

The Friends Group

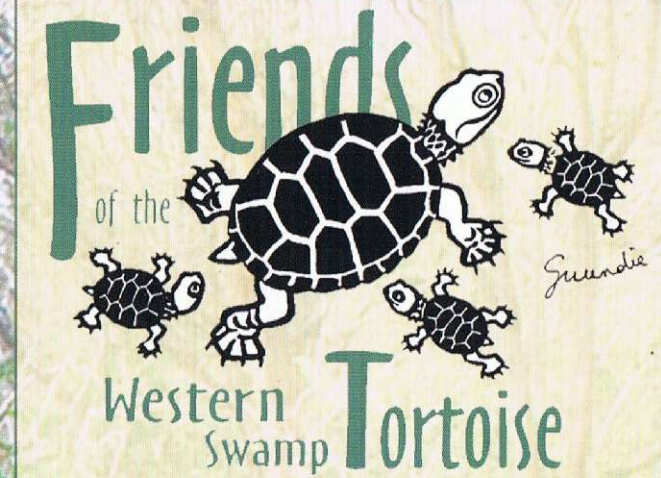
The Friends of the Western Swamp Tortoise (FOWST) formed in July 2004 and is a not-for-profit community organisation. One of our primary purposes is to encourage the public to assist with Western Swamp Tortoise recovery activities that are directed towards establishing a sustainable population in Western Australia, and to complement the work of the Western Swamp Tortoise Recovery Team through on-ground works, displays and events. The Friends group also raises local, national and international awareness of the status of the Western Swamp Tortoise by providing information and educational resources.

Since our inception we have accomplished a lot...

- Become an incorporated body
- Been granted two Community Conservation Grants for on-ground work to improve tortoise habitat in the Swan Valley
- Conducted on-ground work to improve the habitat including: Revegetating swamps, installing aestivation tunnels, weeding and seed collecting
- Released 18 hatchlings bred at the Perth Zoo
- Held many displays and public meetings to help people understand the conservation issues facing this reptile.
- Been interviewed on radio and TV
- Built partnerships with a local business

Yet even with our best efforts, there are only about 300 Western Swamp Tortoises alive, and less than 50 of them in the wild have reached breeding age!

There is no fee to join FOWST and we would welcome your involvement at any level. Enquiries can be directed to the Committee members listed on the back of this brochure, or check our website at www.westernswamptortoise.com for the latest activities.



Friends of the Western Swamp Tortoise Inc

For further information about the group
please contact:

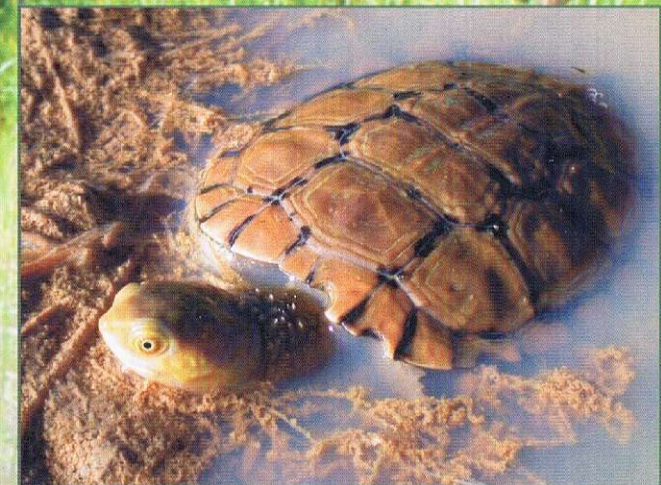
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The Western Swamp Tortoise

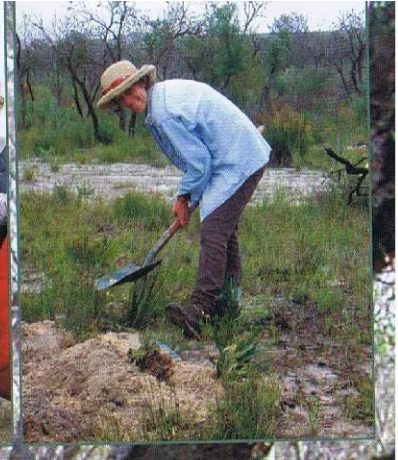
The Western Swamp Tortoise (*Pseudemydura umbrina*) is Australia's most endangered reptile and the world's most endangered tortoise.

This Western Australian tortoise was thought to be extinct until 1953, when a young boy found a live tortoise in the Swan Valley near Perth—the first specimen seen for over 50 years! This amazing discovery resulted in many years of work by leading scientists to bring this special animal back from the brink of extinction.

Only two populations are left in the wild in the Swan Valley, on the edge of the Perth metropolitan area. They live in shallow, winter-wet swamps during winter and in summer and autumn aestivate under ground (similar to hibernation) due to the high temperatures. It is at this time they are most susceptible to fires and predators.

The Western Swamp Tortoise is classified as critically endangered due to several factors including

- Habitat destruction - most of its native habitat has been converted to agricultural, industrial or urban land.
- Introduced predators particularly the European Red Fox.
- Climate change resulting in decreased winter rainfall and the drying of swamps.
- Very specialised habitat and biology - totally carnivorous diet, slow growth and reproduction rates.



The Tortoises' Annual Cycle

The Western Swamp Tortoise (*Pseudemydura umbrina*) has a short neck and a shell length of about 15cm, so it is easily distinguishable from the other (much more common) freshwater tortoise in Western Australia, the Oblong or Long-necked Tortoise (*Cheloidina oblonga*), which has a neck equal in length to its shell.

Western Swamp Tortoises have a very slow growth rate and it can sometimes take up to 15 years before they are mature enough to reproduce. They also have a very long life span estimated to be in excess of 60 years.

Below is a year in the life of a Western Swamp Tortoise.



Winter

The tortoises enter swamps once there are a couple of centimetres of water in them. They only live in temporary (non-perennial) shallow swamps with a clay base, in an area where much of the surrounding land is predominantly sand. They sense the time has come to leave the aestivation tunnels or deep leaf litter, where they've spent the summer, and begin to feed on small crustaceans and insect larva to build up their body mass.



Spring

As we move through spring and towards summer the Western Swamp Tortoises are also on the move, out of the drying swamps and back into their natural or artificial aestivation tunnels or into deep leaf litter. Aestivation (summer hibernation) protects the tortoises from the hot Western Australian summer and—if they find suitably deep places—from bushfires.



Summer

Adult breeding females lay 3-5 eggs underground in the aestivation tunnels near the edges of the swamps, and take no further care of them. Other adult tortoises aestivate until the swamps refill.



Autumn

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