

In this issue

- Volunteers adopt orchids for research
- Massive water bomber to boost firefighting efforts
- Industry regulation staff working well across WA
- Osprey cast away on remote oil rig
- A day in the life of a Perth Observatory volunteer
- OzFlux tower a key focus of new research supersite

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Managing editor: Madeleine Clews

Editor: Sarah Deverell

Contributing editor: Karla Forrest

Design and production: Peter Nicholas

Telephone: (08) 9389 4000

Email: ecn@dec.wa.gov.au

Volunteers adopt orchids for research

A NEW volunteer program—in which participants ‘adopt’ a species of orchid and collect valuable information about it—could help save highly threatened species.

In a move to better understand the status of certain priority-listed species of orchids, the Western Australian Native Orchid Study and Conservation Group and DEC have teamed up to run the ‘Adopt an orchid’ program.

Led by a coordinator, volunteers adopt a species of orchid and work to monitor and survey it, gaining up-to-date population, threat and habitat information, which is then reported to DEC.

Threatened Flora Coordinator Andrew Brown said the priority species targeted in the program are often known from only a few locations and may be under threat, but require further information

to accurately determine their conservation status.

“Some 30 orchid species fit into this category and, with 402 threatened species and 2,905 priority species that DEC has to monitor and survey, would not otherwise get this level of monitoring,” he said.

“With the information coming from this program, DEC can be more certain of their conservation status, including threats and necessary recovery actions and can better manage and protect them.”

After running for just over four months, the program has already proven successful, with a population of flowering Start’s spider orchid being located after not being seen for over 20 years.

More than 100 flowering frail spider orchids were found in an area where just three were located previously.

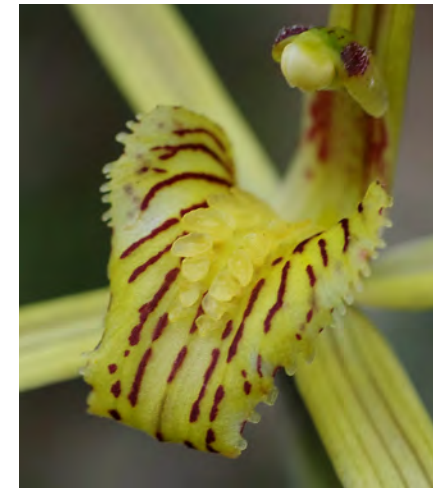
Andrew said the program was proving to be a fun and rewarding experience.

“There are now 32 participants in the program, covering 20 orchid species ranging from Kalbarri to Esperance,” he said.

“Participants are seeing some of our



A volunteer photographs a lemon spider orchid.



A lemon spider orchid, one of the species being surveyed in the program.

rarest orchids growing in their natural habitat and are getting to interact with other dedicated enthusiasts.

“Some participants have already located new populations of some of our rarest priority orchid species. Even when new populations have not been located, the information obtained has been invaluable to DEC and will result in positive actions being undertaken to protect and conserve these species.”

For more information or to join the program contact Andrew Brown on 9334 0122 or email andrew.brown@dec.wa.gov.au.

Get involved with ECN!

THIS is your chance to get involved with the production of Environment and Conservation News (ECN), your fortnightly electronic newsletter featuring the latest news and events from around the department.

The team at ECN is always looking for great ideas for articles. We are keen to know what's happening in your branch, division or organisation, as well as any individual achievements you or your co-workers have made.

Some of the topics which might be suitable include the release of new plans or policies, upgrades to recreation sites, retiring staff, team achievements, the outcome of monitoring activities, work with volunteer groups, universities or schools, international visitors or PhD students, significant meetings, conferences or planning days and awards.

ECN is distributed electronically to departmental staff, volunteers, external stakeholders and other state and local government staff. It features short stories (200–300 words) and photos focusing on DEC staff and DEC activities. You are welcome to write articles or, alternatively, you can simply suggest a story idea and one of our contributors can interview you or the contact person you advise and write the story for you.

If you have a story idea, email us at ecn@dec.wa.gov.au. We look forward to hearing from you.



Massive water bomber to boost firefighting efforts

Director General Keiran McNamara, Fire Management Services Branch Manager Murray Carter and Environment Minister Bill Marmion with the new water bomber 'Marty'.

ONE of the world's biggest rotary water bombers, the Erickson Aircrane, has arrived in Western Australia, and is set to play an important role in bushfire suppression in the state.

The aircrane, dubbed 'Marty', can drop up to 9,500 litres of water in a single load, and will be used to support WA fire crews this summer.

Environment Minister Bill Marmion welcomed the arrival of the Erickson Aircrane.

"It's very reassuring for our firefighting ground crews to know this massive aircraft is on call and ready to respond when called upon," Mr Marmion said.

"DEC and the Fire and Emergency Services Authority (FESA) will trial the use of this aircraft over the fire season to evaluate the effectiveness of the larger aircraft and how it operates in local conditions."

Emergency Services Minister Troy Buswell said the state government

acted on the advice of FESA and DEC to secure use of the biggest rotary water bomber to be stationed in WA.

"Firefighters face a challenging and demanding season and the aircrane is a welcome addition to the state's aerial fleet, supporting fire crews to protect local communities," Mr Buswell said.

"This huge aircraft can drop up to 114,000 litres an hour, more than double that of the Type 1 water-

bombers. It will be invaluable in protecting lives and homes."

Mr Buswell said the state had invested \$12.8 million to secure a large and diverse aerial fleet this summer. The investment was made in partnership with the federal government through the National Aerial Firefighting Centre.

Video of the Environment Minister's announcement is available on DEC's YouTube channel [here](#).

Industry regulation staff working well across WA

DEC's industry regulation staff across the state have just reached the halfway mark in their annual Industry Regulation Compliance Program.

The Industry Regulation Compliance Program governs the department's compliance activities in industry regulation, which includes conducting inspections at prescribed premises—such as waste treatment facilities or coal refineries—to ensure industries are properly managing their impact on the environment.

Inspections of prescribed premises are an indispensable link in the regulatory chain, necessary to promote best-practice environmental management and ongoing adherence to environmental regulations.

Inspection and Compliance Branch Manager Germaine Healy said this year's program was more robust than in previous years.

"In 2010 we conducted a review into the effectiveness of the program and, as a result,

decided to do an overhaul of the wider strategy that governs the program, the Industry Regulation Compliance Strategy 2011–12," she said.

Three key documents make up the new strategy, including the *Industry Regulation Compliance Program 2011–12*, the *Industry Regulation Compliance Guidelines*, and the *Industry Regulation Compliance Activities Operational Framework*.

"The strategy has greatly evolved in the three years since its inception, but we are always looking at ways of improving it further," Germaine said.

DEC's vision is to work with industry to promote and encourage operation beyond compliance in industry regulation.

The Inspection and Compliance Branch has been working closely with regional industry regulation teams to deliver on requirements from the program. In November last year the South West Region's Industry Regulation Team collaborated with the Inspection and Compliance Branch to complete 33 inspections of prescribed premises in just over four weeks, as well as doing a light industrial area survey examining environmental practices in over 46 industrial premises.

South West Region Industry Regulation Leader Neville Welsh said the standard of detail completed during the region's inspection program can be attributed to the teamwork of all members of the Inspection and Compliance Branch team and regional staff.

"The inspections target, set as part of Corporate Executive's reporting to government, will be met in my regions thanks to having a well-structured program supported by the Inspection and Compliance Branch," he said.



DEC Exmouth District Wildlife Officer Renae Gibbs prepares to release the osprey.



The adventurous bird had made its way to an offshore oil rig.

Osprey cast away on remote oil rig

A MOST unlikely visitor found its way to an offshore oil rig almost 300 kilometres north-west of Karratha late last year. The juvenile osprey made the long journey to Woodside-contracted drill rig Maersk Discoverer on a small vessel bringing supplies from Karratha. Once on the rig, the seabird became disoriented and was unable to return to shore.

Rig workers reported the osprey to Woodside environmental officers, who advised them to monitor its behaviour and report on its status.

Woodside Environmental Advisor Tim Grubba said reports from rig personnel indicated that the bird was in a relatively poor condition.

"For two weeks the osprey roosted on the rig and staff monitored it, but for a number of reasons we determined that the bird should be captured and relocated to the mainland by helicopter," he said.

"The rig was due to move to a new well site and it was unlikely the osprey would have the capacity or the desire to leave the rig before then. Additionally, as it had grown more familiar with its surroundings, it had become less cautious

around the helicopters that were coming and going, which was a potential safety risk.

"When I arrived on the rig from Perth its condition had improved. I flew with the bird on the helicopter to Learmonth Airport, south of Exmouth, where I handed it to DEC Wildlife Officer Renae Gibbs."

Renae said the bird appeared to be in a good condition, and though it still had some juvenile feathers, it was close to adulthood.

"I deemed the bird suitable for release, so I took it to Bundegi Sanctuary near the North West Cape and set it free. It took a few minutes to get its bearings but flew away strongly. It was a great result," she said.

Woodside Wellsite Manager Dick Scaife said workers had grown quite fond of the osprey during the weeks it had called the rig home.

"Renae sent us photos of the release, and we were all so glad that it got back and was released successfully," he said.

Renae said while ospreys frequented offshore islands, it was very unusual for one to be so far away from the mainland on an oil rig.



DEC officers undertaking an inspection as part of DEC's annual Industry Regulation Compliance Program.





Members of the Perth Observatory Volunteer Group (from left to right): Terry Edmett, Geoff Chandler, Chairman Arthur Harvey, Mary Hughes and Geoff Scott.

A day in the life of a Perth Observatory volunteer

WELL, a night, to be precise. The 35 stargazers who make up the Perth Observatory Volunteer Group (POVG) spend their evenings helping to run the public star viewing program, a service that allows tourists and locals to access telescopes and learn about stars and constellations.

A typical session for the volunteers begins an hour before the public is due to arrive. They head up the hill to the viewing area, set in State forest on the Perth Observatory grounds in Bickley, and begin setting up the telescopes and finding targets to observe.

Astronomical Officer Greg Lowe said the targets are always changing, depending on the time of year, the presence or absence of the moon, and the amount of cloud in the sky.

“Our dark sky viewing sessions are the best for seeing fainter targets such as nebulae and globular clusters because when there is no moon, the background is dark. On the moonlit nights,

the moon itself is one of the observing targets—and a very popular one at that,” Greg said.

“We usually have four or five volunteers rostered on for each session. The visitors, usually 48 people, are split into four groups and these groups move in order around each of the four telescopes, learning about the various targets from the knowledgeable volunteers.”

The sessions usually last one and a half to two hours. Afterwards, the volunteers stay to pack equipment away and share their experience of the evening, trading knowledge and any interesting questions or discussions that came up.

Greg said that while no experience or astronomical knowledge is necessary to become an observatory volunteer, a keen interest in astronomy is required. Volunteers can learn on the job when it comes to operating telescopes and presenting to visiting groups.

“For some volunteers, access to observatory resources is a major drawback, while for others the

OzFlux tower a key focus of new research supersite

DEC is working with the CSIRO to establish a new research supersite within the biologically rich Great Western Woodlands, located in DEC’s Goldfields and Wheatbelt regions.

The supersite will form part of an Australia-wide network of sites for monitoring the environment under a program supported by the Terrestrial Ecosystems Research Network (TERN).

A key feature of the supersite will be a 36-metre tall OzFlux climate station, which will be used to monitor the energy, water and carbon balance of mature eucalypt woodland that is representative of natural landscapes across the region.

DEC Goldfields Regional Manager Ian Kealley said preparations were underway to install the flux tower at the DEC-managed Credo station, a former pastoral station now used for conservation and recreation.

“Locating the research site and associated

activities at Credo is very exciting for the Goldfields,” he said.

“It complements the plans DEC is developing for Credo, including management for multiple-use recreation and conservation, and development of a field study centre around the homestead.”

According to TERN, the Great Western Woodlands—which covers 16 million hectares (an area about twice the size of Tasmania)—is extraordinary because it has remained relatively intact since European settlement. While most other temperate woodlands around the world have become highly fragmented and degraded through agricultural use, the Great Western Woodlands offers a unique opportunity to understand how intact woodland landscapes function.

The climate station is due to be installed and operational in early 2012, with various aspects of associated research underway throughout 2012.

emphasis is more on the contact with people in a friendly, stimulating environment,” he said.

Greg said he has been amazed by the dedication of members of the Perth Observatory Volunteer Group, which was formed in the observatory’s centenary year of 1996.

“It’s fantastic to have such a committed group of volunteers whose passion and enthusiasm is infectious and really transmits to those attending the viewing nights,” he said.

“One such volunteer is Terry Edmett, who has been an observatory volunteer for five years. Terry has always told me that if I have trouble finding a volunteer to fill a spot on the roster, or if someone falls ill, I shouldn’t hesitate to call him; and I’ve taken up his kind offer many a time.”

Terry’s fine work was recognised recently with an Outstanding Service award, part of DEC’s Volunteer of the Year Awards program.

“Terry has done more for us, night after viewing night, than we could ever have anticipated when he joined us,” Greg said.

New intakes of volunteers are undertaken in September. Anyone interested in becoming a volunteer can contact the volunteer coordinator on 9293 8255 or apply in writing to the Perth Observatory, 337 Walnut Road, Bickley WA 6076.

Anyone wishing to attend one of the evening star viewing sessions can call 9293 8255 to make a booking.

