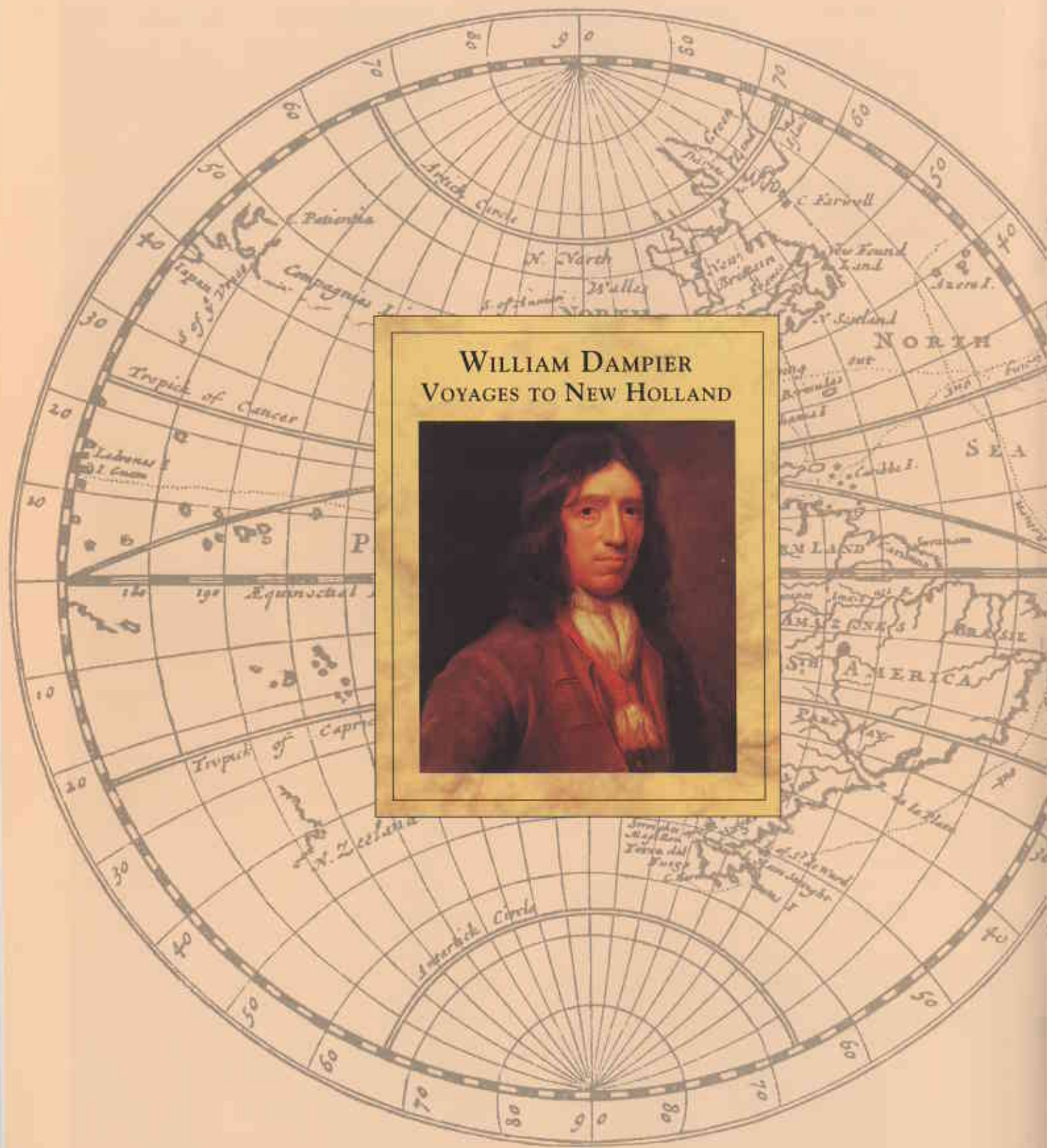


WILLIAM DAMPIER  
VOYAGES TO NEW HOLLAND



Old men ought to be explorers ...  
Through the dark cold and the empty desolation  
The wave cry, the wind cry, the vast waters  
Of the petrel and the porpoise. In my end is my beginning.

From T.S. Eliot, East Coker, 1944.

♦

In the Sherardian Herbarium at the University of Oxford is a small but unique collection of dried plant specimens. Collected in 1699, they are those of the circumnavigator and natural historian William Dampier. They represent the first botanical collections made by an Englishman in Australia.

♦

BY SUZANNE CURRY



**I**n 1679, Dampier began his first voyage around the world. It was not a planned, single voyage. Instead, he travelled on various ships, worked in several places and slowly made his way in a westerly direction. It was during one stage of this voyage, in 1688, that Dampier had his first encounter with Australia, then known as New Holland.

Dampier left Spanish America in 1686 to cross the Pacific on the *Cygnets*, under the command of Captain Swan. He was keen to establish better trade links between England and the Spice Islands and to find safer trade routes while mapping the unknown eastern coast of New Holland. However, the ship followed a more northerly route than was planned, via China and the East Indies, and came upon the north-western coast of what is now Western Australia.

On 15 January 1688, near the islands later known as the Buccaneer Archipelago, the WA coastline was sighted. Extensive studies reveal that the *Cygnets*, now under the command of Captain Read, probably sailed into Karrakatta Bay at the entrance to King Sound, where she remained until March of the same year.

### DAMPIER'S FIRST ACCOUNT OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA

Although no natural history collections were made on this particular voyage, Dampier did make some interesting observations on the country and its inhabitants.

"The Land is of dry sandy Soil, destitute of Water, except you make Wells; yet producing divers sorts of Trees; but the Woods are not thick nor the Trees very big. Most of the Trees that we saw are Dragon-Trees as we supposed; and these too are the largest Trees of any there ..."

The plant observed by Dampier was most likely the screw pine (*Pandanus spiralis*), which is widespread in the tropics of Australia and looks remarkably like the European dragon tree (*Dracaena draco*).

"We saw no sort of Animal, nor any Track of Beast, but once; and that seemed to be the Tread of a Beast as big as a great Mastiff-Dog ..."

The dingo (*Canis familiaris dingo*) or possibly a wallaby or kangaroo could fit this description.



**Top:** Islands of the Buccaneer Archipelago near where the WA coastline was sighted in 1688.

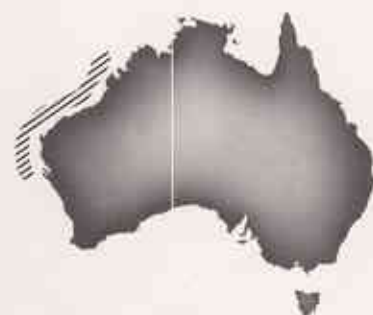
Photo - Bill Bachman

**Above:** Was a dingo responsible for the mysterious tracks recorded by Dampier?

Photo - Wade Hughes/Lochman Transparencies

**Previous page**

**Inset:** Portait of Capt. William Dampier. Painted by T. Murray 1698, National Portrait Gallery, London.



Dampier's notes on the Aborigines reveal:

"They have great Bottle-Noses, pretty full Lips, and wide Mouths. The two Fore-teeth of their Upper-jaw are wanting in all of them, Men and Women, old and young; whether they draw them out, I know not: Neither have they any Beards ..."

And that infamous insect, the common bush fly, was obviously very much apparent:

"... they being so troublesome here, that no fanning will keep them from coming to one's Face; and without Assistance of both Hands to keep them off, they will creep into ones Nostrils, and Mouth too, if the Lips are not shut very close ..."

On 23 March 1688, the *Cygnets* left New Holland for Christmas Island. As Dampier was having difficulties with Captain Read and the crew, who had threatened to leave him marooned in

New Holland, he left the *Cygnets* at the earliest opportunity, at the Nicobar Islands. Later, he joined the *Defense*, from which he disembarked in England on 27 September 1691.

Soon after arriving home, he began writing, *A New Voyage Round the World*, which was eventually finished and published in 1697. The book captured the imagination of all Europe, and revealed Dampier as a competent scientific observer of some literary note. In 1699, he published a supplement to his book, which showed him to be a skilled hydrographer and marine scientist.

### VOYAGE OF THE ROEBUCK

Dampier was by now regarded as an authority on the tropics and the South Seas. On the basis of this reputation, he successfully applied to the British Admiralty for command of a ship to make a voyage to New Holland. He planned to discover the extent of this country and search for economically viable products for Britain.

Dampier, in command of *HMS Roebuck*, left England on 14 January 1699 with provisions for 20 months. Dampier's original intention was to travel by way of Cape Horn and the Pacific to the area of the undiscovered east coast of New Holland. On reaching South America his plans were changed due to the seasons, and he sailed instead for the west coast of New Holland via the Indian Ocean. He still had full intentions of

circumnavigating New Holland, but subsequent events were to prevent him from doing so. The discovery of the east coast was left to fellow-Englishman James Cook.

Dampier reached the west coast of New Holland after a voyage of several months. On 17 August 1699, he sighted an opening in the land where he anchored in seven and a half fathoms. He named this area Shark's Bay (now called Shark Bay) and his anchorage was somewhere between Dirk Hartog Island and Peron Peninsula. The crew went ashore on Dirk Hartog Island in search of water, but to no avail. This search for water continued without success during their entire stay at Shark Bay; however, they were well rewarded with food and wood. During the five days at this anchorage, Dampier made extensive observations on the geography and the plants and animals of the area.



**Top right:** Sketch of *HMS Roebuck* by John Allcot.

**Above right:** Dampier collected *Diplolaena grandiflora* from Shark Bay in August 1699.

Photo - Jiri Lochman

**Below:** *Beaufortia dampieri* was named in honour of Dampier by English botanist Allan Cunningham in 1833.

Photo - Jiri Lochman



He gathered the majority of his botanical collections from Shark Bay, possibly all from the northern end of Dirk Hartog Island. Of the 23 collections still known to exist, 18 can be attributed to Shark Bay. Amongst these are *Beaufortia dampieri* and *Dampiera incana* (both named in honour of Dampier), *Diplolaena grandiflora*, *Melaleuca cardiophylla*, *Myoporum acuminatum*, weeping pittosporum (*Pittosporum phylliraeoides*) and *Solanum orbiculatum*. *Beaufortia dampieri* is a spreading shrub with pale pink to white flowers belonging to the family Myrtaceae. It occurs on sand dunes in tall open-heath on Dirk Hartog Island and on the mainland.

Dampier's collection of *Dampiera incana*, belonging to the family Goodeniaceae, has become the very important 'type' collection, the specimen on which the name of the species is based. It is a perennial herb with deep blue flowers that occurs on sand dunes on Dirk Hartog Island.

Several species of plants, additional to the existing collections, can also be recognised from Dampier's observations:

"The Mould is Sand by the Sea-side, producing a large Sort of Sampier [sic], which bears a white Flower."

This is presumably nitre bush (*Nitraria schoberi*), a succulent-leaved



shrub, which is found growing on the sand dunes.

"Farther in, the Mould is reddish, a Sort of Sand producing some Grass, Plants, and Shrubs. The Grass grows in great Tufts, as big as a Bushel, here and there a Tuft ..."

This could refer to *Spinifex longifolius*, *Triodia plurinervata* or *Plectrachne danthonioides*. The spinifex is common on the coastal dunes, and the other two occur behind the foredunes.

But Dampier's extensive and detailed observations were not confined to botany:

"The Land-Animals that we saw here were only a Sort of Raccoons, ... for these have very short Fore-Legs; but go jumping upon them as the others do ..."

It has been commonly thought Dampier was referring to the banded hare-wallaby (*Lagostrophus fasciatus*), but this may not be the case. It was undoubtedly one of the species of hare-wallaby that once roamed, but is now extinct on Dirk Hartog Island.

Dampier's delightful description of the bobtail skink (*Tiliqua rugosa*) is worthy of mention. How else could such a curiosity be described, but like this:

"And a Sort of Guano's [i.e. iguana],... For these had a larger and uglier Head, and had no Tail: And at the Rump, instead of the Tail there, they had Stump of a Tail, which appear'd like another Head; but not really such, being without Mouth or Eyes

... They were speckled black and yellow like Toads, and had Scales or Knobs on their Backs like those of Crocodiles, plated on to the Skin, ..."

Still in search of water, he moved anchorage to the northern end of Peron Peninsula on 22 August, and again, between 23 and 25 August, to the east of the Dorre and Bernier Islands. He sent a landing party to Bernier Island and records:

"... the Isle produces nothing but a Sort of green, short, hard, prickly Grass, affording neither Wood nor fresh Water ..."

It is very likely this was spinifex (*Spinifex longifolius*) which forms dense tussocks in the sand drifts at the north-eastern end of Bernier Island.

On 25 August, the *Roebuck* departed from Shark Bay, heading north through the Naturaliste Channel. Dampier made frequent observations on marine life, particularly whale activity, along the coastline. On 29 August he recorded:

"... we had in the Night Abundance of Whales about the Ship ... blowing and making a very dismal Noise ... Indeed the Noise made by blowing and dashing of the Sea with their Tails, making it all of a Breach and Foam, was very dreadful to us ..."

This was undoubtedly a pod of humpback whales (*Megaptera novaeangliae*), which are very active in those waters at that time of year. The

ensuing passage was fairly uneventful until land was sighted on 1 September near the Dampier Archipelago.

## DAMPIER'S ARCHIPELAGO

Included among the botanical specimens at the Sherardian Herbarium is a fragment of plant described and illustrated in Dampier's journal as a *Conyza* from New Holland, with leaves like those of the herb rosemary. Thus the island in the Dampier Archipelago on which this plant was first collected by Dampier was dubbed Rosemary Island. Studies have concluded that his Rosemary Island is most likely East Lewis Island (rather than the island known today as Rosemary Island), and that anchor was dropped at the south-western end of this island on 3 September 1699.

The plant species is commonly thought to have been the familiar coastal daisy (*Olearia axillaris*). However, continuing research on this genus by Nicholas Lander, Principal Research Scientist at CALM's Western Australian Herbarium, has revealed that the specimen is in fact a distinct species of *Olearia* which, despite being amongst the earliest of our plants described by Europeans, still lacks a name, a situation shortly to be remedied.

Dampier also collected a plant with blossoms:





**Above:** Dampier collected Sturt pea (*Clianthus formosus*) from the Dampier Archipelago in September 1699.

Photo - Bill Bachman

**Right:** Brown boobies followed the *Roebuck* as it sailed along the coast.  
Photo - Kevin Kenneally

**Facing page**  
**Below left:** Islands of the Dampier Archipelago visited by Dampier in 1699.  
Photo - Carolyn Thomson

**Below right:** The nighttime activities of humpback whales filled the crew with dread.

Photo - Robert Garvey



"... like a Bean Blossom, but much larger, and of a deep red Colour, looking very beautiful."

This is the flower of the beautiful Sturt pea (*Clianthus formosus*). Dampier's collection of the species is housed at the Sherardian Herbarium.

His journal also records the many birds, turtles, shellfish and water-snakes to be found in the area and comments on possible human habitation of nearby islands, because of the smoke which could be seen. Again, no fresh water was to be found so anchor was weighed early next morning and the *Roebuck* departed the Archipelago (later named Dampier Archipelago by Phillip Parker King) through Mermaid Strait.

There are several illustrations in Dampier's journal depicting examples of the flora and fauna seen during this voyage. Among these are birds. One example is a noddy, sighted and recorded a few days after leaving the Archipelago. He records:

"We saw also some Boobies, and Noddy-birds; and in the Night caught one of these last. ... its Tail forked like a Swallow ... the Top or Crown of the Head of this Noddy

was Coal-black ... The Breast, Belly and underpart of the Wings ... were white; and the Back and upper-part of its Wings of a faint black or smook Colour."

This last species is probably either the sooty tern (*Sterna fuscata*) or the bridled tern (*Sterna anaethetus*). Other birds illustrated include the red-necked avocet (*Recurvirostra novaehollandiae*), the pied oystercatcher (*Haematopus longirostris*) and the common noddy (*Anous stolidus*).

## LAGRANGE BAY

Dampier's third and final survey of our coastline was at a deep bay, where he anchored on 10 September 1699. Studies have shown this was most likely to have been Lagrange Bay, and not Roebuck Bay (named in 1821 by Philip Parker King), which is situated some 80 km to the north.

The crew was now in desperate need of fresh water, but only unpalatable brackish water could be found in the holes dug. The few days spent here gave Dampier time to record, with considerable detail, the Aboriginal people living in the area, his attempts to communicate with them and

comparisons with the people seen on his first visit in 1688.

His botanical observations are also interesting:

"And another sort of small, red, hard Pulse, growing in Cods also, with little black Eyes like Beans. I know not their Names, but have seen them used often in the East-Indies for weighing Gold ... I could not perceive that any of them had been gathered by the Natives; and it might not probably be wholesome Food."

This is crab's eye (*Abrus precatorius*), widespread in tropical regions and often found on northern coastal sands. Dampier did well to avoid eating these highly toxic beans.

The unsuccessful search for water forced the *Roebuck* to depart for Timor on 16 September to restock with supplies. From then until July 1700 Dampier surveyed in the area of Indonesia and New Guinea. His intention to return to New Holland was never fulfilled.

The *Roebuck*, tragically, never made the journey home to England. She foundered and sank off Ascension Island in the South Atlantic Ocean in March 1701.



Dampier managed to salvage his journals and at least some of his specimens. He returned to England and later published *A Voyage to New Holland*. The wreck of the *Roebuck* was located in the early 1970s by Dr Robert Marx, an American archaeologist, but little trace of it remains due to the rocky nature of the area.

## WORK GOES ON

Dampier's work in Western Australia remains invaluable. It provides natural historians with data extending over a period of 300 years: unique in Australia, as the eastern coast was not extensively surveyed until 1770.

Dampier's surveys are particularly interesting as they occurred in areas of the north of Western Australia that are still relatively undisturbed, even today. Comparative studies can be made to see what changes, if any, have occurred in an area and can help scientists establish



the distribution range of some species. Such observations can help CALM formulate strategies to conserve and protect plant and animal species and habitats in these more remote parts of the State.

Dampier did well to avoid eating the beans of crab's eye (*Abrus precatorius*) as they are highly toxic.

Photo - Kevin Kenneally

## WILLIAM DAMPIER - THE MAN

Dampier is believed to have been born in East Coker in Somerset, England on 5 September 1651. Sometime during 1672, the year of his 21st birthday, he joined the Royal Navy and served in the Third Anglo-Dutch War which ended in 1674. In 1676 he sailed for Yucatan on the Spanish Main to begin the profitable but risky occupation of logwood cutting, risky because "Campechea" wood (*Haematoxylon campechianum*) grew in hostile Spanish territory. Following this, Dampier took up the controversial profession of privateer against Spain, at that time engaged in a (cold) war with England. In 1686 he continued his voyage, briefly visiting New Holland in 1688. After an absence of more than 12 years, Dampier had little to show than his diaries.

In January 1699, Dampier left England in command of *HMS Roebuck*. Unfortunately, disciplinary problems marred the voyage from the beginning. The *Roebuck*, being a commissioned ship, was normally commanded by naval staff, and Dampier, being a civilian, a celebrity of note, of questionable 'pirating' background and with little skill to command, may have been too much for the professional staff to accept. Difficulties arose, particularly with Lieutenant Fisher, whom Dampier left in Brazil. It was on this voyage that Dampier revisited New Holland.

Dampier arrived back in England in August 1701. The War of Spanish Succession had broken out, and in May 1703, he set out on his second voyage of circumnavigation as Commander of the *St George*, operating as a privateer against enemy vessels in the Pacific. He was imprisoned by the Dutch, but managed to reach home in 1707. He again left England in 1708 as pilot for the *Duke* on his third and final circumnavigation. The *Duke* returned in August 1711 with a rich booty.

Dampier died in 1715 at the age of 64. His burial place is unrecorded, but just prior to this death he was living in the parish of St Stephens, near Old Jewry in London.

William Dampier has been described as a navigator, hydrographer, naturalist, writer and pirate. He spent almost 42 years away from England and circumnavigated the globe three times. His preliminary scientific studies and remarkable writings paved the way for subsequent voyages, such as those of Samuel Wallis, Thomas Nicolas Baudin, James Cook and Matthew Flinders. His narratives inspired Samuel Taylor Coleridge's famous poem, *The Ancient Mariner* and Jonathon Swift's fantastic story, *Gulliver's Travels*. Few travellers have given such knowledge and inspiration to the world. Emperor Napoleon Bonaparte, with a personal interest in science, held him in such high regard that he placed a bust of Dampier (an Englishman!) in his Gallery of Notables.

Suzanne Curry is a Technical Officer at CALM's Western Australian Herbarium, Science and Information Division. The author gratefully acknowledges the works of Alex George, Leslie Marchant and James Spencer on William Dampier and wishes to thank the many staff of the W.A. Museum, Fremantle Museum and CALM for their assistance.

Extracts are from *A New Voyage Around the World* and *A Voyage to New Holland* by William Dampier

**AUTHOR'S NOTE:** Dampier's works were based on the old Julian Calendar. The specific dates given in this article are calculated using the modern Gregorian Calendar. (ie. 11 days later).



# LANDSCOPE

VOLUME EIGHT NO. 4 WINTER ISSUE 1993



'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.



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.



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.

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## 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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