

CHAIRPERSON'S ADDRESS FOR THE 2006 AGM

By Jan Bant

The group has gone from strength to strength in 2006, with over 70 members currently enrolled, and the distribution list for our Tortoise Tales newsletter topping 100. From a bank balance of \$0, the Treasurer was pleased to advise the current balance is \$4 848.24. Even after expending the rest of the committed grant monies, we will still have a healthy credit balance.

Chairperson, Jan Bant, highlighted some of the activities the group has undertaken this year and commended all for their hard work and dedication. A discussion regarding the recent Recovery Team meeting took place, followed by a tour of the Captive Breeding facilities at the zoo. The new Committee elected at the Annual General Meeting on Saturday 9th December, is

Chair Jan Bant
Vice Chair Tanya Marwood
Secretary Jessie Cochrane
Treasurer Bob Height
Committee Helen Pitman, Rodney Louden, Melanie Louden and Margaret Atkinson.



2007 committee—Rodney Louden, Melanie Louden, Tanya Marwood, Helen Pitman, Jan Bant and Margaret Atkinson. Absent—Jessie Cochrane and Bob Height.

This has been an exciting year for the Friends group with several projects being successfully undertaken.

We have received, and spent, two \$5500 Community Conservation Grants and a Grant from Lotterywest for \$5800 to prepare displays

With the help of Edgecombe Brothers Winery we fundraised almost \$2000 through a cocktail party to help them launch their 50year Old Vine Shiraz. It was a resounding success, and we've promised to mount a permanent display for them as tourists and others visiting the Winery are fascinated with the tortoise.

We have completed earthworks at the Reserves, planted seedlings, installed tortoise gates, tidied up rat bait stations and removed thousands of Watsonia bulbs. We collected seed and planted at Twin Swamps and an extension to the Ellen Brook reserve is now fenced completely. We went out to fill the trenches left by the bulldozer along the fence line which DEC was concerned the tortoises might get trapped in.

Our members have spread the word of the tortoise's plight amongst students, seniors and other interested parties through talks, workshops and publicity. I did a radio interview on RTR, and Helen did a TV interview on Access 31. We have done talks to students at Tuart Hill Primary and Ellenbrook Primary, and a senior's group at Midland.

Our website is up and running, www.westernswamptortoise.com

Our incorporated structure ensures that the group will be able to function for many years to come.

Social occasions included lunch at Gingers Roadhouse to view the Western Swamp Tortoise posters, and lunch at Edgecombe Bros Winery.

As you can see, the group is involved in a wide range of activities, and we look forward to a similar variety in 2007. A big thanks to all members and friends for your dedication to this important cause.

RECOVERY TEAM HIGHLIGHTS CLIMATE CHANGES FOR THE TORTOISE

By Jan Bant

At the recent Recovery Team biennial meeting, there was much discussion about the effect of climate change and WA drought conditions on the long term recovery strategies for the Western Swamp Tortoise. The wild population at Ellen Brook Nature Reserve is holding its own, and with the extra land now included with the vermin proof fence, the tortoises previously held at the Perth Zoo have been able to be released back to their home range. The drought has highlighted the difficulties of maintaining enough water in the swamps at the other reserves, and the Team will be looking closely at all other viable locations suitable for captive releases. No releases

were possible in 2006, so an early, wet winter is paramount for 2007. The Captive Breeding Program at the Perth Zoo has been very successful, so there are lots of juveniles waiting for a winter release into the wild. Some members of the Team indicated that because of the great efforts being made, the general public probably believe the Western Swamp Tortoise has been saved from extinction and will not require help in the future, but this is far from the truth. We can do our bit by highlighting in our discussions that the WST is still critically endangered, and will probably be so for some time to come.

Tour of WST Captive Breeding Facility

By Tanya Marwood

Members who attended the AGM were offered a tour of the Western Swamp Tortoise captive breeding facility in the 'back-blocks' of the zoo grounds. As on previous occasions, the tortoise keeper was relaxed and informative and proudly showed us a juvenile and an adult female, as well as the aestivation area. He spoke about the current overcrowding in the facility and indicated an adjacent area that they hope to expand into once money becomes available.

As we walked around, members discussed the leaky state of the tanks that house the animals and the keeper explained that these were constructed with minimal funds in the early days. There are hopes to install new tanks if and when more funds become available and a realistic quote is received for the work. The present tanks waste a lot of water and are mostly so low down that the keepers strain their backs maintaining them eg when cutting back overgrown vegetation.



Juvenile captive bred WST at Perth Zoo, Dec 2006.

Field Day Report

By Jan Bant

Gerald Kuchling, the Western Swamp Tortoise guru, met us at Ellen Brook Nature Reserve in November, and directed the placement of one-way tortoise gates, produced by DEC and trialled earlier in the year. They worked so successfully that more were installed by members on the perimeter of the Reserve. They have a Perspex flap inside the Fence which allows the reptiles to pass through the fence into the reserve, but not get back out again. As they are only about 8 cm high, only tortoises, bobtails and similar small animals can pass through.

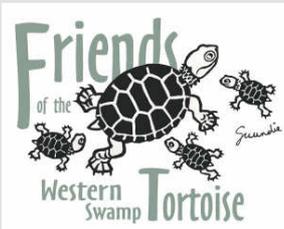


Ellen Brook Nature Reserve

We also prepared the Rat Stations for new baits, which Glynn deposited after we'd weeded the containers and replaced the ramps. There are 93 stations in a rough line through the thicket of hakea in the middle of the Reserve. The hakea scratches, and the rat containers murder fingernails, so I hope they catch lots of rats to make our pain worthwhile!!

Talk to Midland Seniors' Group

On October 16 we used the new Lotterywest-funded display board for the first time, at a talk to the local seniors' group at Midland Library. It was an impressive sight, with all the laminated pictures and information sheets displayed as an aid to the presentation by Tanya Marwood. The audience, numbering about 20, were mostly well informed and enthusiastic and some even remembered the rediscovery of the tortoise in the 1950s and knew people who were involved. At the conclusion of the talk a number people came up to look more closely at the pictures and to take some brochures and information sheets away.



The board was easy to transport, erect and dismantle and we will no doubt get great use out of it at many future events. Thanks to Midland Library staff for their assistance on the day.

Thanks so much to LOTTERYWEST!

By Jan Bant

The Lotterywest Grant has almost been spent, with some great display items purchased to help spread the message. So far we have the portable display boards; some classy posters designed by Jessie; the website complete with .com and .com.au domain names; a wide variety of laminated photos; T shirts; calico bags; stickers; banners and floor games; and a fantastic coloured brochure. At the first meeting for 2007, we will design a calendar to use the display materials to their fullest extent.



Where are they now???

By Helen Pitman

At the beginning of summer adult breeding females, that are at least 8 years old, lay 3-4 eggs underground in the Aestivation tunnels near the edges of the swamp, and take no further care of them. The adults will spend the remaining summer months underground aestivating until the winter rains come along and trigger them to once again venture out into the swamps.

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

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Or check out the website

www.westernswamptortoise.com