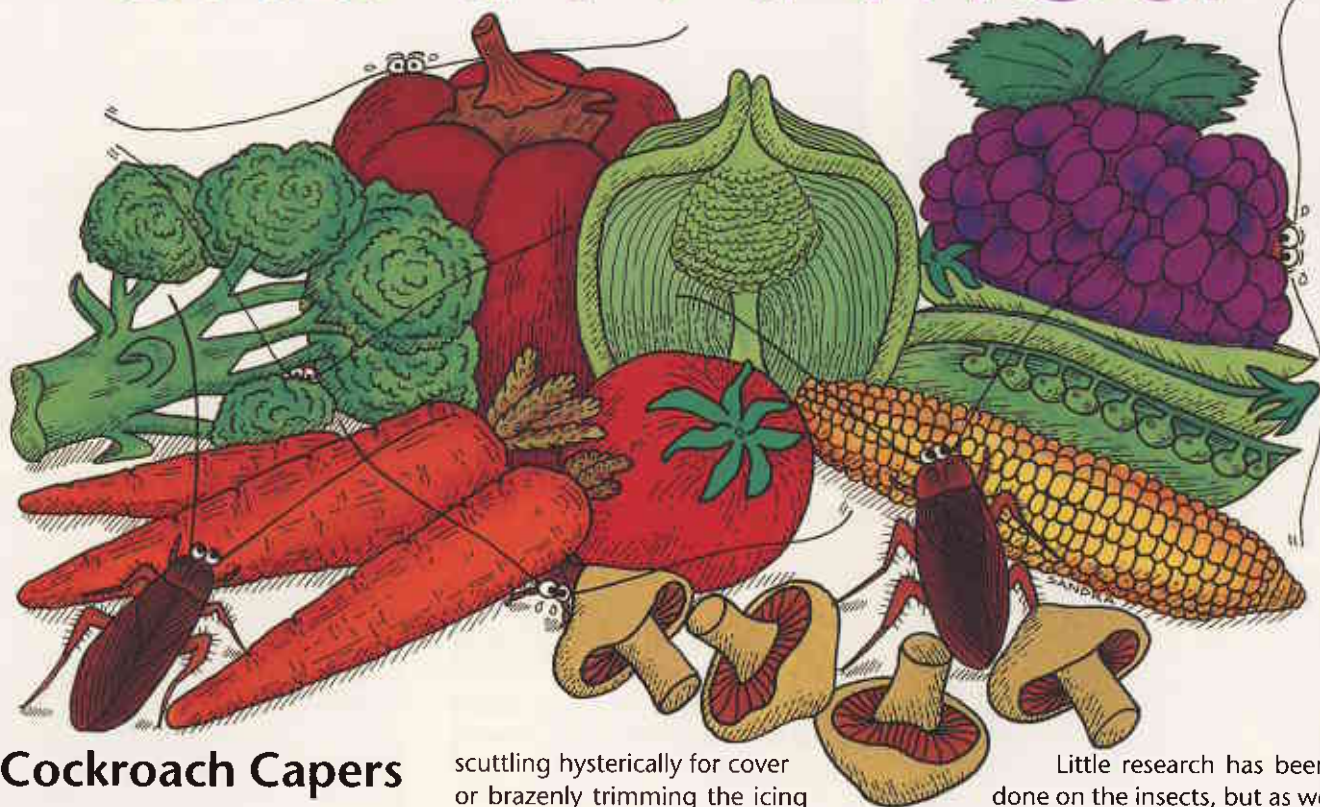


URBAN ANTICS!



Cockroach Capers

'I've got a question,' I said. 'What beasts can you find in remote Shark Bay as well as in a Perth city home?'

'Cockroaches,' came the quick humourless reply from my distant colleague. And he was right.

It was nearly summer again. While we yearned for those lazy days and balmy nights, we remembered that more than half of all households would soon be mercilessly besieged by hordes of revolting, disgusting, grotesque cockroaches.

Australia has about 450 native species of cockroach, which live in the bush quite independently of humans. They eat vegetation and, as scavengers and recyclers, are vital to a balanced environment.

It's the few introduced household pest species that scare the living daylight out of us on our late-night trips to the kitchen or toilet. They're the ones that give all the others a bad reputation.

While native cockroaches are all shapes and sizes, the pest species are generally flat and thick-set. They are omnivorous and able to run extremely fast. Mature insects have thick leathery wings which lie flat on the abdomen.

The four main types, often seen

scuttling hysterically for cover or brazenly trimming the icing off the birthday cake that you left on the sink to set, are the American, smokey-brown, Australian and German cockroaches - named after the places where they were first identified.

The beasts were thought to have originally emigrated from the caves of Africa when, at the dawn of *Homo sapiens*, they attached themselves to humanity and eventually spread on ships of trade throughout the world.

The small German speedster (10-15 mm) is the most widespread of any pest species, preferring to be indoors under the water heater where it's moist and warm. However, it is the big dark-brown American brute (28-44 mm) which is equally at home indoors or outdoors - needing only shelter, warmth, moist surroundings and a ready source of food.

The warm WA climate has been readily adopted by the voracious American cockroach, and the past 10-20 years have seen them become prolific in woodpiles, laneways, gardens, sewers, drains and any room in the house. Cockroaches can live on old leather, human hair, bird droppings, or the smear of oil on a cleaned kitchen bench.

Little research has been done on the insects, but as we know they eat and soil our food, it is logical to conclude that they contribute to the spread of disease.

The way to reduce the numbers of cockroaches in our homes is to make entry difficult, deny all food sources and disturb known hideouts as often as possible.

JOHN HUNTER

DID YOU KNOW?

- The rhinoceros cockroach from Queensland is the largest species on earth. This bush burrower grows to 80 mm long, weighs 30 gm, is armour-plated, and builds an underground tunnel up to 6 m in length.
- The female of most cockroach species lays eggs in a progressively grown, horny, purse-like case formed by special glands. In a few weeks the nymphs break out and begin to forage.
- Cockroaches roamed ancient fern forests 250 million years ago - 150 million before the dinosaurs and some 240 million before humans. They have survived plagues, radiation and modern insecticides to remain unchanged.

LANDSCOPE

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When European scientists first set foot on our shores they found a bewildering array of animals and plants. Péron the Explorer takes an intimate look at the French scientist whose name lives in Western Australia's newest national park. See page 20.



This tour of the Gascoyne's desert coast guides you through Shark Bay and WA's newest national park. See page 10.



Close to where the fictional Gulliver is believed to have been shipwrecked lives one of the world's oldest organisms. Lilliput's Castles, on page 34, describes the creatures and the ecosystem they have built.



Seagrass covers 3 700 square kilometres of the ocean floor around Shark Bay. Grasses of the Sea, on page 42, takes us on a journey through these underwater meadows.



At first glance, Shark Bay is dry, arid and inhospitable. But if you look more closely you discover its Hidden Treasures. See page 16.

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COVER

Green turtles (*Chelonia mydas*), the commonest turtles found along our coast, begin to congregate in the waters of Shark Bay from the end of July. The Bay is the southernmost nesting area for these long-lived animals. During summer, female green turtles lay their eggs on the white sandy beaches of Bernier, Dorre and Dirk Hartog Islands, and occasionally at the northern tip of Peron Peninsula. Illustration by Philippa Nikulinsky.



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