

# urban antics by John Hunter

## Hot babes

It's one thing to enjoy the seasons of any one year, but it's especially nice to get the relief of a change, for change's sake, as you grow older. And so, now it's summer 2007–2008, the heat from a lucky old sun ripples the air as it sears the back of your neck in the walk from an air-conditioned office to an automobile oven. Then, for about two minutes, one is narcotised by solar power. Oh, it's soooo good.

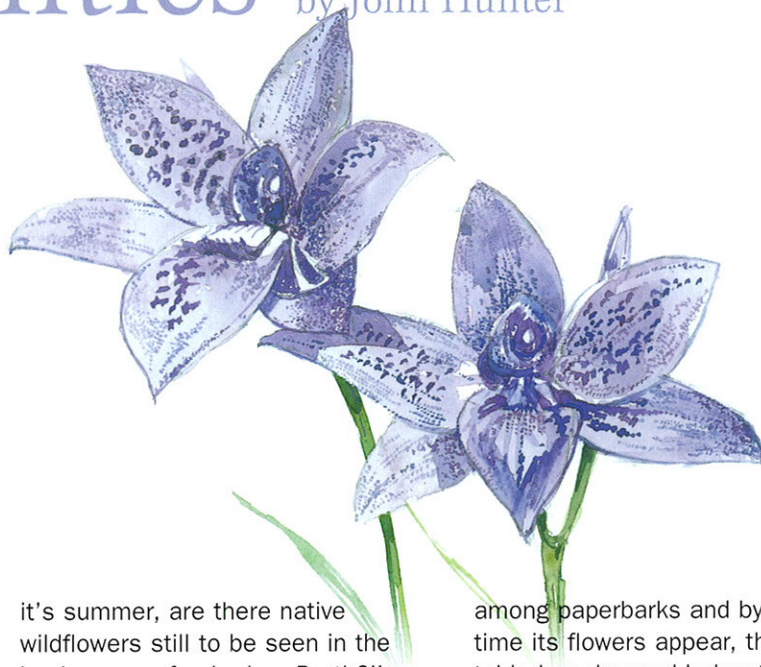
What about the wildflower spotters, you say? What are they going to do 'til next winter–spring? Withdrawal symptoms are cruel, so here's a little medicine.

Western Australia is the wildflower bowl of the planet. With the State spanning the northern tropics through to the southern Mediterranean climate zone, there is probably no time when there are not wildflowers blooming somewhere.

The general spring season of the southern half of the State, around September, is when the majority of blooms erupt across the sandplains, woodlands, swamps and scrub. More than 750 native and exotic plants are found in the inner suburban bush reserves of Kings Park and Bold Park alone. Along with the urban and outer areas of other south-west towns and cities in the Greater Perth Floristic District between Guilderton, Chittering, Collie and Bunbury, there are a staggering 2135 native species and some 764 exotic weed species.

From about June to December each year, in a growth wave starting from the Kimberley to the South Coast, WA becomes a 'Mecca' for serious botanists and tourists alike. Urbanites, country folk and foreigners are all eager to see at least some of the State's 12,000-plus wildflowers.

"What about the workers... er walkers", I hear you say. "Now



it's summer, are there native wildflowers still to be seen in the bush areas of suburban Perth?" Yes there are.

Depending on location, water, fire, soil quality and disturbance to an otherwise normal life cycle, there are probably quite a few, but the following four are my choice for your summer flora fix.

The blue lace flower (*Trachymene coerulea*) is an erect annual thistle-like herb which is found on Quindalup coastal soils near Perth. It has a pompom of showy, tiny flowers ranging from pale to deep blue that attract butterflies, jewel beetles and hoverflies. The flower is also found on Rottnest and Garden islands.

The babe-in-the-cradle orchid (*Epiblema grandiflorum*) has attractive purple flowers with spotted-like appearance. It inhabits wet peaty swamps often

among paperbarks and by the time its flowers appear, the water table has dropped below the soil surface allowing for good close-up photography.

Chenille honey-myrtle (*Melaleuca huegelii*) has small white bottle brush clusters or spikes and is a common shrub-come-bush of coastal limestone. It is now commonly found in many gardens both locally and overseas. The plants attract many bees, wasps, beetles and the Klug's xenica and painted lady butterflies.

The slipper orchid (*Cryptostylis ovata*) has a strange looking reddish-brown, slipper-like labellum with prominent net veins. The plant can resemble a handful of gum leaves stuck in the ground or a strong sturdy specimen 60 centimetres tall. Best obtain a photo of this babe.

Be off with you now, enjoy!

### DID YOU KNOW?

- It is always advisable to take a reference book when flower spotting.
- You might find a new or rare specimen.
- Orchids are those plants where the sexual organs are made up from one of the petals.
- The blue lace flower, also called Rottnest Island daisy, always appears each year on the island, but on the mainland, only a few plants germinate unless affected by fire. They are then found in profusion.



- 48 Uncovering turtle antics  
Monitoring Kimberley flatback turtles provides new insights into this threatened species.
- 55 Controversial cats  
Scientists debate the role of cats in the decline of our native mammals.

## Regulars

- 3 Contributors and Editor's letter
- 9 Bookmarks  
*Pilbara Western Australia*  
*Western Weeds – A guide to the weeds of Western Australia*  
*Rock Art of the Kimberley*
- 30 Feature park  
Marmion Marine Park
- 47 Endangered  
Rottnest Island pine community
- 62 Urban Antics  
Hot babes

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48



25



44



55