

PARKS AND WILDLIFE NEWS

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Mountain biker cycles into Munda Biddi record book

An elite international mountain bike racer has set the fastest official recorded end-to-end time for the 1000km Munda Biddi Trail – 4 days, 6 hours and 39 minutes.

Perth man Declan von Dietze, 22, departed Albany on his mountain bike on Sunday 30 April, and reached the northern end of the trail in Mundaring on Thursday 4 May.

Declan said he attempted the record because he wanted to inspire young people to take up mountain biking.

“The Munda Biddi is among the best and longest mountain bike trails in the world, and what better way to get people interested in this wonderful sport and our magnificent environment than attempting to ‘Bust the Biddi’ in record time,” he said.

“It was an immense personal challenge, and I am proud that I have achieved it, but I am also hoping it

will result in a higher profile for this sport in WA and around the world.”

Declan plans to visit schools and community groups to encourage people to take up the challenge of mountain biking.

The Munda Biddi Trail is the world’s longest continuous off-road cycle trail, drawing tens of thousands of international, interstate and local riders each year.

The trail is managed by Parks and Wildlife in partnership with the Munda Biddi Foundation. The Foundation receives funding from the departments of Sport and Recreation and Parks and Wildlife.

*Declan von Dietze crosses the finish line at the northern terminus of the Munda Biddi Trail in Mundaring.
Photos – Parks and Wildlife*



Department changes announced

Premier Hon Mark McGowan MLA recently announced major changes aimed at delivering a more efficient public sector.

From 1 July 2017, the Department of Parks and Wildlife will merge with the Botanic Gardens and Parks Authority, Zoological Parks Authority and Rottneest Island Authority to form the Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions.

Mr Mark Webb PSM has been appointed to the role of interim Director General of the new department. More information is available from the Premier’s [media statement](#).

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Department of Parks and Wildlife



Celebrating volunteers



Volunteers from the Friends of Samphire Cove on a planting day.
Photo – Parks and Wildlife

As part of National Volunteer Week (8–14 May), Parks and Wildlife today thanked its volunteers for their passion and commitment.

During 2015–16, 5189 volunteers contributed a massive 638,747 hours (or 85,000 work days) to projects around the State – a record-high for the department.

Volunteers took part in a wide range of activities including staffing the Wildcare Helpline, campground hosting, collecting seeds, clearing weeds, taking part in native plant and animal surveys and trail maintenance.

It is the dedication and enthusiasm of volunteers that go a long way to helping the department achieve major conservation and park management goals.

The theme for National Volunteer Week is 'Give Happy, Live Happy', which recognises the mental and physical benefits of volunteering.

If you would like to consider volunteering, visit dpaw.wa.gov.au/get-involved/volunteering-opportunities.

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Minister meets Perth Hills volunteers, students and staff

Volunteers, students and staff spent an afternoon with the new Environment Minister Stephen Dawson last month as part of his visit to the Perth hills to see first-hand the nature-based education and operational work being undertaken by the department.

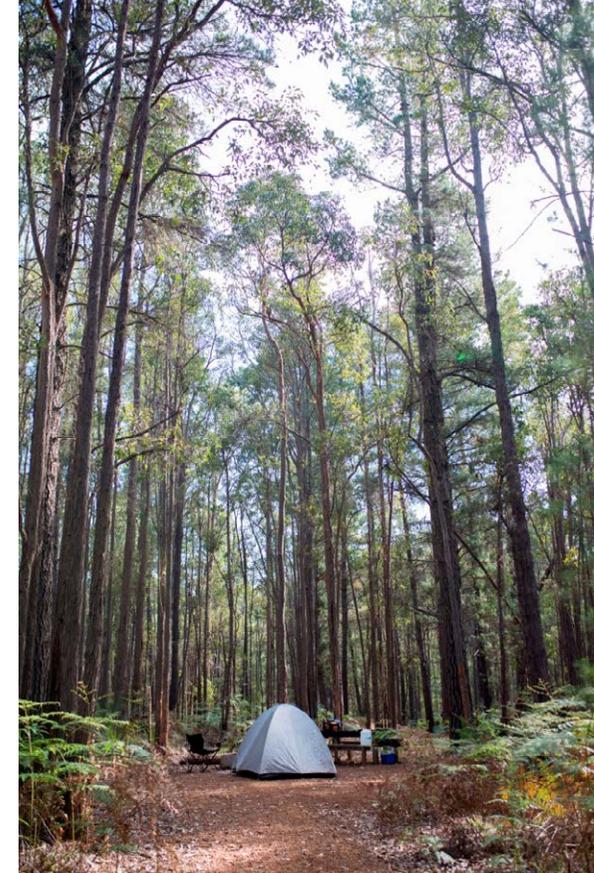
Mr Dawson viewed a recent prescribed burn in Korung National Park, which provides protection to the Kanyana Wildlife Rehabilitation Centre and neighbouring properties, as well Perth Hills Discovery Centre in Beelu National Park.

He participated in a *Nearer to Nature* excursion 'Back to the brink' with Beverley District High School students, an activity giving them hands-on experience in understanding the threats to native wildlife from introduced predators, part of the wildlife recovery program *Western Shield*.

The Minister also met with campground host volunteers Heinz Bare and Dizzy Delvin who take care of guests staying at the Perth Hills Discovery Centre campground.



Top: Minister Dawson with volunteers Heinz Bare and Dizzy Delvin. Above: Minister Dawson with Parks and Wildlife visitor services officer Derek Nannup. Photos – Shem Bisluk/ Parks and Wildlife



Camping in parks proves popular over Easter

Baden Powell, Lane Poole Reserve. Photo – Chanel Bowen

Camping over the Easter holidays once again proved popular with about 3000 online campground bookings made over the period.

Parks and Wildlife staff and volunteer campground hosts were kept busy as people got out and about in parks and reserves, celebrating the holiday.

Ninety-nine per cent of Parks and Wildlife-managed campgrounds were occupied over the Easter long weekend, and 84 per cent were occupied over the broader school holiday period.

Burn protects wildlife centre

Parks and Wildlife's autumn prescribed burning in the south-west forest regions is well underway.

Fire management staff in the Perth hills recently completed a complex but important burn to help protect [Kanyana Wildlife Rehabilitation Centre](#) and other nearby properties.

Perth Hills District manager Benson Todd said the four-day, 120-hectare burn in Korung National Park had to come within metres of the wildlife centre, a challenge for staff to carry out safely.

"Some of this area hadn't been burnt for up to 25 years, so with that you've got a lot of accumulated leaf material, twigs, honky nuts and small shrubs. This burn has reduced a lot of that fuel load," he said.

"If there was to be a summer bushfire there would be a lot less intensity, a lot less spotting, and the firefighters would be able to contain the fire much more quickly and safely."

Kanyana Wildlife Rehabilitation Centre Chairperson Helen Riley said it was a relief to have a prescribed burn completed to protect the buildings and animals.

View the video about the burn on the department's [Facebook page](#).

The value of prescribed burning was further highlighted in February this year, when two bushfires that started on the same day in the Perth Hills District were brought under control because of an earlier prescribed burn. A [second video](#) tells the story of those bushfires and how firefighting staff were helped by the low fuel loads in the area.

Environment Minister Stephen Dawson said the State Government supported prescribed burning as a key land management tool.

"Strategic burns help enhance the State's biodiversity while also keeping our community safe," he said.

For more information about prescribed burns, visit dpaw.wa.gov.au/management/fire/prescribed-burning.

Map showing the 120-hectare prescribed burn carried out by Perth Hills staff.



Outdoor cubby play draws a crowd

Children were encouraged to build cubby structures and enjoy other activities including crafts made from supplied natural materials. Photo – Leanne Dryburgh

Thousands of people joined in the fun at Yanchep National Park on Sunday 30 April for WA's first Cubby Town event.

The free community event was organised by [Nature Play WA](#) in partnership with the [Department of Sport and Recreation](#) and the [City of Wanneroo](#).

The event aimed to encourage families to take part in outdoor play and provided an opportunity for them to spend time together in nature by building cubbies and forts, taking part in mud play, creating nature crafts and participating in rock climbing.

Park manager Julia Coggins said the department was pleased to be able to host the event which was an enormous success with the construction of the biggest cubby village Perth had ever seen.

"Yanchep National Park provided the perfect space for the event and we were extremely pleased with the turn-out," she said.

"Everyone has a responsibility to look after WA's natural environment and this is much easier to achieve when partnering with organisations such as Nature Play.

"It's also a fantastic way to nurture future generations of passionate custodians.

"For example, we share stories about how all uneaten koala feed is kept to provide sticks to build cubbies, and how when the cubby building is finished the leftover sticks are turned into mulch to help plants survive the hot summer months."

Orange-bellied frog populations discovered



The recent discovery of two new populations of the threatened orange-bellied frog (*Geocrinia vitellina*) has extended the known range of the species by 37 per cent.

Parks and Wildlife South West Region staff Kim Williams and Christine Fleay made the discovery during annual monitoring sessions in Blackwood River National Park.

It is the first new population of the species found in 33 years and takes the number of natural populations from six to eight.

Conservation officer Christine Fleay said measures were being taken to protect the new populations, including erosion remediation, rubbish clean-up and track redirections.

“The discovery of two new populations with more than 50 individuals has come at a crucial time, given the other six populations have been steadily declining over the last 10 years,” Christine said.

“These thumbnail-sized frogs are listed as vulnerable to extinction and are threatened by bushfire, changes in rainfall, damage by feral pigs and burial by eroded sediments.”

The orange-bellied frog was first discovered in 1983 and a recovery plan for the species and the closely related white-bellied frog (*Geocrinia alba*) commenced in 1994, with an updated plan released in 2014.

Christine said translocation of existing populations is a key action of the plan, which is supported by the department, South West Catchments Council and the National Landcare Program.

“Each year Parks and Wildlife and Perth Zoo staff collect egg masses from wild populations and raise the young in captivity – a process known as head-starting, before releasing them back into the wild the following year,” she said.

“This greatly increases their survival rate as the egg masses and tiny young are highly vulnerable to predation.

“The young are then released back into the wild the next year, which has so far contributed to the establishment of three additional populations.”

Above: Orange-bellied frog. Photo – Parks and Wildlife

NatureGuide app for south-west attractions



A new app will help people visiting the State's south-west forest attractions learn more about the natural wonders of the region.

Parks and Wildlife, in partnership with NatureGuide, has developed the South West NatureGuide app that provides visitors with information when visiting the Tree Top Walk, Ancient Empire Walk, William Bay National Park and the Gloucester, Bicentennial and Diamond trees.

Warren regional manager Luke Bentley said the app was created by Walpole local Matt Wrigley and friend Christopher Crowell with technical input and advice from Parks and Wildlife staff. It was trialled at the Tree Top Walk in summer, with outstanding positive responses from visitors.

“The app contains more than 120 entries covering local flora, fauna, history and geology with the number of trails and entries set to grow in the future,” Luke said.

“It allows people to ‘take a walk with a local expert’ on their phone – in their own time and at recreation sites.

“In the near future, we anticipate the app will include audio features and additional languages as well as being extended across the whole region and the State,” he said.

To download the app, visit iTunes store and search for the [South West NatureGuide app](#).



*Top: William Bay National Park. Photo – Rory Turker
Left: A screenshot from the new NatureGuide app.
Above: Parks and Wildlife staff Bron Anderson, Julie Ewing and Rebecca MacDonald with some of the QR codes developed for the app. Photo – Parks and Wildlife*



Rare triggerplants benefit from prescribed burn

Staff from Parks and Wildlife's Geraldton District are celebrating after the discovery of more than 60 young *Styliidium wilroyense* triggerplants in Wilroy Nature Reserve near Geraldton.

A 73-hectare prescribed burn was carried out in the reserve in May 2015 to stimulate the recruitment of the critically endangered triggerplants, with just eight plants known to exist in the reserve at the time.

Conservation officer Janet Newell said a recent inspection found more than 60 small seedlings.

"This discovery was very exciting considering the population in Wilroy Nature Reserve has declined from about 30 plants in the 1990s, with no recruitment in that time until now," she said.

"It seems likely this species requires fire, as plants

have previously been found in another area with a recent fire history, although the exact conditions are unknown.

"We will survey the Wilroy burn more extensively in spring when the new recruits may be flowering and will be more easily spotted."

Less than 200 of the pink flowering triggerplants are known to occur across three locations in the district.

The department will continue to monitor the regeneration of the burn area to guide future management.

Far right: The critically endangered Styliidium wilroyense triggerplant. Right: The prescribed burn in Wilroy Nature Reserve that prompted the triggerplants' growth.

Photos – Parks and Wildlife

The home of Australia's largest fringing coral reef, Ningaloo Marine Park, celebrates its 30th anniversary this year.

Ningaloo became WA's second marine park on 3 April 1987 and is now enjoyed by hundreds of thousands of visitors each year from across the world.

Ningaloo Marine Park coordinator Peter Barnes said that within 15 minutes of jumping on a boat, visitors can encounter sea turtles, dugongs, manta rays, dolphins, killer whales and of course the wonderful whale sharks.

"The park also provides a crucial migration pathway, resting and calving area for one of the world's largest populations of humpback whales," Peter said.

The entire Ningaloo reef became protected in 2004 when the marine park was extended south to Red

Bluff, while the wider Ningaloo coast was granted World Heritage status in 2011.

Whale sharks feed in Ningaloo waters from March to July, making it one of only a few places in the world where tourists can swim alongside the majestic creatures, which can grow up to 16 metres long and weigh 11 tonnes.

"We've built on this with the exhilarating swimming with humpback whales trial, which is now in its second year," Peter said.

The Ningaloo Commonwealth Marine Reserve, adjacent to Ningaloo Marine Park and part of the network of reserves making up the Ningaloo Coast World Heritage area, will also celebrate 30 years on 7 May this year.

Tourists flock to Ningaloo Marine Park to swim with whale sharks. Photo – Parks and Wildlife



Ningaloo Marine Park celebrates 30 years

South-west burn contributes to international research



Parks and Wildlife has partnered with researchers from Swansea University in Wales to better understand what happens to leaves, branches and logs on the forest floor burnt during a forest fire.

Professor Stefan Doerr and Dr Cristina Santin joined fire research scientists and Donnelly District staff recently to collect data during a prescribed burn in jarrah forest east of Manjimup. Their aim was to study the processes by which carbon and nutrients stored in vegetation are converted into charcoal and ash when it burns.

Charcoal is richer in carbon than the original vegetation and, due to its higher resistance to biological degradation, can serve as a long-term carbon store in the environment. Ash is rich in nutrients important for plant growth, but can also lead to toxic algal blooms when large amounts produced by severe bushfires are washed into lakes or reservoirs during heavy rainfall.

Principal research scientist and head of the department's Ecosystem Science program Dr Lachie McCaw said the experiment involved taking detailed measurements of the materials that made up forest fuel within the burn boundary, having fire crews light and control the burn,

measuring temperature and other factors throughout the burn, and later examining the charcoal and ash produced.

"Data from the experiment will be analysed together with data collected during planned fires and bushfires in Victoria, New South Wales and the Northwest Territories of Canada," he said.

"The combined results from Australia and Canada will be used to help determine the role of fire in the carbon and nutrient balance of the world's fire-prone forests."

Dr Santin said the opportunity to work in south-western WA was particularly exciting not only due to the jarrah forest being among the globally most flammable forest ecosystems, but because Parks and Wildlife was one of the world's most experienced agencies in carrying out prescribed fires aimed at reducing bushfire hazard.

Top left: Fire spreading through the experiment site. Top right: Professor Stefan Doerr and Donnelly District staff Mike Liebrechts and Wolf Tiedemann observing the fire from the boundary track. Left: Drs Lachie McCaw and Cristina Santin collecting ash samples after the fire. Photos – Parks and Wildlife