

urban antics

by John Hunter

Go wild

Had enough of the moss on the pavers and the dry cold easterly winds that have shafted into town from beyond Kalgoorlie? It hasn't rained as much this winter, the dams are down and those warmer wet winter days seem to have been scarce... but it's now spring, and time to go bush, go wild and... go now.

Living in one of the greatest flower bowls of the entire planet is already a bonus for Perth urbanites, but the surrounding Swan Coastal Plain and close proximity of the Darling Scarp and Wheatbelt areas add magic to the diversity of blooms and landforms to be experienced.

Unlike Daffy, this little black duck never flies south for the winter; he just waddles around indoors waiting for the glory of spring and a picnic or three.

When I was a kid, trips to the bush for me were in my father's Austin 8 tourer, with its skinny wheels and rock-hard suspension. The little four-cylinder, side-valve engine used to labour up Greenmount Hill and then chug along some obscure bush track where, at what seemed the 'end of the Earth' some 30 kilometres from home, we'd spread a tarp in a sea of coloured blooms. Today, it's a little easier with our many conservation areas and well facilitated parks that are found both inside and fringing a greater metropolitan area.

On the Swan Coastal Plain and Darling Scarp, the regional parks of Jandakot, Rockingham Lakes and Darling Range, together with the national parks of Kalamunda, John Forrest, Serpentine, Walyunga and Avon Valley, all have an abundance of strikingly beautiful blooms.

Here, the well drained sandy plain and diverse habitats ranging from coastal limestone to the

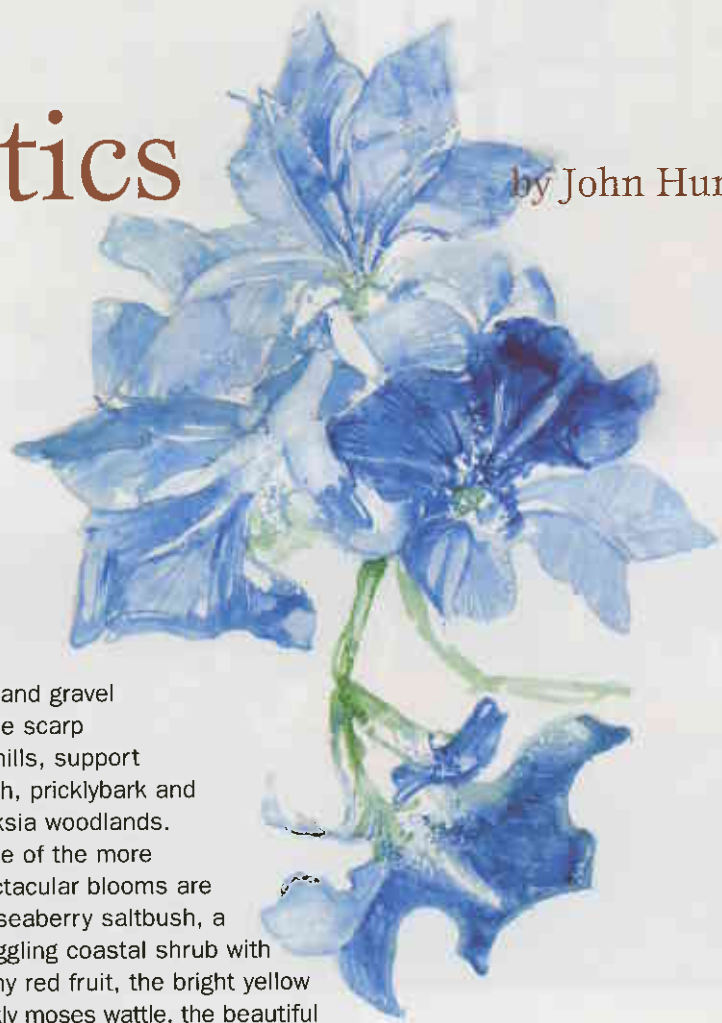
clay and gravel of the scarp foothills, support jarrah, pricklybark and banksia woodlands. Some of the more spectacular blooms are the seaberry saltbush, a straggling coastal shrub with fleshy red fruit, the bright yellow prickly Moses wattle, the beautiful scented pink Swan River myrtle, red swamp cranberry, with its long red or pink flowers, and the rarer insectivorous southern byblis, with purple flowers three to four centimetres across.

Let's not forget the State forest areas around the regional and national parks. The main flowering period of this area, which is predominantly jarrah forest, is from late winter through spring, but the forest trees themselves are mostly summer flowering.

Banksias, of which there are four species—bull banksia, firewood banksia, slender banksia and river banksia—are common. Some of the most

attractive flowers of the forest belong to the leschenaultias with the breathtaking blue leschenaultia being the best known. Hibbertias also occur, along with the spectacular white spider orchid, the red blooms of the yellow-eyed flame pea, many types of insectivorous drosera and the dainty pink flowered bushy boronia.

Hey, wait for me! You have to share these urban gems you know, and don't forget to take the snaggers, a good bottle of red wine and a safe, portable gas stove. Also, if you're driving the latest four-wheel-drive 'Toorak Tractor', please stay on the formed tracks.



DID YOU KNOW?

- Wildflowers are protected by law and cannot be picked without first obtaining a licence from the Department of Conservation and Land Management (CALM).
- CALM is keen to know about any plant species that you might think is rare or unknown. Species 'presumed extinct' have occasionally been rediscovered this way.
- Trailbike riders and pet owners are abusing some of our urban parks. If you see anything untoward, simply provide CALM with a licence plate number or a dog registration.

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