

LFW NEWS

NESTING BOXES FOR A WILDLIFE RETREAT



The Green Corps team with Ayleen and Tony Sands



This nesting box blends nicely with a Wandoo tree.

WITH only 200mm of rain being recorded at the Stirling Range Retreat over the last nine months, Ayleen and Tony Sands have faced one of their toughest times since they took on the ownership of the Retreat on the northern boundary of the Stirling Range near Bluff Knoll turnoff five years ago.

Ayleen and Tony were one of the first landholders in the south coast region to register with LFW and they are also members of the eco-tourism association. They promote a strong conservation ethic to their guests to ensure tourism does not impact adversely on natural bushland. This has included making big changes to the management of the Retreat, eg:

- ▶ removing 175 fireplaces and educating guests about the risks of wildfire
- ▶ restricting camping to a designated area, instead of allowing guests to camp anywhere amongst the bushland
- ▶ advising guests not to bring cats or dogs, as they disturb the fauna
- ▶ revegetating degraded areas with both seedlings and direct seeding
- ▶ creating walking trails to discourage trampling over the bush

- ▶ providing information and guided walks so that people can begin to understand the fragile ecology of the area.

Recently the Albany-based Green Skills Green Corps team installed 23 nesting boxes which Ayleen and Tony had requested them to build. They are specially suited to Brush-tailed Possums, Brush-tailed Phascogales, Pygmy Possums, Honey Possums, Pardalotes, Parrots and other bird species. CALM made the wood

available from a tree with hollow limbs which had blown over during a storm and was blocking a firebreak. Five minutes after installation, a Rufous Treecreeper was observed inspecting one of the boxes.

The focus at the Stirling Range Retreat on preserving the wildlife is obviously attractive to human guests as well as the wildlife. Hopefully the area will get its much needed rainfall and the animals will increase in the comfort of their new homes.

Sylvia Leighton

BUSH DETECTIVE

It is a Quillwort, *Isoetes* sp. and there are a several different kinds across the south-west. Often there are variations from one rock to another.

Quillworts are related to the ferns and reproduce by spores produced in sporangia at the base of the leaves. They are found throughout the temperate regions of the world, and at least eight species are known from Australia. They are a very ancient group of plants, whose ancestors were part of the great forests that covered much of the world in the Carboniferous era.

Quillworts survive the summer as spores in the mud on the bed of the gnamma. Trampling by hooved mammals breaks up this mud and allows wind and water erosion. In rangeland areas such as the Murchison, goats (and to a lesser extent sheep) use the granite outcrops as camp sites. Their grazing, trampling and accumulation of dung has so changed the pools that Quillworts are seldom found there any more. Grazed wheatbelt rocks show the same effect. Given the variation among these tiny plants, and the fact that they have survived so long, this is a sad loss of biodiversity.

