

## Newsletter of the Friends of the Western Swamp Tortoise

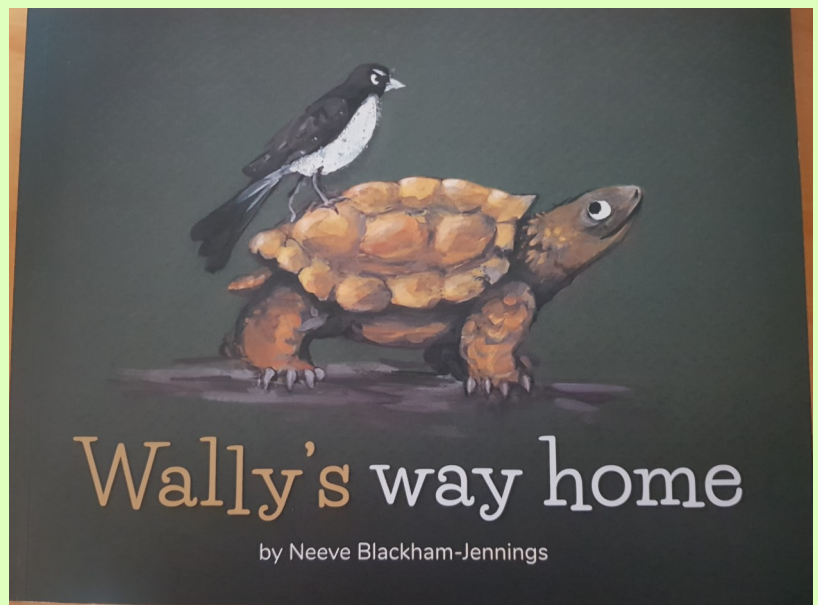
### Education success stories

At the end of the school year, it seems appropriate to report on the successes of our Education Sub-committee.

One of the major aims of the Friends of the Western Swamp Tortoise is to educate the public about this adorable little reptile. An Education Sub-committee was therefore formed to coordinate school visits requested by local teachers. Even with the disruption of COVID, we have visited hundreds of schools, and talked to thousands of students. It is very rewarding to meet some of these children at fairs and fetes we attend, and have them tell their parent "I know all about that tortoise – the lady came to our school". Our presentations are tailored to the focus of the classroom, e.g. climate change, threatened species, etc, so no two lessons are alike.

A heart-warming result of our visits is the number of children who go on to write a book, prepare a project, do some artwork or raise funds for a donation to the group (see below), and take the time to let us know.

A BIG "THANKS!" TO ALL THE TEACHERS WHO HAVE WORKED WITH US.



Above left: Year 1 student Isabelle from Willowbank Primary School with the tortoises she and her grandmother knitted to raise money for the Friends group. Each one comes with its own name and birth certificate!

Above right: The award-winning children's book *Wally's way home* by 16-year-old Neeve Blackham-Jennings, which has not only educated many children about the tortoise but has raised money for its conservation.

## Educating the wider public about the WST



**Above: Young swamp tortoises ready for release at Mogumber NR.**

Friends member **Claire Brooks** has written the following article for DBCA's newsletter *Bushland News*:

The western swamp tortoise *Pseudemydura umbrina* (yarkiny in the Noongar language) is classified as Critically Endangered under the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation 1999 and Biodiversity and Conservation Act 2016. Less than 30 years ago, the species was considered close to extinction, declining from more than 250 mature adults in the 1960's to just 15-25 mature individuals in the late 1980's.

Assisted colonisation is the intentional translocation of a species outside their indigenous range to mitigate a threat, and this has been explored as an option for the swamp tortoise for over a decade to combat threats from climate change, habitat loss, and predation. In 2007, Moore River became the second translocation site for the species after releases in Mogumber Nature Reserve in 2000. Ten young captive-bred individuals from the Perth

Zoo, between 2 – 4 years old and carrying radio-transmitters were released, with a further 17 released in 2008, 30 in 2009, 24 in 2017, and 78 individuals in 2018. The wetlands at Moore River Reserve have excellent water quality and undergo periodic feral animal control to mitigate predation and habitat destruction. In 2020, Tronox signed a three-year commitment to the State Government Western Shield program to assist wildlife recovery efforts and feral animal control at Moore River.

The most recent translocation at Moore River in September 2022 saw 147 zoo-bred individuals released, the largest for the program since 1989. The young tortoises were between 1-3 years old and underwent full veterinary checks at the Perth Zoo prior to release. The release was assisted by over 70 participants, including volunteers from the Friends of the Western Swamp Tortoise (FoWST), local community, Perth Zoo, DBCA, and the Roe family upon which the Moore River Nature Reserve backs. Monitoring of the site over the past few years has found that the released tortoises are not only surviving and putting on body weight, but some of the young tortoises are now growing to maturity and producing hatchlings of their own. The Moore River translocation site forms an integral part of the recovery actions for the western swamp tortoise to safeguard the species against the threat of climate change, predation, and habitat loss.

**Below: Walking into the Moore River release site in September.**

**Right: Claire and friend at Moore River.**





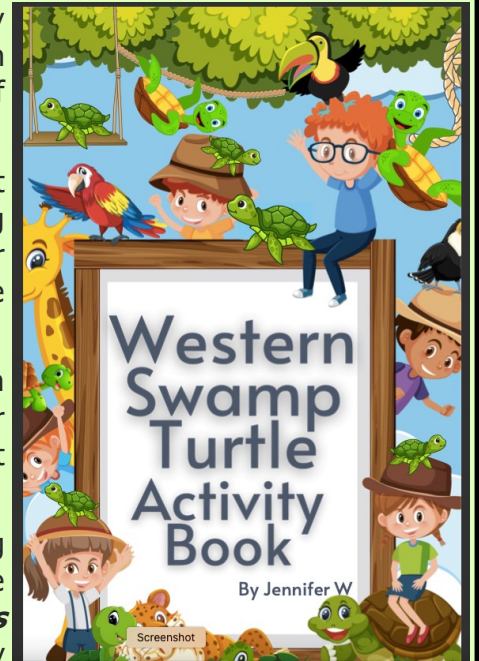
## Young people give us hope

When it comes to choosing an endangered animal to study, the Western Swamp Tortoise is a popular choice for young West Australians. Not only is it the most endangered reptile in Australia, but it is cute and has an intriguing story. From being on the brink of extinction, a team of dedicated people are now helping it survive.

Sometimes we find out about research being done by young people that is so fabulous we want to share it. We have a process of enabling young people to share their knowledge and passion. When we receive their projects, we do a fact check, and sometimes the information needs to be adjusted a little bit to make it accurate enough for us to share.

We recently received a perfect example of how young researchers can interest other children in a topic that they're passionate about. Jennifer sent us the activity book she created (*right*) and, following the fact check process, we asked her if we could share it.

Our website and Facebook page provide an opportunity for these young people to share their wonderful creations. In recent years we have featured ***All Because I Crossed the Road*** by Rachael Wu and ***Wally's Way Home***, by Neeve Blackham-Jennings. And now Jennifer's activity book is available. The link to download and print your own copy of Jennifer's book can be found here <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1Dfl8p4acj3YnvkAJg84zF0qd-duv0qfS/view>



## Schools' conservation contributions

Girls from St. Mary's Anglican School in Karrinyup joined Landcare staff and DBCA during 2022 to attack weeds in the Ellen Brook Nature Reserve on their annual Weeding Day. In 2021 they had pulled out trailer loads of Paterson's Curse, which they were pleased to see had not regenerated this season. This year, they set their sights on the Watsonia. Once again, they filled two large DBCA box-trailers with this difficult to eradicate weed. By doing this, they have helped prepare the site for a much-needed community planting in 2023.

In 2021, NIDO Early Learning Centre, parents and children, assisted in planting several hundred seedlings (*left*), when they weren't splashing in the puddles!

## Where are they now?

(Early summer / Birak — late summer / Bunuru): As we move into summer the Western Swamp Tortoises are also on the move, out of the drying swamps and back into natural havens or artificial aestivation tunnels. Aestivation (a type of hibernation) protects the tortoises from the hot Western Australian summer and any bushfires that may occur. Adult breeding females (at least 8 years old) lay 3-4 eggs underground in or near their aestivation places, and take no further care of them.

**Right: an artificial tunnel helps the tortoises find shelter from the sun through the hot, dry summer.**



## Like a presentation for your school or group?

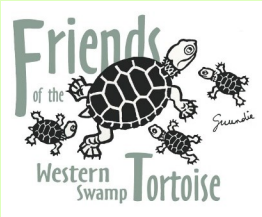
If you know of a **school** or **community group** that would like us to come and talk please contact Jan on 0408 024 800 or Cathy via [westernswamptortoise@yahoo.com.au](mailto:westernswamptortoise@yahoo.com.au).

At schools we include an exciting free games session for the younger children.



## 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](mailto:westernswamptortoise@yahoo.com.au)

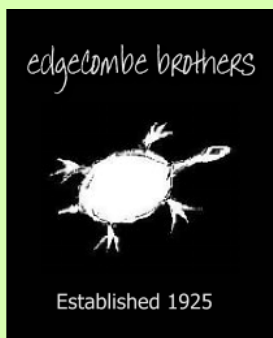
check out the website <https://westernswamptortoise.com.au>

or find us on **Facebook** [www.facebook.com/FriendsOfTheWesternSwampTortoise/](http://www.facebook.com/FriendsOfTheWesternSwampTortoise/) where we usually post the very latest news.

**Committee:** Jan Bant, Chair; Cathy Levett, Vice-chair; Bob Height, Treasurer; Jemma Simpson, Secretary; Tanya Marwood (general); education sub-committee—Jan Bant & Cathy Levett.



### Our current sponsors and recovery partners include:



Department of Biodiversity,  
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...as well as **Tronox, Boral, the University of Western Australia, Curtin University and Adelaide Zoo.**