Gingilup Swamps — An Important Wetland Reserve in the South-West

by Clifford Young

Just to mention the word "swamp" to most people is often enough to conjure up visions in their minds reminiscent of scenes from an old Humphrey Bogart film classic, *The African Queen*. Complete with thigh deep black water oozing putrescent bubbles, the constant whine of mosquitoes overhead, blood-sucking leeches by the thousands and a myriad of other unspeakable creatures lurking in the undergrowth.

However, mention the word to ardent birdwatchers and other nature lovers and they will revel in recounting to you the absolute delights experienced during their last swamp trip. Oblivious to any discomforts they may have suffered, they will talk of a nature wonderland and the spectacle of birds feeding and nesting in an area of abundant food and relative peace, free from man's interference. In other words, those same conditions which act to keep man out of an area such as a swamp also act to make the area a good refuge for wildlife.

One such swamp in Western Australia's south-west is the Gingilup Swamps, a C-class Reserve vested in the Western Australian Wildlife Authority. The area was originally set aside for the conservation of flora and fauna in October, 1970.

The Gingilup Swamps lie on the headwaters of the Scott River which flows west for 30 kilometres and empties into Hardy Inlet opposite Molloy Island. For its length the river is protected by crown land reserves which are continuous from the Gingilup Swamps to the Scott National Park at the river's outlet. The protection afforded by these reserves is undoubtedly one reason why the Scott River remains a valuable source of high quality water all year round. This is in contrast to other waterways where such reservation of headwaters, river and foreshores is lacking.

In addition, the swamp's vegetation stabilises the headwaters of the Scott River. The vegetation is biologically rich and provides ideal wildlife habitat over summer as well as winter.

A recent field survey by one of the Department's Wildlife Officers, Peter Lambert, revealed some of the

◀ This frog, *Hyla adelaidensis*, was one of two species recorded on the reserve. This specimen was found near the southern boundary. (Photo P. Lambert)

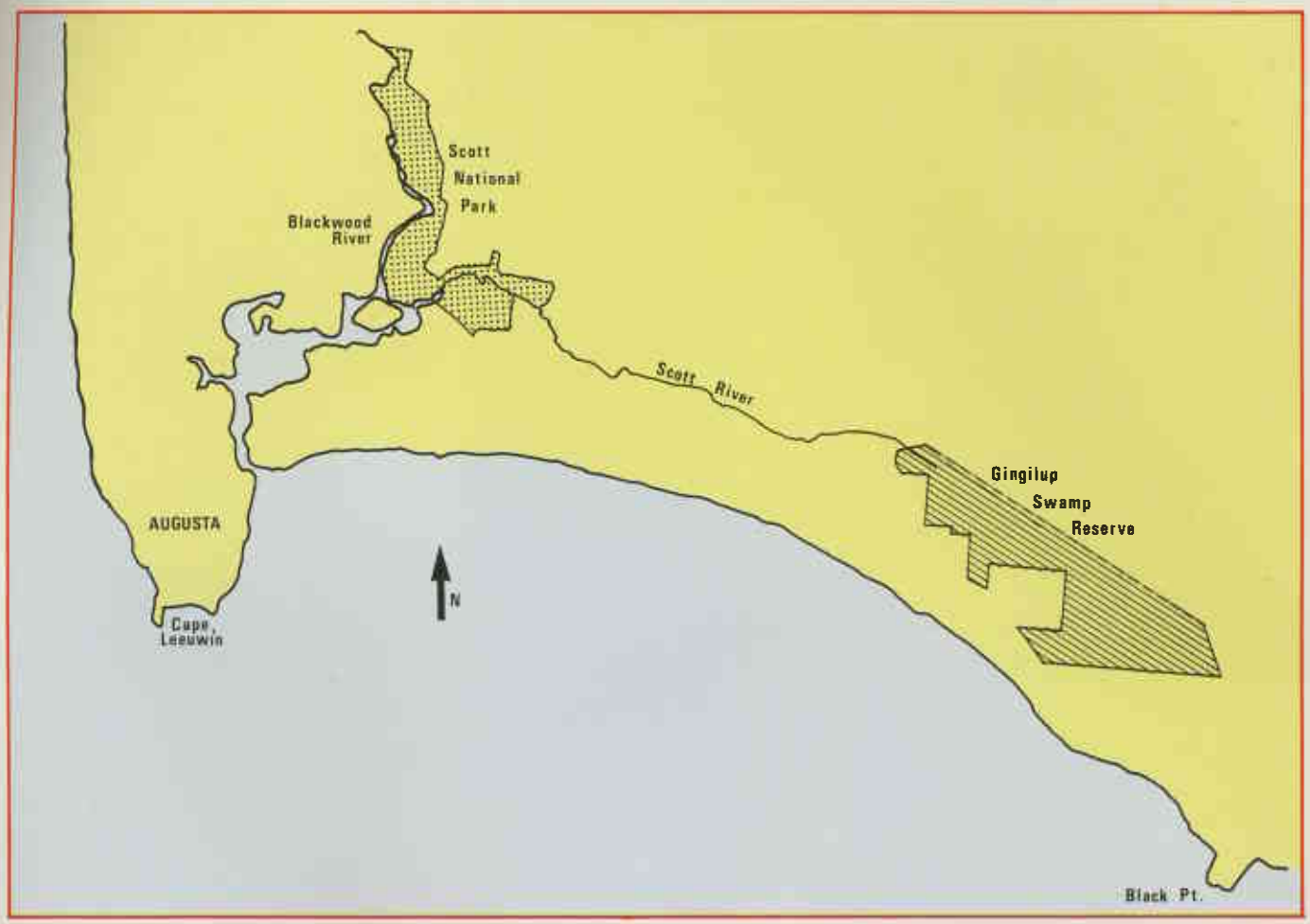
▼ Clamorous Reed-warbler. (Photo copyright A.G. Wells)

▲ The Red Swamp Banksia or water bush, *Banksia occidentalis*, is common on the reserve in small dense thickets. It forms a haven for honeyeaters and other passerines of the area. (Photo P. Lambert)

This specimen was seen near the southern boundary. It is a Stout Blind Snake, *Typhlops pinguis*. (Photo P. Lambert) ▶

◀ A Golden Whistler, another commonly recorded bird of the reserve. (Photo copyright A.G. Wells)

▼ The Yellow Jugflower, *Adenanthos detmoldii*, is a gazetted rare plant of the damp sandy flats in the Scott River area. It was recently reported to occur on the western side of the Gingilup Reserve. (Photo P. Lambert)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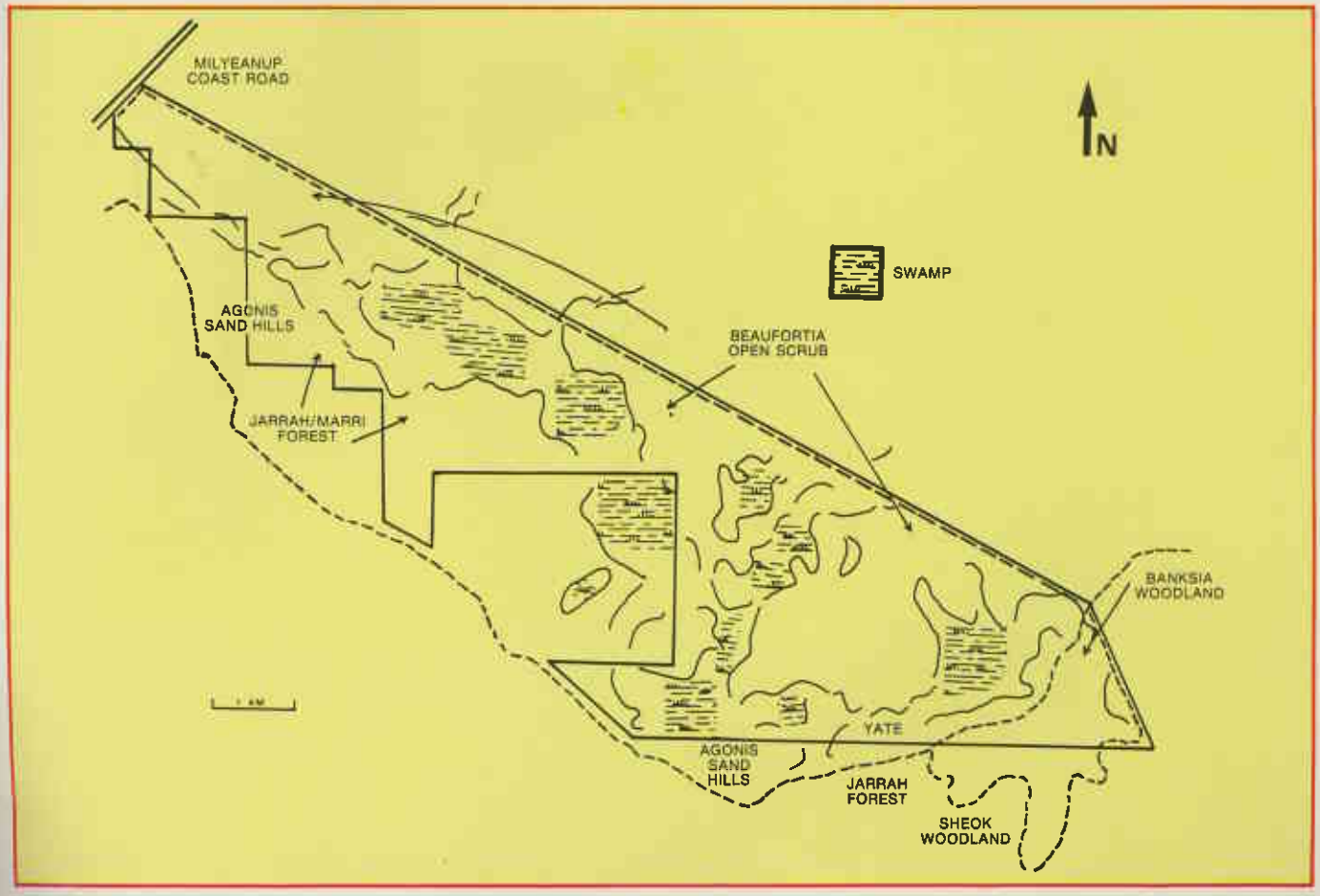
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WOODLAND

▲ A typical wet depression fringed on higher ground by *Banksia occidentalis, Oxylobium lanciolatum, Melaleuca* sp, and *Agonis juniperina.* (Photo P. Lambert)

▼ *Hyla moorei*, another species of frog recorded on the reserve. (Photo P. Lambert)

suspected richness of the reserve's birdlife. Amongst the birds seen within the reserve were the Little Wattle-bird, Red-winged or Blue Breasted Fairy Wren, Grey Currawong, Golden Whistler, Australian Hobby, Ring-necked Parrot, Marsh Harrier, Grey Butcher-bird, Australian Kestrel, Elegant Parrot, Common Bronzewing, Richard's Pipit, Emu, Western Magpie, Stubble Quail, Willy Wagtail, Dusky Wood Swallow, Red-eared Firetail, Kookaburra, White-tailed Black Cockatoo, New Holland Honeyeater, White-backed Swallow, Purple-crowned Lorikeet, Restless Flycatcher, Grey Fantail, Crow, Scarlet Robin and Brown Falcon.

In addition to the birdlife observed within the reserve, other fauna seen included numerous grey kangaroos and several species of skinks, snakes and frogs. The officer also reported that the reserve's vegetation was of considerable interest and varied between low jarrah forest, sheok woodland, beaufortia scrub and banksia woodland. It was also reported that a relatively rare species of banksia had been found growing on the reserve. The species was subsequently indentified as a variety of *Banksia meisneri* which, although known to occur infrequently from the Scott River to Busselton, had previously only been collected from road verges. This was the first record of the plant occuring on an nature reserve and, as such, increases the importance of the Gingilup Swamps for conservation.

It is very probable that many other species of flora and fauna exist on the reserve without the Department's knowledge. This is largely due to the nature of the reserve, being extremely wet and impassable during winter and little better in summer. However, as pointed out earlier, this very fact has helped preserve the swamps in their natural state.