



PARKS AND WILDLIFE NEWS

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Bobtails protected from international black market



Thirteen native bobtail lizards were saved from the black market when an attempt to smuggle them overseas was intercepted.

The seven live adult bobtail lizards and six live babies were destined for Japan but they were detected by Australian Border Force officials inside a suitcase during x-ray screening at Perth Airport. Upon the unexpected discovery, wildlife officers from Parks of Wildlife were quickly notified.

The animals were all in poor condition however every attempt is being made to rehabilitate, rehome or return them to where they were originally taken from.

A Japanese national has been charged.

Western Australian bobtails can attract up to \$10,000 each on the international black market. The maximum penalty for wildlife trade offences is 10 years' imprisonment and/or a fine of \$180,000.

People with information about the illegal removal of reptiles or who notice any suspicious activity should call the Wildcare Helpline on (08) 9474 9055 or Australian Border Force's Border Watch on 1800 009 623.

Above: The seized bobtails. Photo – Parks and Wildlife

Prescribed burning reaches 240,000 hectares

Parks and Wildlife has achieved more than 240,000 hectares of prescribed burning - the best outcome in 29 years.

The last time an amount of this magnitude was achieved was 1987-88, when 252,000ha were burnt.

Since July 1, 2016, the Department of Parks and Wildlife has completed 91 burns in national parks, conservation reserves and State forests, from Gingin in the north to Denmark on the south coast as well as in the Perth Hills. It is the department's primary tool in minimising the risk of damaging bushfires to human life, property, community infrastructure and conservation values.

Parks and Wildlife aims to have 45 per cent of department-managed land in the south-west forest regions with a fuel age of less than six years.

Environment Minister Stephen Dawson said a mix of large landscape and smaller urban prescribed burning was essential to ensure greater protection for our communities.

"An increase in the number of residents living in the hills and regional forest areas, coupled with more people visiting our natural attractions, makes it vitally important that prescribed burning not only continues but is supported and understood by the community.

"Parks and Wildlife has had an outstanding season so far with burns due to excellent preparation, committed staff and beneficial weather conditions."

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Department of Parks and Wildlife



Rock wallabies released into Kalbarri National Park

Twenty-three black-flanked rock wallabies have been translocated into Kalbarri National Park in the Midwest as part of an effort to re-establish a population of the threatened species in the park.

The wallabies were sourced from three Wheatbelt populations, following extensive monitoring by Parks and Wildlife Wheatbelt staff. The release was coordinated by the department's Midwest and science staff, and volunteers with assistance from WWF Australia.

To date, 46 radio-collared rock wallabies have been released into the park from the Wheatbelt, with 23 introduced last year. Monitoring has shown only one animal from last year's translocation is known to have died and the remainder of the wallabies are doing well.

Environment Minister Stephen Dawson said the species was considered extinct from the park for 20 years, until two wallabies were filmed in a gorge in 2015. The sighting was later confirmed by Parks and Wildlife camera monitoring.

"Parks and Wildlife has been culling goats in the park since 2006, with goats having caused the initial decline of the species as they competed for food and pushed the wallabies out of the protected gorge areas where they were vulnerable to fox and cat predation," he said.

"Managing the threat of goats, and foxes and feral cats under the *Western Shield* program, is key to the long-term prosperity of the species in the park, and this will benefit other mammal, bird and reptile species in the area.

"Remote sensing cameras have been deployed throughout the park, and this is helping us learn more about the species' behaviour so we can better protect them in the future, as well as monitoring predator levels."

The nearest known population of black-flanked rock wallabies is more than 450 kilometres away in the Wheatbelt, and there are some scattered populations much further north in the Pilbara.

Top: A black flanked rock wallaby joey, this year's offspring of wallabies released into Kalbarri National Park in 2016. Right: Murchison River Gorge, Kalbarri National Park. Photos – Dr David Pearson/Parks and Wildlife



International whale shark conference to be held at Ningaloo

The World Heritage-listed Ningaloo Coast has been chosen as the location for the 2019 International Whale Shark Conference.

Hosted by the Department of Parks and Wildlife with support from the Australian Institute of Marine Science, whale shark conservation group ECOCEAN and CSIRO, the event will be held in Exmouth in May 2019.

Held every three years, the conference aims to generate and support international collaboration in whale shark science, conservation and management. Previous host countries have included Mexico, the United States and Qatar.

Ningaloo Marine Park is one of only a few places in the world where whale sharks appear regularly in near-shore waters in numbers and where they are easily visible to observers. As a result, Exmouth and Coral Bay are world renowned for the nature-based tourism activity of swimming with whale sharks.

Environment Minister Stephen Dawson said the conference would be a fantastic opportunity to collaborate with the world's leading whale shark scientists while showcasing the outstanding work being done at Ningaloo.

"Western Australia's marine scientists and Parks and Wildlife are at the forefront of developing world-best practice in whale shark management and this conference is an excellent way to facilitate interest in the species' conservation."

About 80-100 delegates are expected from places such as the United States, United Kingdom, Mexico, Philippines and Taiwan providing a boost for tourism facilities in the Exmouth region.

Snorkelling with whale sharks. Photo – Parks and Wildlife



Chuditch discovery at Lowlands Nature Reserve

The recent discovery of a chuditch (*Dasyurus geoffroii*) at Lowlands Nature Reserve near Serpentine marks a significant milestone for the species.

Cameras set up in the nature reserve identified the chuditch on 11 April – more than 16 years since the last image of a chuditch was recorded in the reserve.

In May, Parks and Wildlife staff trapped a male chuditch while undertaking native animal monitoring at the reserve.

It was the first time a chuditch has been captured in the reserve for 20 years.

The capture and remote cameras are part of a fauna monitoring program that tracks the numbers and response of threatened native mammals to management actions such as fox-baiting.

Swan Coastal District manager Brett Fitzgerald said the capture highlighted the increasing presence of chuditch on the Swan Coastal Plain and the positive benefits fox-baiting was having on native animal conservation.

“Under the *Western Shield* program, the department carries out fox and feral cat baiting on a network of sites across the State to control and reduce feral animal predation on threatened native fauna,” Mr Fitzgerald said.

Above left: The male chuditch captured at Lowlands Nature Reserve. Above right: Parks and Wildlife Swan Coastal District staff Alice Reaveley and Mark Claxton with the captured chuditch. Photos – Meg Sheehan/Parks and Wildlife

“More than 1200 hectares has been baited at Lowlands Nature Reserve in the past three years to protect threatened species including the chuditch and brush-tailed phascogale, and other small to medium-sized mammals.

“To monitor the success of baiting, remote cameras have been installed to detect the presence and abundance of native and feral animals, and it was these cameras that picked up the presence of a chuditch in late April.”

Mr Fitzgerald said follow up trapping captured the healthy male chuditch, which was then tagged before being released back into the wild.

“Community partnerships are an important part of the wildlife recovery work we are undertaking in the Serpentine area and I would like to acknowledge the support of the Peel-Harvey Catchment Council in helping us undertake wildlife conservation work on the ground.”

Chuditch were once found throughout the most of the southern half of mainland Australia.

With the exception of a recently translocated population to the Flinders Range in South Australia, the chuditch is now confined to the south-west of WA with the largest populations surviving in the northern and southern jarrah forests.

Perth Observatory wins volunteer award

Above: Her Excellency the Honourable Kerry Sanderson AC, Governor of Western Australia, presenting members of the Perth Observatory Volunteer Group with their award. Photo – Diana Rosman

The Perth Observatory Volunteer Group has taken out the WA Community Volunteer Organisation of the Year Award for 2017.

POVG has been assisting the Perth Observatory since 1996 with its public outreach and education programs. In July 2015 these volunteers took over control of the observatory and have continued to expand and deliver programs to the public.

Having been a volunteer for 10 years, John Tuffin nominated the group for the award to acknowledge the passion and dedication of group members, as well as promoting some of the great programs the observatory has to offer.

“I am very proud of our group and the professional manner in which the volunteers have kept this fantastic facility open to the public,” he said.

“Perth Observatory volunteer hours last year were valued at nearly half a million dollars – a massive contribution to Western Australia.

“Approximately 7,500 people were lucky enough to benefit from the programs on offer and the feedback given from any events we have participated in or assisted with has been excellent.”

In 2016 POVG introduced the highly popular ‘Winter Night Tour’ instead of closing during those months and it has now been permanently incorporated into the tour list.

Volunteers from different backgrounds offer a variety of skills, which have enabled the continuing success of the observatory. School tours have been refined with the help of classroom teachers to provide curriculum-related material.

“Our volunteers have done a wonderful service to the state and will undoubtedly continue to do so as they expand and improve the scientific and historic offerings to the public,” Mr Tuffin said.

Parks and Wildlife continues to support the Perth Observatory and its volunteers and congratulates them on their award.



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National Reconciliation Week observed

Parks and Wildlife celebrated National Reconciliation Week hosting a number of events across the State.

This year commemorates two major milestones in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander history - the 50th Anniversary of the 1967 Referendum and the 25th Anniversary of the High Court of Australia's Mabo decision.

Staff from Bunbury, Collie and Kensington visited Roelands Village, located on picturesque farmland deep in the Collie River valley, for cultural yarns to hear the sometimes happy, but mostly sad, stories of people who experienced life at the mission.

At Kensington, a short documentary on Eddie Mabo was played, followed by a presentation from senior project officer Dr Simon Choo on the department's engagement with traditional owners through native title.

Whadjuk man Walter McGuire gave a Welcome to Country to close Reconciliation Week and delivered a short talk on the significance of the Crawley area to

Whadjuk people at the Matilda Bay Yarn by the River event.

Aboriginal Heritage Unit manager Rhonda Murphy said it has been great to see such an excellent staff turnout at each of the events, with representation across all the divisions.

"Our department is committed to building respectful relationships with Aboriginal people so we can work together to care for country," Ms Murphy said.

"Reconciliation week is about respect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander heritage and valuing justice and equity for all Australians."

Above left to right: 1 Participants at the Roeland Village event 2 Walter McGuire and Ben Ansell at Matilda Bay.

3 Dr Simon Choo speaking on the department's engagement with traditional owners through native title at Kensington.

4 Wayne Nannup- CEO, South West Aboriginal Land and Sea Council, presenting at Kensington. 5 Smoking ceremony at Roelands Village. 6 Participants at Matilda Bay, Yarn by the River event. Photos: Parks and Wildlife