



APRIL 2014

# PARKS AND WILDLIFE NEWS

## In this issue

- Milestone for Tree Top Walk
- Aboriginal cultural training for staff
- Fire managers of the future
- Bush Rangers leaders come together
- Parks promoted at Caravan and Camping Show
- Marine wildlife keeps department officers busy
- Happy Easter to readers

## Milestone for Tree Top Walk



The award-winning Valley of the Giants Tree Top Walk in Walpole-Nornalup National Park reached a significant milestone recently when it welcomed its three-millionth visitor.

Environment Minister Albert Jacob said the milestone highlighted the success of the nature-based tourist and cultural attraction.

"This is a great result for the site, which has been open since August 1996. It's wonderful to see so many people enjoying one of the State's star attractions," Mr Jacob said.

The remarkable 600m walkway, positioned 40m above the ground amid the spectacular heights of the ancient tingle forest canopy, was built to allow people to enjoy the forest without causing adverse impacts on the trees.

"The Tree Top Walk also supports valuable employment opportunities for local people and the income generated is re-invested into the area."

The Minister praised the team of passionate and dedicated guides and support staff who do their best to make every visitor's experience memorable.

"You can have the infrastructure, but it is the personal interaction with visitors that is vital to ensure people have a world-class experience and feel connected with the region," he said.

"We are very fortunate to have such stunning scenery in the south-west and I would encourage everyone to enjoy and explore the natural wonders the State has to offer."

Tree Top Walk business manager Julie Ross said Queensland Annette Moodie was travelling around Australia with her husband Tom when she became the lucky three-millionth visitor.

"Annette and Tom came to see the Tree Top Walk after a recommendation from friends, and loved the experience of being among the tree tops," Julie said.



*Celebrating the milestone: (left to right) Frankland District manager Allison Donovan, three-millionth visitor Annette Moodie, Parks and Visitor Services Director Peter Sharp, Tree Top Walk business manager Julie Ross and Parks and Visitor Services coordinator Mick Murphy.*

Published by the Department of Parks and Wildlife's Public Information and Corporate Affairs Branch

**Editors** Mitzi Vance and Karla Graham

**Contributors** Claudine Ledwidge-O'Reilly, Heather Quinlan and Tania Durlik

**Design and production** Peter Nicholas

**Telephone** (08) 9219 9000

**Email** pwn@dpaw.wa.gov.au



Department of Parks and Wildlife



20140524

# Aboriginal cultural training for staff

A key action in the department's recently released Reconciliation Action Plan has progressed, with the first session of a new training program designed to increase staff awareness of the culture, history and diversity of Aboriginal people.

Twelve employees from Parks and Wildlife, the Swan River Trust and the Office of the Environmental Protection Authority participated in Aboriginal Cultural Awareness training delivered earlier this month by staff from the Aboriginal Heritage Unit and South West Native Title Unit with support from the Learning and Development Section.

The course gave participants a good understanding of Aboriginal culture, including their connection to country, family relationships, cultural obligations and the effects of European settlement. A key focus was the department's engagement with Aboriginal people and the importance of working together on joint management of parks and reserves.

Aboriginal Heritage Unit acting manager Rhonda Murphy said the development of the new training program was one of many actions set out in the plan, which was released in October 2013.

"The release of the plan was an important step for the department in committing to the national reconciliation effort of building better relationships between Aboriginal people and the wider Australian community," she said.

"Already we are seeing positive change through the plan's implementation including the establishment of the RAP Committee, development of joint management and customary activities policies, the investigation of Aboriginal names for department-managed areas, features and assets, as well as the engagement of Aboriginal people through fee-for-service contract opportunities."

Rhonda said Reconciliation Week, which begins 26 May 2014, is an opportune time to embrace the spirit of this national movement.

The [Reconciliation Action Plan](#) is available on the department's website.



Two of the trainees completing the program: fire operations officer Beverly Gardiner and assistant fire operations officer Cindy Miller. Photo – Peter Nicholas/DPaW

## Fire managers of the future

**An innovative program giving aspiring trainees the skills to become senior fire managers recently marked its first year of operation.**

Environment Minister Albert Jacob said 15 Parks and Wildlife staff were receiving specialised training to become frontline fire managers in the future.

"The Fire Management Development Program (FMDP) is providing talented people with the opportunity to acquire skills and experience so they can confidently fill high-pressure, decision-making positions during bushfires and complex prescribed burning operations," Mr Jacob said.

"These prospective incident controllers and district and regional fire coordinators are learning directly from senior staff who have a wealth of expertise built up over many years."

The Minister said the program represented a planned approach to developing fire management capacity.

"The State Government allocated \$2.1 million in the 2012–13 State Budget to establish the FMDP, as part of additional recurrent funding for Parks and Wildlife's fire management program. We have also increased funding to the department by \$32.9 million over four years in response to the Keelty reports," he said.

The program's trainees are entering their second year of training and are based at Parks and Wildlife offices stretching from Geraldton to the south coast, including Perth.

"The trainees are being moved around to different parts of the State so they experience a range of locations, conditions, vegetation types and processes," Mr Jacob said.

"They are also receiving training in areas such as policy, planning, communication skills, administration and geographic information systems."



Participants and trainers at the department's first Aboriginal Cultural Awareness training session.

# Bush Rangers leaders come together

The annual 2014 Bush Rangers Conference brought together more than 60 unit leaders and instructors from around the State to share experiences as part of the department's outdoor education program.



Project officer Richard Olive said the conference was held over two days at the Bickley Recreation Camp and the Perth Hills Discovery Centre in Mundaring and provided a fantastic opportunity to learn from one another.

"Some of the leaders and instructors have been with the program for 10 years and have a wealth of knowledge, while others are very new to Bush Rangers," Richard said.

"The new recruits were able to learn from the experience of our seasoned instructors, as well as hear how some of our Special Education units cope with the complexities of engaging children with disabilities into the program.

"Guest presenters included speakers from Leave No Trace, St John Ambulance and Lotterywest as well as Parks and Wildlife senior research scientist Dr Neil Burrows, who gave a great presentation about prescribed burning in the south-west.

"We aim to give instructors, who volunteer their time outside of their normal teaching hours, as much support as possible while also offering hands-on activities to help them develop new skills and understanding."

These practical sessions involved participants engaged in marsupial trapping and monitoring, geocaching, bush craft, bush tucker and vegetation mapping.

Kimberley regional coordinator Sally Johnston said the conference was a great opportunity to catch up with all the schools involved in the program.

"Despite being spread around the State, a lot of the work and the challenges faced by units are similar. The Kimberley units are remote and don't get the chance to come to the conference, so I plan to take back key ideas and important information to share with our instructors," Sally said.

More information about the program is available on the [Bush Rangers website](#).



**Above:** Unit leaders Jackie Jones from Corrigin District High School and Julia Hancy from Rossmoyne Senior High School setting a shadow stick.  
**Left:** Unit leaders return from an early morning trapping session with Nearer to Nature schools coordinator Stephen Crane.



Competition winner Anthony Pogson with education officer Kevin Smith.

## Parks promoted at Caravan and Camping Show

The recent Caravan and Camping Show held at the Claremont Showgrounds in Perth provided a great opportunity for department staff to interact with the public and provide information about visiting national, regional and marine parks throughout the State.

Staff from Parks and Visitor Services Division and the Tree Top Walk operated an exhibit during the five-day show

in March. Lucky draws were conducted for Park Passes and a hamper of products from the Walpole area. The competitions attracted a constant flow of visitors to the stand who often stopped to chat about their plans and experiences.

Visitors were given demonstrations on how to access the department's digital information, as well as brochures and leaflets that were on offer.

Organiser Kevin Smith said much had changed in the provision of visitor information over the past five years.

"We used to hand out masses of brochures but now almost everyone uses a computer, smartphone or tablet to plan their holidays. They are more than happy to collect a key web address like [parks.dpaw.wa.gov.au/quicklinks/](http://parks.dpaw.wa.gov.au/quicklinks/) and to do their research from home," he said.



# Happy Easter to readers

The Department of Parks and Wildlife wishes all employees, volunteers and subscribers a happy and safe Easter holiday period.

This time of year is very busy for staff, as well as volunteer campground hosts, with many visitors heading into national parks and nature reserves managed by the department to spend time camping, caravanning, fishing and enjoying nature.

The department encourages people to be responsible when exploring and enjoying the State's natural attractions.

## Marine wildlife keeps department officers busy

Nature protection officers and Swan Coastal District marine rangers have had a busy month monitoring a sick 5m beaked whale and investigating an incident of a man harassing a sea lion at Carnac Island Nature Reserve.

Senior marine wildlife officer Doug Coughran said the gray's beaked whale had been hugging the coast between Cockburn Sound and Hillarys Beach for the past few weeks and appeared to be in poor health.

"While it is difficult to know for certain why the whale is coming into shallower waters, all signs indicate that it is illness," he said.

"We will continue to monitor the situation but will not intervene unless it comes ashore.

"Obviously we understand the curiosity beachgoers may have to get close to the animal however we would like to remind the public that they should maintain a safe distance of 30m at all times in the water to ensure the whale's wellbeing is not compromised."

Public and animal safety was also the key message in an ongoing investigation being undertaken, in which the department released CCTV video footage of a man harassing sea lions on Carnac Island Nature Reserve, 10km south-west of Fremantle.

Senior wildlife officer Rick Dawson said the incident was alarming as Australian sea lions can weigh up to 200kg, with large teeth and if disturbed can become aggressive and inflict a nasty bite.

"Boaters at Carnac Island should observe the signs on marker buoys warning people to keep at least 10m away from sea lions," he said.

"We ask that people appreciate these magnificent creatures from a safe distance and allow sea lions to continue resting on island beaches."

Members of the public can report harassment of native animals or distressed whale sighting by calling the department's Wildcare Helpline on 9474 9055.



Campground hosts Mary and Tom McConchie.  
Photo – Community Involvement Unit