

Check out the latest news from your friendly *Nearer to Nature* team.

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Issue No.7

Monday, 18 July 2016

Hi Lisa Wright

Welcome to the latest issue of *Nearer to Nature News*, where you can find nature-based education news and events in the Perth area and surrounds from Parks and Wildlife.

Term 2 has been busy, with lots of primary and secondary schools enjoying good weather and great learning experiences out in the forest. Term 3 is filling rapidly, so don't hold off on booking as you may not get the dates you want.

Winter and spring are exciting seasons in the forest for wildflowers, and this year looks like it will be very colourful. Our native marsupials also breed during this time of year, so keep your eyes open at night. If camping, move quietly, as brush-tailed phascogales have been sighted several times recently.

For Terms 3 and 4, a 10 per cent discount is being offered for all excursions undertaken at Dwellingup's Forest Heritage Centre. We would love to see more schools use the great facilities at Dwellingup and for schools in the Mandurah area the travel time is quicker than driving to Mundaring!



As the new Humanities and Social Services curriculum is implemented please let us know if there is a possible excursion you would like to see. We already have a suite of fire excursions but at short notice it may be possible to design an excursion to meet your curriculum needs.

Mr C

Photo: Triggerplants (Stylidium)

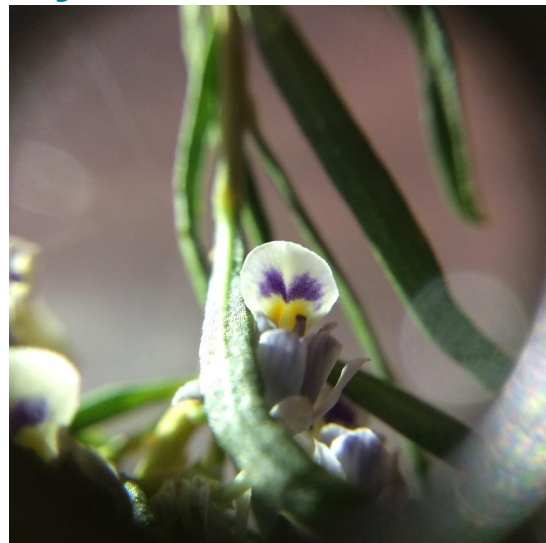
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Slow down for the showy hybanthus

Our days flash by in a rush as we hurry from one task to the next, but why not slow down and take time to connect with the natural beauty that surrounds us.

Our glorious jarrah and marri forest on the Darling Scarp abounds in over 2000 species of plants. Many appear to be seeming insignificant shrubs with small, hard green leaves. But look closer. There is always something in flower in the forest, even in winter.



This includes the showy hybanthus (*Hybanthus floribundas*), an inconspicuous low shrub that is part of the violet family, *Violaceae*, and hosts groups of tiny, delicate, pale lilac-blue/white flowers from May to October. These flowers are pretty, but look even closer; the lower petal is larger and displays a yellow blotch that acts as a 'landing strip' for pollinators.

I watched as a large introduced European honey bee clumsily flitted from flower to flower. Our smaller native bees would be much more efficient pollinators of this plant



Top right: Showy hybanthus through and iScope

Above left: Showy hybanthus near the Perth Hills Discovery Centre.

Above right: Note the size of the tiny flowers

To really connect with nature you should use all your senses and stop, feel, touch listen and smell. If you stop to smell the showy hybanthus you'll be rewarded with a delicate violet perfume. Closer inspection through one of Nearer to Nature's iScopes (Fig. 3) reveals the stunning detail of this tiny flower.

To learn more about the wonderful plants of our jarrah forest visit the Perth Hills Discovery Centre for a guided [eco walk](#). The walk is suitable for Years 1 to 12, and can include use of our iScopes. The duration and theme can be tailored to your needs, so this program helps students to slow down and connect with nature. When in the forest, stop, sit down, and just look, listen and smell. You'll be amazed.

New homes for cockatoos

There is no mistaking the calls of the noisy and conspicuous black cockatoos, particularly as they make their way home at sunset to their roosts after a long day of feeding. Because they are so loud they do a good job of convincing people that their populations are large in number, but both the Carnabys and forest red tailed black cockatoos which can be found in and around the Perth Region are at risk. Forest red tailed cockatoos are listed as vulnerable and Carnabys cockatoos are listed as endangered.



Black cockatoos are dependent on tree hollows for nesting. Large portions of their breeding habitat have been cleared for agriculture or impacted by logging and there is now fierce competition with other species for appropriate tree hollows. While planting

hollow-dependent fauna.

Above right: River Rangers make a nesting box



Above: Simon Cherriman installing a nesting box

That's why installing artificial hollows to increase nesting sites for these birds is an important conservation strategy. Recently it was recognised that the cockatoo tubes in use at the Perth Hills Discovery Centre were in desperate need of an upgrade. Fortunately for the Nearer to Nature team, they had some willing participants on hand.

River Ranger cadets from Regent College in Victoria Park spent the day with well-known ornithologist Simon Cherriman, learning how to build and install the tubes as well as boxes for other bird species and small marsupials. The Nearer to Nature team now eagerly awaits the arrival of nesting season and hopefully the use of the new artificial hollows.

Students can learn more about Western Australian endangered species and Parks and Wildlife's fauna conservation program *Western Shield* by engaging in a 'Back to the Brink' excursion at the Perth Hills Discovery Centre. Please contact Nearer to Nature to find out more.

To burn or not to burn?

understanding of fire and its use. Non-indigenous people mainly came from Europe and had little experience with fire. The experience they had was usually of fire raging through towns and killing people. They had no experience of burning the country.

After the 1961 Dwellingup fires a lot of research went into fire and its management. We now know that the northern jarrah forest on the Darling Scarp accumulates about one tonne of leaf litter each year. Decomposition does not exceed the loss of leaves by a tree each year, so each year we have more and more leaf litter and the chance of a high intensity fire increases. Unless we manage the flammable leaf litter in the forest, the chance of a major bushfire keep increasing.

Prescribed burns undertaken by Parks and Wildlife are designed to reduce the amount of fuel in the forest. With reduced fuel loads, the forest is less likely to suffer a high intensity bushfire. Communities are also safer. If a major fire does start, areas that have been prescribed burned can slow its rate of spread and reduce its intensity.



Prescribed burns are not random or spur-of-the-moment decisions. Before an area is burnt it must be part of the five-year indicative burning plan. About a year before the prescribed burn is scheduled to take place, the area is analysed to determine fuel types, fuel loads, threatened flora and fauna communities, assets that need consideration, topography, and access and infrastructure in the area.

Using this information a burn plan is drawn up. Some are highly specific on the conditions required before lighting, or areas that need special protection. On the day of

A good prescribed burn reduces the fuel within the burn area. It should leave a mosaic of burnt and unburnt areas, and identified areas are protected. Prescribed burning does not stop bushfires from starting but they can play a significant role in reducing their impact on the environment.

At *Nearer to Nature* we offer several [excursions](#) about fire and the environment.

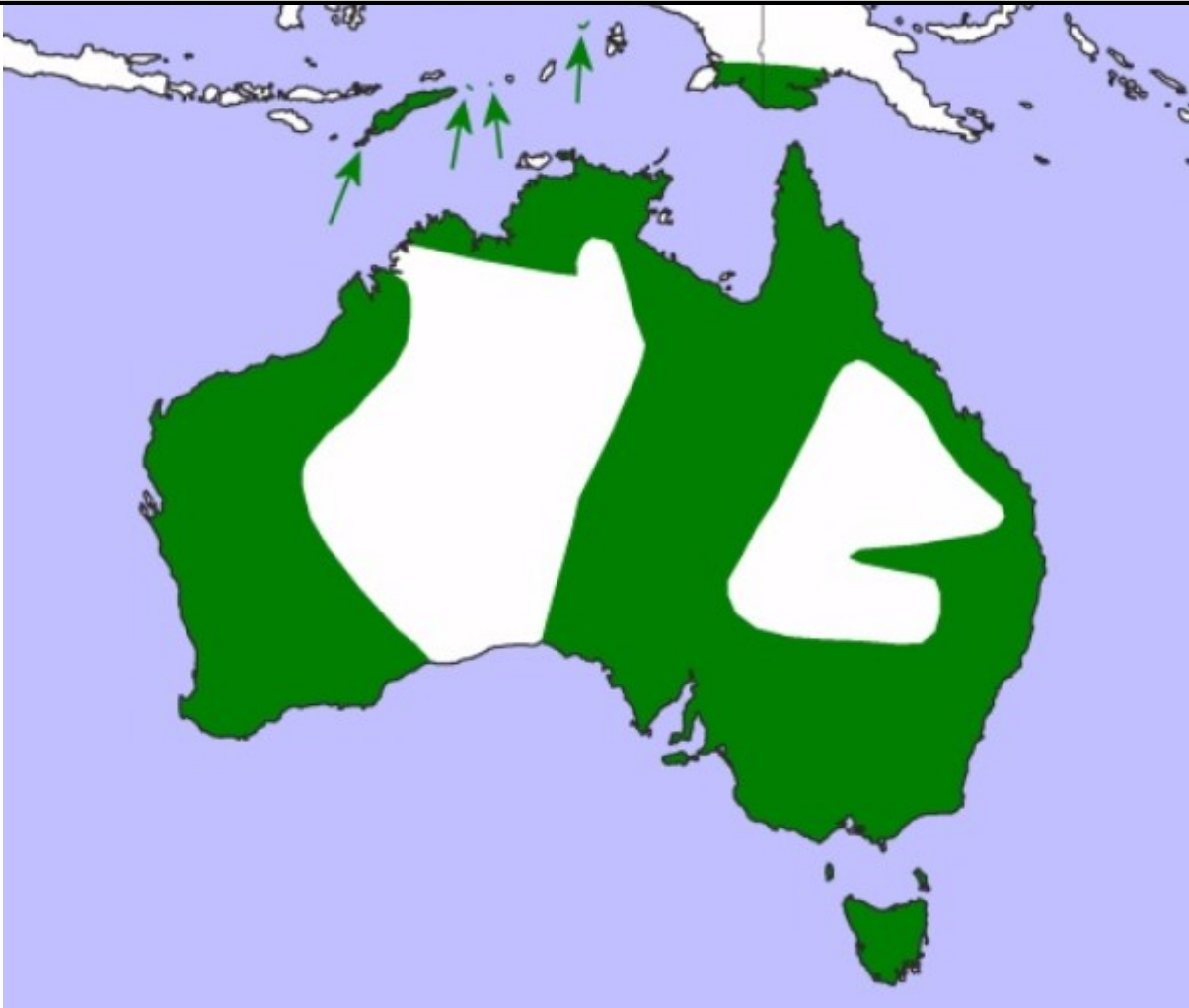
"Boo book" says the Boobook Owl

Boobook owls are one of the smaller and more common owls in Australia. Their call – “boo-book” or “mo-poke”, is well known to many people, but seeing them is a little harder.

Boobooks perch in dense foliage during the day and are very reluctant to move. At night they can be seen on low branches or posts, scanning their surroundings for prey using both hearing and sight.

Being a bird of prey the feet are used for killing. Flying insects can be taken out in flight, while ground-based prey is pounced on. Small birds and mammals, especially mice, are also eaten.





Above: Distribution of boobook owls

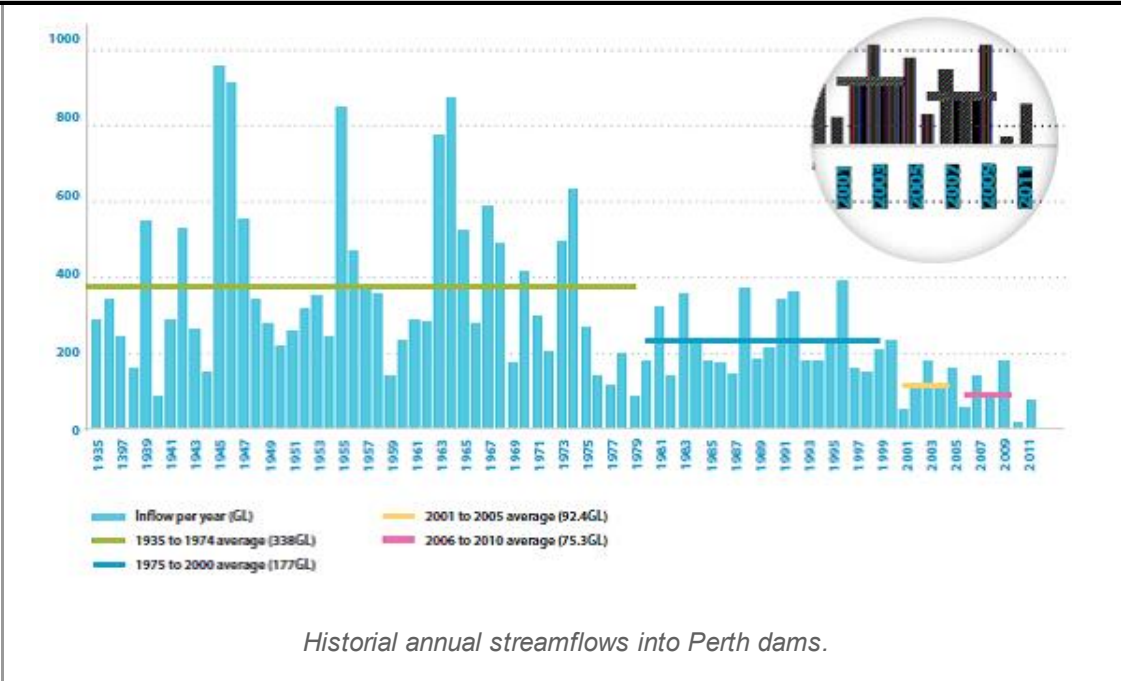
Boobook owl ears are highly developed for locating prey. The ears are at different heights on each side of the head. This allows the birds to create a three dimensional auditory image of their surroundings, allowing distance and direction to be determined. Handy when it's dark!

Want to see a boobook? Why not try a [night walk](#) with Nearer to Nature at one of our centres? You never know what you will find in the dark of night!

A future for our dams?

For decades our hills dams were Perth's main source of water for household and industrial use. Now, with our growing population and drying climate, we are much less reliant on them as the graphs below from Water Corporation's *Water Forever* plan show.

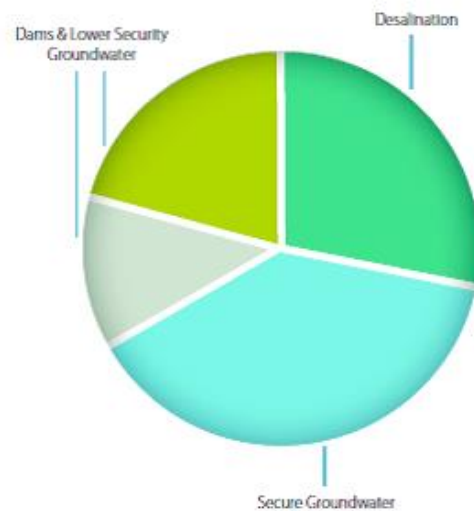




Water Forever projects that there will be an increase in water sourced from desalination, secure groundwater and recycled water, effectively ‘drought proofing’ Perth. Our dams will still play a critical role as storage reservoirs for water from those other sources.

Looking after the catchments of our dams is critical for ensuring good water quality. The Catchment Carer’s Trail at the Perth Hills Discovery Centre provides students with an insight into the many factors that affect water quality in our dams, such as salinity, erosion and forest health. This helps students look at the bigger picture of water supply as one of Perth’s main sustainability issues. To find out more about the Catchment Carer’s Trail excursion, go to the [website](#) or call 9295 6149.

Current Water Sources



You can also download the free [Catchment Carer’s Trail workbook](#).



Above: Students on Catchment Carer's Trail

The banner features a blue background with a white torn-paper edge at the top. On the left, there are four circular icons: a red circle with a black silhouette of a kangaroo, an orange circle with a black silhouette of a bird, a green circle with a black silhouette of a starfish, and a yellow circle with a black silhouette of a frog. To the right of these icons is the official seal of the Government of Western Australia, which includes the text 'THE GOVERNMENT OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA'. Further right, the text 'Department of Parks and Wildlife' is displayed in white. On the far right, there is a logo for 'Nearer to Nature' featuring a stylized green and yellow figure. Below the icons and seal, the text 'Nearer to Nature' is written in a white, cursive font. At the bottom of the banner, the text 'Visit Nearer to Nature at www.dpaw.wa.gov.au/n2n' is written in white.

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If you would like to contact us, provide feedback or are experiencing problems opening stories please email the Nearer to Nature Team at n2n@dpaw.wa.gov.au.

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