

URBAN ANTICS!



ALIENS IN THE TREE TOPS



'Johnno!
I've seen
them ... near
Rosalie Park in
Subiaco, and this darn
goshawk zapped one. Took it right
down through the trees.'

Aliens were at large in the suburbs. If you're a keen wildlife observer, and have lived in Perth for the last 15 years or so, you would have detected the arrival of an alien species - the rainbow lorikeet.

The rainbow lorikeet (*Trichoglossus haematodus*), or Blue Mountain parrot, was traditionally an inhabitant of the wooded and coastal areas of eastern Australia. The striking plumage of bluish-purple, red-orange and dark green, leaves no doubt as to its identification. It flies very high, congregating in small hurtling flocks, attracting attention with thin piercing shrieks. The swiftly beating wings and quick body movements are emphasised by tapering swept wings and a pointed tail.

In *The Noah's Ark Syndrome*, author C.F.H. Jenkins states that in 1960 aviaries of rare parrots were established on Rottnest Island, with the purpose of future release and eventual establishment. Scientists and conservationists vigorously opposed the scheme and it was ultimately abandoned, but not before some unofficial releases. Dorothy Payne, editor of the *Western Australian Avicultural Magazine*, thinks that a storm up-ended the aviaries and the lorikeets

headed for the lush, established gardens and exotic trees west of Perth. Other theories proposed either that a small flock arrived under their own power from the eastern States, or that a local aviary escape occurred.

By whatever means they arrived in Perth, they were certainly here by 1962 when well-known naturalist Vincent Serventy saw a single specimen, and later a pair, feeding on tuart blossoms. Through the 1970s, the birds maintained low numbers in Nedlands, Claremont, Shenton Park, and occasionally Supreme Court Gardens in Perth. But by 1980, numbers had increased slightly and the range extended through Kings Park into Subiaco and Floreat.

About this time I thought of the possible repercussions of introducing new species, remembering what the starling, sparrow, fox and rabbit have done. Was this gregarious, aggressive outsider preparing to push out and eventually replace the local, easy-going twenty-eight parrot?

To date this hasn't happened, although in the last five years rainbow lorikeet numbers have increased markedly, and they are now reported north to Kingsley, west to Cottesloe and City Beach, east to Bayswater and Belmont and south to Murdoch.

The twenty-eights appear to be doing all right. This spring, large numbers were seen feeding in their preferred areas, on the ground and in medium-height, flowering trees. The lorikeets still prefer the high, exotic tree tops, but I must admit they are not as aloof as in the past, sometimes feeding on my two-metre tall bottle-brush trees.

Let's hope that the two species will tolerate each other.

JOHN HUNTER

Did you know ...

Lorikeets have brush-tipped tongues for blossom feeding, which demands lots of daily and seasonal mobility.

Nectar and pollen are the staple diet, while ripened fruit, insects, larvae, part-ripened maize and cultivated flowers are eagerly sought.

Blossoms are located by sight, or by the sounds of others feeding.

LANDSCOPE

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In the central Kimberley, a screw-pine-surrounded creek - just one of the threatened areas in this fragile frontier. Turn to page 22.



Until 1984 more was known about what was underneath the Nullarbor than what was on top. But with such a vast area to study, where do we start? See page 16.



Public awareness and involvement is vital in the conservation of WA's rare and endangered flora. Page 49.



Ten WA mammal species have become extinct in the last 200 years. What can be done to ensure no more are lost forever? Page 28.



Forests protect our environment. They also provide timber. How do we strike a balance? Turn to page 35.

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Dolphins and whales are perhaps the best-known inhabitants of Western Australia's coastal waters. But this unique area is also home to an astonishing range of marine flora and fauna, from sea-turtles and coral reefs in the north to sea-grass banks and great white sharks in the south. See page 10.

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