



New technology used to track entangled whale

SATELLITE technology was used for the first time in Australian waters to follow an entangled whale in late May.

DEC's marine mammal rescue team tracked the 11-metre humpback whale, first seen near Rottnest on Tuesday 17 May. It was tracked for more than five days—a total of 130 hours—across a distance of 718 kilometres.

When spotted, the whale had material crossing its back and around both pectoral fins, and several metres of rope trailed behind its tail.

DEC wildlife officers attached a tag to craypot lines trailing from the animal.

DEC Supervising Wildlife Officer Doug Coughran said this was the first time such technology had been used in Australian waters for this purpose. Technical expertise was provided throughout the rescue attempt by Bob Bowman in Maine, USA. Mr Bowman has been a long-time mentor to Doug on entanglement issues.

"Without the satellite technology, we would have relied on guesswork and sightings of the whale, which would have severely reduced our chances of locating the animal and assisting its disentanglement," Doug said.

Initially it was not safe to attempt disentanglement because of an electrical storm and rough conditions. DEC waited for favourable weather and for the satellite indication that the whale was in shallow waters before attempting to approach the animal.

The whale gradually moved north-east towards

the Abrolhos Islands, where DEC mounted a rescue operation from Geraldton, supported by the Department of Fisheries.

Doug said the rescue team were attempting to locate the whale off the coast of Geraldton, when the satellite data began to suggest the whale was no longer attached to the tag.

"The satellite data began to show that the tag was stationary and floating above the surface, and when we located the tag it was attached to about 50 metres of rope and there was no whale in sight," Doug said.

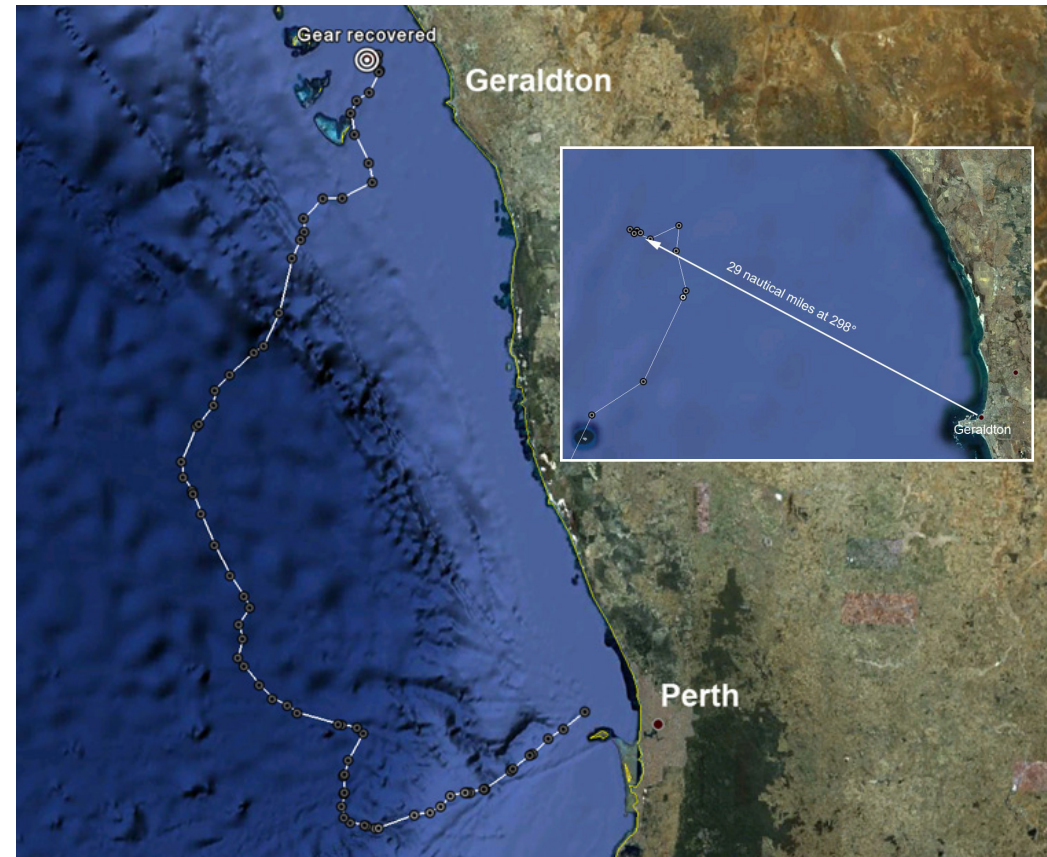
"This is the best possible outcome, because we have not had to be placed in a risky situation or distress the animal.

"It is likely the satellite tag, which weighed about 10 kilograms, caused the rope to pull against the whale and this would have assisted in dislodging the ropes.

"This technology is used in the USA, where the satellite tags have assisted in disentanglement of 30 per cent of satellite tagged whales, so we were hoping this would be the case here.

"This technology has taught us a lot about the behaviour of entangled whales and provided us with the information we needed to plan a strategy with the safest risk management for the team."

People who see an entangled or beached whale should keep a safe distance from the animal and contact DEC's Wildcare Helpline on 9474 9055.



Satellite images of the tagged humpback whale tracked for 387.69 nautical miles (718 kilometres) from Rottnest to Geraldton.



DEC staff abseil down Mt Frankland for rare flora survey

DEC staff members recently abseiled 250 metres down a misty vertical rock face on Mt Frankland to conduct a survey of the rare flowering shrub mountain paper heath (*Sphenotoma drummondii*).

Given that the plants favour sheer granite cliffs and overhangs as habitat, the only way to do a full survey of the Mt Frankland population was to abseil down the face.

DEC Frankland District Flora Officer Janine Liddelow said the plants had been regularly surveyed using binoculars but it had been 14 years since the last full survey.

"It is very difficult to do a full survey but it is important to do one when possible to add to and confirm the accuracy of the observations made from the ground," she said.

"This year we were fortunate to have two DEC employees in the Walpole office who are experienced abseilers and could take on this challenge.

"Frankland District Nature Conservation Coordinator Karlene Bain and conservation

employee Anthony Thompson found the first plant in a shallow rock crevice 70 metres down the cliff face.

"In the next 100 metres they found 14 adult and nine juvenile plants."

Janine said although the plants were restricted in where they were growing, they were healthy and the survey had confirmed that the main area of the population could be seen from the ground with binoculars.

The mountain paper heath on Mt Frankland is one of 20 recorded populations. The majority of the populations are found in Stirling Range and Porongurup national parks.

"The plants are susceptible to dieback (*Phytophthora cinnamomi*) but are protected by their inaccessibility. However, there is a potential that rock climbers or abseilers could disturb their habitat," Janine said.

"There is no threat to the plant from these activities at this stage but DEC will be managing activities near the plants and carrying out regular surveys from the ground."



DEC Nature Conservation Coordinator Karlene Bain on top of Mt Frankland. (insert) Mountain paper heath (*Sphenotoma drummondii*) in a shallow rock crevice.

Nominations open to recognise environmental excellence

THE state government is calling for nominations to recognise the outstanding efforts of Western Australians who care for the environment.

Environment Minister Bill Marmion encouraged corporations, small businesses, state and local government agencies, community groups and individuals to nominate for the 10th WA Environment Awards.

"The environment awards recognise the many projects undertaken throughout WA to conserve and protect our natural environment," he said.

"From large corporations undertaking waste reduction initiatives, to small community groups rehabilitating wetlands and caring for native fauna, the projects are numerous and the WA Environment Awards enable us to recognise this work and dedication.

"Since being introduced 10 years ago, the WA Environment Awards program has seen an increase in the

number of entries each year, highlighting the increasing awareness and action of Western Australians' involvement in environmental issues.

"In marking this 10-year anniversary we are going to recognise this as well as promote and foster greater community involvement in environmental care."

Mr Marmion said the prestigious awards provided winners with public recognition as well as benefitting their businesses and projects through greater public profile, leading to an increase of awareness and the formation of more effective business partnerships.

This year there are 11 categories:

1. Corporate Business Leading by Example
2. Government Leading by Example
3. Small Business Leading by Example
4. Biodiversity Conservation
5. Bush, Land and Waterways

6. Rivers, Estuaries and Wetlands
7. Resource and Waste Management
8. Environmental Education and Communication
9. Environmental Sustainability
10. Community Achievement – Regional
11. Community Achievement – Metropolitan

An overall environment award winner is chosen from the category winners.

The WA Environment Awards program is generously sponsored by the Packaging Stewardship Forum, the Waste Authority, Publishers National Environment Bureau, Royalties for Regions, Western Power, Whiteman Park, Swan River Trust and Rheem.

The awards are open to all Western Australians and entry is free. The nomination period closes on Friday 29 July 2011. Entry forms and further information can be found on DEC's website at www.dec.wa.gov.au/awards.



Cutting-edge conservation plan announced

THE Southwest Australia Ecoregion will soon benefit from the release of a cutting-edge conservation plan. Developed by DEC and WWF-Australia and in consultation with stakeholders, the plan identifies areas that are best suited to conservation action.

The project behind the plan is known as SWAEI (Southwest Australian Ecoregion Initiative). SWAEI aims to prioritise specific areas for conservation action using a more coordinated and systematic approach to planning.

Manager of DEC's Species and Communities Branch and co-chair of SWAEI Dr Ken Atkins said that previously, many conservation land-use decisions had been made in an ad hoc manner without sufficient strategic context.

"This exercise in systematic planning sought to identify the best set of management areas that together achieve explicit conservation goals," he said.

The Southwest Australia Ecoregion is one of the 34 biodiversity hot spots in the world. The vast triangular-shaped region, which is a primary focus for biodiversity conservation in the state, stretches from Shark Bay to Esperance and along a narrow strip towards the South Australian border.

The plan will provide a regional framework to ensure the long-term sustainability of the region's biodiversity.

The plan is informed by, among other things, a map that was generated by software program MARXAN. In generating the map, the software prioritised connectivity among conservation action areas, while avoiding 'threat' areas. 'Threat' areas are places where it is generally more costly or difficult to get good conservation results. As such, it was deemed more worthwhile to focus efforts on areas that would benefit most.

The development of the conservation plan is the result of many years work by DEC, WWF-Australia, stakeholders and experts. SWAEI was formalised in 2002 with the inception of a Stakeholder Reference Group, which was made up of agencies, non-governmental organisations, research centres and various other groups. A major planning symposium in 2006 saw a systematic planning approach adopted to achieve SWAEI objectives.

Funding for the project has come from the Australian Government's Caring for our Country initiative.



Park staff member Cheri Cleary presents a chocolate hamper to Andy Khan after he became the 1000th annual pass holder for 2011.

Milestone reached for Yanchep National Park

THERE was reason to celebrate at Yanchep National Park recently, when a Kinross man became the recipient of the park's 1000th annual local pass for 2011.

To mark the milestone, DEC staff presented pass holder Andy Khan with free access to Crystal Cave, an Aboriginal experience tour, a chocolate hamper and vouchers for dinner at the Yanchep Inn.

Mr Khan, who is a long-term pass holder and regular visitor to Yanchep National Park, renewed his local annual pass last month.

"Yanchep National Park is one of my favourite places to visit. It's not too far from home and is a beautiful place to relax and take the family on the weekends," he said.

"We often come up on the weekend for a meal at

the Yanchep Inn or make a day of it with a picnic in the grounds and a cave tour."

DEC Marketing Coordinator Jennifer Green said the sale of local annual passes was increasing every year as more people moved into the northern suburbs.

"The card represents outstanding value and includes unlimited 12-month vehicle entry for just \$20," she said.

"All revenue collected from entry fees and park passes is reinvested into the park, so it's a win-win for visitors and the environment.

"A number of park passes are available including a four-week holiday pass which covers all national parks in Western Australia for \$40. There is also an all park annual pass for \$80."

All passes can be purchased at national parks in WA or at the online DEC shop at www.dec.wa.gov.au/shop



Driving down fuel costs and vehicle emissions

DEC staff and transport operators outside the department now have the opportunity to reduce their vehicle emissions, with the introduction of an electric vehicle to the DEC driving fleet, as well as the recent launch of the CleanRun EcoDrive resources kit.

The kit is the first resource of its kind in Australia aimed at reducing vehicle emissions by promoting fuel-efficient driving techniques.

The difference between the best and the worst driver can mean up to 35 per cent difference in fuel economy. Since fuel consumption and CO₂ emissions are directly linked, a driver who reduces fuel use by 35 per cent can expect a 35 per cent reduction in CO₂.

The EcoDrive kit provides the resources for fleet operators to engage with their drivers to design an in-house EcoDrive training program. The kit was developed by DEC as part of its CleanRun initiative to reduce vehicle emissions.

The kit is the result of several years of work with road

industry partners and a professional road transport training provider and included an extensive trial with Toll IPEC drivers followed by wider industry consultation.

The free resource includes:

- a handbook
- a training package developed with industry experts, with a training video, PowerPoint presentation, workbooks, assessment tools and an in-cab training CD for drivers to listen to on the road
- information sheets with advice, instruction and background information for each task
- driver engagement tools with workshop materials, agendas, surveys and sample strategies
- tools for supporting change including templates for signs and posters, information booklets and written commitments
- evaluation tools for calculating baseline data and program results.

While EcoDrive targets fleet operators and commercial drivers, the program can help all drivers reduce their vehicle emissions and fuel costs. The initiative has been funded in part by the federal government Department of Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities.

Electric Vehicle Trial Manager Charles Crouch said DEC's newly converted Ford Focus four cylinder car was now available for use by DEC staff on official business on completion of an induction process.

"While the electric vehicle is very easy to drive, there are a few minor alterations that warranted an induction course. The first stage is an overview of the trial and how to drive the vehicle, followed by a brief drive in the car under the direction of a qualified electric vehicle driver."

DEC's electronic vehicle is an automatic, which is driven in exactly the same manner as a conventional car. The car is best used for regular trips that do not exceed a total return of 80 kilometres and can be booked as part of the Atrium vehicle fleet in the usual way once the induction session has been completed. All safety features such as ABS and airbags function normally.

To find out more about the trial contact Charles Crouch at charles.crouch@dec.wa.gov.au, or for a free copy of the CleanRun EcoDrive resource kit please contact CleanRun at cleanrun@dec.wa.gov.au.



DEC's electric vehicle ready for the wide open road.

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