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Friday, 7 August 2015

Hi Lisa

Welcome to the latest issue of *Nearer to Nature* South West News.

We are coming into the time of year when the forest comes alive with winter and spring rains, and a great time for an excursion to break up the school year. We have had a busy start to the year and dates are filling up fast for Term 3.

For staff at Parks and Wildlife the first rains came as a welcome relief this year. The summer of 2014–2015 was one of the worst bushfire seasons in recent times and kept everyone busy dealing with more than 600 bushfires, including a number of significant events at Northcliffe (the biggest fire in WA since Dwellingup in 1961) and Boddington, as well as assisting with numerous fires around the Perth metropolitan area. Fortunately the early rains followed by some ideal prescribed burning conditions resulted in one of the most successful autumn burning seasons in recent years. With such prominent fires still fresh in our memories, it is a good time to educate students about the impacts of bushfires and the importance of good fire management.

In addition to our usual excursion programs so far this year, *Nearer to Nature* South West staff have been involved in a number of other special programs. Once again we were proud to take part in Dunsborough Primary School's Bay OK Day to promote catchment care in the South West. Julie-Anne Oliver delivered a *Western Shield* presentation to an aged care facility in Bunbury, expanding our audience across generations, and our Margaret River staff provided some great activities for a special family [Geo-Challenge](#) weekend hosted by Wharncliffe Mill and Nature Play WA. We look forward to continuing to engage school-age students in biodiversity learning while reaching out to a wider range of the community.

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## Book now for Djiiba

As Term 3 begins we find places begin to fill up fast for excursions, particularly towards the end of term. August and September are our busiest times and despite the cooler weather and sometimes heavy rain is also the best time to be in the forest. We get many teachers trying to book late in the term and finding it difficult to find an available date, so please book as early as possible to avoid disappointment.

For the Nyoongar people it is the season of Djiiba, a time to be in the bush collecting roots and hunting emu, possum and kangaroo. It is also a great time for viewing the incredible biodiversity of the South West Jarrah forests, with many plants beginning to flower.

There are still places available for our trapping week from September 14–18, which provides a unique experience for any school camp.



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## Trapping at Wellington Discovery Forest with Applecross SHS

In May this year, 45 biology students from Applecross Senior High School attended a camp at the Wellington Forest Cottages and took part in a range of *Nearer to Nature* activities at the Discovery Forest Centre. The schedule included a night of *Western Shield* trapping, which was a highlight of the camp.

There was plenty for the students to see this year. A new chuditch was trapped on one transect as well as a number of mardo (and one rat!). During the night time spotlight walk, one group was also lucky to see a pair of tawny frogmouths on the way to the ever popular blindfold Sense-ational trail.



Teacher Helen Lancaster said the excursion was well matched to the school's program and was a great hands-on experience. "The presenters were excellent and adapted the experiences to our requirements and time available. The activities were varied and great fun for the students. We will be back and would recommend it to other schools," she said.

Year 11 students who attended the camp, Sarah and Hannah, said it was a thoroughly enjoyable experience and consolidated what they had been learning in class. "It was a unique and hands-on way to see the application of our lessons. Definite highlights were setting and checking traps, and of course the Sense-ational night trail," they said.



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## Picton Primary School

In our efforts to bring our key message of biodiversity conservation to as many students as possible, we have been looking at ways to bring our knowledge and activities closer to schools.

In June this year, *Nearer to Nature* worked with Picton Primary School teacher Michael

Digby to establish biological survey plots in bushland next to the school. Michael has been active in raising biodiversity conservation awareness with students, including tree planting in the reserve, and is hoping to rehabilitate a nearby wetland.



*Nearer to Nature* officers worked with students from years 3 to 6 to establish four monitoring quadrats in the reserve and to teach the students important biological fieldwork skills. Students carried out plant and invertebrate surveys within the reserve and were amazed at the diversity they discovered.

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# St Mary's Primary School

Students from St Mary's Primary School in Donnybrook discovered some of the wonders of our South West bushland in April when they enjoyed a day at the Wellington Discovery Forest with officers from the *Nearer to Nature* program.

The entire school attended, with different classes doing a wide range of activities. Despite forecasts of rain and storms, the weather stayed fine and it was a great opportunity for the students to have fun while learning about nature in an "outdoor classroom".

While the Year 1 and 2 students donned the ears and black noses of yongas (kangaroos) for a forest treasure hunt, the Year 3 and 4 students explored the underworld, looking for insects and other invertebrates and learning about the important roles they play in the environment.



Meanwhile the Year 5 and 6 students learned about the causes and risks of bushfires, why they are important for biodiversity and how we can control them using prescribed burning. They also thought about how we can prepare for fires and had a chance to get hands-on with some fire fighting tools thanks to the use of the Wellington Mills Bushfire Brigade fire appliance.

Year 1 and 2 teacher Annie Hutton said the day was well planned and entertaining. "It was a valuable learning experience that tied in perfectly with our science and sustainability curriculum. The kids are still raving and sharing what they have learned from this excursion," she said.

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## Contacting Nearer to Nature

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