

Newsletter of the Friends of the Western Swamp Tortoise

What are we protecting?



Newly released tortoise at Twin Swamps, Aug 2011

Scientific Name

Pseudemydura umbrina

Other names

Short-necked Tortoise

Body Length: 11–13 cm (fit easily in your hand)

Weight: 300–450 g

Incubation: 6 months

Number of eggs: 3–5

Conservation Status: Critically endangered. Around 500-550 animals (wild and captive) of which less than 50 are wild, breeding adults.

Distribution: Swan Valley, Western Australia

Habitat: Swamps (ephemeral)

Description

Western Swamp Tortoises have a brown or black shell, a short neck covered by **tubercles** (knobbles), webbed toes with five claws on each foot and they are yellow with black dots underneath.

Diet

Western Swamp Tortoises are **carnivores** and eat small invertebrates.

In the wild

Tortoises live in shallow clay-based swamps that only fill during the winter and spring. While the swamps contain water, the tortoises swim around and feed on small aquatic invertebrates, tadpoles and frogs. When the swamps are dry they **aestivate** (summer equivalent of hibernation) in holes in the ground or under deep leaf litter.

Threats

The Western Swamp Tortoise is the most endangered Australian reptile. Western Swamp Tortoises are threatened by habitat destruction. Most of the original habitat has been lost to agriculture, housing, and mining. They are only found in a few places in the Swan Valley and if these swamps were filled in, the tortoises would not survive. Feral predators like cats, rats and foxes also eat tortoises and tortoise eggs.

This species is also at high risk from global warming and decreasing rainfall impacting on its seasonal wetlands.

At Perth Zoo

Perth Zoo's Native Species Breeding Program has been breeding Western Swamp Tortoises since the 1990s. Over 400 have been successfully released into the wild. You can see Western Swamp Tortoises in the **Australian Wetlands exhibit**.

Did you know?

The Western Swamp Tortoise was feared extinct for over 100 years. By chance they were rediscovered in 1953 and found to still live in two small habitats in the Swan Valley. A current research project is looking at potential new habitats for the tortoise.

Recovery Team meeting

The most recent meeting was held on May 21. Some highlights were:

The Recovery team welcomed a new member, Peter Mawson. Peter is the Perth Zoo replacement for Helen Robertson and will now be responsible for the new facility which has been funded by the recent State Budget.

It was **a good season in the swamps.** Spring rains kept the swamps topped up and the food going. Most ponds dried out by mid-November, but one at Ellen Brook Nature Reserve had water until the end of the year.

For the first time in 14 years, **wild hatchlings** have been caught in Twin Swamps Nature Reserve. Two new juveniles have been captured in Mogumber and seven in EBNR. This is proof of recruitment or natural breeding in the reserves.

Hatchlings were generally bigger this year because water lasted longer and feeding times were extended.

Andrew Burbidge and Gerald Kuchling are writing a paper about **50 years of monitoring data.** Data has been collected from 1963 and this is the longest recorded effort in WA. There will be an event to mark the occasion. (Keep checking the website!)

ARC project finishes March 2013, but it will be another year before translocation areas identified. The project has raised a lot of interest internationally, with its Chief Scientist being invited to speak at a

conference in Vancouver in August.

There will be a community release of 20 individuals at Twin Swamps for the final time at that location, on the 28 July.

Of the 30 hatchlings released at Twin Swamps in 2011, 27 were recaptured for monitoring and appeared to be doing well.

Next planned release is at Twin Swamps—for the final time at that location—on Sat 28 July.



Above: Last winter's release at Twin Swamps.

We'll meet at about 9.45 am. If you want to come then please ring Jan on 0408024800 so we can put you on the list, to ensure you get sent the final details.



R: Eager young tortoise at TSNR, winter 2011

Science Week Fair at Canning River Eco Education Centre Sunday 19th August, 10am - 3 pm

The Friends will once again have a stall at the fair, which was very well attended last year. Come and check it out, perhaps help staff the stall for an hour or two. Contact Jan for more info.

Revamped website

If you haven't looked at our website recently, go check out the improvements! There is now an interactive **membership form**, a more accessible **photo gallery**, updated **links**, etc.

Fundraising and spending

Following the success of the previous **vineyard luncheon at Edgecombe Brothers winery**, we plan to have another of these **this spring**.



Above: A past lunch held on the terrace at Edgecombe Brothers winery.

Alf and his staff have always kept us well fed and entertained, so make sure you come along and bring your friends and family! Keep checking the website for details; probable date is **Sunday September 9 or 16**.

At the recent committee meeting, we signed a cheque for **\$1,000** that will go to **Adelaide Zoo** to help pay for their new **mincer**, used to prepare meals for the 'insurance population' of Western Swamp Tortoises that's been established there.

Publicity

On April 30, committee member Tanya Marwood was interviewed briefly on a Perth **community radio station** about the Western Swamp Tortoise and what the Friends group is doing to help it. See our homepage under 'Latest News' for the location of the podcast of this interview.

Upcoming fieldwork

It's unlikely that there will be any planting this season, for a variety of reasons. Stay tuned to email and the website in case this changes, though!

L: Planting at TSNR, 2005



Next meeting

Our next committee meeting, at which all members and friends are welcome, will be on **August 20 at 7 pm** at **Panda Cottage** (WWF offices, Herdsman Lake end of Selby St, Wembley.) We will be in the cottage near the car-park, but ring Jan on 0408 024 800 if you can't find us.

For further information on any of the group's activities, contact Jan on 9344 2872 or 0408024800
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Or check out the website
www.westernswamptortoise.com