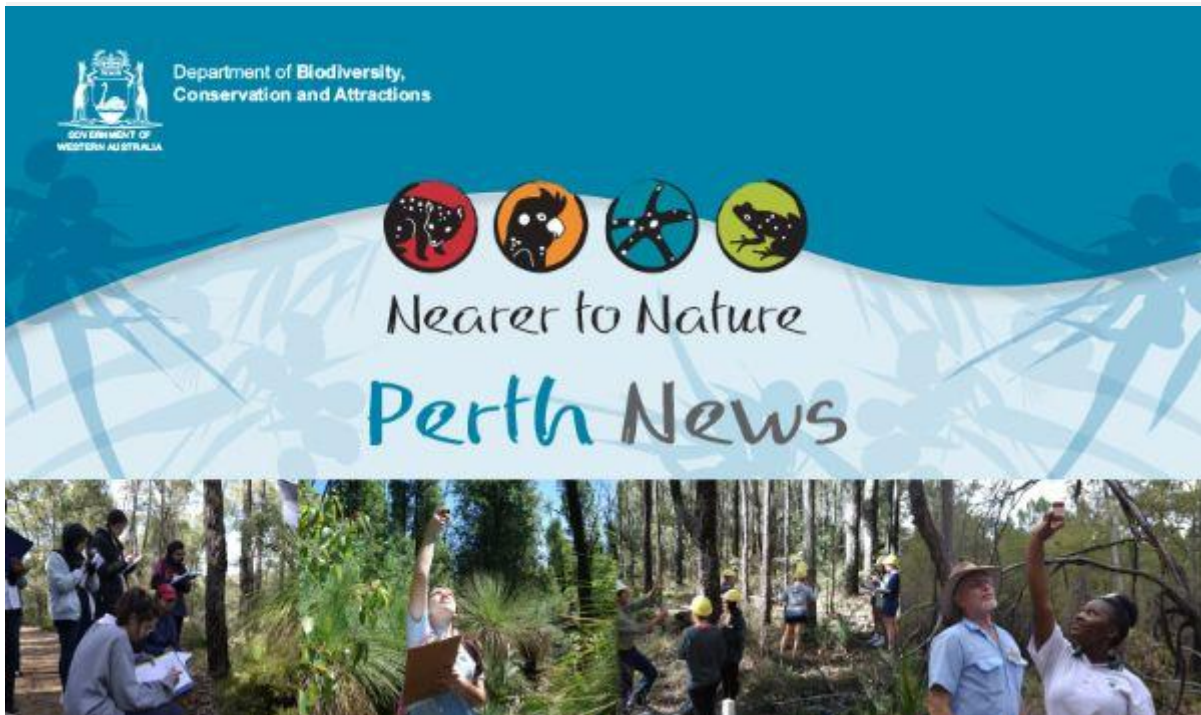


The latest news from your friendly *Nearer to Nature* team.

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Hi Lisa Wright

Issue No. 13

Wanju (welcome)

Wednesday, 12 May 2021

Welcome to the latest issue of *Nearer to Nature News*, where you can find the latest nature-based education news and events in the Perth area and surrounds from the Parks and Wildlife Service.

This year got off to a busy start for the team in Term 1, particularly with many groups of Year 11 and 12 students doing field biology, fauna biology, flora biology, fire biology and fire geography amongst other things.

Term 2 kicked off with a much-anticipated first presentation of our updated Bushfire program. We had 74 Year 8s test-driving the revamped program that increases student participation. Both students and teachers gave the program the thumbs up.

The Bushfire program has always been popular and we expect it will now be even more so. To find out more, including how to book, see the story below.

The Bushfire program is just one of the many available during Terms 2 and 3. Bookings are filling up at Perth Hills Discovery Centre and Canning River Eco Education Centre. If you are interested in an excursion or incursion please get online to [enquire](#) as soon as possible.

Good news for Waterwise Schools, there is still time to apply for a FREE 1.5 hour *Nearer to Nature* excursion. However, you must book your excursion before 30 June

A quick note on COVID: like the landscape, the status of COVID-19 restrictions in WA is ever changing but *Nearer to Nature* adapts and continues to run excursions and incursions in line with the current situation.

As always, my team and I ready to work with you to respond as may be required, at short notice, and to continue to provide quality hands-on education experiences that engage students as they learn and get nearer to nature.

Cheers

Mr C

Fired up by change

After months of hard work innovating our very popular Bushfire program, our team recently headed into the field with the people who would decide if they had done a good job – students.

While the program content has been tweaked, the big change was increasing student engagement, particularly through student-led group work, and to incorporate the use of technology like iPads.

The result: the students were all involved and actively engaged and the teachers were thrilled.

Like the original program, the revamped Fire in the Landscape is for Year 7-10 and has a core module: *Fighting fire with fire* - How is bushfire managed today? This covers the history of fire in the landscape, prescribed burning as a tool to reduce bushfire risk and field work.

There are three other modules and you can choose two more activities, depending on your focus:

- Fire biology: students learn how native animals respond to fire and how their habitats can be both created and destroyed by bushfires.
- Plan your response: working in groups students take on the roles of Parks and Wildlife officers to plan, prepare and respond to a hypothetical fire.
- Fire truck observation: students get up close to a Parks and Wildlife fire truck to learn what equipment firefighters use, how it works and what protection firefighters have to keep them safe.

Visit our website for more information: dbca.wa.gov.au/nearertonature.

To book please [enquire online](#).



Kitted out for fire duty - Year 8s learning about PPE. Photos - Bec Warner/DBCA

Conditioned response

Peter has been leading Nearer to Nature programs for more than 20 years and has faced many challenges so wearing a mask is something he is taking in his stride.

"Working outdoors means you have to be proactive and adaptable, mostly it's the weather that is the challenge and if it is impacting students we come up with another way of doing the activity. We are always thinking on our feet.

"So wearing a mask and complying with other COVID requirements, like cleaning regimes, is no big deal. It is a bit different looking at the students in masks but you can still see it when they get something, when the light bulb

goes on you see it in their eyes. That makes me feel good, why I love doing this.

"It's also great getting feedback from the teachers, they are our clients and we want them to be happy with the program and how we deliver it, that's what we are here for."





Top right: Peter unmasked.

Above: Peter in action last week, adapting to COVID conditions. Photos - DBCA

Waterwise Schools! Time is running out - book your FREE 1.5 hour Nearer to Nature excursion NOW. Click or email n2n@dbca.wa.gov.au details. You MUST book before 30 June 2021.

Look what we found!

Extremely lucky students doing animal trapping (part of Monitoring Marsupials) at the end of Term 1 found a chuditch (*Dasyurus geoffroii*) in one of their traps and had the opportunity to weigh and measure the gorgeous creature before releasing it into its habitat in Beelu National Park near the Perth Hills Discovery Centre.

From records we have built up over many years of the Monitoring Marsupials program, we know chuditch live in the forest here but its very rare that we see them.



The chuditch, also known as the western quoll, is the largest carnivorous marsupial in Western Australia. They have large, rounded ears, a pointed muzzle, rusty-brown fur with distinctive white spots and a mostly black, bushy tail.

They grow to 26-40cm long, with a tail of 21-35cm, and weigh up to 1.3kg. Unlike many other marsupials, the chuditch runs rather than hops.

This cute animal is mostly nocturnal and their dappled spots help them camouflage in the moonlight.

They can climb trees in search of food such as small mammals, birds, lizards, frogs, and bird eggs, however most of their diet consists of crickets, scorpions, and spiders. As opportunistic feeders, they also consume the red pulp on *Zamia* seeds, small fruits and parts of flowers.

Chuditch are solitary animals and live in dens in hollow logs, tree limbs, rocky outcrops and burrows. They forage within a home range of up to 15 square kilometres and often use multiple dens.

Litters of up to six young are born between May and September. Young are carried in the pouch for nine weeks, after which they are denned while the mother forages. At 15 weeks young are fully furred and by 24 weeks they are self-sufficient and disperse.

The chuditch is recognised as a threatened species under State and Commonwealth legislation. Species decline is due to land clearing, removal of suitable den logs and sites, and predation by feral cats and foxes.

If you think you have seen a chuditch, please fill out a [fauna report form](#) to help the department keep track of threatened species and inform management decisions.

Click on the links to find out more about [Monitoring Marsupials](#) or [to book](#).



top right. A emu chick, trapped as part of a monitoring marsupials activity last term, about to be measured before being released.

Photo - taken by one of the students

Hello and goodbye

At the beginning of last term we welcomed two new leaders to the team to help present our Aboriginal culture programs - Mary and Bryce.

Mary's home land is in North Queensland but she has lived in Western Australia for many years and is married to a Ballardong Noongar man.

Her work has focussed on education including teaching in schools specialising in Noongar language, so Mary has a great rapport with students from all year levels.

Sadly for us, another opportunity came up for Mary that was too good for her to refuse and she is no longer able to lead activities for us. We will miss her warmth and enthusiasm and wish her well in her new job.

Maybe some time in the future she will be able to join our team again, we certainly would welcome her back!

Bryce is a Parks and Wildlife Service trainee Aboriginal Ranger who is completing his traineeship with us and making the most of this opportunity to engage with young people.

"It's really great doing these activities with the kids, I'm also learning so much about how to engage with people because I want to work as a park ranger and that is an important part of what you do.

"I really enjoy working with the other leaders, watching and learning from them. It's been particularly great working with Mary."

With Mary leaving and Bryce with us for only a short while longer, we are on the lookout for Aboriginal presenters.

If you, or anyone you know, would like to join our team and lead cultural activities - here is a [short video clip](#) that explains what you will be doing. To find out more please contact us at n2n@dbca.wa.gov.au or 9295 2244.



Mary. Photo - DBCA



Bryce. Photo - DBCA

Fabulous fungi - Nature's recyclers

grows in very low nutrient soils.

In this soil an even more diverse group exists - fungi. Neither plant nor animal, fungi include toadstools, puffballs, and moulds.

Fungi are essential recyclers, breaking down forest debris to provide nutrients to plants, and an important food source for a variety of native mammals, including the endangered woylie.

Unlike plants, fungi cannot make their own food. They feed on living or dead organisms through long slender threads called hyphae that spread through the organism releasing enzymes that break down the food matter into substances that the fungi can easily absorb.

Some fungi form vital symbiotic relationships with forest plants. The hyphae form associations with plant roots - the fungus receives sugar, starch and vitamins from the plant and, in turn, transforms nutrients in the soil into a form the plant can use.

The thin hyphae extend in all directions through the soil and absorb water and nutrients for the plant, assisting the plant's root system.

The spectacular and mysterious fungi we see are the fruiting body that appears after rain and produces thousands of tiny spores from which new fungi grows.

Research shows that without the involvement of fungi in ecosystems, normal processes and bush regeneration may be significantly hindered.

Awareness is growing of why we need to understand and nurture the links between flora, fauna and fungi to help keep Perth's bushlands healthy.



Golden wood fungus (left) and Scleroderma spp. Photos - Rebecca Warner/DBCA



Purple flag (Patersonia occidentalis). Photo - Lyn Marshall/DBCA

As we move into June and July, the fertility season Makaru, the coldest and wettest weather of the year will make itself felt. The winds turn to the west and south, bringing rains and occasional snow to the peaks of the Stirling and Porongurup ranges.

As the waterways and catchments start to fill, water is plentiful and, for the Noongar peoples, it is easy to travel throughout the country.

Traditionally during Makaru, the Noongar peoples sheltered away from the sea and its food supply and feasted on grazing animals such as yonga (kangaroos). These animals also provided bookas, animal skin coats, to fend off the cold. Nothing was wasted as bones and sinews were used for tools and hunting spears.

It's a time of year when many animals pair up in preparation for the breeding season to come. Wardongs (ravens) that fly solo most of the year now fly in pairs, and mali (black swans) are now common on the lakes and rivers of the South West as they too prepare to nest and breed.

Purple and blue flowers such as the blueberry lily (*Dianella revoluta*) and purple flags (*Patersonia occidentalis*) start to emerge.

As Makaru draws to a close, the white flowers of the next season, Djilba, can be seen. Flowers such as those of the weeping peppermint (*Agonis flexuosa*) and old man's beard (*Clematis pubescens*).



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