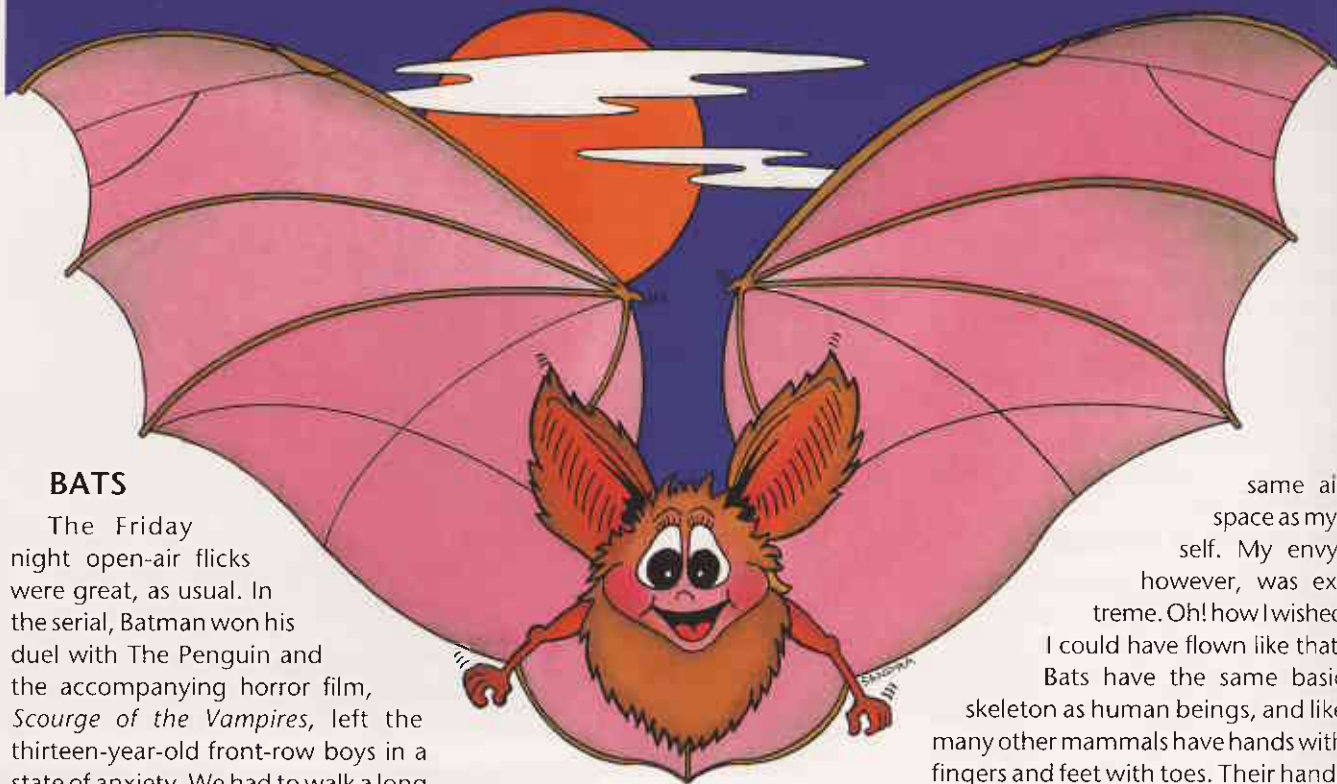


# URBAN ANTICS!



## BATS

The Friday night open-air flicks were great, as usual. In the serial, Batman won his duel with The Penguin and the accompanying horror film, *Scourge of the Vampires*, left the thirteen-year-old front-row boys in a state of anxiety. We had to walk a long way home - in the dark.

We marched in a pack, loud-voiced, wide-eyed and whistling (to keep the boogymen and his bats away). The dim lit streets and back lanes seemed to harbour a multitude of shapes and shadows which resembled the cloaked wings of ugly, saliva-dripping, bloodthirsty, giant bats. Like snakes, frogs and spiders, bats have always been unjustly associated with evil. However, research has helped to dispel the myths that are perpetuated in story books and films.

Bats are the only mammals that have the power of true flight and they also make up a quarter of all the species of Australian terrestrial mammals.

They belong to the order Chiroptera (meaning "hand-wing" in Greek), which is divided into two sub-orders, the Megachiroptera (larger fruit and blossom bats) and Microchiroptera (smaller insectivorous and carnivorous animals).

In Perth, our temperate and dry climate does not continuously produce the numbers and types of blossoms or fruit to sustain fruit bats (flying foxes). Consequently, they are found only in the north of the state. The insectivorous bats, however, do frequent the city

and suburbs.

Here you can find the white-striped mastiff-bat, Gould's wattled bat and two or three species of smaller bats.

Large groups of bats can be observed in late spring, when females band together in maternal colonies. The young are left in a communal creche while the females go out hunting.

To most Perthites, bats are things seen in books, on exotic holidays, in horror movies and the occasional TV documentary. When you first sight one, especially where you live, like I did one evening at football practice at a Scarborough oval in 1957, you may never forget it.

What attracted my attention that evening was either an albino or a light brown-grey coloured animal. The fluttering short wings seemed to pat the air, and the tiny body rose and fell like a tumbling leaf caught in a small willy-willy. It was a bat alright. The typical angular wings and stubby, seemingly tailless body, was just like those in the movie a year before.

Instantly, my thoughts of revulsion and horror were dispelled. Here in the half-light, some 10 metres above was a frail, harmless mammal living in the

same air space as myself. My envy, however, was extreme. Oh! how I wished I could have flown like that.

Bats have the same basic skeleton as human beings, and like many other mammals have hands with fingers and feet with toes. Their hands serve as wings, with long fingers supporting flexible skin, which is also joined to forearms, legs and tail.

Contrary to belief, their eyes are quite good and, with their ability to use vocal sound as sonar to track insects on the wing, they are truly among the Earth's most fascinating creatures.

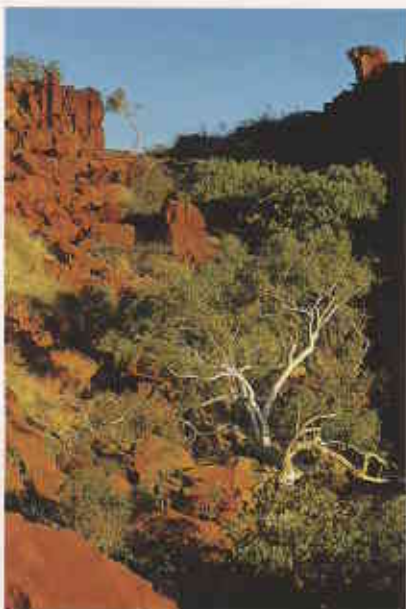
## JOHN HUNTER

### DID YOU KNOW?

- *Insectivorous bats eat up to half of their body weight in insects each night and some become torpid in the winter and hibernate. To disturb them in this condition could cause death through loss of body heat and critical energy reserves.*
- *Of the 900 plus species of bat worldwide, one flying-fox has a wingspan of one and a half metres, while Kitt's hog-nosed bat of Thailand is about the size of a bumble bee.*
- *Unusual places where bats have been found roosting include old tractor exhausts, disused bird nests, water pipes from tanks, under stones, cracks in wooden fence posts and even tin cans.*

# LANDSCOPE

VOLUME EIGHT NO. 4 WINTER ISSUE 1993



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.



'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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Colour Separation by Prepress Services

Printed in Western Australia by Lamb Print

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Published by Dr S Shea, Executive Director  
Department of Conservation and Land Management,  
50 Hayman Road, Como, Western Australia 6152.