

URBAN ANTICS!



Stone the Crows

"AAH...AAH...AAH...AAAAAHHH"
What the...! Torn from deep dreams as Ali Baba's harem keeper, into stark, staring consciousness of somewhere beyond the black stump, is the stuff of heart attack victims.

The dawn sound of crow calls echoing over loam and clover and through corrugated corridors of dungy sheep sheds, are treasured memories of school holidays on the farm. These days, however, the birds have become a regular urban antic.

Like many large bush birds, the Australian raven (*Corvus coronoides*) has benefited from agricultural development. It has even followed human establishment into the hearts of our cities, where handouts, rubbish bins and natural food such as insects, fruits, eggs, young or weak animal life and carrion are easy pickings.

The Australian raven is the local member of the corvid or crow family

and is best described as a large, predatory, scavenging passerine (perching bird). Five other crow species, including one introduced, are found in Australia, with some species overlapping breeding ranges in some areas. In the Perth metropolitan area, however, the Australian raven is usually the only species to be found.

This big black bird, the largest of the corvids, was maligned for many years as a killer of lambs, but is in fact one of nature's 'garbagemen'. It has simply been clearing up the country of dead and dying animals.

As new agricultural lands were opened up in Western Australia, so the raven expanded its range and numbers. Unfortunately, as is the case in an imperfect world, ewes, weakened after giving birth, sometimes lost their eyes to crows. But in times of locust plagues, the birds are so well fed and full, they wander around verges like fat roadside ruffians.

Today, it is not unusual to be entertained, startled or in some cases bothered by the presence of Australian ravens in our urban parks and backyards.

Considered high on the scale of intelligent birds, the Australian raven is often seen flying away from Fido's dinner dish with a stolen greasy bone, which is either lardered in a tree or dropped in the family swimming pool. On fairways, golf balls are occasionally mistaken for eggs and rolled into the rough, while in suburbs near food outlets and people eager to hand feed, resident ravens loudly announce territories and roost on ridge caps, eyeing householders like the familiars of medieval sorcerers.

Lately, these inquisitive birds have taken to tampering with parked cars, most times simply attacking their own reflections in the high gloss paint. However, not content with these

endless unresolved encounters and having a beady eye for bits and pieces, windscreen wiper blades, beading and rubber packings have been damaged or taken.

As usual, requests to destroy the culprits have been received by CALM, and it is likely that many a stone has been cast. But rather than destroy the birds, it is easier to shift, cover or camouflage property to avoid damage.

In a world where humans dominate and have the power to create domains of plenty, we should be willing to share and experience the company of lesser beings. It is a wonderful experience to watch ravens as they wheel and call against a deep blue sky, be it winter in the Snowy Mountains or summer on the Swan Coastal Plain.

BY JOHN HUNTER

DID YOU KNOW?

- In Australia, the major difference between crows and ravens is that crows have white down at the base of their body feathers and ravens have ashy-brown down.
- The Australian raven has long pointed feathers on a dewlap pouch under its bill. The pouch expands when calling, giving a longer and deeper sound.
- Corvids naturally disgorge pellets of indigestible material. Hence, when baited by sheep farmers early in the century, crows were able to easily disgorge the usually foul tasting material, which enhanced their reputation as 'clever little devils'. The corvid family evolved in Australia and spread through Asia where it radiated into many species around the world. The ancestor of our five corvids was one of those species which returned to evolve into the present forms.

LANDSCOPE CALM LIBRARY ARCHIVE NOT FOR LOAN

VOLUME TWELVE NUMBER 1, SPRING 1996



Rainbow lorikeets. Are they pests? Will they displace our native birds? Do we need to control their numbers, and if so, how? Find out more on page 17.



A subspecies of granny bonnets (*Isotropis cuneifolia* subsp. *glabra*) found in a threatened community on the Swan Coastal Plain. See story on page 35.



'The Magic of Magenta' co-author Mal Graham clearing an Aboriginal soak in Lake Magenta Nature Reserve. See our story on page 41.



A rat by any other name...? In 'Dinkum Aussie Rats' Andrew Burbidge discusses the use of common and Aboriginal names for native rodents.



In 'Saving the Giants', read how a new Tree Top Walk in WA's south-west is set to become one of Australia's nature-based tourism icons.

FEATURES

SAVING THE GIANTS CLIFF WINFIELD	10
RAINBOW LORIKEETS: INVADERS IN THE SUBURBS DAVID LAMONT & ALLAN BURBIDGE	17
DINKUM AUSSIE RATS ANDREW BURBIDGE	22
SLUGS OF THE SEA KEVIN CRANE	28
THREATENED PLANT COMMUNITIES ON THE SWAN COASTAL PLAIN VAL ENGLISH, GREG KEIGHERY & JOHN BLYTH	35
THE MAGIC OF MAGENTA MURRAY CARTER, MAL GRAHAM & CHRIS JOHNSON	41
CRONINA: A NEW GENUS SUZANNE CURRY	48
A BLAST FROM THE PAST ALEX BEVAN	50

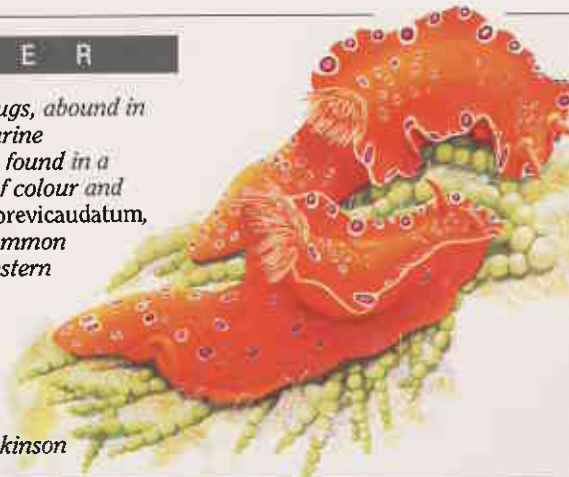
REGULARS

IN PERSPECTIVE	4
BUSH TELEGRAPH	6
ENDANGERED: DUNSBOROUGH SPIDER ORCHID	47
URBAN ANTICS	54

COVER

Nudibranchs, or sea-slugs, abound in Western Australia's marine environment. They are found in a tremendous diversity of colour and form, the *Ceratosoma brevicaudatum*, illustrated here, is a common inhabitant of south-western waters. See page 28 to learn more about the 'Slugs of the Sea'.

Illustration by Ian Dickinson



Managing Editor: Ron Kawallak
Editor: David Gough
Contributing Editors: Mandy Clews, Verna Costello, Penny Walsh, Carolyn Thomson, John Hunter
Scientific/technical advice: Andrew Burbidge, Ian Abbott, Paul Jones, Tony Start and staff of CALM's Science & Information Division
Design and production: Mana Duthie, Sue Marais
Finished art: Gooitzen van der Meer
Illustration: Gooitzen van der Meer, Ian Dickinson
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.
LANDSCOPE Online: <http://www.calm.wa.gov.au/>



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