Welcome to the third edition of World Heritage Connect, a newsletter produced by the Queensland Department of Environment and Heritage Protection (EHP). Thanks to all contributors for sharing their stories. Our next deadline for submitting articles is the end of February 2015. World Heritage Team, EHP, Queensland Government worldheritage@ehp.qld.gov.au

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38th session of the World Heritage Committee

In June this year, the 38th session of the World Heritage Committee meeting was held in Doha, Qatar. The meeting was particularly interesting for Australian attendees with several key items on the agenda concerning two Australian sites. This ensured there was no shortage of fellow Australians in attendance, ranging from conservation campaigners and Indigenous Tasmanians to Senior Government Officials.

There were some emotive moments over the 10 days of the meeting. A highlight was Botswana’s Okavango Delta being inscribed as the 1000th World Heritage Site. Indigenous people from the Delta travelled to Qatar to show their support for the listing—a momentous occasion for them and for the World Heritage Convention.

On the other side of the spectrum, the Selous Game Reserve in Tanzania was placed on the World Heritage In Danger list, mainly due to the increase in elephant and rhino poaching in the park.

When the Committee wasn’t in session, side events were hosted by various organisations and governments. These ranged from presentations on rights-based approaches to World Heritage management, biodiversity offsetting, disaster risk management, periodic reporting workshops and heritage relevant exhibitions and book launches.

Al Zubarah WH site
Image courtesy of A Stringer
The opportunity to attend the World Heritage Committee meeting came through completing my Masters (MPhil) in Conservation Leadership at the University of Cambridge, while on study leave from my role in the World Heritage management unit, Queensland Department of Environment and Heritage Protection (EHP).

As part of my degree, I took part in a placement project with the International Union for Conservation of Nature’s (IUCN) World Heritage Program and attended the meeting as the Site Manager focal point with the IUCN delegation. This gave me the opportunity to meet and talk with many people from all over the world who are involved in managing World Heritage areas.

My role involved developing a strategy for engaging World Heritage Site Managers in the new IUCN World Heritage Outlook program. This program was launched at the Committee meeting, and aims to fill knowledge gaps on natural World Heritage sites by tracking their state of conservation.

The World Heritage Outlook program provides the first global assessment of natural World Heritage sites, as well as aiming to identify, celebrate and showcase conservation success stories and achievements in natural World Heritage management.

Currently, 60% of natural World Heritage sites are not regularly monitored, and the outlook program tries to address this by encouraging inclusive and regular assessment of properties—an idea that originated from EHP’s Great Barrier Reefs Outlook Report that began in 2009.

Having worked in local World Heritage management it was fascinating to be at such an esteemed international forum listening to the 21 Member States of the committee, providing input and comment on World Heritage site management. World Heritage provides a global platform for opportunities, education and most importantly conservation. Attending the meeting gave me a greater understanding of the other end of World Heritage governance, and served as a reminder of the bigger picture when it comes to conserving the most inspirational places on the Earth.

Further information/reading:
- The IUCN Outlook website can be found at: www.worldheritageoutlook.iucn.org
- Seven reasons to remember this year’s committee meeting: https://portals.iucn.org/blog/2014/08/05/seven-reasons-remember-2014-world-heritage-committee-meeting/#comments

Angie Stringer
Principal Project Officer, World Heritage Management, Queensland Department of Environment and Heritage Protection
Removing pests on Macquarie Island

The Macquarie Island Pest Eradication Project (MIPEP) has successfully rid Macquarie Island of rabbits and rodents.

The $24.7m project was funded as an equal partnership between the Tasmanian and Australian governments and has been one of the most ambitious multi-species eradication programs ever undertaken. The project's success represents the culmination of many years of careful planning, preparation and hard work by staff from the Tasmania Parks and Wildlife Service and other agencies.

Sub-Antarctic Macquarie Island is a small and remote Tasmanian Nature Reserve and World Heritage Area located about half way between Hobart and Antarctica. Introduced rabbits, ship rats and house mice have had a devastating impact on the island’s natural values over the last 150 years. Rabbits severely grazed the island’s vegetation and rodents preyed on invertebrates and on the eggs and chicks of small birds. The island rabbit population is thought to have numbered at least 150,000 at its peak.

The MIPEP was planned as a two part operation. The aerial baiting phase of the project (completed in the winter of 2011) involved helicopters spreading pellet baits across the island targeting all three pest species. It was anticipated that the aerial application and ground baiting of buildings would eliminate all rats and mice, which proved to be the case.

The second part of the project involved field teams using a range of techniques including shooting, fumigating burrows and trapping to remove the small percentage of rabbits that were expected to survive the baiting. These teams made use of dogs specifically trained to find rabbits in the difficult terrain of Macquarie Island. It was predicted that several years of ground hunting may have been required to target surviving rabbits as only 13 rabbits were killed during the hunting phase, which lasted four months from the end of the baiting.

There were some hurdles along the way; an aerial baiting attempt in 2010 failed because of a combination of a late winter and some prolonged periods of extremely bad weather. The second aerial baiting attempt the following year was preceded by the release of the Rabbit Haemorrhagic Disease Virus (primarily intended to achieve a lower level of non-target poisoning) which helped to dramatically reduce rabbit numbers.

In the period after the aerial baiting was completed, hunting teams and dogs covered more than 92,000km on foot searching the island for any surviving pests. There have been no confirmed sightings of ships rats or house mice since July 2011 and no confirmed rabbit signs since December 2011.

The island’s flora and fauna is already showing signs of rapid recovery with tall tussock grass re-sprouting on the steep coastal slopes and many burrow-nesting petrel species breeding successfully on the island once more. Strict biosecurity measures have been put in place to ensure that rodents don’t return or that any new pest species are allowed to establish.

Noel Carmichael
Macquarie Island Executive Officer, Tasmania Parks and Wildlife Service

Tussock slope pre eradication Track April 2005
Tussock slope post eradication March 2014
Images courtesy of Keith Springer

MIPEP Hunting Team and Dogs March 2014
Image courtesy of PWS
Return to 1616: Ecological Restoration Project on Dirk Hartog Island

Following purchase of the island by the Western Australian (WA) Government, Dirk Hartog Island National Park was established in October 2009, with the previous pastoral lessees retaining several parcels of freehold land and continuing to operate a small tourism venture from the homestead in the south of the island.

The island, an 'A' class reserve of around 63,000 hectares, falls within the Shark Bay World Heritage Area and is the largest in the state at 80kms long and 15kms wide. One of the four natural criteria for which Shark Bay was World Heritage listed is that the area supports important and significant natural habitats where threatened species of Outstanding Universal Value still survive. Reconstructing Dirk Hartog Island’s mammal fauna will further enhance the values of the World Heritage property.

The WA Department of Parks and Wildlife commenced a project to transform the island into one of the world’s most important animal sanctuaries by making it a safe haven for the rare and endangered mammals that once thrived there, some of which have been decimated on the mainland and their survival rests largely on captive breeding and refuges. ‘Return to 1616’ is a project which aims to restore the vegetation and habitats of the island to its pristine pre-colonisation state.

Dirk Hartog Island formerly supported at least 13 species of ground-dwelling terrestrial mammals. The Dutch explorer Dirk Hartog made the first recorded European landing at the northern end of the island at Cape Inscription in October 1616 almost 400 years ago, followed by several other English, Dutch and French explorers. With the introduction of weeds, cats, mice, sheep and goats; the occupation of the Cape Inscription lighthouse; the island’s use by recreational fishers and campers and over 150 years of pastoral use, only three small mouse-sized native mammal species exist on the island today.

The Ecological Restoration Project (ERP) aims to remove the sheep and eradicate the goats and cats, then re-establish up to ten species of medium-sized mammals onto the island with the introduction of locally extinct species of mammal, including the boodie, woylie, western barred bandicoot, chuditch, brush-tailed mulgara, dibbler, greater stick-nest rat and three mice species, as well as the rufous hare-wallaby and banded hare-wallaby.
The ERP is being partly funded by Australia’s largest resource development project—Gorgon, which is underway on Barrow Island further north in the Pilbara Region. As part of an agreement to support conservation in the region, the Gorgon Barrow Island Net Conservation Benefits fund has contributed $11.5m over seven years to 2018 to help eradicate feral cats on the island, with the WA Government contributing a further $4.8m in the first stage.

Introduced herbivores, goats and sheep, were the first to be removed with a major destocking effort starting in 2007 when the pastoral lessees removed around 4000 sheep and 750 goats from the island by barge. This was in preparation for the change in tenure from pastoral lease to national park. Teams of Parks and Wildlife staff then culled the remaining sheep and most of the goats between 2008 and early 2014.

To assist with a continual decrease in goat numbers, Judas collars were fitted to females so that goats wearing these collars could always be tracked during the four year battery life of the collars. By collaring only females, their capacity to socialise with other females and attract males, meant the goat eradication team were able to locate the maximum number of goats by radio tracking during aerial shooting.

Goats have two breeding seasons each year when they can produce two or three young, having the capacity to quickly increase. The team needs to be vigilant until it has been established that all of the goats have been eradicated. Over 10,000 goats and 5000 sheep have been removed from the island since 2007.

With sheep now thought to be removed and less than 100 goats estimated to remain on the island, habitats are already returning to how they would have appeared to Dirk Hartog in 1616. Once the remaining goats have been eradicated, Dirk Hartog Island will be the largest island in the world from which they have been removed on a broad scale.

A cat eradication program is also underway to restore the natural balance of predators. Cats are efficient predators that have devastating impacts on native animal populations. A cat eradication team have started radio collaring cats, tracking their movements and researching the effectiveness of baiting—the main control technique. Although these and other methods have been trialled on Peron Peninsula with limited success, it is believed the absence of rabbits as a food source will substantially increase the likelihood of cats taking poison meat baits.

Earlier this year, a network of sand pads and monitoring camera sites were established in the southern end of the island, to determine the number of cats both pre and post aerial baiting. Currently, a 13km fence is being constructed across the island to enable more efficient and effective baiting and monitoring of cats. Once each section is deemed cat-free, success will be verified by an independent team and if there is no evidence of cats following two years of surveillance, the island will be declared free of cats and safe for the return of native animals.

Cheryl Cowell  
World Heritage Project Officer, Shark Bay World Heritage Property

Susan Pedersen  
World Heritage Interpretive Officer
The Australian Fossil Mammal Sites World Heritage Area, composed of the Naracoorte Caves in south-east South Australia and Riversleigh in north-western Queensland, was declared in December 1994. This year marks the 20th anniversary of World Heritage listing of these fossil sites in recognition of their Outstanding Universal Values.

For the Naracoorte Caves, these values are the rich record of mammals, reptiles, birds, frogs and plants spanning the last 500,000 years in age. Research into the deposits has provided insight into the ecological responses to climate change over this period and the arrival of humans (both Indigenous and European) to Australia.

Complementing the Naracoorte fossil record are the older deposits of Riversleigh. Dating from 25 million years ago, Riversleigh fossils represent the evolution of the Australian fauna, including changes in the diversity of species, body-form and biology of Australian animals as rainforest was gradually replaced by dry and fire-adapted vegetation.

Despite the vast differences in age, setting and fossils of Riversleigh and Naracoorte, the sites face similar management challenges. In February this year, the South Australian Department of Environment, Water and Natural Resources secured support from the Australian Government to establish a community reference group and an Executive Officer for the Naracoorte Section of Australian Fossil Mammal Sites.

The Naracoorte committee will now be known as the Interagency-Community Reference Group (IRG) and is an extension of the 2013 Master Plan group. Through the Master Plan process, representatives from the scientific community, tourism industry, local government and other stakeholders provided valuable ideas and recommendations for the revitalisation of visitor facilities and interpretation at the Australian Fossil Mammal Site, Naracoorte. A business case for the Master Plan is now being developed.

The IRG will now be engaged to provide advice regarding the management of the World Heritage site and provide input into the development of guiding documents including a Scientific Research Plan and Local Collection Management Policy.

In July, the manager of Naracoorte Caves, Deborah Craven-Carden and I visited the Riversleigh section of the World Heritage property to meet the Riversleigh Community and Scientific Advisory Committee (RCSAC) and staff from Queensland’s Department of Environment and Heritage Protection. As Riversleigh has been supported by RCSAC for many years, the trip enabled us to learn more about community input into the management of World Heritage sites and the role of World Heritage advisory committees.

The visit complemented a reciprocal trip completed last year, when representatives from RCSAC and the Queensland Government attended a meeting of the Naracoorte Master Plan group on site at the Naracoorte Caves.

The opportunity to view and explore the World Heritage values of the serially listed World Heritage sites has led to an enhanced understanding of the shared and unique challenges facing the two properties.

Over the next two years the partnership between Riversleigh and Naracoorte will grow through the development of an overarching management document for Australian Fossil Mammal Sites and the sharing of ideas and resources between the two sites. It is an exciting time ahead for the World Heritage Property—bridging distance between the two sections through this revised partnership approach will enhance their management into the future.

Dr Amy Macken
World Heritage Executive Officer, Australian Fossil Mammal Site—Naracoorte
Bush Trackers

Bush Trackers is an environmental and cultural education project that is growing across the Greater Blue Mountains World Heritage Area which encourages and enables locals and visitors to explore our natural, cultural and historic heritage with guides created by kids for kids.

The project provides an opportunity for local kids to engage with, and learn more about, their local history and environment and to collaborate in the production of an educational and unique guide from a child’s perspective, to inform visitors to the region.

The Bush Trackers Project involves National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) Discovery Rangers guiding primary school students on a local walk of natural and cultural significance, encouraging the kids to share their experience through words, poems, pictures and photos. Graphic designers then use these materials to create the map and guide to inform and allow other kids and families to explore the beauty and value of the region.

Inspired and supported by the Blue Mountains Stronger Families Alliance and its commitment to creating more child-friendly programs and spaces in the Blue Mountains, the success of the Bush Trackers project is in its partners: the Blue Mountains City Council, Blue Mountains Lithgow Oberon Tourism Limited, local Aboriginal organisations, Blue Mountains Conservation Society, the New South Wales National Parks and Wildlife Service Discovery Program and of course, local primary schools.

Since May 2012, ten schools with hundreds of children from Glenbrook to Mt Victoria have participated in the project and Bush Trackers Guides have been published and are available at a range of locations including national parks and tourist offices throughout the Blue Mountains. The guides are also downloadable from the Bush Trackers website www.bushtrackers.com.au.

Bush Trackers both promotes and depends on the engagement of schools, local Government and community organisations in order to combine skills and extend the project to reach broad sectors of the community.

For more information on Bush Trackers, please contact the Greater Blue Mountains World Heritage Area Executive Officer on 0419 307 099 or jacqueline.reid@environment.nsw.gov.au.

Jacqueline Reid
Greater Blue Mountains World Heritage Area Executive Officer
Wet Tropics Management Authority launches Learning Landscapes initiative

The Wet Tropics is being positioned as an international hub for tropical environmental research following the launch of the Wet Tropics Management Authority’s (the Authority) Learning Landscapes initiative in June.

The Learning Landscapes initiative encourages research investment in the Wet Tropics World Heritage Area to inform policy and management decisions that affect tropical ecosystems.

Learning Landscapes aims to enable researchers, the community and protected area managers to work together creating, sharing and applying their collective knowledge of this exceptional part of the world.

The research potential of the Wet Tropics will be maximised through the use of the world class facilities and infrastructure already on offer, the high calibre of researchers available here and a research culture that encourages vibrancy and innovation with the highest standards.

The initiative was officially launched by Vice Chancellor of James Cook University, Professor Sandra Harding, at the university’s Cairns campus on 13 June.

Professor Harding congratulated the Wet Tropics Management Authority on the initiative.

“The Wet Tropics offers a myriad of research opportunities for scientists. The region boasts high quality research organisations, programs and infrastructure teamed with some of the most renowned tropical scientists in the world.

“The Learning Landscape initiative will build upon these foundations to encourage meaningful and productive interaction between academics and land managers. This will result in research that will assist in the conservation and protection of the ‘Outstanding Universal Value’ of the World Heritage Area,” Professor Harding added.

The Learning Landscapes initiative will encourage the Wet Tropics community to learn about and appreciate the international importance, complexities and uniqueness of the World Heritage Area. The communities in and around the Wet Tropics World Heritage Area have established themselves as leading the way in community conservation of the Wet Tropics. Learning landscapes will continue to add value to the wealth of knowledge that these stewards of the World Heritage Area hold and use it to benefit the protection of the landscape.

The recent meeting of the Association for Tropical Biology and Conservation (ATBC) in Cairns was a great opportunity to promote the Learning Landscapes initiative. The Authority received a lot of positive feedback and interest from national and international delegates and gained many new subscribers to the Learning Landscapes e-bulletin.

Some current work underway at the Authority to implement the Learning Landscapes initiative includes:

- communicating the outcomes of current National Environmental Research Program funded research to policy makers in Brisbane
- developing a directory of ‘research associates’ with the Wet Tropics Scientific Advisory Committee at its core
- working with researchers to ensure the Wet Tropics is well placed to contribute to outcomes sought under the new National Environmental Science Program
- providing small grants to support post graduate research aligned to the Authority’s research strategy.

For more information go to www.wettropics.gov.au
Country-based planning for World Heritage nomination

In 2010, the Queensland Government started a program of work to engage the Cape York Peninsula (CYP) community in a potential World Heritage nomination for the region. Both the Queensland, and Commonwealth governments made commitments to only progress a World Heritage nomination in the region where supported by the Traditional Owners (TOs).

Country-based planning and sea country planning were emerging as best practice approaches for supporting increased empowerment of TOs to take a greater role in planning and managing their country. The approach was also considered a highly effective way to encourage TOs to objectively consider a World Heritage nomination in the context of their land use aspirations, the existing planning and legislative arrangements applying to their country and the suite of other options for managing country.

Country-based planning also set in motion processes and capacities for identifying, managing and protecting the cultural and natural heritage of CYP, regardless of whether a World Heritage nomination would be progressed. The program was managed in a way that ensured TOs felt the freedom to plan for country, without the obligation of reaching a positive decision on World Heritage. Communities were able to choose their own process and focus for their planning based on the needs of their community and were given the option to share or keep private certain parts of their planning.

The program had a range of benefits including; improved relationships and trust building between the government and TOs, new learning that has been catalysed in many communities to plan strategically across tenures for their traditional country, and facilitating the development and sharing of creative ways in which these aspirations may be implemented. This program also tied in with the successful Indigenous ranger program, enabling further engagement in planning at the strategic level for their role in managing country.

Sarah De Vries
Senior Policy Officer, Biodiversity Strategy, Queensland Department of Environment and Heritage Protection

Noah Creek, Cape Tribulation National Park