SKINK TALE

Most lizards would be unlucky to lose their tail once in their lifetime, but this fence skink has not only lost or damaged its tail twice, but has a fork tail to prove it.

Department of Conservation and Land Management wildlife officer David Algaba noticed the animal on his fence at home and snapped this striking photograph.

The fork tail may look impressive, but indicates that life for this lizard has been hazardous. The loss of a tail has serious repercussions for any lizard. Its balance when running is altered and it loses the store of fat that could affect its survival over winter or even its capacity to breed.

"The need to grow a new tail requires increased food consumption and more time basking in the sun to maximise growth, which exposes the lizard to further attack by predators," CALM scientist David Pearson said.

"However, by dropping its tail to confuse a predator this lizard gained another chance at life. Examination of its tail suggests it has had two close calls with death."

David said that almost all the tail had been lost at some time in the past.

"Perhaps its crazed wriggling captivated the attention of a hungry bird, but gave the lizard time to scamper for cover. It was then regrown, with the new tail being coloured differently and with less elaborate patterning than the original.

"Later, the unlucky skink had another bad experience when the tail tip was broken, perhaps by another predator. On this occasion the tail was not shed, but remained linked by some connective tissue.

"The regenerative cells on the detached side of the tail break probably sensed that the tail had been lost, so a new tail was grown, resulting in this remarkable fork."

Above: *This fence skink has broken and regrown its tail on two occasions.*
Photo – David Algaba

IMAGES CELEBRATE AUSTRALIA'S LOCAL COLOUR

Regular *LANDSCOPE* photographer Bill Bachman has produced a book of special interest to all who love the Australian landscape.

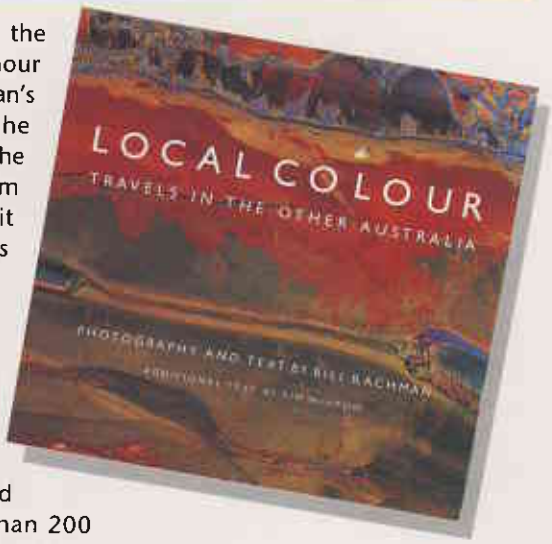
Bill set out to record the Australian outback and its characters in *Local Colour: Travels in the Other Australia.* He took all the photographs and wrote most of the text in the book, with additional text contributed by award-winning novelist Tim Winton.

The Macquarie Dictionary defines local colour as the "distinctive characteristics or peculiarities of a place or period as represented in literature, drama etc., or observed in reality".

Bill spent several years exploring Australia's faraway places. A large part of these travels were in Western Australia, visiting such places as a shearers' camp in Shark Bay, the Buccaneer Archipelago, Marble Bar and Gascoyne Junction, to name only a few.

Bill's photography is often quirky, with an underlying sense of the bizarre. Even bush junk is celebrated for the stories it tells. Other photographs show fascinating patterns in tidal mudflats and spinifex plains, or shapes made by termite mounds. At other times, Bill records the vast expanse of the outback.

Winton's themes include faces, the special place of corrugated iron in Australian culture and the bogus glamour of the stockman's life. Dogs, he muses, "run the country. I'm sure they sit on numerous shire councils."



Local Colour is superbly produced and is packed with more than 200 pages of colourful images and wry observations. It is published by Odyssey/Allen & Unwin and is available for $59.95.

P55915

LANDSCOPE

VOLUME TEN NO. 2 SUMMER ISSUE 1994–95

The golden whistler is a common forest bird. 'Forest Focus' (on page 10) discusses a five-year study into the effects of timber harvesting on forest birds, insects and mammals.

The 10th Light Horse Memorial Trail is one of two walktrails in Neerabup National Park. The story on page 22 takes you inside this little-known park in Perth's northern suburbs.

In the closing days of 1991, heavy downpours of rain flooded Rowles Lagoon in WA's Goldfields; and so began an unusual year of floods, frogs, flowers and fires (see page 42).

Aboriginal people of the northern deserts call the black-headed python 'warrurungkalpa', which roughly translates as 'grinder or crusher of rock wallabies'. See the story on page 17.

Radio collars are fitted to feral cats to help scientists track their movements. 'Hunting the Hunter', on page 36, focuses on research into the habits of these supreme desert hunters.

FEATURES

REGULARS

COVER

The majestic and graceful whale shark visits the north-west of Western Australia each year and is fast becoming a major tourist attraction. What does the future hold for the world's largest fish? See page 28.

The illustration is by Danka Pradzynski.

Managing Editor: Ron Kawalilak
Editor: David Gough
Contributing Editors: Ray Bailey, Kate Hooper, Carolyn Thomson
Scientific and technical advice: Ian Abbott, Andrew Burbidge, Paul Jones
Design and production: Maria Duthie, Sue Marais
Finished art: Sue Marais, Gooitzen van der Meer
Illustration: Gooitzen van der Meer
Cartography: Promaco Geodraft
Marketing: Estelle de San Miguel ☎ (09) 334 0296 Fax: 334 0489
Subscription enquiries: ☎ (09) 334 0481
Colour Separation by Prepress Services
Printed in Western Australia by Lamb Print

© ISSN 0815-4465. All material copyright. No part of the contents of the publication may be reproduced without the consent of the publishers.

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