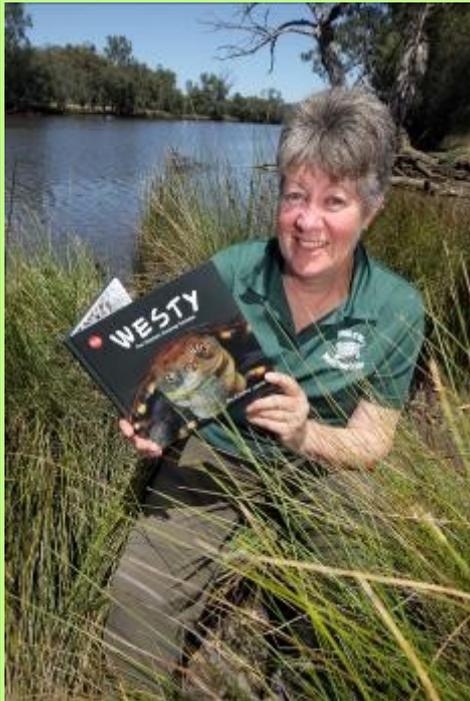


Newsletter of the Friends of the Western Swamp Tortoise

The tale of 'Westy'



The new children's book 'Westy'—sponsored by the Friends—will soon be launched. It's full of colourful photos and clear, informative text about the life of a western swamp tortoise. Author and Friends committee member Cathy Levett (*left*) is proud and relieved that the book is finally available and hopes your children and grandchildren will love it!

Meantime, you can buy the soft-cover version from us for just \$19 (+\$4 packing & post), or if you're a member of FOWST, \$15 +p&p. Just email us on westernswamptortoise@yahoo.com.au with your name, number of books and postal address; then send your payment by EFT to Friends of the Western Swamp Tortoise Inc. at BSB 036-308, Account 201858, labelling the transaction '[surname] book'.

Zoo visit and AGM

On September 23, 2017 we held our AGM at Perth Zoo and thereafter enjoyed a tour of the captive breeding facility with keeper Lesley Shaw—an area normally off limits to the general public. Lesley gave us a particularly detailed talk about the management of the captive population of tortoises and explained how they are moved into aestivation pens (*below right*) during the summer, to mimic the natural lifecycle (see 'Where are they now?')

During the meeting we discussed the new Memorandum of Understanding with the zoo and the benefits it may bring to the group and the tortoises.

Our publicity film, made by member Ian Hakanson, has been amended and is ready for our perusal and use in 2018.

R: Tortoise looks up from its pond at the zoo.



Fundraising by our supporters

Many thanks to our fabulous supporters in the community, including:

The CO2&U team at Aveley Primary School, which held a 'green dress-up day' raising \$520

Andrew Triglavcanin coordinated a fundraiser at Grill'd Mt Lawley, raising \$300

Margaret River Chocolate Company's delicious tortoises



MRCC supports us in helping save this critically-endangered animal by donating part-proceeds from the sale of each gift box of 15 tortoise chocolates (*below*) to our group. Available for \$14.95 from the Swan Valley and Perth city shops. Ideal for Easter—or any time at all!

...and don't forget the burgers!

Edgecombe's Brothers Winery's Burger Kitchen on Friday nights is just up the road from MRCC and

it's the place for delicious food & awesome value! A great, family-friendly spot for gourmet homemade burgers and all the kids' favourites. All while you relax with a wine tasting and enjoy the firepit. FRIDAYS 5-9pm (Kitchen serving 5:30pm to 8pm)



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 or Cathy on 0408 024 800. At schools we include an exciting free games session for the children.

Bullsbrook museum display

We expect that early in 2018 the display board detailing the history of the tortoise in the Bullsbrook area, including its rediscovery on Warbrook Rd in 1953, will be erected at the museum on Turner Road.

Chittering Landcare Group planting

Friends members Melanie and Peter reported to us about a recent planting done by Chittering Landcare Group, in which they completed planting around two ponds and a zigzag path formed on a degraded area, which was replanted to form four connective corridors fanning out from Lake Wannamal. About 20 000 plants went in over three days, which was a mammoth effort!

Where are they now?



In early summer the Western Swamp Tortoises move out of the drying swamps and back into their natural or artificial aestivation* places (*artificial aestivation tunnel, left.*)

Adult breeding females (at least 8 years old) lay 3 or 4 eggs underground in their aestivation places near the edges of the swamp, and take no further care of them.

*Aestivation (a type of hibernation) protects the tortoises from the hot Western Australian summer and any bushfires that may occur. It can be in natural cracks in the clayey ground, under deep leaf litter or in artificial PVC tunnels installed in the reserves. Occasionally during

this time they may emerge to drink if there is a rain event.

News from the Recovery Team

The Western Swamp Tortoise Recovery Team was formed in 1990 as a collaboration between Perth Zoo, Conservation and Land Management (CALM)—now Dept of Biodiversity Conservation and Attractions, University of Western Australia (UWA), Curtin University and World Wildlife Fund (WWF). At the same time, a Western Swamp Tortoise Management Program was published. The Recovery Team is still meeting twice a year, and the Friends group has been a member since 2005. The Management Plan is updated every five years.

The following report summarises some of the items covered at the most recent meeting, in late October 2017.

The current Recovery Plan (renamed Management Program) is under review. Two of the criteria for moving the tortoise off the Critically Endangered list will likely be met over the next planning period—viz. we now have over 50 adults in the wild for four consecutive years (five consecutive years needed to satisfy that particular criterion), and the formation of a second captive breeding program at the Adelaide Zoo (which has successfully bred hatchlings) satisfies another criterion. There are still several criteria to be achieved before the tortoise can move up to the 'Endangered' category and the Management Program will outline continuing strategies to be undertaken.

A review of five years' worth of incubation data from the zoo has shown that sex determination in the western swamp tortoise is not temperature-dependent (like crocodiles and sea turtles), but genetic. The aim now is to find the best incubation temperature (since all Perth Zoo eggs are incubated) and whether static or fluctuating temperatures are best for maximum growth of embryos and their survival.

There has been success with an innovative design for flap doors in the perimeter fence that was trialled at Twin Swamps, so there are plans to add more. Each one needs to have a camera monitoring entry and egress; foxes have been using them to exit the reserve. The one-way design stops them from using the door to enter from the outside.

At Moore River NP work is happening to bring feral pigs under control. Pigs trample the earth and disturb aestivation tunnels, with fatal consequences for the western swamp tortoises hibernating there during the hot summer months.

How many tortoises are there? (The Friends get asked this all the time! It's a fair enough question but the answer is far from simple.) There are probably over 400 western swamp tortoises currently in the wild, but since only 80 are recaptured each year and many individuals are only captured once in every 5-10 years, it is impossible to be more accurate. The Zoo has released over 500, and the lack of convincing evidence of mortality indicates most of these animals are still in the reserves, cryptically hiding from view. There are about 200 animals in captivity at Perth and Adelaide Zoos.

The 2016 translocation to the south coast was a success, with all recaptured animals found to have gained weight. The remaining—as yet uncaptured—animals that can be found (two at Site 1 and nine at Site 2) will be recaptured in November 2017 and brought back to the zoo for aestivation. Plans for 2018 include another translocation at Site 2 and a possible trial at Scott River Nature Reserve.

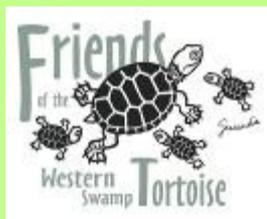
Below left—one of the south coast trial sites.

Below right—a tortoise with radio-tracking antenna at a trial site.



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.



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