



Hi Lisa

Mookaroo kickstarts wildflower displays

Mookaroo (first rains) came late this year with a very strong front and coincided with some pretty unusual late bushfire activity in the south-west.

When a fire is in the crowns of the trees in pouring rain, it really highlights the important role of wind in bushfire behaviour.

However the landscape has had a good drink and the honey bush (*Hakea lissocarpa*) is now in full flower. In our jarrah forest this signals the start of wildflower season and a move into the Nyoongar season of Djilba, when a large range of foods become available in the supermarket - which is of course, the forest.



For us, it also heralds the start of a stunning couple of months to be getting out in nature and seeing the huge biodiversity in our south-west forests.

Our new location

We are delighted to be able to offer nature-based activities at our new education pavilion at Mangrove Cove. For many schools, the costs of transport can be a big disincentive to forest-based excursions. Mangrove Cove, in the heart of Bunbury, provides a venue close to local schools to learn about important ecosystems within the Greater Bunbury area. Our opening day

Productive partnerships

We have also been active this year with different groups involved in education about and conservation of the threatened western ringtail possum. Apart from our planned Possum Week with Nature Conservation Margaret River (NCMR), we have also worked on some great activities with Geographe Catchment Council (Geocatch).

Team changes

We have had some staffing changes during the year. Michelle Keppel, who has been running excursions for us in Margaret River for more than 10 years, has taken on a position as the 'Our Patch' Environmental Education Officer with NCMR and we wish her the best in her new role. We have worked for several years assisting NCMR with programs in the Margaret River region including our Possum Week activities, so we expect to continue a great working relationship with Michelle.

We have also had two new casual leaders join our team. Some local teachers within Wellington District will have already met Susie Anderson in Wellington District, who began her training last year and is now proficient in running many of our excursions. Peta Lierich, based in Blackwood District, joined us early this year and will be running excursions in Margaret River and surrounds, drawing on her knowledge working in nature conservation in various locations around the State.

John Anderson

Project Officer

Nearer to Nature South West

Hidden treasures of Mangrove Cove

On Wednesday 3 June, about 175 Year 3 and 4 students from Coinda, Maidens Park and Dalyellup primary schools spent the day taking advantage of the fantastic weather to enjoy a day of nature based activities at Mangrove Cove. The area is managed by our new Regional Parks team and includes a purpose-built education pavilion overlooking the ecologically important mangroves of Leschenault Inlet.

The free educational day was organised by the *Nearer to Nature* team, as a way to provide students with an engaging and interactive day of cultural and environmental activities while introducing teachers to the facility and the range of people and organisations offering nature-based school education programs within the Greater Bunbury area.

Students engaged in round robin activities throughout the day covering the importance of mangroves, food chains, nature conservation, geology and indigenous history of the area.

In addition, students engaged in practical rehabilitation work as part of an effort to increase native vegetation in the area and provide additional habitat and food for native wildlife.

Jennifer Elson, Year 3 teacher at Dalyellup Primary School said the venue was a great asset to Bunbury.

"It is easily accessible and able to cater for a large number of students and activities, and the activities provided on the opening day were both enjoyable and stimulating," she said.

"It was a great opportunity to educate our children on issues relating to their local environment."

Another day is in the planning for September and we are hoping that this can become an annual event. Individual programs can be booked there at any time by contacting *Nearer to Nature*.



Above: We had a good turnout for the opening of the Mangrove Cove education pavilion.

Possoms come out to play

Throughout this year we have been working closely with the Geographe Catchment Council to raise awareness of the critically endangered Western Ringtail Possum (*Pseudocheirus occidentalis*), known to the Noongar people as ngwayir. The greatest threat to Western Ringtail Possums is loss of habitat and associated threats. They have declined to less than 10% of their original range and this is primarily in very close proximity to human habitation. Threats associated with this include removal of large peppermint trees from private property, traffic and ingestion of pesticides such as snail and rat baits, but it also means they are particularly vulnerable to predation by domestic animals such as dogs and cats.

During the summer months, *Nearer to Nature* leaders in conjunction with GeoCatch conducted a number of spotlight walks for the public in Busselton and Dunsborough which were very well attended.

We also helped the Year 2 cohort at Georgiana Molloy Anglican School to spotlight both ringtail and brushtail possums in their local bushland. In August, we participated in the "Pets Away, Possums Play" bin sticker launch in Vasse with Geocatch, an effort to encourage pet owners to keep their pets contained at night when the possums are active.



Above: 'Pets Away, Possums Play' - an important message to help our western ringtail possums.

St Brigid's whole school incursion

In March, *Nearer to Nature* were invited to St Brigid's in Collie to present a day of incursions to the whole school.

It was a great opportunity for the students to learn about different aspects of conservation and forest management at a level appropriate to their age. Year 1 and 2 students learned about the critically endangered numbat, Western Australia's fauna emblem, which included an engaging video, a look at some termites and making their own numbats.

The Year 3 students learnt about the features and jobs of invertebrates in the environment by thinking about just what a plant needs to grow.

Year 4 and 6 students conducted a mock trapping exercise to understand monitoring of native fauna which is a part of the *Western Shield* fauna recovery program.

Year 5 students learnt about fire behaviour, the role of fire in the environment and the things we can do as a community and as individuals to keep ourselves safe from bushfires over the summer.

Nearer to Nature have a wide range of engaging incursions suitable for all ages and linked across the curriculum which can be a very cost-effective way to bring some important environmental education into the classroom.

Please feel free to contact us to discuss what kind of programs might suit your students.

Below: Year 6 students from St Brigid's take measurements on their captured quenda.



New program - primary school forestry

During Semester 2 2019, we will be introducing a sustainable forestry program for upper primary students to introduce them to modern forestry management concepts. Timber is increasingly being seen as a sustainable, low emissions alternative to other building materials such as concrete, steel and aluminium.

How can we ensure a local supply of this important natural resource while protecting and enhancing environmental values? The excursion is being developed in partnership with the Forest Products Commission and looks at how we can manage plantations and native timber reserves to maximise productivity while using modern silvicultural knowledge and practices to increase forest health and reduce the extent and intensity of summer wildfires.

learning areas of HASS, Science, English and Maths.

If you are interested in being a pilot school for this excursion, some funding is available to assist with costs. Please contact us to discuss your needs.



Above: Students learn the importance of research in maintaining a healthy forest.

Changes to *Western Shield* trapping at Wellington Discovery Forest

Previously our licensing conditions required us to conduct our educational trapping program at the Wellington Discovery Forest in two blocks over four nights in May and September.

We have recently modified our trapping licence to allow trapping on eight individual nights throughout the year which will hopefully provide the flexibility to make this great hands-on program more accessible for schools.

The program is suitable for Year 5 to 12 students and it is a great activity to combine with an overnight camp at the Wellington Forest Cottages or Potters Gorge. It would also be ideal for *Bush Ranger* groups. Early bookings are advised.

Right: This young male chuditch is being measured before release.



Contacting *Nearer to Nature* in the South West Region

For any **enquiries and bookings for excursions or PLs**, please contact *Nearer to Nature South West* at the Parks and Wildlife Service South West Regional Office:

Phone: 9725 4300

Fax: 9725 4351

Email: swecoed@dbca.wa.gov.au

For the **development of programs and educational liaison** please contact John Anderson, Project Officer at the Parks and Wildlife Service South West Regional Office.

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