

NEWS

THE 'GREAT BIODIVERSITY BUS TOUR'



16th September 2007. A group of keen *Land for Wildlifers* and members of the Esperance Bird Observers Group and Esperance Wildflower Society met with a common goal - to participate in the Great Biodiversity Bus Tour. The aim was to raise awareness of the high level of diversity we have in the area with particular respect to biodiversity hotspots such as the Fitzgerald River National Park and associated Ravensthorpe Range. We planned to experience it first hand by visiting the Ravensthorpe Wildflower Show and then conducting surveys at Louise Lodge's *LFW* property in Hopetoun. To take the hassle out of transport and to provide an atmosphere where the participants could freely chat and exchange ideas, I hired the Esperance Residential College's bus for the day and I put on my bus driver's hat. Thanks to Peter Jarzabek, manager of the College, for providing the bus at half the going rate.

Australia is one of the five most ecologically diverse countries in the world. The Fitzgerald River NP is a hotspot. A hotspot, by definition, is rich in plant and animal species with a high degree of endemism and under immediate threat from

factors including land clearing, development pressures, salinity, weeds, feral animals and disease. The Australian Government announced the identification of 15 national hotspots in October 2003, including the Fitzgerald which has more than 1800 species of plant with about 70% endemism. To put this into perspective, more than 18% of Western Australia's plant species are within the Fitzgerald River NP. The main threat here is from the 'biological bulldozer' known as dieback, *Phytophthora cinnamomi*, which has been found within the national park. With a high proportion of plants susceptible to the disease and no known remedy the threat is very real.

We spent just over an hour at the Wildflower Show intrigued by the diversity of species found within some of the genera on show and impressed by the palate of colour. Some took the opportunity to purchase new books while others just enjoyed stretching

their legs before continuing the tour to Hopetoun.

On arrival we gathered together and I planted some seeds of thought by asking if someone could define biodiversity? Why is any loss of biodiversity important? Left to ponder these questions, people started wandering spurred on by the myriad of form and function on show. A test of species richness as the most basic measure of biodiversity was conducted. As time dwindled we gathered together for some LFW-sanctioned bakery treats and a quick chat about our respective finds. I reminded all of a quote I found whilst researching the trip;

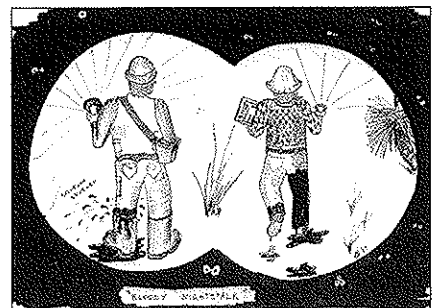
"A definition of biodiversity that is altogether simple, comprehensive, and fully operational ... is unlikely to be found." (Noss, 1990)

The final statistics showed a flora list in excess of 80 species including one priority and a bird list of 14 species. Finally it was time to load the bus and head for home. On arrival back in Esperance the feedback was excellent. Taking a bus load of enthusiastic nature lovers touring around the country side was a great way to spend a Sunday.

Wayne Gill

ON THE OTHER HAND - THE NIGHTSTALK ...!

In September, a small group went nightstalking on a property near Esperance, hoping to spot a quenda. No luck -- lots of frogs, though. But what we didn't spot was a deep sticky patch of quicksand --- squidge! Well, some things work well, some don't!



Wayne Gill