

CRITTER CAMP AT MUGGON

Della Otway (Yr 11 Carnarvon High School)

On the 3rd of August, 2009, 23 students from both Carnarvon and Meekatharra School of the Air made their way by car, bus and aeroplane to Muggon Homestead for a 3 day "Critter Camp". The camp was organised by the staff of School of the Air, Department of Agriculture & Food (DAFWA) and Department of Environment and Conservation (DEC). The Muggon Homestead and surrounding lands are managed by DEC and is proposed to become a Conservation Park in the future.

The primary school aged students were invited to attend this camp to gain a better understanding of how our native and introduced critters fit into their rangelands habitats. Techniques and skills learned at the camp included how to capture, observe and identify different species of both native and introduced small animals.

The students were introduced to several methods of humanely capturing and releasing critters by Shane Heriot (DEC Geraldton) and Steve Toole (DEC Carnarvon). After learning about the rules in handling native critters the students equipped their own Elliot traps and set up pit-fall traps before dark. In the Elliot traps they used an unusual mixture of ingredients as bait in their traps, which consisted of peanut butter, sardines and rolled oats. Shane explained how the 3 ingredients making up the bait would each attract different types of animals. Hopeful that the bait was made of the right stuff to attract plenty of critters, the students returned from the field to set up in front of a slide



show kindly put together by Muggon's caretaker, Sean Bryce and Leanda Adams (of Murchison Shire). The slide show detailed the types of flora and fauna found on the station that the students might get the chance to see during their visit.

Carnarvon and Meekatharra School of the Air students taking a close up look at the carnivorous *Stripe-Faced Dunnart* – Australia's equivalent to the Lion!

Brisk early morning starts saw the troop of students, parents and critter experts setting off to check their traps for any wild critters that may have made their way into the traps over night. The traps produced a Dunnart, two small dragon lizards and a field mouse for all to examine and learn more about. The students were also given the opportunity to gently handle a couple of Burton's legless lizards.

After being set free back into their habitats, the students were also set free to explore their artistic sides, with the students producing brightly coloured images of Muggon which have proudly made their way into the Muggon Museum.

Entertainment was not only confined to the daylight hours, evening activities were full of fun and rhythm with a few new songs being invented - courtesy of Mr Jim (Jim Peletier, Carnarvon SOTA Principal) who's guitar skills and the youthful voices of the students in combination was great. Given that 2009 is the International Year of Astronomy, several activities were designed by Kaz Johnson (Ag Department) to explore our vast solar system. Equipped with plenty of props, high powered telescopes and a night sky-scout, the students were able to identify almost any star seen in the sky - with the full moon, Jupiter and six of her moons and the constellation Scorpio all putting on a show. Through the telescope, the visibility of the moons craters prompted many creation stories by the students with one mentioning, "*I can see where the spaceships must have landed on the moon 40 years ago by the dark round patches*". The students were also granted the chance to explore Mars by looking through groovy 3D glasses, at fascinating posters of Mars' surface and handling small chunks of Meteorites.

After a sad farewell, the students departed for home, but left with a whole new outlook on things they would normally see every day at home. A number of students mentioned, "*I had an awesome time on Muggon, and can't wait to return for more critter catching next year!*"

A big thanks to all the parents, teachers and members of DEC, and the Carnarvon Department of Agricultural and Food, and especially the kids, that made this camp such a great success and a very memorable



event.