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PAMPHLET 3

# Fauna of the Shannon.



This pamphlet is a brief guide to the fauna which lives in or visits the Shannon River Basin. It has been designed as an aid to the casual observer, providing illustrations of, and information on, over twenty creatures.

Sightings

There are two ways in which you may make your observations. Either pick an animal to look for and seek it out in its preferred habitat, or pick an area to look in and see what you can find. Both approaches have their own excitement, but the latter is likely to be the more rewarding, as it deals more directly with the workings of the forest.

Eco-systems

Looking at an area to see what's there has a special name: ecology. It means we are concerned with life-forms (be they plant or animal), how they live with each other and how they survive in their immediate environment. So it's not just the plants and animals which are important, but also what the weather's like, what type of soil is present, whether there are any hills or rivers or roads around, the amount of shading from trees or bushes, and anything else which affects the nature of the area. Taking all these things into account, we call this natural community an ecosystem. When we start observing ecosystems, and begin to recognise the myriad relationships which make them up, it becomes easier to appreciate how much a part of our environment we all are.

MAMMALS

Honey-possum (*Tarsipes rostratus*) (cover)

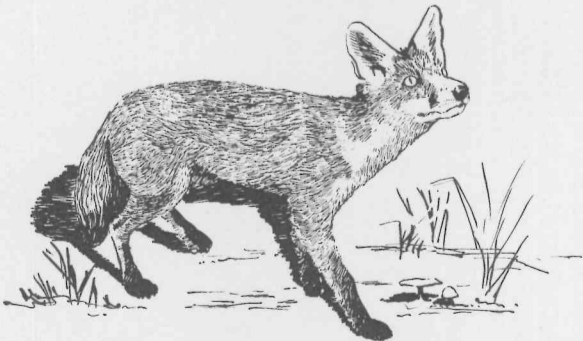
The tiny Honey-possum is not a possum. It seems to be the sole survivor of a long-extinct marsupial group, and is unique to the south-west. It might be seen in the forest at night feeding on the nectar and pollen of blossoms (especially banksia and bottlebrushes), but commonly prefers the more open heaths of the coastal sandplains. Unlike most mammals, it does not climb with the aid of claws, but rather grips branches using its fingers and toes and prehensile tail.

Western Grey Kangaroo (*Macropus fuliginosus*)



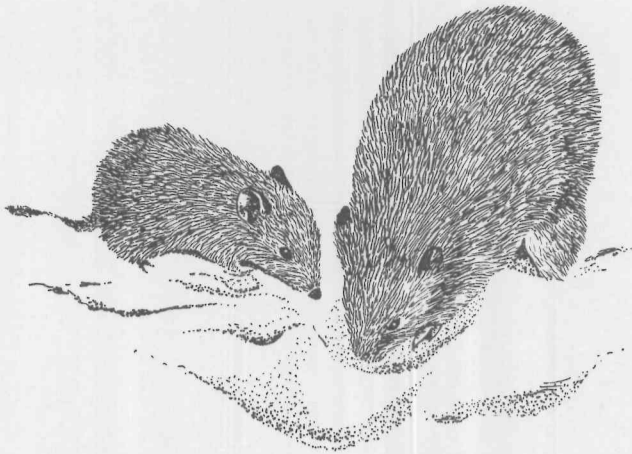
A popular name for this type of kangaroo is stinker, due to the strong characteristic odour of the male. You are not likely to get close enough to smell them, but an excursion in the early morning might find them grazing in the open, feeding on grasses and fresh shoots of native plants.

Fox (*Vulpes vulpes*)



The European Red Fox was deliberately introduced into Eastern Australia in the 1860's for sporting purposes. By 1917 it had spread to W.A., and is now found everywhere except Tasmania and the tropical north of the mainland. It may be seen at night hunting insects or small mammals, or feeding on fruits and carrion.

Southern Brown Bandicoot (*Isoodon obesulus*)



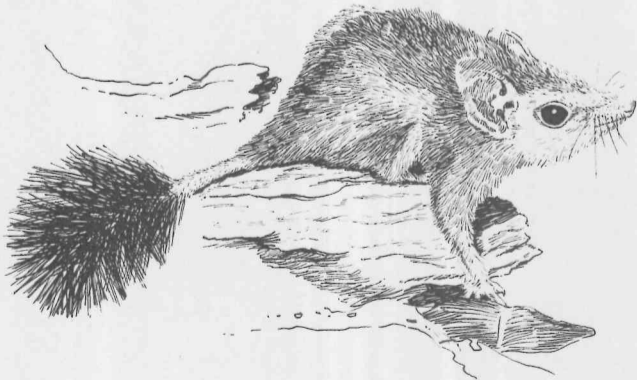
Forest fire is an integral part of the forest environment. It frees established areas of old trees and dense undergrowth, exposing to the elements seeds which until then have lain covered and dormant. Some seeds actually require the heat of a fire to stimulate their germination. After a fire, a profusion of plant life springs up, covering the ground and attracting masses of insects. And with the insects come their predators. The Southern Brown Bandicoot is a ground marsupial which thrives in the early regenerating bush. It likes the scrubby ground cover and feeds at night mainly on insects and earthworms, leaving strange little cone-shaped diggings as an indication of its search for food. As the new growth gets older and the insect population decreases, it moves on to other, more recently-burnt areas. The bandicoot is a solitary creature whose territory may cover up to 7 hectares.

Yellow-footed Antechinus or Mardo (*Antechinus flavipes*)



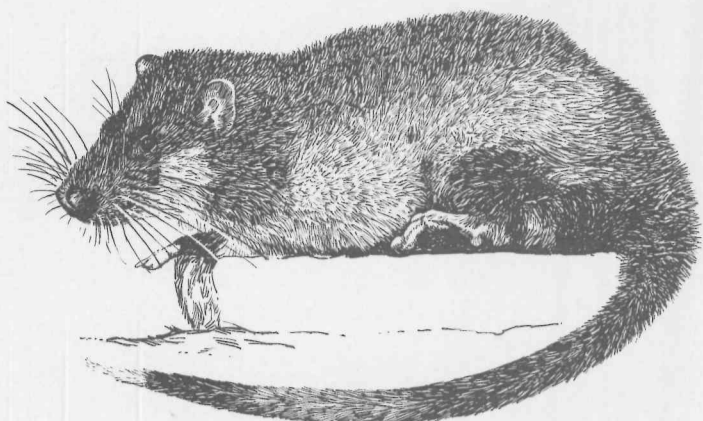
You may have already seen one of these around your house, for it is one of the few small nocturnal marsupials which is prepared to live near human dwellings. Unlike the bandicoot, the Mardo avoids areas which have been recently burnt, preferring the deep leaf litter and accumulated ground bark of the older scrub. Although insects are its staple food, it will feed readily on flowers, nectar and small vertebrates (including birds and mice). As it devours the latter, the Mardo will neatly turn the animal inside out, leaving the everted skin behind.

Brush-tailed Phascogale (*Phascogale tapoatafa*)



This carnivorous marsupial is perhaps the only mammal of the south-west which is truly forest-dependent. It spends most of its time in the trees, but will come down at night to hunt insects, spiders and centipedes, or small vertebrates. It prefers clearings to dense underbrush, and might be seen around the base of trees as it searches for food. The hindfeet of the Phascogale can be rotated backwards, allowing it to climb in either direction with equal ease. It has a black brush-like tail with hairs up to 40 mm long.

**Water Rat (*Hydromys chrysogaster*)**



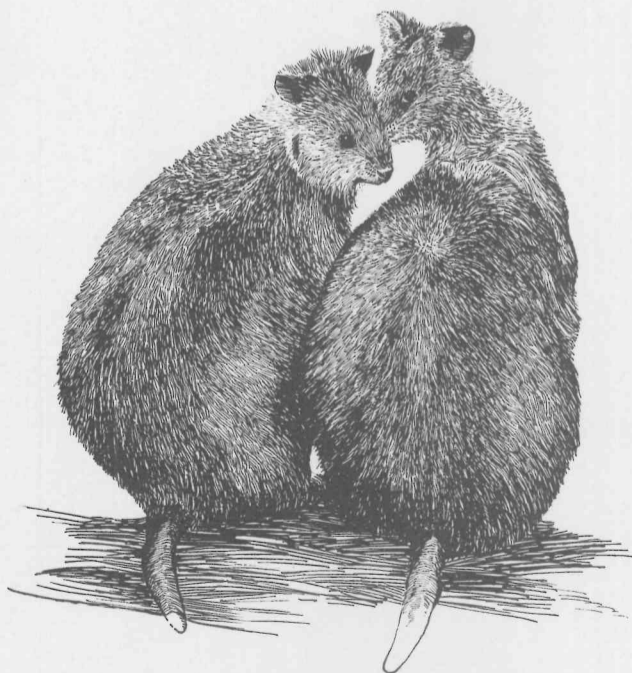
The Water Rat lives in burrows in riverbanks, or sometimes in logs. It hunts for food usually around sunset, but may venture out in full daylight seeking large aquatic insects, fish, crustaceans, mussels, frogs, lizards and even small mammals and water birds. These it generally carries to a regularly-used feeding site. It has broad, partially-webbed hindfeet and waterproof fur for its life in the water, but may also be seen to climb trees in its search for food.

**Chocolate Wattled Bat (*Chalinolobus morio*)**

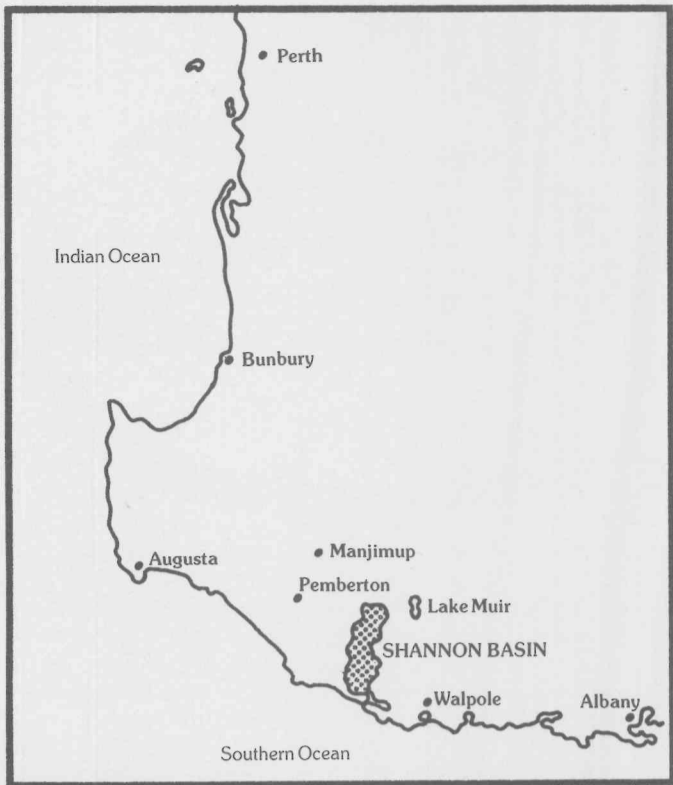


The Chocolate Wattled Bat is common to the southern half of the Australian continent. During the day it roosts in tree-hollows or abandoned birds' nests, or even in caves if they are available, and emerges soon after sunset to hunt for moths and other flying insects. It returns to its roost a few hours before sunrise. This tiny bat, weighing only 8-12 gm, does not store much fat in its body. Instead, its period of hibernation over winter is shorter than that of other bats, ensuring little competition for food during the late autumn and early spring.

**Quokka (*Setonix brachyurus*)**



Best known as a Rottneest Islander, the Quokka actually prefers the denser vegetation and moister conditions of the south-west forest. The Shannon Quokka is a shy creature, but may be sighted in the evening around small grassed areas or near the long passages, called runnels, which it creates in the dense undergrowth. For those with patience, it might even be lured out into the open with peanut-butter sandwiches or fruit (apples in particular). A nightly offering from the Quokka Observation Hut, on the Shannon Dam Walktrail, may in time yield a response.

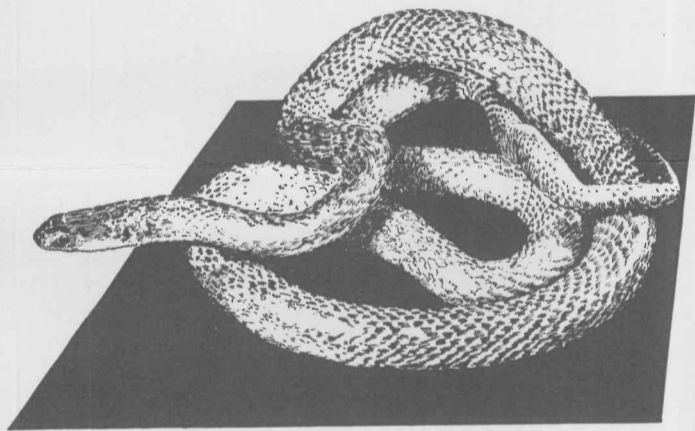


## REPTILES AND FROGS

Reptiles are best sighted during the heat of the day over the summer months between October and March. They prefer the open bush typical of jarrah forest and low woodlands, and are often seen on roads or on granite outcrops basking in the sun. Watch out for snakes, as many of them are venomous.

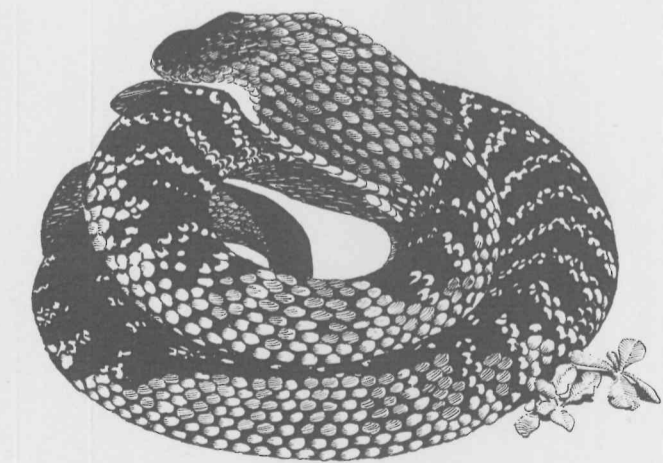
Frogs may be found in the denser undergrowth near fresh-water reserves. The mating calls of the male frogs can be heard from early spring right through to late summer, and some species call during the day as well as at night.

**Dugite** (*Pseudonaja affinis*)



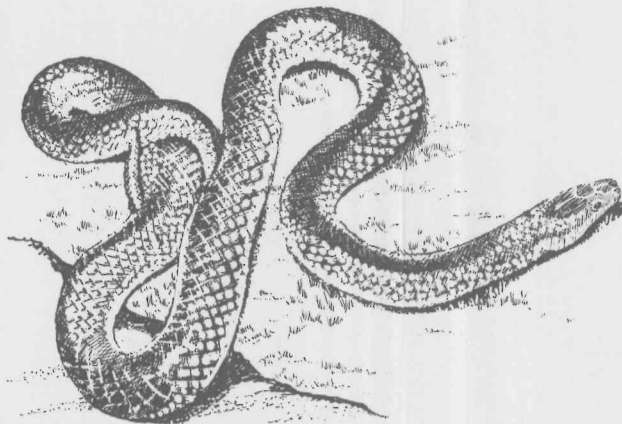
The Dugite is not an aggressive snake, but it is very venomous. Longer and more slender than the Tiger Snake, it moves gracefully and has beautiful grey-olive-brown colourings with a yellowish underbelly. The head is generally of lighter hue than the body. The Dugite loves mice, and will often enter sheds or houses in search of them.

**Tiger Snake** (*Notechis ater*)



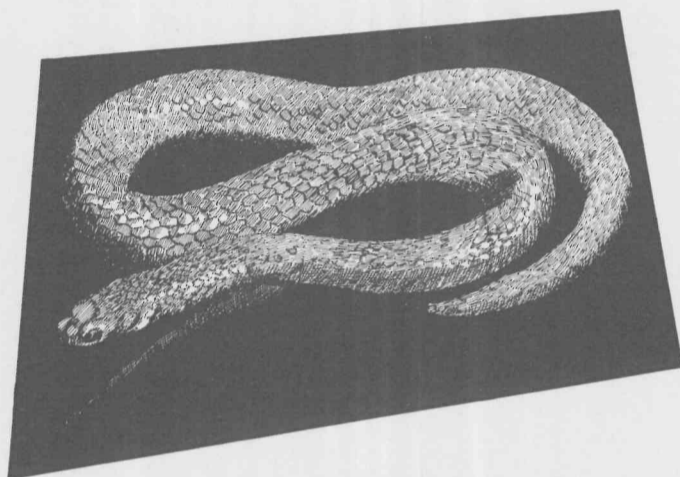
The potent venom and the aggressive nature of the Black Tiger Snake make it the best known and most dangerous reptile of the south-west. It is dark blue-black in colour with a pale orange-yellow underbelly which often extends to the sides and back in a series of narrow stripes or cross-bands. It grows up to 1.8 m long, but its thick body and broad head give it a rather stout appearance. The Tiger Snake seems to prefer the damp conditions where frogs abound, but it may also enter the drier areas to seek out lizards and small mammals. Nornalup, a town just east of Walpole on the southern coast, takes its name from the aboriginal word "norne" for Tiger Snake.

**Mueller's Snake** (*Rhinoplocephalus bicolor*)



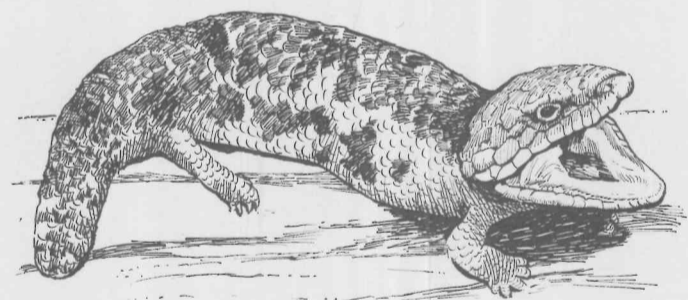
This is one of our rarer snakes. Confined to the lower south-west, it grows up to 0.4 m, is mildly venomous, and has an olive-grey colouring with a cream underbelly. It seems to prefer small frogs.

**Little Brown Snake** (*Elapognathus minor*)



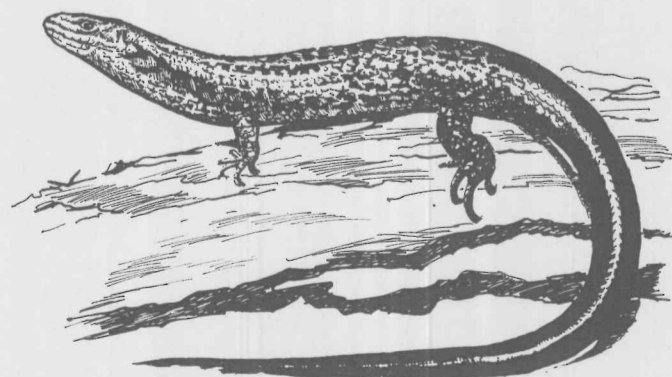
This small (0.4 m) mildly venomous snake is even rarer than Mueller's Snake and is likewise unique to the lower south-west. It is brown with an underbelly of greenish-yellow.

**Bobtail Lizard** (*Trachydosaurus rugosus*)



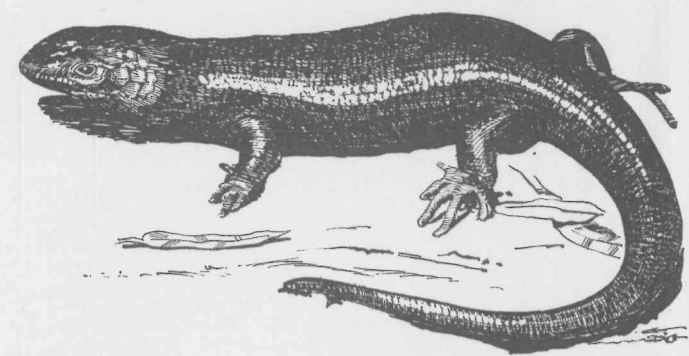
This skink, often incorrectly called a goanna, is one of the most distinctive and abundant of all Australian reptiles. It is immediately recognisable by its short, rounded, depressed tail and heavy back scales. It is slow-moving, feeds on insects, snails, flowers and fruit, and shelters under fallen timber or leaf-litter. It grows to about 0.2 m. When threatened, the Bobtail will open its wide mouth exposing a striking combination of red gums and blue tongue, and if provoked will bite with surprising force and with a tenacity which makes it difficult to dislodge once it has taken hold. It is not an aggressive lizard, however, and would much rather slink away into the undergrowth.

**Mourning Skink** (*Egernia luctuosa*)



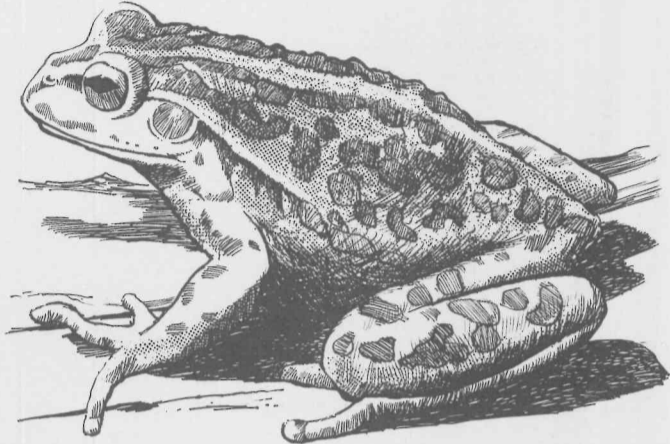
This attractive skink has a tail which is twice as long as its body, measuring about 0.3 m in all. It has a black, hood-like stripe on its head, as if in mourning, and, like the King's Skink, is unique to the lower south-west.

King’s Skink (*Egernia kingii*)



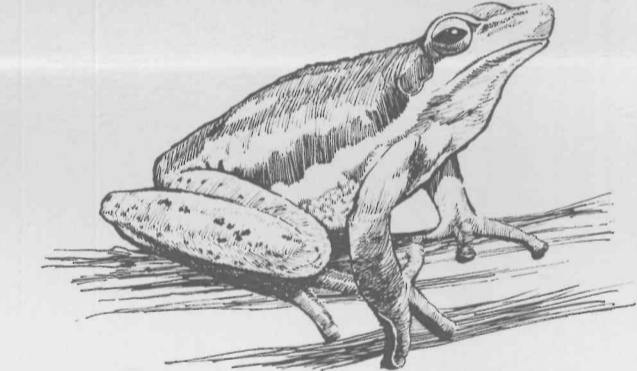
This stout lizard measures about 0.4 m, half of which is tail. It is olive-brown in colour with a whitish underbelly, and feeds mainly on insects.

Western Green and Golden Bell Frog (*Litoria moorei*)



If you are camping in the Shannon, and find yourself lying awake on a hot summer's night listening to what sounds like a motorcycle repeatedly changing up through its gears, then you are more than likely hearing the mating call of the male Bell Frog. A robust, muscular frog, it may be found at a more respectable hour hiding underneath bark or logs in areas of permanent water. It is usually pale brown or green with a dark stripe from the nose to the eye.

Slender Tree Frog (*Litoria adelaidensis*)

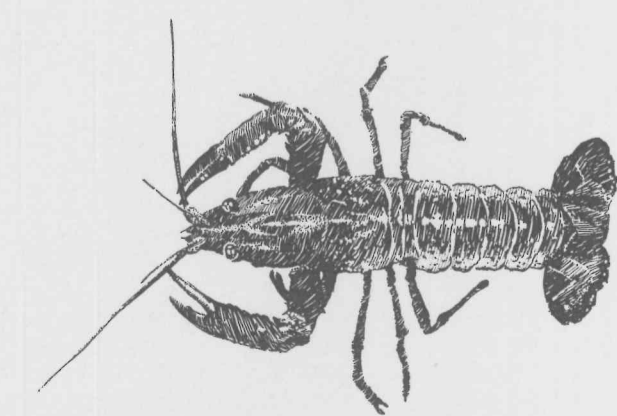


Like the Bell Frog, the smaller Slender Tree Frog is confined to the lower south-west. It breeds in spring, the male calling with a harsh grating screech, and prefers the dense vegetation at the edge of static or slow moving water. It is brown or green with a broad, dark brown stripe along the side of the head and body.

CRUSTACEANS

The crustaceans of the Shannon are well known under the names of Marron, Koonac and Jilgie. These distinct species are most easily distinguished by the size of their claws or chelae. The most popular table crustacean, however, is the Marron. But beware, check the regulation size before taking your catch.

Marron (*Cherax tenuimanus*)



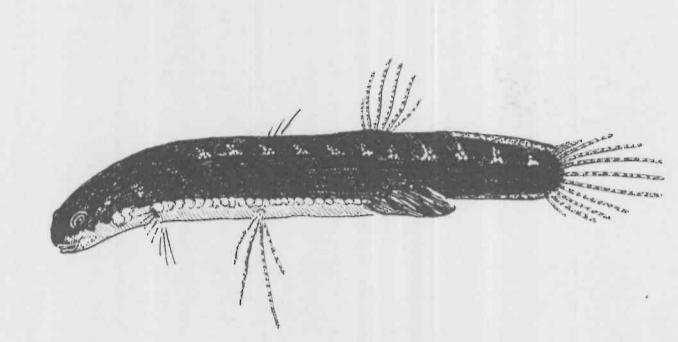
The Marron prefers the deeper, broader water of the more permanent streams and rivers, often sheltering under logs and stones on the bottom of large pools. It feeds exclusively on vegetable matter.

FISH

The Shannon River is a moderately small river, draining an area which measures 50 km north-south and 10-20 km east-west. The average annual temperature of the water is 15-18°C, and the typical “tea-stain” colour is due to the presence of tannin which is leached from dead leaves and bark. This is a common feature of the south-west rivers. Perhaps the most abundant native freshwater fish to be found in the Shannon is the Striped Minnow (*Galaxiella munda*), but also common are the Western Pygmy Perch (*Edelia vittata*), the Nightfish (*Bostockia porosa*) and the Freshwater Cobbler (*Tandanus bostocki*).

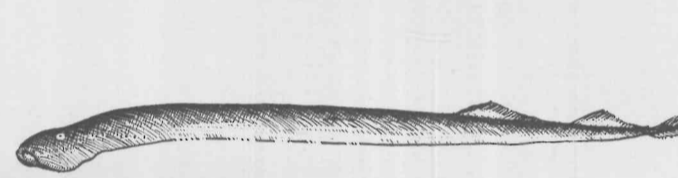
Two of the most interesting, however, are the Salamanderfish and the Pouched Lamprey.

Salamanderfish (*Lepidogalaxias salamandroides*)



This is the only surviving species of what appears to be a very ancient lineage stretching back perhaps more than 90 million years. Like the Striped Minnow, the Salamanderfish has the ability to aestivate in times of summer drought. It burrows into the mud or under a pile of leaves and remains in a state of torpor until the water returns. It prefers the dark-stained or muddy waters of the lower woodland and non-forest areas, and in winter may be found widespread over the herblands and scrublands which are at this time under water.

Pouched Lamprey (*Geotria australis*)



Unlike the other fish mentioned, the Pouched Lamprey spends much of its adult life in the sea, migrating into the lower reaches of the river at spawning time. The larval lampreys, called ammocoetes, live in the freshwater muddy burrows until they undergo metamorphosis into a stage known as the macrophthalmic, which then migrates out to sea. The Lamprey has an eel-shaped body and a peculiar mouth in the form of a sucking disc, used for sucking blood from other fish. They may grow up to 0.6 m.

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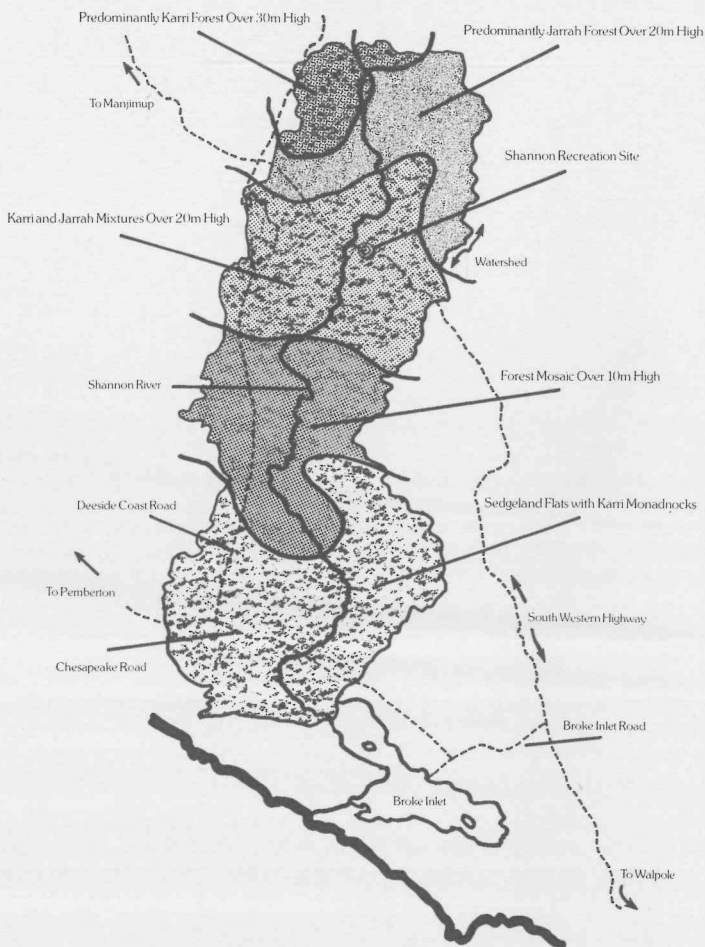
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# Shannon River Basin



The south-west forest occupies less than 1% of the total area of the State, and yet nearly 35% of the native mammal species are confined within its borders. The Shannon River Basin covers 3% of the total forest area, and, small as this may seem, its 60,000 hectares provide a rich variety of habitats for the south-western life-forms. A glance at the map will show the progression from the high open forest of the north to the sedgelands of the south. Remember that the choice of viewing area will govern the likelihood of sighting the various animals.