FAUNA

SPIDERS AND WOODLANDS GO TOGETHER

Rosemany Jasper

THE fauna of healthy Salmon Gum woodlands is dominated (in terms of number of species) by small reptiles and the invertebrates. And once you focus in at this level of the woodland, there is an amazing array of shapes and sizes of ants, termites, spiders, moths, beetles, snails, geckos and skinks, etc.

Look at this photo taken in a good quality patch of bush on private property near Ravensthorpe. It shows an impressive spider burrow, which Barbara York Main identified as probably built by the black wish-bone trapdoor spider *Aname mainae* (Family Nemesiidae).

The 'wish-bone' refers to the fact that these spiders build two entrance tubes, the obvious silk-swathed entrance (as in the photo) and a nearby entrance (near the edge of the silk sheet) which has a collapsed opening and is not visible. This is the emergency escape route. The two tubes join up underground into a single burrow.

Aname mainae is found across southern Australia from near the Flinders Ranges to the west coast of WA. They are generally shiny black though the abdomen may be grey. The males have a single large spur on the first walking legs. Males mature and wander during early to mid-summer. The females remain in their burrows unless dug out or otherwise disturbed.

Burrows like this or the ubiquitous ant holes are indicators that a piece of woodland is in good condition. Grazing by stock will destroy these structures and will compact the soil. Once this occurs, and if the understorey is also eaten out, to restore the woodland to good condition will usually require some active management apart from simply fencing out the stock. It is easier to look after what is in good condition than to resurrect a patch.

These issues and more were covered during a very enjoyable field day held near Ravensthorpe in March. The participants visited two privately owned patches of Salmon Gum woodland and were able to compare the features of each as well as consider actions that could be taken to restore the one that had been grazed in the recent past.

One of the remnants was very interesting because there had been a fire through a section of it 20 years ago which has resulted in a healthy regeneration of understorey species and Salmon Gum. Salmon Gum woodland does not carry fire very readily but fire along with other disturbances (like a wind storm, a flood, or a drought) which cause the deaths of mature trees, are recognised triggers for regeneration. Another example of regeneration, which has apparently occurred after a wind storm cut a swathe through the bush, can be seen on the Lake King Heritage Trail, near the Lake King townsite.

Wishbone Trapdoor Spider burrow

Some participants during the field day

If you have Salmon Gum or other woodlands on your property, it is well worth searching for these smaller creatures, to get a true idea of the biodiversity present. Julianne Waldock of the WA Museum (ph. 9427 2734) may be able to help with the identification if you have clear photos.

Congratulations!

To Clive Malcolm of Denmark, who has been awarded the 'Great Southern Natural Resource Management Medal' for 2004. Clive was a pioneer of saltand agronomy and continues (even in 'retirement'!) to work towards the productive use and rehabilitation of secondary saline land, as well as encouraging many other initiatives in natural resource management. Individuals can make a difference!