

Swan Region



Department of
Environment and Conservation

Newsletter

December 2008

Message from Acting Regional Manager, Paul Brown

It is great to be Acting Regional Manager for Swan Region! Briefly, my background is one of 26 years in DEC, mostly in Regional Services Division. Over the past 16 months I have been leading a project team working on Gnangara Mound, its biodiversity and the extreme impacts of climate change on its drinking water. I was the District Manager at Swan Coastal for five years between 2002 and 2007.



My aim is to provide you with stability as Regional Manager over the coming summer. I intend to get out to all ten work centres before Christmas and look forward to meeting most of you at your work places.

Key strategic issues that Alan Sands and I have discussed are:

- Filling vacant, acting and seconded positions

- permanently
- Budgets, budgets and budgets
- Evaluating nature conservation outcomes from our prescribed burning programs; and
- Preparing a new Swan Region Strategic Plan.

It is important that we get our financial house in order during 2008/2009 as we are all aware that the economic environment for the next couple of years is not looking good. Although the Director General will cover the 3% cut in DEC's budget this year, we need to be prepared for it in the 2009/2010 financial year. My immediate focus will be on identifying and managing unbudgeted parts of our programs.

I wish you and your families a very happy and safe Christmas - New Year period. ■



Contributions to this Newsletter are welcome. Swan Region is a vast area and its many work centres scattered throughout. The Newsletter provides a great opportunity to let the rest of the team know some of the exciting and innovative things that are going on in your area - and we are not averse to humour. Please send your news to:

Kay Poetschka
kay.poetschka@dec.wa.gov.au

Wandoo crown decline - 5 year review

By Liz Manning



Conservationists from across the south-west travelled to York in late October to hear the latest research on wandoo decline and learn about the conservation of wandoo woodlands. The seminar, hosted by the Government's Wandoo Recovery Group (WRG) attracted one hundred delegates including community group leaders, land managers, scientists and researchers.

WRG members and research scientists from DEC, UWA, Murdoch University and the Tuart Health Research Group highlighted major achievements in research and mapping, communicated information and acknowledged the enormous contributions and input of rural communities.

Tree decline is one of the biggest threats to biodiversity in southwest WA, affecting species such as wandoo, jarrah, marri, tuart and peppermint. The WRG was formed in 2003 in response to community concern over wandoo's failing health. It works to support research and unite government and community-based actions to develop practical solutions. The WRG has been coordinated through Swan Region since its inception. The technical and administrative support provided by Swan Region has been substantial.

To better understand when and where declines occur, WRG coordinates a Woodland Recovery Project, assisted by DEC, WWF – Australia and a \$71,295 Lotterywest grant. Many local groups, TAFE students and individuals have taken part in the project which includes community surveys to record and monitor wandoo health, an historical review of wandoo and a public education program. Results from surveys spanning six years indicate that wandoo decline is stabilising, with recovery evident at some sites. Ten years of photographic observations support these findings.

A booklet *Wandoo in health and decline – a history* brings together results of historical research that strongly suggests wandoo decline has only emerged at significant levels since the 1980s.

Research into wandoo's tolerance and response to drought reveals important differences in how

wandoo takes up and uses water compared to other species like Jarrah and marri. Insect and fungal studies have examined the effects of harmful organisms and how, where and when they contribute to decline.

The new State Centre of Excellence for Climate Change; Woodland and Forest Health will unite future research efforts. One of the key programmes of the Centre is to determine the historical impact of climate change on woodland ecosystems and link these predictions to local impacts.

Special thanks go to David Mitchell and the administration staff at Swan Region for their assistance in ensuring a smooth well organised event. For more information contact Liz Manning on 0427 441 482 or email lizmanning@bigpond.com



From L to R: Allan Wills (DEC), Ryan Hooper (UWA) and Bruce McGregor (WRG) discuss wandoo research



From L to R: Alan Sands (WRG Chairman), Bruce McGregor (WRG), Dr Erik Veneklaas (UWA), Dr Andrea Gaynor (UWA), Dr Ian Abbott (DEC)

Closure of DEC Outdoors

by Bruce Harvey and Heddy King

DEC Outdoors officially closed for business on 31 October after nine years and, **Jane Earp**, who managed DEC Outdoors for the duration of its existence, celebrated the occasion by retiring after a total of nineteen years with the Department. Jane's tremendous contribution was acknowledged by Alan Sands in his speech at the farewell function at DEC Outdoors on its last day. Jane acknowledged Dolly Gallagher for employing her at Jarrahdale and Heddy King for her great support in recent years. We wish Jane well for the future.

The provision of services, offered there for so many years, is now being covered by Perth Hills National Parks Centre. Armadale Visitors Centre will stock DEC's maps and publications. Below is the background to the creation of DEC Outdoors.

In 1999 it was decided to relocate the Swan region/FMB staff from the ageing Kelmscott site to the improved facilities at the former Bush Fires Board building at Kensington. This caused some concern with the public in the Kelmscott area and the Armadale/Kelmscott City with the result that it was agreed that CALM establish a shop-front in Armadale next to the Tourist Bureau. This was named *CALM Outdoors* and was open to the public for limited hours



'From L to R Bibbulman Bob, Jane Earp, Julie Davies and Heddy King

including weekends to cater for public demand for recreation information, public fire wood permits and information on fauna, flora and the environment. The small shop-front was ideal in location with plenty of parking available especially for firewood getters with their trailers and 4-wheel drive vehicles.

Friday afternoons and Saturdays were particularly busy in certain times of the year especially in providing the firewood permits. Tourists and recreationists were able to browse through the available publications for purchase and free pamphlets in a quiet environment with a staff member readily available to assist them.

The establishment of DEC Outdoors has proven surprisingly successful over the 9 years of existence with very few complaints recorded against many grateful remarks. Staff who worked there were given additional work and projects to complete in the quieter times and the office provided valuable employment for casuals and permanent staff.

In particular, students with a keen interest found the casual work rewarding in breaking into the working environment and earning some cash while improving their knowledge and skills on DEC business. Some of these students also worked as volunteers for the department and have progressed to become longterm public servants.

The question of whether the shop-front was profitable was regularly raised by management and with the adjacent Tourist Bureau now able to carry out most of the functions of DEC Outdoors it was decided to close the office for business at the end of October 2008.

The success of the establishment for 9 years is a testament to the efforts of so many dedicated staff and management, especially **Jane Earp**■

Emma Fiorentino has been appointed as Swan Region's Business Manager. Challenges abound for those responsible for DEC's finances. Emma is ready for the fray after her recent European trip■



Emma in Europe (or "Emma through a drinking glass")

Preparation of Pre Formed Teams for 2008-2009 Season

by Kay Poetschka

Photographs by Jane Mansergh: Kalbarri Fire and Green and Gold PFT meeting

For those of us who recently participated in the AIIMS and Basic Wildfire Awareness instruction courses conducted by Ross Mead and Jane Mansergh for teams Green, Gold, Red, Blue and Black, as well as the pre season in-briefing days, the importance of preparation in the Department's fire fighting role was valuable and informative. Many of those attending had been involved in fire management in previous seasons but most attendees were new recruits.

The Australasian Inter-Service Incident Management System (AIIMS) was developed and produced by the Fire and Emergency Services Authority of WA and DEC. The incident management structure is not confined to wildfire control as any incident can be resolved by applying the principles of control to any event. There are three levels of incident with degrees of complexity ranging from simple to moderately complex to extreme; the first requiring fewer personnel and the latter two requiring many more resources and the use of

numerous operational units.

Whether staff is operational (frontline) or behind the scenes in the Incident Management Team, the AIIMS course is not only very educational, it is mandatory to have this certificate to be part of a Pre Formed Team.

The Basic Wildfire Awareness Course familiarises all of the above groups with the actual nature of fire and the elements influencing it. The terminology used is of paramount importance as every unit/sector at a fire has to be cognisant of the risks and safety issues surrounding such an incident and be able to communicate with each other.

The supporting material, especially film, used by Ross and Jane was quite dynamic, demonstrating the drama involved with actual

fires in WA and interstate. The video footage of water bombing showed its ability to assist in the suppression of fires with the assistance of other machinery.

In-briefing Meetings

Black PFT met in Manjimup on 20 November with Incident Controller, Peter Keppel, presenting the bulk of the agenda* which had been formulated to suit all the PFT pre-season meetings. Rod Simmonds (Regional Fire Coordinator for the Warren Region) and Lachie McCaw (Planning Officer) assisted with the presentation. The value of getting to know a team prior to working with them in an incident could not be underestimated.

Green and Gold teams met at Perth Zoo and Jane Mansergh is to be congratulated on the organisation of packs for everyone on these teams consisting of grab bags, travel bags, clothing and stationery such as log books and personal fire diaries.

* In-briefing Powerpoint presentations will be available on the FMS website soon ■



A

Generous Gift

by Alison Pritchard (Manager Yanchep National Park)

Local Two Rocks residents, Stan and Ruby Daley, have just donated two beautiful pieces of their private collection to Yanchep National Park.



Image: Ruby Daley, Alison Pritchard (park manager) and Stan Daley

Stan and myself are holding a framed photograph of Crystal Cave taken in 1971.

Ruby is holding a painting of Crystal Cave by Walter Hartland which was painted from memory in 1937 after an extended stay by Walter in the park. The painting was given to the former Yanchep National Park superintendent in the 1960s, Joe Hill (deceased), and passed onto Stan by Joe in 2005.

Stan's father, William (Snow) Daley worked in the park as a diesel engineer and electrician between 1930 and 1944 and was involved in providing Crystal Cave with lighting during this time.

After some slight restoration, the donated pieces will be on public display within the park for the enjoyment of park visitors. ■

Snippet from our resident OSH
Chairman, Richard Boykett

Driver Safety:

- there are 19 serious injuries for every death that occurs in motor vehicle accidents;
- your blood alcohol level will remain at the same level of elevation for up to 4 hours after your last drink;
- your body works to a rhythm. The most dangerous times for driving are in the period after lunch (1200 to 1400) and in the early morning (0100 to 0600) when you are normally asleep. Beware of yourself and other drivers at these times; and
- keep your headlights on at all times when driving, whether city or country. It might make all the difference in the split second that counts.

Australian Mammal Society Conference

by Nicole Willers

During the last week of September, I was lucky enough to escape the winter chill in Perth to visit tropical Darwin. The wet season build-up hadn't really kicked in which was good, so we experienced hot days and balmy nights, without overwhelming humidity. The occasion was the annual conference of the Australian Mammal Society (AMS). Members of the society conduct research on a wide variety of biological disciplines including community ecology, population genetics, conservation and management. The annual conference is a great opportunity to discuss the latest research with other AMS members, and develop friendships and collaborative relationships.

We started the conference with a sundowner at Mindil Beach markets on the Sunday night. The AMS is a really social group, and the annual conferences are always jam-packed with social events. The conference involved about 120 members. Presentations were given on genetics, wombat surveys and the private lives of echidnas and a visit made to the Territory Wildlife Park for a behind-the-scenes tour and dinner. It was great to see a black wallaroo, agile wallabies and the nocturnal house which was impressive. The presentation that I gave centred on my PhD research in the use of fertility control to manage over-abundant black flanked rock wallabies in the central wheatbelt of WA.

On the last day, an award was given for the best student presentation for the conference and I was really chuffed to receive a high commendation. Given the high calibre of all the student presentations, I was really honoured to be acknowledged.

The conference ended with a dinner at the flash Hanuman's restaurant. A tradition of the conference dinner is the limerick competition where participants write in a humorous vein about a topic covered in the conference. These are presented to the audience and the level of applause determines the winner. As I'd found inspiration in the private lives of echidnas - and after a few champagnes - I was asked to read it out (to my dismay). The response to the limericks was enthusiastic and provided much raucous entertainment.

Overall, the AMS conference was a great opportunity for me to learn more about Australian mammals, practise communicating to a large group of peers and have a lot of fun. The conference next year is in Perth, so maybe we'll see some of you there ■



Nicole Willers with a NT termite nest



Nicole with Phil Matson (Perth Zoo) at AMS Conference



Summertime with Nearer To Nature

by Marie Milagro (Manager Perth Hills
National Park Centre)

As always the Nearer to Nature team has a diverse and exciting range of activities lined up for the whole family. Activities for the adventurous include Hi Tek Trail Trekkers, and Canning Canoeing Capers; for the curious there is Deadly and Dangerous, It's a Shell Life and Wild About Whales and for those who want to experience an encounter with amazing native animals, come to Wonders of the Wildlife Ark, Nocturnal Delights, or Whoo's Who.

Adults, don't forget to book early for our February Valentines Day Special, *Darlings on the Range*, which is sure to be a popular favourite of the summer season. This dreamy evening will commence with a guided walk under the forest canopy, followed by a picnic under the stars with a gourmet hamper. During your meal enjoy the antics of endearing native animals, introduced by our animal carer guide. Finally, the romance continues with a movie in the enchanting open-air Kookaburra Cinema. For those wanting to further extend their evening, a Valentines Day special rate is available in our campground.

This summer, activities are being held at national, marine and regional parks all throughout the Perth Metro area, including the new and very popular Canning River Regional Park, Woodman Point, Mullaloo, Shoalwater and Trigg Beaches, Matilda Bay, John Forrest National Park and Perth Hills National Parks Centre. There is sure to be a location near you, so book your Nearer to Nature activity today!

Don't forget, staff get a 20% discount off all Nearer to Nature activities■

