

Newsletter of the Friends of the Western Swamp Tortoise

Western Swamp Tortoises get an extension

On Friday 1st June the Federal Threatened Species Commissioner, Dr Sally Box, officially opened the extension to the tortoise habitat at Ellen Brook Nature Reserve. Ellen Brook is the only self-sustaining tortoise population in the world. The five hectare extension has been fenced to make it feral-proof, after bunds and earthworks were completed to enhance the hydrology of the area. After commending all those involved, Dr Box and WWF Species Conservation Project Coordinator—Southwest Australia, Shenaye Hummerston, snipped and dismantled the old boundary fence to let the tortoises through to the new area. We expected them to be queuing up like shoppers at a Boxing Day Sale, but apparently no-one sent them the memo! Chief Investigative Scientist, Dr Gerald Kuchling, expects them to explore the new area over the coming months. There is a short video at: <https://www.facebook.com/TSCCommissioner/videos/1908895976067766/>



The new fence



A new pond

We were back there on Sunday 10th June to plant native tube stock to enhance the habitat. Thanks to Shenaye and Merrill, from WWF; Brian and DBCA staff for the barbeque lunch and the auger; the Member for Swan Hills, Jess Shaw, MLA (*right*) for working so hard and keeping us

Below: Sam enjoys the window of fine weather



cheerful; and the 30 participants who braved the weather to make the planting a success. We had a window of fine weather, even sunshine, for



an hour and a half before the wind and rain returned. At least we didn't have to worry about watering the new plants in, as we huddled under the tarp with our drinks and barbequed sausages!



'Westy' book launch

We were proud to launch *Westy the Western Swamp Tortoise* by Cathy Levett (*above right*) at a special event held at the Ellenbrook Library in March. Chair of the Friends Group, Jan Bant, introduced the Honorable Minister for the Environment, Stephen Dawson MLC (*above centre*), who spoke about the support given to this critically endangered reptile over the past 60 years. Member for Swan Hills, Jessica Shaw MLA (*above left*), spoke passionately about the necessity for conservation and protection of the tortoise habitat and then the author, Cathy Levett, delighted the children attending the regular library story-time session with a reading of the book. A delicious morning tea was provided by Jessica and many of the guests took the opportunity to get Cathy to sign their book. Thanks must go to Cathy and Naomi for coordinating the event and to the staff at the Ellenbrook Library for their cooperation

Westy is a totally Western Australian book: a WA author, an iconic WA species, printed and published in WA. Sales have been exceptional and we are down to our last few books. A reprint has been ordered.

NOW AVAILABLE

Hard covers - \$20 (FOWST members), \$25 (non-members) + \$6 postage.

Soft covers - \$15 (FOWST members), \$20 (non-members) + \$4 postage

Guided Reading Kits* for schools \$120 + \$11 postage (available August)

*10 soft covers, laminated information sheets, Teacher's Guide

You can buy the book by emailing the Friends group on westernswamptortoise@yahoo.com.au, at Perth Zoo, or Zanthorrea Nursery (Maida Vale).

News from the Recovery Team

The March 2018 Recovery Team meeting was attended by Phil Ainsley from Adelaide Zoo, who reported on the situation at the 'insurance colonies' at Adelaide and Monarto zoos. Tortoises at both sites are doing well, with some hatchlings born. They requested another male and two females for the 2018/2019 season and are planning some natural ponds to get the tortoises used to wild conditions.

Recovery Team members are working on a proposal for another translocation to the south-west this year. The tortoises would be released about September. We'll keep the Friends informed.

A new project focussing on the genetics of the captive (zoo) population has been flagged.

There was a problem with the groundwater pump at Twin Swamps Nature Reserve resulting in a shorter hydro-period* for last winter (2017). Chief Scientist Gerald Kuchling had a low capture rate in TSNR during his regular monitoring program.

At Moore River, some of the tortoises released in previous years are beginning to mature and breeding is occurring.

The scientists in the team are investigating the use of telemetry tracking devices to overcome some of the problems of glued-on radio trackers, which have been falling off too often.

A new book *Recovering Australian Threatened Species - a Book of Hope* includes two chapters about the Western Swamp Tortoise.

The next Recovery Team meeting will be held in August 2018.

* hydro-period is the time in which the tortoises are in the swamp and actively feeding



Thanks to Upper Swan Primary School

A group of students from Upper Swan PS , the Student Councillors, organised a fundraising effort for the tortoise in which they held a 5-cent drive where every class had their own collection jar and collected as many 5-cent pieces as possible. The school also had a colouring competition and a crazy hair day, for which students gave a gold coin donation. They promoted the fundraising through classroom visits and assemblies.

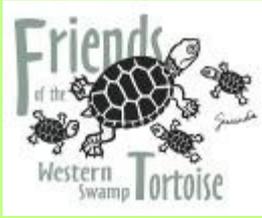
Well done everyone—the tortoises can use all the help we can give them!

Where are they now?

Right now the tortoises are happily swimming and feeding in their swamps, building up their reserves of fat in readiness for breeding and to help them get through the long dry summer—when they can't feed because the water dries up. When that happens they go into a torpid state called aestivation, in holes in the ground or under deep leaf litter.

You can help save an endangered species, right on your doorstep!

Membership of the Friends is **FREE** and we have lots of great activities, including behind-the-scenes zoo visits and tortoise release days.



**Join us to help save the tortoise...
because EXTINCTION SUCKS!**



For further information on any of the group's activities, contact Jan on

9344 2872 or 0408024800

Email: westernswamptortoise@yahoo.com.au

check out the website www.westernswamptortoise.com

or find us on **Facebook** www.facebook.com/FriendsOfTheWesternSwampTortoise/ where we usually post the latest news.

Committee: Jan Bant, Chair; Tanya Marwood, Vice-chair; Bob Height, Treasurer; Jo Gibb, Secretary; Mike Stokes, Pippa McLeery, Cathy Levett (general); education sub-committee—Jan Bant & Cathy Levett.



Our current sponsors and recovery partners include:



Department of
Parks and Wildlife

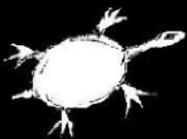


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...as well as **Boral**, the **University of Western Australia**, **Curtin University**, **Adelaide Zoo**, **Long Road Website Development**, **Aveley Primary School**.