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Term 3, 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*.

Semester 1 was a busy time for us. Not only were schools emerging from the drawn out COVID interruptions of the last couple of years, but we were also offering some great school holiday activities for nature lovers and families. From the critters in the leaf litter to the starry skies, there have been opportunities to investigate the wonders of nature from low to high, as well as learning some tricks for survival for those who have lost their way!

After a long wait, our education pavilion at Mangrove Cove is finally available again along with a great new all-abilities playground. Beyond our popular Treasures of Mangrove Cove days, this area is a great year-round venue for nature-based excursions in the heart of Bunbury.

Although the coming months of Makuru can be wet and cold, it is rarely enough to stop us and an excursion during this time has its own special seasonal experiences, so don't hesitate to get in touch and see what we can do to get your students *Nearer to Nature*.

Regards,

John Anderson
Project Officer, *Nearer to Nature South West*

Makuru – season of fertility

Makuru sees the coldest and wettest time of the year come into full swing. Traditionally the Noongar people would move away from the sea and head inland away from the cold winds that bring the wet weather and occasionally snow on the peaks of the Stirling and Porongurup ranges.

The creeks and rivers started to fill and the diet changed from sea, estuarine and lake foods to grazing animals of the land such as the yonga (kangaroo), weitj (emu), quenda (bandicoots) and koomal (possum). Nothing was wasted; these animals provided people with many other things. The skin was used to create bookas (cloaks) and bags. Bones, tendons and sinews were used to make barbs and hunting tools.

Makuru is also a time for a lot of animals to be pairing up in preparation for breeding in the coming season. If you look carefully, you might now see pairs of 'wardongs' (ravens) flying together on the lakes and rivers of the South West. You'll also start to see a large influx of the black swan or 'mali' as they too prepare to nest and breed.

This is also purple season! Flowers that will start to emerge include the blues and purples of the blueberry lilly (*Dianella revoluta*) and the purple flags (*Patersonia occidentalis*) and, particularly further south, the native wisteria (*Hardenbergia comptoniana*).



Above: The characteristic shaped flowers of this native pea species begins to cover the forests around Margaret River.

Fabulous fungi

This is a great time to observe the bewildering array of fungi that our found in our forests. The South West is home to more than 10,000 species of all shapes, sizes and colours, including brackets, corals, jellies and even native truffles which fruit underground.

Fungi are critical to the good health of ecosystems and have many roles. They are neither plant nor animal, but strangely are more closely related to animals - that mushroom has more in common with you than the tree it is growing under! Some are recyclers, helping to break down dead plant and animal matter into soil. Others (the mycorrhizal fungi) form associations with plants to provide them with valuable nutrients and water.

Some varieties are also food sources for our native fauna. Although there are some species which are edible to humans, the vast majority are either toxic or their edibility is unknown, and since many may look very similar, it usually takes an expert to know which are which. So, if you are looking for these wonderful ecosystem engineers on a walk, make sure you take a camera but don't disturb them and do not be tempted to try them, even if it looks like one of our furry critters seems to have taken a bite. Even touching some of the more notorious types, such as many of the Amanita species (including death caps) can be enough to cause serious illness.



Above: Russula species are a common mycorrhizal fungus found widely in our South West forests. Photo from Fungimap by Paul George (Creative Commons license CC-BY-SA)

Autumn school holidays @ WDF

We had a busy school holiday program up at the Wellington Discovery Forest, with something for everyone. We had almost 100 children and 60 adults join us for workshops including another visit from S/W Reptile Rescue and Education with his many friendly reptiles. We even had a curious emu pop into the centre, keen to inspect the bobtails a bit more closely.

Kids young and old had a ball learning about and hunting for invertebrates that call the Wellington Discovery Forest home at our Creepy Crawlies workshop. The highlight would have been the giant centipede found hiding amongst its rotting log home and the small scorpions discovered in amongst the leaf litter.

Mango, a Carnaby's cockatoo, and Anzac, a young forest red-tail black cockatoo made a lasting impression on those that attended the Cockatoo Capers activity. Their adult, Dean, shared his knowledge and passion for our threatened native black cockatoos and participants were able to get up close to two of these magnificent birds. Anzac needed a nap halfway through as he tired himself out calling for attention.

Luckily the clouds parted for long enough for us to view the sky on Friday night. Participants enjoyed sitting around the campfire and listening to dreamtime stories from Harvey Aboriginal Corporation member Brad before sharing in a hot beverage, toasted marshmallows and damper. The SW Astronomical Society then shared their telescopes and knowledge, pointing out interesting constellations in the sky. A UV torch also came in handy to spot a few scorpions on the forest's edge. It was a wonderful night enjoyed by all.

To round off the school holiday program, kids and parents alike learnt some very valuable skills at our Bush Survival workshop which will assist them greatly if they ever get lost in the bush. They covered navigating with a compass, using a stick and shadow and also using the night sky, what to do if lost, collecting and filtering water and how to signal for help.

We look forward to putting together another interesting program of activities in the coming school holidays and welcoming you to the Wellington Discovery Forest.



Top left: Scorpion photographed under UV light during the Starry Skies activity at Wellington Discovery Forest.

Top right: Young forest red-tailed black cockatoo Anzac having a little nap with Dean of Carnaby's Crusaders during the Cockatoo Capers workshop.

Bottom left: House centipede found in amongst the leaf litter during the Creepy Crawlies activity.

Bottom right: Learning how to get water during the Bush Survival workshop.

Hidden treasures of Mangrove Cove

Swarms of students from multiple Bunbury primary schools descended on Mangrove Cove's all-abilities nature play area and education pavilion for a day of nature-based learning during week 2 of Term 2.

Students learnt about the mangroves with their animal inhabitants, local Noongar culture and threatened species including the western ringtail possum. Organisers from the Parks and Wildlife Service's Nearer to Nature and Kalgulup Regional Parks teams were joined by other South West environmental educators in providing an exciting, packed program for students from South Bunbury, Picton, Eaton, Maidens Park, Carey Park and Clifton Park schools.

The free event was generously supported by the City of Bunbury's Habitat Bunbury grant funding program, which aims to achieve positive environmental outcomes through meaningful learning experiences for students. Special thanks go to the local environmental educators who helped make it such a successful event – Green Teach South West Inc., Ngalang Wongi Aboriginal Cultural Tours, Forest Products Commission, Dolphin Discovery Centre, Birdlife Bunbury, The Frog Doctor, Discover Deadly, Geo Bay Wildlife Rescue Inc and RainbowLeeWriters.





Top left: Maidens Park Primary School students from years 2 and 3 on the Mangrove boardwalk during their birdwatching activity.

Top right: Eaton Primary School class Eucalyptus 3 with Troy Bennell during his telling of the story 'The Land of Bits and Pieces'.

Bottom left: Clifton Park student Halen meeting Alice, Discover Deadly's South West carpet python.

Bottom right: Clifton Park students looking for aquatic invertebrates with the help of Greenteach SW.

A boost for our trailer

Thanks to the City of Bunbury Public Libraries Community Grant funding, our mobile trailer has had a bit of a spruce up with some craft supplies and additional water quality testing equipment. The trailer and its resources, including over a dozen taxidermy animals, allows our Nearer to Nature team to attend school and community events across the South West region. We are able to raise awareness and educate community members on the wonders of our natural environment and its inhabitants.



Above: Water quality testing equipment and craft supplies provide by the City of Bunbury.

Nature journaling – a new incursion or excursion opportunity

During the holidays we had a small group of keen naturalists join us for a session on nature journaling. This is a wonderful practice that anybody can do, anywhere, with little required.

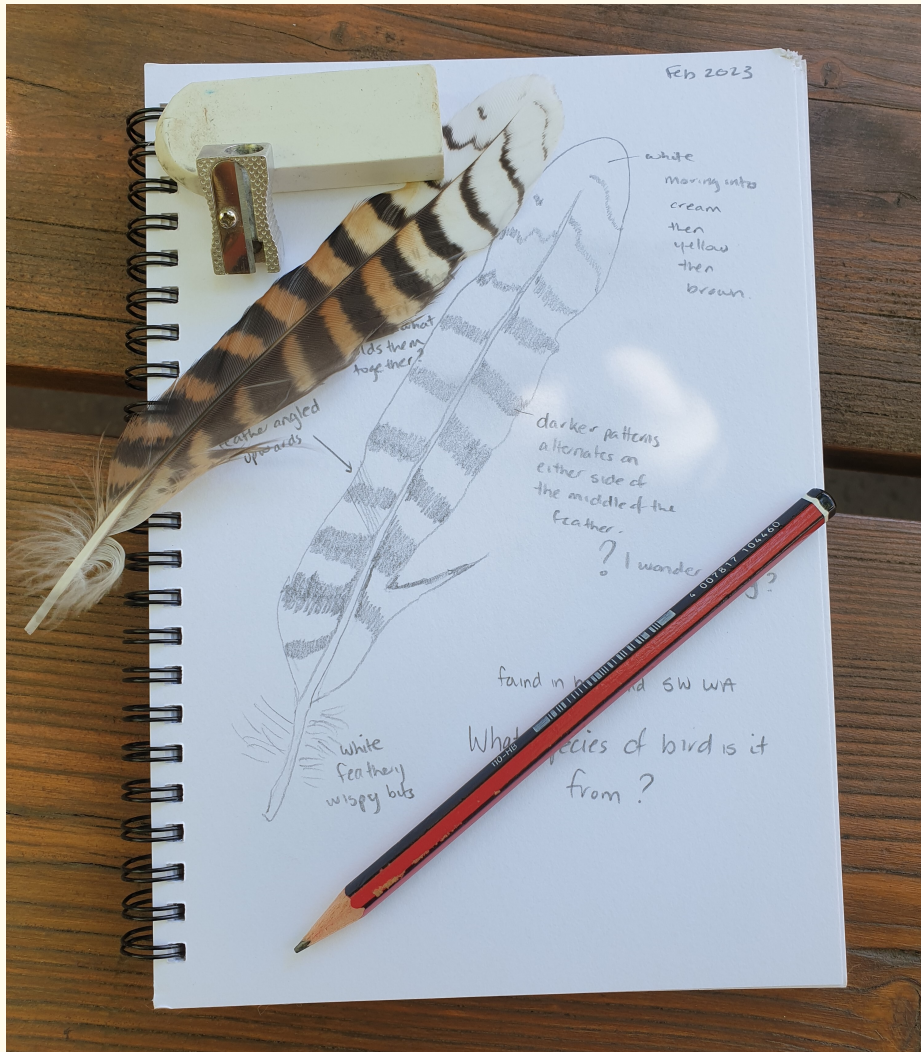
But what is it?

It is the process of recording your observations about things you see in your own backyard, in your school gardens or local parks, bushland, beaches and forests. It is about taking notice of natural things around you and recording what you see in your journal. It's a great way to help you:

- make better observations about nature through using all your senses
- build deeper and longer lasting memories of the natural world
- uncover new ecological perspectives and ask better questions about your environment, and
- appreciate nature and have a more meaningful experience outside.

We would love to introduce nature journaling to you and your students if you are interested. We can come into your school's natural environment or you can take a trip out to the Wellington

Discovery Forest or RAC Nature Park and combine the experience with our Sense-ational trail. Please get in touch if you have any questions.



Above: Nature journaling can be a fun and engaging activity to do with students, that improves their observational and questioning skills as well as their skills in using maths, words and drawing.

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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