

OUR Gidgegannup retreat has been a welcome escape from the sanitized city and provides a beautiful window into the workings of the natural environment. Over the years the brush wallabies and emus have disappeared, and have been replaced by a horde of kangaroos. The kangaroos now graze and trample the whole area like a herd of cattle, progressively removing the natural vegetation, while we watch with dismay as the tide of South African weeds advances up the hill from the road. What will be left of it all in another 100 years?

Mostly we are too busy to stop and observe details - the small picture - but the call of nature forces us all to sit a while and contemplate our surroundings. There is nowhere better to do this than in the old outside dunny. On entry you are usually greeted by a flurry of Old Lady Moths - they love to rest in dark outbuildings, and there is usually plenty of other insect activity to watch while sitting there. Mud-dauber wasps are often busy building nests behind the door and provisioning them with garden spiders, while brilliant blue-green chalcid wasps come searching for these nests. Their larvae are parasitic and eat the mud-dauber larvae.

Sometimes, there is not much to see and my mind wanders - relaxed by the rhythmic movement of clots of cobweb on the wall, blowing in the breeze. Once I was brought back

FAUNA

DUNNY-BUGS

Jan Taylor



"Dunny-bug" - an assassin bug (*Reduvildae*) belonging to the subfamily *Emesinae*.
Photo: Jan Taylor

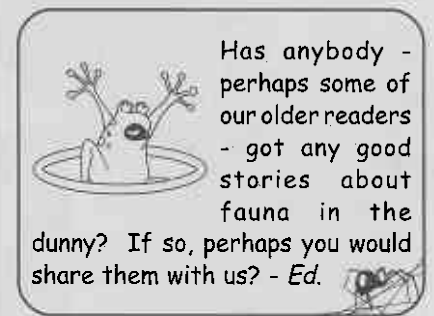
to reality when I noticed that one of the clots of web was not fixed at all. It was floating around just like the other pieces of web, but was actually walking! A close look revealed that it was a heavily disguised assassin bug. It had feathery outgrowths over its body and was using its long thin spidery legs to move forward in a web-mimicking manner. This bug looks like a mantis and is probably a very successful predator, escaping detection by its looks and behaviour. It had to be called a *dunny-bug*.

Since this discovery, looking out for dunny-bugs became an added interest during visits to the dunny. I found that the bugs often fly, seeking out dark places to land on. Their

well-developed wings even have veins made to look like strands of web. What did they prey on? Spiders? I tried presenting one with a dead spider - the bug very stealthily approached and gently inserted its proboscis into the spider's abdomen. Would it do this naturally to a living spider? Would the spider notice?

These questions still need to be answered - but time in the dunny is usually cut short by the menacing high-pitched whine of a horde of silver-banded mosquitoes emerging from the dark recesses. These tiny mosquitoes unerringly head for the tip of the nose - the only exposed biting point on most mammals. There is no doubt that each one is intent on inserting its proboscis into my living body! It is time to go out and pull up some more veld grass.

Dr Jan Taylor is a zoologist and author; his books include "Australia's Southwest and Our Future" published by Kangaroo Press. He can be contacted by email: jmtaylor@cygnus.uwa.edu.au



Has anybody - perhaps some of our older readers - got any good stories about fauna in the dunny? If so, perhaps you would share them with us? - Ed.

NEW GROUP

FRIENDS OF THE WESTERN GROUND PARROT

IN all too few long-unburnt low heathland areas of the South Coast, lives a shy and secretive bird, the Western Ground Parrot. Green with a yellow underside, all heavily barred with black, it is perfectly camouflaged as it feeds, nests and even roosts on the ground, below the shrub canopy. It can fly, but usually does so only at dawn and dusk or when flushed.

Once more widespread, fragmentation, foxes and frequent fires have devastated its habitat, and the bird is in severe decline - over the past 12 years, from an estimated 380 birds to 250. That's all there are in the world! It is in danger of going the way of it's arid zone relative, the Night Parrot - presumed extinct.

This bird really needs Friends! You can help in many ways, why

not contact the organisers and find out how?

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