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Sent: Wednesday, 8 February 2023 12:55 PM
To: Library
Subject: Nearer to Nature South West, Term 1 2023

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Term 1, 2023



Department of Biodiversity,
Conservation and Attractions



Nearer to Nature

South West News



Welcome to the latest edition of Nearer to Nature South West news and welcome to the start of the 2023 school year.

We had a busy end to last year, welcoming many local and non-local students to the Wellington Discovery Forest and RAC Margaret River Nature Park. We were once again involved in Dunsborough Primary School's Bay OK Day and assisted with Geocatch's Possum Week incursions which happened across the local Margaret River and Cowaramup schools.

In addition, we were out in the community, talking to visitors at the Follow the Dream Careers Day held at Bunbury Senior High School and at the Dalyellup Community Christmas Festival.

After taking a short break to refresh and celebrate the festive season with family and friends we were back for a January program at Wellington Discovery Forest (more on that below).

We are now busy taking bookings for our excursions and incursions for next year and are very much looking forward to enjoying another great year of nature-based education with you all.

John Anderson
Project Officer, Nearer to Nature South West

2022 Wrap-up

Whilst Covid did still cause a few hiccups in the first part of the year, our 2022 year ended up being a busy one. It is nice to look back on our activities as a team and we thought we would share them in numbers here:

- 111 events (excursions, incursions, community events and open days)
- 43 educational institutions and groups including primary and high schools, Vacation OSH and Childcare providers, Scout groups and home schooling groups.
- 2463 children and 432 adults engaged (not counting those that came through our stall at 4 community events)



Above: A busy year completed by Nearer to Nature South West

BUNURU – Season of adolescence

As we end the festive season and head back to the classroom, we are moving from the Noongar season of *Birak* into Second Summer, a time for coastal living and fishing. The season *Bunuru* is represented by the colour orange and is the hottest time of the year with little or no

rain, as those of us old enough to remember non-airconditioned classrooms in February can attest! Hot easterly winds continue with respite from a cooling sea breeze – the “Fremantle Doctor” – most afternoons if you're close to the coast.

Traditionally this was, and still is, a great time for living and fishing by the coast, rivers and estuaries. Because of this, freshwater foods and seafood made up major parts of the Noongar people’s diet during Bunuru.

Bunuru is also a time of the white flowers with lots of white flowering gums in full bloom, including jarrah, marri and ghost gums.

Another striking flower to look out for is the female zamia (*Macrozamia riedlei*). Being much larger than its male counterpart, the huge cones emerge from the centre of the plant with masses of a cotton wool like substance.

As the hot and dry weather continues, the seed cones change from green to bright red, indicating they’re ripening and becoming more attractive to animals, particularly the emu, that will eat the toxic fleshy outer layer.



Above: Abundant Marri flower at this time of year precedes the production of the iconic Honky Nuts. Image: Cas Liber

Also the season of March flies . . .

If you are bringing a class to the forest during term 1, it is well advised for your students to follow our suggested dress code and wear long pants and sleeves (lighter colours are best), even if the weather is a bit warm.

The flowering of the Marri heralds the arrival of March flies which can be annoyingly persistent and deliver a painful bite. Although they do not carry disease, the bite can cause an allergic reaction. March flies are in the Order *Diptera* (two winged flies) and the Family *Tabanidae*, and there are over 200 species in Australia. As with most biting insects, only the females need a

bloodmeal to obtain the protein required to produce eggs. They have strong piercing mouthparts to puncture the skin and mop up the blood with spongy mouthparts. The males feed exclusively on nectar, in the South West primarily from Marri blossom. They can also be a serious pest to livestock which gives them their alternative name of horse flies.

The lifecycle may take months or years however the adult stage generally lasts three to four weeks. They breed in damp leaf litter and rot holes in trees and the maggot larvae are quite aggressive and efficient predators too and can bite if handled. The prey is usually the larvae of other insects, however they are also known to be cannibalistic. They have sharp mandibles (mouthparts) and inject their prey with venom. The venom immobilises the prey almost instantly and helps to liquefy the tissues, which are then sucked out, leaving just an empty skin.



Above: Big-eyed March fly. Image: Natalie Tapson/Flickr

Geography Unit 3 – Focus on climate change

Providing Geography students with the required fieldwork opportunities is easy with Nearer to Nature. Our senior excursions address specific knowledge across the learning area with many different fieldwork experiences including fauna and flora monitoring, biodiversity surveys and measurement of abiotic indicators. Sampling techniques may include transects, quadrats or plots. Our Year 12 offering for Geography Unit 3 depth studies until now has been more focussed on the relationship between land cover change and biodiversity. However, for 2023 we will be introducing a new version of this program with a greater focus on climate change. When you book please let us know what depth study you will be following so we can best address your fieldwork needs.



Above: Maintaining a healthy forest is key to tackling climate change

Hidden Treasures of Mangrove Cove

We are eagerly awaiting the completion of the nature playground currently being constructed at Mangrove Cove Education Pavilion (opposite Koombana Bay Beach) in Bunbury. We have been fortunate to receive Habitat Bunbury Grant Funding through the City of Bunbury to host another two Hidden Treasures of Mangrove Cove School Open learning days in 2023. Currently proposed dates are Thursday 4th May and Friday 5th May. These events bring together local environmental educators and local schools to engage in great day of nature-based activities and our grant funding allows us to include bus transport for participating schools. Places are limited but there are still opportunities for more Year 2 – 4 classes to be involved, so please contact us to register your interest.



Above: Discovering the varied birdlife at Mangrove Cove

School Holidays @ Wellington Discovery Forest

We had a busy January up at the Wellington Forest Discovery Centre. We welcomed members of the Harvey Aboriginal Corporation to share their knowledge and experiences with members of the public. Participants enjoyed learning about tools, artefacts, seasons, bush medicines and bush tucker. Kids applied ochre, decorated rocks with symbols and enjoyed a game of animal bingo whilst learning the Noongar names.

Phil from South West Reptile Rescues and Education brought a selection of his favourite lizards and snakes to our Reptile Encounter Experiences where people, big and small, got up close and personal with the scaly critters and some even overcame their fear of snakes and enjoyed giving them cuddles.

Dr Kit Prendergast joined us to share the amazing things she knows about our fascinating and diverse native bees. Everyone had great fun making and decorating their own bee hotel to take home for their gardens and help create habitat for native bees.

As well as these bigger activities, John and Jodie enjoyed sharing time with members of the public who came up to view the taxidermy collection and the wonders of the touch table. Others enjoyed using their senses on the sense-ational trail, collecting forest treasures to use in forest craft or being detectives to solve a mystery of the forest.

We are hoping to run similar activities in future school holidays as they were all well received by

members of the local surrounding areas as well as visitors from further away. To find out what is happening in the future keep an eye of the Nearer to Nature Facebook page and the Explore Parks WA webpage <https://exploreparcs.dbca.wa.gov.au/site/wellington-discovery-forest-centre>.



Above: Top - Dr Kit with participants and their bee hotels at the Creating a Haven for Native Bees workshop; Left - playing Animal Bingo while learning Noongar language at our cultural activity; Right - getting up close with a Blue-tongue lizard at the Reptile Encounter activity

Excursion feedback

Thank you to all those who provided feedback during the year on your excursions. It allows us to see what is working and what is not so that we can continuously improve our offerings. Feedback this year has been very positive, which is great to pass on to our leaders and is always appreciated. As always, everyone who fills out our survey goes into a draw for \$100 worth of DBCA publications from the department's [WA Naturally online shop](#). This includes a range of calendars, guides and books as well as park passes and the fabulous Landscape magazine.

This year's much deserved winner was Carlene Mills from Dunsborough Primary School who has been bringing her pre-primary cohort to the RAC Margaret River Nature Park (and previous iterations) for many years to experience our Busy in the Forest excursions. Congratulations and enjoy!

Contacting *Nearer to Nature* in the South West Region

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

Online bookings: parksandwildlife.rezdy.com/catalog/458491/n2n-schools-south-west-region

Phone: 9725 4300

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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