

# URBAN WILDLIFE ANTICS



## ALL WASHED UP

It was winter again and salt and sand stung my hands and face as I stood on my favourite suburban beach. I could already see a line of debris on the windswept beach. By tomorrow there would be wreckage of all descriptions.

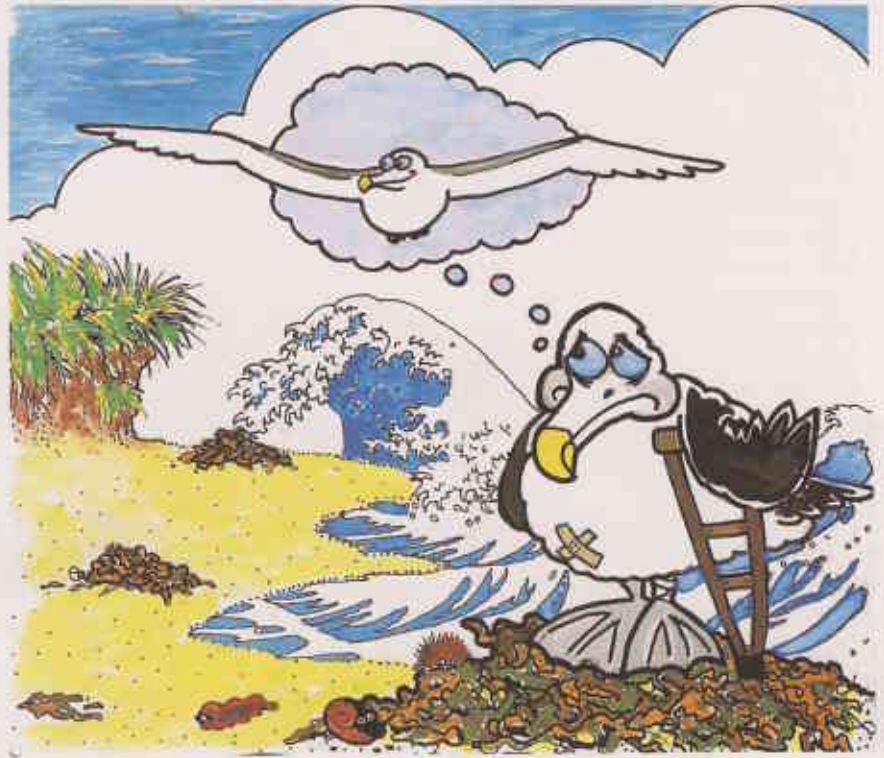
Winter beachwalking is a marvellous pastime, providing fine family recreation and stimulating the urge to learn. Our planet's oceans contain a myriad of life forms and dead, injured or exhausted marine dwellers litter our beaches after storms. In the past, quite a few rare or previously unknown sea creatures were "discovered" in this way, eventually finding their way into museums and science laboratories.

While most people are content to collect simple driftwood and sea shells, the more adventurous delve into the piles of seaweed to locate the remains of sponges, crustacea, softcorals, sea slugs, molluscs and other creatures.

Care should be taken when walking or probing through weed piles as, from time to time, poisonous tropical fish, sea snakes and jellyfish that have been caught in strange currents are washed up on South-West beaches. Use gloves or a stick to avoid possible injury.

Some of the most stirring discoveries are land wrecked sea birds. If you find one alive professional help must be sought before attempting rescue and rehabilitation. Contact a local vet, particularly if the bird is injured or, alternatively, experienced community volunteer groups can be recommended by CALM.

Many species which require treatment are members of the Procellariiformes group, which includes the albatrosses, shearwaters and petrels. They are completely oceanic and only visit land to nest. Currents, a food source or winds sometimes bring them unusually close to land, and if a storm develops they can be blown ashore or washed up on the beach.



When located by walkers, the birds look normal and seem quite sedate. In fact under their beautiful plumage, beach wrecked storm petrels and the like are usually emaciated, dehydrated, starving and exhausted and give the false impression of being tame.

If you find an oceanic bird handle it as little as possible; touching the plumage with bare hands damages and de-oils the feathers. A towel should be used.

The birds are wild creatures and their beaks can be dangerous. The legs and feet, which cannot be used properly on land, are often damaged when they are dumped heavily on a land surface.

Birds being rehabilitated have to be force-fed with fresh fish and, usually, prescribed medicines. Dehydration is also a problem. At sea the birds drink seawater and excrete the salt through a gland near their beaks. Some seabird rescue groups suggest they should be given seawater to drink during rehabilitation.

There are many other special requirements for rehabilitating oceanic birds, so remember, please seek professional help and your winter beach walks will be even more worthwhile.

**JOHN HUNTER**

### *Did you know...*

*After a storm in 1984, 247 wrecked birds were found on suburban beaches; 35 were later released.*

*Oil soaked plumage no bigger than a one cent coin is enough to destroy a bird's insulation.*

*Wildlife officers can advise what to do and where to go for wildlife strandings; phone 367 0292 or after hours 332 6368.*

*Australia is visited by 58 species of petrel, shearwater and albatross. The largest is the Wandering Albatross with a wingspan of up to 350 cm.*

# LANDSCOPE

VOLUME 4 NO 4 WINTER EDITION 1989



*Effluent disposal ponds from industry disfigure an idyllic strip of coastal land. But restoration work and a new conservation park are planned for the Leschenault Peninsula, near Bunbury. Turn to p.8.*



*Wood that was once only suitable for firewood can now be used to make high grade furniture. Find out how on p.24.*



*With spring approaching, the bush beckons...but without proper planning your walk could turn to disaster. See p.40.*



*A spectacular landscape, with an astounding array of plants and animals lies inland from Jurien Bay. Read about the Mt Lesueur area on p.28.*



*A population explosion of coral-eating snails threatens the unique reefs of Ningaloo Marine Park. How does CALM plan to counter their attack? See p.14.*

## COVER



*In W.A.'s far north, Aboriginal rangers with ties to land now in national parks draw on the traditional wisdom of their people for use in Park management. Photo-Robert Garvey*

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