

WILDLIFE HABITAT THREATENED AT ALFRED COVE

There is only one remaining section of natural foreshore on the Swan River.

If destroyed, the few hundred metres of Alfred Cove in question will mean the disappearance on the Swan River Estuary of a small migratory wading bird, the Greenshank and a rare saltwater snail. The area has also the distinction of having the only existing exposed prehistoric fossil grounds on the estuary.

The Greenshank

Because of past river reclamation, the samphire flats of Alfred Cove provide the only habitat on the Swan River with food sources for the Greenshank. From September to April each year the bird can be seen feeding voraciously in the Cove.

Greenshanks breed in the Arctic summer, nesting in Northern Europe and the isolation of Siberia. Egg-laying begins in May and only two months later the young have taken wing. In August, only three months after breeding, the onset of winter forces the birds and their young on a southward migration.

They have been known to travel the 12 000 km from Siberia to Western Australia in only 75 days, and for this reason the birds are usually emaciated and exhausted on their arrival.

In order to recover and attain the full physical condition needed for their return journey, the Greenshanks must have ready access to a feeding ground with a food supply of the quantity and quality as is found in Alfred Cove.



Greenshanks, as may be seen loafing on the flats of Alfred Cove.



Panorama of Alfred Cove. District of Attadale on left and centre. Perth skyline is on the extreme right.

Alfred Cove provides a food chain in the form of insect larvae, crustaceans (shrimp etc.) annelids (worms) small fish and molluscs (marine snails). The saltwater snail mentioned previously, exists only in this area.

Greenshanks do not eat plants and therefore depend upon animal life for food. It is reasonable speculation that any attempts at pesticidal control of the saltwater mosquito and other insect larvae on Alfred Cove Flats would impair or destroy food chains on which the bird depends.

Large and small animal predators (including Greenshank) of insect larvae could be removed, making the control of mosquitos etc., entirely dependent on pesticides.

Reclamation as a control, would have just as damaging an effect as pesticides in wiping out the biological resources of the Cove, but a further loss would be incurred as is explained in the following.

Fossil Deposits

The Alfred Cove flats are comprised of an unmodified fossil deposit of sea shells some 7 000 years old. The deposit records levels reached by the rise in the sea between 20 and 6 thousand years ago, following the last ice age.

Because of previous reclamation in the Swan River Estuary, Alfred Cove has the only surface deposit left for study by future generations. The Cove therefore, is of geological importance for understanding the evolution of local landscapes.

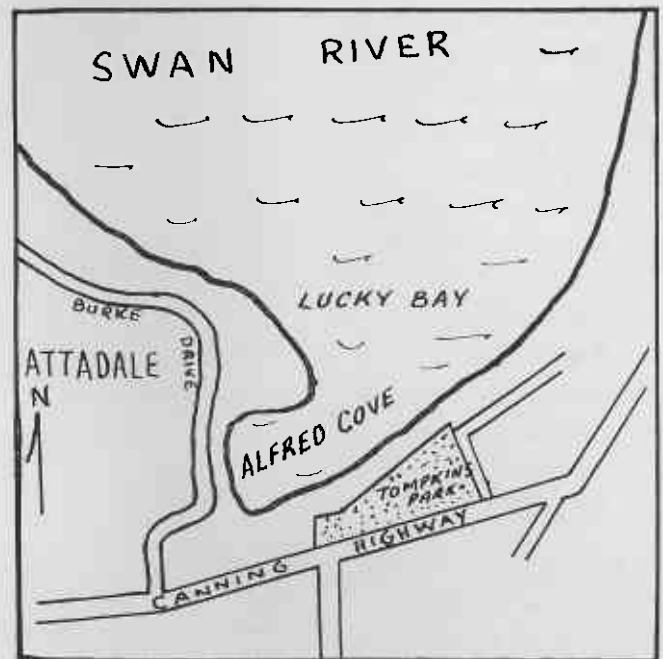
The aforementioned is a situation of ludicrous repetition within cities of the world today.

Civilization encroaches on the domain of all wild creatures, but with a little thought and pre-planning, the biological diversity and natural resources of a com-

munity can be maintained for the education and enlightenment of its people and future generations.

Cities are becoming huge artificial "People Parks" devoid of most indigenous fauna with the exception of a few common species.

Anything of value has a cost, in the case of Alfred Cove with its small amount of insect pest (compared with years ago) the cost is trivial.



Looking north-west across Alfred Cove. Mud flats utilized by Greenshanks are across water on the left. This is the area which has been in the news as a mosquito breeding ground and will be the subject on a research programme next summer. Spraying pesticides over the mud flats to combat the mosquito problem also presents a hazard to the wildlife and marine animals.

