

EARLY 1976/77 DUCK SHOOTING SEASON

The 1976/77 duck shooting season opened at 6 p.m. on Saturday, December 18, 1976 and closed at 8 p.m. on Sunday, January 16, 1977.

The Bird Committee of the Western Australian Wildlife Authority had given careful consideration to the views of the W.A. Field and Game Association and the Department's research staff before recommending the limited season.

Aerial and ground surveys had been carried out late in 1976 by the Department of Fisheries and Wildlife and this had revealed that about one-third of the shooting area within the South West and Eucla Land Divisions was not available due to the dry seasonal conditions.

Reports indicated that breeding within the waterfowl population had been minimal this season and the reduction of the shooting season to one month plus a change in the daily bag limit from ten to six birds was to assist in moderating the shooting pressure.

Lake Towerrinning in the West Arthur Shire was closed to shooting to provide an additional refuge area. Also, the Avon River between the Northam Townsite and Dumbarton Bridge was closed so that the summer pools provided protection for birds moving to the area from further inland.

Game species for the season were:—

Whistling Tree-Duck *Dendrocygna arcuata*
Plumed Tree-Duck *Dendrocygna eytoni*
Mountain Duck *Tadorna tadornoides*
Black Duck *Anas superciliosa*
Chestnut Teal *Anas castanea*
Grey Teal *Anas gibberifrons*
Blue-winged Shoveler *Anas rhynchos*
White-eyed Duck *Aythya australis*
Wood Duck (Maned Goose) *Chenonetta jubata*

A report on the results of the season will be given in a following issue of S.W.A.N.S.

OUR ATTITUDE TOWARDS NATIVE PLANTS

By R. Powell

(reprinted from W.A. Wildflower News, Vol. 13, No. 4, Nov. 1975)

Since colonization, Western Australians have grown exotic plants. A gardening tradition has evolved with certain clear characteristics. Admired most are:

- the showiest plants (with large, bright flowers; dense foliage; bright green or variegated leaves)
- plants which are neatly shaped.

Gardens are seen as collections of individual plants. The greater the number of showy plants in a garden, the more it is admired. It does not matter if those plants do not harmonize; in fact, they are often purposely planted so that they contrast with each other, to heighten the spectacle. Fundamental to the keeping of such a garden are certain gardening habits—

- pruning (to maintain a neat shape and to increase the mass of foliage and the abundance and density of flowers)
- spraying (to maintain a tidy, unblemished appearance)
- digging, fertilizing and watering (to encourage the plants to produce a lot of foliage and abundant flowers—and, indeed, to keep them alive in our climate).

Today, some people are growing native plants. But that is no real revolution: they admire them according to the same criteria and treat them in much the same manner as the exotics. Consequently, not many native plants have become popular. Only thirty to fifty native Western Australian genera contain a majority of showy species (such as *Banksia* and *Acacia*) and only fifty or so genera can even muster more than one or two showy species. Altogether that is less than one hundred of the State's seven hundred and forty-four native genera. Certainly, most native Western Australian plants are not showy; nor do many of them grow into a neat shape.

But should we judge native plants (things of nature) by the same criteria as exotics? Are we going to admire and cultivate only those comparatively few that are showy? I believe that every native plant is beautiful, and worth growing, if it is looked at in the right way.

Many large trees, particularly Eucalypts, are admired for what is described as their grace, form or character. Why not admire other native plants in the same way? All native plants, large or small, grow according to a formula. The formula is different for each species and the plant is further modified by its environment; thus there are produced patterns of an endless variety. Each pattern is delicate, whether it be a fine pattern produced by slender branches and dispersed foliage, or a bizarre one where branches twist or form sharp angles. The leaves themselves, which may be divided, toothed, wedge-shaped, etc., add to the pattern. (Many of the patterns are emphasized when the plant supports raindrops or the morning dew.) Exotic plants, which bear more foliage, or bigger leaves, often conceal their pattern of growth. Moreover, in cultivation the plant's structure is distorted either through selective breeding or simply because it is growing in an unfamiliar climate. And, of course, if the plant is pruned the pattern is destroyed.

Nothing is more harmonious than unspoiled bushland; the plants all belong together—they have evolved together. For the gardener who desires his garden to be harmonious and integrated, a collection of local native plants has an immediate advantage over one of exotics (from different countries and climates). But one can increase the harmony much further still by imitating the way plants occur in nature. For example, in the sand-dunes, where plants are of many different colours and textures, they diffuse through one another, which mutes and blends the colours; one can space such plants appropriately in the garden to produce a similar effect. Thus there is an opportunity to have a garden with a beauty of an altogether different kind—a kind seldom even hinted at by the exotic garden.

Watching the behaviour of native plants can also awaken our admiration. In particular, their seasonal behaviour—which enables them to thrive in our climate—is often quite dramatic. It is enchanting to observe the small plant *Opercularia vaginalis* in its transition



In gardening books we often see the phrase "ugly old wood"—but woody is the very nature of most of our perennial plants, which must survive harsh dry summers. If we find wood ugly we cannot enjoy the beauty of our native plants.

from its late summer condition—brown and all but leafless—to its condition in winter, when it is dense, leafy and bright green. Some native plants (e.g. *Acacia pulchella*) flower first during the wet season then grow, whereas others (e.g. *Pimelia floribunda*) grow first, then flower. Although many plants become dormant in summer, others (e.g. *Melaleuca acerosa*) are at their softest and greenest. Others flower at that season.

Natural flora attracts natural fauna. We can wonder at the diverse designs by which native plants lure their pollinators. We can also enjoy the company of the birds and other small creatures which the plants bring us.

There is much to admire in native plants. What is most important is that we cannot admire many of them if we require them to conform to rigid ideas. We must look at them with humility, with a mind open to the delight the plant can give us, each in its own way.

And should we treat native plants as we treat exotics? If we admire the plants' form we shall never prune them. As they become old and develop their character to the fullest, so we admire them more (just as with trees). If we admire native plants for the way they harmonize with each other we shall study the plant communities in nature and try to copy them in the garden. If we admire the way plants adapt to our climate we shall grow plants that occur in the same climate as that where we live. We shall not water plants (except when they are very young and vulnerable); we shan't want to interfere with the plant's seasonal behaviour.

We are very lucky to have native flora around us to see. At last we are cultivating some of our own plants. But if we are to go any further, I believe, our thinking must change, along with our gardens. We must realize that native plants are all worth cultivating. Obviously there are far too many of them for anyone to grow them all, but if each of us stuck to the plant communities of his own locality, then between us we could cultivate a substantial proportion. If we grow native plants we can learn about them; if we don't change our attitude we shall never get to know the great majority of our plants.

LITTLE FALCON PROTECTED

At last some of our antiquated laws are slowly emerging to become victims of modern day commonsense.

In the *Government Gazette* of May 28, 1976 the Minister for Fisheries and Wildlife declared a new list of unprotected fauna in Western Australia. This appeared in S.W.A.N.S. Vol. 6 No. 2.

The Western Australian Wildlife Authority had recommended that the Little Falcon (*Falco longipennis*) be deleted from the new list as it appeared that the bird was not causing the damage to stock and property as first suspected many years ago.

A situation had also arisen whereby the markings of the bird produced a likeness similar to that of a Peregrine Falcon. This led to the situation where the Little Falcon could be indiscriminately shot by gun happy vandals and the very similar Peregrine (a rare and endangered species) therefore placed in jeopardy and the warrant of a \$1 000 fine.

The Agriculture Protection Board raised no objection to the reclassification providing there was a liberal policy regarding the issue of damage licenses to people whose pigeons or poultry were being attacked.

Commercial poultry growers have fully confined premises which prevents their exotic stocks from intermingling and competing with indigenous birds; a paradox exists however in the case of domestic pigeons (also exotics) which are regularly released for exercise and sporting purposes.

According to the Wildlife Conservation Act, pigeons are unprotected introduced fauna and whilst they are the hobby of some breeders, these birds at large are considered by many to be exotic intrusions to the State's indigenous fauna.

Birds of Prey have been persecuted by man since time immemorial; whether protected or unprotected, it is folly to believe that they can be wilfully exterminated in preference to exotics.