



PARKS AND WILDLIFE NEWS

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Tangled whales freed by Parks and Wildlife staff

Parks and Wildlife officers successfully disentangled two humpback whales recently north-west of Geraldton and near Busselton.

The first operation near Geraldton involved an 8m sub-adult whale, with rope entangled around its tail and towing two large orange buoys. It was first reported on Sunday 24 August north of Kalbarri with further sightings over the next two days near Horrocks beach north of Geraldton.

The disentanglement team, including marine operations officer John Edwards, marine park coordinator Paul Jennings and wildlife officers Matt Swan and Garth Grimsley, was mobilised on Tuesday but was unable to carry out the rescue until Thursday when the whale was re-sighted by Parks and Wildlife staff from the air, 20 nautical miles from Geraldton.

Midwest regional manager Anthony Desmond said after first carefully assessing the animal, the disentanglement team was able to cut the rope away from the whale, allowing it to swim free.

"The ropes were wrapped twice around the whale's peduncle area and around each of its tail flukes," Anthony said.

The second operation near Busselton involved another 8m humpback whale, which had fishing rope entangled around its tail. The disentanglement team lead by marine park coordinator Matt Dasey and assisted by Fiona Graham was able to free the whale with a single cut to the rope.

Both these operations were extremely delicate and involved trained staff dealing with an animal that weighs thousands of kilograms, as such human safety was addressed first as a priority. Assistance for both operations was provided by the Department of Fisheries, with additional support from the Kalbarri Volunteer Sea Rescue for the Geraldton disentanglement.

After being freed both whales appeared tired but were swimming strongly.

People who see an entangled or beached whale should keep a safe distance from the animal and contact Parks and Wildlife's Wildcare Helpline on 9474 9055. Check out the fantastic footage shot by staff on the boat in the Geraldton operation on the [Parks and Wildlife YouTube](#) channel.



The whale disentanglement team in action off the Geraldton coast. Photo – Garth Grimsley/Parks and Wildlife
Inset: A clip from the whale rescue footage.

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Department of Parks and Wildlife



New canoe trail to explore Esperance lakes

Parks and Wildlife staff have been busy installing a self-guided canoeing trail throughout the Esperance lakes system, complete with signage and markers.

Esperance district nature conservation coordinator Stephen Butler said the 5.5km trail traversed Woody Lake, Lake Windabout and Lake Wheatfield and suited beginner, intermediate and experienced paddlers.

“Paddlers have the option of launching at any of the three lakes and can choose whether to paddle from lake to lake or limit their trip to just one,” Stephen said.

“An information sign is available at each of the launch sites, providing distance and time information and general tips on personal safety.

“Markers on the lakes guide paddlers across a pre-determined route and indicate access to the smaller inter-connecting channels.

“When water levels are lower during the summer months, the channels linking the three main lakes may be too low for craft, so depth markers have been placed at the entrances.”

Stephen said the Esperance lakes provided a host of nature-based recreation activities for visitors and community members, including picnics, bush walking, birdwatching, fishing and waterskiing.

“Birdlife is prolific on the lakes and paddlers will be able to see egrets, pelicans, swans, a variety of ducks and summer visitors such as sanderlings and green-shanks,” he said.

“Sea eagles and ospreys have also been recorded on the lakes.”

Users of the canoe trail are requested to be mindful of their surroundings, their personal safety and most importantly, enjoy a unique paddling experience on this coastal dune wetland system.



Esperance district nature conservation coordinator Stephen Butler with one of the signs for the new Esperance Lakes Canoe Trail.



Parks and Wildlife staff taking part in the fire fitness test. Photo – Peter Nicholas/Parks and Wildlife

Gearing up for fire season

August has seen the start of mandatory fire training for Parks and Wildlife staff throughout the State.

Swan Region fire operations officer Brad Reynolds said more than 230 employees from the Perth metropolitan area would participate in pre-season fire training and fitness testing ahead of the 2014–15 bushfire season, with many more staff involved across the State’s regional centres. Last year, more than 900 staff completed the training and testing.

“The training comprises many components including safety and operational drills, radio communication skills, and theoretical training in bushfire behaviour, map reading and incident management structures,” Brad said.

Last year, Parks and Wildlife staff attended and monitored an estimated 607 fires across the State, which burnt an area of more than 2 million hectares in total.



Senior communications officer Lauren Emmerson finishes her fire fitness pack test.

Photo – Peter Nicholas/Parks and Wildlife

WA firefighters due to return from Canada

Three of Parks and Wildlife's leading fire managers recently travelled to Canada as part of an 81-person Australia–New Zealand contingent to help battle widespread forest fires in British Columbia.

Parks and Wildlife officers Mark Moore from the Central Wheatbelt District, Stephen Mills from Blackwood District and Jordan Cantelo from Swan Coastal District joined Department of Fire and Emergency Services district officers Gavin Eva and Danny Mosconi to form the WA team.

The officers left Perth on 10 August and are due to return in early to mid September.

Staff were deployed to several different fires within British Columbia, which were among approximately 100 fires burning across the

province over the past month or so, resulting in the largest area burnt at this time of year since 1958.

Parks and Wildlife senior fire operations officer Terry Maher said the WA officers fulfilled positions as incident controllers, divisional commanders and an air base manager, relieving exhausted Canadian emergency services crews.

"The department was pleased to be able to assist in the international effort," he said.

"Not only does this help our international counterparts, it is a tremendous opportunity for our staff, who will bring back knowledge from their time working with Canadian, New Zealand and fellow Australian fire officers," he said.

With improving weather conditions in British Columbia now enabling progressive containment of fires, the Australian contingent will begin to return, with the first officers coming back this weekend.

"During their rest breaks, our firefighters have been enjoying the beautiful countryside and particularly seeing snow and glaciers, some of them for the first time ever," Terry said.

The department was asked to contribute fire managers to the bushfire suppression effort as part of an agreement with Victoria. This request follows on from successful deployments in the past 14 years where WA fire officers have been part of six contingents to the USA and one to British Columbia.

News in brief

High honour for Bibbulmun Track

The Bibbulmun Track has been named one of *National Geographic's Top 20 World's Best Epic Hikes*, putting the track in esteemed company, along with trails such as the GR20 in Corsica, the Continental Divide Trail in the USA and the Great Himalaya Trail in Nepal.

National Geographic said that along with the wildlife, the social aspect of the Bibbulmun Track was what made it most Australian.

"At the camp sites you will meet hikers from around the globe as well as regular Australians who have fulfilled the original promise of the trail and are spending time simply walking for weeks to better understand themselves and the unique place where they live," the review said.

The Bibbulmun Track's sister trail in the south-west, the Munda Biddi Trail, has previously been recognised as one of *National Geographic's Top 10 Cycle Trails*.

Read *National Geographic's* full write-up [here](#). More information on the Bibbulmun Track is available on the [Explore Parks](#) website.

People who have walked on the trail in the past four weeks can have their own say on the Bibbulmun Track by completing this [survey](#).

Western Shield poison risk maps available online

A series of detailed maps showing areas that contain 1080 poison baits distributed as part of the *Western Shield* wildlife recovery program are now available on the Parks and Wildlife website at www.dpaw.wa.gov.au.

1080 poison is the name for a synthetically produced compound called sodium fluoroacetate. Several species of native plants, particularly the 'poison peas' (genus *Gastrolobium*), have been identified as having naturally occurring fluoroacetate. As a result our native animals have evolved with a high tolerance to fluoroacetate. The difference in 1080 tolerance between native and introduced species in WA is important because it makes targeting specific animals in control programs such as *Western Shield* possible.

Symposium puts marine turtles in the spotlight

The importance of community and industry involvement in marine turtle conservation was highlighted at a national symposium held in Perth last month, with more than 130 Australian and international delegates in attendance.

Environment Minister Albert Jacob, who addressed the symposium, said Western Australia's 13,500km coastline was well known for its rich and abundant marine life, and conservation and effective management of these values was a key priority for the State Government.

"Some of the world's most remarkable marine wildlife occurs in WA, with six of the world's

seven species of marine turtles inhabiting the State's waters," Mr Jacob said.

"Parks and Wildlife has a number of turtle conservation programs throughout the State that rely on and are supported by industry, Aboriginal people and the wider community.

"Its scientists, field staff and volunteers have engaged in marine turtle research for more than 30 years and included work such as the tagging and release of more than 28,000 adult female turtles and monitoring of their movements."

Parks and Wildlife has a number of successful marine turtle monitoring programs throughout the State including at Dirk Hartog



Island National Park in Shark Bay and Rosemary Island in the Dampier Archipelago, Eighty Mile Beach in the Kimberley and along the Ningaloo Coast.

"In addition, Parks and Wildlife marine scientists are engaging

in new research projects on key turtle nesting beaches in the Kimberley, in collaboration with other scientists through the Western Australian Marine Science Institution," the Minister said.

Kimberley *Bush Rangers* gather for annual camp

Bush craft and survival workshops were just some of the activities on offer for the third annual *Bush Rangers* Kimberley region camp at Manning Gorge on the Gibb River Road last week.

Kimberley *Bush Rangers* coordinator Sally Johnston said 86 cadets and instructors attended.

"Members of six Kimberley units came together for an exciting program of events during the camp, now in its third year," Sally said.

"Activities included hiking, orienteering, bush craft and survival workshops, night games, and presentations from conservation workers including staff from Parks and Wildlife and the Australian Wildlife Conservancy.

"The camp gave cadets the opportunity to work with their peers in a fun and adventurous environment, while achieving core outcomes of the *Bush Rangers* program.

"This included the development of teamwork and leadership skills and learning about different methods of conservation."

Bush Rangers, is a voluntary nature conservation program run by Parks and Wildlife for secondary school students aged 12 to 17.

For more information about *Bush Rangers*, visit www.dpaw.wa.gov.au/get-involved/schools-programs.



Bush Ranger cadets get out on the water at the Kimberley regional camp.

News in brief

Prescribed burn videos now online

A series of 14 short videos highlighting the extensive planning that goes into the department's prescribed burning program is now available on the Parks and Wildlife website www.dpaw.wa.gov.au under 'Videos and Features'.

Developed over a 15-month period and shot throughout the south-west forests, the videos explore why and how the department carries out prescribed burns to protect communities and wildlife.

Statewide vegetation map available

A special issue of *Conservation Science Western Australia* is now available to view online at www.dpaw.wa.gov.au/cswajournal.

It contains a new colour vegetation map of WA and an explanatory memoir. The 1:3,000,000-scale map gives a general impression of the vegetation of the State, as well as aspects of the geology, geomorphology and climate patterns.

The memoir and map will be an important resource for conservation planning and education and a key reference for anyone interested in the vegetation of WA. The publication culminates and acknowledges the vision and commitment of John Beard, former Director of Kings Park and Botanic Garden, in providing WA with a comprehensive vegetation map.

Hard copies are available by contacting Judith Harvey at judith.harvey@dpaw.wa.gov.au.

WA's largest area of woodland tuarts protected

The final management plan for Tuart Forest National Park has been released with strategies outlining how to protect and enhance the area's natural values.

Environment Minister Albert Jacob said the 3030ha covered by the plan, 15km north-east of Busselton, represented the largest area of tall tuarts remaining in WA.

"One of the aims of the *Tuart Forest National Park Management Plan 2014* is to reduce the impact of weeds, inappropriate fire regimes, introduced animals and threats to tuart health from insects and pathogens," the Minister said.

Survey reveals new populations of Kimberley wildlife

A recent wildlife survey of two islands in the Kimberley has revealed new populations of native animals, including a number of threatened species.

Environment Minister Albert Jacob said Parks and Wildlife and Balanggarra Rangers conducted an 18-day wildlife survey on Lacrosse Island, Buckle Head and a mainland site adjacent to these islands, as part of the *Kimberley Science and Conservation Strategy*.

"This was the first time these areas had been surveyed systematically and included the use of traps and remote cameras," Mr Jacob said.

"Parks and Wildlife scientists and Balanggarra Rangers found a wide range of native species, including the threatened golden-backed tree rat on Buckle Head. This

species is currently only known to occur on nine other islands in the Kimberley.

"A healthy population of the endangered northern quoll was also found on Buckle Head and follows the discovery late last year of a new population of the northern quoll on Molema Island. A bandicoot was also detected by camera on Buckle Head, although whether it was the threatened golden bandicoot or the more common northern brown bandicoot is yet to be determined."

Other animals recorded included the common rock rat on both islands and the water rat on Lacrosse Island. All three sites had a similar diversity of reptile species, including the giant slender blue tongue skink on Buckle Head, which is found only in the northern Kimberley.

"Scientists also uncovered a collection of chewed *Owenia* nuts that they suspected had been deposited by the endemic scaly-tailed possum," the Minister said.

"The possums managed to elude their traps but a scaly-tailed possum was later identified on camera."

The Minister said the encouraging survey results highlighted the biodiversity of the islands.

"The State Government's \$81.5 million *Kimberley Science and Conservation Strategy* is a bold vision for the Kimberley's long-term conservation and will provide unprecedented protection for the region's unique plants and animals, as well as creating tourism opportunities, and jobs for Aboriginal communities," he said.