

## Chairperson's Address AGM

Dec 2008

*By Jan Bant*

Firstly I'd like to thank all Committee members for their hard work, their contribution of ideas, and their attendance at the monthly meetings.

2008 was a particularly difficult year for the Recovery Team of the Western Swamp Tortoise, as over 60% of their funding was cut. This has impacted on the group in small ways – there was no-one available for planting, or other on ground works for much of the year. In the future, we may have to become less reliant on DEC resources, and provide our own, necessitating some fundraising initiatives. If anyone has any bright ideas for fundraising events which are particularly successful, please let the committee know.

This year the Friends group has funded seed collection and tube stock and paid for new radio transmitters for the released juveniles and the refurbishment of the old ones. Our in-kind voluntary work has been cleaning up and GPSing aestivation tunnels and repotting tube stock so they will be bigger and better for the 2009 planting. We also held a morning games making session in preparation for a holiday program called Make your Mark at the Zoo in July. Thanks to the members who manned and womanned our stand. We were able to cement the connection with the Education Branch of the Zoo, by arranging a Field Trip for them to see Ellen Brook Nature Reserve in October.

We also released some tortoises at Mogumber, and last I heard, they were doing well. The colony there will now become a Maintenance Colony, with no further releases. Some of the early released tortoises are now approaching adulthood, and need to be left to their own devices for a few years so the scientists can determine if the colony is sustainable. The Zoo is still breeding, and the next release may be at Moore River Nature Reserve. Trials in 2006 and 2007 indicate that area is suitable for a new colony.

On the Education front, Margaret discovered a very old display (probably done by original Green Corps workers who put up the first vermin proof fences) at the Muecha Tree Farm, and offered to update it for them. I understand it looks great now.

Tanya presented to the Hills Branch of the Naturalist's Club following an approach by Dot, one of our members. They were surprised to hear of the long road to recovery for the WST. From this event, Tanya was able to contact Robert Boyd, who "rediscovered" the WST in 1953 as a schoolboy. She did a wonderful interview with him, which was featured in the Spring Tortoise Tales, and will be in the TSN newsletter soon.

I have been to Baldivis Children's Forest and Christchurch Prep School, speaking to the next generation who will need to ensure the WST is safe from extinction. These children are very aware of conservation and threatened species. They also loved our floor games.

Our free standing display has been at a Seminar for Midland Brick, a North Metro Catchment Group event, the Nats Club, several schools and is currently back here at the Zoo for the Australian Wildlife Management Society Conference.

Helen is still producing Tortoise Tales, the Group's quarterly newsletter. Our website has been refurbished, and promises to be better than ever once completed. Thanks to Helen and Rodney for helping spread the message.

2009 is the 5th anniversary of the Friends Group, and, as well as several events already planned, we will try to contact the original Green Corps members who were instrumental in the formation of the group, to join us for a celebration. It will be interesting to see what direction their lives have taken since then.

### Tortoises rock!

Thanks to Ms Duncan and the boys in the Year 3 class at Christchurch Preparatory School for their enthusiastic participation in a presentation about the Western Swamp Tortoise.

The boys were so engaged in the topic, they organised a fundraiser and adopted two tortoises from the Zoo.

They also visited the Zoo and saw the Breeding Program in action.

Back at school, they wrote up information reports and created lino prints in a similar style to Guundie Kuchling's work, which is used as the Friends Group logo.



## Zoo news

The Western Swamp Tortoise Captive Breeding program is steaming ahead at the Perth Zoo. As well as their core business of hatching the eggs and growing the juveniles to a healthy release weight, they are involved in many other associated projects designed to bring the Western Swamp Tortoise back from the brink of extinction. Some of these are

- Design and trial of prototype breeding tanks (see picture)
- Provision of a PhD genetic project with the University of Western Australia
- Displays at the Australian Wildlife Management Society Conference
- Workshop for the Education Team on the habitat and requirements of the tortoise
- Possible move to a new section of the zoo to enable expansion of the program



We are indebted to the dedicated staff who make this world class program a reality.

## Reserve in focus

Ellen Brook Nature Reserve is part of the Ellen Brook Catchment, which extends from south of Gingin, through Muchea and Bullsbrook townsites and the Swan Valley to connect with the Swan River in the suburb of Henley Brook.

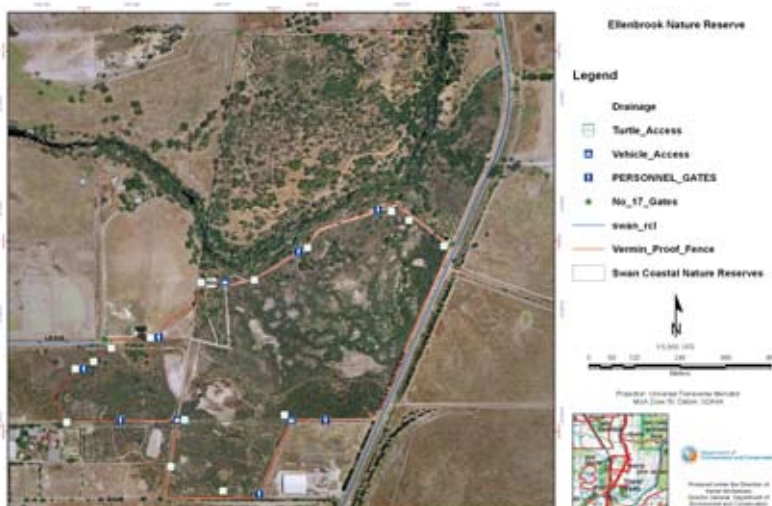
Six per cent of the total water input into the Swan River estuary comes from Ellen Brook catchments. This is one reason the Friends group is hosting a meeting about stormwater issues in the catchment (see next page for details).

You may have seen notices attached

to the gate of the Ellen Brook Nature Reserve off Great Northern Highway indicating the reserve is a TEC.

Communities are described as Threatened Ecological Communities (TECs) if they have been defined by the Western Australian Threatened Ecological Communities Scientific Advisory Committee and found to be endangered or vulnerable.

So not only are we helping the tortoise, we're also preserving an area of special flora.



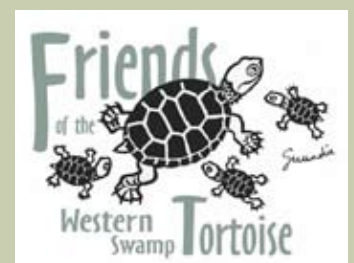
## FoWST Plans for 2009

- 14 March  
Social event at Edgecombe Bros. Winery - see next page for details
- 30 March  
Stormwater / drain water seminar and public meeting in Ellenbrook - see next page for details
- 3 April  
Earth Day at ECU
- Zoo School Holiday Program
- July  
5-year anniversary of the FoWST
- September  
Royal Show
- Volunteering WA website
- Planting
- Releasing
- On-ground works in Moore River



Dr Nicola Mitchell has applied for an Australian Research Council Linking Grant to map out suitable tortoise habitat in SW Australia using a mechanistic modelling approach. We are partners in the research, and will be doing on-ground works and revegetation at a later stage. She has applied for \$200 000 over 2 years, starting in mid-2009.

In addition to the above we will be presenting our usual quarterly newsletters, conducting education visits to schools to talk about the WST, fundraising and preparing capability statements with a view to approaching potential corporate sponsors.



Fun event and fundraiser

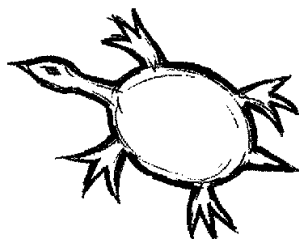
## Food Lover's Guide to the Swan Valley

Saturday 14th March - \$60

January, February and March are the peak growing months for the fresh produce of the Swan Valley. Learn where and how your food is grown, and purchase some gourmet treats to enjoy.

Proposed format is

- 10am Meet at Edgecombe Winery for tea and coffee
- 10.30 Walk to Maggie's Place at Edgecombe Brothers (market)
- 10.45 Board bus to Giannatis stall on West Swan Rd
- Then Vince Musaro's property in Campersic Rd
- Then Rangeview Orchard on Gt. Northern Hwy
- Return to Edgecombes for long table platter lunch approx 1pm
- Then walk in vineyard with Alf Edgecombe and pick some grapes to take home



Produce available direct from the farmer ranges from avocados and freshly dug summer vegetables like corn, tomatoes and baby zucchinis, to red wine vinegar, home pickled olives and fruit (peaches, plums, apricots and melons). A guide will accompany us.

All participants receive a FoWST shopping bag, and discount wine packs will be available for sale from Edgecombes.

*Join us for a fun-filled foodies day*

## In the news.....

*Future of giant turtle still uncertain* by Jim Yardley  
from the New York Times Oct 7, 2008

Only one female Yangtze giant soft-shell turtle is known to exist, and she is 80 years old and weighs 90 pounds. Prominent herpetologist and Chief Scientist of the Western Swamp Tortoise Recovery Team, Gerald Kuchling, helped to oversee a mating program with the only known male in China – a 180 pound, 100 year old. The female was transported over 600 miles and now lives in an adjacent pond at the Suzhou Zoo.

The pairing in May was a success, and the female produced roughly 100 eggs, about half of which appeared to be fertilized. Unfortunately the embryos apparently died in early development. Dr Kuchling suggested the diet of the female may have been responsible.

Scientists will ensure that nutrition of each animal is optimal for the next 12 months, and in May 2010, an underwater door between the two ponds will be opened, and the two old turtles will try again.

For the complete article go to [www.nytimes.com/2008/10/08/world/asia/08turtle.html](http://www.nytimes.com/2008/10/08/world/asia/08turtle.html)

## Stormwater meeting

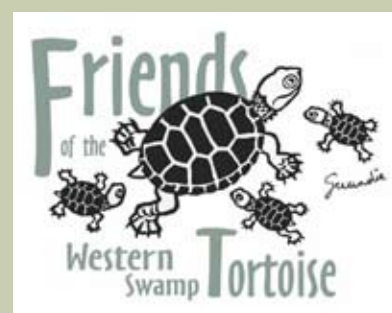
Monday 30th March - 7pm- 9pm meeting at The Grapevine, Charlotte's Vineyard, Ellenbrook. Guest speaker Amy Krupa from SERCUL (South Eastern Regional Centre for Urban Landcare) will be talking about the impact of stormwater on local wetlands. This meeting is a precursor to a project with local schools to stencil tortoises on stormwater drain inlets in the local area, to remind residents that whatever they allow to enter the stormwater system will have an impact on the lives of the critically endangered Western Swamp Tortoises.

All welcome, light supper provided. Please RSVP for catering to an Bant on 08 9344 2872.



## Where are they now???

Eggs hatch from late autumn to early winter and the hatchlings, which are about as big as a ten-cent coin, make their way to the newly filled swamps.



For more information on any of the group's activities contact Jan Bant on 08 9344 2872, 0408 024 800, [westernswamptortoise@yahoo.com](mailto:westernswamptortoise@yahoo.com). au or check out the website [www.westernswamptortoise.com](http://www.westernswamptortoise.com)