

Stewardship – what's on offer?

Many of you will have recently had, or will soon be receiving, offers of a stewardship visit to your properties. What does this mean?

When we take on a conservation covenant, the Department is taking on a long-term commitment to help you manage your land. To best help you do this, staff of the covenant program are available to come and visit your property every three years (or sooner, if the property changes hands). During these visits, staff can review with you any management issues that might have come up, such as new weeds that have appeared or any unusual plant deaths, or difficulties you may be having with specific management actions. On the positive side, new plants or animals might have appeared and we can help identify those. The management guidelines for your property are also reviewed at this time, and if you want them modified to reflect changes in management, a new draft can be prepared for your signature.

We also make annual contact by phone to see if you've had any problems that we might be able to help you with. We can assist with applications for funding programs (such as Envirofunds) and we may be able to help you with advocacy, if there is a new development proposal that could affect your covenant site.

For example, in the past months, the covenant program has provided advice to the Department of Environment (DoE) on the potential impact of a clearing proposal on a property adjacent to a covenant site. In this case, the proposal was to place a dam upstream of the covenanted property, which would have had a significant impact on a population of white-bellied frogs (*Geocrinia alba*).

These frogs are a threatened species in WA, with a very restricted distribution. The purpose of the covenant was to protect both the frogs and their habitat, so it is important that the covenant be taken into account when development proposals such as this arise.

Of course our advocacy role can only extend as far as potential impacts on the nature conservation values that the covenant is protecting, but if you have any concerns, discuss them with us and we can see if we can help.

If you haven't heard from us recently and you'd like some more information, have an issue that is concerning you, or would just like to share with us any successes you've had, please feel free to get in touch with either the Covenant Coordinator, or your Covenant Officer.

Nature Conservation Covenant Program Staff

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Conservation Covenant News

Newsletter of the Department of Conservation and Land Management's Nature Conservation Covenant Program



Issue 2, February 2006

Editorial

Welcome to Issue 2 of Conservation Covenant News!

The aim of this Newsletter is provide you, our covenantors, with up-to-date information on funding opportunities, incentives and Covenant Program developments, as well as to share your stories.

So, if you have any news, photos or stories that you'd like to share with other covenantors about your projects, or pictures you've taken in your bushland, please send them in and we will do our best to include them in the next issue.

Sophie Moller, Covenant Program Coordinator

(N.B. In March I will be going on maternity leave for approximately 6 months and Emma Bramwell will again coordinate the Program for this period.)

Current Status

The Nature Conservation Covenant Program has entered into conservation covenants with 60 landowners to protect 5,298 hectares of remnant vegetation throughout the southwest of the State. **Thank you to all of you who've made this commitment!**

We are currently negotiating with 33 landowners to protect a further 5,066 hectares, ranging in location from Mingenew to Walpole. We look forward to bringing many of these covenants to fruition this year.

Assistance for Conservation Projects

The Australian Government will launch Round 8 of Envirofund in February 2006. This program helps communities to undertake local projects aimed at conserving biodiversity and promoting sustainable resource use. This program offers up to \$50,000 in assistance for suitable projects. For further information please go to www.nht.gov.au or call 1800 303 863.

We would be pleased to assist you to develop suitable projects and can provide letters of support for projects at sites protected by conservation covenants. Such sites are looked on favourably by funding programs, as the covenant demonstrates your long-term commitment to conservation. If you have a project that you would like to undertake on your covenant site, please contact the Covenant Coordinator on 9334 0477. We look forward to hearing from you!

Signs for Covenant Sites

Over the years many of you have requested signs to make others are aware of, and take into consideration, the values of your bushland. This has been of particular interest for those of you who have sites that are accessed by service providers for routine maintenance. In the past some sites have been unwittingly damaged.

I am pleased to announce that we now have signs for you. The 'Protected Habitat' signs are 150 mm x 150 mm (see Figure 1 below for design). Please contact Emma Bramwell on 9334 0404 or email emmab@calm.wa.gov.au if you would like to order one for your covenanted site. We will send them out free of charge.



Figure 1. Nature conservation covenant site sign.

Feral Bees

We have recently received enquiries from covenantors who are concerned about feral bees taking over nest hollows in trees or nest boxes on their property. European honey bees (*Apis mellifera*) were introduced in the 1820s for honey production and to help pollinate crops, but over the years bees have swarmed from the parent hives to form feral bee colonies.

Although they are the same species, feral bees differ from managed bees in that they are more aggressive, have a tendency to swarm, and are often of little commercial value for honey production. They also take over tree hollows and evict native birds and mammals – of particular concern is the effect on nesting hollows of three threatened species of black cockatoo (red-tailed, Carnaby's and Baudin's). Feral bees are not as efficient at pollinating plants as the native species are, and may harvest nectar rewards without pollinating the flower. The lack of a floral reward reduces the flower's attractiveness to other pollinators and so the flower may not be pollinated, and no seed will set.

With financial support from the Water Corporation, CALM is researching feral bee control, and is planning to develop a Feral Bee Control Strategy. The aim is to reduce feral bee numbers in areas where they negatively impact on native flora and fauna without affecting the beekeeping industry. So, if you have feral bees on your property, CALM would like to know about it. Contact Jacqueline Hay (jacquelineh@calm.wa.gov.au) or by phone on 9334 0103.

In the meantime here are some tips for dealing with feral bees taking over nest boxes:

- regularly inspect nest boxes, as newly established colonies of feral bees are far easier to remove than established ones;
- nest boxes should be inspected at night when bees are less active;
- wear protective clothing(!);
- swarms that take refuge in nest boxes should be removed as soon as possible – local apiarists may assist with removal and their contact details are in the yellow pages. If an apiarist isn't available, you can either call a licensed exterminator or attempt to remove the swarm yourself (use the precautions above!); and

- if you need a light, use a filtered one such as a torch covered with red cellophane, as white light will irritate bees.

Removing the swarm

- Remove the lid from the nest box – the bees won't be able to maintain a constant temperature in the hive and will leave in search of a better home in a few days.
- If the hive is already established, block the entry to the nest box. The bees will consume the remaining honeycomb and eventually starve to death. This may take some time, depending on how much honeycomb they have.
- Spray the hive with citronella oil.
- Clean the nest box to reduce the likelihood of reinvasion.
- If you are allergic to bees, never attempt to remove the swarm or colony yourself! Hire a licensed exterminator or apiarist.

Jacqueline Hay

Project Officer, Feral Bee Management



Figure 3. Bee hive, taken by Jennifer Jackson, former Project Officer, Feral Bee Management.

Tax Benefits of Conservation Covenants

Did you know that your property may be eligible for an exemption from State Land Tax exemption and may also be eligible to receive Capital Gains and Income Tax benefits? There are certain eligibility criteria, so for further information on the Land Tax exemption, please contact the Office of State Revenue. For further information on the Capital Gains and Income Tax benefits, please contact the Australian Taxation Office or your taxation adviser.

Carnaby's Cockatoo

Carnaby's Cockatoo (*Calyptorhynchus latirostris*) is a large (53-58 cm), black bird with white cheek patches and white panels on its tail (Figure 2). It inhabits a large area of south-west Western Australia, extending from Kalbarri south-east to Esperance and is listed as 'rare or likely to become extinct'. It is protected in WA.

Carnaby's Cockatoo is mainly found in uncleared or remnant areas of eucalypt woodland and shrubland and heath country. It is dependent on large eucalypts containing hollows to breed, and these are decreasing due to old age and clearing for agriculture. Establishing new trees so that future generations of cockatoos have hollows in which to breed is imperative, as it will take centuries for these hollows to form.

You can assist by protecting existing nest trees and helping new ones to establish by excluding livestock and rabbits, as many of you are already doing.

You can further contribute to the conservation of this species through participating in activities run by the Carnaby's Black-cockatoo Recovery Project, such as 'The Great Cocky Count'. For further information on how to help conserve Carnaby's cockatoo, go to www.carnabyscockatoo.org or call Helen Pitman, Regional Coordinator for the Carnaby's Black Cockatoo Recovery Project on 0428 762 292.

This article is an extract of Fauna Note No. 05/2005, Carnaby's Cockatoo, written by Tamra Chapman, Belinda Cale and Marion Massam. For further information, please refer to the full article at www.naturebase.net/plants_animals/living_with_wildlife/pdf/0505_carnabys_cockatoo.pdf



Figure 2. Carnaby's Cockatoo (Adapted from Johnstone and Storr, 1998).