



PRACTICALITIES



THE CREATION OF AWATUKEE WETLAND

By Julie and Greg Bousfield

WE moved to our property near Perth some twelve years ago, wanting to lose ourselves in the natural bush of this rural retreat. Our five-acre property, called "Awatukee" (a Cherokee Indian word for "place of dreams"), consists almost entirely of natural vegetation over Bassendean sand, with sections of banksia woodland, kunzea thicket, heathland, and a wetland.

Originally, however, the wetland did not exist in the form it is in now. When we first moved here the wetland area was a shallow sumpland with a few native rushes, an extension of a much larger and deeper seasonal wetland that extended into several neighbouring properties. It was home to a number of tiger snakes, and little else as far as we could see.

As more people moved to the area their chosen landuses conflicted with the natural environment, which resulted in the clearing of vegetation and the infilling of much of the large wetland. So ten years ago we decided to modify our sumpland to cope with the increased runoff resulting from these activities, and to provide a similar habitat for those organisms that once existed in it. In effect, I guess what we really did was attempt to move the original wetland from a neighbouring property to ours!

Amidst our own speculations that we weren't really doing the right thing by nature, we went ahead and spent \$1200 on the hire of a D7 bulldozer, which we used ourselves.

The sumpland was dug out to a depth of about one and a half metres, although shallow flats along the edges were deliberately left. Much of the spare dirt from the operations was used to create two islands within the new wetland, while the rest was used to make a bank matching the

height of the neighbour's infilling along the edge of our property, so we could put a boundary fence up.

The ground water level has dropped over the years, probably because of the pumping stations scattered about the area to prevent flooding and subsidence of urban developments. We are finding that mature banksias are dying in large numbers, the reason as suggested by one neighbour is due to the sudden lowering of the water table, while the growth of young trees is occurring in areas that once would have been much too wet for them. Once we could dig down two feet and hit water, but now the soil is bone dry.

Our speculations that we weren't doing the right thing in creating the wetland have been somewhat diluted by the modifications that are occurring in the area as a result of urbanisation. Our sumpland, had we left it, would now probably be no more than a large, empty patch of dusty sand.

Having completed the structure of the wetland, we decided to plant

a few non-endemic plants on the islands, and had great inspirations to create a romantic lakeside gazebo surrounded by lush lawns. However, as we learnt, nothing grows better in an area than the plants that are actually meant to be there. So while we watched our planted trees and romantic dreams die, the native rushes and scrub hastily covered the area to create a habitat denser than the original one, leaving very little for us to do in the way of revegetation.

Over a ten year period we have seen the number of visitations by water birds to the wetland increase, and have observed pairs of ducks (possibly the Pacific black duck) breeding each year on the islands. More recently, ibis have started visiting "Awatukee" as well. There are also long-necked tortoise, gilgies, and heaps of frogs that call the wetland home. Of course, the tiger snakes still live here!

Julie and Greg Bousfield are keen wildlife observers, and are members of Land for Wildlife.



Julie and Greg in the cab of the D7 bulldozer, constructing the basin of the wetland (1988). Photo courtesy of Julie Bousfield.