

Newsletter of the Friends of the Western Swamp Tortoise

Tortoise releases

On July 22 DEC and the Perth Zoo released 30 captive-bred young tortoises at Moore River National Park, site of last year's release. This time it was not open to members of the public, due to the inadvertent damage caused by the passage of so many vehicles and people into the swamp area. DEC Conservation Officer Paul Tholen tells of this year's experience:

'...around 30 individuals aged between 2 and 7 were released into the claypan wetland. Getting out to the site took approximately 2 hours; however the release took less than 15 minutes. The day was overcast and rain started falling just as we were leaving the site.

'After negotiating 5 km of sandy tracks, two locked gates and a 150 m short walk through sticky mud, the team of Gerald (Kuchling), three DEC staff, two zoo staff and one Murdoch University fauna expert released the animals in approximately 30 cm of water, close to the centre of the wetland. Around half had radio-tracking devices attached to the shell.'

Last year most of the tortoises were subsequently taken back to the zoo, due to low water levels and these were some of the animals released last week. *Déjà vu?*



Above: A young tortoise released this year at Moore River. (Photo courtesy of DEC)

Please note that there will also soon be a release at **Twin Swamps** reserve on **Saturday August 6**, at which the Environment Minister will be present. For details of this event please call Jan Bant on 9344 2872 or 0408 024 800. ***Hurry as numbers will strictly limited!***

Where are they now?

by Helen Pitman

During winter the tortoises enter the swamps once there is a couple of centimetres of water in them. They feed voraciously on small crustaceans and insect larvae to build up their body mass for aestivation later in the year, when the swamps dry up again.



Recovery Team meeting

On July 15 the Recovery team met to discuss issues related to management of the tortoise and its habitat. Some highlights were:

- ◆ Water levels are much better in all the reserves this year, compared to last year. Water quality monitoring will be possible this year, as a result.
- ◆ At Twin Swamps reserve, new piping and valves are in place and have extended to the northeast swamp, to allow water to be pumped there as necessary. Breeding females were found in TS but no juveniles, so perhaps the hatchlings are dying, making maintaining the water levels crucial.
- ◆ In the captive breeding program, 47 tortoises hatched in Perth Zoo and 46 survived. Some eggs were even laid in the public exhibit, to the surprise of keepers! A large number (60-70)



Above: A hatchling at Perth Zoo.

of captive-bred animals are available for release this year due to the abortive release last year at Moore River, when animals were returned to the zoo. In Adelaide, 3 females have laid 9 eggs but no hatchlings as yet.

Chocolate Tortoises!

Margaret River Chocolate Factory in the Swan Valley has indicated its interest in making and selling chocolate tortoises as a way to raise funds and awareness for the Western Swamp Tortoise. Anecdotal evidence suggests that in decades past the tortoise lived near the factory site in West Swan, even after the land was developed for agriculture.

Discussions are underway to develop a suitable chocolate mould and to decide on presentation (eg an information bag with each purchase of chocolate

tortoises) as well as what proportion of the profit will flow to FoWST. The company may even agree to have a display board about the tortoise, like the one currently in place at Edgecombe Bros winery. We'll keep you posted!



Above: Margaret River Chocolate Factory's showroom.

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