

# URBAN ANTICS



## What... no birds?

Alfred Cove looked a picture. Nine-thirty on a Saturday morning in the middle of spring, sun dancing on a glassy Swan River at low tide and...what...no birds? Sounds like Bayswater not Melville.

Shoreline slush, steaming samphire and the wonderful, earthy odour from the very bowels of this rare Swan estuarine nature reserve threw me back to 1953. Then, the semi-rural lowlands area between Perth and Fremantle was sparsely populated and the shoreline in the cove was very close to pristine. There was no landfill, no pesticides, no plastic rubbish, but plenty of bugs, bush and birds.

The Olympic opening ceremony the night before had triggered a sense of historic pride, so I thought I'd wallow in a place where I had wandered as a kid. Although it was still early in the season for the return of transequatorial wading birds (which fly in from as far afield as Siberia), I expected some species on the beach or in the marsh, even local herons and egrets.

A stroll along the beach within the wildlife sanctuary indicated the possible cause for the lack of feathered fauna. On the white sand below high water mark and out on to the grey, rippled tidal flats were hundreds of prints where birds had been earlier, but they were intruded upon by the erratic tracks of two skittish canines, one the size of a small dinosaur. The imprints of a pair of joggers on the beach indicated that a human was at the helm of the disturbance. Problem solved.

In the 1970s it had been decided by residents, the local council, naturalists

and scientists that Alfred Cove should be reserved and its wildlife undisturbed by visitors. Its value of being one of few remaining natural Swan River shorelines, with a complete food chain, fossil ground and suite of plants and animals, made it a jewel in the crown of the City of Melville. The State Government and the world signatories to the Japan-Australia and China-Australia Migratory Bird Agreement in turn declared that the site be protected against any disturbance.

Of late, it is becoming evident that residents and visitors exercising dogs have forgotten or are simply not content with using the adjacent multi-use park areas. Alfred Cove Nature Reserve and the adjacent Swan Estuary Marine Park are under siege and under threat.

The Department of Conservation and Land Management (CALM), like other park management agencies throughout the world, has implemented the policy of not allowing dogs (even on a leash) into any conservation parks or reserves. This policy was developed in the late 1970s by the then Council of Nature Conservation Ministers on the advice of the International Union for the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources—now the World Conservation Union (IUCN)—to protect both indigenous fauna and the rights of other park users.

Further, Census information indicates that the majority of reserve visitors do not want dogs in conservation areas. Their reasons...

- the scent of a dog lingers and causes native wildlife to vacate areas for weeks;

- some dogs do knock down children and they will frolic in crowded situations that may be dangerous in hazardous areas, such as near water, cliff tops and gorges;

- dogs foul the ground where people walk or sit, and their behaviour is unpredictable.

- people do let dogs loose when rangers are not in the vicinity, and other visitors complain.

Unfortunately, 'the poor old dog' cannot read our signs or understand our need for protection measures, so let's give it a break. Please don't bring your pets into these special areas; it may cost you, and cause them to be sent to the 'dog house'.

BY JOHN HUNTER

### DID YOU KNOW?

- *The greenshank (Tringa nebularia) and 32 other species of wader fly from Mongolia, Siberia and other parts of eastern Asia each spring and spend the summer in Alfred Cove and other Australian wetlands. During the last few years, greenshank numbers have been down considerably.*
- *The Alfred Cove flats are comprised of shells some 7,000 years old, and record levels reached by the rise in the sea 20,000 to 6,000 years ago, following the last ice age.*
- *Some 10,000 waders visit the Swan Estuary Marine Park and more than 140 species of birds can be seen at Alfred Cove.*

Winner of the 1998 Alex Harris Medal for excellence in science and environment reporting.

# LANDSCOPE



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Botanists rediscover a presumed extinct grass perched on the mountain tops of the Stirling Range National Park. See page 43.



How can we preserve the Leeuwin-Naturaliste caves while catering for increasing visitation? See page 16.



Salinity Strategy surveys are revealing that salinity threatens more than 850 Wheatbelt plant species. How can managers intervene? See page 36.



Discover Perth's eight regional parks and their special features and attractions on page 28.



Learn about the spineless wonders of the marine world and their clever disguises on page 42.

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## COVER

More than 160 different bird species use Cape Arid National Park, which lies on the South Coast about 120 kilometres east of Esperance. The red-eared firetail is one of them. This exotic-looking finch is confined to south-western Australia. It is found in areas of dense heath and undergrowth in thick forest, never too far inland. Cape Arid National Park is the eastern limit of its distribution.



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