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Managing editor: Madeleine Clews

Editor: Joanna Moore

Contributors: Leanne O'Rourkes, Emma O'Leary, Heather Quinlan, Liz Grant, Karla Forrest

Design and production: Peter Nicholas

Telephone: (08) 9389 4000

Email: ecn@dec.wa.gov.au

Kimberley prescribed burning underway

DEC has commenced early dry season prescribed burning in the Kimberley.

DEC regional fire coordinator Ed Hatherley said last month's fuel reduction and biodiversity burn in Purnululu National Park followed a wet season of average monsoonal rains, which resulted in a very fire-prone environment for the Kimberley in 2013.

"DEC's dry season program includes planned prescribed burns at Purnululu, Mitchell Plateau, Prince Regent and Drysdale River national parks and also the King Leopold Ranges Conservation Park and Mirriuwung Gajerrong conservation reserves to protect communities and visitors," he said.

"Prescribed burning is based on science and involves consultation with traditional owners, pastoralists and other regional partners, ongoing monitoring and a rigorous risk assessment and approvals process as part of a shared responsibility.

"As we have done for the last five years, we'll be working to protect and maintain the natural and cultural values of the Kimberley from the impacts of extensive late season bushfires.

"We do this by creating mosaics of burnt and unburnt patches, which are designed to provide refuge for animals, promote new growth for food resources, reduce fuel loads and reduce the intensity

and extent of late dry season bushfires and their impact on plants, animals and cultural values."

Ed said smoke haze and fire activity from the burns could affect some industries in the region.

"I encourage local businesses to stay up-to-date with DEC's prescribed burning program in the Kimberley by visiting the website at www.dec.wa.gov.au," he said.



DEC prescribed burning activities in the Kimberley.

Coral spawning makes stunning natural spectacle

ONE of Western Australia's most remarkable natural events—the annual coral mass spawning in the state's north-west—took place earlier this month, turning the waters along our coral reefs pink.

DEC Marine Science Program Leader Dr Chris Simpson said the autumn spawning was caused by numerous colonies of many coral species releasing their reproductive eggs at the same time.



Office of the Environmental Protection Authority Marine Ecosystems Branch Manager Dr Ray Masini observes coral spawning off the WA coast. Photo – Dr Chris Simpson

“Mass coral spawning looks something like a pink underwater snowstorm,” he said.

“It occurs during neap tides, when there is minimal tidal movement, and the colour is due to the reddish-pink hue of the buoyant coral eggs that come from the most common spawning species, *Acropora* sp.

“Most coral species are hermaphrodites with both male sperm and female eggs. Evidence suggests that synchronised nocturnal spawning occurs to maximise successful fertilisation, and it happens at night to minimise predation by plankton-eating fish.”

Chris said the coral spawning was a spectacular natural event that relatively few people had been lucky enough to have seen, but the community in the Dampier Archipelago, Ningaloo Marine Park and Abrolhos Islands had been able to witness it.

“The predictable nature of coral spawning, which usually goes for around two hours, made it possible for people to experience the event by diving or using a glass-bottom bucket and a torch,” he said.

“Once the corals have spawned and the eggs are fertilised they develop into coral larvae over a week or so and settle on suitable reef habitat where they slowly grow into large colonies and begin the cycle all over again.”

Chris said that minor spawning events also occurred in the days after the full and new moons in February and April, but the early April event was the main period of spawning this year.

News in brief

New awards to honour litter reducers

A new community program known as the STAR Awards will reward Western Australian organisations for their efforts to reduce litter, promote recycling and develop better waste management.

Entries are now open for the 2013 awards, which are run by the Keep Australia Beautiful Council WA.

Council Chairman Mel Hay said the awards will assess an organisation's actions to prevent litter, increase recycling and reduce the amount of waste going to landfill.

“Individuals and organisations are encouraged to enter – we see this as an excellent way to showcase the hard work that is being done to prevent litter in the community,” he said.

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

Martins Tank campground to be upgraded

The popular Martins Tank lakeside campground at Yalgorup National Park, south of Mandurah, is currently closed while work is undertaken for a major upgrade to the site.

DEC expects the improvement works to be complete by mid July.

Swan Region Parks and Visitor Services Manager David Charles said a new camp kitchen, extra toilets and more camping sites and caravan bays would be created.

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



Nature-based tourism on show



Tourism and Recreation Education Officer Kevin Smith chats to visitors at the show.

THE state's national parks and the Tree Top Walk received an overwhelming positive response from visitors to the DEC display at this year's Perth Caravan and Camping Show.

For five days from 21 March, more than 50,000 visitors walked through the show at the Claremont Showgrounds, with a steady stream visiting the DEC display.

The Perth Caravan and Camping Show is WA's premier outdoor lifestyle event with more than 300 displays showcasing the latest in caravan, camping and tourism information.

The aim of the display was to promote tourism to protected areas of WA, DEC's online and printed park visitor information and one of the state's iconic tourism attractions, the Tree Top Walk.

Tree Top Walk business manager Julie Ross said the caravan and camping tourism market was thriving.

"More young people and families seem to be turning to camping as a holiday option, exploring the great outdoors and the many national parks in the state," she said.

"It was great to talk to the people who visited the stand, many of whom had lots of fantastic memories of their trip to the Valley of the Giants and the Tree Top Walk.

"Engaging with the public and potential travellers puts the Tree Top Walk back into their minds and enables us to gain valuable feedback on what experiences holidaymakers are looking for.

"Visitors indicated that they are interested in extraordinary experiences and journeys, which will create memorable times, so we were keen to highlight some of these opportunities in the Walpole Wilderness and across the region.

"This year we were also pleased to make mention of the soon-to-be-opened Mount Frankland Wilderness Walkway.

"We have many natural treasures in the region, most of which are free for visitors to explore, which suits the discerning traveller who is money conscious," she said.

Julie said that marketing of the Tree Top Walk would continue to include trade events to capitalise on a growing Perth population with strong visitor numbers expected to continue to the walk as well as the region.

Pilbara threatened species in the spotlight

THREATENED species of the Pilbara were the focus of a three-day conservation science workshop last month which focused on biodiversity management strategies.

More than 55 people with a range of expertise shared information and valuable insights on 53 listed and threatened Pilbara species and considered various threat management options taking into account a range of factors including cost effectiveness.

DEC Principal Research Scientist and workshop organiser Dr Stephen van Leeuwen said the workshop attendees had a diverse range of expertise and backgrounds.

"It was very important that we had people with experience in working with traditional owners on the land as well as biological scientists, economists and people responsible for developing policies and making decisions," he said.

"The results of the workshop will provide invaluable information for managing land across the Pilbara in a way that mitigates threats for these species."

CSIRO scientist Dr Josie Carwardine said it was a privilege to be part of a project that involved such knowledgeable and wide-ranging experts and was focused on one of Australia's most important regions regarding decision-making around biodiversity conservation.

"The costed and prioritised sets of threat mitigation strategies are an essential input to make better decisions for the protection of threatened species along with other values and priorities for the Pilbara," she said.

The pooled information will be analysed after the workshop and the findings published in a CSIRO report on biodiversity threat management in the Pilbara. The report is expected to be completed by May 2014 and will be made publicly available on CSIRO's website.

The Pilbara Biodiversity Workshop was coordinated by DEC and the CSIRO.

The workshop was held at the Western Australian Conservation



Experts discuss biodiversity management strategies at the workshop.

Science Centre from 11 to 13 March and delegates included representatives from DEC, CSIRO, the Department Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population

and Communities, Office of the Environmental Protection Authority, the resources industry, environmental consultancies, conservation bodies, landholders and Indigenous groups.

