



Toodyay Naturalists' Club Inc.
THE TNC NEWSLETTER

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wheatbelt
natural resource
management

PRESIDENT'S REPORT

by Brian Foley

I was pleased to take over the Presidency of the Toodyay Naturalist Club from the July AGM and I wish to thank the previous president, my daughter Michalie Ruoss, for her time she was able to give during her reign.

2015 proved to be again a successful year; the excursions were well attended along with our monthly meetings and other activities.

I believe we will be able to come up with some interesting speakers and excursions for the 2016 year and I am hopeful that the members will support the Committee and ensure that they attend our meetings and outings. If any members wish to contribute in the 2016 plans or in any other way to assist the hard working Committee this is always appreciated.

I personally wish to thank Wayne and Desrae along with Sharon for their continued support and look forward to working together in 2016. To all our members I wish a safe and happy Christmas and New Year.

2015 TOODYAY AGRICULTURAL SHOW

ALTHOUGH THE DAY was a hot one the 'Environment Matters' marquee was quite comfortable as experienced by Bob, the Red-tail Black Cockatoo, as he sat in his luxurious cage with the moisture infused fan turned on him. If, by chance, an unsuspecting visitor placed themselves between Bob and the cooling fan, they were notified in loud Red-tail Black Cockatoo screeches interpreted as 'get out of the way!!!' Such was some of our entertainment!

The large marquee housed a variety of environment groups from within the Shire which, besides the Naturalists' Club, were the Toodyay Friends of the River, the Shire recycling department, Toodyay Seed Group, Wildcare with several bush babies and the extremely supportive not-for-profit organisation, Wheatbelt Natural Resource Management.

All areas received a lot of community attention but especially Bob and the bush babies.



Left:
The Environment Matters marquee at the 162nd Toodyay Agricultural Show.

Cover Photo: Gimlets (*E. salubris*) to the north of Southern Cross.

Photo Greg Warburton

VENOMOUS SNAKES RELOCATION COURSE

by Greg Warburton and Brian Foley

On Saturday the 12th of December the Shire Works Depot meeting room was transformed into a venomous snake re-location training area conducted by Dr Mitch Ladyman of Venomous Snake Relocation WA (VSRWA); Mitch has studied reptiles all his life both in Australia and overseas.

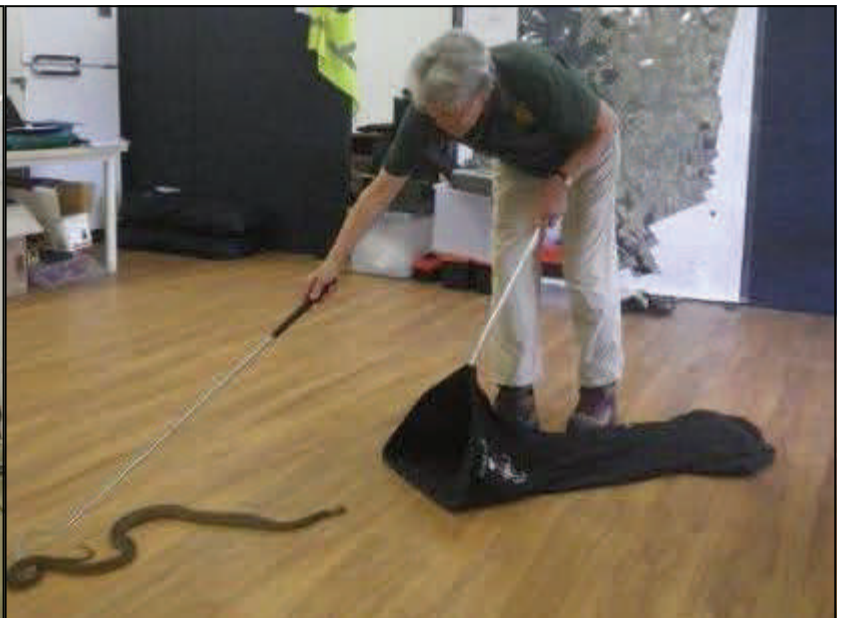
The course had been organised by Toodyay Naturalists' Club President, Brian Foley, with ten community members attending, including club members Sarah and Greg, all learning how to re-locate snakes safely and to qualify as 'licensed snake re-locators'.

Mitch was very pleased with the support from Toodyay because normally the attitude in the rural areas is to kill snakes and ask questions later. Mitch's technique is to use a hook and bag only. This is the least stressful method for both the snake and the catcher and indeed safer than actually trying to kill a snake and, with practice, this method is extremely effective. A Mulga Snake, Dugite and a Tiger Snake, all recently captured from the wild, were used for the training with a magnificent Carpet Python, Crystal, and a Frilled-necked Lizard providing extra interest on the day.

The students were put through a series of exercises involving location and capture of the snakes while all the time learning how fascinating these reptiles are. No one was fearful of the snakes and Sarah talked to each snake calling it 'Sweetie'! It was more about respect for the animals and the fact that snakes are only defensive when they feel threatened just wanting to get away from people and hide.

Everyone passed the course learning how to catch snakes safely for us and the snake. It means there will be more people available for snake call outs reducing the amount of reptile deaths in the Shire. Every year not only venomous snakes are unnecessarily killed but also many harmless Pythons and Legless Lizards. The re-locators will provide a valuable community service while promoting the preservation and respect for our wonderful wildlife.

The Shire is thanked, most sincerely, for allowing the group to use the Works Depot for the course and the Shire workers can be assured that no visitors were left behind!



Above right: Sarah Dudley enticing a dugite into her bag during the course. The question is - has Sarah become a snake whisperer?

Left: President Brian takes advantage of having long arms.

Photos by Greg Warburton

2015 BIOBLITZ

Part 1 - The flora, birds and insects by Michalíe Foley

IN SEPTEMBER, in conjunction with the Wheatbelt Natural Resource Management (NRM), the Toodyay Naturalists Club hosted a BioBlitz. This consisted of a 24 hour biological survey conducted by experts and volunteers interested in the bush.

The event was held over a number of private properties that back onto Julimar Conservation Park which included those of members Robyn and Brian Foley and Don and Eva Smith. Base camp was established on a farm across the road owned by Kelvin and Trinette Ryan who graciously loaned the use of their horse stables and a paddock for camping. I was very fortunate to have a babysitter for the weekend (in the form of Nana Foley) to be able to join the BioBlitz.

The weather wasn't very kind being cold and rainy on the Saturday however, in spite of this, we had around 60 participants. The weekend kicked off with the group gathering at the Ryan's farm to learn about the weekend's process and meet the experienced people leading each of the survey groups. The participants then chose an area of interest and helped the leader conduct the survey.

My first group was conducting a flora survey on Eva and Don's property. The group was led by Jacqui Lucas, one very knowledgeable lady about the flora of the Toodyay area. The rain held off and within one and a half hours we had documented over 90 species of plants. There were some fantastic specimens of kangaroo paw (*Anigozanthos manglesii*) as well as *Conostylis* species, *Gompholobium marginatum* and many others. The diversity seen on this property is likely due to the mosaic of soil types seen from laterite to shallow sand. After the survey it was back to camp for afternoon tea and a change of teams.

I decided to join the bird team this round led by Georgina Steytler. However, it was not to be as the weather was not very conducive for bird watching. It soon started raining and no birds were around. Nearby the bug team was scrounging around so I took the opportunity to join them.

This group was led by Paul van Heurck formerly of DPAW. He was a fantastically enthusiastic leader and distributed plastic vials to all the volunteers to capture invertebrates for him to identify. We spent the afternoon searching through leaf litter, under rocks and fallen logs and chasing after moths. It was a fascinating afternoon with many inverts found from scorpions to termites and daytime moths. Paul's knowledge was amazing and he had some interesting facts about each of the critters that were brought to him.

That evening we were spoilt with a BBQ cooked by the Toodyay Lions Club members. The rain held off long enough for a very pleasant dinner around the campfire. The night stalk that followed on the Foley property was a bit wet, however, there were lots of animals sighted consisting of kangaroos and woylies. Unfortunately, no Chuditch were sighted. While I went to bed I did hear, next morning, that there were great discussions held long into the night.

A dawn bird walk was held early Sunday morning but I stayed home with the baby, unfortunately. The weather was very much improved with the sun coming out and we started the day with a fantastic cooked breakfast. Two further survey sessions were held on the Sunday. I joined the bird group for the first session and we walked from the Foley property along the back track into Julimar forest. We spotted many species with the highlight for me being the Western Yellow Robin, which posed for many photos. It was great to get some experience with Wayne Clarke on the calls of many birds that were heard but did not see.

The final session of the day took place on a bush block behind the Ryan's farm. Everybody joined here and I flitted from group to group learning about the plants, reptiles and invertebrates as well as just wandering around on my own searching, unsuccessfully, for orchids.

Overall it was a great experience to be able to learn from a wide variety of people on a wide range of subjects. It was great to see so many enthusiastic people getting out and learning about the bush especially the young kids. While the weather wasn't kind it didn't dampen spirits and we all had a fantastic time. I'm eagerly awaiting the official report from the Wheatbelt NRM and the date of the next BioBlitz.

2015 BIOBLITZ

Part 2 - The reptiles by Desraé Clarke

AMY GRIFFITHS led the search for reptiles with several great surprises eventuating. I was fortunate to accompany Amy on the first search and, as Michalie has said, the day was rainy and cold.

However, 12 year old Angus Dempster, an up-and-coming young naturalist, located a Western Bearded Dragon (*Pagona minor*) catching a tiny bit of warmth by changing to a black colouring and lying on a thin branch of a *Banksia Sessilis* – it was an amazing sighting! Angus also found a Barking Gecko (*Underwoodisaurus milii*) and a Granite Worm Lizard (*Aprasia pulchella*).

Reptiles found on other excursions were the Fence Skink (*Cryptoblepharus buchananii*), Snake Eyed Skink (*Morethia obscura*), Goulds Hooded Snake (*Parasuta gouldii*), Clawless Gecko (*Crenadactylus ocellatus ocellatus*), Legless lizard (*Delma fraseri*) and the South West Rock Skink (*Liopholis Pulchra*) a reptile that needs to be confirmed as it is slightly out of range; the genus used to be *Egernia*.



Top left: Western Yellow Robin Photo by Georgina Steytler

Top right: Western bearded-dragon found by Angus. Photo by Desraé Clarke

Bottom left: Jacquie Lucas leads the flora group Photo by Michalie Ruoss

Bottom right: Breakfast at the 2015 BioBlitz Photo by Wayne Clarke

THE AVON RIVER WATERBIRD SURVEY

by Wayne Clarke

IN 1995 THE FORMER Avon River Management Authority (ARMA) requested the Toodyay Naturalists' Club (TNC) to undertake a waterbird survey prior to, during and following the Avon Descent. The survey was conducted over a three-year period and was to determine what impact - if any - the Avon Descent was having on the waterbird population, particularly during the breeding season.

The late Jim Masters OAM, an Honorary Life Member of the TNC, coordinated the survey, and meticulously compiled the results into a meaningful report. Also included in the survey were the birds of the riparian vegetation - the land birds.

Twenty years on a proposal to repeat the survey was endorsed by the TNC and a grant application to Wheatbelt NRM for material support was successful. Unfortunately the extremely dry winter had an impact on the survey, the late rains pushing the start date back, with very few members available to assist. Some areas previously surveyed were no longer accessible (due to changes in land tenure).

The following is Jim Masters' summary of the earlier project:

'This assessment of waterbird counts at Katrine/Glen Avon and Toodyay Town during winter 1995 to 1997 is directly comparable with earlier counts at Katrine/Glen Avon (*J.R. Masters 1982 to 1988*) and Toodyay (*Doreen Morrow 1989 to 1994*). For *these two areas at least* such a comparison of total waterbird numbers occurring is still showing the same unchanged pattern of use. Subject only to *seasonal variations*, no longer term substantial variation in number of waterbirds or species occurring seems to have taken place over the past 15 years, wet winters having a lower population present and *a dry one, greatly increased*.

For Long and Coombawongi Pool [incorrectly called Posselt's Ford] there are no long-term winter records. The very low numbers of waterbirds found there during this survey in winter here is in marked contrast, particularly since apparently there was no increase in numbers there this dry winter 1997. Perhaps constant use of these narrow pools last winter by canoeists were the cause. Also Coombawongi Pool is now a popular picnic area in winter and spring.

Refuge areas: Katrine/Glen Avon Pool and two adjacent dams (Northam Shire) and Millard Pool (Toodyay Shire) continue to be the main centres for waterbirds along this lower end of the Middle Avon, and they support considerably increased numbers on dry years. At Glen Avon the two dams close to the pool act as refuge retreats ***whenever boating activity occurs*** in Katrine Pool. By counting changing numbers at the dams some idea of the displacement taking place during the ***Avon Descent*** has been recorded there each year since 1984. Perhaps this data ***indicates the value*** of having other such places, including small swamps, protected on the upper floodplain of the river as a further aid to retain waterbirds. The counts for the Saturday morning of the race day were made *before 10am* after the first rush of power boats from Northam mostly have cleared this part of the river, flushing out most waterbirds, particularly most ducks, coots and cormorants. The numbers of these finding refuges at the dams obviously reflect their general population present in the river area at the time. These recent counts on the Saturday were made *before helicopter flights* were being made over the dam area. Almost invariably over recent years and all of the last three years, by 1pm *helicopters flying over or near the dams* have once again sent most of the ducks and cormorants from them but coots remain. By Sunday evening quite normal numbers usually have returned to the dams, but very few even by then can be found to count on the river pool nearby.

Incidence of Waterbird Breeding: - Some breeding clutches of three species of ducks (Australian Shelduck, Grey Teal and Black Duck) and Little Pied Cormorants were found all three years by the first week in August with a small increase into September. Earliest breeding was a Black Duck July 7th 1996. Breeding was found at all places surveyed in odd single broods except for Cormorant rookeries. Final fledgling success of these broods is unknown.

Listing of all birds seen to use Riverine Habitat:- Included in an Excel spreadsheet is a R.A.O.U. (Birds Australia) bird *Species Record Card* showing all species seen, both Waterbirds and Land Birds, using the river foreshores and floodplain as well as the pools and river bed. No attempt was made to count the number of each species of Land Bird or determine just how common some might be. For Waterbirds this can be found on the counting charts (as percentage of total) [charts and records held by the TNC]

Total number of bird Species recorded:- 86 using this wetland, consisting of **30** Waterbirds and **56** Land Birds during winter.'

JR Masters, Survey Coordinator, 15 October 1997

THE RESERVES OF TOODYAY

by Greg Warburton

Numbering 166 and covering some 20,000 hectares, reserve land within the Toodyay Shire makes up 13 % of the entire Shire. These reserves consist of a plethora of vesting, purposes and management orders. In addition to Shire reserves there are Department of Parks and Wildlife (DPaW), Department of Water, crown land, unallocated crown land and Main Roads reserves.

Some of the reserves are no more than re-generated gravel pits and at least one has been incorporated into farm land. They range in size and usage greatly from under one hectare to 100's of hectares, from purely conservation, as in the case of Dawn Atwell Reserve, to a reserve for the Shire works depot and waste transfer station.

The 35 Shire priority reserves were all surveyed in 2015. This has involved the collection of 100's of waypoints, photographs, (and tick bites) and a yet-to-be estimated number of kilometres walked. Information gathered includes;

- Vegetation
- Topography
- Asset location and vulnerability
- Environmental threats
- Dumping
- Fuel loads and flammability
- Fire breaks condition and position
- Fire history
- Heritage values

In addition Shire and Landgate records, with combined aerial photography digital mapping programs, have enabled large amounts of information on Shire reserves to be gleaned. A draft management plan for the now DPaW Nature Reserves of Toodyay was published by the then Department of Fisheries and Wildlife in 1984 and has proved a valuable reference as has the 1986 Toodyay Naturalists' Club publication "The Avon Valley – A Naturalists' View". In the early 2000's Walter Kolb of the Toodyay Naturalists' Club undertook a reserve survey project but as yet the RMO has been unable to locate the data arising from that project.

Community Value of Reserves

There are varying perceptions and values put on the Shire reserves. These views range from negative with views expressed that they are a fire hazard and a haven for feral animals and weeds while others express passionate feelings of ownership, recreation, tourist attractions and conservation.

Examples of the latter are Lloyd Reserve, Millard's Pool, Dawn Atwell and Malkup Brook Reserves. Interestingly, all these reserves have had, in recent years, management improvements and facilities added by community groups. Generally, the public rarely seem to make the distinction between the different tenures and vesting and some see reserve land as simply 'bush' while others recognise the need for management and value efforts to achieve that.

Dawn Atwell Reserve is an excellent example of an impressive conservation outcome for a shire reserve as it was originally vested for 'camping'. The Toodyay Naturalists' Club recognised that the conservation value of this near pristine bushland was under threat from weed infestation, inappropriate activities, such as off-road vehicle use, and dumping of rubbish and sheep carcasses. The Club successfully engaged with the Shire Council to get the vesting changed to 'conservation'.

It also gained external funding for a biological survey and management plan to be completed by World Wildlife Fund (WWF); declared Rare Flora species *Thelymitra stellata* was identified within the reserve. Named in honour of a founding member of the Toodyay Naturalists' Club this reserve now has interpretive signage, rubbish removed, weed control, revegetation sites, a parking area and a picnic table. There are many opportunities to continue the value-adding particularly with interpretive, botanical walk tracks as the reserve has a suite of vegetation types and species with a spectacular wild flower display in spring.

A popular activity conducted in Shire reserves is dog walking but increasingly visitors and locals alike are walking for personal exercise and interest. The popularity of Toodyay Friends of the River Inc (TFOR) Bilya Walk Track with its facilities, including world class Toodyay Naturalists' Club project, the John Masters Bird Hide, is indicated by the demand for information brochures by the following e-mail quote: *'Good afternoon Greg, We are out of your brochures again so are we able to have a substantial amount. It appears every second person wants walk trails. Regards, Stephanie Customer Services Officer/ Tourism'*

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TFOR's environmental development of Millard's Pool Reserve demonstrates outstanding value with superb access, Avon Descent viewing, kayaking/canoeing, walking and picnicking plus further riparian re-vegetation and demonstration sites planned for 2016-17.

The historic Pelham Reserve has an impressive network of sign posted walk tracks that offer scenic views along with interpretation and picnic facilities. There can be no doubt that many other Shire reserves could easily be promoted as visitor and tourism experiences as many of them are accessible with existing fire breaks serving as ideal walk tracks. Reserve 39943, accessed via Sandplain road and at the end of Acacia Close, is comparatively unknown but contains magnificent pristine bushland and wonderful scenery.

There are, however, reserves such as a 3ha crown land reserve on Parkland Drive, Julimar, that are quite incongruous as they have no conservation or recreational value.

Management Plans

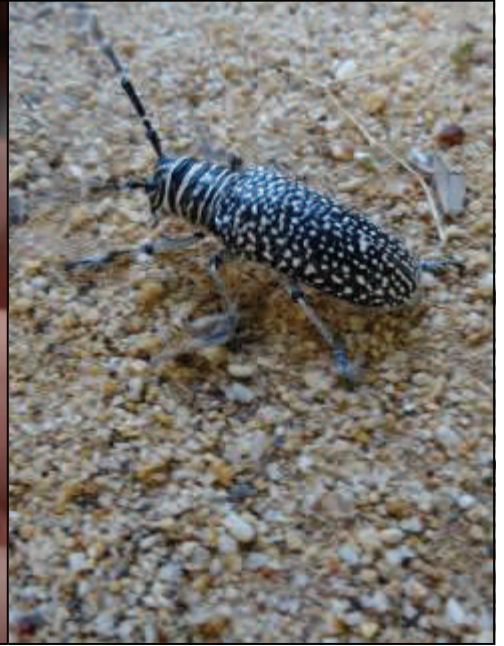
Dawn Atwell, Dudley Chitty and Lloyd Reserves already have comprehensive management plans written as a result of community and Shire partnerships and cooperation. It is hoped that management plans will be compiled for all the Shire Reserves. I look forward to bringing the reader further instalments about the reserves of Toodyay as it is an extensive story.



Above: Shire of Toodyay funded picnic table and seating in the Dawn Atwell Reserve.

Photo by Greg Warburton

Photographers page



*Above: Barking gecko at the BioBlitz
Photo by Desraé Clarke*

*Above: A colourful White-spotted Longicorn Beetle
Photo by Sandy McKay*

Left: Sun orchid Photo by Gary Nelmes



*Above: Orphaned woylie at the Toodyay Show
Photo by Wayne Clarke*



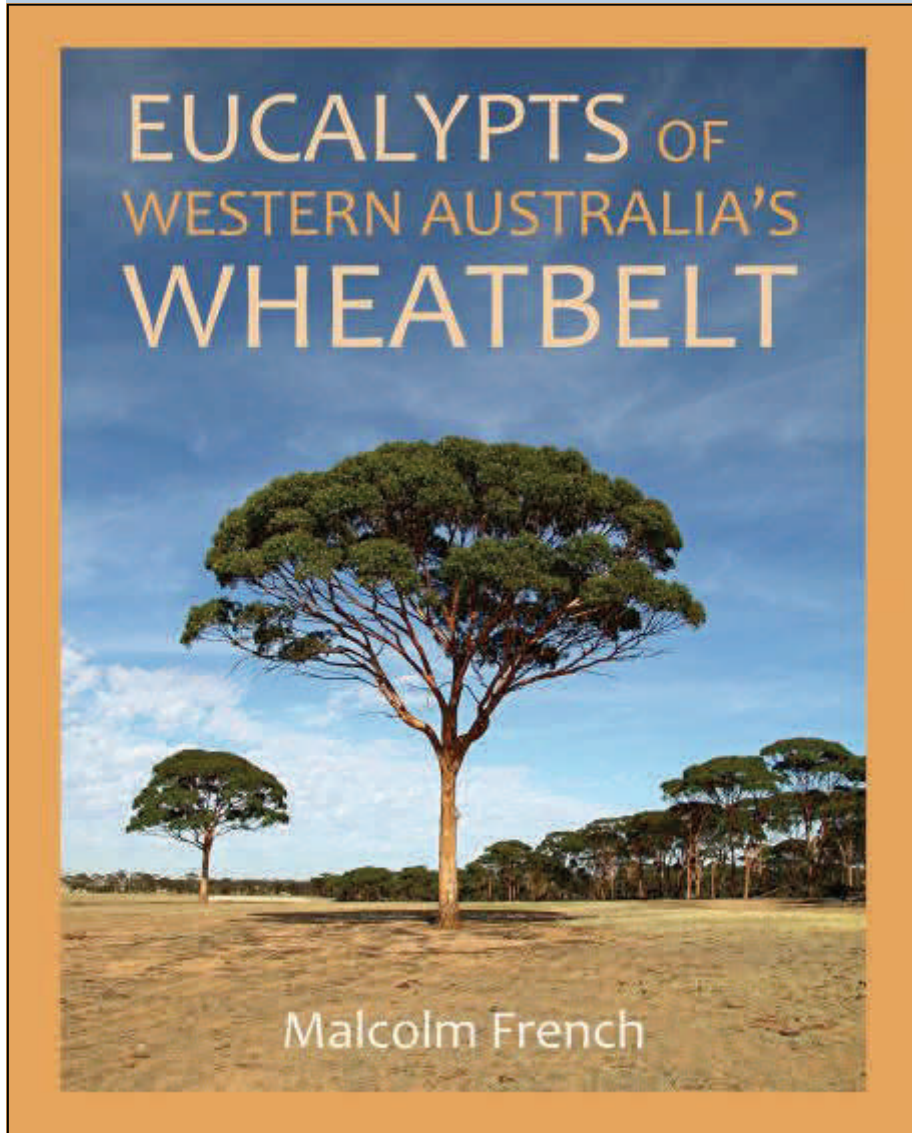
Left: Phil, Brian, Mitch and Kurt, in action at the Venomous Snakes Relocation Course in December

Photo by Greg Warburton

'EUCALYPTS of Western Australia's WHEATBELT'

by Malcolm French

An overview by Desraé Clarke



MALCOLM'S 2012 publication of his passion of eucalypts is a treasure! It is written for those with a scientific mind but also for those who love the eucalypts and want to know more.

The wheatbelt of Western Australia covers an area of nigh on 200,000 square kilometres. This area ranges from above Geraldton, with the western boundary formed by the eastern aspect of the Darling Range, the southern boundary from the northern aspect of the Stirling Range with the eastern aspect passing through the towns of Morawa, Southern Cross and further south to the area of Lake King.

The vast region of the wheatbelt, as above, is comprised of a remarkable assortment of landforms which, in turn, support 159 species and sub-species of eucalypts of an amazing variety of habit. There are tall, grand single-trunked specimens to small, multi-stemmed, bushy types that, in turn, exhibit a range of bark, foliage, buds and fruits. Malcolm has included an excellent glossary, throughout, to the descriptive terms and an index

of both scientific and common names. Many farming and associated communities are currently involved in revegetation projects and replanting of local species is encouraged for the success of these projects.

Throughout this publication there is excellent photography of the mature specimen within its site together with a descriptive map of location. Close-up photography of the bark, buds, opercula, flower and the fruits, with an account of size and the colour of the seeds, together with an index of common and scientific names, with a break-down of pronunciation of the latter, complete this excellent publication.

The 'Eucalypts of Western Australia's Wheatbelt' is a gem. Malcolm's website is www.eucalyptsofwa.com.au

Gratitude is extended to Malcolm for his assistance and for the use of the cover image.

DID YOU KNOW...

... **THAT THE EIGHT** most widely planted ornamental trees in the eastern states of Australia are from the WA Wheatbelt! And what's more, they are the least planted ornamental trees in Western Australia! This is rather a poor reflection in our sense of taste - and loyalty.

Those iconic species are *Eucalyptus caesia* (Silver Princess), *E. macrocarpa* (Mottlecak), *E. rhodantha* (Rose mallee), *E. macrandra* (River yate), *E. pleurocarpa* (Blue Mallee), *E. erythronema* (Red-flowered mallee), *E. synandra* (Jingymia mallee) and *E. crucis* (Southern Cross silver mallee).

Perhaps when you next order your seedlings you can consider planting some of these species.

The Red-eared Firetail Finch

by Neville Tanner

THE RED-EARED Firetail Finch is only found in the lower south west of Western Australia as it prefers dense heath and undergrowth in heavy forest. Imagine the delight experienced by former Nat's members, Val and Neville Tanner, to have a pair of these colourful little finches using the bird baths among the beautiful native plants of their Nannup garden.

The finch is small at twelve to thirteen centimeters in length. It breeds from September to January building a horizontal bottle-shaped nest thirty five to forty centimeters in length from twining green stems on the outer walls and a lining with shorter stems and feathers. Four to six eggs are laid so hopefully there will be more of this colourful finch species to utilise the Tanner garden. The following writings demonstrate the amazing faunal success now enjoyed.



Neville takes up the story.....

'For the first four years in our Nannup house we saw not one Red-eared Firetail Finch on our property. As you know over that period of time Val and I have planted a lot of native vegetation on our lot and cleared away most of the weeds.

We used to occasionally see a couple of these Finches on the back decking overlooking a jungle covering a small creek, called *The Dry Brook*, when we went down to the Bridge Cafe

in Nannup. Then about 18 months ago we sighted one on our property and we felt that this was because the native shrubs we had planted were now bushy and offered plenty of cover. Now we see two of these finches at our bird bath on a fairly regular basis and we are assuming they are nesting in the native vegetation lining the Blackwood River at the bottom of our property.

We are quite excited about this and have also noticed other small birds now frequenting the place that were not sighted originally on our property which include the Red-winged Fairy-wren, White-breasted Robin, White-naped Honeyeater, New Holland Honeyeater and the Golden Whistler. I take photographs of them on a regular basis which gives me great material for my monthly write up in the Nannup Telegraph on birds of the south west especially in the Nannup district.

We have a colony of King's Skink (*Egernia kingii*) living in the rock walls at our place and they are multiplying. The adults are up to about 60 cm in length, shiny jet black in colour and frighten the hell out of us when they take off rapidly when disturbed. The juveniles look very pretty in their bright yellow spots on their black skins. We also see the Gould's Monitor in the nearby bushland'.

Neville and Val moved to Nannup in 2009 and have become very involved in the Nannup community encouraging a love of natural history and the environment. Val writes a wildflower article and Neville, one on birds, for the monthly community paper, the Nannup Telegraph. They have also instigated a group of community members to eradicate weeds and revegetate the Blackwood River Foreshore.

Neville has been nominated for the 2016 Nannup Citizen of the Year - best wishes, Neville, from the Toodyay Nat's!

Photo by Neville Tanner

ENVIRONMENT MATTERS

The uniqueness of the Australian environment, from region to region and state to state, was brought home during the Australian Naturalists Network Get-together in Tasmania last year. On the final excursion, the group ventured up Mount Wellington, on the outskirts of Hobart.

It was a bleak day, cold and *very* wet when the visitors ascended the mount, and 'The Springs' area. Dr Mark Hovenden, School of Biological Sciences, University of Tasmania, met the group to look at the Snow Gum vegetation at the top of the mountain.



Snow gums about to be snowed in.



On the way down the group stopped to look at some extremely rare crustaceans. These mountain shrimp (*Anaspides tasmaniae*) pictured at left were in a fresh water rock pool.

Apart from an unusual freshwater crustacean described in Victoria in 1907, the only known relatives of the Tasmanian Mountain Shrimps are several fossil forms found in the Permian and Carboniferous sandstones of Europe and North America. Photos by Wayne Clarke

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