



PARKS AND WILDLIFE NEWS

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News in brief

New home for endangered western swamp tortoises

Twenty-four captive-bred western swamp tortoises were translocated into conservation reserves in Meerup, south of Northcliffe, and east of Augusta earlier this month as part of a colonisation trial.

The trial for the critically endangered species is part of efforts to ensure the survival of Australia's rarest reptile against future climate change.

Environment Minister Albert Jacob said western swamp tortoises were naturally found in two winter-wet, clay swamps in the Swan Valley. Habitat modelling highlighted that without remedial actions these small and isolated reserves would be at risk of becoming unsuitable by 2050.

This is the first time a vertebrate animal species has been moved outside of its historic range with the aim of finding a more suitable alternate habitat as a result of climate change.

The trial is part of the departments' wildlife recovery program *Western Shield*, which is working to control the threat of introduced predators and restore populations of native species.

"Researchers have identified suitable sites for the assisted colonisation trial and have considered current and future climate scenarios and the impact on tortoises and egg development," Mr Jacob said.



Above: District fauna officer Julia Wayne, district manager John Gillard and nature conservation coordinator Ian Wilson at the release site.

Chair of the Western Swamp Tortoise Recovery Team Craig Olejnik said the released tortoises would be monitored by students and staff from The University of Western Australia (UWA) for the next 12 months.

"The results of monitoring will help us compare the overall condition of the released tortoises at Meerup and east of Augusta with those released at Moore River Nature Reserve," he said.

"These translocations are an important part of recovery actions undertaken by the department with support from Perth Zoo, the Friends of the Western Swamp Tortoise, UWA and the National Environmental Science Programme's Threatened Species Recovery Hub.



Above: The tortoise, known as #228, after his recovery. Photo – Matt Swan/Parks and Wildlife

Recovery of #228

It's been a big month for Australia's rarest reptile species, with the recovery of a western swamp tortoise by Parks and Wildlife officers from a private property in Gidgegannup.

Designated as #228 in Parks and Wildlife's records, the tortoise had not been sighted since 2010. #228 was captive-bred at Perth Zoo in 1990 and released to Twin Swamps Nature Reserve in the mid-1990s where it had been monitored.

Wildlife officer Karen Smith highlighted the significance of the discovery.

"There are very few adults of this species remaining in the wild, so to recover this individual is a massive find," she said.

#228 has gone to Perth Zoo for a veterinary check before being released back into the wild.

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Department of
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Virtual reality app showcases parks



Two new digital media initiatives – DISCOVER WA and Park Explorers – were launched earlier this month aimed at encouraging people to explore the many activities and experiences on offer in WA’s 100 national parks and other reserves.

Environment Minister Albert Jacob said the rapid growth of digital and social media had enabled people to preview potential holiday destinations and activities before they visited.

“Through DISCOVER WA and Park Explorers, we are now providing people with glimpses into real holiday experiences that are occurring

throughout WA, showing them what they can do and see before visiting a national park,” he said.

“The DISCOVER WA app lets people immerse themselves in 3D imagery of national parks, providing virtual reality tours of a range of natural areas in the State.

“The app focuses on new outstanding attractions including The Gap in Torndirrup National Park, the awe-inspiring Granite Skywalk in the Porongurup Range and the historic lighthouse and Lake Cave in Leeuwin-Naturaliste National Park.

“It enables users to navigate the State using a map and choose parks and sites where they will

then be taken ‘inside’ stereoscopic 360-degree photos.”

Mr Jacob said Park Explorers was a new project that encouraged people to share their experiences in natural areas by recording them and posting them on social media channels.

DISCOVER WA is available for download on Apple and Android smartphones and requires VR headsets.

DISCOVER WA and Park Explorers are part of the State Government’s *Parks for People* initiative, funded by the Royalties for Regions program.



Abrolhos Islands to become a national park

Above: The Abrolhos Islands. Photo – Parks and Wildlife

The State Government recently made a commitment to create the Abrolhos Islands National Park, covering around 90 per cent of the islands.

Premier Colin Barnett said this would not only ensure the extraordinary and unique environment and heritage of the Abrolhos was protected for Western Australians, it would open up the islands to more tourism opportunities, and ensure ongoing access for commercial and recreational fishermen.

Mr Barnett said initial infrastructure improvement efforts would focus on the Wallabi group of islands, with improved facilities such as an upgraded jetty and camping facilities.



Swimming with humpbacks trial begins

Visitors to Ningaloo Marine Park have the rare opportunity to swim with humpback whales, as part of a four-month trial which continues until 30 November 2016.

Launched by Environment Minister Albert Jacob, the in-water humpback whale interaction tours are being conducted by 11 commercial operators based at Exmouth and Coral Bay and are a Western Australian first.

“This exciting Liberal National Government initiative is generating strong local and international interest

Left: Conservation officer Dani Rob with Environment Minister Albert Jacob during the first week of the trial. Photo – Parks and Wildlife

and creating a world class tourism attraction for WA,” Mr Jacob said.

Parks and Wildlife developed new guidelines and licence conditions for the swimming with humpback whale program and conducted training sessions with tour operators and their staff.

A research, monitoring and compliance program will be carried out by the department, in collaboration with external researchers, for the duration of the trial to assess disturbance to whales, compliance with licence conditions and visitor satisfaction.



Garvey Park completed as new Riverbank funding announced

A popular recreational site on the banks of the Swan River in Ascot has been revitalised under Parks and Wildlife's Riverbank funding program.

Environment Minister Albert Jacob said the State Government had worked with the City of Belmont since 2010 to redevelop the Garvey Park foreshore as part of the Riverbank program, which aims to protect foreshores and improve the public amenity of the Swan and Canning rivers.

"Garvey Park is a classic example of Riverbank funding at work and the excellent outcomes that can be achieved when the Government works in partnership with the community and local government," Mr Jacob said.

Riverbank project officer Markus Nordstrom said the work at Garvey Park included significant engineering and construction to stabilise the eroding riverbank, as well as works to improve recreational access to the river and enhance fringing vegetation.

"This was accomplished through bank re-grading, construction of a new beach, rock headlands and gabions, improvements to the existing beach, construction of a viewing deck, planting of native vegetation, as well as upgrading the path and access arrangements," he said.

"We had to overcome issues such as acid sulphate soils, dewatering and geotechnical challenges, which complicated the stabilisation of footings for the viewing platform and access ramp."

Stage three of the four-stage project at Garvey Park received \$379,000 in the 2014–15 round of Riverbank funding. The Government has invested a total of \$600,000 in the project since 2010, with the City of Belmont contributing the remainder of the \$1.5 million investment.

The Minister recently announced recipients of the 2016–17 Riverbank funding allocation with 13 projects across 10 local council areas sharing in nearly \$1 million.

An additional \$1 million has been allocated to fund priority projects, which are being negotiated with local councils. These priority projects include Southern River in the City of Gosnells and at Woodbridge Riverside Park in the City of Swan.

Top: City of Belmont Chief Executive Officer Stuart Cole, Member for Belmont Glenys Godfrey and Environment Minister Albert Jacob examine the new facilities. Below: River systems manager Mark Cugley, Environment Minister Albert Jacob and Riverbank project officer Markus Nordstrom celebrate the opening of works at Garvey Park. Photos – Parks and Wildlife



New mountain bike trail for Bramley National Park

Above: Mountain bike rider on the trail. Photo – Parks and Wildlife

Construction is underway to complete a new 9km, world-class mountain bike trail in Bramley National Park near Margaret River which will provide a challenge for even the most experienced off-road cyclists.

The new trail forms part of the first purpose-built trail network under the State Government's *South West Mountain Bike Master Plan*.

The first trail of the new network, Paper Trail, opened last year, and this challenging track has already been very popular, recording nearly 6500 rides, Environment Minister Albert Jacob said.

"The extra 9km of new trail being constructed by Margaret River trail business Common Ground will be suitable for all skill levels, but will also provide testing options and lines for experienced mountain bikers," he said.

The master plan released last year identified Margaret River as a site for development of a trail network of national significance. Ultimately there will be about 80km of purpose-built trails constructed.

The new 9km trail is funded by \$155,000 from the Royalties for Regions program through the *Parks for People* initiative, as part of the *Western Australian Caravan and Camping Action Plan 2013–2018*. Lotterywest also provided a grant of \$100,000 to the Margaret River Offroad Cycling Association to support the project.

Blackwood District parks and visitor services officer Ben Tannock said some of the trail network within the construction zone would be closed to riders during development, with limited entry roads into the pines trails.

The new trail is expected to be completed by the end of October 2016.



Protecting a **critically endangered Kimberley shrub**

Parks and Wildlife has been working to improve the conservation outlook for the critically endangered fringed keraudrenia shrub – found only in the wider Broome area.

There is little known about this plant and Parks and Wildlife scientist Dr Karen Bettink in collaboration with Yawuru rangers, has carried out a trial to test the plants response to fire and mechanical disturbance.

“There are three known populations from two areas – one occurs on the Dampier Peninsula in Broome with a further two populations located approximately 130km south, in the Great Sandy Desert area near Nita Downs,” Karen said.

She said within the local population, there appeared to be a large variation in growth in correlation to the wet and dry seasons. Stems appeared to naturally deteriorate and die-off throughout the year, in particular during the dry season.

“Hardly anything is known of the biology of the species so protecting and understanding more about keraudrenia is important given the risk of extinction,” she said.

The department has conducted a series of carefully-managed trials including small-scale experimental prescribed burns and mechanical disturbance to keraudrenia in Yawuru Birragun Conservation Park.

“These plants were showing signs of aging and poor health, potentially due to presence of long-unburnt vegetation,” Karen said.

“Following the burn, the plots will be monitored to see if there is any regeneration from seed or resprouting. Samples have also been collected for all known populations of the species for DNA analysis, to see how plants and populations are related.”

Karen said early results have shown some positive signs of re-sprouting. Observations over the next 12 months will determine the trial's real effects on plant regeneration.

“These results will assist us to develop management strategies that support the health of the species into the future,” she said.

Above: Prescribed burning keraudrenia for the trial. Photo – Karen Bettink/Parks and Wildlife

Chinese delegation visits national parks

Parks and Wildlife recently hosted a delegation from China's Danxiashan National Park. The delegation's visit is part of the ongoing collaboration and sharing of information under a sister park relationship between Danxiashan National Park and WA's Purnululu National Park – both World Heritage-listed areas.

Director General Jim Sharp accompanied the delegation to Kununurra, where the members were given an overview of the management operations at Purnululu National Park. They visited Elephant Rock, Mini Palms Gorge Walk, Kungkalanyi Lookout, Echidna Chasm Walk and, on return to Kununurra, Mirima National Park.

Back in Perth, the delegation was provided with an Aboriginal cultural experience at Yanchep National Park and met with Environment Minister Albert Jacob.

Mr Sharp said the sister park agreement offered significant cross-cultural opportunities for both agencies.

“The delegation was particularly interested in the way Parks and Wildlife deliver interpretation in parks, as well as manage visitor risk,” he said.

“Discussion was also had on how we could initiate scientific research across both World Heritage properties, share on World Heritage governance and the possibility of hosting science symposiums to share knowledge and undertake conservation actions.”

Right: Director General Jim Sharp (second from left) with Chinese delegates Mr Young Ng, Mr Duan Pingbo, Mr Peng Yuelong and Mr Ou Yiming. Far right: The delegation visits Cathedral Gorge in Purnululu National Park. Photos – Shem Bisluk/Parks and Wildlife



Cane toad hitches ride to Derby



Above: Cane toad discovered in Derby. Photo – Parks and Wildlife

The discovery of a live cane toad in Derby earlier this month has prompted Parks and Wildlife to warn travellers of the risks of 'hitchhiker' toads.

Parks and Wildlife cane toad program coordinator Corrin Everitt said the toad, which was found in tourist accommodation, had probably been accidentally transported to the Kimberley town by travellers from Kununurra.

"We're asking all travellers to be vigilant before leaving areas where cane toads are present, such as Kununurra, to carefully check their luggage, in particular swags and bags that are often on the ground," Corrin said.

"Cane toads can hide in very small spaces so it's important to check your load – inspect vehicles, luggage, pallets, camping gear and caravans before you leave."

Cane toads, which are toxic to many native animals, have been present in Kununurra since 2009 and have been moving east at about 50km a year.

Corrin said the department was notified immediately once the toad was found by accommodation staff and isolated in a cardboard box. It was later formally identified as a cane toad by Parks and Wildlife officers, who humanely euthanased the animal.

If people find a suspected toad, Parks and Wildlife recommends not killing it, in case it is a harmless native frog.

The animal should be isolated in a container and immediately reported to Parks and Wildlife, with a photo to 0400 693 807 or canetoads@dpaw.wa.gov.au.

For more information about cane toads visit www.dpaw.wa.gov.au/plants-and-animals/animals/cane-toads.

Alcoa staff help with *Western Shield* trapping



Two Alcoa environmental scientists joined Parks and Wildlife staff recently to carry out fauna monitoring at Julimar State forest as part of *Western Shield's* annual fauna monitoring program.

Western Shield coordinator Gareth Watkins said as a sponsor of the program, Alcoa was offered the opportunity for some of its employees to attend and gain a better understanding of the wildlife recovery program.

"Environmental scientists Kira Sorensen and Joel Batten's assistance was rewarded with the opportunity to handle chuditch and also provided them with some skills that they could use as part of the Alcoa fauna monitoring programs," Gareth said.

"Both were very enthusiastic and positive about *Western Shield*, and asked many questions regarding the program. Kira and Joel were interested in our 1080 baiting operations, which targets introduced predators and in particular how the recently registered *Eradicat*® bait is being integrated into the program to target feral cats."

Kira thanked Parks and Wildlife staff for the opportunity.

"I had such a great time. The whole team was so lovely, it's so rewarding to be able to contribute and work with such passionate and friendly people. I look forward to coming along and helping out in the near future," she said.

Below: Alcoa environmental scientist Joel Batten releases a chuditch. Photo – Gareth Watkins/Parks and Wildlife



News in brief

Araluen

Premier Colin Barnett recently opened the Springtime at Araluen festival – a major drawcard on the annual calendar for Western Australians and visitors to the State. For the last 26 years, this major tourism attraction has celebrated the diversity and importance of the floral wonderland of Araluen Botanic Park with more than 60,000 visitors flocking to see the stunning display.

This year's outstanding showcase consists of more than 120,000 tulips, daffodils and many other colourful plants. More than a million other flowering bulbs were planted to create this display.

Recovery project for endangered plants

A three-year Parks and Wildlife recovery project has significantly improved the conservation outlook of 105 species of critically endangered plants across south-west WA. A targeted approach to controlling major threats such as invasive weeds, grazing and trampling by feral animals and *Phytophthora* dieback disease has helped reverse the decline in many endangered plant populations. The State NRM Program provided \$1.6 million in funding for the project.

New emergency phone at Salmon Holes

An emergency telephone has been installed at a dangerous rock fishing spot at Salmon Holes in Torndirrup National Park near Albany. The phone is expected to improve emergency response times and potentially save lives.

The phone was funded by a grant to Recfishwest from the State Government's Gaming Community Trust. Recfishwest worked with Parks and Wildlife to determine the installation site for the phone.

Seals resting on beaches

Parks and Wildlife has recently received numerous reports of sightings of seals on beaches and is reminding people not to get too close or interfere with the seals in any way.

While seeing seals can be a fascinating and rewarding experience, it is important that people leave them undisturbed and maintain a safe distance.

Anyone seeing a seal with obvious and significant body injuries can report it to the department's Wildcare Helpline on 9474 9055.