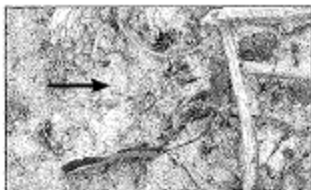


## TOAD BUGS



Heather Adamson, the LPW Officer based in Mandurah, was searching reserves on the Swan Coastal Plain last December for tiny,

solitary native bees, when she spotted some sand moving. A small, well-camouflaged, odd-looking insect was revealed, foraging in the surface layer of soil. It turned out to be a toad bug.

These insects are in the order Hemiptera, family Gelastocoridae (the family name is derived from Greek and roughly translates as 'laughable bug'). Australia has some 20 species, all in the genus *Nerthra*.

Most toad bugs are partly aquatic and occur in rain forests but some, like this one obviously, occur in forests and woodlands where they burrow among the leaves on the forest floor. They gained their common name from

their squarish shape with bulging eyes, and their habit of jumping onto prey. They eat a wide range of small insects, seizing them in their front legs, then tearing them apart with their needle-like mouthparts. Some toad bugs deposit eggs in burrows dug in wet sand, but very little is known about the natural history of this particular species.

Toad bugs are not often seen, but that may be because of their cryptic colouration and reclusive habits, rather than being really rare. Next time you are walking in banksia woodland, look carefully at the soil surface. Perhaps you will see a toad bug, an earwig fly or some other bizarre and unusual creature!



*Nerthra nudata* (from *Insects of Australia*, CSIRO).