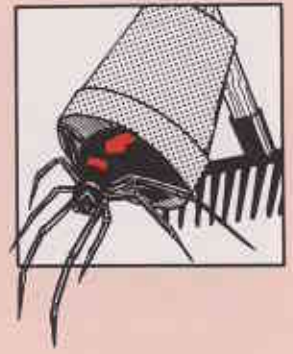


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# URBAN ANTICS

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## Spiders

by Liana Christensen

Since the disappearance of the *al fresco* dunny, close encounters of the arachnid kind are less common. But from time to time that shy city dweller, the red-back spider, will take up residence in your letterbox, meter box or under the capping on an asbestos fence.

Spiders inspire a mixture of fascination and horror. Some of us execute a little dance of fear when we spot a daddy longlegs in the bathroom, or a wolf spider has been brought in with the laundry, but there's no real need for a tarantella. In W.A. we are lucky not to have anything so venomous as the tarantula, and we are more fortunate than our eastern cousins who have to contend with the deadly funnel web.

The funnel-shaped web of the black house spider, which is found under westralian eaves, often gives people some anxious moments, but rest assured this spider is not at all aggressive, and, although its bite is venomous, it is far from deadly. The only species urbanites need to be really cautious about is the red-back.

Despite the red-back's fearsome appearance - an adult female abdomen can be as large as one centimetre across, adorned with livid red markings - they are likely to be more frightened of you than you are of them. Rather than outface a human, most will try to escape or play possum by curling their legs and dropping to the ground. They seldom bite humans. If disturbed while napping on a garden tool, however, or mayhap affronted by an alien hand groping in their dark dwelling, or, in the outhouse, an awesome, moonlike sphere descending, they may have no option but to bite. And their bite - especially that of a female guarding egg sacs - is considerably worse than their bark.

A red-back bite can kill a small child within a few hours. Adults who are allergic to the venom will suffer serious illness. Symptoms include intense, localised pain, swelling and sweating five minutes after the bite; pain and swelling throughout the body after about 30 minutes; headaches, nausea and vomiting may occur after an hour. Profuse sweating is typical.

If the very thought of spiders brings you out in a sweat, consider this comforting fact: since 1979,

nobody in W.A., and only two people in Australia, have died from spider bites. In the extremely unlikely event that you are bitten: keep as quiet and still as possible, use ice packs (not direct freezing) to reduce the pain, do not use a tourniquet, do not cut the bitten area. Major hospitals will be able to administer anti-venene or admit you for observation if necessary.

Before you dedicated arachnophobes get out the spray and douse your environs 'just to be on the safe side', stop and think. There is no appropriate all-purpose anti-arachnid aerosol which will guarantee you never again have to come eye-to-compound-eye with a spider, so there is no point using insecticides unnecessarily. The recommended poisons are highly residual, and more likely to be hazardous than the occasional spider. A little common sense is all that's needed.

When you do have the odd encounter, you might as well use the old boot-heel method, unless you are lucky enough to have somebody in the family with Buddhist leanings, who can be relied upon to relocate the offending beastie with a minimum of fuss. Serve the eviction notice with the help of a straw broom, and an upturned jar or icecream container: use the broom to bring the spider within reach, trap it with the jar or container, then slide a thin, stiff lid underneath and transport it outside. This is not a recommended method with red-backs, but it can be successfully employed with black house-spiders, huntsman spiders, wolf spiders and the like.



# LANDSCOPE

Volume 3 No. 2  
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Contents	Page
Gulls by Catherine Meathrel .....	3
Magic Spot .....	7
Bush Telegraph .....	8
Sadwrap by Liana Christensen .....	10
Nostalgic Naturalist .....	15
W.A.'s Rainforests by N. McKenzie, K. Kenneally and C. Winfield .....	16
Portfolio — Michael Morcombe by Sweton Stewart .....	23
Local Heroes by Andrew Cribb .....	26
Urban Antics: Spiders by Liana Christensen .....	34
Fire: Good Servant; Poor Master by Colleen Henry-Hall and John Smart .....	35
The Shannon by Rae Burrows .....	38
Dreaming for the Future by Chris Haynes .....	40
Letters .....	46

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## Cover Photo

We've heard of wolves baying at the moon, but frogs? Obviously, this amphibian is not above displaying a little lunacy. Nor is the photographer, Jiri Lochman, who must have been moonstruck to get this superb shot.

## EDITORIAL

Every year at this time the subject of bush fires becomes a preoccupation with land managers. Steps must be taken to ready fire-fighters and their equipment; hazards must be identified and minimised; education programs for neighbours and visitors must be renewed. Fires are inevitable. The combination of hot, dry weather, inflammable fuels in the bush and ignition from lightning or careless people will see to it that almost every day over the next few months Conservation and Land Management Staff or Bush Fire Brigades will be fighting a bush fire somewhere in the State. Because of modern technology and efficient fire control practices, land managers these days can very largely determine the fire regime which is to be applied in a given area. For example, in most of the land CALM is responsible for, the policy is to try to keep fire out, pending a better understanding of ecological requirements. In a small proportion of the CALM estate (notably parts of the south-west forests), regular, controlled burning is done. The aim of this operation is to minimise the risk of serious wildfires in places where values are highest. The most important value to be considered in the South-West is human life. In this edition of *Landscape* readers are urged to recognise their individual responsibilities. Most importantly, these are to make their own houses safe from bush fires and to learn how to look after themselves and their families if a fire occurs. This dual approach by land managers and householders will help combat the worst consequences of one of nature's most dangerous and predictably-occurring events: the Australian summer bushfire.

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