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An Educational
Resource Package

LANDSCOPE'S

Urban Wildlife Antics



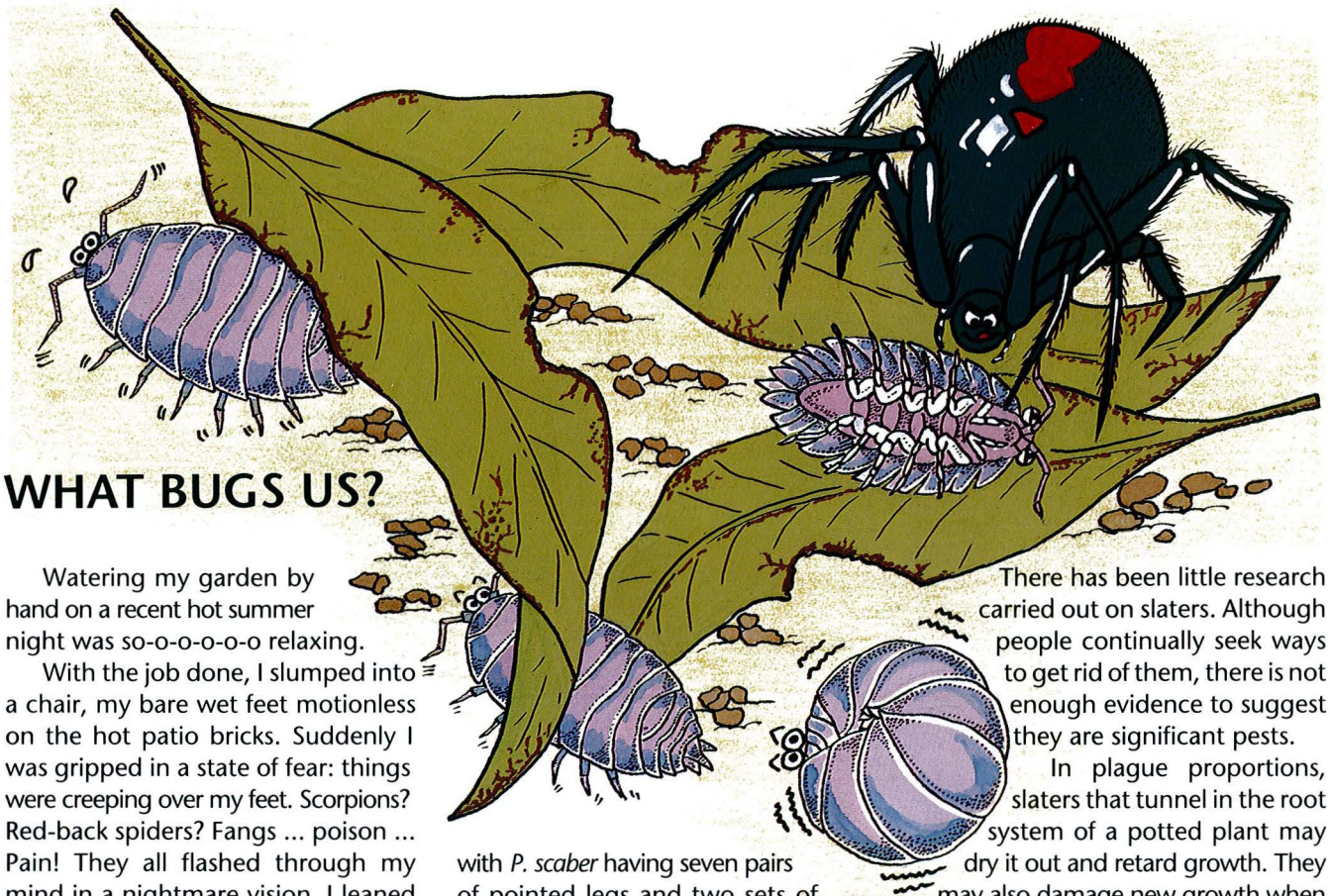
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Department of Conservation and Land Management



URBAN ANTICS!



WHAT BUGS US?

Watering my garden by hand on a recent hot summer night was so-o-o-o-o relaxing.

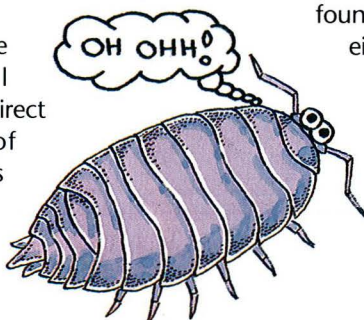
With the job done, I slumped into a chair, my bare wet feet motionless on the hot patio bricks. Suddenly I was gripped in a state of fear: things were creeping over my feet. Scorpions? Red-back spiders? Fangs ... poison ... Pain! They all flashed through my mind in a nightmare vision. I leaned forward, eyes straining in the light scattered from a nearby window.

My uninvited guests were slaters, or woodlice. My cool wet feet had attracted them to a free drink and a respite from their hot homes between and under the pavement bricks.

Slaters are a common and prolific dweller in our urban environment. They are seen regularly in gardens, backyard sheds, or any dark, moist area. It is not unusual to have them come from behind a skirting board and scamper across the lounge room carpet while the family watches TV.

Several species of slaters are found in Western Australia, but the one most likely to be seen is *Porcellio scaber*, an exotic species probably transported here in a packing case many years ago.

Slaters are terrestrial crustaceans, direct relatives of crabs, prawns and lobsters. They are invertebrates,



with *P. scaber* having seven pairs of pointed legs and two sets of antennae. The animals are a dull pinkish-grey colour and are covered with a segmented armour-like cuticle which resembles the tailpiece of a rock lobster.

The local species of slater is from the most successful group of terrestrial crustaceans. Like an armadillo they can roll into a ball which protects them from predators and the loss of body moisture.

The thin shell or exoskeleton of slaters does not have the waxy component of terrestrial insects and spiders, hence their nocturnal habits and their preference for nooks and crannies where the atmosphere is humid.

Humidity and water are essential to slaters, as the seven different families found throughout the world breathe either through moisture-laden gills or a lung-like cavity. They feed on any moist decomposing organic matter, mostly decaying vegetation, and are therefore an important link between plants and larger animals in the food chain.

There has been little research carried out on slaters. Although people continually seek ways to get rid of them, there is not enough evidence to suggest they are significant pests.

In plague proportions, slaters that tunnel in the root system of a potted plant may dry it out and retard growth. They may also damage new growth when they devour decaying parts. On the whole, though, the animals are worth putting up with, as they otherwise do our gardens good.

As former denizens of the deep, slaters are secretive and special animals, worthy of tolerance and further study.

JOHN HUNTER

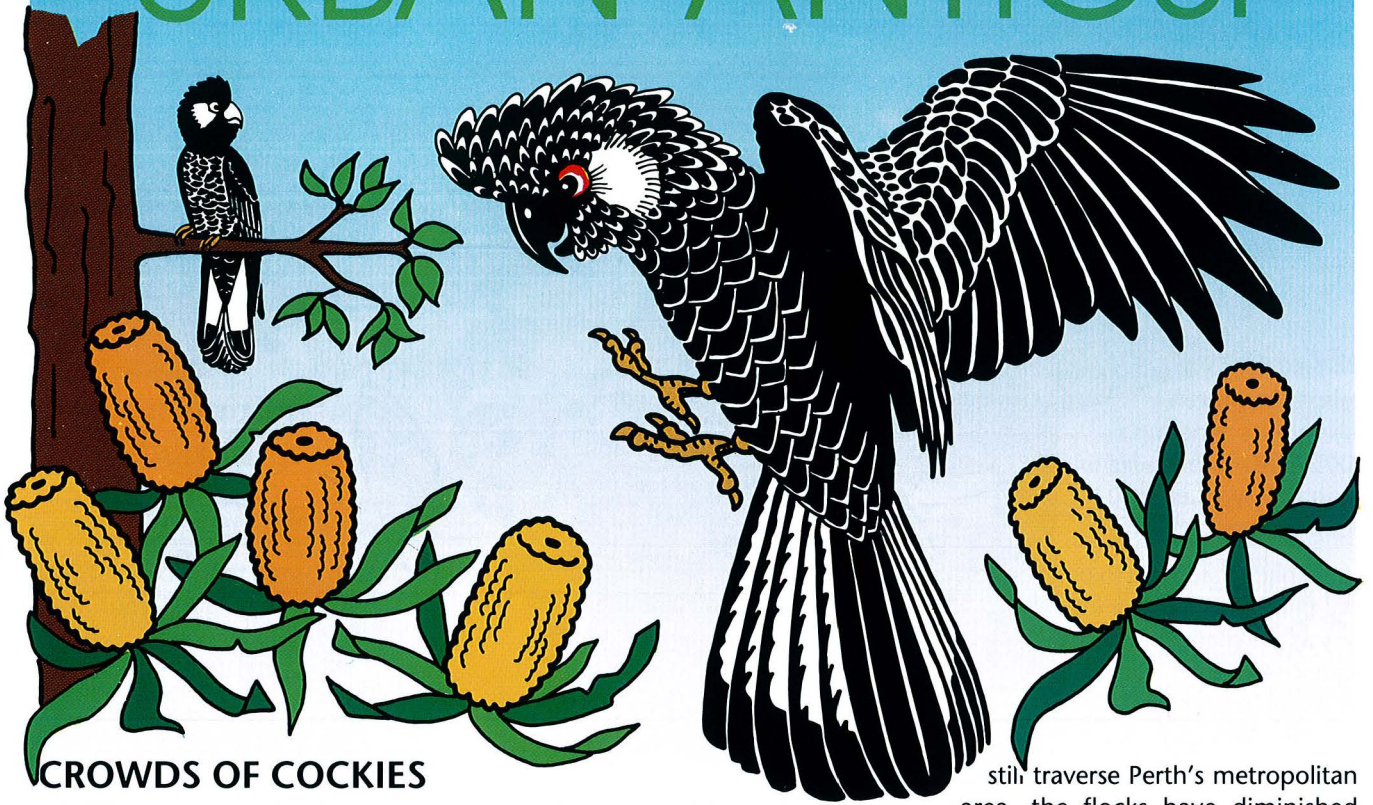
Did you know?

Invertebrates make up 98 per cent of the world's animals.

The class Crustacea has a sub-class called Malacostraca, the prawns, crabs, lobsters and woodlice or slaters. They total 18 000 species. Some species are 1 mm long, while the Japanese spider crab has a limb span of nearly four metres.

Most crustaceans have several larval stages before they mature. Slaters are hatched as miniature adults, with some species carrying their young on their antennae.

URBAN ANTICS!



CROWDS OF COCKIES

'Here come the cockies, son - it's going to rain.'

My dad used to say that in the autumn and winter every year during the forties, as wave after wave of white-tailed black cockatoos darkened the skies over our house. It always did seem to rain too (even though there is no scientific truth in the statement), but as a little 'un I was eager to believe him.

Often the wails and screeches of a thousand birds penetrated the surrounding bush and asbestos walls of our tiny Scarborough dwelling, obliterating all other sound. Then, like a bomber squadron, the whole flock would land in nearby tuart and banksia trees, spreading to dryandra thickets while cursing and tearing at seed pods and foliage.

There are two species of white-tailed black cockatoos in the South West of Western Australia, Baudin's cockatoo (*Calyptorhynchus baudini*) and Carnaby's cockatoo (*Calyptorhynchus latirostris*). They are similar in appearance, but Baudin's cockatoo has a longer bill and prefers the southern eucalypt forests, where it feeds mainly on the seeds and nectar of marri and banksia. Carnaby's cockatoo frequents the drier

woodlands and sandplain areas around Perth and to the north, mainly feeding on the small hard fruits of hakeas, grevilleas, banksias and dryandras.

In the metropolitan area from about January to June each year, flocks of this seemingly slow-flying, large, noisy bird forage for food in native vegetation and gardens. It is usually easy to see where a group has been by the mess of seedpods and foliage on the ground, especially under pines. At times gum nuts and pine cones rain down to damage vehicles or narrowly miss an observer's unprotected head.

Rain does seem to excite the birds, which probably look forward to a feed of fresh nectar and insect larvae under wet bark.

About July each year the cockatoos disperse to their usual breeding areas in the wandoo and salmon gum woodlands north and east of Perth. Here, each life-bonded pair raise one chick in a hollow-branch nest.

After 11 weeks of brooding, the fledgling and parents join other family groups and move to their coastal summer refuge. They congregate in flocks at plentiful food sources in and around the suburbs.

While white-tailed black cockatoos

still traverse Perth's metropolitan area, the flocks have diminished drastically both in size and numbers. This is due primarily to the rapid and extensive clearing of the birds' food trees and nest trees in agricultural areas. Today, like the dryandras and banksias they eat from, the white-tailed black cockatoos are but a remnant of past populations. Those small, feathery black clouds on the horizon are perhaps a storm-warning for another species heading towards extinction. Only time will tell.

JOHN HUNTER

Did You Know

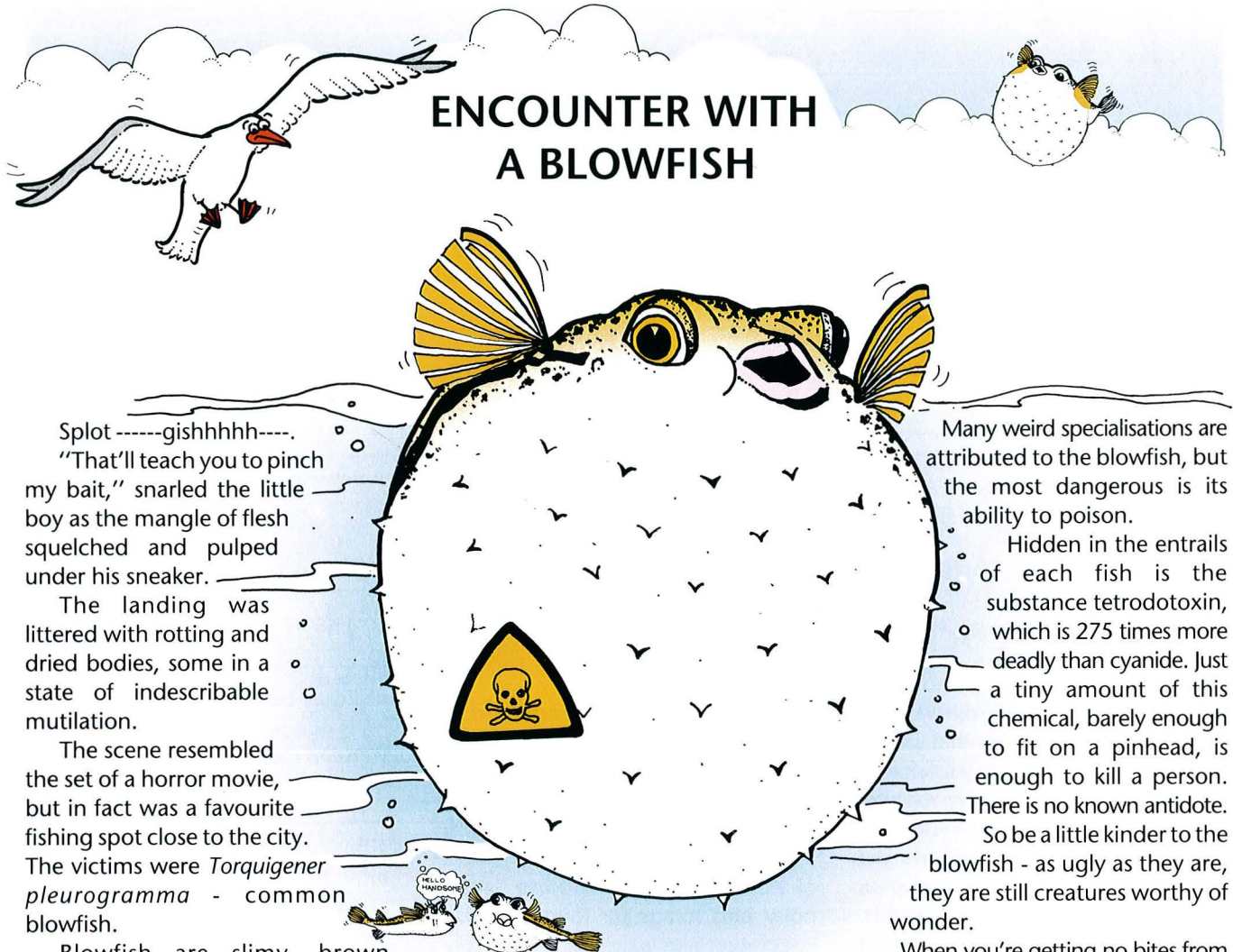
White-tailed black cockatoos lay two eggs. The second nestling usually dies within two days of birth.

A reliable food source near the nest is vital. Brooding adults usually feed in line-of-sight vegetation. If this is fragmented and isolated, time may run out for a hungry nestling.

*The galah (*Cacatua roseicapilla*), an aggressive competitor for the cockatoos' nest sites, has increased in numbers. It breaks Carnaby's cockatoo eggs when the birds temporarily leave the nest.*

URBAN ANTICS!

ENCOUNTER WITH A BLOWFISH



Splot -----gishhhhh-----.
"That'll teach you to pinch my bait," snarled the little boy as the mangle of flesh squelched and pulped under his sneaker.

The landing was littered with rotting and dried bodies, some in a state of indescribable mutilation.

The scene resembled the set of a horror movie, but in fact was a favourite fishing spot close to the city. The victims were *Torquigener pleurogramma* - common blowfish.

Blowfish are slimy, brown-spotted and goggle-eyed little beasts, which are caught by the thousands each year in the Swan Estuary and at metropolitan coastal beaches. They are perhaps the most maligned and physically abused of all urban dwellers.

The name blowfish, or puffer, is derived from the fish's ability to balloon into a sphere two or three times its original size. When frightened, excited or annoyed, it gulps water or even air into a sac on its belly. It swells inside its tough elastic skin like a tube inside a tyre, so as to discourage predators. When the fish feels safe, it releases the air or water, deflating to its normal shape.

About 100 species of blowfish are found throughout the world. Our local species may reach 300 mm in length, but a giant in the northern hemisphere reaches about one metre long and weighs some 13 kg.

Local blowfish start life in the ocean after spawning occurs off our suburban beaches in November and December each year. Eggs and larvae develop through a planktonic stage, with young fish dispersing to the nearest food source.

At about seven months old, those near Fremantle migrate into the Swan Estuary, where they stay for two years till they mature. Between October and January they head seawards with the annual breeding migration of older fish.

Very young blowfish prey on marine worms and small crustaceans. Older fish take bi-valve mussels and marine snails.

Blowfish are like the seagulls of the underwater world - they'll eat anything. Where man provides bait or any refuse, they sometimes congregate in plague proportions.

Many weird specialisations are attributed to the blowfish, but the most dangerous is its ability to poison.

Hidden in the entrails of each fish is the substance tetrodotoxin, which is 275 times more deadly than cyanide. Just a tiny amount of this chemical, barely enough to fit on a pinhead, is enough to kill a person. There is no known antidote.

So be a little kinder to the blowfish - as ugly as they are, they are still creatures worthy of wonder.

When you're getting no bites from other fish, they're great fun to catch.

JOHN HUNTER

Did you know ...

Their buck teeth and massive chewing muscles can tear apart crabs and oysters, and have been known to nip rusty fish-hooks in half.

They have iridescent blue and green eyes which are quite mobile. In some species the eyes darken automatically as light intensity increases, like the lenses of some manufactured eyeglasses.

In Japan, one blowfish species (called fugu) is highly regarded as a food - at about \$200 a serve! - even though it has caused hundreds of deaths there over the last two decades.

URBAN ANTICS!



A Haunting in Suburbia

Screeeeech, screech ... thump ... rattle ... rattle.

The house lights clicked on in the sultry dark of a summer night, and a string of expletives issued from the next room. 'Bloody little so and sos. Where are my golf clubs?'. Footsteps clumped down the hall and the front door banged.

We were witnessing a nightly ritual, enacted with monotonous regularity, month in and month out. It didn't seem to matter where or when we lived, we were members of a small, but select group. The front-line in an unceasing vigil against things that go thump in the night.

It might have been Floreat Park in the 1960s, Bunbury in the '70s, Wanneroo in the '80s. The rest of suburbia slept, while we battled the demonhaunted dark. You could always tell fellow hauntees by the trembling handshake, and gaunt look in their eyes.

We knew the sequence of events too well. First, mysterious yellow circles would appear in the ceiling, and multiply with frightening rapidity. As one began to fade, the next would appear. A week later a faint musky odour would begin to permeate the house, gradually growing stronger as the summer wore on. Friends would drop in less often, and leave more quickly.

Soon scufflings, rattlings, and faint snuffling noises would whisper through the darkened house. Strange droppings, spontaneously generated, it seemed, by the very air, would

liberally coat the car in the garage. The apple tree in the backyard would start to grow half-eaten apples ... Amityville was child's play by comparison.

Our poltergeist was not a rat or cat, but the not-so-common brushtail possum: a small furry creature with bright eyes, a bushy tail, and no roof manners.

In their native setting brushtails live and nest high up in tree hollows. Often they occupy the same trees for years, or even generations. Males tend to be territorial, and have a definite 'home range', seldom venturing outside unless forced to move by a cataclysm. Females appear more flexible, and will occasionally share part of their territory with other females, or move in and share a male's home tree when nesting.

After the young are born and weaned they move out, seeking their own 'possum tree', and territories. Young males, particularly, are forced to find fresh pastures where they won't clash with established males.

Possum territories are not large, and appear to extend only about 200-300 m in any direction. But this can include a lot of roofs in suburbia.

In the metropolitan area they are one of few native mammals that have survived in close proximity to humans. They can live and breed in small bush areas, provided they can find a suitable tree to dwell in. Their main requirement is a large enough hollow, high above the ground. Because most large cavities in trees are formed from broken branches, most possum trees are large, old, and often in decline or dead. Surveys in the South-West forests have found that such trees are seldom, if ever, less than 40 cm in diameter. You can usually tell a possum tree by the pathway of scratch marks leading up the trunk.

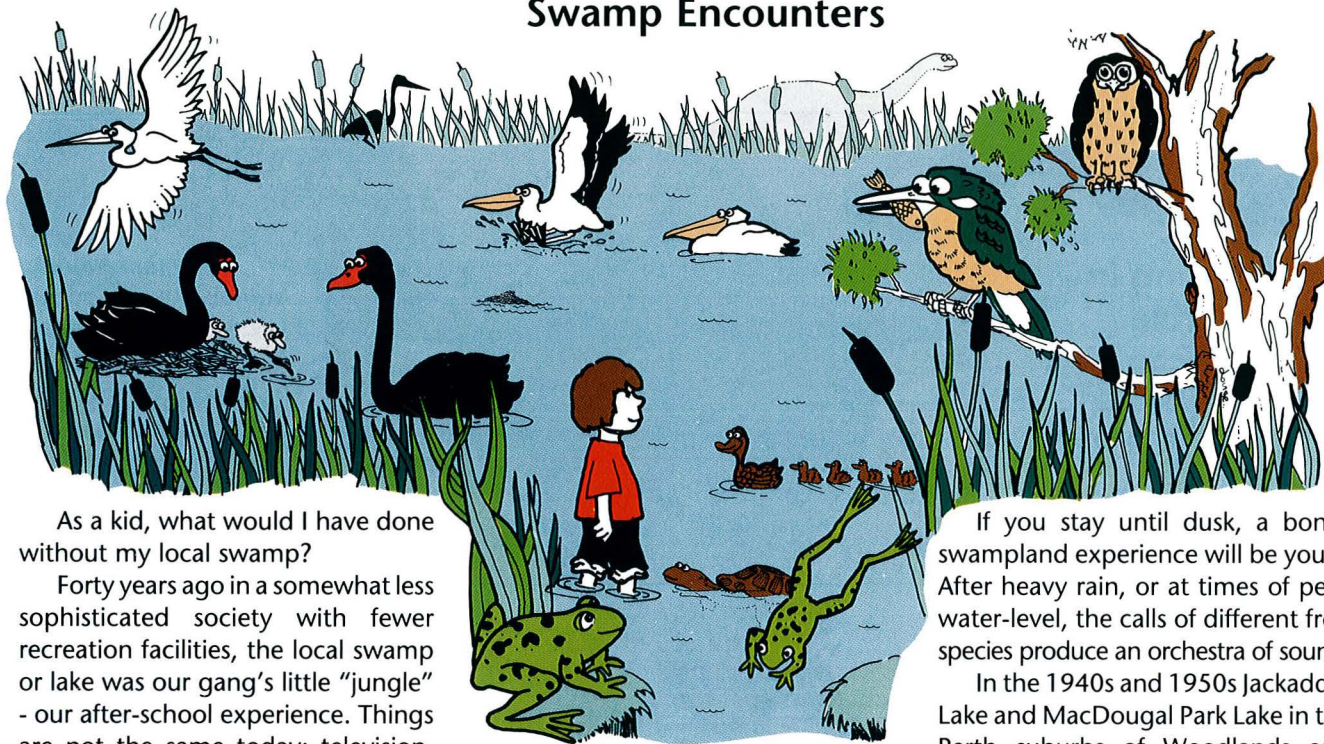
The next best thing from a possum's perspective, when these trees fall over, or are lopped, is a nice warm, cosy roof cavity, preferably in a yard which provides an abundance of fodder in season.

How does this help you, the hapless hauntee in suburbia? Possums are protected, and molesting them is not permitted. The best advice is to make your roof uninviting. The process is simple. A liberal sprinkling of moth-balls in the roof cavity will send them running. Then get some chicken wire and search for any entries in to your roof. Then nail them up. Your house is now possum proof, and if you ever get haunted again you know the answer.

ANDREW CRIBB

URBAN ANTICS!

Swamp Encounters



As a kid, what would I have done without my local swamp?

Forty years ago in a somewhat less sophisticated society with fewer recreation facilities, the local swamp or lake was our gang's little "jungle" - our after-school experience. Things are not the same today: television, super toys and other entertainments keep us from such places.

Some 3000 million years ago, life on our planet evolved from primeval bodies of water. Today, wetland depressions still provide a keyhole view of primitive life-forms and jog memories of childhood escapades.

There is nothing more relaxing and enlightening than to plonk your feet into the shallows of a secluded pond in a well-vegetated swamp. Let's imagine you've done just that. SHHHHHHH - remain still and quiet. Let your senses tune in to this other world.

Look down and you will see water fleas, tadpoles, shrimp, small fish and a myriad of other water bugs swimming over your feet. Keep still and you will be buzzed by different types of coloured dragonflies. As these marvellous creatures skim across the water their huge multi-celled eyes enable them to catch insects on the wing and devour them while still in flight.

Coots, ducks, moorhens, and sometimes swans, raise a cacophony of sounds as they squabble for territory and crash through reeds and thickets.

The occasional moving shadow above is a swamp harrier, kestrel or goshawk searching for a meal of unprotected duckling, insects or water rat.

Time to move out a little deeper. Methane gas bubbles from your footsteps in the mud, giving off an unpleasant but nonetheless stimulating, smell.

If you look to the shore you may see a heron or egret stalking fish, frogs, small tortoises, gilgies or other dwellers of the shallows.

Raise your eyes to the branches of overhanging trees and you may spot the motionless forms of night herons, owls or frogmouths as they await darkness to take their part in the swamp community.

Glance back to the still, reflective waters and, from time to time, you will see concentric rings of disturbance, as long-necked tortoises push their heads through the surface for a breath of fresh air and a look around.

Your attention could be distracted at this stage as a kingfisher slices through the air to snatch a lizard from a log on the opposite shoreline.

If you stay until dusk, a bonus swampland experience will be yours. After heavy rain, or at times of peak water-level, the calls of different frog species produce an orchestra of sound.

In the 1940s and 1950s Jackadder Lake and MacDougal Park Lake in the Perth suburbs of Woodlands and Manning provided my initiation into wetland exploration. These areas were then pristine swamps on the edge of civilisation in Perth.

I hope you, too, can find places like these to make contact with your ancestral beginnings.

JOHN HUNTER

Did you know ...

Before European settlement, Aborigines who lived by our urban swamps preyed heavily on the long-necked tortoise. Today, prolific numbers of long-necked tortoises prey on young water birds, causing some species to have second or third broods.

In the last 200 years, 75 per cent of pristine wetland habitat on the Swan coastal plain has been destroyed by land reclamation or the diversion of water.

A book, A Naturalists' Guide To Perth, \$10.95 from CALM's Como office, will help you to enjoy urban wildlife and wetland habitat.

URBAN ANTICS!



Looking Out My Back Door

Every year near the beginning of winter, just as the sun begins to lose its warmth and a chill creeps into the evening air, a number of strange visitors arrive on WA's southern shores.

The Easter holiday often marks their first appearance. As the crowds from Perth swarm southward to the herring-rich seas of Leeuwin-Naturaliste, and thousands rediscover the grandeur of the karri forests from Boranup to the Porongurups, a few curious reports filter through to wildlife officers and national park rangers.

Here and there on rocky shorelines a startled angler or beachcomber will find an equally startled seal. Spotted like a leopard from head to tail, and with a set of whiskers that would be envied by any feline, these one-year-old leopard seals have just made the 2 000 km trip from Antarctica. Why? No-one knows. Leopard seals neither breed here, nor migrate to WA as adults.

Even if you stay in Perth and explore the reefs and islands of the coastal waters, you may have close encounters with marine wildlife such as groups of Australian sea lions, basking in the winter sun or loafing in the shallows.

Fisherfolk chasing a feed of herring,

or hoping for a salmon, on the ocean side of the chain of reefs which follow the coast from Lancelin to Mandurah, are often entertained by a pod of dolphins cruising the waters or surfing in the bow waves. If a huge brown shape surfaces nearby, start the motor and move out: white pointers are not unknown in coastal waters. With any luck, however, you may spot a humpback whale on its way from the warm waters of the North-West to Antarctica.

Further south, in the incredibly blue and green bays of Cape Arid National Park, southern right whales, once hunted to the brink of extinction, come inshore at the beginning of spring, and stay for nearly a month to calve, before heading for Antarctica and the krill feasts that await them.

What do all these creatures have in common? The answer is people. Perth's northern and southern suburbs are creeping further along the coastline and the holiday hordes are getting larger. Things are getting a little crowded.

This opinion appears to be shared by the sea lion that bit a fisherman's dog on one of the tiny islands off Marmion reef.

More and more people are visiting these islands, which sea lions have been using for thousands of years to rest up. Beautiful, and passive as they

usually are, they are still very much wild animals. Feeding them by hand, getting between a bull and his harem, or attempting to stroke them is about as smart as trying to cuddle a Bengal tiger. People and sea lions can co-exist with the appropriate courtesy, but they definitely take a dim view of dogs running around their 'lounge rooms'. So, for that matter, do the seabirds which roost on our offshore islands.

WA is one of the few places left in the world where such animals can be found on the doorstep of a major city. Elsewhere they've either gone, or areas have been closed to visitors so that they aren't disturbed when breeding and raising their young.

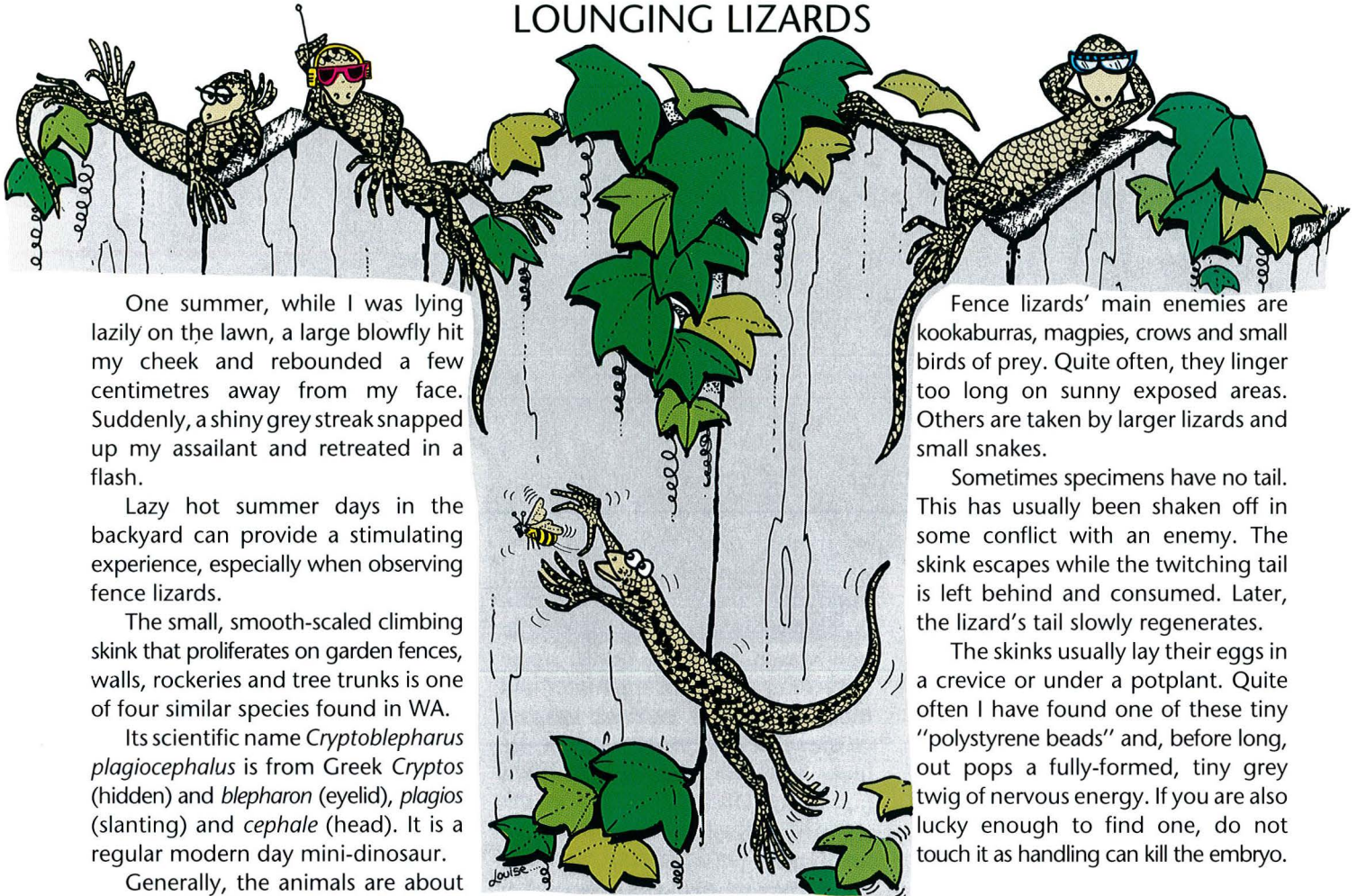
Another tale from Marmion concerns the pygmy right whale which appeared to be studying human behaviour. The four metre whale was first seen in November 1986 near Whitfords, and appeared since on a regular basis up and down the coast from Marmion to Rockingham. The whale seemed particularly interested in putting in appearances where there are groups of people in the water, which can be very disconcerting.

Let's hope this interspecies study can grow into mutual understanding, so we can appreciate how incredibly lucky we are to share our environment with these beautiful creatures.

ANDREW CRIBB

URBAN ANTICS

LOUNGING LIZARDS



One summer, while I was lying lazily on the lawn, a large blowfly hit my cheek and rebounded a few centimetres away from my face. Suddenly, a shiny grey streak snapped up my assailant and retreated in a flash.

Lazy hot summer days in the backyard can provide a stimulating experience, especially when observing fence lizards.

The small, smooth-scaled climbing skink that proliferates on garden fences, walls, rockeries and tree trunks is one of four similar species found in WA.

Its scientific name *Cryptoblepharus plagiocephalus* is from Greek *Cryptos* (hidden) and *blepharon* (eyelid), *plagios* (slanting) and *cephale* (head). It is a regular modern day mini-dinosaur.

Generally, the animals are about 8 cm long when mature (with their tail intact). Their dark olive-grey scales are dotted with dark brown or black with a blackish side-stripe. A coppery coloured head is evident during the summer months.

With the onset of summer, fence lizards venture from their niches of winter dormancy to seek food, warmth and to mate.

The skinks are insectivorous and hunt their prey in every nook and cranny into which they can squeeze, or leap some 20 cm to devour a tasty insect.

Being cold-blooded, they often bask in the mid-morning sun on warm, flat surfaces.

In many ways they act like dogs; they will pounce on one another, locking jaws on any body part, and roll over and over for up to 10 minutes.

Fence lizards' main enemies are kookaburras, magpies, crows and small birds of prey. Quite often, they linger too long on sunny exposed areas. Others are taken by larger lizards and small snakes.

Sometimes specimens have no tail. This has usually been shaken off in some conflict with an enemy. The skink escapes while the twitching tail is left behind and consumed. Later, the lizard's tail slowly regenerates.

The skinks usually lay their eggs in a crevice or under a potplant. Quite often I have found one of these tiny "polystyrene beads" and, before long, out pops a fully-formed, tiny grey twig of nervous energy. If you are also lucky enough to find one, do not touch it as handling can kill the embryo.

Two beasts may chase each other across fences or walls then disappear into a crack or crevice.

Fence lizards are quite good swimmers and have been seen trying to escape from backyard swimming pools.

Inquisitiveness, thirst or attraction to insects on the pool surface often leads to their undoing. Young lizards, in particular, soon succumb to the cold water; their movement slows and if the surface tension is broken they drown.

It pays to check your pool regularly in summer as all types of reptiles can be caught, and become waterlogged or too cold to help themselves.

Simply place them on an exposed flat surface to obtain instant body heat and they will recover in a matter of minutes or seconds.

JOHN HUNTER

Did you know ...

*Lizards in the genus *Cryptoblepharus* have five fingers and toes, each with a claw for efficient action on vertical surfaces.*

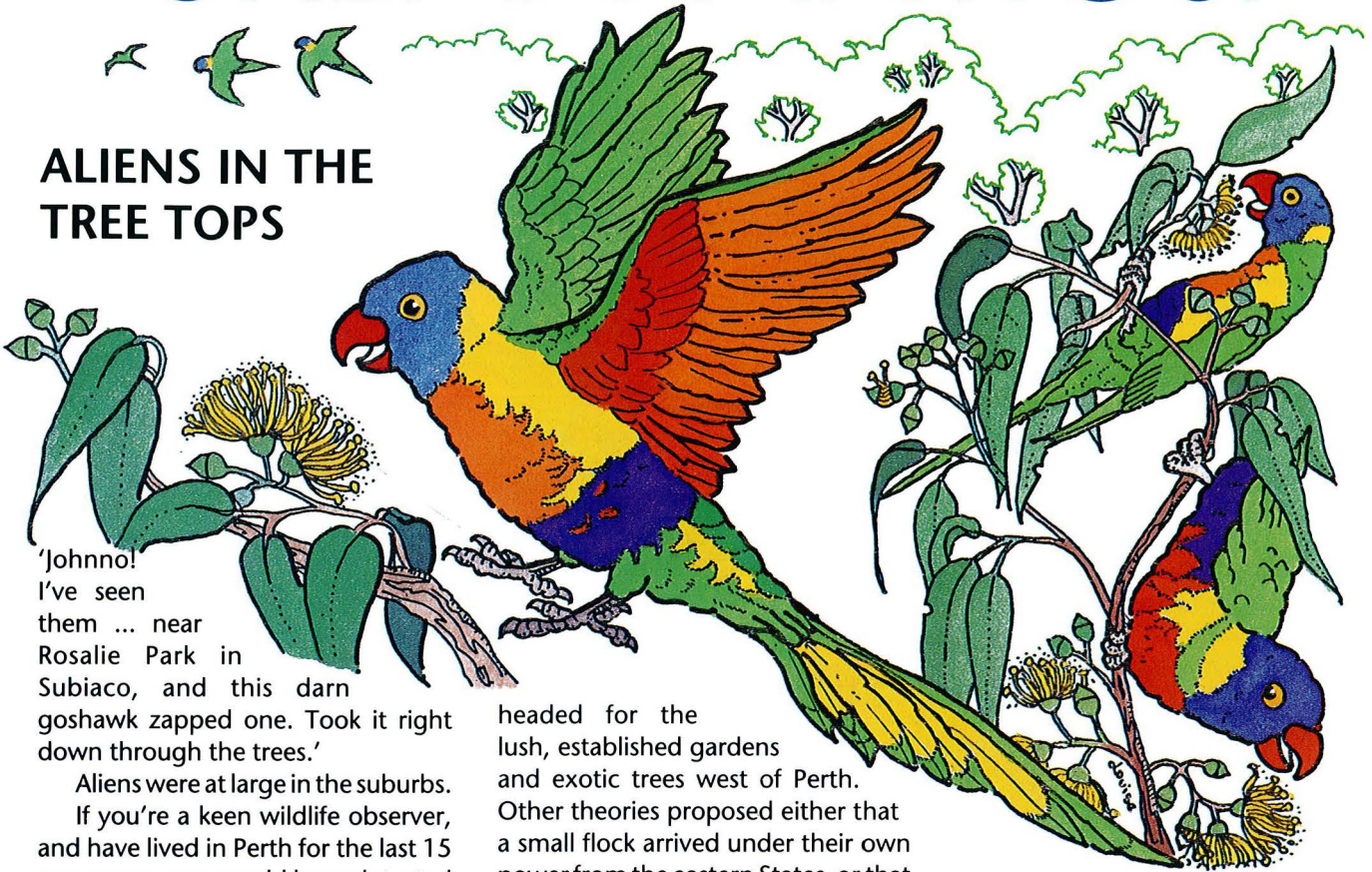
Most of the 150 species of skinks in WA throw their tails when in conflict. Regeneration is usually reflected by an abrupt change in colour pattern.

If you go looking for fence skink eggs beware, redback spiders inhabit similar locations in the same season and their egg sacs look similar.

URBAN ANTICS!



ALIENS IN THE TREE TOPS



'Johnno! I've seen them ... near Rosalie Park in Subiaco, and this darn goshawk zapped one. Took it right down through the trees.'

Aliens were at large in the suburbs.

If you're a keen wildlife observer, and have lived in Perth for the last 15 years or so, you would have detected the arrival of an alien species - the rainbow lorikeet.

The rainbow lorikeet (*Trichoglossus haematodus*), or Blue Mountain parrot, was traditionally an inhabitant of the wooded and coastal areas of eastern Australia. The striking plumage of bluish-purple, red-orange and dark green, leaves no doubt as to its identification. It flies very high, congregating in small hurtling flocks, attracting attention with thin piercing shrieks. The swiftly beating wings and quick body movements are emphasised by tapering swept wings and a pointed tail.

In *The Noah's Ark Syndrome*, author C.F.H. Jenkins states that in 1960 aviaries of rare parrots were established on Rottnest Island, with the purpose of future release and eventual establishment. Scientists and conservationists vigorously opposed the scheme and it was ultimately abandoned, but not before some unofficial releases. Dorothy Payne, editor of the *Western Australian Avicultural Magazine*, thinks that a storm up-ended the aviaries and the lorikeets

headed for the lush, established gardens and exotic trees west of Perth. Other theories proposed either that a small flock arrived under their own power from the eastern States, or that a local aviary escape occurred.

By whatever means they arrived in Perth, they were certainly here by 1962 when well-known naturalist Vincent Serventy saw a single specimen, and later a pair, feeding on tuart blossoms. Through the 1970s, the birds maintained low numbers in Nedlands, Claremont, Shenton Park, and occasionally Supreme Court Gardens in Perth. But by 1980, numbers had increased slightly and the range extended through Kings Park into Subiaco and Floreat.

About this time I thought of the possible repercussions of introducing new species, remembering what the starling, sparrow, fox and rabbit have done. Was this gregarious, aggressive outsider preparing to push out and eventually replace the local, easy-going twenty-eight parrot?

To date this hasn't happened, although in the last five years rainbow lorikeet numbers have increased markedly, and they are now reported north to Kingsley, west to Cottesloe and City Beach, east to Bayswater and Belmont and south to Murdoch.

The twenty-eights appear to be doing all right. This spring, large numbers were seen feeding in their preferred areas, on the ground and in medium-height, flowering trees. The lorikeets still prefer the high, exotic tree tops, but I must admit they are not as aloof as in the past, sometimes feeding on my two-metre tall bottle-brush trees.

Let's hope that the two species will tolerate each other.

JOHN HUNTER

Did you know ...

Lorikeets have brush-tipped tongues for blossom feeding, which demands lots of daily and seasonal mobility.

Nectar and pollen are the staple diet, while ripened fruit, insects, larvae, part-ripened maize and cultivated flowers are eagerly sought.

Blossoms are located by sight, or by the sounds of others feeding.

URBAN ANTICS



ALL WASHED UP

It was winter again and salt and sand stung my hands and face as I stood on my favourite suburban beach. I could already see a line of debris on the windswept beach. By tomorrow there would be wreckage of all descriptions.

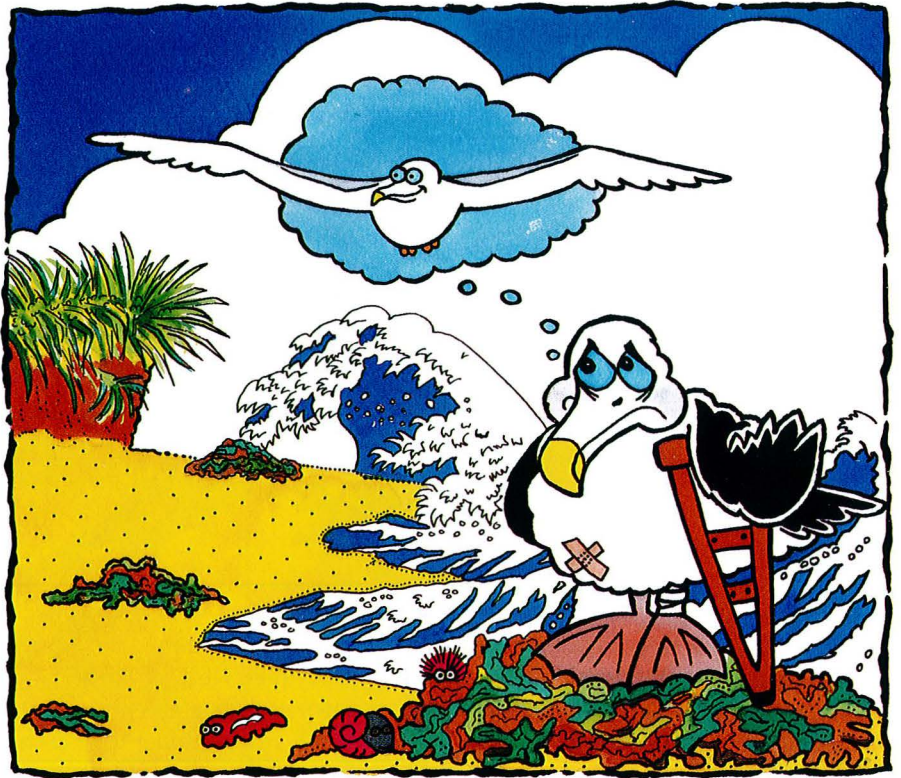
Winter beachwalking is a marvellous pastime, providing fine family recreation and stimulating the urge to learn. Our planet's oceans contain a myriad of life forms and dead, injured or exhausted marine dwellers litter our beaches after storms. In the past, quite a few rare or previously unknown sea creatures were "discovered" in this way, eventually finding their way into museums and science laboratories.

While most people are content to collect simple driftwood and sea shells, the more adventurous delve into the piles of seaweed to locate the remains of sponges, crustacea, softcorals, sea slugs, molluscs and other creatures.

Care should be taken when walking or probing through weed piles as, from time to time, poisonous tropical fish, sea snakes and jellyfish that have been caught in strange currents are washed up on South-West beaches. Use gloves or a stick to avoid possible injury.

Some of the most stirring discoveries are land wrecked sea birds. If you find one alive professional help must be sought before attempting rescue and rehabilitation. Contact a local vet, particularly if the bird is injured or, alternatively, experienced community volunteer groups can be recommended by CALM.

Many species which require treatment are members of the Procellariiformes group, which includes the albatrosses, shearwaters and petrels. They are completely oceanic and only visit land to nest. Currents, a food source or winds sometimes bring them unusually close to land, and if a storm develops they can be blown ashore or washed up on the beach.



When located by walkers, the birds look normal and seem quite sedate. In fact under their beautiful plumage, beach wrecked storm petrels and the like are usually emaciated, dehydrated, starving and exhausted and give the false impression of being tame.

If you find an oceanic bird handle it as little as possible; touching the plumage with bare hands damages and de-oils the feathers. A towel should be used.

The birds are wild creatures and their beaks can be dangerous. The legs and feet, which cannot be used properly on land, are often damaged when they are dumped heavily on a land surface.

Birds being rehabilitated have to be force-fed with fresh fish and, usually, prescribed medicines. Dehydration is also a problem. At sea the birds drink seawater and excrete the salt through a gland near their beaks. Some seabird rescue groups suggest they should be given seawater to drink during rehabilitation.

There are many other special requirements for rehabilitating oceanic birds, so remember, please seek professional help and your winter beach walks will be even more worthwhile.

JOHN HUNTER

Did you know...

After a storm in 1984, 247 wrecked birds were found on suburban beaches; 35 were later released.

Oil soaked plumage no bigger than a one cent coin is enough to destroy a bird's insulation.

Wildlife officers can advise what to do and where to go for wildlife strandings; phone 367 0292 or after hours 332 6368.

Australia is visited by 58 species of petrel, shearwater and albatross. The largest is the Wandering Albatross with a wingspan of up to 350 cm.

URBAN ANTICS!

FROGS

Winter again. Water, wet grass, pools, ponds, puddles ... and frogs.

It's time to be entertained again by those neckless, fat-bellied, goggle-eyed, big-mouthed sons of tadpoles that seem to win their way into our hearts, homes and swimming pools at least once a year.

For ages, the frog has been one of the animals most likely to share in the lives of children. Nursery rhymes, pop songs, squeaky toys in the bath, tadpoles in jars, chocolate Fredos and, most important of all, the King: Kermit with his daily children's TV workshop.

Frogs are amphibians. Most spend part of their lives as water animals and part as land animals. Some live their entire lives in or near water while others never come near water, even to mate.

Only two families of frogs are found in and around Perth's Swan Coastal Plain - tree frogs and ground dwellers (or burrowers). More than 20 species, however, of all shapes, sizes, colours and calling sounds, make up these families.

Most frogs have a thin, moist skin and are also cold-blooded, so they tend to live in cooler places such as leaf-litter, in dense vegetation, wetland areas or underground. It is after summer or autumn rains that humans and frogs most often come into contact. The frogs emerge from their hiding spots to relish the cool cleansing rain,



catch a juicy bug and perhaps find a mate. Driving around any of our suburban wetland parks on a rainy night can be quite soul-destroying, as thousands of beasts cover roadways and are accidentally run over.

Throughout suburban Perth there have been a few interesting frog reports of late. One householder was amazed to find his privacy invaded by a couple of slippery characters on his window ledge. Further observation revealed that his visitors were successfully climbing the glass pane to catch insects attracted by the electric light. Even more interesting was the discovery a day or so later of frogs hiding under the leaf-litter in the roof-gutter above the window.

At different times of the year, depending on the species, females respond to the loud calls of males and move towards the source of the noise. Mating occurs and eggs are laid. Recently, moaning frogs have made themselves very unpopular in Booragoon backyards. These stout, burrowing species have been calling

before the autumn rain and their loud, low moans have infuriated would-be sleepers. If this happens to you, saturate the area thoroughly with a hose and the culprits will move away.

The rarely seen, bizarre-looking turtle frog has also made an appearance in the metropolitan area, with one being found in Kings park. Another was caught by a dog, which suffered for his trouble with a frothing mouth caused by skin toxins.

All frogs secrete a varying toxicity of poison through glands around their body. Equally, though, human handling of delicate-skinned frogs has a damaging effect on the poor old frog. So be careful!

For more stories on frogs, visit your local library. Better still, rush to your local wetland and, in the solitude of thick vegetation, experience an orchestra of sound from frog calls like you've never dreamed possible.

JOHN HUNTER

DID YOU KNOW?

- *Frogs appeared on Earth about 180 million years ago. About 2 700 species of frogs and toads exist today.*
- *Toads are different from frogs. They have a broader, flatter body and darker, drier, warty skin. No toads occur naturally in Australia.*
- *A frog's eyes bulge out, enabling nearly all-round vision. To aid the swallowing of prey, the eyes sink through openings in the skull and force food down the throat.*

Teacher's pet.

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Orange chat Photo - Michael Morcombe

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