

In this issue

- Lorna Glen survey shows native wildlife thriving
- Humpback whale successfully disentangled
- Cane toad discovered in South Hedland residence
- Illegal sandalwood harvesting targeted
- News in brief
Pilbara and Midwest-Gascoyne Tidy Towns titles announced
- Turtle experts meet in Perth
- Long-distance traveller on its way home

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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Lorna Glen survey shows native wildlife thriving

A SURVEY has revealed that bilbies and other native animals such as echidnas are thriving at Lorna Glen in the northern Goldfields, home to one of the world's most extensive and groundbreaking arid zone wildlife reconstruction projects.

DEC used observers on horses to monitor bilby activity as part of Operation Rangelands Restoration, which aims to restore 600,000 hectares of former pastoral lease land purchased by the government for conservation at Lorna Glen (Matuwa) and Earahedy (Kurrara Kurrara) to its natural state by 2020.

DEC senior research scientist Dr Neil Burrows said bilbies were elusive, mostly solitary, nomadic creatures, and monitoring them by horseback was most effective.

"Horses can travel long distances through thick scrub, recently burnt spinifex, water and across steep dunes and provide an excellent observation platform," he said.

"Bilbies are very difficult to trap for surveys, so we rely largely on signs of their presence to determine how well they have been doing since we introduced 128 captive bred bilbies into the Lorna Glen landscape between 2007 and 2009."

Neil said six people covered 36,000 hectares, riding a total of 545 kilometres and visually inspecting more than 1,500 hectares of ground during the survey.

"During the survey there were 247 observations of burrows, tracks and diggings, including 74 bilby burrows. Based on this, we estimate the bilby population at Lorna Glen to be between 128 and 339 animals, but we need to continue our research to

provide more precise population estimates," he said.

"These results are very encouraging as they show that the population appears to be stable or increasing."

Neil said feral cats were the greatest threat to establishing a thriving bilby population and annual aerial baiting with cat baits developed by DEC scientists had significantly reduced the cat population.

"While this is a good result, we are aiming to increase cat control to further reduce predation pressure by carrying out opportunistic ground baiting during winter and by targeted trapping in spring and autumn," he said.

Native mammals that once occurred across the arid zone, but have disappeared since European settlement, have been re-introduced to Lorna Glen over the past five years, in conjunction with sustained fox, cat and wild dog baiting,

camel control, cattle exclusion, fire management and infrastructure work by DEC and the Wiluna Aboriginal community.

This work has also resulted in a dramatic increase in the abundance of animals that were in very low numbers, such as mulgara.

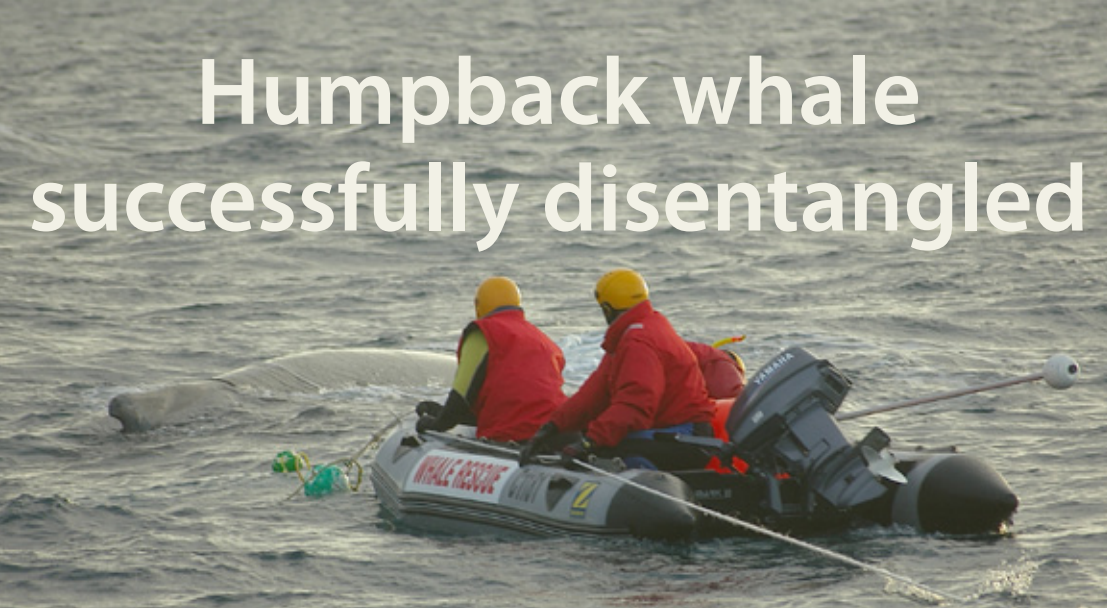
DEC aims to re-introduce 11 native mammals, and has already successfully released boodies, mala, Shark Bay mice and golden bandicoots into an 1,100-hectare predator-proof acclimatisation compound, while bilbies and brushtail possums have successfully been released into the wider landscape.

The restoration of Lorna Glen's native mammal fauna is partly funded by Chevron as part of the environmental approvals for the Gorgon Joint Venture project, with boodies and bandicoots being translocated from Barrow Island Nature Reserve.



DEC staff and volunteers about to set out on the bilby survey.

Humpback whale successfully disentangled



WILDLIFE officers from DEC, with assistance from the Department of Fisheries, successfully disentangled a humpback whale south of Rottneest on 24 August 2012.

The nine to 10-metre juvenile whale was reported with fishing gear wrapped around its tail, preventing the tail flukes from functioning and severely compromising its chances of survival.

DEC marine mammal rescue team leader Doug Coughran said the whale was successfully disentangled within four and a half hours of the report.

"The marine mammal rescue team responded quickly to the report and the team achieved the best possible outcome for this whale," he said.

"The whale was severely entangled, with rope wrapped around its tail at least 20 times, so it took the team nearly two hours using specialist cutting equipment to free it.

"Because the animal was so weighed down it was exhausted and unable to swim properly, but we were still dealing with a very powerful and easily agitated animal, so human safety was our priority.

"The whale, which looked to be in good condition, has now continued its southern migration to its Antarctic feeding ground unhindered."

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.

Cane toad discovered in South Hedland



DEC is reminding communities in the Pilbara to remain vigilant following the recent discovery of a live cane toad at a South Hedland residence.

The cane toad was found by the homeowner who promptly contacted the department through the cane toad hotline. The homeowner was advised to capture the toad to ensure it could be correctly identified as a cane toad.

DEC State Cane Toad Initiative program coordinator Corrin Everitt said they were yet to determine how the individual arrived in the area.

"It is possible that the cane toad may have been inadvertently transported here in freight from a toad infested

area either interstate or in the east Kimberley region of Western Australia," she said.

"It's important people remain vigilant as toads are not always easily found because they are very good at hiding in small spaces, which is why it's particularly important for people to do thorough checks of their vehicle and camping equipment if they are coming from areas where cane toads are present."

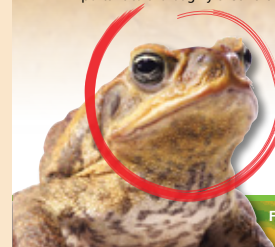
Corrin praised the homeowner for acting quickly and urged anyone travelling from the Kimberley or Northern Territory to be on the lookout for toads hiding in freight.

Check your load for a **cane toad**

Cane toads are great stowaways and can be easily transported in your goods and luggage. When you are packing up to leave from an area where cane toads are present, it is important to thoroughly check that you are not accidentally carrying a cane toad.

Cane toads can hide in many places, such as:

- boxes, crates and pallets
- building materials
- camping equipment (such as folded tarps, tents, swags and chairs)
- vehicles, trailers and caravans
- boats (under the floor, bait boxes, tackle boxes, eskies or engine wells)
- pipes (such as rod holders) and conduit
- potted plants and empty pots.



For more information call **1800 44WILD (9453)** or visit www.dec.wa.gov.au/canetoads



"As cane toads continue to advance further west in WA, the chances of cane toads hitching lifts on vehicles or freight are likely to increase," she said.

Local wildlife officers will inspect the area for any other possible toads.

In WA, cane toad populations are present in and around Kununurra, with

breeding occurring in irrigation areas.

Anyone who finds a suspected cane toad should isolate the animal and report the sighting to the DEC cane toad hotline immediately on 1800 44 WILD (9453).

For more information about cane toads visit www.dec.wa.gov.au/canetoads.



Illegal sandalwood harvesting targeted

DEC has issued a warning about illegal sandalwood harvesting following the seizure in August of up to \$600,000 of sandalwood destined for the black market.

More than 40 tonnes of illegally harvested sandalwood was seized in two separate incidents in the Kalgoorlie area on Friday 17 August and the Menzies area on Saturday 18 August. Charges are expected to be laid.

The black market for sandalwood is thought to be worth millions of dollars and most illegally harvested sandalwood is exported out of Australia to Asia where it is used for medicinal and aromatic purposes.

DEC senior investigator Rick Dawson said illegal harvesting was on the rise due to the increasing value of sandalwood, which grows across Western Australia's rangelands.



DEC officer Cam Craigie with a sandalwood seizure.

"Sandalwood can command up to \$15,000/tonne, and this has resulted in an upsurge of illegal activity by people who want to cash in on this very lucrative market," he said.

"Since March 2011, DEC, with the assistance of WA Police, has seized 17 consignments of illegally harvested sandalwood weighing in excess of 70 tonnes and valued at around \$1 million, with one person charged and several investigations ongoing.

"The harvesting practices employed by illegal operators damage natural bushland and are wasteful and unsustainable. They also threaten to undermine legitimate operators.

"Anyone involved in the sale, transport or processing of illegally harvested sandalwood faces prosecution under state legislation and will be required to forfeit all machinery and equipment used."

Sandalwood harvesting on Crown land, pastoral leases and private land is regulated by DEC, with harvesting licences issued on an annual basis under a quota system.

Sandalwood buyers are required to ensure that sandalwood is purchased from licensed sandalwood pullers and to record their purchases. New transport requirements have also been introduced this year for licensed private property sandalwood pullers.

People are encouraged to report any suspicious activities with sandalwood, particularly vehicle movements and registration numbers, to their nearest DEC office or WA Police.

News in brief

Pilbara and Midwest-Gascoyne Tidy Towns titles announced

Hedland (Port and South Hedland) has claimed the Tidy Towns – Sustainable Communities Pilbara regional awards title, announced in Karratha in mid-September.

And Mingenew has claimed the Tidy Towns – Sustainable Communities Midwest-Gascoyne regional awards title announced in Kalbarri in late August.

The awards recognise towns for their achievements in working towards sustainability including preserving their culture and protecting the environment and amenity of their towns.

For more information see the [Hedland](#) and [Mingenew](#) Tidy Towns media statements.

Turtle experts meet in Perth

DEC hosted the first-ever Western Australian Sea Turtle Symposium in late August.

Held at Curtin University, the two-day forum brought together international and local experts to share ideas and information on research, management and conservation projects.

For more information contact DEC Marine Science Program principal scientist Scott Whiting on 9219 9752 or DEC marine researcher Holly Raudino on 9219 9754.

Long-distance traveller on its way home

A hawksbill turtle found on the south coast in August—more than 1,500 kilometres from its usual habitat in the waters of the Pilbara—has now been released into the Dampier Archipelago.

When found, the turtle was taken to DEC's South Coast regional office in Albany, underweight and lethargic. It was then assessed by veterinarians at Perth Zoo and soon recovered from the exhaustion of the long and cold sojourn on the south coast.

The juvenile turtle was micro-chipped and flipper tagged before released by DEC marine conservation officers in Karratha.

For more information see the full [media statement](#).

