

BUSH TELEGRAPH

Marri Blossom Time



J. Lochman

How blase West Australians can sometimes be to the beauty that surrounds them! One of the finest blooms of marri ever seen occurred in summer-autumn 1988. Throughout the South-west masses of creamy, blossom-covered trees were bordering road verges, or growing in paddocks, forests and woodlands. Yet hardly a comment

was heard. Certainly no fuss was made in the media, as it is when the cherry trees flower in Japan or Washington, the jacarandas in Grafton, the poincianas in Brisbane, or even the apple trees in Donnybrook.

Perhaps the problem is that a mass flowering of marri only occurs infrequently, and cannot reliably be predicted.

In general, marri trees tend to flower about every two years, but there is a four or eight-year cycle between the sort of mass, synchronised flowering which we saw throughout the South-west this year. Another dramatic marri blossom in recent times was in the summer of 1972/3. The flowering that year was so prolific that foresters at Manjimup commissioned a special aerial photography mission to provide the definitive data base on the distribution of the species. Marri grows throughout the South-west, developing into a pure forest in some rare spots like Beedelup National Park, but more often growing in mixture with jarrah, karri or blackbutt.

Although conventional bush wisdom has it that a mass flowering of marri foretells an early, heavy winter, this is not supported by rainfall records. Research into mass eucalypt flowering has yet to provide anything conclusive about either the causes or the effects. Nonetheless, any good bushie can tell you the significance of a heavy marri blossom - plenty of honkey nuts the next year!

Marri is a curiously underrated tree. For most of the years of European settlement West Australians always seemed to have preferred jarrah and karri for timber, wandoo for honey, and red flowering gum as an ornamental tree. Even on farms, where marri grows into such a superb shade tree, it is often cleared if the trees are thought to harbour the *Armillaria* fungus, which destroys fruit trees.

'Marri Blossom Time' may never become a West Australian festival, but should always be a cause for celebration. The blossom provides us with scenes of unsurpassable beauty, with nectar for birds and beekeepers, and eventually a bumper crop of marri seed for regeneration work in the forest and the raising



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of marri seedlings in nurseries for the replanting of farms, minesites and dieback areas.

It also reminds us of some of the qualities of this species. Marri is a tough survivor in the W.A. environment. It copes with fire, dieback and leaf miner; with sandy, gravelly or clayey soils; it regenerates easily, grows quickly and flowers prolifically at a very young age. Although good sawlogs are rare, the timber is strong and beautiful. Marri is used most often for fine writing paper, nectar, shade and amenity.

So fellow West Australians, let's take stock of and pay tribute to the marri - the South-west's all round beautiful gum tree.

Roger Underwood

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EDITORIAL

Anybody who reads tourist brochures in this State will appreciate that the tourist industry is, to a large extent, dependent on natural features and wildlife for its 'product'. Many people who are concerned with the natural environment are antagonistic to tourism, and it is certainly true that in the past there have been some insensitive tourist developments in the State. But, just as the farming community over the past ten years has become one of the greatest allies of conservation, so, increasingly, is the tourist industry. For example, in a recently published tourist industry report on tourism in the Kimberley, the need to preserve this environment was given top priority.



Shark Bay, p.8

This report is indicative of the growing awareness in that industry of the symbiotic relationship between tourism and the protection and maintenance of our unique flora, fauna and landscapes. Rather than being despoilers, the tourist industry has the potential to become one of the strongest advocates for conservation in the broadest sense.



Carving the Future, p.33

There is a great potential for synergism between those interested in the science of conservation and the tourist industry. One of the ways by which the tourist potential of any natural area can be enhanced without any cost to the environment is by providing information to the visitors on the natural science that makes that area special.



Garden Escapes, p.44

Landscape is one avenue by which we are attempting to provide an added dimension to the 'look it's lovely' tourist experience. Interestingly, while *Landscape* receives almost universal acclaim from the general public, there is ongoing, often vigorous, internal debate about how technical we should make the magazine. We would appreciate your views.

Cover Photo

'Now, just how do I find my way out of this Renoir landscape?'
Photographer **Richard Woldendorp** captured this lizard taking a sighting.



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