



The Nostalgic Naturalist

by Old Timer

It was one of those days in late summer, a real stinker with no breeze and the air so moist you could pour it. Then came a blinding flash and simultaneous ear-splitting crash as a bolt of lightning speared into a roof top just over the road.

I don't know whether it was the ozone from the lightning, or the noise of the thunder jolting my brain, but almost as if I was standing there I could visualize those storms in the Kimberley, when I was a young bloke. As the thunderstorm filled in, a rainsquall entered the street and rushed away to the north, with my memory jogging along behind it.

Old Ginger had just put in a 'wet' as a carpenter on the Wyndham meatworks construction job. He was a bit of a loner, a funny bloke. While the rest of the workers were down at the pub at every opportunity, Ginger would be climbing the Bastion or borrowing a horse to 'have a bit of a squiz'. I was a bit that way myself, so when I saw him sitting at the end of the jetty 'watchin crocs', another of his pastimes, I sauntered out with a view to having a chat.

'G'day Ginge, what's happening?' I asked.

He looked around a bit startled. 'Orh, ya frightened six months growth out of me!! G'day young fella, I was daydreaming. A flock of birds just flew in towards Parry Creek, reminded me of a day one of the old tribesmen took me in to see the birds. Hey you're interested in the bush aren't you?'

'Yeah, I suppose I am,' I replied, sensing another one of Ginger's yarns coming on.

'Well, that place is like magic. In five minutes I can show you more than an eyeful of birds, more than you've ever seen at once, millions of them!'

Very few people ever doubted Ginger, he was about six foot and eighteen stone, but I must admit that I thought he was exaggerating a bit. He must have sensed my disbelief. 'Come Good Friday,' he said. 'If you want to, I'll borrow some horses and we'll get the Babblin (cook) to make up some crib and we'll have, like a picnic, and I'll show you the bloody birds!' he roared jovially. Just then the black sky started to spit, in normal fashion for that time of the year, and Ginger and I dashed for cover.

Slowly, over the next month or so, the clouds got less and less. Easter came around, and there hadn't

been any rain for a while. A cool breeze was wafting in from the south-east, and there wasn't a cloud in the sky. On Good Friday Ginger and I rode out to the Nine Mile, then headed north on a track across the flat towards Parry Lagoons. The flat was like an endless green felt table, with a few boab skittles here and there. It was dry for the most part, and the horses were able to negotiate the black-soil plain without difficulty.

Ginger hushed me and pointed to a drying swamp a hundred yards away. At first it seemed lifeless, but as my eyes became adjusted I realised that I couldn't see the banks of the lagoon for birds. Then one of the horses snorted and as if they were one almighty creature, thousands and thousands, or maybe a million ducks left the water and the grass surrounding the lagoon to blacken the sky like a thunderhead. I just sat there in wonderment and said 'Strewth!'. Ginger just smiled.

It seems that during the 'wet' the whole of the flat is mostly immersed and so is an excellent habitat for waterbirds. As the monsoon ends, the flat dries out and the birds are forced to concentrate on the more permanent pools. Flash Mick, another old Wyndham man, was in town a month or so ago. He tells me that in April or May, or when the track is dry enough, the quiet observer can still catch a good eyeful of waterbirds on Parry Lagoons Nature Reserve.

True as I'm sittin' here, cheers.

For more information on the reliability of the Old Timer's tale, contact the CALM office in Kununurra.
Ed



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 Kalgoorlie'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 Kalgoorlie 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.