

# *Wetland Reflections*

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The landscape of the Swan Coastal Plain is sprinkled with picturesque lakes and swamps. Perth is particularly fortunate to have such a beautiful setting on the Swan and Canning Rivers with Cockburn Wetlands to the south and Wanneroo Wetlands to the north.

Previous generations often failed to appreciate the significance of wetlands for waterfowl conservation, fisheries and groundwater supplies. Wetlands were drained, filled or polluted to meet short-term human needs.

So many of the original coastal wetlands have been lost since the European settlers first arrived, those which remain are a priceless biological resource. People now recognize that they are an important part of our natural heritage, and they play a vital role in recreation, conservation, education and tourism.

The beauty of wetlands is subtle and profound. The most obvious attractions are immediately apparent: an everchanging panorama of paperbarks, reeds and water. Closer observation reveals a complex biological web in which water, nutrients, soil and light





support an amazing variety of plants and animals. On the water and around the lake margins are many waterbirds, a visual delight. Paperbarks, reeds and water blend in a harmonious relationship of the Spectacles Swamp in Medina (opposite page).

The shoreline of North Lake is dominated by reeds, paperbarks and flooded gums (below left).

The Great Crested Grebe is a striking sight on the freshwater coastal lakes of the south west (above).

The Great Egret is a graceful wading bird often seen feeding by freshwater lakes (right).

The Dusky Moorhen is a familiar sight in the reeds and long grass around the fringes of the coastal wetlands (below).





Many of the coastal wetlands dry out in summer. These swamps play an important role as a spring and summer habitat for wading birds.

As the swamps dry out the long-necked tortoise burrows into the mud and hibernates until winter rains refill the swamp (opposite). Swamps are an important habitat for reptiles such as the dugite. It inhabits the dry margins feeding on mice and frogs (left).

Sunset at Lake Joondalup: a serene blend of water, reeds and paperbarks (below).



If you probe deeper into the ecology of the wetlands you will find many small birds, mammals, reptiles, insects and plants which live interdependently. No other natural system on the Coastal Plain has such a diverse range of wildlife.

The coastal wetlands are the cradle of life for many native creatures. Most of the wildlife of the coastal plain is dependent to some extent on the wetlands and their fringing woodlands for food and water supplies.

The observant visitor will always find something new beyond the dominant beauty of the sky, water, reeds and paperbarks.





One of the most charming native animals of the wetlands, is the short-nosed bandicoot which lives in the fringing woodlands and feeds on the abundant supplies of insects, worms and spiders (left).

Many varieties of spiders, including this large-jawed spider, may be found around the margins of the wetlands where they feed on insects such as mosquitoes and midges (below right).

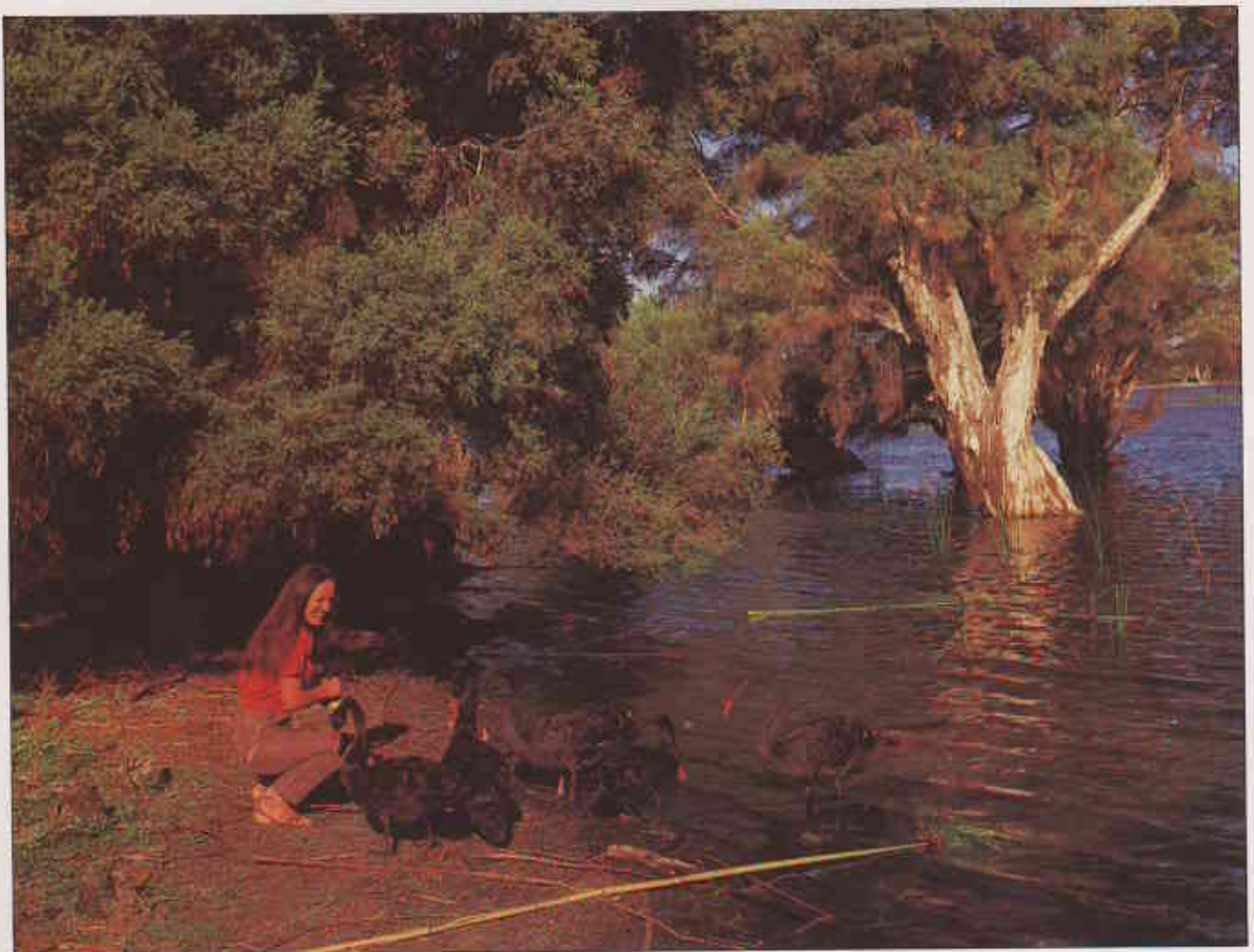
The blue damselfly is another intricate and lovely creature which depends on the wetlands for its survival (below left).

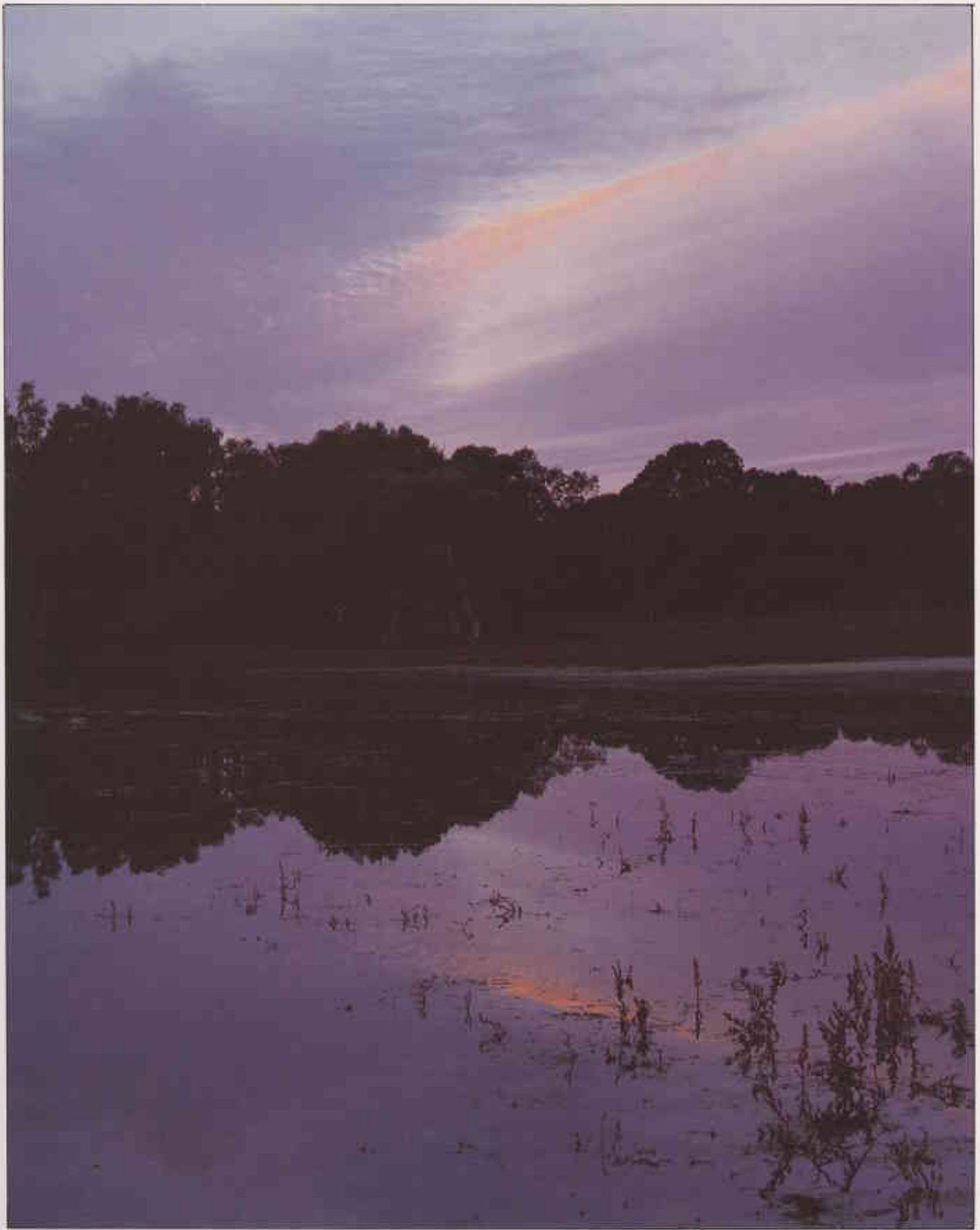
The freshwater wetlands are an essential breeding place for many species of frogs such as the banjo frog shown here. Its colourful markings serve as camouflage, providing protection from its many predators (bottom).





The wetlands also support a rich and diverse flora. Close to the lakes the dominant species are the large paperbarks and the stately flooded gums. Trunks and branches often form fascinating shapes and patterns such as those in the bark of this old freshwater paperbark (left). The reeds are another distinctive feature of the wetlands, and their blossoms have an unusual form and structure (above).





*What would the world be, once bereft  
of wet and of wildness? Let them be left  
O let them be left, wildness and wet.*

Gerard Manley Hopkins

As the city grows the coastal wetlands are becoming increasingly important for recreation and wildlife conservation.

Urbanisation stresses these delicate biological systems, and it is a challenge to

our society to find a way to live in harmony with the wetlands and their creatures. They are an irreplaceable gift from nature which we must manage carefully if our descendants are also to enjoy their charm and tranquility.



# Landscape

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## COVER PHOTO

A tender moment between human and whale shows the care which was a feature of the highly successful Augusta whale rescue.

Photo courtesy of the Western Mail.

## A Conflict of Interests

Why are there so many conflicts when it comes to our natural environment? There is conflict among industrial groups exploiting natural resources; environmentalists advocating preservation of wildlife; government agencies; and recreation groups.

In an ideal world we would have a total understanding about ecosystems and natural resources, and of the long term needs of the community. But this is not an ideal world, and much of the conflict stems from a lack of agreement about environmental impact and human needs.

Take whale strandings for instance. From the time whales beach, tissue damage occurs due to a rise in body temperature and the sheer weight of the mammal. We don't know how long they have to lie there and how hot they have to get before the chances of survival are next to nil. Strandings may be part of a natural culling process or accidents caused by human impact on the environment. And, what about the people who turn out in large numbers under often adverse conditions, and become so emotionally caught up in saving these creatures? What weight do we put on their need?

It is not an ideal world. We are a long way from knowing the answers to too many important questions.

There is a need for more investigation, better communication and a broader understanding of environmental processes and human needs.

This brings us to *Landscape* and its purpose. Its prime objective is to achieve an understanding about conservation of ecosystems and management of natural resources.

*Landscape's* aim is to provide expert information on the major conservation issues, latest developments, research in progress and general features of the State's wildlife, national and marine parks, nature reserves and forests.

It will give a balanced representation of viewpoints and will not shy from contentious issues.

*Landscape* will inform readers about the natural wonders of our environment, the management considerations involved and the lifestyle of its inhabitants. It will not provide all the answers, but it will present the facts and therefore a basis for sound argument.

*Landscape* is Western Australia's own conservation and wildlife magazine.

## Wetlands

The theme for this year's World Environment Day has been 'Wetlands — Not just for the Birds'. In this issue of *Landscape* we feature the ecological importance of wetlands.