

FIRE versus FAUNA.by M. Law.

With the advent of aerial burning and the almost spontaneous ignition of large tracts of forest, the time seems opportune to discuss the effects this method of burning may have on the continued existence of our forest fauna.

Following the fires which swept throughout much of the Dwellingup Division in 1961, one rarely observed until quite recently, any species of fauna in the burnt areas. Areas unburnt at that time were inhabited by normal fauna and bird life. There may have been a mass exodus from the fire areas, but this is doubtful and is not verified by excess numbers of fauna in adjacent unburnt areas. My impressions are that the animals, rather than evacuating en masse in the face of the fire, run confused until succumbing to the smoke and flames.

With the exception of the larger marsupials, many of our fauna breed in select areas often associated with rivers and swamps. These conclusions were reached by observation and field confirmation by naturalist Mr. Harry Butler, of the W.A. Museum, who visited Dwellingup.

A brighter picture associated with aerial burning appears to be that many of the breeding sites in the jarrah forest are located on the river systems and adjacent swamplands; I am led to believe that these areas do not lend themselves easily to aerial burning. The areas of swampland do not burn readily in spring and could be ground burnt in Autumn. This would temporarily destroy breeding sites, but would, I feel, be preferable to a total aerial burn in late Autumn.

Bearing these points in mind, we should perhaps endeavour to observe breeding grounds and note their locations with a view to their preservation. It is realised that this will present difficulties as regards aerial burning, many possibly unavoidable. Whatever the problems, we should strive to preserve our diminishing fauna and create conditions suitable for the prolific growth of all desirable species.
