

Through a poet's eyes



Rose van Son brings together her love of nature and the written word into her poetry. Through her words, she explores the natural world – drawing on Western Australia's unique and fascinating biodiversity and magnificent landscapes to inspire her.

story by Tracy Shea, photos and poems by Rose van Son

Rose van Son grew up in the Swan Valley and exploring the Swan River. Through this, she developed a deep love of Western Australia's native plants, animals and landscapes and an appreciation of the complex relationship of how humans interact with them.

Rose has spent her lifetime putting her impressions of biodiversity into words. Poetry is her first love but she also writes short stories and personal essays, filling her pages with tales and prose inspired by WA's unique and diverse natural history.

"There is so much to see, if only we take the time," she said.

Rose says she doesn't have to travel far out of Perth to access beautiful areas that nurture her soul and feed her creativity. On any given day, you will find her walking along the beautiful Swan River or its tributaries and wetlands, camera in hand, watching for birds and taking in her surrounds. The Perth Hills are a favourite haunt, too, as is Kent St Weir in Canning River Regional Park where the blue-billed ducks, the Australasian grebes and yellow spoonbills delight with their antics. Further afield, Rose enjoys visiting the Malbup birdhide at Tuart Forest National Park near Busselton, and Parry Lagoons Nature Reserve, near Kununurra, which teems with birdlife.

Rose says she enjoys finding patterns in nature and writing them into her poetry. She seeks to hear the 'music of the forest' and studies the interconnectedness of all its elements. But she also appreciates the

quietness of the national parks she visits around Perth – Walyunga, John Forrest and Gooseberry Hill. When creating her works, Rose ties together the weather, mood of the sky, sounds of the birds, shadows and light. She enjoys experiencing the natural environment as a whole and then revels in the detail she finds in the plants and animals that live there – from the towering trees that dominate the landscape, to the small but significant invertebrates found on the forest floor, and everything in between.

Rose has been widely published in Australia and overseas and has just completed a poetry manuscript and is writing a memoir. Her *Three Owls and a Crescent Moon*, is a book of haiku with images depicting her love of nature.

Rose has also taught at Curtin University and reads her poetry at venues around Perth. She has been a visiting artist at Corrugated Lines, Broome, on World Radio 6EBA, and in Margaret River. In 2015 she was a guest poet at the Perth Poetry Festival and her poems have appeared in many journals. She won the Katharine Susannah Prichard Short Fiction Award, and several prizes for poetry.

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Top Jacana at Parry's Lagoon.

Inset Rose van Son.

Right Mulla mulla flowers.

Photo – Peter Nicholas/Parks and Wildlife

Opposite page

Far right Darter spreads its wings.

Right Leschenaultia macrantha, Paynes Find.

LANDSCOPE readers can delight in Rose van Son's poems and photographs here which show a different perspective of nature – through a poet's eyes.

Past Jubilee Downs

"Look at them standing about – like wildflowers, which have nowhere else to grow"

Rainer Maria Rilke

silver-mauve against blue
Mulla mulla flowers
smart the roadside
the road dips then bends
pindan red balloons edges
railway tracks banish Spinifex
in evening light
snappy gums stamp shadows
wrap their trunks in late news
beyond the bend
the road taking us further
than where we wanted to go

Bird Hide

Parry Lagoons Nature Reserve
Comb-crested jacana (*Irediparra gallinacea*)

*we drive a stony path
until we find the hide
ramping it to see a brolga
waiting for her picture to be taken
mazed in lagoon's storied light*

*Marlgu-sanctioned waterlilies, billabong lipped
flowers cream, some deep, deep pink
where egrets, magpie geese, finches too
all manner of waders
feed on evening light*

*but it was the lotus bird, that floating Jacana
picking her way on fine legs to walk on water
stepping from one waterlily to another
pecking seeds on the belly of the flower's great leaf
that left us mouthing more!*

*we could have watched for hours, such a poise
photographing her crested-comb, the waders
and her kind, starring step-by-step
feeding in reflective light
the birds seemingly unaware*

*our awe, our eyes, slit
hide to see*

Desire

"And yet, if our Earth needed to
she could weave us together like roses
and make of us a garland"
Rainer Maria Rilke

*Speak to me of wreaths, those garlands
set like gardens in colours of rose-pink
and red, when light seeps in
curls your head onto my breast*

*Speak to me of words
set in garland rounds
when sun throws shade
to early afternoon*

*Speak to me of colour
woven leschenaultia flowers
garlands, rare and utterly deceiving
appearing wanton on sandy plains
clasped in Spring's gathering arms*

A Darter's Moment

The black darter
now flies across still water
now dips its head

a silent sacrifice
a fish below the surface
catches its eye

disappears under cloud
bends with river water
then reappears in a grasp

lifts its neck, pushes
it forward as if praying –
a god of plenty

swallows the petrified eye
the body drawn whole
slides the snake-neck

a tube for all its belongings
turns to dry its wings
feathers spread

on a log long dead
dipped in river water
the snake-bird shudders

settles, snatches the sun
left over water
spills from its skin.

Shadows
sketch what is left
black/ grey brush-

strokes as if paint
has drawn them
together

the canvas a slow
meditation, neck outstretched
turns one side

then the other
modelling the art-
work, the glow

grey on black, its
underbelly a picture-
card promise

the log, glad to be of use
the snake-bird folds
in the wake of a passing boat.

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'Touched by nature' is a feature that tells the stories of people who have used their experiences in nature to enrich the lives of others.