

The Friends Group

The Friends of the Western Swamp Tortoise (FoWST) formed in July 2004 and is a not-for-profit community organisation. Our primary purpose is to encourage the public to help with recovery activities that aim to establish sustainable wild populations of the WST. We do this by raising community awareness through education, displays and events.

The Friends group also provides information and educational resources to interested parties at local, national and international levels.

Since our inception we have

- Become an incorporated body
- Received several grants for on-ground work to improve tortoise habitat in the Swan Valley resulting in revegetation of wetland areas, installation of artificial aestivation tunnels, weeding and seed collection.
- Held many displays and public meetings to help people understand the conservation issues facing this reptile.
- Built partnerships with local businesses
- Released many captive-bred tortoise juveniles into the wild
- Established an education program for primary students to learn about the Western Swamp Tortoise, its threats and action being taken to save it from extinction.

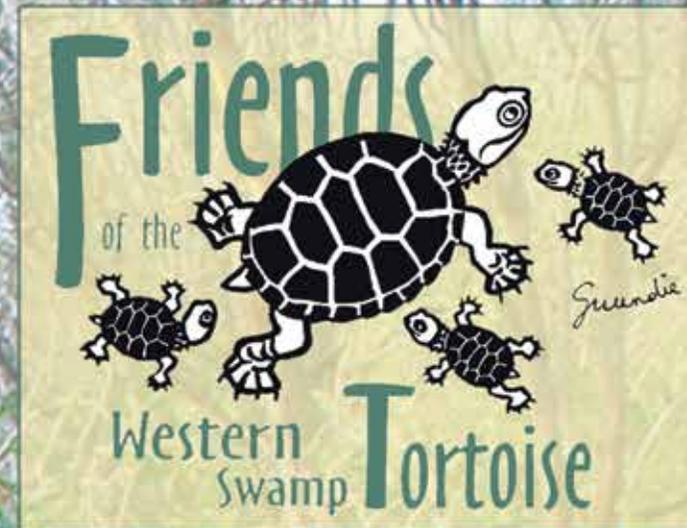


Friends of the Western Swamp Tortoise Inc

If you would like to contribute to our work, please go to our website
www.westernswamptortoise.com.au
for further information and an online membership application.

MEMBERSHIP IS FREE

Alternatively
contact the Chairperson,
Jan on 9344 2872 or 0408024800
westernswamptortoise@yahoo.com.au



**AUSTRALIA'S MOST CRITICALLY
ENDANGERED REPTILE**

www.westernswamptortoise.com.au



The Western Swamp Tortoise

The Western Swamp Tortoise (*Pseudemydura umbrina*) is Australia's most critically endangered reptile, with less than 50 adults living in the wild.

This Western Australian tortoise was thought to be extinct until 1953, when a young boy found a live tortoise in the Swan Valley near Perth – the first specimen seen for over 100 years! This amazing discovery began over 50 years of work by leading scientists to bring this special animal back from the brink of extinction.

Only two wild populations are left near Perth, with two more trial populations about 80km to the north. They live in shallow, winter-wet swamps during winter and in summer and autumn aestivate under ground (similar to hibernation) due to the high temperatures. It is at this time they are most susceptible to fires and predators.

The Western Swamp Tortoise is classified as critically endangered due to several factors including

- Habitat destruction – most of its native habitat has been converted to agricultural, industrial or urban land.
- Introduced predators particularly foxes, feral cats, rats and also native ravens.
- Climate change resulting in decreased winter rainfall and the drying of swamps.
- Very specialised habitat and biology – totally carnivorous diet, slow growth and reproduction rates.



The Tortoises' Annual Cycle

The Western Swamp Tortoise (*Pseudemydura umbrina*) is a freshwater tortoise with a short neck and a shell length of about 15cm. It is easily distinguishable from the more common Oblong or Long-Necked Tortoise (*Chelodina collieri*) which has a neck equal in length to its shell.

Western Swamp Tortoises have a very slow growth rate and it can sometimes take up to 15 years before they are mature enough to reproduce. They also have a very long life span estimated to be 60 – 90 years.

Below is a year in the life of a Western Swamp Tortoise.



Winter

The tortoises enter swamps once the rain has filled them to a depth of a couple of centimetres. They only live in temporary shallow swamps with a clay base, in an area where the surrounding land is predominantly sand. With the onset of rain they sense the time has come to leave the places where they've spent the summer in a state of torpor (aestivation), under deep leaf litter or in natural or artificial tunnels. They then begin to feed on small crustaceans and insect larva to build up their body mass.



Spring

As we move through spring and towards summer the Western Swamp Tortoises are also on the move, out of the drying swamps and back into their natural or artificial aestivation tunnels or into deep leaf litter. Aestivation (summer hibernation) protects the tortoises from the hot Western Australian summer and—if they find suitably deep places—from bushfires.



Summer

Adult breeding females lay 3-5 eggs underground in the aestivation tunnels near the edges of the swamps, and take no further care of them. Other adult tortoises aestivate until the swamps refill.



Autumn

Eggs hatch from late autumn (May) to early winter (June) and the hatchlings, which are about as big as a ten-cent coin, make their way to the newly filled swamps.