



PARKS AND WILDLIFE NEWS

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Detector dog Reggie set to sniff out cane toads

A new detector dog being specially trained to sniff out noxious cane toads is set to boost Western Australia's fight against the feral species.

Environment Minister Albert Jacob said Reggie—a springer spaniel—would play an important role in the detection of the pest, whose threat was highlighted after a cane toad was discovered in the backyard of an East Perth home.

It is not known how the cane toad reached the suburb. Following the discovery, Parks and Wildlife officers searched the area and delivered information brochures, warning people to be on alert in case other toads were in the area.

"This incident is an important reminder that while the scourge of cane toads is mainly a problem in the Kimberley, even people in Perth need to be aware of the invasive species," Mr Jacob said.

"People who find a suspected cane toad need to isolate the animal and report the sighting to the department's Cane Toad Hotline as soon as possible. People should not try to kill the suspected cane toad because it may turn out to be a native frog.

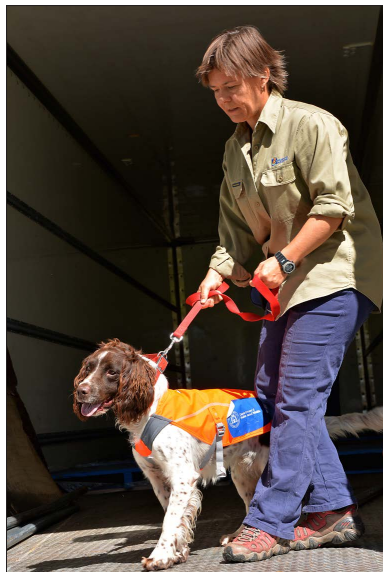
"People can also use the free Cane Toad app that I launched last year to distinguish between cane toads and harmless native frogs."

Reggie is undergoing the last few weeks of his training before starting work with the department inspecting high priority freight.

"The most likely way cane toads will reach the south-west is through being undetected on vehicles and



Environment Minister Albert Jacob with quarantine officer Jackie Ellis, Acting Director General Jim Sharp and Reggie. Photo – Peter Nicholas/DPaW



Reggie will work closely with Parks and Wildlife quarantine officer Jackie Ellis inspecting trucks in the Kimberley. Photo – Peter Nicholas/DPaW

in freight, so Reggie's role in sniffing them out will be a significant one. He will be used as a proactive quarantine measure and will be deployed mainly to inspect high priority freight leaving the east Kimberley for hitchhiker cane toads," the Minister said.

Program coordinator for the State Cane Toad Initiative Corrin Everitt said cane toads were an environmental pest in WA that impact on biodiversity and ecosystems in the Kimberley.

"Cane toads impact on native animals predominantly by poisoning through ingestion. We know that top order predators such as king brown snakes and yellow spotted monitors decline rapidly when cane toads arrive," she said. The Minister said Reggie was one of a range of measures implemented as part of the Cane Toad Strategy for Western Australia 2009–19.

Reggie has replaced the state's original detector dog, Nifty, who retired in 2011.

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Department of Parks and Wildlife



Heavy rains provide rare opportunity for bird research

Thousands of banded stilts (a small nomadic wading bird) have abandoned wetlands around the WA coast and flocked to Lake Ballard in the Goldfields, about 150km north of Kalgoorlie. This was a result of heavy downpours experienced in the region, with some areas receiving their entire annual rainfall in just a few days.

Goldfields regional manager Ian Kealley said the recent rains had created a rare opportunity for researchers to tag the stilts with satellite trackers to monitor their breeding patterns.

"We recently assisted researchers from Deakin University on a flyover of Lake Ballard and this revealed thousands of stilts, many of which are nesting," he said.

"In the past few weeks 12 adult stilts have been fitted with trackers as part of ongoing research by the university."

Reece Pedler from the Centre for Integrative Ecology at Deakin University said they were keen to learn more about the stilts' breeding patterns and movement in WA after completing similar studies on Lake Eyre in South Australia.

"In early January, we visited a number of wetlands across the south-west and selected some sites near Esperance, Katanning, Bunbury and Mandurah that were suitable for tagging stilts, however before we could return, this massive rainfall event intervened and the stilts suddenly departed to lakes in the Goldfields," he said.

"At this time the satellite images revealed that many previously recorded banded stilt breeding sites in the Goldfields were inundated and a flight over lakes Ballard, Marmion and Goongarrie showed stilts spread across these large saline lakes and a small breeding colony of about 4,000 pairs on Lake Ballard.

"With assistance from the Department of Parks and Wildlife, we were able to get out there quickly and assess the nesting colony and attach trackers. We are also particularly interested to see if the tagged stilts move between western and eastern Australia."

Banded stilts are found throughout south-eastern and south-western Australia and are renowned for their unusual breeding strategy in which they await infrequent large rainfall events in the inland that inundate vast and normally dry salt lakes.

"Banded stilts somehow know it has rained and arrive within days. Here they feast on abundant brine shrimp and build thousands of nests on tiny islands," Reece said.



Top: Stilt nesting area. Photo – Reece Pedler
Above: Tagged stilt. Photo – Ben Parkhurst



Southern visitor takes a break



Photos – Matt Swan/DPaW

Nature protection and Swan Coastal District staff were kept busy last week when a 2,000kg southern elephant seal went ashore at Sorrento Beach in Perth's northern suburbs.

Wildlife officer Matt Swan said the sub-adult male had most likely spent a long period hunting in the water and hauled out to rest on the beach.

The seal stayed for five days and was a major drawcard with tens of thousands of people visiting the beach to see this unusual occurrence.

Last year the department received reports of four southern elephant seals coming ashore on the south coast and one sub-adult male reported on Carnac Island.

Southern elephant seals are large ocean-going mammals with males having a large proboscis (nose). Weighing up to 3,000kg, they are generally found in waters around subantarctic islands and while it is unusual for one to haul out as far north as Perth, there have been previous occurrences. Records go back a number of years and in one case a large male hauled out in the Exmouth area and remained there for five years.

New crocodile trap to improve safety

A new, semi-permanent crocodile trap laid in Dampier Creek will assist Parks and Wildlife staff to better manage estuarine crocodiles in Broome.

Measuring 5m long, 1.2m wide and 0.75m high, the aluminium trap has an inspection hatch allowing staff and Yawuru rangers to attach snout ropes to an ensnared crocodile before the trap is opened.

Senior operations officer David Woods said the trap was made in Broome from a design used extensively in the Northern Territory.

“This is a tried and tested design that has been used to trap crocodiles in Darwin Harbour for a number of years,” David said.

“It is more practical than having to tow a cage five kilometres into position every time we need to use it.

“Also, the inspection hatch makes it safer for staff to secure a crocodile before it is removed from the trap.”

David said it was important people did not approach the trap or interfere with it.

“If a crocodile has been trapped, we urge people to call our Broome Parks and Wildlife office – the phone number is on the sign on the trap.”

He said the trap would be bolted and set when required and would be checked twice a week.

Trapped crocodiles will be released at the Malcolm Douglas Wilderness Park.

David said the baited trap would be left in Dampier Creek as long as it was required.

“We are seeing estuarine crocodiles around Broome on a more frequent basis and the community and visitors should be mindful of this,” he said.

“Dampier Creek was chosen as the trap’s location because of its proximity to popular Town Beach.

“We ask that people continue to heed crocodile warning signs and exercise caution around beaches and waterways.”

Sightings of crocodiles should be reported to the Broome Parks and Wildlife office on 9195 5500.



Parks and Wildlife staff setting the trap and moving it into position.



Action to protect Bungle Bungle rock art



Clearing vegetation near the rock face.
Photo – Bill Dempsey/DPaW

Significant Aboriginal art sites on the Bungle Bungle Range are safer from the ravages of bushfires following a special program of prescribed burning in Purnululu National Park.

Traditional owners, Aboriginal rangers and fire management staff have conducted vegetation clearing and ground burning along a 1km section of ancient rock art.

Purnululu World Heritage Area manager Bill Dempsey said controlled burning adjacent to the art sites would help protect the rock face from radiant heat generated by out-of-control and high-intensity bushfires.

“We get fires caused by lightning strikes every year in Purnululu so by doing this burning now, after we’ve had some rain, we can reduce the impact of intense fires,” Bill said.

“Our next phase is to start broadscale aerial burning in the park, which is another strategy to minimise the effect of bushfires.”

Bill said ground burning near rock art sites in Purnululu would be part of an ongoing program.

“A report prepared for the department in 2013 identified fire as a significant threat to rock art in Purnululu National Park, so we decided to take action through prescribed burning to help protect the art and the park’s World Heritage values,” he said.

“We collaborated closely with traditional owners and our Aboriginal rangers from the local Djaru and Kija language groups and they have identified the most significant sites and participated in the burning program.”

“The Bungle Bungle Range covers about 45,000 hectares so we plan to continue with burns like this well into the future.”

The Purnululu burning project is funded by Parks and Wildlife and a Federal *Caring for our Country* grant.



Burning in Purnululu National Park. Photo – Bill Dempsey/DPaW



Webmasters Nitin Solanki and Ryan Scott with the new online shop site. Photo – Peter Nicholas/DPaW

Improved online shop goes live

The new Parks and Wildlife online shop—shop.dpaw.wa.gov.au—went live on Monday 17 February, with the first sale being made on the site within just 30 minutes.

The new shop has many improvements for staff, customers and administrators and features a cleaner look and better usability with streamlined and secure purchasing.

The upgraded site also features social media connectivity,

allowing users to register with the shop via existing social media accounts such as Facebook and Google.

Webmaster Ryan Scott said the departmental site, dpaw.wa.gov.au, which was launched in July 2013, had provided a strong framework for the shop upgrade.

“A comprehensive reporting and analytics function has been built into the new shop site, meaning that staff can remotely access sales information to streamline

tasks and processes, as well as access inventory and manage stock,” he said.

“Work is also underway to provide click-throughs between affiliated sites and organisations, allowing customers to purchase Parks and Wildlife products that are promoted on other sites.”

Sales and distributions manager Cathy Birch said products available from the shop included national park passes, *WA Naturally* publications such as

recreation guides, Bush Books and children’s books, as well as Bibbulmun Track and Munda Biddi Trail maps.

“*WA Naturally* publications aim to enhance readers’ knowledge and appreciation of the state’s parks, reserves and wildlife and to help visitors enjoy and experience to WA’s natural areas,” she said.

“The upgraded shop is an excellent platform to help us deliver these wonderful products to people.”



Geocache first for Yanchep

Staff at Yanchep National Park have been working closely with Bush Ranger cadets from Duncraig Senior High School to develop the first geocache trail for the park.

The geocache trail, a course of hidden containers (called caches) that are discovered by GPS or smartphone, is located on the Wetlands Walk which circumnavigates Loch McNess at Yanchep National Park.

Yanchep National Park manager Julia Coggins said this was a great opportunity for Yanchep to join the latest worldwide craze.

"The Nyanyi-Yandjip geocache trail, named after the traditional tribal name of the park, will lead people through the stunning Australian bush. On completion, they can share the details of their find with the world online," Julia said.

Bush Rangers WA cadet program instructor Gary Thirlwell worked with cadets at the school to develop the geocache trail for the park.

"I had been introduced to geocaching by my nephew, and thought there was potential to develop a geocache trail with my cadet unit," Gary said.

"Thankfully we received some education funding from BP Australia to develop the trail and, given we were holding our annual orientation camp at Yanchep National Park, thought it would be the best location.

"More than 30 students made several visits to the park to consider locations for the caches. We decided the Wetlands Walk Trail was the perfect place to do so.

"The geocache trail at Yanchep is a fantastic idea that uses technology and encourages people to get active outdoors," he said.

Visitors to the park can hire the geocache receivers and trail guide from McNess House for \$10 plus a \$50 deposit. Identification is required.

More information about the Nyanyi-Yandjip geocache trail is available from www.geocaching.com.



Top: Wetlands Walk Trail. Photo – Peter Nicholas/DPAW

Above: Bush Rangers WA cadet program instructor Gary Thirlwell and Yanchep National Park manager Julia Coggins with the GPS receivers for the new trail. Photo – Jennifer Green/DPAW

News in brief

Recognition program for fire staff

An annual rewards and recognition program has been developed to acknowledge the department's staff and crews who display excellence, outstanding achievement, commitment and exemplary behaviour in the department's fire management activities.

Fire management activities are carried out by highly competent and dedicated staff throughout the state who often go above and beyond the call of duty.

The program will reinforce the departmental appreciation of the ongoing efforts and contributions of employees.

A range of staffing levels will be recognised, with various award categories for operational and support roles, presented annually.

Stay tuned to hear about the first round of awards.

Dolphin rescue in state's south

Staff from the department's Warren Region were joined by Walpole locals and a special international guest in rescuing a 2.8m bottlenose dolphin stranded in the state's south recently.

Marine park coordinator Shaun Ossinger was aboard a boat tour in late January with UK guest Rich Keam, Tourism WA's 'Taste Master', who had been travelling around the state taking in the highlights after winning Tourism WA's 'Best Jobs' competition.

"During the tour of the spectacular Walpole and Nornalup Inlets Marine Park, I received a call from our marine park ranger who said there was a dolphin stranded near the mouth of the Nornalup Inlet," Shaun said.

"We rallied the troops on board, including Rich, to help with the rescue by digging a trench to enable the dolphin to wriggle into deeper water. Once in deeper water, the dolphin joined a juvenile and began to chase sand whiting."