

# urban antics

by John Hunter

## Dead wood

For years, the huge, dead, limb of a tuart hung precariously at right angles over the nature reserve fence and out into the air space of the busy urban road. At 100-something-years of age, the tuart tree had been attacked in the past by fire, little boys with tomahawks and hundreds of other species of Earth dwellers that regularly use it as prime habitat. Because of its age and size, its presence in the shire conservation reserve was imperative to the visual enhancement and conservation integrity of the surrounding bush.

During a storm in June, the lower limb succumbed to centrifugal and other forces and plunged harmlessly onto the street verge. It was a lucky result but a frightening experience even though the formed footpath was on the opposite side of the road. The event could have been avoided with some pre-planning and pruning. What happened next was a typical human knee-jerk reaction and the reason for this peasant's proverbial 'spitting of the dummy'.

For years it has been in the forefront of government programs and all local land care initiatives to preserve, where possible, icons of conservation habitat value. At the behest of earning a 'quid' and within a couple of hours of the 'fall', little council people in work clobber oozed onto the scene like termites from an upturned plank. Now, I wasn't privy to the investigation, if any, but the three remaining trunks that did not protrude beyond the fence line, including one which sported a tuft of greenery high up, were set upon and demolished at ground level. John Williamson's song 'Rip Rip Woodchip' was alive and well.

As reported by neighbours, three species of parrot protecting some six nest holes screamed incessantly during the procedure and hung on violently as they rode the entire tree nearly to the

ground. No-one mentioned the geckoes, skinks and insects that succumbed under the buckled bark.

At some 20 metres high and on a hill reserve, the tree was a navigation point for passing Carnaby's black-cockatoos that regularly come through the lower valley to rest on the prime stag heads and reconnoitre the distant office towers of Perth city before heading south.

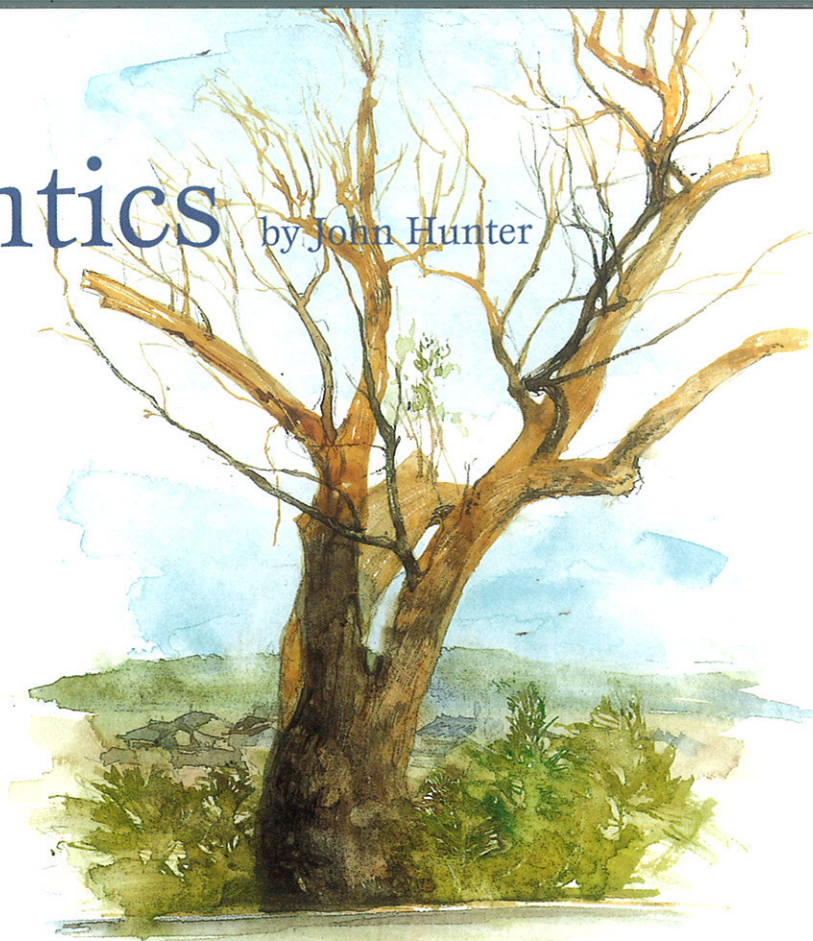
Most times these days it seems to be necessary to remind those who like to be seen to be earning their stripes with strength and flair, that there is a need to also think before acting, especially in relation to environmental matters.

At the risk of preaching to the converted once more, this grizzle is not aimed at you, the supporter of this magazine and urban gardener, but it is a reminder for those of us with big, old trees down by the back fence. Before removal, the question must be asked, can they be pruned? Can they be used for nest holes or boxes? Can they really be left as part of the web of nature?

We are all the custodians of the environment within our small lots in suburbia and while it can be hazardous to accumulate logs and ground refuse for reptile habitat, we sure can do something better in this 'urban desert' by planting native vegetation and looking after trees of known habitat value.

### DID YOU KNOW?

- The values of tuart woodlands include conserving biodiversity, protecting ecosystem function and providing connectivity between remnant vegetation.
- A dead tuart tree pruned for safety, but with a few nesting hollows and draped in native wisteria vine, is an absolute bonus in your backyard, aesthetically and as wildlife habitat.
- Before Europeans arrived, there were more than 111,600 hectares of tuart woodland. Today, through insect damage, urban clearance and agriculture, only 35 per cent remains.





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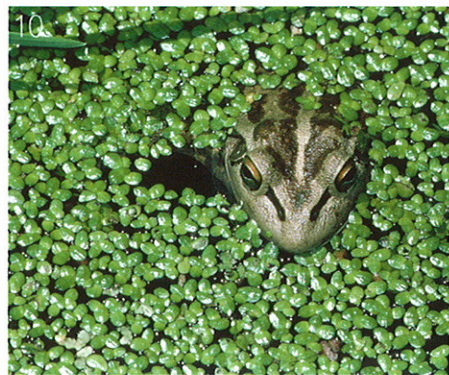
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