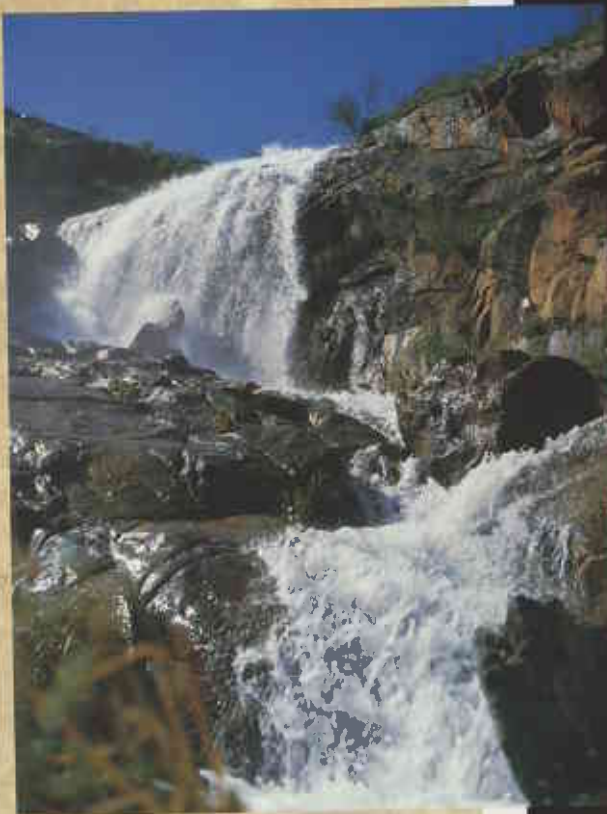


# THE HILLS FOREST

*by Stev Slavin and Ray Bailey*

*Lakes, trees, valleys, hills ...  
Stev Slavin and Ray Bailey  
show us some of the sights of  
Perth's closest working forest,  
set among the hills of the  
Darling Range, east of the city.*





**J**ust a short swan's flight up river from the blue-green waters of the Indian Ocean, Perth is sitting pretty. Few capital cities can boast such pleasant surroundings, with a sweep of natural parkland immediately to the west, a beautiful river environment on its doorstep, and magnificent bushland on its eastern and south-eastern borders.

This bushland largely consists of jarrah forest. Jarrah (*Eucalyptus marginata*), one of the world's densest hardwoods, grows only in the forests that stretch from Lancelin to Wanneroo, Mundaring to Dwellingup, Waroona to Nannup, and Manjimup to Denmark. A good portion of that forest is preserved in national parks; the best-known near to Perth is probably John Forrest National Park east of Midland. Nearly all the rest is managed as State forest for many uses, including water catchment, timber, recreation, nature conservation and research.

To the east and south-east of Perth, an innovative project called The Hills Forest is being launched by the Department of Conservation and Land Management (CALM), incorporating in its 80 000 hectares an important part of this precious forest. Just 30 minutes from the heart of the city, The Hills Forest is very much the bush in Perth's back yard. It covers five national parks (including John Forrest National Park), scenic Mundaring Weir, a large area of State forest, and Mt Dale. The Hills Forest is served by the towns of Mundaring and Kalamunda, and runs almost as far south as Karragullen. Its location makes it ideal for day-trippers who want to get out of the city for a few hours, perhaps to take a quiet, leisurely bush lunch amidst the trees and wildflowers of the magnificent native forest. Indeed, the area attracts the highest number of visitors in Western Australia after Fremantle and Northbridge.

The land here is old and rich in natural features. Some of the massive king jarrah trees that tower over the scene are several hundred years old. The jarrah and marri woodland are intermixed with other eucalypts on the valley floors, and in areas such as the Helena River valley, wandoo grows side by side with flooded gums. Somewhat closer to ground level, the large boulders so prominent in the landscape are made of some of the most



ancient granite and metamorphic rocks in the world; they date back almost to the time when the earth's crust cooled.

## SEASONAL ACTIVITIES

The Hills Forest offers visitors an all-year-round natural environment. In winter, when the Helena and Bickley Reservoirs and Lake Leschenaultia are full, the creeks and waterfalls, such as Lesmurdie Falls, captivate the eye and

ear, and cloudy skies accentuate the vivid yellows and golds of the wattles. In spring the wildflowers bloom, proliferating until early summer; this is the time for light breezes through the eucalyptus, and for sunset dinners off the beaten track. Autumn is for bushwalking and exploring, when the dusty green of the jarrah leaves turns amber in the late afternoon sunlight.

One of the most popular activities in The Hills Forest is the *Go Bush!*

### Previous page:

Enjoying the light and companionable warmth of a campfire at the Little Oven campsite near the Bibbulmin Track.

Photo - Jiri Lochman

*Inset:* The Lesmurdie Falls cascading over the Darling Scarp.

Photo - M & I Morecombe

### Above:

Golden rainbow (*Drosera microphylla*), part of the exquisite flora of the jarrah forest.

Photo - Babs and Bert Wells

### Below:

Scene of abundant life: a brook near the Brookton Highway.

Photo - Babs and Bert Wells







recreational program currently offered by CALM during school holidays. Designed for the enjoyment of individuals, families and groups, *Go Bush!* operates at least 20 different activities out of The Hills Forest.

'Forest Under Canvas' is an activity where family groups walk into the bush to spend the night in a secluded spot around the campfire under the stars and later under canvas. In the morning, activity leaders give tips and advice to those who want to organise their own night out in the bush. In another program, 'Night Shift', CALM staff take small groups of people out into the forest after dark to discover the action as the nocturnal forest inhabitants begin their 'day'. Sometimes known as spotlighting tours, these popular excursions take people stealthily through the bush to observe animals, birds and insects - and no doubt to be stealthily observed themselves, by frogs, owls, bats, moths, and the occasional kangaroo, all of which can see much better at night than humans.

The jarrah forest provides habitat for a range of wildlife. It is the home of the grey kangaroo; the quenda makes its refuge amongst the thick creek-side scrub; the brush wallaby and even the endangered numbat and chuditch have been seen here in recent years. The brown-headed honeyeater and the grey shrike-thrush dart through the tree tops, while rufous tree-creepers cling to the trunks of the larger trees.

The Hills Forest has a wide range of attractive locations. There are small ones, such as South Ledge, Big Log, and



**Left:**

The bull frog (*Litoria moorei*), a common resident of creeks and ponds in the Hills Forest.

Photo - Jiri Lochman

**Below:**

A grey shrike-thrush (*Colluricincla harmonica*) finds a meal in one of the hollows in a jarrah tree.

Photo - M & I Morecombe

The Dell; or, somewhat further from Perth, Mt Dale (70 km to the south-east near Brookton Highway) or Forsythe's Mill (40 km along the Great Eastern Highway). All these are splendid spots for picnics and bushwalking.

Then there are the bigger attractions. The Hills Forest is graced by five national parks: John Forrest, Gooseberry Hill, Greenmount, Kalamunda, and Lesmurdie Falls. In Mundaring Shire,

Helena River Reservoir (known to most metropolitan residents as the Mundaring Weir) is a popular destination, with the Mundaring Weir Gardens overlooking the dam and the O'Connor Museum at the foot near the Water Authority's pumping station. Not far away is Lake Leschenaultia; originally designed to supply the eastern railway with water for steam locomotives, the lake is now a picturesque expanse of water set amongst





the tall jarrah and marri trees, and teeming with fish.

There are wonderful walk trails. Southell Track begins at Fred Jacoby Park, then wanders for seven kilometres through the lower Helena Valley past Mundaring Weir. The Mundaring stretch of the Kattamorda Heritage Trail carries signs describing some of the local history, with prints of old photographs that hint at the lifestyles of those who lived in the area during the past 150 years. The famous Bibbulmin Track begins in The Hills Forest and journeys 650 km to Walpole on the south coast of WA. There is an easy-to-walk 10 km section from Kalamunda town to Mt Gunjin, with two

separate trails (the Kalamunda Circuit and the Little Oven Circuit) looping away and rejoining the track later.

Other walks explore gullies, granite outcrops, and the trees and plants of the hills. There are also trails for four legs instead of two; horse lovers particularly enjoy riding a beautiful track through the Lower Helena Valley, a gentle bridle trail through 40 km of bushland from Boya to Mundaring.

### FOREST CUSTODIANS

The Hills Forest is the first of a series of recreation areas planned by CALM, each focusing on a particular ecological type - in this case, a forest. The wooded

The rare chuditch (*Dasyurus geoffroii*) on nocturnal prowls.  
Photo - Jiri Lochman

**Below:**  
A night-time observer: the tawny frogmouth (*Podargus strigoides*) caught away from its usual jarrah-bark camouflage.  
Photo - Jiri Lochman

country will offer experiences for visitors to understand, value, and above all enjoy our unique natural environment. At the moment, people visit in high numbers, but they leave with memories of only a very small part of the area. Not many see its majestic waterfalls, the views it offers as far as Northam (some 65 km off to the north-east), or the old railway formations that carried trains on wooden rails.

This project, which will be developed during the next ten years, is beginning simply. As well as the creation of wide-ranging activities, recreation sites along Mundaring Weir Road will soon be improved. More trails for walkers, cyclists and horse riders are proposed. More picnic spots are being chosen, and will be designed to blend in with the bush. There are also plans for a bush campground, an environmental playground, interpretation trails, and even a 'demonstration' forest designed to show how a forest is managed. A further activity now being planned is a bushwalk, but one with a difference: it will be elevated, allowing visitors





impressive views while taking a stroll through the very canopy of the forest.

CALM is encouraging other land managers in the area to join them in offering the biggest range of recreation opportunities possible. The area's other custodians include the Water Authority and the shires of Kalamunda, Mundaring, Swan and Gosnells. All have tried to plan and manage public areas independently, often with meagre resources. The Hills Forest concept allows a better use of resources, and it may well create a new sense of identity for businesses and residents of the area.

### IMAGINATION IS THE LIMIT

The Hills Forest is not only the bush in Perth's back yard. It is an environmental opportunity for the future. The Hills Forest will promote the use of

public land to develop nature-based recreation experiences, to encourage a greater awareness of the many values of Australian forests.

The Hills Forest will still be managed for its primary functions of water catchment, nature conservation, wildlife protection, and timber production. Indeed, it is the aim of the forest managers that visitors will become aware of these forest processes and how they are managed. Other traditional uses of the area, for example bushwalking, horse riding and picnicking, will be encouraged and diversified to offer a greater variety of bush experiences.

But Hills Forest management has plenty of other ideas. CALM staff will plan and construct a range of self-guided walks and guided interpretation trails. Diverse activity programs will be

developed. The Forest Activities Centre is being constructed near the Mundaring Weir and will become the focus of the *Go Bush!* program. New sites will be developed and a wide variety of activities will be offered, from doing little and enjoying the sights to actively participating in a 'forest experience' group.

In The Hills Forest, imagination is the only limit! ☐

Stev Slavin is the manager of The Hills Forest and can be contacted on (09) 295 3149. Ray Bailey is Senior Communications Coordinator at CALM and can be contacted on (09) 389 8644.



**Above:**

A western grey kangaroo (*Macropus fuliginosus*) on the alert for intruders. Its numbers are high within The Hills Forest.

Photo - M & I Morecombe

**Above left:**

Misty morning in the Darling Range jarrah forest.

Photo - Jiri Lochman

**Left:**

High in the saddle along the Helena bridle trail.

Photo - Jiri Lochman





You don't have to go far from Perth to enjoy the peace and quiet of the bush. The forest is right on our doorstep. See page 10.



The increase of births in captivity for cockatoos seemed promising, but was it related to the upsurge in 'birdnapping' in the wild? To Catch a Thief explains how forensic experts unravelled the mystery. See page 28.

# LANDSCOPE

VOLUME SEVEN NO. 4 WINTER ISSUE 1992



Painted ladies, northern admirals, southern admirals and Western Australian skippers - not the stuff of a sailor's dream, but all members of the butterfly family. See page 23.



Our native animals are prey to introduced species. While baiting gives them a fighting chance, scientists are looking for more long-term, humane solutions. See page 16.



The bilby has many names, including ninu and dalgyte. Ninu Magic tells the story of this shy animal and its remarkable survival skills. See page 43.

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## COVER

The red-tailed black cockatoo (*Calyptorhynchus magnificus*) is one of several cockatoos native to Western Australia. These spectacular birds nest in tree hollows and can be found in the woodlands and grasslands of the south-west of Western Australia.

Illustration by Philippa Nikulinsky



Managing Editor: Ron Kawallak

Editor: David Gough

Contributing Editors: Verna Costello, Helenka Johnson, Tanyia Maxted, Carolyn Thomson

Scientific and technical advice: Andrew Burbidge, Roger Underwood

Design and production: Sue Marais, Stacey Strickland

Finished art: Gooitzen van der Meer

Advertising: Estelle de San Miguel ☎ (09) 389 8644 Fax: 389 8296

Illustration: Ian Dickinson, Sandra Mitchell

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