

## Newsletter of the Friends of the Western Swamp Tortoise

### The 'small and tough' kids with big ideas!

You don't have to be a big person to have an impact! Teacher Penelope Harris and her class of five-year-olds at Bridgewater Primary School in South Australia have raised money to help the Western Swamp Tortoise. The school is located in the Adelaide Hills about 30 minutes from Monarto Zoo (where there is an insurance colony of tortoises.)

One of Penny's students, Angus, came crying into school for an entire week every morning because he heard about how few Western Swamp Tortoises there are in the world and he was very worried. He told her:

"We HAVE to help it! It is small like us and tough like us but it needs us or there will be NONE left!"

He went home and brainstormed with his mum and then the 22 other pupils in his class about how they could help. All the children in class came up with a plan and were desperate to help. Their plan was to make biscuits in the shape of the Western Swamp Tortoise and sell them in the community to raise money for a new incubator at Monarto Zoo. Any other money raised over this target of \$450 would help Monarto Zoo to safely freight the new babies back to WA for their natural release.

All of this was driven and brainstormed by the students, with support from the community, families, Phil Ainsley from Monarto Zoo and Penny.

The children created the biscuits, bagged, tagged and sold them and raised a massive \$900 over eight weeks, easily eclipsing their target. The photo below shows all of the students, with the Monarto Zoo representatives accepting the cheque.

Penny just wanted to let everyone know that there are 23 five-year-olds in SA who are trying everything they can to help save this amazing species and are quickly learning that they can achieve great things with great effort and great love, and that even though they are only little people, they are making an enormous

effort to help The Western Swamp Tortoise.

Children's quotes on the Western Swamp Tortoise (19.10.16):

**"We are small and tough like them."**  
*Winter*

**"We hope they have a happy life with lots of babies."**  
*Savannah*

**"Just help them lots!"**  
*Austin*



## New head of the WST Recovery Team

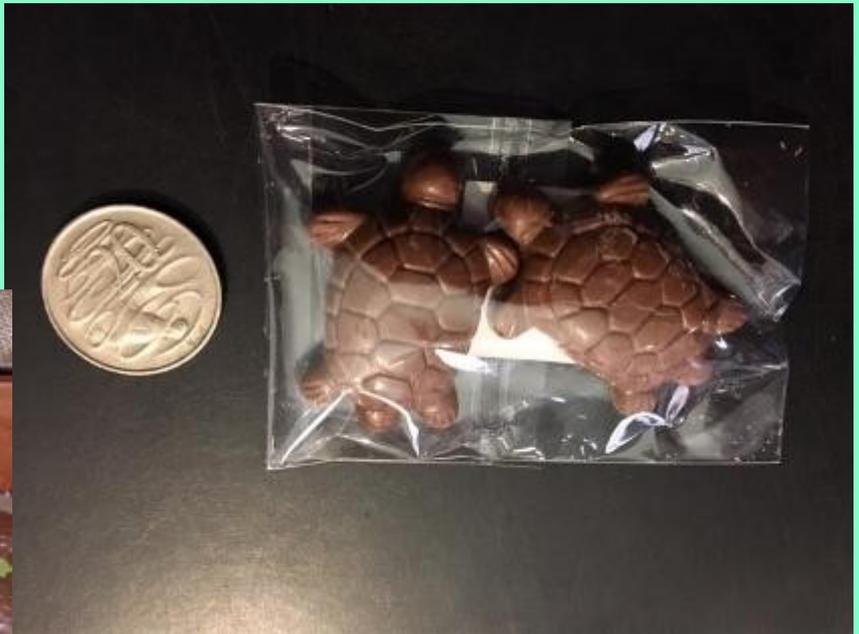
The Friends of the Western Swamp Tortoise is pleased to welcome **Dr Karl Brennan** as the new head of the Recovery Team—the body of scientists, zookeepers and land managers which manages the tortoises' conservation.

Dr Brennan is the Nature Conservation Coordinator (NATCON) and now the Chair, Western Swamp Tortoise Recovery Team, in the Dept. of Parks & Wildlife (DPaW). He is based in the Swan Coastal District offices in Dundobar Rd, Wanneroo. Karl replaces Craig Olejnik, who after seven years has left to take up a new position with DPaW in Broome.

Karl has been kept busy over the past few months directing the replacement of many of the fence poles at Twin Swamps Nature Reserve, which had rusted at the base.

## Margaret River Chocolate Company news

Our sponsors are now packaging their delicious Western Swamp Tortoise chocolates in **packs of two**—just right for a handy snack! Support the group by purchasing these packs (*right*) for \$1.75, as well as the normal gift boxes of 15 for \$14.95 (*below*).



## Like a presentation for your school or group?

Beechboro Christian School hosted the Friends as presenters at their recent Sustainability Day—many thanks to the school's organisers. We also presented to the CWA at Edgewater, where we sold some exclusive WST merchandise.

If you know of a **school or community group** that would like us to come and talk please contact Jan or Cathy on 0408 024 800. At schools we include an exciting free games session for the children.



## Where are they now?

The tortoises are currently in their aestivation\* places, waiting (and waiting!) for the rains to begin filling their swamps so that they can finally emerge and start feeding again. Then they will have a lot of eating to do before they breed in late spring and then return to aestivation to wait out the next long, dry summer.

\*Aestivation is a kind of torpid state, like hibernation. Our tortoises might be smaller than bears but they're just as hungry when they emerge! (*Left: an artificial aestivation tunnel.*)

## Good news from the translocation trial sites

All the tortoises that were translocated to areas near the south coast last winter have now been returned to Perth Zoo and are in aestivation.

The swamps at Site 1 and Site 2 dried up late December to early January. This was approximately two months after the northern release site at Moore River. It meant that the southern translocated tortoises had almost an extra 6-8 weeks to forage and grow in preparation for aestivation.

All tortoises in the southern sites exhibited relatively good growth, considering it was one of the coldest and wettest winters on record! Animals at Site 1 appeared to grow much more than those at Site 2. One at Site 1 gained up to 26g over the period of the trial. These growth rates are promising, meaning that these sites may be suitable for long term translocation!



The thermal data showed that both the southern sites were significantly cooler throughout most of August and it appeared that the tortoises spent most of this time inactive. Temperatures became a lot warmer during October and into November and the animals began to utilise much more of the environment. Observation and temperature data suggest that they spent much more time basking and utilising warmer water temperatures during this time than earlier on in the trial.

Additionally, all the tortoises found suitable aestivation burrows/locations at both of the southern trial translocation sites. So maybe our tortoises really have found a new home! (Info provided by A Bouma)

### Know your turtles!

(by Cathy Levett)

	<b>GREEN SEA TURTLE</b>	<b>OBLONG TURTLE</b>	<b>WESTERN SWAMP TORTOISE</b>
<b>HABITAT</b>	Ocean	Ponds, lakes	Clay-based ephemeral swamps
<b>WATER</b>	Salt	Fresh	Fresh
<b>SHELL SIZE: Hatchling</b>	5 cm	3.5 cm	2 cm
<b>SHELL SIZE: Adult</b>	70-1500 cm	15-40 cm	13-15 cm
<b>WEIGHT: Hatchling</b>	20 grams	5 grams	5 grams
<b>WEIGHT: Adult</b>	160-300 kg	1-2 kg	400-500 grams
<b>NEST</b>	On beach	Sandy soil	In clay soil or under leaf litter
<b>FOOD</b>	Crabs, jellyfish as juvenile. Algae and seaweed as adults (herbivore)	Insects, fish, tadpoles, ducklings (carnivore)	Swamp insects (carnivore)
<b>EGGS</b>	100-200 eggs	2-3 clutches, 2-16 pe clutch	1 clutch, 3-5 eggs
<b>SCIENTIFIC NAME</b>	<i>Chelonia mydas</i>	<i>Chelodonia colliei</i>	<i>Pseudemydura umbrina</i>

## 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

[www.westernswamptortoise.com](http://www.westernswamptortoise.com)

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

We're now also at the exciting new **Particle Picks** (Scitech blog) <http://particle.scitech.org.au>.

In particular, you can see us at:

<http://particle.scitech.org.au/earth/earth-watch-meet-the-friends-of-the-western-swamp-tortoise-particle/>



### Our current sponsors and recovery partners include:



Department of  
Parks and Wildlife



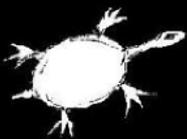
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**lotterywest**

...as well as **Boral**, the **University of Western Australia**, **Curtin University**, **Perth Zoo**, **Adelaide Zoo**, **Long Road Website Development**, **Grill'd Mount Lawley** and all the donors to the quiz night.