



A Year in Lilliput

Story and Photographs by Grant Wardell-Johnson

The islands of rock rising above the forest and shrubland in the South-West are vestiges of an ancient land — the residual remains of eroded plains. These granite outcrops provide variation in the gentle landscape, and many reward a climb with a fine view over the surrounding countryside. They also offer the inquisitive a lilliputian spectacle of the seasonal cycle of life. Let us take a year-long journey to some of these outcrops



December: rare summer flowers, a geranium



January: bottlebrush



and an elbow orchid



The marbled gecko is active throughout summer.

In summer the outcrops bake and plants are exposed to searing winds. The rock and soil surface appears dry and lifeless, but don't be deceived. One careless step on the dry and fragile lichen may destroy many years' growth. This seemingly sterile surface will spring to life with the first winter rains.

While summer lingers, however, lichen and other plants near the rock surface are brittle, and the bulbs and corms of many perennials lie hidden in the shallow soil. The leaves of the



February: bottlebrush with lichen.



April: lichens on Mt Roe.



March: dried lichens.



May: colour comes back to the rock.

shrubs in the deeper soil aprons appear as muted greys, golds, browns and blues. Animal life, however, is very visible. The rocks and crevices of the outcrop surface provide shelter and habitat for many reptiles active only during the warmer months.

As the first winter rainstorms flood the granite, the thin soil becomes water logged and a new world is revealed. The almost-bare rock springs to life. Lichens, mosses and algae clinging to tiny depressions in the rock suddenly appear alive and vibrant. A multitude of shapes, colours and textures is visible.



June: battlebrush on Mt Roe.



and fully opened.



July: sundews emerging



Sundews are deadly insectivorous plants with flypaper-like traps.

Where the soil and natural litter have accumulated a few millimetres of depth, a moss sward develops. The storage organs of plants hidden in the dry moss of summer respond rapidly to the surge of moisture.

As the lizards of summer disappear, they are replaced by other animals. Tiny, fragile invertebrates appear in the rock pools, and frogs shelter during the day under the rocks near the pools.

Granite outcrops harbour many rare and restricted species because of the unusual and patchy habitat that they provide. Fire is a rare visitor because of the natural fuel breaks created by the rocks' surfaces. Many ancient gnarled, lichen-covered stems are left on the outcrops after fire has swept through the surrounding bush. There is a greater effective rainfall in soil pockets



August: fungus and moss sward



October: sun orchid



Coral lichen and moss sward



September: snakebush



November: daisy in a moss sward

around the base of outcrops. A good example of this is the jarrah trees growing around the base of Jilakin Rock in the northern wheatbelt a long way from their normal range. By contrast, because the thin surface soil dries quickly, some species which are characteristic of dry regions are found in granite outcrops in the moist South-West.

Granite outcrops are special places, deserving interest and care. Next time you visit a rock outcrop, take a close look at its living features. You might need to be on your hands and knees to appreciate the detail. Take care not to slip, but also not to break up the delicate swards that take so long to grow and develop. Don't forget that you are a giant privileged to take a peek into Lilliput.

Landscape

Volume 2 No. 3
Autumn Edition/March 1987

Contents	Page
Home On The Range by Dr Barry Wilson	3
Garden For Wildlife by Robert Powell	9
Diplomats From Day One: W.A.'s Stromatolites	11
Urban Antics — A Haunting in Suburbia by Andrew Cribb	15
Exploits At Icy Creek	16
A Year In Lilliput by Grant Wardell-Johnson	17
The Writing on the Wall by Howard McNickle	22
The Nostalgic Naturalist by Old Timer	28
Wildfire by Colleen Henry-Hall	29
Gimlets and Gold — The Story of Kalgoortie's Woodlines by Cliff Winfield	34
A Swamp For All Seasons by Susan Moore	41
Letters	47



Published by Dr S. Shea, Executive Director, Department of Conservation and Land Management, 50 Hayman Road, Como, W.A. 6152.

Executive Editor: Sweton Stewart
Editor: Liana Christensen
Designer: Trish Ryder

All Maps by Department of Conservation and Land Management Mapping Section.

Offset plates by Photolitho-PM.
Typesetting by Printworks.

Printed in Western Australia by the Department of Services, State Printing Division, ISSN 0815-4465.

© All material copyright. No part of the contents of the publication may be reproduced without the consent of the publishers.

Editorial

W.A. is a vast, sparsely populated State, and it is not uncommon to hear some parts of it described as 'the last frontier'. But there are few, if any, parts of W.A. that have not been affected by European settlement.

Evidence of western civilization in some of the most remote areas is far too often the empty can. But even where there are no obvious traces, the effects have been profound.

There is compelling evidence, for example, that the displacement of Aboriginal communities from much of inland W.A. — and the subsequent removal of Aboriginal firing practices — is directly responsible for major changes in vegetation, which in turn has resulted in the virtual extinction of many native animals.

It is not always easy to pick the effects of European civilization on the natural environment even when the history is well-documented. This *Landscape's* account of the woodlands around Kalgoortie talks about the often horrific environmental damage, but an observer of these woodlands today would have difficulty recognizing that vast areas were clearfelled less than 50 years ago.

While the concept that we should 'let nature do its thing' has superficial appeal, the reality is that the purity of nature has been, and will continue to be, distorted by human presence. We have no option if we want to sustain the unique ecosystems of W.A. but to apply management principles.

The history and management problems of Benger Swamp, which feature in this edition, illustrates two fundamental points. Firstly, even the most disturbed areas of W.A. can make a major contribution to conservation. Secondly, we must be careful not to change a system that works even though the way it works may not be 'natural'.

As complex and as difficult as the task of understanding ecosystems is, the social and political factors which influence the type of management that can be applied are often more difficult to deal with.

The key to good management is an understanding of the processes that drive the ecosystem. Once we understand what the natural processes are, we can then devise management systems which will mimic them.

The only way to ensure that rational decisions are made on environmental management is to provide the facts.

COVER PHOTO

Just when you thought you had seen every angle on our State symbol, photographer Jiri Lochman surprises you with a fresh perspective.