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Published by the Department of Environment and Conservation's Strategic Development and Corporate Affairs Division, Cygnet Hall, (cnr) Mounts Bay Road and Hackett Drive, CRAWLEY, WA 6009.

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DEC Campgrounds website one year on

DEC's online campgrounds resource, launched in January last year by the department's Parks and Visitor Services, is celebrating its first anniversary.

The DEC Campgrounds website contains details of more than 110 campgrounds across the state and currently allows holiday-makers to secure a spot at 13 of these by booking ahead.

Sites available to book include five in Cape Range National Park, five in Lane Poole Reserve, one in Beelu National Park and two in Purnululu National Park.

Parks and Visitor Services Project Manager Glenn Willmott said it was important for visitors to make a booking to avoid disappointment if they planned to camp in one of these campgrounds.

"During the past few years, the demand at a number of DEC campgrounds has exceeded capacity. The DEC Campgrounds website has helped meet the growing expectations of visitors to plan and book their travel itineraries in advance," Glenn said.

"In addition, by allowing people to book sites, DEC is better able to protect the site by ensuring campgrounds are not overfilled and that impacts on sites are managed.

"The newest addition to the campgrounds website is Osprey Bay campground at Cape Range National Park. Additionally, both campgrounds within Purnululu National Park—Walardi and Kurrajong—are now 100 per cent bookable online."

Assistant Director Parks and Visitor Services Rod Annear said the DEC Campgrounds website was valuable for visitor centres and front counter staff when dealing with visitor enquiries about campgrounds across the state.

"It has provided a great resource for both visitors and staff to gain information," Rod said.

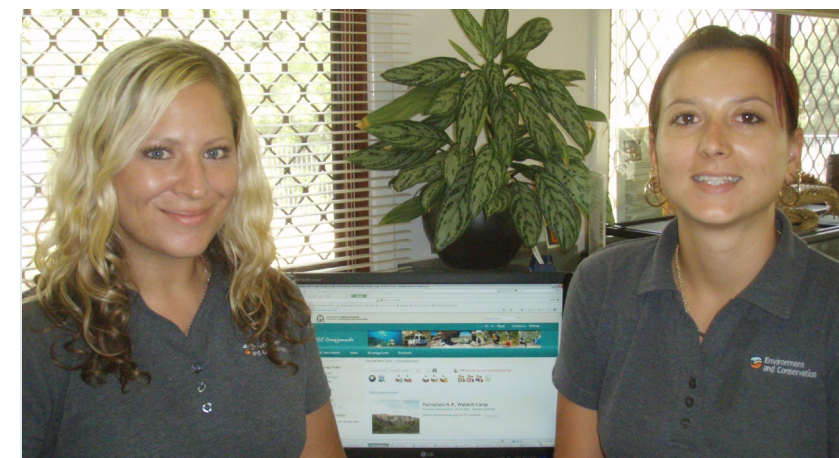
"The ability to book a site in the most popular campgrounds at the busiest times of year has reduced anxiety for campers about securing a site. In the past we have had people lining up at gates waiting for a site to be vacated and rangers trying to squeeze in campers with nowhere else to go. Neither of those situations is ideal.

"The booking system is also providing a wealth of information for our social research unit by attaining valuable visitor statistics such as length of stay per booking and number of children, adults and concession holders per booking.

"The campgrounds website also helps visitors assess the campgrounds and on-ground conditions. This way they can make informed decisions and have realistic expectations about the facilities available and the activities and attractions close to each campground."

Rod said one of the improvements planned for the website was to enable users to search by bookable campgrounds, to make it easier to identify which of the campgrounds require bookings and which do not.

The DEC Campgrounds website currently includes links to brochures, up-to-date weather forecasts and a colour-coded availability calendar, and enables users to purchase park passes. Explore DEC Campgrounds by visiting www.dec.wa.gov.au/campgrounds.



Clerical Officer Sylvia Jaworski and Regional Business Manager Candice Davey check out the site for the two Purnululu National Park campgrounds, which are now only available by booking.



Environmental officers Christine Davis and Clarrie Green referring to the regulatory maps.

Regulatory maps go external

THE department has made available a comprehensive industry regulation resource—a series of regulatory maps.

The maps identify all environmental issues associated with a particular industry type and the agency and mechanism responsible for managing that issue. Previously available only to DEC staff, they can now be accessed on DEC's website by people outside the department.

Environmental Officer Christine Davis said the maps helped DEC licensing officers in determining the likely environmental impacts of prescribed activities and the associated regulatory requirements under the *Environmental Protection Act 1986*, as well as other legislation.

"Following completion of a number of regulatory maps it was determined that other stakeholders could also benefit from this resource and so 15 maps have been published on DEC's website," Christine said.

"These will serve as a useful guide for those preparing applications for regulatory approvals—including industry, consultants and the community—as well as for managing whole-of-government approval processes.

"Publishing regulatory maps externally will help improve timeliness in determining applications."

View the published [regulatory maps](#) on DEC's website.

Moonlit Tree Top Walk a summer favourite

AFTER four action-packed weeks, the summer holiday activity program at the Tree Top Walk has come to an end. This summer's program was well received by visitors as it provided a range of fun and educational nature-based activities for children and adults alike.

The Valley of the Giants Tree Top Walk summer holiday activity program ran from Wednesday 28 December 2011 to Friday 20 January 2012.

This year's program offered great new activities such as 'Tree Top Walk by moonlight' which proved very popular.

Tree Top Walk Business Manager Julie Ross said visitors thoroughly enjoyed the opportunity to walk among the tree tops under the moonlight and even spotted some of the local quokkas feeding.

"This event's success has prompted the planning of similar evenings for the upcoming Easter holiday period," she said.

Other brand-new activities on offer were the result of a new partnership with the Albany museum. Both 'Merinj for coolangar', an Aboriginal cultural experience, and 'We dig dinosaurs', a junior palaeontologist's adventure, proved a success with kids and adults, providing valuable yet fun educational experiences.

'Forest by night' was once again a crowd favourite and booked to capacity. Sightings of possums and



quokkas were the highlight of the night walks and, for many participants, a high point of their holiday. 'Bug hunt' was also a popular choice this summer as kids enjoyed getting to know the wonderful world of the tiny invertebrates found in the tingle forest.

Attracting record numbers was the activity 'Sensational snakes'—in fact nearly double the visitation numbers recorded last summer. Visitors enjoyed the opportunity to learn about these magnificent creatures, while taking advantage of some great holiday photo opportunities.

The summer holiday activity program also included beach activities.

Great feedback has been received, making the program rewarding for organisers and a fantastic platform for DEC to convey a lasting conservation message.

Above Tasting bush tucker during the 'Merinj for coolangar' activity.

Left A young girl enjoys the 'Bug hunt' activity at the Tree Top Walk.



Nature-based activities delight once more

AS children head back to school this week, those who attended *Nearer to Nature* summer holiday activities will have some exciting stories to tell their friends. An encounter with a wriggly reptile, a canoe ride on the Canning River, or a trip into a dark and fascinating cave are all tales sure to delight in the post-holiday catch-up.



A young girl enjoying the 'Wriggly reptiles' activity.

Nearer to Nature Programs Coordinator Jill Francis said the adventure caving activity once again proved very popular.

"Children aged between eight and 10 explored Yonderup Cave, and those aged 10 to 14 made their way through Yancheep Cave, both located in the beautiful Yancheep National Park," she said.

"Our 'Wriggly reptiles' activity was also a big hit this summer, as children tested their nerves by getting up close and personal with a range of WA's reptiles, including various species of snake.

"We had a great turnout at many of our all-ages events, which encourage families to get together and learn about the world around them.

"During 'Nocturnal delights', guests did some spotlighting and met some of Australia's nocturnal creatures during an interactive marsupial encounter.

"As part of another activity, families went behind the scenes at Chidlow Marsupial Hospital, where they met the animals and their carers, and found out how things work at a real animal hospital."

Jill said she was now looking forward to *Nearer to Nature's* autumn program.

On Sunday 12 February the *Nearer to Nature* team will be hosting a special Valentine's Day adult event at the Perth Hills Centre. Visitors can take that special someone along for a leisurely guided walk to take in the incredible view before sitting down to a gourmet supper and animal encounter, followed by a movie at the Kookaburra Outdoor Cinema. To book contact *Nearer to Nature* on 9295 2244.



News in brief

AFAC and Bushfire CRC conference – call for papers

Submissions of papers are now being accepted for the Australasian Fire and Emergency Service Authorities Council (AFAC) and the Bushfire CRC 2012 conference in Perth.

The theme for this year's conference is 'Diverse country. Common ground.'

The annual conference, now in its 19th year, has grown to be the pre-eminent knowledge sharing event for the fire and emergency service sector in Australasia. This year the event will be held at the Perth Convention and Exhibition Centre, from Tuesday 28 to Friday 31 August 2012.

The call for papers closes on 17 February 2012.

More information about the conference and paper submissions is available on the AFAC website.

Jurien Bay the subject of biodiversity survey

DEC scientists are conducting a survey of invertebrates along the Jurien Bay coastline to gain a better understanding of potential impacts on wetland areas in the region.

DEC Senior Research Scientist Adrian Pinder said little was known about the diversity and composition of aquatic invertebrates in the wetlands between Cervantes and Coolimba, although they are an important part of the biodiversity of the area.

"If we don't know what species are present, how they are distributed and what their ecological requirements are, it is difficult to plan for their conservation," Adrian said.

"There are many pressures that affect aquatic invertebrates, including pollution, weed invasion, feral animal and stock damage, salinisation, groundwater abstraction and climate change.

"Surveys such as this one can provide basic information on the distribution of aquatic biodiversity, and that allows us to help guide land-use planning."

For more information see the [media statement](#) available on DEC's website (www.dec.wa.gov.au).



DEC astronomers part of new discovery

STAFF from DEC's Perth Observatory have been part of an international team that has concluded that planets around stars are the rule rather than the exception.

In a six-year search that surveyed millions of stars, the team used a new technique—gravitational microlensing—to measure how common planets are in the Milky Way. These are planets outside our Solar System, referred to as 'exoplanets'.

Most previously known exoplanets were found either by detecting the effect of the gravitational pull of the planet on its host star or by catching the planet as it passes in front of its star and slightly dims it. Both of these techniques are more sensitive to planets that are either massive or close to their stars, or both, and many planets will be missed.

The new technique used by the international team can detect planets over a wide range of mass and those that lie much further from their stars.

DEC Astronomer Ralph Martin said Perth Observatory had been part of

the Probing Lensing Anomalies NETWORK (PLANET) collaboration since it was established in 1995 to follow up promising microlensing events.

"PLANET uses a round-the-world network of telescopes located in the southern hemisphere for 24-hour coverage of the sky," Ralph said.

"Because Perth is so isolated, Perth Observatory plays a vital role in keeping up the 24-hour monitoring of microlensing targets."

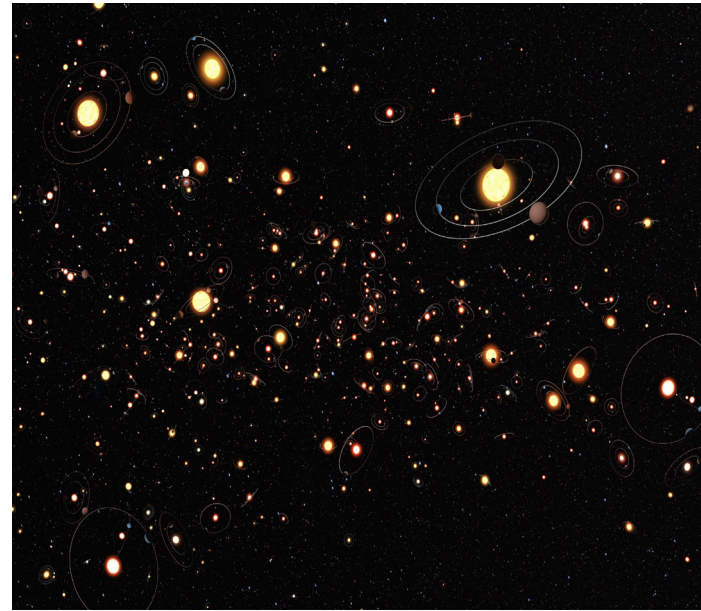
Perth Observatory astronomer Andrew Williams, who is also part of the International Centre for Radio Astronomy Research, said until as recently as 1995, astronomers had no proof that planets existed around any ordinary sun-like star, apart from our sun.

"After years of exhaustive research, this collaboration has shown that they are amazingly common—that there are actually more planets than stars," he said.

"It also shows that just as in our solar system, lighter planets outnumber heavier ones."

The results of the research appeared in the journal *Nature* earlier this month.

This artist's cartoon view gives an impression of how common planets are around the stars in the Milky Way. The planets, their orbits and their host stars are all vastly magnified compared to their real separations. Image – ESO/M. Kornmesser



Fauna monitoring in the Swan Region: a snapshot of 2011



RESULTS from the Swan Region's 2011 fauna monitoring program have shown an encouraging growth in numbers of native animals in small reserves being managed by DEC to improve habitats.

A strong presence of chuditch, brushtail possum and the endangered woylie were found in Julimar State Forest in July last year when DEC staff worked with volunteers, members of the World Wildlife Fund and Department of Defence environmental officers to conduct the monitoring exercise.

Nature Conservation Officer Paul Tholen said this indicated that the delivery of 1080 baits via ground and aerial baiting had been successful.

"Fauna monitoring is important in helping DEC to

determine the effectiveness of feral baiting programs," he said.

"It also helps us evaluate the effectiveness of other work being undertaken to improve habitats, such as removing invasive weeds and replanting degraded landscapes.

"Not restricted to trapping alone, qualified field staff use spotlighting, bird calling, radio tracking, nest box monitoring, sand pads, sticky wickets and hair tubes to collect data on both native and introduced fauna that exist in our national parks and nature reserves."

In November 2011, a fauna monitoring exercise was completed in Buller Nature Reserve to determine if a small remnant island surrounded by farmland was

continuing to support a native animal population.

Records showed the presence of the brushtail possum, echidna and bandicoot, four reptile species, three amphibian species and 26 species of bird. Despite being largely intact, the 300-hectare reserve suffers constant threat from dieback, weeds, introduced animals (foxes, cats and rabbits) and unlawful human activity.

Paul said smaller reserves are of great value when it comes to implementing 1080 baiting programs.

"The variety and abundance of animals in small reserves is comparable to that found in larger ones, but is arguably more important as fauna is restricted to isolated pockets of habitat among a sea of cleared paddocks," he said.

