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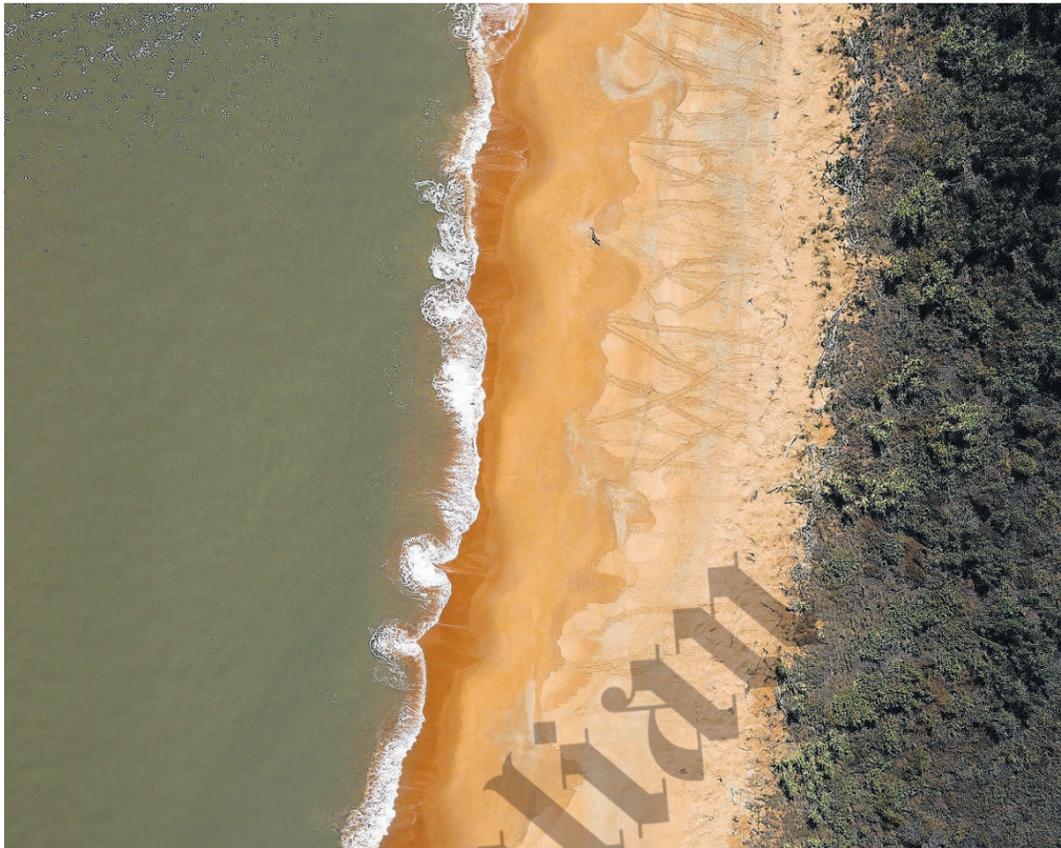
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Aerial view of the winter-nesting flatback turtle rookery at Cape Domett, north of Kununurra, showing turtle tracks and a lurking crocodile. Picture: Parks and Wildlife

# Eyes in sky reveal turtle nest secrets

■ Glenn Cordingley

Hundreds of thousands of aerial images taken along the Kimberley coast have helped scientists explore the habitats of nesting turtles.

More than 40,000 pictures have been snapped from 80 Mile Beach between Port Hedland and Broome to the NT border just north of Kununurra as part of the Western Australian Marine Science Institution (WAMSI) turtle research project.

Information about adult females and turtle hatchling numbers and species gleaned from tracks seen in the images of more than 2500 island and 1300 mainland beaches is now being verified.

The aerial and ground surveys are part of a project that aims to identify when and where turtles nest, develop climate change mo-

del to predict how turtles might be impacted and work out relationships between different turtle nesting groups.

Department of Parks and Wildlife senior research scientist Dr Tony Tucker said more than 90 per cent of the Kimberley coastline's available turtle nesting habitat was accessible only by foot, boat or helicopter posing significant challenges for field surveys.

"The aerial images taken during the summer and winter surveys in 2014 have helped identify hotspots of relative density for follow-up by ground survey," he said.

The "ground truthing" phase of the project started during 2015 and will continue this year along with work on the other facets of the project.

Tissue samples were collected from more than 700 turtles, in-

cluding a rare WA sample from an olive ridley turtle, and by the end of the year the number of samples could be close to 1000.

Dr Tucker said genetic analysis would allow researchers work out the relationships between groups of nesting turtles and define breeding units for the four predominant nesting species.

"We need to know what are the breeding groups for summer and winter-nesting flatback, green, loggerhead and hawksbill turtles to protect and conserve these species through effective strategic management of habitats," he said.

Dr Tucker said the sea turtle project team was working with 10 different traditional owner groups which assisted in the ground surveys and were helping to establish how traditional and scientific knowledge complemented each other.

## Community mourns loss of war veteran

■ Nicola Kalmar

A Broome-based World War II veteran, who received recognition for his service 70 years after the war, has died at 87.

Palm Bill Stephen died at Broome Hospital on February 18, six months after receiving his service medals.

Mr Stephen, known as Uncle Billy, served as an underage private in the Torres Strait Infantry Battalion from September 17, 1944, to June 20, 1946, but only received his medals last year after he approached NORFORCE Kimberley Squadron to help track them down.

Last August, Mr Stephen was flown to Thursday Island in Torres Strait and presented with his medals by former Prime Minister Tony Abbott before returning to Broome.

A funeral service was held in town last week, attended by family, friends and community members.

Perth-based nephew Dixie



World War II veteran Palm Stephen (seated) with family members and NORFORCE representatives. Picture: Nicola Kalmar

Stephen said the family was "very grateful" to see their relative finally recognised for his service.

Niece Florianna Bero said her uncle had lived in Broome for more than 30 years and was well known to indigenous and non-indigenous people.

Broome RSL president Stuart Simpson said anyone who knew a veteran like Mr Stephen, who had not been recognised for their service, should contact their RSL branch or the Department of Defence Honours and Awards division.

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