New facilities take visitors on a river journey

A series of new interpretation facilities along the Swan River is using digital media and interpretive signs to help visitors connect with the natural and cultural values of the river.

The facilities, known as River Journeys, were unveiled recently at three key river foreshore sites in the City of Melville – Bicton Baths, Point Walter and Heathcote. Each site features attractive wooden deck structures that link into existing pathways, and include seating and important information about the river in both Noongar and English languages. Digital media, accessible via smartphone, tablet or computer, has also been developed to add to the experience, featuring audio guides, detailed maps, virtual trails and information on points of interest.

Environment Minister Albert Jacob said the facilities were important because they highlighted significant cultural heritage stories from the Whadjuk traditional owners, along with the natural values of the area.

"With River Journeys, anyone coming down to the river can enjoy the Melville foreshore’s past and present in a contemporary way. As well as enjoying the magnificent view, visitors will gain an understanding of the Aboriginal history of the area and other historical events."

Riverpark project officer Ben Ansell said the involvement of traditional owners was central to the project.

"An advisory panel consisting of Whadjuk Noongar community members was established to provide input and advice on important themes, stories and key locations. Four elders were also recorded sharing culturally significant stories specific to each site," he said.

Two virtual trail guides were developed to link the three sites. One of the trail guides, the Melville Water Riverpark Trail, runs 16km from the Fremantle Traffic Bridge to Canning Bridge. The second 1km trail guide, Jenna Biddi Yorga, meanders through Blackwall Reach Reserve. They are available from the Trails WA app and the Geotourist app. The audio stories can also be accessed on the Explore Parks website.

The completion of the first three sites is just the beginning of a larger plan to develop a network of trails and interpretation sites throughout the whole Swan Canning Riverpark. The development of a fourth site is already underway at Bull Creek in Brentwood and is due for completion in June 2016.
Bandicoot release chalks up early success

Fauna translocation research scientist Dr Colleen Sims releases a golden bandicoot at Matuwa. Photo – Jennifer Eliot/Parks and Wildlife

A group of golden bandicoots released into the wild last year at Matuwa (former Lorna Glen pastoral station, which is now part of the Matuwa Kurra-ra-Kurrara Indigenous Protected Area) appear to be thriving in their new surroundings, according to a recent survey and trapping effort.

Parks and Wildlife scientists joined Wiluna Martu to translocate bandicoots from inside a predator-proof enclosure back to their natural range in September 2015.

Of the 93 golden bandicoots translocated, the team recaptured 30 in the first three months after release. Most had increased their body weight by 30–50 per cent since the release.

Fauna translocation research scientist Dr Colleen Sims said there had been some early losses of radio-tagged animals due to predation by dingoes, with only one known to have been killed by feral cats. However, there had been no more deaths since September.

“All 26 females caught during the two trapping sessions at the end of 2015 were carrying pouch young. Of these, two females showed signs of successful weaning and remarkably, nine of the 10 females in the second trapping had four pouch young each. This is a great outcome because two offspring is the usual number,” he said.

“Other positive signs were sightings of young golden bandicoot tracks and indications that animals were spreading up to 3km from the release zone.”

The golden bandicoot is just one of the species benefiting from the Operation Rangelands Restoration program, which aims to return 11 native mammals to Matuwa.

To date, the brush-tailed possum and bilby have been reintroduced and established populations are now found throughout the 244,000ha property, as well as healthy populations of golden bandicoots, boodies and mala inside the predator-proof enclosure.

Parks and Wildlife staff returned to Matuwa last week to undertake further monitoring of the bandicoot population. They found plenty of signs indicating the animals were thriving at the translocation site six months after release, including lots of tracks, females with pouch young, and young bandicoot recruits. Several sets of bandicoot tracks were discovered as far as 30km away.

Plan for Esperance and Recherche region

A new 10-year management plan has been released for 490km of southern coastline in the Esperance region including the Stokes, Cape Le Grand and Cape Arid national parks and 62 nature reserves.

Releasing the Esperance and Recherche parks and reserves management plan recently, Environment Minister Albert Jacob said the area boasted stunning beaches and numerous recreational opportunities, along with rich plant and animal biodiversity and Aboriginal heritage.

“This area around Esperance is environmentally significant, with high biodiversity in Cape Arid National Park, two internationally recognised wetlands and an archipelago of 105 islands,” he said.

“The islands are significant breeding areas for the New Zealand fur seal and Australian sea lion.”

The plan will guide Parks of Wildlife as it continues to work with the community on the area’s tourism, recreation and conservation values, and the management of issues such as bushfire, dieback, weeds and introduced species.

The department is developing detailed recovery plans in response to severe bushfires in Esperance at the end of 2015, which burnt up to 20 per cent of the planning area, including large parts of Cape Arid National Park.

Proposed changes in tenure and additions to key Esperance conservation reserves are planned to enable greater visitor access and enhance the area’s natural values. This will result in additions to Stokes, Cape Le Grand and Cape Arid national parks, with Stokes National Park almost tripling in size.

The Minister said the planning area was important to Aboriginal people and included a site on Australia’s National Heritage List and at least 88 Aboriginal heritage sites.

View the plan on the Parks and Wildlife website.

Above: Sweeping view of Lucky Bay at Cape Le Grand National Park. Photo – Parks and Wildlife

Below: The old Moir homestead is a historic highlight at Stokes National Park. Photo – Mike Shephard/Parks and Wildlife

Bandicoot release chalks up early success
More than 40,000 aerial photographs of the Kimberley coast have been taken and scrutinised for signs of nesting turtles as part of the Western Australian Marine Science Institution (WAMSI) turtle research project.

Information about adult females and turtle hatchling numbers and species gleaned from tracks seen in the images of more than 2500 island and 1300 mainland beaches is now being verified through a process of ‘ground truthing’.

The aerial and ground surveys are part of the distribution and abundance facet of the WAMSI Kimberley Research Program’s sea turtle project that aims to identify when and where turtles nest, develop climate change models to predict how turtles might be impacted and work out relationships between different turtle nesting groups.

Parks and Wildlife senior research scientist Dr Tony Tucker said more than 90 per cent of the Kimberley coastline’s available turtle nesting habitat was accessible only by foot, boat or helicopter posing significant challenges for field surveys.

“The aerial images taken during the summer and winter surveys in 2014 have helped identify hotspots of relative density for follow-up by ground survey,” he said.

The ground truthing phase of the project, started during 2015, will continue this year, as will work on the other facets of the project.

Tony said the sea turtle project team was working with 10 different traditional owner groups who had assisted in the ground surveys and were helping to establish how traditional and scientific knowledge complemented each other.

Partners in the WAMSI Kimberley sea turtle project include Parks and Wildlife, The University of Western Australia, CSIRO, Griffith University and Pendoley Environmental. WAMSI’s $30 million Kimberley Marine Research Program is funded through major investment supported by $12 million from the Kimberley Science and Conservation Strategy and co-investment by the WAMSI partners.

Cameras reveal secret life of marine creatures

The secret lives of fish communities found deep within Ningaloo Marine Park are being revealed for the first time as part of an ongoing project by Parks and Wildlife and The University of Western Australia.

While the park is famous for the colourful fish that grace its coral reefs, those that live below the reach of snorkellers and divers are still somewhat of a mystery. As part of the department’s long-term marine monitoring program, this project aims to change this with a technique known as ‘bailed remote underwater stereo video’ or ‘stereo-BRUV’.

Using a baited, weighted video camera to attract fish previously unseen and unstudied, this unmanned device can travel up to 150m below the surface.

Marine research scientist Tom Holmes said the project focused on the whole fish community in the 40–60m depth range, including those targeted by recreational fishers. And while it is performing this task beautifully, the stereo-BRUV is also capturing some unexpected scenes.

“It is an excellent method for surveying rare, flighty and highly mobile species such as sharks, rays and even sawfish,” Tom said.

“Will it be a large shark, or a rare fish, or maybe just some incredibly intricate and beautiful deep water sponge gardens? These are areas I know that I’ll never get to see with my own eyes due to their depth, but seeing them through the eyes of a BRUV is the next best thing.”

Tiger, reef, hammerhead, leopard and nurse sharks along with targeted species including red emperor, spangled emperor, rankin cod and the occasional gold band snapper have all been captured on camera.

Tom said the program would provide essential information to marine park managers, helping to ensure the protection and sustainable use of fish communities.

“Long-term monitoring programs such as this are an essential tool in understanding how biological systems are distributed and how they may respond to natural and human induced pressures,” he said.

Surveys will be repeated every two to three years to develop a time-series to track changes to the deeper water fish communities.

Check out Parks and Wildlife’s video to see exactly what the cameras have picked up.
Future protection of southern *Swan Coastal Plain*

The State Government has released a 10-year management strategy for 82 parks and reserves – totalling about 22,000ha – on the southern part of the *Swan Coastal Plain*.

The release of the *Swan Coastal Plain South management plan* will secure the protection of a diverse range of landscapes, plants and animals for the community to experience and enjoy.

The plan covers conservation lands in and around Perth, from the Darling Range to the western coastline and from Dunsborough to the Swan River, and is the culmination of widespread community consultation.

Environnement Minister Albert Jacob said the area was recognised as an international biodiversity hotspot.

“**The parks and reserves are known for their natural and cultural values as well as being popular recreation spots for activities such as cycling, horse riding, hiking, picnicking and camping,**” he said.

“A key initiative of the management plan is the protection of the internationally significant Ramsar sites, the Peel-Yalgorup and Vasse-Wonnerup wetland systems, which provide habitat and breeding grounds for thousands of waterbirds.

“**These and other wetlands comprise about 80 per cent of the management plan area and include plant species of conservation significance, threatened ecological communities, as well as threatened plants and animals.**

The Minister said the plan took into account significant cultural values and the importance of providing opportunities for joint management arrangements with Noongar people.

View the plan on the [Parks and Wildlife website](#).

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20th anniversary celebration for *Cadets WA*

**Staff and students from Parks and Wildlife’s Bush Rangers WA and River Rangers WA programs joined in celebrations this month to recognise 20 years of Cadets WA.**

The State Government program offers primary and secondary school children the opportunity to participate in a range of activities that develop leadership and life skills, and a sense of community responsibility and service. *Bush Rangers and River Rangers* are two of nine programs on offer to schools under the *Cadets WA* banner.

Since its inception in 1996, *Cadets WA* has expanded to encompass more than 200 cadet units across the State with about 8000 young people taking part. Parks and Wildlife’s *Bush Rangers* program is the largest of the nine, with about 2300 cadets enrolled, and has the highest percentage of Aboriginal and female cadets taking part. *River Rangers* is the only primary school cadet program.

Youth Minister Tony Simpson marked the occasion by recognising some of the program’s longest serving instructors – school teachers that lead the cadet units, often in their free time.

“**Instructors are the backbone of *Cadets WA*, and today we have the opportunity to celebrate some of the program’s most dedicated individuals,**” he said.

*Bush Rangers* instructor Gary Thirwell from Duncraig Senior High School was awarded a Certificate of Service.

“I congratulate everyone who has made the program a resounding success over the past two decades,” the Minister said.

*These and other wetlands comprise about 80 per cent of the management plan area and include plant species of conservation significance, threatened ecological communities, as well as threatened plants and animals.**

The Minister said that the plan took into account significant cultural values and the importance of providing opportunities for joint management arrangements with Noongar people.

View the plan on the [Parks and Wildlife website](#).

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An exciting project to restock the *Swan and Canning River with western school prawns* has seen more than 4.5 million prawns released back into Perth’s iconic rivers.

The latest release of 674,000 western school prawns occurred in early March along the Como foreshore.

Parks and Wildlife, the Department of Fisheries, Recfishwest, the WA Fish Foundation, the Australian Centre for Applied Aquaculture Research, Murdoch University, Prawn Watch and the Fisheries Research and Development Corporation are working together on the restocking project.

Rivers and Estuaries Division principal scientist Kerry Trayler said the partnership was helping reinstate prawning as a popular recreational activity for Perth families.

“The parks and reserves are known for their natural and cultural values as well as being popular recreation spots for activities such as cycling, horse riding, hiking, picnicking and camping,” he said.

“A key initiative of the management plan is the protection of the internationally significant Ramsar sites, the Peel-Yalgorup and Vasse-Wonnerup wetland systems, which provide habitat and breeding grounds for thousands of waterbirds.”

The Minister said the plan took into account significant cultural values and the importance of providing opportunities for joint management arrangements with Noongar people.

View the plan on the [Parks and Wildlife website](#).

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**Youth Minister Tony Simpson inspects the *Cadets WA* parade. Photo – Linley Brown/Parks and Wildlife**

**Prawning on the Swan River. Photo – Stewart Allen**
the grants," she said. Hepburn Heights, which was funded through Bushland, described weed management at one of The Friends of Hepburn and Pinaroo’s projects in five-minute talks. Community group members presented their experiences and outcomes for 17 of these projects.

Community bushland coordinator Julia Cullity said community group members presented their experiences and outcomes for 17 of these projects in five-minute talks. “One of these talks, presented by John Hudson of The Friends of Hepburn and Pinaroo Bushland, described weed management at Hepburn Heights, which was funded through the grants,” she said.

“After two years of work, counts of the invasive weeds Cape tulip and wild gladiolus have plummeted in monitoring plots. The group has also persuaded their local land manager, the City of Joondalup, to triple the grant funding and extend the weed program across the entire 22ha of Hepburn Heights.”

The workshop also featured a presentation by Parks and Wildlife senior ecologist Mark Brundrett about vegetation establishment techniques using topsoil transfer, direct seeding and tube stock planting, as well as monitoring results from revegetation, weed management and regeneration after bushfire. After the formal presentations there was a great opportunity for networking over lunch.

Julia said the workshop was held towards the end of the funding period so grant recipients could come together to report successes and discuss shared challenges. “It will be great to hear back from the groups when the projects are completed at the end of this year,” she said.

A great turn-out at the Banksia Woodland Community Restoration workshop gave community volunteers the opportunity to learn from each other’s experiences. Photo – Mark Brundrett/Parks and Wildlife

Shared experiences of banksia restoration

Community groups working on banksia woodland restoration have shared their bushland management experiences and discoveries at a workshop organised by Parks and Wildlife in February.

The department’s Banksia Woodland Restoration Project invested offset funding of more than $300,000 for 20 community projects between June 2014 and September 2016. These projects are restoring about 1000ha of banksia woodland with revegetation, weed and feral animal management and Phytophthora dieback treatment projects.

“Being involved with the conference also strengthened the partnership the department has with WAITOC to work together to support Aboriginal tourism operators in the future,” she said.

Parks & Wildlife presented to almost 70 people during a national Aboriginal tourism conference earlier this month in Bunbury, aimed at encouraging traditional owners to conduct cultural events and tours in national parks and reserves.

The initiative, which forms part of the department’s Reconciliation Action Plan, seeks to provide employment and economic independence opportunities for Aboriginal people.

Aboriginal Heritage Unit manager Rhonda Murphy said supporting cultural tourism was just one way the department recognised the unique role and expertise Aboriginal people have as traditional landowners.

“We want to see Aboriginal culture shared and celebrated and what better place to do that than on country in national parks and reserves,” she said.

“Parks and Wildlife is interested in working with and supporting businesses to develop high-quality cultural experiences, whether it be vehicle tours or safaris, guided walks, educational sessions, music events, festivals or dances.”

A range of Parks and Wildlife staff attended the conference, and were joined by Balanggara and Willinggin traditional owners from the Kimberley. Business owner Claire Prendergast from Wharncliffe Mill and Wardandi traditional owner Josh Whiteland gave an insight into their shared partnership in providing accommodation and Aboriginal cultural immersion tours.

Rhonda said a number of potential operators had expressed interest in developing commercial opportunities in different parts of the State.

“We want to see Aboriginal culture shared and celebrated and what better place to do that than on country in national parks and reserves,” she said.

Whale shark activity book released

Whale sharks have arrived in the clear blue waters of Ningaloo Marine Park for another year and to celebrate, Parks and Wildlife has released The Whale Sharks of Ningaloo activity book.

The book is full of fun facts, stickers, mazes and games to help share information about the world’s largest living fish. Pick up a copy from the Milyering Discovery Centre, local retail outlets or online at shop.dpaw.wa.gov.au. For more information about whale shark tours or how to see these beautiful animals from your own boat contact the Parks and Wildlife Exmouth office on 9947 8000.

Ningalulu the whale shark shows off the new activity book. Photo – Parks and Wildlife

Tourism workshop held for traditional owners

Tourism WA