

ECOTOURISM

The first meeting since the official launch of Kimberley Society in December 1993 was held at the Old Observatory in West Perth on 16 February 1994. The guest speaker was Pat Barblett who is Convenor of the Cultural and Eco-tourism Focus Group. She was formerly a Physical Education teacher who graduated from the University of Melbourne, and has since obtained post-graduate qualifications in recreation, environmental interpretation and public history. She is the immediate past chairman of the WA Recreation Council, an advisory body to the minister, and has just retired from the Rottneest Island Authority after 15 years with last three as chairman. Pat is now chairman of the Advisory Council to the Environmental Protection Authority and a member of both the Nature Based Advisory Committee and the Whiteman Park Board.

Pat began her talk by bringing to our attention the recent article in the West Australian newspaper (in "Earth 2000") entitled "Tourism turning into a monster" by C.F.H. Jenkins, biologist and former Government Entomologist. He began by saying that:

"Tourism is one of the fastest growing but most destructive industries in Australia. One of the tourist industry's latest offshoots is eco-tourism. Ecotourists are supposed to be environmentally sensitive, leaving the landscape and the wild life unaffected by their presence. This is of course an impossibility. Every true environmentalist knows that beauty spots and tourist attractions can be loved to death. The problems associated with over-use and tourist control have been recognised by conservationists for many years, but not by the general public. The answer is to educate people to appreciate and protect their unique natural inheritance and it must be carefully managed in order to survive. We call it sustainable development. Eventually the numbers of people visiting particularly fragile areas will have to be restricted."

Pat told us about the IBIS Aerial Highway being developed in the Kimberley, where small planes are being used instead of vehicles to carry tourists, with less impact on the land. We also heard about the Aboriginal people running their own tours at Karijini, previously called Hamersley Range National Park, and educating people about their own customs and culture, all helping towards a better understanding between races.

It was a very interesting and informative talk and much discussion ensued.

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