

Newsletter of the Friends of the Western Swamp Tortoise

Tortoise release Twin Swamps

Saturday August 6, 2011 was a bright sunny winter's day and Twin Swamps Nature Reserve was looking stunning as many Friends, Perth Zoo and DEC staff and other interested individuals gathered, along with the WA Environment Minister Bill Marmion, to release 30 young tortoises bred in the Perth Zoo program.

Before we began, Jacqui from DEC explained about the Recovery Program and some of the threats to the tortoise, then Dr Gerald Kuchling (also of DEC) explained correct tortoise handling. Gerald had attached radio trackers to 12 of these animals.

Over 50 participants, including many children, then trekked carefully to the release site in the North West Swamp, formed a long line in the water, took lots of photos, and released the animals into the wild. This annual event really is the culmination of the work done by all of us. It's both exciting and sobering to participate in such attempts to save this creature from extinction.



Above L: participants line up to release their animals. Rahima Bannerman in foreground.

Above R: The minister enjoys a moment holding a tortoise.



*Above: Getting ready to go...
Below: Home at last!*



Where are they now?

In the heat of summer the tortoises are on the move, out of the drying swamps and into aestivation places. Aestivation is a type of hibernation that protects the tortoises from the hot summer conditions and any bush-fires that may occur. The tortoises use natural ground cover, hollows or artificial tunnels. This is also the place where eggs are laid and incubated for hatching the following winter when the rains come.

At right: Helen digs in an artificial tunnel.



Recovery Team meeting

The most recent meeting was held on 13 Nov 2011. Some highlights were:

Successful trial of **new fencing** and funds applied for to pay for it.

Free offcuts of high-quality **dam lining material** obtained through team chairman Craig Oljenik's contacts. These will be used at Mogumber.

State NRM funding for \$2.1 million sought. The tortoise was flagged as a focus species, so chances of success should improve.

Recovery Plan fourth edition 2008–2012 now endorsed, approved and on DEC website.

Ellen Brook Nature Reserve weed mapping has been completed

Twin Swamps Nature Reserve has a new extended pipe system

At **Perth Zoo**, 14 females produced 56 eggs. Expecting 60-70 eggs for the year. Western swamp tortoises are back on display in the Australian Wetlands section

At **Adelaide Zoo** insurance colony there has been successful mating this year, with 5 eggs laid; 2 of them are probably fertile. They now have one male, 4 females, 2 unknown.

The **ARC linkage project** research is now 16 months into its 3-year project. Researchers hope to have maps with boundaries showing **suitable new habitat** by the end of the year.

Fundraising

The group held four successful fundraising events in 2011.

At the Paradiso cinema in Northbridge, 19 people came to see *Never Let Me Go* on April 3rd and this raised **\$150**

A lunch was held at Edgecombe Brother's Winery on June and as usual Alf and his staff looked after us magnificently, helping us raise **\$100**

The Australian Association of Practice Managers held their 2011 Conference at Burswood Convention Centre in August, and proceeds from the Coffee Cart and donation tins raised **\$1200**



Above: Margaret River Chocolate company's choc tortoise display!

As we mentioned in the previous newsletter, **Margaret River Chocolate Company** tried out a tortoise-shaped chocolate. To their surprise they found it hard to keep up with the demand for them! They have now purchased several more moulds, and production will

increase accordingly. Not only have they **pledged \$2 from every box sold**, each box has a sticker with information about the tortoise and our group attached. We feel it's a great (and rather yummy!) strategy to educate the general public.

Product launch at Margaret River Chocolate, Swan Valley

When: 10 am, Monday 27 Feb 2012

Where: Margaret River Chocolate Company, 5123 West Swan Rd, West Swan

This event is designed to publicise the new product, gain media coverage for the company, the Friends group and of course the tortoise! Come for half an hour or so and enjoy a coffee and a slice of chocolate cake decorated with chocolate tortoises. How could you resist?

Priorities for funds raised

At the recent AGM, members decided on the priorities for spending the money we have raised (see article previous page) along with some accumulated funds. We chose from a range of projects proposed by various stakeholders, with a focus on our core businesses of education and ensuring a sustainable future for the Western Swamp Tortoise. Priorities for 2012 are therefore:

1. Website upgrade, \$500. To address the need for an interactive membership form, separate photo gallery and menu drop down, perhaps a facility for tracking tagged tortoises in real time.
2. Radio transmitters, up to \$2000 p.a. conditional on funds raised from chocolate sales. Transmitters are an ongoing expense, due to them eventually being naturally shed from the tortoises' shells after release, and sometimes not being retrievable.
3. Food mincer for Adelaide Zoo Insurance Colony, \$1000. New staff there are keen to refine their tortoise husbandry and nutrition is an important part of this. One Perth Zoo keeper has travelled to Adelaide to ensure their strategies are appropriate, and a keeper from Adelaide subsequently came here to shadow him at Perth Zoo.
4. Planting/tube stock, approx. \$1000, which is vital to enhance tortoises' wild habitat.
5. ARC expenses, up to \$500, to assist with projects to find new habitat areas for releasing captive-bred tortoises.

A recent development is the decision by the majority of the committee to put \$1000



Their future: in our hands...

towards the purchase of a bird-scaring device to protect young tortoises in the reserves from raven predation. DEC staff will oversee its use and monitor its effectiveness.

Next Friends meeting

All members are welcome to attend the next committee meeting on **Monday 20 Feb, 7pm at Panda Cottage**, which is at the end of Selby St on Herdsman Lake (at WWF's Perth office).

Urban Bushland Council AGM

FOWST members are cordially invited to the AGM of the Urban Bushland Council on **Tuesday 6 March at 7pm at Lotteries House, 2 Dehli St, West Perth**. Special guest speaker, Ron Johnstone, Curator of Ornithology at the Western Australian Museum, will tell us all about Forest Red-tailed Black and Baudin's Cockatoos.

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