



PARKS AND WILDLIFE NEWS

In this issue

Way forward for Kimberley National Park

Road trip for rescued dolphins

Exciting find on remote Exmouth beach

Promising results for threatened species

Prescribed burn saves homes

Working with traditional owners at Eighty Mile Beach

New camp sites available for the community

Cockatoos embrace new artificial hollows

Whale rescue in Bunbury

Easter campers enjoy Conto Campground

Caravan and Camping Show

Way forward for Kimberley National Park

The magnificent Mitchell Plateau will be included in a new Kimberley National Park, thanks to an historic agreement between the State Government, Rio Tinto and Alcoa of Australia.

Premier and State Development Minister Colin Barnett introduced legislation into State Parliament recently to terminate a State Agreement for the development of an alumina refinery and bauxite mine in the Mitchell Plateau region of the Kimberley.

“The Mitchell Plateau and the Mitchell Falls are spectacular and unique landscapes in Australia and will be the jewels in the crown of the new Kimberley National Park,” the Premier said.

“I am delighted that thanks to this agreement, this extraordinary landscape will now be conserved.”

Mr Barnett said the termination of the Alumina Refinery (Mitchell Plateau) Agreement 1971 would allow more than 175,000 hectares of land on the Mitchell Plateau to be included in the proposed Kimberley National Park, which would extend over more than two million hectares and be surrounded on its coastal boundary by new marine parks.

“This new national park will encompass the existing Prince Regent, Mitchell River and Lawley River national parks and will become Australia’s biggest national park,” he said.

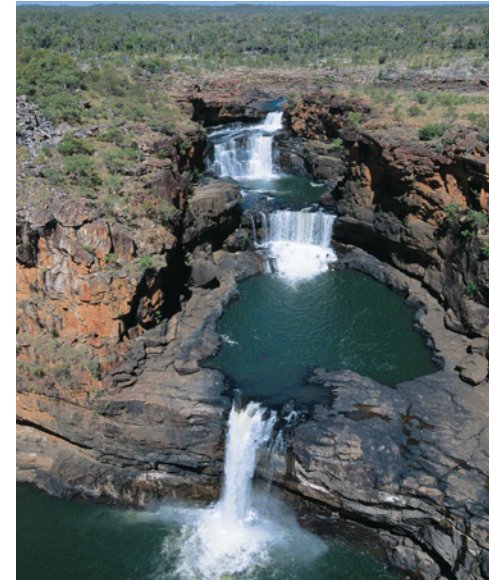
Environment Minister Albert Jacob said the State Government’s *Kimberley Science and Conservation Strategy*

was delivering more resources for the protection of the Kimberley than ever before.

“The strategy involves the creation of almost five million hectares of interconnected marine and national parks across the Kimberley, which will support the delivery of research and on ground conservation work to protect the region’s unique plants and animals,” Mr Jacob said.

“This is also generating employment opportunities for Aboriginal communities and supporting environmentally sensitive nature-based tourism.”

The State Government will continue to work with the traditional owners in the area, the Dambimangari, Wunambal-Gaambera and Wilinggin, to create and jointly manage the proposed Kimberley National Park.



*Above right: Mitchell Falls.
Photo – Cathy Zwick*

*Right: Premier Colin Barnett, Rio Tinto CEO Sam Walsh and Environment Minister Albert Jacob.
Photo – Jennifer Eliot*

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

Editors Mitzi Vance and Karla Graham

Contributors Heather Quinlan, Tania Durlik, Emma O’Leary

Design and production Peter Nicholas

Telephone (08) 9219 9000

Email pwn@dpaw.wa.gov.au



Department of Parks and Wildlife





Road trip for rescued dolphins

*Parks and Wildlife officers Stephen Goodlich, Miecha Bradshaw and Erin Clitheroe during the rescue operation.
Photo – Peter Nicholas/Parks and Wildlife*

Two bottlenose dolphins stranded in a Mandurah lake were the subject of an unusual Parks and Wildlife operation to rescue and release them into the lower reaches of the Serpentine River recently.

Parks and Wildlife marine park coordinator Melissa Evans said marine park rangers and representatives from the Mandurah Over 55s Canoe Club carried out a three-hour operation to rescue two adult male dolphins that were stuck in Black Lake on Sunday 22 March.

“Both dolphins were healthy, but a bit tired after several days of being in the lake, which had become too shallow for them to navigate back to deeper water,” Melissa said.

“The kayakers helped herd the dolphins into the shallowest section of the lake and with a 30m net, Parks and Wildlife marine rangers were able to grab hold of one of the animals and get it into a sling.

“It took 10 people to lift the 300kg-plus dolphin into the trailer we had attached to our ute.”

Melissa said the second animal proved trickier to corral.

“Dolphins are very smart animals; they learn straight away, so the second one was much harder to herd,” she said.

“This dolphin avoided the net and broke free when the marine rangers initially tried to grab hold, but eventually we were able to get it into a sling.

“In the meantime, we slowly drove the first dolphin in the trailer about 10km towards the coast to a boat ramp on the Serpentine River and released it back into the water.”

The rescue of the second dolphin attracted a small crowd of local residents, who accompanied the Parks and Wildlife vehicles to the release point.

“When we backed the trailer into the water and got the dolphin free of the sling there was plenty of cheering and clapping,” Ms Evans said.

“Neither of the dolphins has been sighted in the area since the release so we are delighted the operation was so successful.”

Exciting find on remote Exmouth beach

A remote beach near Exmouth was the site of an exciting find for Western Australia when a dead whale was identified as an Omura’s whale the, first record and sighting in WA and only the second nationally.

The whale was discovered by a Channel 7 crew following Tropical Cyclone Olwyn.

Environment Minister Albert Jacob said the find was highly significant for whale scientists in WA and researchers globally because there had not been many recorded sightings of the species so very little was known about it.

“Omura’s whale was only described in scientific journals for the first time in 2003 and is apparently restricted to tropical and subtropical waters,” he said.

“The knowledge we gain from this whale will help to improve field identification guides to better understand the whale’s regional distribution.

“Scientists know a fair bit about many whale species but this exciting discovery shows there is still so much more to learn in our oceans.”

The specimen was reported after it was observed above the high water mark following the cyclone’s storm surge.

Identifying the 5.68m juvenile female was difficult and results proved inconclusive. Undeterred, senior wildlife officer Doug Coughran enlisted the help of Parks and Wildlife scientist Kim Ottewell to run DNA profiling, which confirmed the animal was an Omura’s whale (*Balaenoptera omurai*), normally found well to the north of Australia in the western Pacific and eastern Indian oceans.

The carcass has been buried and the skeleton will be recovered in a few years for further scientific investigation and possibly for public display in museums.



Rare Omura’s whale beached during Cyclone Olwyn. Photo – Channel 7



Woylie relocation release at Perup. Photo – Peter Nicholas/Parks and Wildlife

Promising results for threatened species

A five-year research project on the south coast of Western Australia has revealed a drop in the level of predation on threatened species in the area, providing hope for their long-term survival.

Trapping studies at Cape Arid National Park east of Esperance, has shown that since using Eradicat® feral cat baits, the local quenda population has significantly increased and the population of critically endangered western ground parrots has stabilised.

When combined with fox baiting, Eradicat® has been effective in reducing the number of feral predators on more than 300,000ha of land managed by Parks and Wildlife in the south coast region.

The project is part of the department's *Western Shield* program, one of the biggest native animal conservation initiatives undertaken in Australia.

Work to recover the critically endangered woylie is also showing early signs of success. Monitoring in December of one of the largest-ever relocations of critically endangered woylies has shown early signs that the

species is responding well to recovery efforts in the wild.

In June 2014, 182 woylies were released in the 420ha predator-free Perup Sanctuary near Manjimup and in and around nearby Greater Kingston National Park, which already holds a wild population of woylies.

Parks and Wildlife staff and Murdoch University staff, along with volunteers returned to the release sites in December to monitor the population. They caught 233 woylies, including 124 resident animals, 39 relocated animals and 70 new animals, many of which are presumed offspring from the relocated animals.

The team also caught and released 22 brushtail possums, seven chuditch, a quenda, six bobtail lizards, two king skins and a dugite. Numbats were also sighted on two occasions.

Environment Minister Albert Jacob said the abundant and varied wildlife shows native species are doing well in the area, largely due to sustained fox baiting under the department's *Western Shield* wildlife recovery program.

Prescribed burn saves homes

A Parks and Wildlife prescribed burn completed in 2011 saved homes last month when a bushfire in Beeliar Regional Park in Perth's southern suburbs was stopped after running into the burnt area.

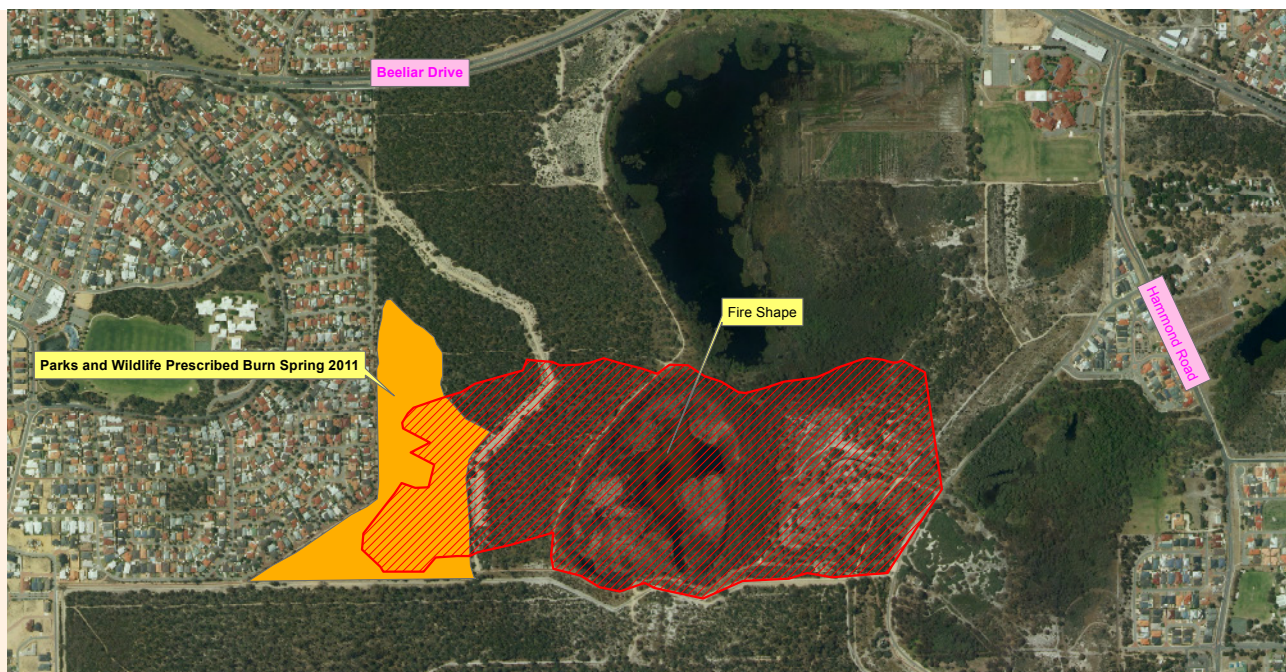
The fast-moving bushfire was running at 1km/h burning in a westerly direction and out of control when it entered the previously burnt area, halting the fire and drastically changing its behaviour.

Swan Coastal District manager Craig Olenjik said officers were able to stop the head fire in the previously burnt area before it reached the suburbs of Beeliar and Yangebup on the west side.

"The fact that we had undertaken an important burn in the area four years ago was vital in controlling this fire. The prescribed burnt area enabled us to slow the running fire so that we could consolidate containment lines and extinguish it," he said.

"As a result the fire was downgraded from an emergency warning and later cleared."

"This highlights the importance of carefully planned and controlled prescribed burning in suburban interface areas in the metropolitan area," he said.



Working with traditional owners at Eighty Mile Beach



Planning on-country with Nyangumarta people. Photo – Parks and Wildlife

Parks and Wildlife staff continue to successfully build strong working relationships with stakeholders and traditional owners across the Pilbara and lower west Kimberley regions.

The planning process for Eighty Mile Beach Marine Park, which spanned more than seven years, was finalised late last year and signalled the conclusion of successful negotiations with Ngarla and Nyangumarta native title holders and the commencement of joint management of the park.

Four groups have native title rights and interests in the marine park and the reservation of intertidal areas of the park required their agreement.

Planning officer Matt Fossey was heavily involved in consultation with traditional owners since the inception of the planning process.

“From the outset, we agreed that developing appropriate, inclusive and transparent engagement processes with the area’s traditional owners was essential, and that we would work towards joint management,” he said.

“As part of the engagement program we prepared a photo book and organised on-country visits with each group to better understand how traditional owners are connected to their coastal and sea country.

“Spending time together on country proved an excellent way of sharing ideas, issues and features important to traditional owners. We also had follow-up meetings where we shared ideas about reserve design and management.”

These efforts helped in developing the management plan, process, which recognised and sought to conserve Aboriginal cultural and heritage values. This included special zoning to protect sites of cultural significance and a framework for joint management.

Nyangumarta Elder Margaret Rose said the best part about the process was that the department came to the people.

“They sat down and learned from us and valued the vast knowledge that we have about our land and sea country,” she said.

The strong relationship established during the planning process supported the successful

conclusion of native title negotiations over the area. These were conducted collaboratively with officers from the Department of the Premier and Cabinet, State Solicitor’s Office and Parks and Wildlife staff from across the department.

The marine park will be jointly managed with the area’s traditional owners. Two groups, the Nyangumarta and the Ngarla people, have signed joint management agreements with Parks and Wildlife. Both groups have already established a joint management body and are contributing to turtle monitoring, fencing projects, and the design of interpretive signage. Two Nyangumarta and two Ngarla rangers will soon be employed by the department.

The traditional owners are now working closely with staff from West Kimberley District to carry out on-ground management activities in the marine park. Relations will continue to be strengthened with the department as a new planning process is underway for a number of terrestrial conservation reserves adjacent to and inland of Eighty Mile Beach.

New camp sites available for the community

New camp sites have opened at the popular Osprey campground within Ningaloo World Heritage area, providing greater camping facilities for visitors to the Gascoyne.

The reopening of Osprey Bay in Cape Range National Park has provided 45 camp sites and new walking tracks for the peak tourist season from April to October.

The camp sites each offer views of the waters over Ningaloo Marine Park. Other new facilities include toilets, shade shelters, picnic tables, sunset viewing platforms and a walk trail to Sandy Bay. A separate area for day users has been built to provide direct access to the offshore kayak mooring, snorkel trail areas and beaches.

Environment Minister Albert Jacob said the State Government’s \$1.25 million *Parks for People* redevelopment provided better access to one of the State’s most visited national parks, and fulfilled an election promise to create more affordable camp sites.

“We need to ensure visitor facilities in our national parks are attractive and functional so that people have an enjoyable time and can experience and appreciate the State’s wonderful natural assets,” he said.

This project complements the recently completed upgrades to Kurrajong and the recovery works to Milyering Discovery Centre and other infrastructure as a result of flood damage sustained by ex-Tropical Cyclone Jack in April 2014.

Correction:

The March issue of Parks and Wildlife News incorrectly referred to a further \$2.7 million for more facilities at Logue Brook including 130 new camp sites. When completed, the total investment for the Logue Brook campground will be about \$2.9 million and which includes 137 camp sites.



Carnaby's nestlings sighted in artificial hollows at Coomallo Creek. Photo – Rick Dawson/Parks and Wildlife

Cockatoos embrace new artificial hollows

Wildlife officers and volunteers from Rockingham's Rotary Club of Palm Beach recently installed 30 artificial hollows to replace smaller ones at Coomallo Creek to help increase Carnaby's cockatoo numbers in the wild.

The rare cockatoos have since taken a shine to new, bigger artificial hollows installed in wandoo trees in a breeding area 190km north of Perth.

Senior wildlife officer Rick Dawson said the hollows were specifically designed to provide the birds with better accessibility, comfort and protection from predators.

"Our research shows the birds prefer the larger-sized

hollows and all the new hollows have been occupied this breeding season," Rick said.

The artificial hollows are made from large PVC pipes with smooth internal surfaces and a strip of steel mesh inside to enable the birds to climb in and out.

Of the 97 natural hollows and 60 artificial hollows that have been available since 2009, the black cockatoos chose to nest in the new artificial hollows first, and for the first time there were more eggs laid in them rather than natural hollows.

Since the project started in 2009, the number of eggs laid by Carnaby's cockatoos at Coomallo Creek had more than doubled from 41 to 101.

Whale rescue in Bunbury

Late March saw 23 long-finned pilot whales strand at Bunbury Harbour. More than 20 staff from the South West Region worked to help stabilise and move several long-finned pilot whales from the vicinity of the harbour into deeper waters on 23 March 2015.

They were supported by Dolphin Discovery Centre volunteers and staff and worked in close liaison

with the Bunbury Port Authority and Department of Fisheries.

Sadly 13 whales died while 10 were successfully herded out to sea in the 12hour rescue operation.

Regional nature conservation leader Kim Williams said the rescue was a team effort and he thanked all involved for their rapid response and efforts.



Top: Rescue operations at Bunbury Harbour.

Above: One of the long-finned pilot whales stranded. Photos – Parks and Wildlife

Easter campers enjoy Conto Campground

Easter is traditionally a popular time to camp in Western Australia and 2015 proved no different with many people choosing to spend time in the great outdoors and holiday in parks and reserves around the State.

Campers at Conto Campground in Leeuwin-Naturaliste National Park enjoyed 37 new sites with the latest improvements made under the *Parks for People* initiative and funded by *Royalties for Regions*.

Conto is a popular campground in WA's most popular national park and this upgrade has provided more low-cost, high quality camp sites with a focus on catering for a growing number of caravans and camper trailers.

Parks and Wildlife staff worked hard to ensure the new sites were open and ready for the Easter long weekend to fulfil the high demand for camping in

this picturesque spot under the peppermint trees. The new camping areas include camp kitchens, toilets and paths.

Parks and Visitor services officer Ben Tannock from Blackwood District reported that the campground was full throughout Easter.

"Feedback from campers has been very positive," he said.

There are still more improvements to come, with the replacement and upgrading of the entire campground's interpretative and directional signs.

"In total, \$1.1 million is being spent on the redevelopment to allow more people to enjoy affordable family holidays at this popular spot. The works will be completed in time for the July school holidays."



Visitors at the Parks and Wildlife stand at the show. Photo – Parks and Wildlife

Caravan and Camping Show

The multitude of landscapes in Western Australia's parks and reserves were highlighted at the Parks and Wildlife display at the 2015 RAC Perth Caravan and Camping Show.

The five-day show at Claremont Showgrounds in March attracted nearly 48,000 visitors and provided an excellent opportunity for Parks and Wildlife to interact with the public and provide information about visiting and camping in parks, as well as the new camping opportunities being made available under the State Government's *Parks for People* initiative.

A video wall of images provided the main focus of the display and showed spectacular photographs of our parks and reserves. This was supported by demonstrations of digital visitor information and special offers from a selection of the department's

partners and a lucky draw competition. The stand was shared with Karijini Eco Retreat, which donated the major prize for the competition, and WA Wilderness Glamping. Wharncliffe Mill also provided a special offer for show-goers.

Daily draws for park passes and a two-night stay for four people at the Karijini Eco Retreat attracted more than 900 entries and, with the video wall, attracted a constant flow of visitors to the stand. Many visitors stopped to chat about their plans and experiences or to ask questions. The most frequent enquiries were about campground booking, where to camp and park passes.



New shelter with barbecue facilities at Conto Campground. Photo – Glenn Willmott/Parks and Wildlife