



PARKS AND WILDLIFE NEWS

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Huge effort to fight fires in the south-west



It's been a challenging month for many Parks and Wildlife staff, who have been responding to bushfires around the State, including the large fires at Northcliffe and Lower Hotham in the south-west.

Director General Jim Sharp said more than 650 Parks and Wildlife staff had been part of the multi-agency firefighting effort.

"The tremendous efforts of all those involved, whether directly or in support roles, has led to both major fires being controlled and the threat to lives, property and infrastructure reduced," Jim said.

"Parks and Wildlife officers from as far north as Kununurra and inland to the Goldfields travelled to Perth and the south-west to assist in fire suppression."

The department worked closely with the Department of Fire and Emergency Services, the Forest Products Commission, the State Emergency Service, local volunteer bushfire brigades and volunteer firefighters, local government authorities, WA Police, Western Power, Main Roads WA, the Salvation Army and the Australian Defence Force.

As the fire conditions worsened, local teams were supported by about 380 interstate firefighters who formed three separate deployments from Victoria, New South Wales, the Australian Capital Territory, Queensland and the Northern Territory.

"The interstate teams provided some much-needed relief for our tired firefighters. We were very appreciative of their help," Jim said.

Local businesses, schools and community groups have also provided a great deal of support and encouragement.

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Editors Mitzi Vance and Karla Graham

Contributors Tania Durlik and Emma O'Leary

Design and production Mandy Pike and Natalie Curtis

Telephone (08) 9219 9000

Email pwn@dpaw.wa.gov.au



Top: Plumes of smoke from the Northcliffe fire. Photo – Ed Hatherley/Parks and Wildlife **Above:** A true team effort: representatives from a number of agencies came together to respond to both south-west fires. Photo – Jennifer Eliot



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Jim said the Northcliffe fire was one of the most significant bushfires that the agency, and its predecessors, had responded to.

"Almost half of the department's total number of staff have been involved. I would like to acknowledge all for their commitment and professionalism," he said.

"Firefighters saved a number of homes and other infrastructure, which is a credit to their incredible perseverance and commitment," Jim said.

"The public support for firefighters and support crews has been overwhelming, with hundreds of messages of support from the community posted on our [Facebook page](#)."

Photos 1: Planning the attack: officers gather at the incident control point. Photo – Jennifer Eliot **2:** Firefighters at the end of a long day. Photo – Jennifer Eliot **3:** Side by side: Victoria's Country Fire Authority was one of the many interstate agencies who flew crews over to help WA firefighters. Photo – Wayne Rigg/Country Fire Authority **4:** Incident controller Greg Mair meets with Environment Minister Albert Jacob and Director General Jim Sharp. Photo – Parks and Wildlife **5:** Volunteer firefighter Paddy finishes a shift. Photo – Jennifer Eliot **6:** The sun goes down on another long day fighting the fire near Northcliffe. Photo – Jennifer Eliot

Reptile trafficking attempt busted

Two separate operations by State and Commonwealth authorities have thwarted the attempted trafficking of hundreds of Western Australian native animals.

An investigation by the Australian Customs and Border Protection Service (ACBPS) and Parks and Wildlife has prevented more than 150 reptiles and amphibians from being illegally exported out of the State, with four men also arrested and charged.

Two men from Russia and two from the Czech Republic were arrested by ACBPS officers at Perth International Airport on 6 February 2015 after the earlier discovery of reptiles allegedly hidden in hollowed out books and cigarette packets in packages posted from Carnarvon, Tom Price, Geraldton and Perth to European destinations.

Two of the men also allegedly had reptiles hidden in their luggage at the airport.

All of the men face charges under the Commonwealth *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* and WA's *Wildlife Conservation Act 1950*.

Parks and Wildlife officers assisted with the operation and identified 157 reptiles and amphibians including skinks, geckos, frogs, pygmy pythons, a dead death adder, a number of invertebrates and 33 dead reptiles which appear to have been tagged for use as specimens.

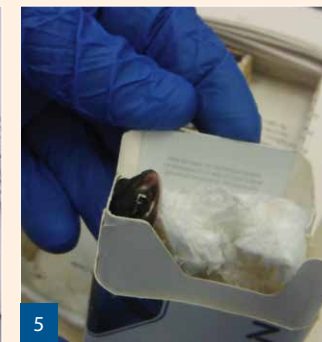
ACBPS WA investigations compliance and enforcement manager Vesna Watt warned of the significant penalties for those attempting to export wildlife.

"These arrests should serve as a warning to those looking to illegally exploit Australia's natural fauna," Vesna said.

"Customs and Border Protection takes these matters seriously and those caught could face up to 10 years in prison."

During a separate Parks and Wildlife operation on 5 February, a total of 92 reptiles were found at Broome, Derby and NSW post offices and in a vehicle intercepted in Broome by WA Police. A male from WA and two NSW-based males, including a minor, could face more than 90 charges under the Wildlife Conservation Act.

Senior wildlife officer Rick Dawson said the two incidents represented a major breakthrough in the detection of reptile



Photos 1: Federal Assistant Minister for Immigration and Border Protection Senator Michaelia Cash, Director General Jim Sharp and Environment Minister Albert Jacob address the media. **2:** Wildlife officer Matt Swan with Assistant Minister Cash. **3:** Nature Protection Branch manager Kevin Morrison with one of the snakes that were seized. Photos – Parks and Wildlife. **4, 5, 6:** Some of the species found in the operation at Perth International Airport. Photos – Australian Customs and Border Protection Service

trafficking in WA history, with such a large number of animals rescued within a short period of time.

"Together, more than 240 native species have been prevented from leaving the State in the space of a week," Rick said.

"Posting animals in packages and secreting them in luggage is not only illegal but cruel and inhumane – more than 20 of the reptiles were either dead by the time these parcels were intercepted, or have since died.

"The cooperative effort by agencies to conduct these operations and protect native wildlife is outstanding."

Rick said among the animals seized from the operations were several species of reptiles listed as Specially Protected under the Wildlife Conservation Act.

"Our aim is to always release rescued animals back into the wild, if possible," he said.

People with information about the illegal removal of native animals or who notice any suspicious activity suggesting that animals are being illegally removed should call Parks and Wildlife's Wildcare Helpline 9474 9055, Customs Watch on 1800 061 800, the police, or Wildlife Trade Compliance on 02 6274 1900.

Australia Day honours for staff and volunteers



Nature Protection Branch manager Kevin Morrison, Environment Minister Albert Jacob and senior wildlife officer Rick Dawson hold three of the native species that are being helped under Western Shield; the tammar wallaby, woylie and bilby. Photo – Jennifer Eliot

Two milestones for Western Shield

Parks and Wildlife's leading wildlife recovery program Western Shield celebrated two milestones last month.

After a decade of research in WA to refine its use, the Eradicat® feral cat bait was approved for use in the control of feral and introduced predators across the State.

Environment Minister Albert Jacob said the registration of Eradicat® by the Australian Pesticides and Veterinary Medicines Authority was significant in the fight to protect wildlife from feral cats.

"Feral cats are widespread across the State and they are proficient hunters," he said.

"We know they are a key driver in the extinction and decline of many native species.

"The use of this product will complement the broadscale fox control carried out by Parks and Wildlife under a reinvigorated *Western Shield*, which is working to ensure the sustainable recovery of native animal populations."

About one million poison baits are laid annually across more than three million hectares of department-managed land, from as far north as the

Pilbara, through the forests of the south-west, to areas east of Esperance.

"*Western Shield* has been achieving strong results with dramatic increases in the populations of several threatened species including the chuditch, quokka and western brush wallaby," the Minister said.

January also marked the beginning of a new three-year \$120,000 sponsorship agreement with existing sponsor Tronox.

Parks and Wildlife Director General Jim Sharp said the sponsorship would support baiting in and around Nambung National Park.

"As part of the baiting, monitoring native wildlife and feral animals using new methods, including the use of remote cameras, will also be carried out," he said.

"The support of private sector project partners like Tronox is enabling the department to bait in new areas to improve the recovery efforts for native wildlife under *Western Shield*."

The program is also generously supported by Alcoa and BHP Billiton Worsley Alumina.



Two Parks and Wildlife employees, one volunteer and one Herbarium researcher have been recognised in the prestigious Australia Day Honours List for 2015.

Land tenure project officer Alex Errington was awarded a Public Service Medal for his outstanding 57-year career in government, with a lot of that time spent working to acquire land for addition to the conservation reserve system.

In recent years, Alex has negotiated and purchased more than 160 parcels of land on behalf of the State, and many of these comprise multiple land titles. He was instrumental in acquiring land to form D'Entrecasteaux National Park.

"I am honoured to be given this award. I enjoy my work and doing my part to contribute to WA's conservation efforts," Alex said.

Senior fire planning officer Roger Armstrong was honoured on Australia Day with an Australian Fire Service Medal.

Roger's lengthy career in fire management has earned him great respect among his colleagues. He has led multi-agency incident management teams from WA to other states, including during the Victorian Black Saturday bushfires in 2009, and has been involved in several deployments to fires in the USA.

Roger said he was pleased to be recognised with the award.

"Fire management is a mix of intellectual and physical challenges that provides a work environment that never ceases to exhilarate me," he said.

"You get to stand in some of the most awe-inspiring landscapes in the country and observe nature working at intricate and expansive scales, shaping ecosystems."

Two other people closely associated with the department have also been awarded with Order of Australia Medals in the General Division.

Malcolm French, who has authored several books about eucalypts in WA, has been an associate researcher and taxonomist with the WA Herbarium since 2006. He was recognised for his service to conservation and the environment in WA.

Shirley Fisher has been recognised for her service to environmental education and to the community. She is a valued volunteer at the South Western Regional Herbarium and is an active member of the Bunbury community, with involvement in several environmental committees and groups.



Top: Senior fire planning officer Roger Armstrong.

Above: Land tenure project officer Alex Errington with Director Corporate Services John Byrne. Photos – Parks and Wildlife

Communications trailer effective at fires

Parks and Wildlife's state-of-the-art mobile communications unit was deployed for the first time this bushfire season to the large fire at Bullsbrook north of Perth, which began on Saturday 10 January.

Dubbed 'Priscilla' by its Parks and Wildlife creators, the large Pantech trailer acts as a mobile incident command centre and provides corporate network access, phone and fax services, and mapping, printing and scanning technology to officers on the fireground.

Fire Management Services branch manager Mike Meinema said the trailer enabled decision makers on the ground and at department headquarters to have up-to-date and thorough information at their fingertips.

"Having this sort of technology so readily available and mobile is a huge asset to the department, the community, and other agencies including the Department of Fire and Emergency Services (DFES)," he said.

"The Bullsbrook fire was a large-scale, multi-agency bushfire, so having rapid and reliable communications was crucial to our response in order to keep the public safe.

"More recently, the trailer has been in use at the large forest fire at Northcliffe and surrounding areas."

Office for Information Management's chief information officer Femina Metcalfe said the trailer was set up with multiple independent telecommunications service options to ensure communication capability in the face of system failures.

"The radio and satellite communications system is independent of commercial terrestrial telecommunications carriers, so if telephone systems were disrupted by a bushfire, the centre can provide continuous connection with the systems of other agencies including DFES and WA Police," she said.

Femina said the centre could be up and running shortly after arriving at a fire, due to its self-aligning satellite.



Staff make use of the trailer, which acts as a fully functional mobile office, at the Bullsbrook fire last month. Photo – Parks and Wildlife

"Other portable and mobile offices at the fireground can also connect to phone and internet services using Priscilla's technology," she said.

"In addition, it interacts with existing web-based spatial information systems built on open-source software that are used in the field to provide real-time GPS-based resource tracking of bulldozers, aircraft and trucks on frontline operations."

Femina said development of the mobile communications facility was a joint effort between the Office for Information Management and the Fleet and Works Support Section.

"A wide range of staff with specialist skills contributed to its development and ongoing maintenance, including systems architects, engineers, radio specialists, and IT support officers," Femina said.



Campground hosts Greg and Kim Woolley at Stokes National Park.

Volunteers commit half a million hours to conservation

Parks and Wildlife volunteers contributed more than half a million hours to a range of projects in 2013–14.

More than 4300 active volunteers have contributed 506,000 hours to projects including wildlife rehabilitation, campground hosting, trail maintenance, plant and animal surveys and general duties across national parks during 2013–14.

Community Involvement Unit project officer Lee Hollingsworth said about 800 people recently completed a 2014 Volunteer Satisfaction Survey, providing an excellent snapshot from a wide range of volunteers.

"On average, volunteers have given 9.5 years work to the department, which shows a great commitment to the agency and the projects they participate in," he said.

"The comments from volunteers are interesting reading as it is useful to know what volunteers

think, as well as receive suggestions on how we can make improvements.

"The good news for the department is that 84 per cent of respondents said they were satisfied with their experience as a Parks and Wildlife volunteer, with 86 per cent recommending it to others and 88 per cent continuing to volunteer.

"The survey was completely anonymous and overall the responses were positive, with respondents citing that they enjoyed 'helping hundreds of people to enjoy our national parks' and 'meeting like-minded people working for the same goals in the parks', among the many comments."

Volunteers also made practical suggestions for improvements, some of which have already been incorporated, including a list of volunteer opportunities

being made available online to encourage even more volunteering: www.dpaw.wa.gov.au/get-involved/volunteering-opportunities.

More changes based on feedback from the survey will be gradually implemented while continuing to carry out future work with all suggestions in mind.

"Thanks to all the volunteers who responded and to those who continue to give their time, energy and commitment to important projects across the State," Lee said.

"Volunteers are an integral part of the department's ability to deliver a variety of services across WA."

Copies of the full survey report can be obtained from social science coordinator Dr Amanda Smith at amanda.smith@dpaw.wa.gov.au.

Visitor numbers continue to grow

In 2013–14, more than 16.7 million visits were made to Parks and Wildlife-managed lands and waters throughout the State. At more than 28.5 million hectares, this is an area larger than the United Kingdom.

WA's most popular park is Leeuwin-Naturaliste National Park, with almost three million visits last financial year.

While these numbers might surprise some, they give an insight into the opportunities and challenges facing us at Parks and Wildlife.

Providing enjoyable and safe visitor experiences is an important function of the department. Through experiences, visitors can gain a deep appreciation for parks and the spectacular landscapes and unique wildlife that they support.

Camping is a great way to experience parks. Parks and Wildlife manages more than 250 campgrounds, 2500 individual camp sites and almost 37,000km of roads in parks throughout the State.

More than \$2.7 million in camping fees was collected in 2013–14. These fees are an invaluable resource for maintaining park facilities. New campgrounds and upgrades to existing campgrounds are being made under the *Parks for People* initiative with funding from *Royalties for Regions*, to provide affordable options for family holidays.

Visiting parks on commercial tours is also a great way to experience the State's parks. In 2013–14, Parks and Wildlife licensed 413 commercial tour operators to conduct tours in parks and reserves, and managed 267 leases for accommodation providers such as caravan parks and for telecommunications.

Obtaining feedback from our visitors is an important aspect of maintaining a quality, efficient and relevant community service. In 2013–14, visitors reported an 89 per cent overall satisfaction with their park visit, and the agency seeks to maintain this satisfaction level above a benchmark of 85 per cent, as it has done for the past ten years.



Breaksea Island. Photo – Gary Wellstead

Helicopter tours to begin at Breaksea Island

Breaksea Island Nature Reserve near Albany, which was the last link to Australia for the first Gallipoli-bound soldiers in 1914, will soon become more accessible with public helicopter tours starting within a few short weeks.

Environment Minister Albert Jacob said Skyhook Helicopters has been licensed by Parks and Wildlife to meet increased demand for cultural, adventure and eco-tourism experiences on the south coast.

"Breaksea Island is recognised as a place of cultural heritage significance that boasts a

fascinating history. Until now, viewing of its impressive wildlife and rugged coastline has been limited because it is difficult to access safely by boat," Mr Jacob said.

"Helicopter tours will allow visitors to get a bird's-eye view of the area before landing on the island for greater appreciation and access to the heritage-listed lighthouse and keepers' cottages."

Over the past 10 years, the State and Australian Governments have invested more than \$1.5 million in repairing, restoring and maintaining the assets of the Class A nature reserve.

At the outbreak of World War I in 1914, the lighthouse on the island was the last communication point with Australia for troops departing from Albany. The Breaksea Island 'lighthouse girl' Fay Howe signalled to the departing fleet in morse code, becoming the last human contact many of the young soldiers had with Australia.

The story of the Gallipoli-bound troops and Fay Howe were part of the inspiration for the Perth International Arts Festival street parade The Giants held last weekend.