



# Preparations underway for upcoming bushfire season

**THE weather is warming and we are heading into another summer. Like any other summer we will have our share of hot days, and some of us have summer recreation on our minds. For others, these days mean the possibility of a bushfire and the challenging work of fighting it.**

Senior Fire Planner Roger Armstrong said this year would be no different.

"Bushfires can occur anywhere, anytime, throughout the summer. Sometimes they have significant consequences as was seen last summer at Roleystone, where houses were lost and families traumatised," he said.

"The department works tirelessly throughout the year, with our partners in FESA and local government, to ensure that the communities we work and live in are as safe as we can make them against the threat of bushfire."

The department's preparation activities for the upcoming fire season are well underway.

"Trucks and equipment are being checked and refurbished. Spotter aircraft and fire towers are being made ready. Contracts for water bombers and heavy machinery are being finalised. Duty rosters are being prepared, pre-formed teams briefed and refresher training undertaken," Roger said.

Roger said one of the most effective means of mitigating the risk of bushfires on

DEC-managed land was to manage the fuel quantities across forests, parks and reserves.

"Keeping fuel loads at manageable levels through prescribed burning reduces the intensity of bushfires and provides firefighters with options to contain bushfires and to suppress them quickly with much less risk to life and limb," he said.

The department undertakes a large prescribed burning program each year that involves burning the bush under specific conditions using low intensity fires, resulting in a mosaic of burnt and unburnt patches. Prescribed fire is applied to a variety of land systems from the Kimberley to the south coast. In the three forest regions of the south-west, where most of the state's population is located, 72,000 hectares have been treated with prescribed fire throughout autumn and spring. As a result about 30 per cent of DEC-managed forest is carrying fuels less than five years old.

"These strategically located low-fuel zones significantly reduce the opportunity for bushfires to burn large areas before they are brought under control," Roger said.

Updates and information on DEC fire management can be found on the DEC website ([www.dec.wa.gov.au](http://www.dec.wa.gov.au)). Follow the links News > Media statements > Fire updates.



## Are you prepared?

**DEC is getting prepared and has worked hard to minimise the risk of bushfires on the land that it manages—what have you done to protect your house and family from bushfires?**

Some very simple precautions can be taken to provide your family and property the best chance of surviving a bushfire.

A bushfire plan for your family is the most important measure, ensuring you all know what to do in the event of a fire. You should discuss this with everyone in the family and have a practice run to make sure the plan works.

Preparing your house and yard so that flammable material is reduced is the next important step.

FESA's website has useful information on preparing for this bushfire season. Have a look at [www.fesa.wa.gov.au](http://www.fesa.wa.gov.au) and use the information you find there to make sure you are ready.

## Bushfire emergency warning system

**THIS season the public will hear messages on ABC radio and TV relating to the status of bushfires.**

These messages will be graduated from an 'ALERT' informing that there is a fire in the vicinity, to a 'WATCH and ACT' message that things are becoming more serious and steps need to be taken to leave the area or prepare for the passage of a bushfire.

The highest level message is an 'EMERGENCY WARNING', informing that the passage of a bushfire in the area is imminent and it is best to shelter in a safe place.

When the threat has abated an 'ALL CLEAR' message will be broadcast.

More information on these messages is available on the FESA website.



# Weed workshops run across south-west

**A SERIES of workshops across south-west Western Australia were held recently to increase awareness about weeds of national significance (WoNS), bringing many stakeholders together in the fight against invasive plants.**

In a major collaborative project, national WoNS coordinators teamed up with DEC, the Department of Agriculture and Food (DAFWA) and five NRM regions to organise and present the workshops.



*DEC Invasive Plants Program Coordinator Kellie Passeretto examines the WoNS-listed species ground (basket) asparagus.*

Information was provided on WoNS species—including high-risk willows, boneseed and asparagus weeds such as bridal creeper—followed by discussions on best practice management of these species.

The WoNS process aims to identify and rank weed species of greatest threat to biodiversity, agriculture and forestry across Australia. Twenty species currently make up the WoNS list, with more under consideration.

DEC Invasive Plants Program Coordinator Kellie Passeretto said there was a broad range of participants at the workshops.

"We've had a lot of interest and enthusiasm from many people involved in weed action in the south-west, including DEC, DAFWA and NRM staff, researchers from The University of Western Australia, staff at the Botanic Gardens and Parks Authority, local government and community volunteers," she said.

"A major part of these workshops—which were held in Albany, Manjimup, Bunbury and Perth—was to discuss the feasibility of developing a south-west invasive species network.

"Developing this network would improve communication and collaboration between all those involved in weed control; however, this would depend on all stakeholders sharing the funding responsibility. A similar network could be developed for the rangelands regions of WA."

DEC's Invasive Species Section, within the Environmental Management Branch, is responsible for coordinating DEC's invasive plants program.

"Weed management is an important part of the branch's work as weeds present a major threat to biodiversity, causing devastating consequences for native species and communities," Kellie said.

"DEC recently implemented the first stage of an invasive plant prioritisation process across each of its nine regions, which will provide a better framework for prioritising actions. This species-led approach focuses on infestations of species considered to be high impact, rapidly invasive and still at a population size that is feasible to eradicate or contain to a manageable size.

"The next stage will investigate an asset protection-based approach. This approach focuses on identifying high-value assets, the weeds that pose a threat to these assets, and the sites where control will have the greatest benefit."

# Get your tickets for the WA Environment Awards

**TICKETS are now available for the presentation evening of the 2011 Western Australian Environment Awards.**

In its 10<sup>th</sup> year, the state government's awards program aims to encourage and recognise community involvement in caring for the environment.

Award winners will be announced at a dinner function on Friday 25 November 2011 at the Perth Convention and Exhibition Centre.

Environment Minister Bill Marmion recently announced the 46 finalists of the awards, adding that a record 112 entries were received this year from across the state, from as far north as Kununurra to the south coast.

"The strength and diversity of the entries illustrates the many different projects being undertaken throughout the state aimed at environmental protection and conservation," he said.

Mr Marmion said there were 11 categories in the awards program and the judging panels had an extremely difficult task in assessing submissions.

"I would like to congratulate all entrants, no matter how big or small their project. All are making a difference towards ensuring our environmental values are protected for future generations," he said.

Mr Marmion said he looked forward to meeting entrants at the awards presentation dinner and seeing firsthand some of the award-winning projects underway in the metropolitan and regional areas.

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

Tickets are available from [www.dec.wa.gov.au/awards](http://www.dec.wa.gov.au/awards).



# Spring school holiday round-up

THE spring school holidays provided the perfect opportunity for children to get outdoors and experience nature in a range of environmental education programs around the state.

## Nearer to Nature

*Nearer to Nature's* school holiday program was again very popular, with activities across the metropolitan area well-attended by children and adults of all ages. Many activities were totally booked out and additional sessions were run.

*Nearer to Nature* Program Coordinator Jill Francis said the four sessions of adventure caving filled up so quickly that an additional two sessions were held in Yanchep National Park as part of the spring program.

"Expert cave guides led children through the majestic and rarely seen Yonderup cave, allowing them to crawl, climb and slide their way through," she said.

"This was a great opportunity for people to learn about the fascinating underground world and allows children to see what life really is like below the surface."

In a new activity to *Nearer to Nature*, children had fun paddling down the Canning River as part of the exciting *Canning canoeing quest*. Jill said the activity provided a great opportunity for kids to participate as a team in a fun and exciting way.



Adventure caving was a hit these holidays.

"Participants teamed up in a two-seater Canadian canoe and worked together in challenges, heading upstream to explore the river environment," she said.

"Using cryptic clues in this intriguing quest, kids uncovered stories about the river and the people who relied on it—past and present.

"Once again the *Sunlit spring* program was very successful, but we're looking forward to the upcoming summer holiday program, for which we've got a great range of activities planned."

## Tree Top Walk the place to be

The Valley of the Giants Tree Top Walk was the place to be for children in the south-west. Valley of the Giants Business Manager Julie Ross said the holiday activities were designed to get children into nature and have fun while at the same time learn about the importance of protecting our unique environment.

"The activities were also free or low-cost, which made them a great opportunity for families," she said.

This year's spring program offered brand new activities such as the free *Kid's springtime art and craft session*, where kids learned about some of our unique and interesting invertebrate species while making their very own masterpieces.

In *Bug hunt* kids foraged in the undergrowth and discovered a new world. Marine creatures were the focus of another new activity, *Fishy fun in the forest*.

Julie credits the success of the Tree Top Walk school holiday program to the creativity and innovation of activities initiated by Interpretation Officer Claudia Simpson.

"Claudia is such an asset to us and the continued success of the program," Julie said.



Children show off their creations during the Tree Top Walk's art and craft session.

## Fun in Kununurra

Children in Kununurra and surrounds also had a jam-packed schedule with a range of nature-based activities on offer. DEC, in collaboration with the Department of Fisheries, organised several of the activities that were part of a wider holiday program designed by the Shire of Wyndham/East Kimberley and Save the Children.

Communication Education Officer Jasper Kruse said the program kicked off with the painting of a mural featuring the theme: 'what country means to you'.

"We invited Miriuwung Gajerrong Ranger Chris Retsas to have a discussion with the children about what country means to him, and how special it is to live and work on his and other people's country," Jasper said.

"The mural was a great success. The children used leaves and seed pods as stencils, painted boab trees and waterholes, and finished it off with hand and foot prints.

"A water activities day was held during the second week of holidays. About 15

children went fishing after learning about sustainable fishing the day before. The rest of the kids were happy to have a swim as the temperature was a very warm 42 degrees Celsius!

"We also organised a reptile and amphibian display, where children could look at and handle the animals while learning about them."

Jasper said this was the first time he had organised a school holiday program and that it was a steep learning curve.

"Working with kids from such diverse backgrounds was challenging, but rewarding. The heat of the build-up was challenging for some of our volunteers, but that's what the top end is like this time of year.

"I found that patience and flexibility where the key words for success, and a success it was! The kids turned up voluntarily every day and were happy and excited about the activities on offer. I'm already looking forward to next year's program."



## Scientists enlightened by sun-moth project

A DEC scientific research project has turned up some interesting results, with many unexpected findings being made about the biology and taxonomy of various sun-moth species in the south-west. It has also revealed that the project's main focus, the graceful sun-moth, occupies a much wider range than originally thought.

The project, called *Conservation of the graceful sun-moth*, began in 2009 to study the rare day-flying moth, which is endemic to the south-west of Western Australia.

Senior Technical Officer and Entomologist Andy Williams said the speed and number of discoveries made in the past few years is remarkable.

"The graceful sun-moth is now known to occur as far north as Kalbarri National Park, and as far south as Binningup. DEC is therefore re-assessing the conservation status of the species," Andy said.

"We have also found many other sun-moth species across the state. The diversity of sun-moths in WA is astonishing. Without doubt, our state is the hub for sun-moth diversity in Australia. The eastern states by comparison have relatively few species."

Research Scientist Carly Bishop, who has been working on the project for the past two years, said they were also studying the biology, genetic characteristics and behaviour of the graceful sun-moth and comparing results with various other sun-moths.

"We hope that a better understanding of the biology and taxonomy of sun-moths will provide a foundation to assess the conservation status of all the species, not just the graceful sun-moth. Like most invertebrates, we know relatively little about these moths in comparison with plants or vertebrate animals," Carly said.

"Before this project, the larvae (caterpillars) of the graceful sun-moth had never been seen, but now we can find them fairly easily."

While the research project was initially focused on the Perth metropolitan area, the focus has project changed following the discovery of many new populations of the species in 2009 and 2010. It now aims to identify key habitats for conservation and refine knowledge of the species' distribution and habitat requirements.

For more information go to [www.dec.wa.gov.au/content/view/5695/1820/](http://www.dec.wa.gov.au/content/view/5695/1820/).

# Artificial nesting hollows give Carnaby's new hope

**THE endangered Carnaby's cockatoo has been given a helping hand with the installation of 30 artificial nesting hollows north of Badgingarra.**

The hollows were installed in a joint effort between DEC and the Palm Beach Rotary Club based in Rockingham.

Senior Wildlife Officer Rick Dawson said in addition to the 30 artificial hollows installed, 25 existing natural hollows were repaired at Coomallo Creek.

"This site has been monitored for the past 43 years and in that time the number of breeding pairs of Carnaby's cockatoos has declined from 100 down to about 43," he said.

"In 2009, a bushfire destroyed 18 Carnaby's hollows that have been used for decades and killed three chicks in three nests, placing the local population under even more pressure.

"Competition for the small number of remaining hollows in the burnt area was intense, with all hollows being used by Carnaby's cockatoos showing evidence of nesting attempts by galahs."

Rick said the installation of artificial hollows and repair of existing ones would make a big difference to the species in the area.

"Research has shown that Carnaby's cockatoos will readily breed in artificial hollows that are installed at breeding sites," he said.

"As a result, DEC decided to install hollows at Coomallo Creek and was offered the assistance of eight members of the Palm Beach Rotary Club, who were all registered as DEC volunteers for the activity.

"I would like to thank these 'Rotarians' for their hard work, which will enable Carnaby's cockatoos to continue to breed at the important Coomallo Creek site."

Rick said DEC would monitor uptake of the hollows.

"We anticipate that only a few will be used this year as the breeding season is already underway, but we are hopeful that there will be greater uptake next year," he said.

Footage of the installation works is available on [DEC's YouTube channel](#).



*DEC senior wildlife officer Rick Dawson (left) and Des Mant from the Palm Beach Rotary Club installing the hollows.*

*Photo: Kelvin Robinson.*

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