

## PERUP FAUNA WEEKEND

A Land for Wildlife 10th anniversary event

A fabulous weekend was held by the *Land for Wildlifers* who attended the tenth anniversary celebrations at Perup Nature Reserve on 21-22nd October. Not only did the participants enjoy fascinating talks and walks but nature also put on a dramatic electric storm with hail stones over an inch in size thundering out of the skies. Luckily all participants were protected in the safety and comfort of the facilities at the Perup Ecology Centre as nature showed us its force.

Julia Boniface welcomed the 50 participants with lunch, then in the afternoon there was a series of talks. First the Centre Manager, Glen Beatty, gave a general outline of the area. Then DEC's Forest Ecologist, Adrian Wayne, described a very worrying decrease in woylie populations. Over the last 30 years, fox control had allowed woylies to grow in numbers so that they were even taken off the endangered list – but suddenly, over the last year, the population has crashed back to the levels of 30 years ago. Why? Cat predation, perhaps, or a disease, or habitat modification? It is Adrian's task to find out – fast!

Associate Professor Pierre Horwitz from Edith Cowan University spoke about the problems that could be caused by climate change and water extraction, especially to wetlands in the region. He first congratulated all the *LFW* members on their attentiveness to land management at a local level which is so important to the future of this state. He said that so many of us get distracted by looking at problems at a national and international level and that it is management at a local level that needs more emphasis. This led into his talk on providing more background information about the wetlands of the south west forests and the Yarragadee aquifer.

The south west forests are the coolest and wettest area of the western side of the driest inhabited continent in the world. The flora and fauna are adapted to fairly high rainfall with a very short summer dry period. This area also provides a very important freshwater flush into the Blackwood River all year round including during the dry summer months.

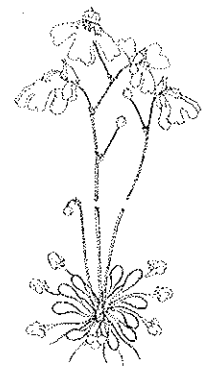
Research in the area on the different creeklines feeding into the system showed that the water in the creeks varies greatly in composition depending on whether it's catchment flows over sandstone, laterites, shales or granites. The organic loading in the wetlands is also extremely significant in that it gives the soils the peaty quality so that they hold much higher levels of moisture. This results in a special and unique composition of water that is fed into the aquifer and into the Blackwood River. Pierre also made reference to the Gondwanan elements of the landscape leading to many of the endemic and rare species and ecological communities. The big question asked by Pierre was: 'Do we know enough about this unique landscape to know the long-term consequences of pumping water out of the aquifer? If we try to override the natural resilience aspects of our ecosystems, then we are removing the protective elements for the relictual fauna and flora'. Needless to say, there were many questions!

After a shared BBQ meal the group prepared for the night activities. A talk on owls of the south west was provided by Ian Wheeler who is Muir-Uncup Recovery Catchment Officer with DEC. Then DEC National Park Ranger, Julia Northin, provided a detailed report on the animals that could be sighted during spotlighting and three groups

set off on foot – one to concentrate on calling up owls. One group that contained many of the parents with children took the minibuses, and were most successful spotlighting from the vehicle. The children managed to see lots of brush tail possums, a bandicoot, a tawny frogmouth, a long necked turtle, a cow and lots of grey kangaroos. The other groups saw very few animals, even the spiders were hiding. Perhaps they were deterred by the threatening weather!

Sunday's early morning bird walk, led by local bird enthusiast, Gwen Goodreid, recorded 32 species. The flora walkers, led by Penny Hussey, took two and a half hours to walk a flat 2.7km – a pretty good indication of the number of interesting plants! The list included a bladderwort and 13 different orchids. During this time the kids were having lots of fun practicing being 'fauna' survey scientists with all the measuring equipment and 'furry animals' brought by Sylvia Leighton.

"Thank you all for coming" said Julia, as people rushed around helping to clean up. Despite the lack of spotlighting success, everyone declared that it had been a great weekend, with meeting and talking to like-minded neighbours one of the pluses.



*Pink petticoats, Utricularia multifida.*  
Illustration: Allen Lowrie from 'Carnivorous Plants' Vol. 3.