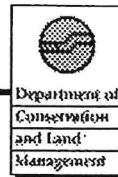


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News

R E L E A S E



7/11/96

Chuditch release -- success for Western Shield!

The release of 40 threatened chuditch at Lake Magenta Nature Reserve marks the beginning of success for the biggest wildlife conservation program ever undertaken - Western Shield.

The release of chuditch is the first major re-introduction of threatened animals under the Department of Conservation and Land Management's Western Shield program.

CALM Executive Director Dr Syd Shea said the chuditch release at Lake Magenta was also a major rebuttal to the Friends of the Chuditch claim that prescribed burning and logging was the main cause of the decline of native animals.

"Lake Magenta is a low fire area that has never been logged and the fact that chuditch have declined to non-existent levels there attests to the fact that foxes have been the major cause of their decline," he said. The chuditch *Dasyurus geoffroii*, the largest carnivorous marsupial found in WA, used to be widespread and abundant throughout Australia. The introduction of predators such as foxes and feral cats has contributed greatly to its decline and it can now only be found in limited numbers in the south west of WA.

Dr Shea said the Western Shield program was aimed at redressing this decline and bringing native animals, such as the chuditch, back from the brink of extinction.

"Through successful fox baiting operations at Lake Magenta over the past nine months, a 90 per cent reduction in the number of foxes has been achieved, paving the way for the re-introduction of the chuditch. "The release at Lake Magenta is part of a detailed recovery plan funded by CALM, the Australian Nature Conservation Authority, Perth Zoo and Aloc, to improve the conservation status of the chuditch by translocating it to parts of the State where it previously inhabited before foxes.

"Extensive surveys of large conservation reserves in the southern Wheatbelt have failed to locate significant chuditch populations and the recovery team decided to maintain at least one population in the region.

"31 of the 40 chuditch, translocated from the captive breeding program at Perth Zoo, were released in October and comprised of an equal amount of male and

female numbers with at least 25 being under two years of age.

"Extensive post release monitoring by CALM staff will commence immediately and if the translocation and release is successful, a further 20 to 30 chuditch will be released in April 1997."

Dr Shea said Lake Magenta's status as a 108,000 A class nature reserve made it an ideal site as it provided the flora and fauna needed for the chuditch to survive.

"The size, remoteness and relatively pristine condition of Lake Magenta Nature Reserve means it will play a vital role in the re-establishment of plant and animal species in the Wheatbelt region.

"Much of the vegetation on the reserve is mallee or mallee heath on sandy soils, with small patches of Salmon Gum woodland in the northern part of the reserve and thickets around Lake Magenta," he said.

"Other mammals present on the reserve include the Mitchell's hopping mouse, heath mouse, western mouse, ash-grey mouse and quenda."

Dr Shea said the re-introduction of chuditch at Lake Magenta was one of a number of planned releases of native fauna under the Western Shield program.

"During 1996-97 it is planned to translocate and release a number of species such as the quenda, western barred bandicoot, woylie, malleefowl and western swamp tortoise to a number of sites throughout the State from Peron Peninsula and the southern forest region to Dryandra and Boyagin," he said.

"The Friends of the Chuditch need to spend more time concentrating on research and facts rather than attempting to tarnish the sound scientific basis that CALM uses in conserving native wildlife."

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