

AGM 2007

By Jan Bant

The 2007 Annual General Meeting at the Perth Zoo on Saturday 8th December was very well attended. Thirty people participated in a short meeting, including election of Committee members for 2008, and then headed up the hill for a guided tour of the Western Swamp Tortoise Captive Breeding facilities—ably led by Jasmine. A barbecue lunch followed (thanks to Robert, Kaitlyn and others for their cooking skills).

Report on 2007 activities

The AGM was an occasion to reflect on the many and varied activities undertaken by the Friends of the Western Swamp Tortoise during 2007.

Money matters

The Group received two grants in 2007 – a Community Conservation grant for the Zoo prototype tanks, and a Threatened Species Grant for collecting seed and propagating it for planting in Winter 2008. In addition, we have had donations from the ANZ bank, United Credit Union, Edgcombe Brothers winery and two individual members—so our “bottom line” is looking quite healthy!

Membership

Membership has been gradually increasing, and now our ‘Tortoise Tales’ quarterly newsletter reaches over 200 people. Although Helen left us early in the year to go to Sydney, she has continued to produce Tortoise Tales, for which we are all very grateful.

Our members have spread the word of the tortoise’s plight through radio interviews (thanks Janelle, Jessie and Helen) and displays at various venues, ranging from the Conservation Council Conference to the Bullsbrook Library and, most recently, the Chittering Landcare Open Day. There have been articles in DEC’s ‘Landscape’, ‘Australian

Geographic’ and the RAC’s ‘Road Patrol’ magazine, as well as an item on ABC TV’s ‘Stateline’, and numerous mentions in environmental magazines and newsletters of other groups. Every little bit helps to raise the profile of the recovery effort.

The highlight of the year for many of us was the release of 25 juveniles into Sheep Swamp at Mogumber. It was a special celebration, as the previous year was too dry for releases. We wish these little tortoises well and hope that they are the beginning of a self-sustaining colony. While they grow, aestivate, dodge predators and fires in a struggle to reach breeding age and increase the size of the colony, the Friends group will continue working in the background on strategies designed to raise their profile in the community and ultimately see them removed from the Critically Endangered list.



Captive-bred Western Swamp Tortoise at Perth Zoo

Tortoise’s champions feature on Stateline WA

By Tanya Marwood

It was an unexpected pleasure to see Gerald (pictured) and Guundie Kuchling featured in a short item on Stateline last November.

The feature focussed in part on the unusual situation of two European immigrants taking on the preservation of this uniquely West Australian animal. Most of you will realise that’s partly because the first Western Swamp Tortoise known to science was acquired by the Museum of Natural History in Vienna, where Gerald and Guundie once lived.

The program also emphasised the Kuchling’s amazing dedication to the tortoise’s conservation over the last 20 years.

“They’re relatively small, and not particularly colourful or anything, but very nice and interesting animals,” said Gerald.



Guundie explained that her interest in tortoises has been lifelong, beginning when she kept Greek tortoises as pets when she was a child. Her closing comments sum up their motivation:

“I think we all have to leave our marks. I am committed to educating and entertaining children and to raising awareness that we are not alone on this planet, and we have a duty to look after other species, because if one species goes, another species goes, and we are part of the whole system.

“So I think it’s our responsibility to do something.”

FOWST hopes to obtain a DVD of the item to show at events and displays. Meantime, the transcript is available either from the ABC

website or Tanya Marwood 9291 3723 or tanya.m@globaldial.com

New ponds a hit with residents and carers

By Jan Bant

The Friends of the Western Swamp Tortoise inspected the new prototype breeding tanks at the Perth Zoo in December, and gave them the thumbs up! The tanks, designed by Zoo staff, are at waist height for easy maintenance and handling of the reptiles, and have a special filtration system to keep their contents in an optimal state for the precious inhabitants. Early indications are that these tanks are a very workable alternative to current 30-year-old tanks and (as funds permit) they will replace the leaky, old, in-ground version.

The Perth Zoo has completed groundbreaking research to find the best methods of keeping the critically endangered Western Swamp Tortoise, as very little was previously known about their requirements for optimum health. Dedicated research and keen observation has refined keeping practices. (See recipe adjacent for a "happy meal" – tortoise style!) Funds for the prototype tanks were partly provided by a Community Conservation Grant awarded to the Friends group in April. Congratulations to Zoo staff for their continued success in the Captive Breeding Program.



Old captive breeding facility at Perth Zoo



New captive breeding facility at Perth Zoo

A tortoise's "Happy Meal"

Ingredients:

- 1000g Beef heart
- 960g Rats (minus skin, head, feet, tail)
- 640g White-fleshed fish fillets
- 280g Marron
- 4 Egg yolks
- 1400ml Water (boiled)
- 460g Gelatine
- 15g Herptivite
- 20g Calcium Carbonate

The ingredients above must be fresh (not frozen).

Method

1. Remove feet, head, skin & tail of rats. Skin rats with scalpel blade.
2. Trim fat from heart.
3. Place rats, heart, fish & marron in plastic bucket.
4. Hang metal bucket from mincer to catch minced ingredients.
5. Run the above through fine mincer. Mince marron last.
6. Boil water and add 460g gelatine. Stir until dissolved.

7. Add 4 egg yolks to mince while gelatine is dissolving
8. Add gelatine and water to meat mix and stir until gelatine is evenly spread throughout mix.
9. Check food temperature before adding vitamins & calcium.
10. Add vitamin/mineral supplement if temp is under 40°C & mix thoroughly.
11. Pour into 4 metal trays and place in fridge to set. This takes approximately 2 hours.
12. Once set, cut into 12 strips per tray.
13. Remove from trays and put into plastic bags.
14. Place in freezer.

NOTE: Once the process has begun, i.e. meat ingredients minced, the mix must be completed. Do not leave minced ingredients sitting.

Heads and skin from rats should be given to the Bushwalk Keeper as enrichment for either the Dingos or the Tassie Devils. Feet can be thrown out (or can be given to someone else who might like them).

News and Events

The Executive Committee elected for 2008 are:

Chair - Jan Bant

Vice Chair - Tanya Marwood

Secretary - Kaitlyn Height

Treasurer - Bob Height

General members – Darlene Leeson, Jessie Cochrane, Marg Atkins.

Thank you to all Committee members for their hard work, contribution of ideas, and attendance at the monthly meetings. We look forward to another successful year in 2008.

Congratulations to all!

Proposed Meeting dates for 2008 - usually third Monday of the month

Mon 17th March

Mon 21st April

Mon 19th May

Mon 16th June

Mon 21st July

Mon 18th August

Mon 15th September

Mon 20th October

Mon 17th November

AGM - Saturday 7th December

Please note venues and dates of meetings subject to change for special activities. Maximum possible notice will be given.



Where are they now???

By Helen Pitman

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.au or check out the website www.westernswamptortoise.com