

Celebrating 30 years of Ramsar wetlands in Perth-Peel

By Michael Coote

The State is celebrating 30 years since the first listing of nine iconic wetlands under the international convention on wetlands, the Ramsar Convention in June 1990. The [Forrestdale](#) and [Thomsons Lakes](#) and the [Peel-Yalgorup System](#) Ramsar sites were two of these that are within a short drive from Perth and loved by many local residents and bird lovers from Western Australia and further afield, not to mention the thousands of waterbirds that visit these wetlands from overseas and the ones that call it their home all year round.



A southwestern snake-necked turtle, one of the small residents of Lake McLarty in the Peel-Yalgorup Ramsar site. Photo – DBCA.

Forrestdale and Thomsons Lakes play an important role in maintaining wetland biodiversity as they are the best remaining examples of brackish, seasonal lakes with extensive fringing sedgeland that were once typical of wetlands on the Swan Coastal Plain. In particular, these lakes play an important role for providing a safe place for breeding of resident waterbirds such as black swans. Eighty-five species of waterbirds have been recorded at the two lakes and 27 of these have been recorded breeding.

The fringing vegetation around the lakes provide safe habitat for a large number of terrestrial birds and other vertebrate species including the uncommon skink, the Perth slider (*Lerista lineata*), six species of frogs, and the southwestern snake-necked turtle (*Chelodina colliei*). Both lakes contain rich and diverse communities of aquatic invertebrates, which are a main food source for the many faunal species, including the migratory waders.

Critical to the conservation of Forrestdale and Thomsons Lakes is the hard work and many hours of on-ground activity that staff from the Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions (DBCA) and the [Friends of Forrestdale](#) dedicate to managing the threats from weeds, feral animals and climate change. As a result of all this hard work, we have incredibly peaceful, yet active wetland systems that invite the visitor to explore along signposted walkways and paths.



Entrance walkway to Forrestdale Lake with some of the Friends group. Photo – DBCA.

The Peel-Yalgorup Ramsar site is located in and around the Peel and Harvey estuaries in Mandurah, just 80km south of Perth and include the lakes of Yalgorup National Park. The system is one of the most diverse wetland systems listed under the Ramsar Convention in Australia, containing estuaries, rivers, saline lakes and freshwater lakes and marshes.

The site is the most important area for waterbirds in south-western Australia. Large populations of waterbirds utilise the estuary and lakes and there is a diversity of fish, aquatic invertebrates and fringing salt marsh vegetation. In addition, the system contains rare microbial communities in the form of thrombolites. The thrombolites at Lake Clifton are considered to be 2,000 years old. They are one of only two examples of living thrombolites in Western Australia, and a handful in the world.

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The [Peel-Yalgorup Ramsar site](#) lies within Bindjareb country, a dialect group of the Noongar. It contains hundreds of sites of significance to the Indigenous community, including sites of artefact scatter, camp sites, ceremonial sites, fish traps, and skeletal remains.

The [Peel-Harvey Catchment Council](#) coordinate oversight of the system and have a tremendous track record for conserving the many natural values of the wetlands. The group partners with staff from DBCA and the Department of Water and Environmental Regulation, four local governments that surround the system, and community groups to conduct on-ground restoration and scientific investigations, working to ensure there is a balance between protecting natural habitats and allowing a great experience for the thousands of locals and visitors to the system.



A view across Thomsons Lake showing important habitat for resident waterbirds. Photo – Ezgi Perincek.



The Serpentine River joins the Peel Estuary in the Peel-Yalgorup Ramsar site. Photo – PHCC.

The Peel Inlet and Harvey Estuary system supports the largest commercial and recreational estuarine fishery in Western Australia. The estuarine fishery was [certified as sustainable](#) by the Marine Stewardship Council in 2016, a good indicator of the balance that has been achieved between ecological requirements and the pressures of recreational and commercial fishing and other activities that take place there.

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