



In this issue

- Community engaged as prescribed burning kicks off in the south-west
- Rediscover your city with new DEC book
- Twin awards for Pat Barblett at FACET's 21st birthday celebrations
- Bruce scoops botany award
- Four-wheel-drive clubs clean up
- Big rescue mission for tiny bugs
- *Nearer to Nature* popular during school holidays

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Community engaged as prescribed burning kicks off in the south-west

DEC's spring burning program is underway as the protracted cool moist spring conditions lift, ahead of the coming fire season. A selection of more than 171 candidate prescribed burns totaling 152,000 hectares have been prepared in the south-west forests.

Acting Fire Management Services Branch Manager Keith Low said that in addition to carrying out the prescribed burns, regional and district staff had been busy consulting the community.

"On Saturday 6 October, staff from the South West Region and Perth showcased DEC's communications van, including the mobile emergency equipment cache, at the Dunsborough Expo," he said.

"More than 100 people visited the display – a vast improvement on last year.

"In the Warren Region, DEC staff with FESA and the Shire of Manjimup have been trialling a local initiative by holding a number of information forums on fire management.

"Dozens of people attended the forums with DEC providing information on the indicative two and six season burn plans. It gave the community an opportunity to see the areas being considered for prescribed burning over the next three years and to provide comments and feedback.

"Information was also given on fire management, firebreak maintenance, fenceline clearing, firewood gathering and conservation issues in local State forest and national parks."

In August, DEC staff attended the Australasian Fire and Emergency Service Authorities Council

DEC scientist Lachie McCaw (left) with Bushfire CRC CEO Gary Morgan at the AFAC Conference.

(AFAC) and Bushfire Cooperative Research Centre (CRC) conference in Perth, where new ideas and the latest research were shared and discussed ahead of the coming bushfire season.

Keith said the spring burning program was particularly important because above-normal fire potential had been forecast.

"Severe bushfires can threaten communities and harm the environment," he said.

"We use prescribed burns to create a patchwork of burnt and unburnt areas across the lands we manage to help stem the intensity of bushfires.

"Prescribed burning is based on science and involves planning, consultation and monitoring, underpinned by a new risk assessment and approvals process.

"As part of the new risk-based approach, DEC now prepares maps showing the potential rates of fire spread under severe conditions to rapidly assess potential impacts if a burn was to escape under a worst case scenario, and to guide contingency planning."

On 27 September, Environment Minister Bill Marmion lifted the suspension on DEC carrying out prescribed burns within five kilometres of townships and rural subdivisions in the south-west.

Information about DEC's prescribed burning program is available on the DEC website (www.dec.wa.gov.au). Highlights from the AFAC/ Bushfire CRC Conference can be viewed at <http://knowledgeweb.afac.com.au/conference>.



Rediscover your city with new DEC book

Rediscover Perth outdoors—a guide to natural recreation areas in and around Perth—has hit the streets, ready to inspire your outdoor leisure this spring and summer.

DEC's most recently released book was a popular item at the department's WA Naturally stall at the Perth Royal Show and will be officially launched by the Minister for Environment, Hon Bill Marmion MLA, on 30 October.

The book launch—to be held at Hollywood Primary School and also attended by Griffin Longley of Nature Play WA—will mark the start of a partnership between DEC and Parents and Citizens groups in Perth, which will see \$5 per copy contributed to school fundraising.

The 152-page full-colour recreation guide features information on the history, natural attractions and ways

to explore 37 national parks, regional parks, marine parks and other reserves in Perth and its surrounds. It also details walk and cycle trails, and includes maps and stunning photography for each park.

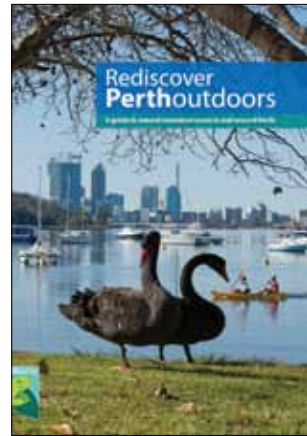
Acting Publications Manager Joanna Moore said the book covered reserves across an area stretching from Yanchep National Park in the north, to Lane Poole Reserve in the south, Avon Valley National Park in the east and offshore to Rottnest Island.

"Perth has so many beautiful natural places," she said.

"And this book is perfect to help you rediscover them—whether you prefer the stunning coastline or the forested Perth hills, or want to explore the inner-city reserves or the many walk and cycle trails the city and its surrounds have on offer."

In addition to the information provided about each of the reserves, *Rediscover Perth outdoors* includes suggestions for walk and cycle opportunities near Perth on the Bibbulmun Track and Munda Biddi Trail, plus information on mountain biking in the Perth hills. Joanna said author Samille Mitchell, editor Rhianna King, graphic designers Natalie Jolakoski, Tiffany Taylor and Maria Duthie, and the many DEC staff who had contributed to and reviewed the book, had done an excellent job.

Rediscover Perth outdoors can be purchased from DEC's online shop (www.dec.wa.gov.au/shop), or order forms will shortly be available. The comprehensive recreation guide costs just \$24.95, and DEC staff may use their personnel pass for a 20 per cent discount, available on all WA Naturally publications.



Twin awards for Pat Barblett at FACET's 21st birthday celebrations



Pat Barblett receiving the Sir Edmund Hillary Parks Award for 2012 from Director General Keiran McNamara.

CONGRATULATIONS to Mrs Pat Barblett AM, the recipient of the inaugural FACET Medal and the Sir Edmund Hillary Parks Award for 2012.

Pat is a former chair and member of the Conservation Commission of Western Australia and the founder of the Forum Advocating Cultural and Eco-Tourism (FACET). Pat was a long-standing member of the National Parks and Nature Conservation Authority, the predecessor of the Conservation Commission.

Both awards were presented at FACET's 21st birthday celebrations on 22 September at Claremont Yacht Club.

The Minister for Environment, Hon Bill Marmion MLA, presented the FACET Medal and DEC Director General Keiran McNamara presented the Sir Edmund Hillary Parks Award on behalf of Parks Forum – the peak body for park management organisations in Australia and New Zealand.

In accepting the awards, Pat paid tribute to the many people who work in parks.

"They are a dedicated group who work sometimes under very difficult circumstances. Efficient management is the key to connecting people to parks," she said.

The FACET medal recognises the extraordinary personal and professional achievements and contribution by an individual to eco and cultural tourism in WA.

The Sir Edmund Hillary Parks Award recognises an individual's outstanding contribution to the parks industry over a number of years or through action that has resulted in significant changes in attitude or management practice.

Pat has made significant contributions to conserving natural areas and the public's appreciation through nature-based tourism in WA.

She has served on more than 20 boards and committees since the mid-1970s, and was the first woman appointed to the Rottnest Island Board in 1977.

During her time with the Conservation Commission, Patricia helped advance conservation

efforts through milestone achievements from the creation of new national parks, to a historic joint management agreement with the traditional owners of the East Kimberley region. She also helped to develop the first *Forest Management Plan* and has been a driving force behind the Conservation Commission's work to raise awareness of the state's conservation estate.

Pat's long and passionate support for interpretation and public access to the natural environment has inspired many people and is appreciated right around Australia.

DEC Acting Director Parks and Visitor Services Tracy Shea, who is also a member of FACET's executive, said it was a proud moment watching Pat receive her awards.

"Pat has been a mentor and a role model to so many of us in DEC.

"She is tireless in working for the benefit of conservation and eco-tourism, and it was wonderful to see Pat receiving such well-deserved recognition."



Bruce scoops botany award

DEC Senior Principal Research Scientist Bruce Maslin's passion for and commitment to botany has earned him a prestigious Australian Systematic Botany Society award.

Bruce won the society's Nancy T Burbidge medal in recognition of his long-standing contribution to Australian systemic botany.

In a career spanning 40 years Bruce has become recognised as the principal taxonomic expert in Australia's biggest plant genus, *Acacia*.

His research has dramatically improved understanding of the genus and resulted in the description of more than 350 new taxa.



Bruce has shared his research in innovative ways, launching and establishing the World Wide Wattle website (www.worldwidewattle.com).

He has also developed the interactive identification guides *WATTLE – Acacias of Australia* (2001) and *Wattles of the Pilbara* (2010). The *WATTLE* key was recently revised and will soon become available on the web.

On receiving the award Bruce paid tribute to the opportunities, challenges and triumphs his work had presented.

"Without question, working on *Acacia* has provided me with fabulous opportunities," he said.

"The group presented an enormous intellectual challenge and I received very considerable job satisfaction from trying to address this.

"*Acacia* provided me with ample opportunity to publish and to travel, both nationally and internationally.

"And over my career I have been privileged to work and interact with many fascinating and stimulating people, some of whom have become life-long friends.

"So I thank the society for bestowing this honour on me."



Bruce Maslin with his Australian Systematic Botany Society medal. Photo – Russell Barrett



Some of the rubbish collected at Wilbinga ready for removal by the Shire of Gingin.



Collection of rubbish bags by a volunteer along the Powerline Track.

Four-wheel-drive clubs clean up

TRACK Care WA (TCWA) and clubs allied to the Four Wheel Drive Association of WA (4WDWA) recently helped to clean up two popular four-wheel-drive areas close to Perth.

On the coast, TCWA worked with staff from Swan Coastal District, the Wilbinga Shacks 4X4 Crew and several other clubs to clean up Wilbinga, an area on the coast between Two Rocks and Guilderton. The area was long overdue for another clean-up due to the continuous illegal dumping of rubbish.

On Sunday 9 September, more than 70 volunteers in 50 four-wheel-drive vehicles with 12 trailers 'spring cleaned' the tracks within the area. Significantly, one-third less rubbish was removed compared to previous clean-up events, proving that the work by volunteers was finally making a difference.

The Shire of Gingin generously assisted by removing rubbish collected on the day at no cost.

In the hills, TCWA and the four-wheel-drive clubs worked with staff from DEC's Perth Hills District and Recreation and Trails Unit and the Water Corporation to clean up an area referred to as the 'Powerline Track'.

As the name suggests, the track follows the power line – one which shadows the Great Eastern and Southern highways from Mundaring Weir Road to York. This track runs for 24 kilometres, providing a variety of challenges for four-wheel-drive enthusiasts.

Again, due to illegal dumping and general littering it was desperately in need of attention and a clean up. 4WDWA and TCWA put out a call to all four-wheel-drive clubs and the response was overwhelming.

On Sunday 23 September, 14 different clubs and 119 volunteers in 81 four-wheel-drive vehicles with various trailers attended, picking up refuse along the entire length of the track. The rubbish collected filled three 10-cubic metre bins.

The Shire of Mundaring supported the effort by waiving tipping fees and offering ranger support, and the Water Corporation assisted and also provided refreshments for volunteers. Keep Australia Beautiful WA generously provided a limitless supply of sturdy rubbish bags.

After both events everyone enjoyed a cool drink and barbecue provided by DEC.

PVS Coordinator Swan Coastal District Shawn Debono and Senior Ranger Perth Hills District Paul Udinga said they were amazed and impressed by the number of volunteers who came out to help, demonstrating that the four-wheel-drive community are serious about working with DEC and keen to be involved in natural area management with a view to sustainable access.

DEC would like to thank TCWA, 4WDWA and the volunteers for putting in a huge effort.



Big rescue mission for tiny bugs

THREE rare insect species that rely on critically endangered Western Australian plants to survive will receive a lifeline as part of a project to save the tiny but ecologically important bugs from extinction.

Three little-known bug species measuring two to four millimetres will be introduced or re-introduced to three rare plant species in October in Stirling Range National Park and surrounding areas on the south coast.

It will be the first time that insect conservation will involve the translocation of rare insects onto rare plants in WA.

Australian Research Council Centre of Excellence for Environmental Decisions and University of Melbourne ecologist Melinda Moir has been investigating insects

that are dependent on rare plants in south-western WA, where DEC has an extensive critically endangered flora recovery program.

Melinda said insects were thought to play an important though largely invisible role in plant pollination and priming the immune system of their hosts.

"We are trying to preserve as much of the Earth's biodiversity as possible, and while that's a monumental task, we can take small steps such as these insect translocation trials," she said.

"If we take the plants and leave the bugs behind, the bugs will become extinct if the plants fail to survive at their original location, as they are specially adapted to live on those plants and no others."

DEC Senior Principal Research Scientist Dave Coates said it was important to conserve threatened flora because all elements of the ecosystem, including insects, were closely interlinked and delicately balanced.

"Translocations have been carried out by DEC for nearly 60 plant species over the past 17 years, but with 137 critically endangered species in WA there is plenty of work still to do to prevent extinctions," he said.

Two of the bugs are yet to receive scientific names. Introductions will include the plant louse *Acizzia veski* onto *Acacia veronica* plants, an undescribed species of mealybug onto *Banksia montana* and an undescribed species of plant louse onto *Banksia brownii*.

Left: A *Banksia montana* plant.

Below: An *Acizzia veski* plant louse.



Theo VanDijk and Aren Hoogerdijk join in the Canning Canoeing Quest activity at the Canning River Eco Education Centre.

Nearer to Nature popular during school holidays

DURING October, DEC hosted a range of Nearer to Nature activities across Perth—including at the Canning River, in the Perth hills, and at Yanchep National Park.

Programs coordinator Berdina Ballast said the spring season was a wonderful time of year to play, discover and learn in the bush.

"There were activities for kids of most ages," she said.

At Yanchep National Park children taking part explored wild caves as part of *Adventure Caving*, and learnt about fossils.

The *BrilliantS* program provided an interesting look into the life of an ant and encouraged children to work in teams.

At the Perth Hills Centre, participants found out who's who in the world of owls, spent the day honing their spy skills or joined *Ramble with a Ranger*.

Other activities included getting up close and personal with scary yet fascinating creatures in *Deadly and Dangerous*, and learning about an animal's survival instincts in *Fight or Flight*.

At Canning River Eco Education Centre, activities ranged from *Downy Ducklings* and *Baby Bush Birds*, for young children, to *Night Stalk*, run in conjunction with Perth Zoo, and suitable for the whole family.

Energetic explorers could take part in the *Canning Canoeing Quest* that gave participants between the ages of 11 and 14 the chance to venture upstream in Canadian canoes to unlock the secrets of the river environment and uncover stories about people and the river.

Berdina said the activities were well received.

"The spring weather had people wanting to get out and about, and *Nearer to Nature* activities help them to do that," she said.

"Participants come back each season to do more!"

Nearer to Nature staff are now working on programs for the summer holidays.

For more information contact DEC's *Nearer to Nature* on 9295 2244, between 8.30am and 4.30pm Monday to Friday, and 10am to 4pm on weekends, visit www.dec.wa.gov.au/n2n or email n2n@dec.wa.gov.au.

