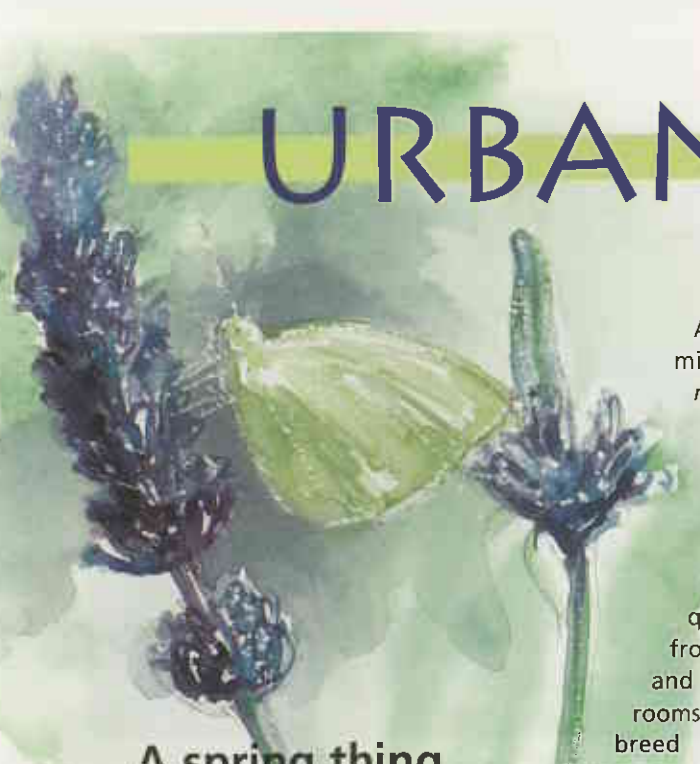


URBAN ANTICS



A spring thing

So that was winter. It was much like all the rest; stormy and violent or still and sunny... ugly one minute, picturesque the next.

Beauty, however, is in the eye of the beholder and, if you appreciate your existence and that of everything around you, you will have noted that no two winters are alike. And now it is spring... the mother of all seasons, where most of the planet's life-forms experience the fullness of *yin* and *yang*, and all creatures look to expand the parameters of their existence.

Deep green thickets of winter weed, laced with nasturtium, engulf the lower rail of the back picket fence as fat, black, hairy, cabbage moth caterpillars greedily consume the entangled salad. Soon, the green will wither to brown and disappear under the sting of an early summer sun. During this time, the grubs, with their cylindrical crew cuts, will pupate in the vegetation and later emerge to dance away on the wind as mature white butterflies.

Under bits of wood, brick and stone behind the garden shed, many invertebrates are beginning to feel the new warmth and withdraw further into their nooks and crannies. Here, slugs and slaters in their dark, dank domiciles escape from all light and heat, while segmented 'monsters' like centipedes, earwigs and millipedes do the last early morning daylight rounds, picking off a breakfast of tiny animals, fungi and other minute vegetation.

As a matter of interest, the millipede (*Omatoiulus moreletii*), a large introduced species, has become prevalent in the western suburbs since a large population invasion last autumn.

The 'beasts' have become quite rampant, being found from footpaths to pantries and in second-storey lounge rooms. These exotic millipedes breed up in the autumn and wander around at night during winter. They breed again, to a lesser degree, in spring and aestivate in a cell just under the soil during summer. Fortunately, indications are that the animals become less abundant after periodic invasions, probably because of food shortage, predator control or disease. They are harmless to people but, nonetheless, are a nuisance as they can stain flooring if squashed, infest food and bedding, and eat your garden fruit and veggies. The Portuguese pests were first recorded in Perth in 1984.

If you are lucky enough to have a native garden of bottlebrush, wattle and banksia, as well as the usual exotic collection of hibiscus, citrus and lavender, you'll have noticed an influx of birds, bugs and lizards. Fence skinks (*Cryptoblepharus plagiocephalus*) will now be patrolling the walls in search of food and heat, and scrapping among themselves in a flurry of legs and tails. Bobtail skinks (*Tiliqua rugosa*) will be emerging from their burrows under ground cover in search of snails, blossoms and fruits, while in some suburbs, western bearded dragons (*Pogona minor*) bask in sunlight on dead shrubs or fallen branches. On your way to the letterbox you may hear nervous scuffling under a pile of dead leaves as a shy, but beautiful black and gold lizard, the south-western odd-striped skink (*Ctenotus impar*) detects your approaching footsteps.

Unfortunately for WA, introduced kookaburras, aptly described as

'aerial foxes', are watching from powerlines and poles, and waiting for an opportunity to decimate our local reptiles as they snooze in warm spots of the garden. Far overhead, screeching introduced rainbow lorikeets temporarily leave their nesting holes, that they seem to 'hog' all year round to the exclusion of twenty-eights and others, to flock up and head for their communal feeding spots.

In this season of plenty, quite a few species of honeyeaters frisk the new blossoms of trees and shrubs in search of nectar, pollen and insects. The cacophony of bird sounds together with the thrashing of foliage, as they squabble over tucker and territory, is music to the ears of this layabout.

There is now only one sound missing—the clicking of cicadas.

Roll on summer. Roll on. . .

BY JOHN HUNTER

DID YOU KNOW?

- *The two-word italicised names found following the common names are scientific names. The first word is the genus, which begins with a capital letter, and the second word is the species name. They are often Latin or Greek derivatives.*
- *A place within an environment where an organism lives is called its habitat. The specific place an animal occupies, within one of these areas, is its microhabitat.*
- *For a long time now, we have all gone about striving to protect individual animals from danger. As urban landowners, we must all realise that the provision and protection of habitats will go further in protecting and increasing populations of urban species and their numbers.*



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

LANDSCOPE

VOLUME EIGHTEEN, NUMBER 1, SPRING 2002



Discover some amazing lifestyles of the little-known fungi of our south-west forests. See 'Forest fungi' on page 10.



One of WA's longest serving wildlife researchers looks at changes to nature conservation in the State. See 'For the times they are a-changin' on page 20.



Two unusual beetles are attracted to large bushfires. But why, and how do they find the fires and avoid getting burnt? See 'Australian fire-beetles' on page 36.



Two wildlife rescuers recently received Queen's birthday honours. See 'Kanyana to the rescue' on page 42.



What do wildlife officers do when a large whale weighing up to 80 tonnes becomes entangled? Turn to 'When nature calls...for help' on page 42.

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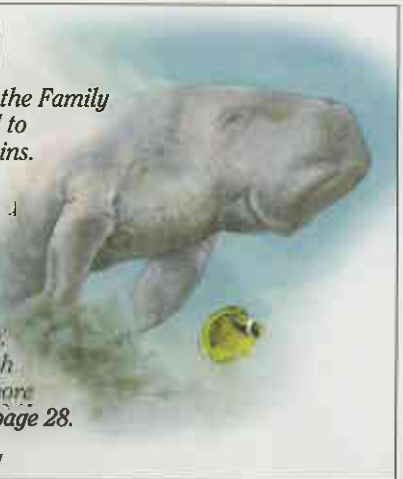
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Executive editor: Ron Kawalifak
Editors: David Gough, Carolyn Thomson-Dans.
Bush Telegraph editor: Verna Costello.
Scientific/technical advice: Andrew Burbidge, Keith Morris, Kevin Kenneally, Paul Jones, Chris Simpson.
Design and production: Tiffany Aberin, Maria Duthie, Gooitzen van der Meer.
Illustration: Gooitzen van der Meer.
Marketing: Estelle de San Miguel ☎ (08) 9334 0296 Fax: (08) 9334 0498.
Subscription enquiries: ☎ (08) 9334 0481 or (08) 9334 0437.
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COVER

The dugong is the only living species in the Family Dugongidae, and is more closely related to elephants than it is to whales and dolphins. One of the largest and most secure populations of dugong grazes on the extensive beds of seagrass in the shallow marine environment of Shark Bay. An estimated 10,000 dugongs, representing 10 per cent of the world's population, live in the bay. A new study, involving collaboration with local Aboriginal people, is discovering more about their movements in the bay. See page 28.

Cover illustration by Phillipa Nikulinsky



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