months," Robert said.

"The department also granted a record 36 works approvals last quarter. Since January 2009, DEC has assessed and issued 145

works approvals for mining and industrial projects, with 62 of these being issued in the past six months alone.

"Despite this increase in workload, we continue to maintain an average processing time for works approval applications below the target timeframe, and processing licence applications in an average of 34 working days.

"This is a direct result of our commitment to a risk-based approvals system that meets the community's expectations for environmental protection."

The data are part of new quarterly reporting arrangements that will ensure environmental approval processes are timely, rigorous and transparent. DEC will also

be introducing further reforms, including new, easy-to-understand guidelines for applicants.

Robert said in respect to native vegetation clearing permits, the time taken to make a decision has improved significantly.

"DEC set a new target that 80 percent of applications were to be decided within 60 calendar days of receipt, with a decision on the remaining 20 per cent within 90 calendar days," he said.

"In the past 12 months, the department has met those targets and in the past three months the targets have been exceeded with 86 percent of applications decided within 60 days of receipt and the remaining 14 per cent within 90 days.

"The new targets are being achieved as a result of a risk-based approach to applications based on the sensitivity of the environment, magnitude of the impact and urgency of the clearing.

"DEC is confident that its approach appropriately manages risk consistent with the legislative framework to achieve a timely outcome and this is borne out by performance reporting."

DEC publishes quarterly reports for works approvals and licences, native vegetation clearing permits, classification of contaminated sites, environmental enforcement statistics, and land use planning advice on its website at: www.dec.wa.gov.au/quarterlyreporting

AirWatch launched by weather star

THIRTY-SEVEN primary and secondary school teachers from across metropolitan Perth gathered at Channel Seven Studios last week for the 2011 AirWatch Launch and professional learning sessions.

Hosted by DEC AirWatch staff, the enthusiastic teachers were welcomed and presented with an overview of AirWatch, including information on how the innovative education program can enable students to investigate links between lifestyle and the quality of our air.

In a rare and exciting insight into weather reporting, the teachers were whisked away for a behind the scenes studio tour by Channel Seven weather presenter Natalia Cooper.

AirWatch Program Manager Catherine Doran said the excitement the teachers showed at the opportunity to tour the news studio reinforced the impact that the experience could have on their students.

"It was fantastic to see energy levels of the participants rise after setting foot on the news set," she said.

"Some teachers were brave enough to attempt a mock weather broadcast, complete with teleprompter and green-screen."

Following the tour, the teachers encountered the hands-on approach that AirWatch takes in improving the quality of our environment.

Community Education Coordinator Fiona Marr said the classroom activity sessions were a great way for the teachers to gain an understanding of the AirWatch program.

"Participants tried out one of three activities such as weather forecast observation and practical exercises to create weathervane and wind speed gauges," she said.

Catherine said the teachers were particularly interested in learning more about recent global extreme weather events, climate change and long term climate trends.

"AirWatch staff will also review the WeatherWatch program to see how it can support teachers and students to better understand the causes and consequences of air pollution, so that schools and individuals can adopt lifestyles that keep our air clean," she said.



Natalia Cooper (centre) and teachers at the conclusion of the Channel Seven studio tour.



Star gazers flock to Perth Observatory

DURING the summer of 1987–88 the Perth Observatory in Bickley began its regular programming of evening public viewing sessions.

Administrative Officer Vera Smith said people still can't get enough of Perth Observatory.

"For the past 24 years, people of all ages, nationalities and from all walks of life have been wowed by the wonders of the southern skies as seen through the Perth Observatory telescopes," she said.

"Demand for these public viewings has increased over recent seasons. Our

evening sessions are fully booked well in advance, which is amazing considering that we don't advertise!

"The 2010–11 season is the first to have the Perth Observatory Volunteer Group conducting viewing sessions under the guidance of astronomical officer Greg Lowe.

"Greg will be familiar to many DEC staff and members of the public as the mainstay of the outreach program for 24 years. Since 1987, he has written the Night Sky column in The West Australian. Greg also contributes to the South West Times in Bunbury, and the Swan magazine and Roleystone Courier in the Perth Hills.

"The Observatory is following the lead of places like Perth Zoo, where the docents—a leadership group of volunteers—have been conducting public outreach programs for many years.

"The Perth Observatory Volunteer Group was established in 1996 and still includes some of the volunteers from the first intake.

"Membership has included teachers, engineers, geologists, technicians, computer programmers, university students, miners, helicopter pilots and mechanics—a truly diverse group of people with their own special talents and experiences.

"Similar to other areas of the department, the Perth Observatory relies heavily on volunteer participation and owes much of the success of its public viewing program to the volunteers.

"Each year, one of the highlights of the outreach program is the Perth Observatory summer lecture.

"This year, Radio Astronomer Professor

Miller Goss came to us all the way from Socorro in New Mexico. His presentation was entitled 'Under the Radar—the Life and Times of Ruby Payne-Scott'.

"Australian born Ruby Payne-Scott was the world's first female radio astronomer. She was a pioneer of modern radio astronomy playing a major role in the development of the world's first radio interferometer.

"The summer lecture was a huge success with nearly a hundred people seated on the back lawn of the observatory to enjoy a picnic and Professor Goss' talk.

"2012 will be the 25th anniversary of the Public Viewing Program and certainly, if the public had their way, the Perth Observatory would be running many more night sessions.'

For more information about Perth Observatory contact Vera on 9293 8255 or vera.smith@dec.wa.gov.au.



A 12-hour star trail observation captured above the Perth Observatory.

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Volunteers relocate turtle eggs at Yanchep National Park

YANCHEP National Park operations staff were recently surprised to spot a wayward long-necked turtle (*Chelodina oblonga*) laying her eggs at a well-used recreational area of the park.

The quick-thinking staff members cordoned off the area to protect the clutch and approached park volunteers for assistance to relocate the eggs to safer ground, during what was school holiday peak period for the park.

Volunteer Coordinator Julia Coggins headed up a team of three volunteers to undertake the task of relocating the eggs.

After consulting DEC's Wildlife Branch to talk through the best practice for relocating the clutch, the volunteers identified an area of the park similar to the original laying ground for relocation. The eggs were then safely lifted and placed in the new spot.

Julia said it was not out of the ordinary for park volunteers to find themselves carrying out such an operation without warning.

"Yanchep National Park volunteers are often called upon

to assist with tasks such as rounding up the kangaroos out of the wildflower garden, collecting data on the endangered Carnaby's black cockatoo or capturing injured birds or wildlife," she said.

"During the months prior to finding the clutch there were a number of baby turtles sighted, and in some instances the volunteers assisted the young ones on their journey to Loch McNess.

"Although Loch McNess appears to be a bit dry due to the lowering groundwater table exposing the 'floc', we still see turtles poking their noses through the surface to take a breath.

"We're all looking forward to good winter rains and hopefully a good recharge of Loch McNess that will enable the turtles to be seen swimming around again from the viewing platform.

"We are not expecting any movement on the relocated clutch until the onset of winter. I have been and checked on the relocation spot and all appears to be well and undisturbed."



Roy Jackson, Darren Solomon, Julia Coggins and Joy Jackson carefully uncover the clutch.



Tree Top Walk staff share in some fun with Vince Gareffa in the rain!

Pioneer fun for picnic goers

A PIONEER picnic held at the Tree Top Walk on the weekend was heralded a great success by all those who attended.

The picnic was part of the 2011 Taste Great Southern program—an annual showcase of the region's outstanding wine and foods, with particular emphasis on its people.

Tree Top Walk Business Manager Julie Ross said the evening was an event first for the Tree Top Walk and represented a unique opportunity to showcase foods of the early pioneers.

"Fifty-five people attended the event and were treated to a night of good old fashioned cooking washed down with quality entertainment and many laughs," Julie said.

"Local butcher Vince Gareffa of Mondo Meats is a real character and demonstrated his cooking skills on the barbeque with duck breast, rabbit and kangaroo fillet.

"Highlights of the menu included smoked fish, damper, Lancashire hotpot, potato pie, vegetarian pasties, bread and butter pudding, traditional trifle and home-made lemonade, and ginger beer.

"It must have been good because there was very little left at the end of the night!

"Tony Duckett of Peaceful Bay got the crowd into high spirits at the beginning of the evening with his Australiana-style songs and ballads.

"Bush poets Peter Blyth and Peg Vickers from Albany put on an excellent display reeling off funny poems and they were definitely a crowd pleaser.

"The evening was topped off by Dave Tapley who showed how to make Billy Tea and it was eagerly tried and drunk by many."

Julie would like to thank all the community members who supported this unique event at the Tree Top Walk.

For more information on events at the Tree Top Walk contact Julie Ross on 9840 8200.

