

## WRENS RETURN

Brighton Beach at Scarborough has a new family of residents thanks to the recovery of the dune vegetation over the past decade.

In the 1970s the area south of Scarborough became a wasteland, because of building developments at the beachside and along the West Coast Highway south to City Beach, and degradation by trail bikes, horse riders and stray dogs.

A beach management plan, introduced by the City of Stirling, included a system of fences to provide restricted-access pathways and protect the dunes in a series of enclosed blocks.

In February 1993 we found a population of white-winged fairy-wrens (*Malurus leucopterus*) in a small dune block near the surf club. Twenty years ago these tiny birds were common in the area, but disappeared with the pressures of human activity. They probably dispersed north to the Trigg Dune Reserve and south to the bushland at Bold Park, where historical records show they have existed for many years.

Recent sightings were all within 500 metres of the surf club. There were up to five females, including youngsters (a drab brown colour), and a male, identified by early signs of characteristic blue and white breeding plumage. When in breeding condition, male fairy wrens are a brilliant colour that shines like lacquer.

Although we could hear the high-pitched reeling call, usually issued by the male, it was not loud enough to attract the attention of passersby unfamiliar with the birds. The behaviour of the 'family' was also unobtrusive; the birds either flying low from one small shrub to another, or running with rapid hops across patches

of bare sand, in search of insects. Their cocked-up tails were unmistakable.

It is likely that the species had returned to its former habitat only because of the sanctuaries created by good management of the dune system. The downside is that on three occasions we also saw domestic cats actively stalking singing honeyeaters, inside a protected dune block.

Late in the year (August to November), when white-winged fairy-wrens are most likely to breed, the male's plumage assumes a brilliant blue, with a white patch on each wing. If nesting follows at Scarborough Beach, it will indeed be a remarkable event in the natural history of one of Perth's most popular beaches.

*Top right: Adult female white-winged fairy-wren.  
Right: Brighton Beach dunes and Scarborough Surf Club.  
Below: Male white-winged fairy-wren in breeding plumage.  
Story and photos by Babs and Bert Wells*



# LANDSCOPE

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Wildfires are synonymous with Western Australian summers, but what can be done to lessen the threat to life and property? Lachlan McCaw discusses the problem on page 49.



Daisies belong to the Asteraceae family, one of the world's largest families of flowering plants. Suzanne Curry presents some of them in 'Delightful Daisies' on page 41.



Aborigines have eked out a living in the harsh Western Desert region for thousands of years. Their intimate knowledge of the desert is helping scientists learn more about its plants and animals. See 'Digging Sticks and Desert Dwellers' on page 10.



'Rainforests and Bats', on page 34, tells the story of the recent LANDSCOPE Expedition to the Mitchell Plateau.



Can images from space help locate desert mammals? See 'From Buckshot to Breakaways' on page 23.

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## COVER

Cape Barren geese live on the islands and rocks of the Archipelago of Recherche. A few years ago their numbers appeared very low and their survival was in doubt. However, a recent survey of the islands has brought good news with a marked increase in the bird's population.

The illustration is by Philippa Nikulinsky.



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