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Geckos show the way

HOW do you know if a mine site has been rehabilitated? Count the geckos, according to Edith Cowan University PhD student Scott Thompson.

After two years, 65,000 trap nights and 3500 trapped lizards, Mr Thompson is putting the final touches to an index the mining industry hopes will mean faster freeing of environmental bonds when mining is finished.

The premise of the study is that vertebrates are the last type of plant or animal to return to a site after it has been disturbed.

And hardy reptiles, which manage to survive in some of the country's most inhospitable landscapes and are easily trapped, are a good sampling choice.

Mr Thompson says, under the index, reptiles numbers and types at the rehabilitated site are compared with an undisturbed site nearby. When the two are similar, a site is deemed to be rehabilitated.

"The approach we have adopted is that the terrestrial biological community will colonise an area if the chemical and physical parameters and the vegetation at the rehabilitated sites are appropriate" Mr Thompson said in his report.

The work is being sponsored by OMG Cawse, Placer Dome Asia Pacific, the Minerals and Energy Research Institute of WA and the WA Chamber of Minerals and Energy.

"The PhD is being wrapped up at the end of August but there is the possibility Placer Dome and OMG will want the study continued," Mr Thompson said.

The study is not only benefiting mining companies.

As an offshoot of the pit studies has been more information on little-known mammal and reptile species.

"We discovered there are a lot more pygmy possums in the Goldfields than was previously thought," Mr Thompson said.