

LIVING WITH POSSUMS

The common brushtail possum is one of the most well-known Western Australian marsupials. Hunted extensively for its fur during the Depression, the species is now fully protected. Although still found throughout much of its former range in the south-west of the State, its numbers have been reduced in recent years.

Recent studies by the WA Museum have shown that the Tuart Forest National Park has the highest densities of brushtail possums in the State. More than 80 individuals occupy a 40-hectare site near the Abba River. Young are born between April and June. Hence, ranges overlap extensively, with up to five adults occupying an area of about three hectares. Peppermint is the principal diet at Ludlow, with some tuart also eaten.

While it may be tempting for campers to feed possums, the long-term effects on the animals can be negative. Changes to behavioural patterns could occur, with possums around campsites changing from leaf gatherers to scavengers, making them more susceptible to predation and injury. Any build-up of animal numbers around the campsites may also make the animals more prone to disease. They could also become a nuisance to campers.

For many years, possums in suburban roofs were removed with traps and released in other areas. Recent studies, however, have indicated that relocated animals do not fare very well, with resident possums forcing them out of trees and onto the ground, where they are more vulnerable to predation.

In any case, new possums soon move in to replace those removed. Instead of advice on

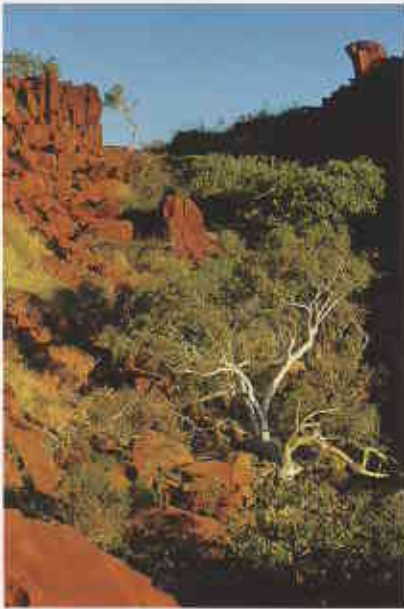
trapping, information on how to live with possums, blocking up holes in roofs, netting fruit trees and so on, is now given out by wildlife officers from the Department of Conservation and Land Management. This has been well received, and has resulted in much less trauma for the possums.

*Right and below:
In the metropolitan area, the common brushtail possum (Trichosurus vulpecula) is one of the few native mammals that has survived in close proximity to human society. However, its range in WA is now greatly reduced, probably due to predation by the introduced fox.
Photos - Ray Smith*



LANDSCOPE

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Nature-based tourism is a rapidly-growing industry and WA is poised to take a slice of that growth. See 'Our Natural Advantage' on page 10.



Frogs can be an interesting addition to any suburban native garden. Grant Wardell-Johnson describes how to attract them to your garden on page 16.



'Seagrass, Surf and Sea Lions' (page 21) are just some of the features of a string of islands that dot the WA coastline north of Lancelin.



Forrestdale Lake is an 'Outer City Sanctuary' for thousands of visiting and resident waterbirds. See page 35.



When is a flower not a flower? Neville Marchant, from CALM's WA Herbarium unravels the intricacies of the State's many 'False Flowers' on page 39.

FEATURES

OUR NATURAL ADVANTAGE

SYD SHEA & JIM SHARP 10

FROGS IN THE GARDEN

GRANT WARDELL-JOHNSON 16

SEAGRASS SURF AND SEA LIONS

CAROLYN THOMSON & GREG POBAR 21

WILLIAM DAMPIER

SUZANNE CURRY 28

OUTER CITY SANCTUARY

ROD GIBLETT 35

FALSE FLOWERS

NEVILLE MARCHANT 39

FOOTPRINTS ON THE SANDS OF TIME

KEN McNAMARA & NIGEL TREWIN 44

OIL IN THE LEAVES

LIZ BARBOUR & JOHN BARTLE 49

REGULARS

IN PERSPECTIVE 4

BUSH TELEGRAPH 6

ENDANGERED THE SWAMP FLOWER 27

URBAN ANTICS 54

COVER

The bull frog (*Litoria moorei*) is very large and has a voracious appetite. It is a frequent visitor to gardens and may be found particularly in greenhouses, ferneries and wet areas such as streams and ponds.

The illustration is by Philippa Nikulinsky, inspired by a Peter Marsack photograph, courtesy of Lochman Transparencies.



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