

KWONGAN CONNECTIONS

A biodiversity-based education and awareness raising initiative

West Australia:

Region: Northern Agricultural region

Affiliated Regional NRM Group: Northern Agricultural Catchment Council (NACC)

Background

Lack of awareness was identified as the greatest threat to the unique (and internationally recognised) biodiversity of the West Midlands region. The focus of the project was the floristic biodiversity of the Kwongan heathland, which attracts national and international tourists year round. The immense diversity of the heathland, with marked transitions between vegetation communities over short distances, makes it difficult to ensure adequate representation in a reserve system. Raising broader community awareness of the value of the region's biodiversity was seen as a priority.

Although recognised internationally, there was very little understanding or appreciation, at a local scale, of this regional 'jewel'. The valuing biodiversity project aimed to:

- document and promote the unique biodiversity of the West Midlands; and to
- facilitate community education on the value of biodiversity.

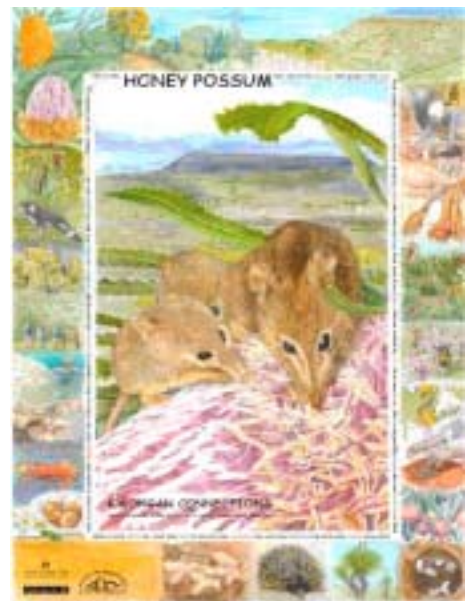
The project was an initiative of the WA Department of Agriculture and NACC.

Achievements to Date:

- ❖ *Kwongan Connections Honey Possum Poster*
This story poster features an eloquent and simple representation of the interconnectedness of the local ecosystem. It is a timeless story that appeals to all ages.
- ❖ *Kwongan Connections Wildflower Drive Map.*
The map filled a void in the eco-tourism market. There was only one map of the area and it was essentially a navigation tool. The Wildflower Drive Map incorporates information about the rich floristic diversity of the West Midlands area. Practical need combined with creativity to create a product that was informative, educational, useful and represents the beauty of the area.

It was developed with the assistance of the WA Department of Conservation and Land Management. It is a professionally produced and sold locally, including through the local tourist bureau.

The Northern Agricultural Catchments Council manages the proceeds from the map sales. These proceeds are set aside to fund further print runs and to maintain the website.



- ❖ *Kwongan Connections Biodiversity Education Kit Website; Kwongan Connections Biodiversity Education Kit Website Poster; and Kwongan Connections Biodiversity Education Kit Website Postcards*

One of the problems at the local community level was the complete lack of biodiversity information available to school children within the region. It was felt that there needed to be an environmental education package written about this unique region, for the children who live in the region. An education package was developed and presented as an informative, enjoyable, and accessible website. In addition, a poster of the website homepage was printed to help promote this important learning tool (www.kwongan.asn.au).

The value of this work has not been realised as the part-time co-ordination position, required to support and encourage uptake by local educators, was not funded for a third year.

- ❖ Valuing the Biodiversity of the West Midlands for Nature Based Tourism: a report.
- ❖ Promotion through static display materials and presentations.

Information Used:

Data access was an issue in the project. Although a significant amount of data exists about biodiversity in the region, it tends to be contained in scientific reports and proved difficult to access. Some data was obtained from the state agencies, but the most valuable source of information was local (and often hidden) knowledge.

Market and Non-Market Mechanisms for Biodiversity Conservation:

Community measures (motivational mechanisms):

- ❖ Awareness-raising materials and activities.
- ❖ Education package developed and easily accessible.
- ❖ Part-time coordination/facilitation – particularly important in sourcing and accessing regional biodiversity data.

Critical Success Factors:

- ❖ Cultural appropriateness
- ❖ Local knowledge was invaluable
- ❖ Identified a niche in the eco-tourism market – the need for a more informative tool to support a tourism industry based on wildflowers.
- ❖ This was an innovative project for the region and it provided an opportunity for people to see the landscape from a different perspective. Local communities now value what is in the region and it has instilled a sense of pride and ownership of the region.
- ❖ The use of locally relevant information.

Quote:

“It got the ‘biodiversity ball rolling’ in the region.”

Margi Weir, former Co-ordinator