



urban antics

by John Hunter

Mangroves ...

"A rose by any other name would smell as sweet," said Juliet.

Ahh ... but not so every forest, says I. For example, as peppermint and eucalypt may be the very essence of addictive fragrance, a mangrove forest at low tide was once viewed, and still is by some, as a stinking place, a mosquito-ridden swampy wasteland.

How times have changed. Thank goodness science has unravelled the importance of mangroves to the coastal ecosystem and we now hold in high regard these forested areas as nurseries of rich biodiversity arguably like no other. They are real 'salt of the Earth' places for aquatic and terrestrial life to live and breed.

Mangroves are trees and shrubs that grow in the intertidal coastal areas and are most common in the tropical and sub-tropical areas of our north.

One species, however, the white mangrove (*Avicennia marina*), is found in the urban area of Bunbury city about 180 kilometres south of Perth. This rare southern colony is thought to have arrived as floating seedlings from northern climes to the Leschenault Estuary and tidal lagoons some several thousands of years ago on a then much stronger Leeuwin Current.

My first introduction to the Bunbury mangrove forest was during the early 1960s when, after weekend music engagements at a nearby hotel, the Perth 'ivy league uni set' would retire to the Koombana Bay campground for some serious partying. Many's the time we sat in complete darkness behind the mangroves, quaffing ale and whispering sweet nothings to friends while listening to the late-late shows on radio 6BY. Next morning it would be crabbing from old clinker rowboats in the backwater mangrove lagoons until the drinks esky was emptied and refilled with angry blue mannas, or we all went overboard for a swim in a frenzy of naked joy. Ahh ... those were the days.

Since those times, reclamation for urban and industry expansion has changed the original lay of the Preston River delta and lagoons in the southern part of the

estuary, but the mangrove-fringed shoreline has persisted and is now enhanced with an interpretive walkway. Young seedlings, saplings and mature trees are evident in the colony but it will be interesting to see if, in the future, the ecosystem remains unaffected by modern urbanisation and pollution.

Meanwhile, the special thick-leaved canopy and strange systems of tangled arboreal, underground, and vertical air-filled roots called pneumatophores that typify mangroves will continue to grace the environment of the Leschenault Estuary and lagoons.

Like times past—when Aborigines camped and speared cobbler, mulloway, mullet, black bream and taylor and collected many species of mollusc and crustacean in these waters—it is hoped the Bunbury mangrove forest will continue to thrive and protect its diverse community of marine life.

DID YOU KNOW?

- The United Nations has declared 2011 as the International Year of Forests, themed *Celebrating forests for people*.
- Forests cover only 31 per cent of the Earth's terrestrial area but it is estimated that they provide habitats for about two-thirds of all species on the planet.
- Mangroves are adapted to cope with salt and waterlogging. Their leaves have epidermal cells that secrete salt.

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