




# PARKS AND WILDLIFE NEWS

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## Team effort to combat Waroona fire



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**The recent Waroona fire was one of the largest and most intense bushfires that Western Australia has experienced in the past few decades. At more than 69,000ha and with a perimeter of more than 420km, the fire devastated the town of Yarloop and tragically claimed the lives of two residents.**

The fire was so large and intense that at its peak, the flame heights reached around 50–60m with the bushfire creating its own weather conditions with thunder, lightning and ember attacks up to 5km away.

The fire started in steep, rugged terrain in the Murray River valley early on 6 January 2016, but extreme weather conditions including very strong winds,

particularly over the first 48 hours, hampered bushfire suppression efforts.

More than 500 staff from Parks and Wildlife joined the Department of Fire and Emergency Services and local volunteer bushfire brigades in the bushfire suppression effort, filling firefighting and behind-the-scenes support roles.

Staff from various districts and regions throughout the State from as far north as the Kimberley, inland to the Goldfields and South to Esperance were deployed to assist with the firefighting effort.

Continued over the page....

1 Swan Coastal firefighters control a hopover east of the Murray River. Photo – Steven Busby/Parks and Wildlife

2 The Incident Management Team discusses the fire situation. Photo – Lauren Emmerson/Parks and Wildlife

3 Chaplain Steve Bradfield chats to firefighters. Photo – Sally Bostwick/Parks and Wildlife

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Department of Parks and Wildlife





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Additional support was received from interstate with 130 officers from NSW Rural Fire Service, NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service, ACT Fire and Rescue Service, SA Country Fire Service and Queensland Fire Service flown over in two contingents to help relieve staff on the fire ground.

The bushfire was given an all clear on Saturday 23 January. Recovery actions are now underway to help the communities affected by the fire.

Director General Jim Sharp thanked and commended staff for their professionalism and dedication in what has been an extremely challenging few weeks for the department.

An independent inquiry, to be conducted by former Victorian Country Fire Authority head Euan Ferguson AFSM, was announced late last week. This will be in addition to a separate operational audit that will be undertaken jointly by the Department and DFES.

4 Public information officer Paul Roberts is joined by interstate officers at the incident command centre. Photo – Lauren Emmerson/Parks and Wildlife 5 Firefighters coming off a long shift are given details of their accommodation. Photo – Sally Bostwick/Parks and Wildlife 6 The forest of Lake Navarino near Waroona after the fire front has passed through. Photo – Lauren Strumpher/Parks and Wildlife 7 Firefighter Norman Schulze with a joey rescued from the fire ground. Photo – Parks and Wildlife



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## Stranded whales rescued

Above: Parks and Wildlife officers guide the stranded whale to deeper water in a sling. Photo – Craig Olejnik/Parks and Wildlife

**Parks and Wildlife staff, together with the Department of Fisheries and community volunteers, rescued two stranded whales in the space of a week in early January.**

In separate incidents, two Gray's beaked whales had become stranded in the shallows, one at Leeman north of Jurien Bay and another at Mangles Bay near Rockingham.

Marine park rangers and staff from the department's Swan Coastal District and Moora District joined members of each local community and, in Leeman, the Department of Fisheries, to guide the whales into a sling and usher them out to deeper waters.

The Leeman Bay stranding was the northernmost record of this species off the Western Australian coast. It is usually found between Lancelin and Hopetoun. Gray's beaked whales are the most commonly stranded species of the beaked whales along WA's coastline.



Video: The 3m Gray's beaked juvenile whale at Leeman is guided out to deeper water by Parks and Wildlife staff and volunteers. Video – Ray Worrall/Department of Fisheries

# Rediscovery of rare sea snakes

**A photograph taken by department wildlife officer Garth Grimsley on patrol in Ningaloo Marine Park has led to the rediscovery of a sea snake species previously thought extinct.**

The critically endangered short-nosed sea snake was last recorded at Ashmore Reef in the Timor Sea, in 1998, and has never been found on Ningaloo Reef before.

The species was identified by scientists at James Cook University. The pair was photographed 'courting', indicating that they could be members of a breeding population.

In a separate but equally important discovery, a breeding population of the critically endangered leaf-scaled sea snake was discovered in seagrass habitats in Shark Bay Marine Park.

This markedly increases the known range of this species, which was previously only thought to live in coral reef habitats much further north.

A paper detailing the findings of both discoveries was published in the journal *Biological Conservation* and can be viewed at [www.sciencedirect.com](http://www.sciencedirect.com).

Below: Short-nosed sea snakes. Photo – Grant Griffin/Parks and Wildlife





## Survey of Prince Regent shows mammals thriving

**A survey in the remote and stunning Prince Regent National Park in the Kimberley has revealed a wealth of thriving threatened mammal species.**

Environment Minister Albert Jacob said the survey found threatened species such as the golden-backed tree rat, golden bandicoot and northern quoll were prospering in the remote north Kimberley coast.

“One of the most important finds was the discovery by remote cameras of the Kimberley sugar glider, a new animal for the park,” Mr Jacob said.

The Parks and Wildlife survey was carried out on Mount Trafalgar, an escarpment surrounded by sea and rugged sandstone that can only be reached by helicopter.

Other survey sites included Cascade Creek, near the famous Kings Cascades on Prince Regent River.

“The remoteness of this country along with the fire management being undertaken by Parks and Wildlife has kept this area almost entirely bushfire-free for eight years,” Mr Jacob said.

“Despite below-average rainfall in the previous wet season, trap success at both sites was high with the Kimberley rock-rat, scaly-tailed possum and northern brown bandicoot all found at Cascade Creek and the threatened brush-tailed rabbit-rat also recorded at Mount Trafalgar.”



Mr Jacob said these finds highlighted the importance of the *Kimberley Science and Conservation Strategy* in conserving the unique and natural values of this region.

Parks and Wildlife staff were joined by Dambimangari Rangers, the park’s traditional owners for the 2012 and 2014 surveys. Parks and Wildlife and Dambimangari people have collaborated on a number of Kimberley island and mainland biodiversity survey projects since the establishment of the *Kimberley Science and Conservation Strategy*.

*Top: Mount Trafalgar. Photo – Adrian Barrett  
Above: Sugar glider. Photo – Claudia Buters*

## Staff promote **clean rivers**

**Last week was Clean Our Rivers Week and Parks and Wildlife staff got involved by pulling on their gloves and heading to the Swan Canning Riverpark to pick up rubbish at a different site every day.**

The team collected plastic bags, bottles, fishing line, a safe and even a CPR training mannequin.

Members of the community joined in the efforts by staging their own clean-ups and posting before and after photos to the [River Guardians Facebook page](#).

Community engagement officer Rachel Hutton said Parks and Wildlife had teamed up with Keep Australia Beautiful to clean the river.

“We have had a great response with so many people getting involved. The simple act of picking up rubbish and discarded fishing waste will hopefully help to reduce the number of wildlife entanglements we have had recently and, it looks so much nicer,” she said.

*Above right: Discarded fishing line can cause big problems in our waterways including entangling birds and dolphins.  
Right: Parks and Wildlife staff Rachel Hutton, Lee Hollingsworth and Jason Menzies were joined by a Swan River local during their clean-up. Photos – Miranda Jackson/Parks and Wildlife  
Below: Rock climbers get in on the action by scaling Blackwall Reach near Point Walter to clear rubbish from hard-to-reach caves and crevices. Photo – Andrew Close*



# Trails app released



**A new app to help people plan their trail adventures in WA has been released.**

Assistant Director of Visitor Services Rod Annear said the Trails WA app gives information about walking, cycling, mountain biking, four-wheel-driving, horse riding, snorkelling and paddling trails across the State.

"Trails can be filtered and sorted by location, trail experience, trail type, time and level of difficulty, meaning there is something for everyone and people can discover all the amazing trails we have on offer here in WA," he said.

"The app links to the Trails WA website, so whenever a new trail is added to the website, you automatically get it on the app."

The app was developed in partnership between Trails WA and Parks and Wildlife with support from the Department of Sport and Recreation and Lotterywest. It is part of the \$21.05 million, four-year Royalties for Regions-funded *Parks for People* initiative that is expanding camping and visitor experiences in parks and reserves throughout WA.

Download it through iTunes below.



Planning for an Android version is underway.



## Firefighter's milestone

*Above: Firefighter Robert Buckley was presented with a cake after a long shift at the Waroona fire. Photo – Parks and Wildlife*

**Parks and Wildlife overseer Robert Buckley was just one of many firefighters who responded to the Waroona bushfire, but during his 11-day deployment he recognised 45 years since he began with the department's predecessor.**

Robert began with the Forestry Department on 10 January 1971 as a 19-year-old pine plantation worker.

He said his role evolved to include fire management and he has since worked on most of the major bushfires in the State, including Waroona (2016), Northcliffe (2015), Dwellingup (2011) and Bridgetown (2009).

"Working on the Bridgetown fire was especially memorable because my workmate Mike Piper and I worked together in a gang truck to save homes and that was really rewarding," he said.

During his long career, Robert worked as an overseer for more than 30 years, completed a 10-month stint with the National Service and conducted many prescribed burns to help protect the community.

## News in brief

### Visiting Penguin Island this summer

Penguin Island, off the coast of Rockingham near Mersey Point, is a great spot to visit during summer, but Parks and Wildlife would like to remind people not to make the potentially dangerous sandbar crossing to get there.

Parks and Wildlife officer Dave Charles said the department regularly closed the sandbar when forecasted local weather, tide, surge and sea conditions posed a risk to people but the closures were often ignored by a number of people.

"Many people with local knowledge often use the sandbar even when closed, but this is risky and can provide a false sense of security for people not familiar with the area," he said.

Surf Life Saving Western Australia is working with the department to increase community awareness of the dangers and already this summer have rescued a number of people trying to cross.

Check out Parks and Wildlife's new video on visiting the island below.



### Changes to sandalwood harvest quota

Western Australia's annual quota for the harvest of sandalwood has been reduced to help protect the native tree.

Environment Minister Albert Jacob said the wild sandalwood quota would fall from 3000 tonnes to 2500 tonnes per year from 1 July 2016.

"This follows a recommendation from the Legislative Council Standing Committee on Environment and Public Affairs and a review by an expert panel that the quota be reduced," Mr Jacob said.

"Sandalwood is highly valued for its wood and aromatic oils so it is essential that we manage this wild resource in a sustainable way as the industry transitions to sandalwood that is mostly grown in plantations."

### Closure of The Gap and Natural Bridge

Works to redevelop and improve visitor facilities at the iconic Gap and Natural Bridge in Torndirrup National Park are continuing. The site will be closed until mid to late March 2016.

Part of the site was opened to the public over the busy Christmas/new year period to give visitors a sneak preview of the works.

The exciting project will provide outstanding views of the Southern Ocean and the coast from Bald Head to West Cape Howe from new, state-of-the-art and universally accessible lookouts.

*Below: New walkway at Natural Bridge. Photo – Mike Shephard/Parks and Wildlife*

