

Julimar Forest survives as unique wildlife 'island'

Julimar Conservation and Forest Alliance

Beth Frayne, Toodyay Historical Society delegate

BEFORE colonial settlement, local Noongar Yued and Whadjuk folk would have used forests in their protective and caring way.

Later land use tended to be unrestricted, as summarised in a 2006 *Landscape* journal article (Vol. 21/4):

"It was the valleys with their creeks, loamy soils and open wandoo woodlands that first attracted European settlement.

"These valleys proved easiest to clear and supported good pasture.

"Nearly half the area was taken up for farming under conditional purchase leases.

"Only about half of these properties were cleared out but by the 1930s and the onset of the Great Depression, most farmers were forced to abandon the land.

"The leases reverted to Crown land and the area eventually became State Forest in 1956.

"By this time, Julimar had been subjected to years of unrestricted timber cutting and firewood collecting.

"On the other hand, it had been well protected from high intensity bushfires, the result of regular burning by beekeepers seeking to protect the wandoo trees and dryandra shrubs, their main source of honey."

From 1922 and into the 1930s, local apiarist Samuel Cook Snr, of Avondale Bee Farm, Coondle, wrote letters to the Forest Department in Perth about his concern for Julimar.

He had observed wandoos in Julimar that had been 'rung' (ring-barked) and deplored clearing and the waste of good timber sleeper material.

Sam's persistence was significant in retaining the forest.

Following the 1952 Royal Commission report upon WA Forestry and Timber matters, the Julimar Timber Reserve was later declared State Forest No. 61 in 1956.

This was not done to protect its ecological environment, but to protect its marketable timber.

The business decision implies forestry resources have to earn the right to protection via economic return.

Onsite forestry staff oversaw controlled logging.

Logging from leased land in Julimar only stopped after Industrial Extracts Ltd and various WA sawmills and charcoal producers ceased operations in the 1970s and 1980s.

From 1971 to the present day, the Toodyay Naturalists' Club cast its protective eye over the forest by visiting and writing about its value in *The Toodyay Herald*.

Club members closely followed Conservation and Land Management (CALM) discussion about future forest plans, and participated in fauna and flora surveys and fauna releases.

Club member and apiarist Sam Cook Jnr and his wife Joan were highly active in this regard, writing articles and leading excursions.

Interestingly, the forest was added to the Register of the National Estate in 1980 along with several other forest areas in WA.

By 1983, the forest had been designated a 'Management Priority Area' in a CALM study with the intention of progressing it to a regional park.

A CALM Northern Forest Regional Management Plan in 1987 brought the possibility of a conservation park closer.

In April 1992 the Toodyay Shire Council recorded CALM had proposed the Julimar Conservation Park.

The following September, club members attended the release of 22 chuditch into the forest.

These were the first bred in captivity, and it was a significant media event.

The club resolved to congratulate Government on the chuditch release but expressed concern about the delay of the Bill to proclaim Julimar State Forest a conservation park, and in 2023 is still waiting on this protection.

Woylies were released in the forest in 1995.

CALM's Western Shield program, which began the following year, aims to reduce the number of foxes and cats and other introduced predators through baiting; work which is still being undertaken.

In 1999, the first and current Regional Forest Agreement said Julimar State Forest's proposed conservation park status was "subject to established State Government processes including mineral exploration and prospectivity review."

In 2000 a motion to create the Julimar Conservation Park was passed by both Houses but subject to the issue of "mineral prospectivity" being resolved. This has not yet happened.

However, CALM was happy to call the Forest a Conservation Park and erected signage to support this.

In 2006, CALM officers wrote "the Julimar Conservation Park stands today as an excellent example of mixed age, multi-species woodland.

"It has survived many battles waged for its attributes and uses.

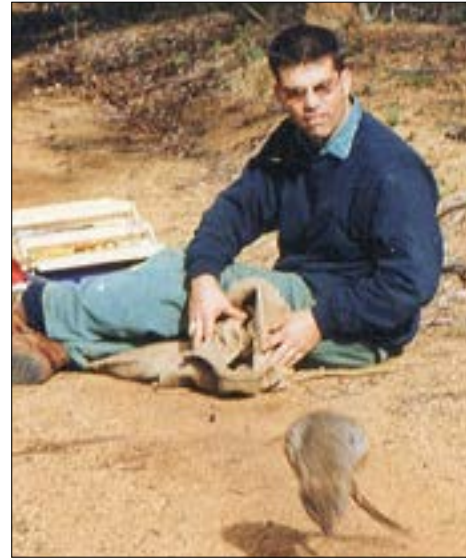
"It now offers nature lovers a relaxing and interesting forest experience, yet is relatively close to the Perth metropolitan area.

"With a diversity of habitats, interesting wildflowers and abundant refuges, the native animals that were once so common have returned to inhabit this unique 'island'."

We hope the faith of these officers in the value of Julimar is not misplaced.

Coming up: The Wheatbelt Avon Bird Group is conducting its summer flora and fauna survey in the Julimar Forest on Saturday February 25.

If you would like to participate, contact Max Howard via email at: avon.hill@bigpond.com.



Woylie released in Julimar State Forest after a 1999 CALM fauna trapping survey. Photo: G V Warburton.