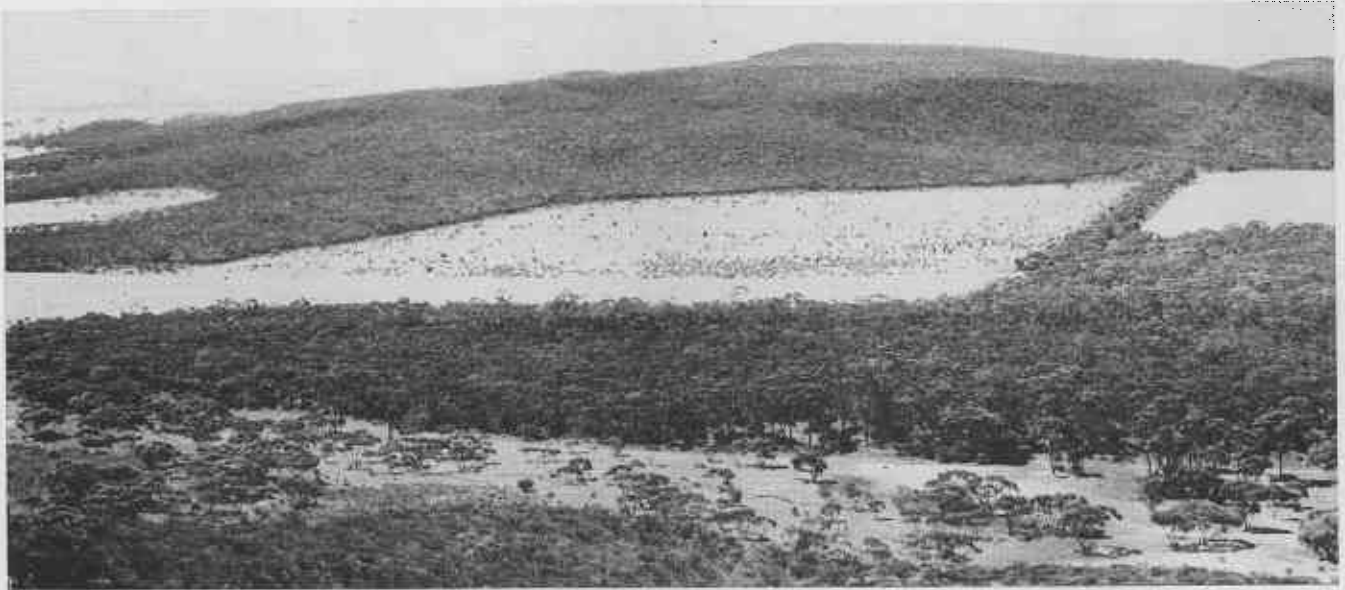


THE WONGAN HILLS



During 1977 the W.A. Naturalists' Club conducted a biological survey of the Wongan Hills.

Such a survey had not been done for many years and it was necessary to evaluate the current biological situation and determine possible past effects from agriculture.

The Department of Fisheries and Wildlife decided to produce a leaflet incorporating a precis of the report with additional reasons why the status of the Hills should be maintained by its private land owners. It was also necessary to inform the people of Wongan-Ballidu of the need to maintain the biological diversity and natural resources of their community.

The Wongan Hills are vegetated by one of the largest remaining single representative samples of natural bushland (some 1750 hectares) in the Northern Wheatbelt.

The Hills themselves, lie 12 km north-west of the township of Wongan Hills which is 194 km north-east of Perth in the Wongan-Ballidu Shire.

FLORA

Over two hundred and fifty species of flowering plants exist in the Hills—an exceptionally high number of species for a single area. Some plants such as the Dryandra, *Dryandra comosa* and the Triggerplant, *Stylidium coroniforme* do not occur anywhere else in the world.

There are only two small nature reserves existing within the Hills for the protection of flora and fauna. Most of the Hills are on private property, and their future as a prime ecological entity depends upon the landowners.

LANDSCAPE

The Hills' landscape is a complex of ridges dissected by steep gullies, and Breakaways. A capping of laterite overlays outcropping greenstone rocks. Such

a concentration of rugged landforms are uncommon in the Wheatbelt, and the rugged terrain has created difficulties for farming. Consequently, it is fortuitous that the Hills remain as an isolated haven for native plants and animals.

HISTORICALLY IMPORTANT

The Hills are important both historically and biologically. Named in 1836 by Surveyor-General J. S. Roe they were subsequently visited as early as 1842 by the colonial botanist James Drummond who was accompanied by John Gilbert, the noted collector employed by the famous British ornithologist John Gould. Many plant and animal specimens obtained from the Hills by these men were new to science.

FAUNA CONTENT

There is a wealth of vertebrate animals in the Wongan Hills; to date 112 birds, 10 native mammals and 26 reptiles and frogs have been recorded. Such a variety of animals is directly due to the diversity of vegetation.



Common Dunnart.

Photo by A. G. Wells

Many of the birds that have declined elsewhere in the Wheatbelt, due to land clearing, are quite common in the Hills. Included among these are Malleefowl, Redthroat, White-browed Babbler, Chestnut-tailed Thornbill, Southern Scrub-robin, Yellow Robin and White-eared Honeyeater. The presence of the Splendid Wren, *Ma'urus splendens* is interesting because this bird is extremely uncommon throughout most of the Wheatbelt. It exists in the Wongan Hills together with populations of Blue-breasted Wren, *M. pulcherimus* and the White-winged Wren, *M. leucopterus*.

The occurrence of the Ashy Grey Mouse, *Pseudomys albocinereus* is significant because in the Wheatbelt this species is rare, being recorded on only six widely scattered reserves. The mouse-like Common Dunnart, *Sminthopsis murina* and the Fat-tailed Dunnart, *Sminthopsis crassicaudata* have been observed below the ridges at the junction of grassland and bushland. The Little Broad-nosed Bat, *Nycticeius greyi* which occurs in the Wongan Hills has not been recorded elsewhere in the Wheatbelt.

There is an interesting assemblage of reptiles and frogs including the geckos, *Diplodactylus pulcher* and Whipsnake, *Demansia reticulata* and the skink, *Morethia butleri* which is the most westerly known record of a dry country species.



The Gray Fantail, a resident of the Wongan Hills.

Photo by R. Garstone



A breakaway in the Wongan Hills.

Photo by K. Kenneally

DEPARTMENTAL INVOLVEMENT

In its review of environmentally important areas in System 4 (the Wheatbelt), the Environmental Protection Authority recommended that:

“The owners of private lands (the Wongan Hills) adjoining the reserves, should be commended on the conservation work they have done. If the present conservation work ceases, however, steps should be taken to retain the land in its present state.”

This recommendation is being considered now by the Department of Fisheries and Wildlife and monitoring has already commenced using colour aerial photography. Such photography clearly shows boundaries between vegetative communities; it also indicates

that each farm property is subject to a particular land-use regime. The photography could be used for photogrammetric contouring if and when the vegetated ridges begin to erode.

SO IT CAN REMAIN AS WILDERNESS

The local community will be encouraged to continue to conserve the Hills as a wilderness area. If any change is contemplated by landowners, by way of clearing or other development, the Department would like to be invited to discuss the proposal with a view of either purchasing the property or reaching an agreement which would ensure the retention of the land as a wilderness area.