

urban antics

by John Hunter

Moving poles

About a year ago, it occurred to me that I could no longer drive to work—or anywhere else for that matter—in the same time or carefree manner that I had been accustomed to over the last 40 years. I'm feeling the squeeze, the rush and the uncomfortable need to share scarce resources with a burgeoning population. Perhaps I now know how the quendas in new outer suburbs are feeling, as the creep of human development also encroaches on their habitat.

It is strange how some human 'improvements' to our urban environments have changed things for the better and yet at the same time... for the not so good.

Take the recent changes to underground power in some suburbs. For decades, the grey jarrah power poles, bedecked with a finery of crossbars, insulators and wire, covered our streets like rampant bramble bush. On the other hand, this high flat perch, level with my sitting room window, although a blot on the view, provided a keyhole scene of wildlife interaction. The post top often resembled a butcher's chopping block, as nomadic birds of prey went about their meals. Not to mention the spreader bars, where gangs of galahs, cuckoos and twenty-eight parrots squabbled and wobbled precariously between wires that could have conceivably turned them into shish kebabs.

The spring rush by brooding honeyeaters for insects and spiders always saw the sagging feeder wire to a house become a sway bridge of 'pedestrian' traffic, as these feisty gluttons paraded, then attacked, the new season's webs under eaves and shrubs. Multicoloured hairy caterpillars could be seen climbing the fissured timber to

cocoon for their next stage of life, as millions of termites poured out of some pole crowns like living molasses to seemingly evaporate in search of a new queen.

High summer around the poles rewarded observers with the spectacle of reflective sunlight shimmering iridescent green and bronze. Here, aerobic bee-eaters chased dragonflies through, over and around the maze of wood and wire on which they later perched in pairs to consume their prey and preen.

The removal of the poles and their adornments had an immediate effect on all. Homeowners immediately felt a euphoric exposure to the rest of the world. It was as though there was no longer a protective canopy, no extraterrestrial dreamcatcher. Then there was that feeling of utter crapulence as people realised the value of property had increased by 20 grand. Strange reactions also occurred among local fauna.

Territorial kookaburras that always had a set routine patrolling boundaries were seen to falter in mid-flight, do two 'panic circles', then head towards a newfangled light standard 50 metres away on the opposite verge. Here, they crash-landed and toppled in frantic disarray to the ground. I've never seen one stare upwards before.

Then there was the shih tzu cross, a terrier dog of great pride that raced down the drive onto the verge, cocked a leg into the



breeze and peed on himself as he toppled into a vacant 'space'.

The new British Racing Green painted steel poles were also playing havoc with other species. Fence skinks tried to claw their way skywards, only to find it was two steps up and one step back, as the hot glossy surface took its toll. On the other hand, white bush snails have discovered a wonderful smooth dark surface on which to park for the day, a disaster if discovered by small children on the way home from school. Such is life.

DID YOU KNOW?

- Pelicans are the masters of light pole landings. They can be seen from time to time roosting comfortably along the Kwinana Freeway between the zoo and the river.
- Some high-tension wires crossing the flight paths of night flying swans and ducks on the coastal plain have had reflective indicators attached to help prevent collisions.

- 50 The Geraldton to Shark Bay sandplain—a strikingly beautiful biodiversity hotspot
Initiatives are underway to restore the Geraldton to Shark Bay sandplain area to its former state and protect it from threats.
- 56 Julimar—turning full circle
After a chequered past, Julimar Conservation Park is once again home to an abundance of animals, including threatened chuditch.

Regulars

- 3 Contributors and Editor's letter
- 9 Bookmarks
An enthusiasm for orchids
The Turquoise Coast
Ernest Hodgkin's Swanland
- 18 Endangered
Cape Range remipede community
- 30 Feature park
Cape Arid National Park
- 62 Urban antics
Moving poles

Publishing credits

Executive editor Caris Bailey.
Editors Carolyn Thomson-Dans, Rhianna King.
Scientific/technical advice Tony Start, Paul Jones, Chris Simpson, Keith Morris.
Design and production Tiffany Taylor, Maria Duthie, Natalie Jolakoski, Gooitzen van der Meer.
Illustration Gooitzen van der Meer.
Cartography Promaco Geodraft.
Marketing Estelle de San Miguel
Phone (08) 9334 0296 *Fax* (08) 9334 0432.
Subscription enquiries
Phone (08) 9334 0481 or (08) 9334 0437.
Prepress and Printing Advance Press, Western Australia.

© ISSN 0815-4465

All material copyright. No part of the contents of the publication may be reproduced without the consent of the publishers.

Please do not send unsolicited material, but feel free to contact the editors

Visit NatureBase at www.naturebase.net

Published by the Department of Conservation and Land Management, 17 Dick Perry Avenue, Kensington, Western Australia

