

NEWS

VINCENT SERVENTY - AN INSPIRATION TO MANY

Avril Baxter

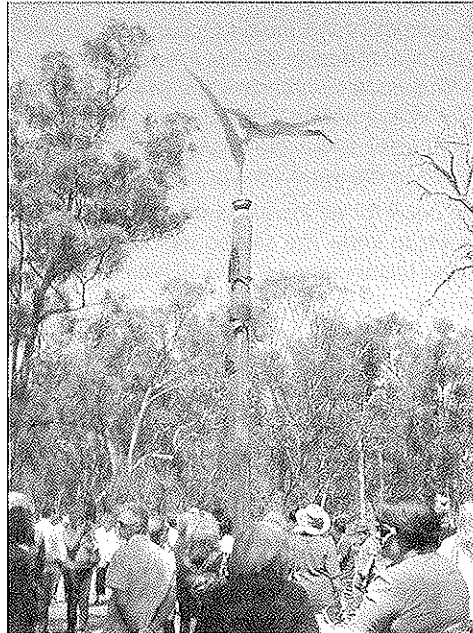
Those who love Dryandra Woodland will be familiar with Vincent Serventy's book *Dryandra: the story of an Australian forest** which documents a year in the life of this special place. Not so many will be aware that on reading this book, Australian media tycoon Rupert Murdoch, whose company owned the bushland and planned to mine it for bauxite, instructed his company to relinquish any mining claims, leaving one of the jewels in the Wheatbelt's Biodiversity Crown.

It was therefore fitting that in October last year members of the Serventy family, representatives of the local Nyoongar community, the Conservation Commission, DEC and Murdoch University staff, members of the WA Naturalists' Club, Bush Rangers from Northam District High School and interested locals and others gathered at Dryandra Woodland to unveil a tribute to his life.

Dr Vincent Serventy (1916 – 2007) was born in Armadale WA and graduated from the University of Western Australia. In his first career as a teacher he succeeded in installing the wonder of nature in many a school child. Taking time off from teaching to research, travel and write, he soon became a well-known naturalist and author, producing television documentaries and more than 70 books and publications.

Vin fought for the conservation of many areas including the Great Barrier Reef, Tasmania's south-west forests, the Shark Bay region and, closer to home, was involved with Kings Park, the Swan River, Ellenbrook freshwater turtle refuge and Star Swamp.

He was also deeply involved



The totem pole symbolising inspiration from nature. Photo: A. Baxter.

with many organisations such as the Wildlife Preservation Society of Australia, WA Naturalists' Club, Gould League, National Trust (WA) and the Tree Society. He worked tirelessly in executive positions and as a speaker to spread the message that natural bushland is precious, and we must look after it. He also served on the first Australian Heritage Commission and other

government advisory bodies.

Vin's words for December in *Dryandra* are a fitting finale:

"The forest settles into its long summer sleep. The bustle of spring-time is over. Like any period of sleep, there will be those for whom the period of quiet is a period of opportunity, but for most the year is finished. Many animals must still keep searching for food. Here and there in the forest, both those too old and too young have paid the price of waning skill or lack of it. Nature begins to weed out the new crop, selecting the differences which are advantageous, wiping out the differences which harm the race. There are minor catastrophes. A falling tree limb kills fit and unfit alike. A grey kangaroo loping through the forest may stamp on a promising colony of ants, destroying it before it can show its potential. Yet these are only ripples on the slow ground swell of evolution, as life moves on to its hidden destinies." *

**Dryandra: the story of an Australian forest*. Vincent Serventy. AH and AW Reed 1970

I met Vin through the WA Naturalists' Club where he impressed me with his deep understanding of 'natural history', that complex inter-relationship of living things and their environment that shapes the world we live in. He wasn't just concerned with the names of things, or statistically analysable numbers – though he understood these aspects as well – but rather was fascinated with the minutiae of living within the functioning whole. He believed, too, in communicating knowledge, so that, as people came to understand the bushland and its inhabitants, they would love it more and manage it better. Hence the book *Dryandra: the story of an Australian forest* to showcase a very special place. The book was instrumental in helping me – an incomer from the Northern Hemisphere – to appreciate how unique the rhythms of life in Australia are. I am sure that thousands of other people will also thank Vin for helping them develop their understanding of this complex land. – Penny Hussey

