



Editorial

Welcome to the third edition of Conservation Covenant News. The Nature Conservation Covenant Program (NCCP) team has done its best to keep in contact and visit as many of our covenantors as possible for site assessments and stewardship visits. However, for those of you who we haven't been able to catch up with recently, here's an update of what's been going on in the Covenant Program.

This issue of Conservation Covenant News will provide readers with information relating to staff changes, new projects, an update on the Covenant Program status and an exciting new way for landowners to monitor wildlife and feral animals on their property. Other topics covered are the new funding opportunities currently available and the 'Fauna in focus' article on the southern carpet python.



Covenant staff

There have been a few staff changes in the covenants team since you last heard from us. Jana Sturis is now the Acting Covenant Coordinator for the program, Sophie Moller is the Coordinator for the Commonwealth-funded *Protected Areas on Private Lands* (PAPL) project and Mick Davis and Mike Fitzgerald have joined us as Covenant Officers for the PAPL project. Kimberley Oswald is also new to the team as the Acting Covenant Technical Officer on a part-time basis. If you need to contact Jana, Sophie, Mick, Mike or Kimberley our details can be found at the end of this newsletter.

Nature Conservation Covenant Program status update

The Nature Conservation Covenant Program has now entered into conservation covenants with 120 landowners, protecting 11,451 hectares of remnant vegetation throughout the south-west of the state. Thank you to all of you who've made this important commitment.

We are currently in the process of negotiating with 44 landowners to protect a further 8,300 hectares, ranging in location from Kalbarri to Esperance.

So far for the 2010–11 financial year we have successfully registered five covenants and another seven could potentially be registered before the end of the financial year.

Grants received

Last year the Covenant Program was successful in applying for funding from the Australian Government's *Caring for our Country* (CfOC) program. The program received \$450,000 for the *Protected Areas on Private Land* (PAPL) project to work with landowners, predominantly in the Avon Wheatbelt bioregion. The project was extremely successful, with nine new landowners agreeing to place 4,765 hectares of their land under conservation covenant. The project also assisted our existing covenantors with stewardship, visiting 10 properties and providing revised management guidelines, technical advice and funding.

Altogether the project has committed more than \$98,000 in funds to new and existing landowners to establish fencing, undertake weed or feral animal control, and other conservation-related activities.

The funding for the PAPL project has now been extended until May 2011, and funding has also been received for another CfOC project which will operate until June 2011. This project offers new landowners:

- An obligation-free assessment of the biodiversity values of their nominated sites.
- Obligation-free management guidelines to conserve their sites' biodiversity.
- Funding to assist with the implementation of essential management activities.
- Free ongoing technical advice and support to landowners who take up the covenant option.

The program will also apply for more funding to establish further projects from July 2011. Wish us luck!

Funding opportunities – Environmental Community Grants 2011

All our covenantors are strongly encouraged to apply for Environmental Community Grants. These grants provide up to \$15,000 to private landowners to manage their bushland. With a conservation covenant on your property, you are well positioned to be successful against other landowners who don't, because the government recognises the contribution you make to conservation through your covenant.

Grants are available for projects which restore or re-vegetate bushland (for example, planting or weed control), and for protective fencing (other than boundary fencing which is always your responsibility). You can apply for funds to purchase materials, or to hire contractors. Applications are due by **4pm on Thursday 7 April**, and forms can be downloaded from www.dec.wa.gov.au/content/view/5135/1/. If you need help with your application, please contact Mick Davis (mick.davis@dec.wa.gov.au) or phone 9334 0570.



Southern carpet python. Photo – Kimberley Oswald

Fauna in focus

The southern carpet python (*Morelia spilota* subsp. *imbricata*) occurs in the south west of Western Australia from Northampton south to Albany and Esperance and as far east as Kalgoorlie. It has been recorded to inhabit semi-arid coastal and inland habitats, banksia woodland, eucalypt woodlands, grasslands, granite outcrops and watercourses.

The colour and patterns of this reptile vary across their geographic range and can be pale to dark brown with blackish variegations that form cross bands. The belly is white, cream or yellow and unmarked or with black blotches. The head is a distinguishing feature as it is quite broad compared to other common snake species found in WA such as the dugite or tiger snake. The average length of an adult python is 230 centimetres and they can weigh up to one kilogram for males and up to 4.5 kilograms for females.

The carpet python's diet includes a variety of terrestrial vertebrates including mammals, birds and lizards. They have a preferred home range and can be found sheltering in burrows made by other animals, hollow tree limbs and logs or in rock crevices. During the warmer months pythons are most active at night or dawn and dusk, and during the cooler months they can be seen during the day basking in the sun to keep warm.

These amazing reptiles are currently listed on Schedule 4 of the *Wildlife Conservation (Specially Protected Fauna) Notice 2010(2)*. This species, like many others, is threatened due to loss of bushland habitat, altered fire regimes and predation by exotic species such as foxes and feral cats. Landowners can help reduce the impacts on this species by protecting remnant bushland on their property to provide habitat, engaging in feral animal control to reduce predation and practicing bushfire prevention strategies which will encourage natural regeneration in bushland.

This species is not aggressive and is quite stunning to observe, so if you are lucky enough to see one on your property please enjoy it from a distance and let it continue on its way.

To view the full article 'Carpet pythons (*Morelia spilota*) (Lacepede 1804)' please visit www.dec.wa.gov.au/content/view/3432/1999/1/3/.

Other reference

- Bush, B, Maryan, B and Browne, R – Cooper and D Robinson (eds.) (2007) *Reptiles and Frogs in the Bush: Southwestern Australia*.

The protection of flora in Western Australia

Most people are probably not aware that all flora native to WA is 'protected'. But what does this mean?

The Wildlife Conservation Act provides for the Minister for Environment to declare any flora native to the state, or any other flora that the Minister decides, to be protected. Currently, all flora native to the state is protected if it is in the classes: Spermatophyta (flowering plants, conifers and cycads); Pteridophyta (ferns and fern allies); Bryophyta (mosses and liverworts); or Thallophyta (algae, fungi and lichens). That is, anything that one generally associates with being a plant (including fungi that are now regarded as being in a kingdom of their own).

The protection afforded under the Wildlife Conservation Act principally relates to the approvals required to 'take' the plant. Under the Act, the term 'take' refers to any activity that affects the plant, including direct acts such as picking, digging up, destroying, burning or allowing a secondary activity to affect it, such as grazing or modifying the water levels affecting it. Also, the reference to flora includes any part of a plant, such as branches, flowers, fruits, seeds or spores.

Protected flora growing on private property is owned by the property owner. The permission of the owner is required for a person to take protected flora on private property. A licence is required to sell any protected flora taken from private property. This licensing requirement is to ensure that any flora that is harvested is done so in a sustainable manner.

Protected flora growing on Crown (public) land is owned by the Crown, and a licence is required to take any protected flora on such lands. If the flora is being taken for scientific, educational, hobby or some other prescribed purpose, the applicable licence is a Scientific or Other Prescribed Purposes Licence. This licence also requires the licensee to obtain the permission of the land manager in whom the Crown land is vested before taking any protected flora.

A large number of the state's native flora is threatened with becoming extinct. These flora need special protection above what is provided through the licensing system. The Wildlife Conservation Act includes special provisions for threatened flora. Under the Act, the Minister may declare a type of protected flora to be 'rare' where the Minister considers the flora to be at risk of extinction, rare, or otherwise in need of special protection.

'Declared rare flora', as they are termed, are specially protected under the Act by a requirement that any person must have the written permission of the Minister before taking any flora listed under this declaration. The penalty for taking declared rare flora without permission is \$10,000, compared to the penalty of \$4,000 for taking other protected flora contrary to the permission or licences prescribed in the Act.

Flora considered to be rare or threatened, are referred to the Minister by the state's Threatened Species Scientific Committee. Once a species is listed as rare, the Department

of Environment and Conservation (DEC) coordinates recovery and other management activities designed to prevent the species becoming extinct, and to eventually reclassify the species as non-threatened, if possible.

Because most (all except one) declared rare flora are endemic to WA, they are also regarded as being threatened nationally. Consequently, many declared rare flora are also listed as being threatened under the Commonwealth's *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999*, providing additional protection.

Further information

Information on flora licensing and the protection of threatened flora in WA is available on the web at www.dec.wa.gov.au/content/view/863/1217/ (licensing) and at www.dec.wa.gov.au/content/view/862/1287/ (flora protection).

Further information on threatened flora is available through DEC's Species and Communities Branch. The Branch Manager is Dr Ken Atkins (9334 0425) and Senior Botanist is Melanie Smith (9334 0472).

This is an extract from an article by Dr Ken Atkins for Bushland News (formerly Ecoplan News). To view the full article, go to www.dec.wa.gov.au/index2.php?option=com_docman&task=doc_view&gid=401&Itemid=711 (Summer 2006, Issue 56).



Declared rare flora *Caladenia excelsa* found along the South West Capes.
Photo – Andrew Brown/DEC

Native vegetation clearing regulations

Many who live on rural properties will, at some stage, have to do some clearing of vegetation on their land, whether it's to install or maintain firebreaks, collect timber or seeds and plant material. These activities are fairly straightforward but do you have all the information you need when it comes to performing these activities lawfully and sustainably within your covenant or other areas of your bushland? This topic can be complicated so the following will clarify a few points regarding native vegetation clearing regulations and managing your vegetation.

The definition of 'native vegetation' under the *Environmental Protection Act 1986* is 'indigenous, aquatic or terrestrial vegetation, and includes dead vegetation unless that dead vegetation is of a class declared by regulation to be excluded from this definition but does not include vegetation in a plantation'.

'Clearing' is defined under the Environmental Protection Act section 51A as:

- a) killing or destruction of;
- b) removal of;
- c) the severing or ringbarking of trunks and stems of; or
- d) the doing of any other substantial damage to, some or all of the native vegetation in the area, and includes the draining or flooding of land, the burning of vegetation, the grazing of stock, or any other act or activity that causes
- e) the killing or destruction of;
- f) the severing of trunks and stems of; or
- g) any other substantial damage to, some or all of the native vegetation in an area.

Under the *Environmental Protection Act 1986* the taking of standing timber, dead or alive, constitutes clearing and therefore requires a clearing permit unless it is exempt. Certain exemptions exist where the timber is taken for firewood, farm use or where vegetation is required to be taken for firebreak or track maintenance. These exemptions can be found under the Environmental Protection (Clearing of Native Vegetation) Regulations 2004.

The most common exemptions that apply to private property are as follows:

Fire prevention and control

Where possible and practical, good vehicular access and firebreaks should be maintained around the perimeter of your bushland, in accordance with your relevant local government authority's regulations for fire management. An effective method of establishing priorities for fire suppression and minimising the risk of long-term damage to your land's natural values is to develop a fire management plan. This can be developed on advice sought from sources including the relevant local government authority (your local shire) and the Fire and Emergency Services Authority of Western Australia (FESA). If bush is required to be burnt during a restricted time a permit must be obtained from a bush fire control officer under the *Bush Fires Act 1954*.

Collection of firewood from private property for domestic use and clearing to provide fencing and farm materials

An exemption from the requirement for a clearing permit applies for taking firewood for domestic use from private property and similarly for clearing of timber to provide for fencing and farm materials. The following conditions must be adhered to if undertaking this activity:

- Timber collection must be preferentially from clearing undertaken for another exempt purpose (such as building a shed).
- If no such clearing exists, timber may either be dead vegetation or live trees as long as it does not kill the tree or prevent its regrowth. This allows for the taking of branches or of sprouting species such as mallees.
- There is a limit of one hectare per financial year for all exempt clearing allowed under the regulations (including for such purposes as fencelines, vehicle tracks and walking tracks), including firewood collection.
- The wood collected for domestic purposes cannot be sold, given away or used off site.

Collection of plant propagation and identification material

You may opportunistically collect seed and plant material from your bushland for the non-commercial purpose of revegetation in the local area, if this has been included in the management guidelines for your covenant. If you wish to collect seeds or plant material to sell you will need to apply for a Commercial Producer's Licence through the department's Wildlife Licensing Section. Plant material may also be collected as voucher specimens for identification. Plant propagation material other than seed can also be collected for the purpose of revegetation in the local area, but not for any commercial purpose.

However, you cannot burn, irrigate, prune, fertilise or undertake any other activity specifically for the purpose of manipulating the production of seed or plant material.

The specific conditions in your management guidelines must be adhered to if undertaking the above mentioned activities.

Those with a registered covenant will have a set of management guidelines. These guidelines have been prepared by a Covenant Officer and may include some or all of the activities outlined above. They contain detailed recommendations on how to perform these activities correctly to ensure that minimal damage is caused to your bushland and that its conservation values are protected. You should always refer to your unique management guidelines before performing such activities as they are written specifically to suit you and your covenant. If you would like to discuss clearing regulations or your management guidelines please contact the covenants team on the numbers below.

Please be aware that this is a guide only. If you have any queries regarding clearing on your property, contact the Native Vegetation Conservation Branch on 9219 8744.

You can also view fact sheets explaining various aspects of the clearing regulations on DEC's website at www.dec.wa.gov.au/content/view/3553/2082/.



Kangaroos drinking at a dam at night. Inset: remote camera mounted on a tree.

Remote cameras

Last year the program bought six remote cameras to increase our understanding of how animals are using covenanted lands. The cameras are placed along animal trails for about two weeks at a time, and are triggered when an animal passes by. After retrieving the camera from the field, our officers can identify which native or feral animals (if any) are using the bush. This information is not only interesting for our covenantors, but is essential to ensure the best management advice is being given, specific to each site. In the long term, the use of remote cameras can also be a useful monitoring tool.

If you are interested in having a camera placed on your land at your next stewardship visit, please email Mick Davis (mick.davis@dec.wa.gov.au) or phone 9334 0570.

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Please contact us if you would like further information on any of the topics covered or if we can assist you with anything in regard to your covenant. We are here to help and would love to hear from you.

