

BUSH NEWS

from the Natural Areas of Kedron Brook & Environs

No 18, Spring 1993

GreenBrook Association

EDITORIAL

One night last week I looked out of my bedroom window to see the unusual sight of a Bush Stone-curlew standing in our pond.

Without doubt the last decade has seen vast changes in the greening of the suburbs. Just ten years ago the trees and ground litter that these large birds need to survive did not exist in our area.

Bush regeneration, the planting of native gardens and a large tree planting program in parks and streets by councils has greatly increased the food supply and nesting sites for native fauna. These programs have been very successful and the results highly visible.

Usually environmental planning decisions are more complex. Failure is sometimes easier to measure than success. For example air, noise and water pollution are often measured after the event by the "clean-up rate".

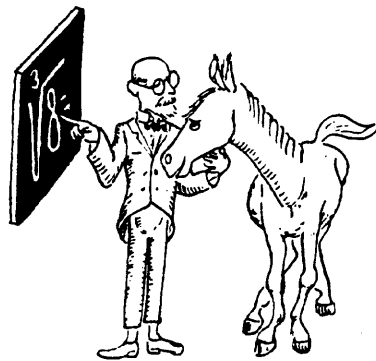
Consequently environmental impact statements are a vital part of town planning. Their aims are to provide "co-ordinated foresight" in the town planning process.

Balancing environmental issues with development must continue. The benefits to our quality of life over the next decade will be as striking as the tree planting program has been over the last ten years.

TALK TO THE ANIMALS!

Every so often I tell them that they are wasting their time. They pause, look at me, and then resume flying at the dark knot in the old stump.

We have a special relationship, these Kookaburras and I, stemming from an incident that has caused me to completely reconsider the intelligence of animals.



For several years, these birds reared their young in an artificial nest in what was then a large, healthy tree. Breeding Kookaburras are fascinating birds to watch, and we could look straight into the nest from our kitchen window.

They reacted to this lack of privacy by pretending that we were not there. While they would take food from our neighbours, our offerings were ignored. They also ignored us whenever we went into the yard.

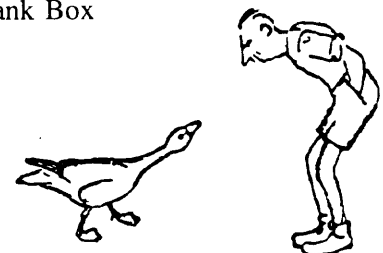
This continued each year until, early one spring, I was having breakfast on the verandah. To my great surprise, one flew onto the verandah rail, looked at me, and then flew up to the nest. It hung momentarily from the entrance lip, and then flew to the clothes line. The two of them took turns in flying up to the nest, with me watching. The whole exercise was repeated later with my wife.

About mid-morning, my wife went to the back door to see who was knocking. It turned out to be the Kookaburras again, sitting on the verandah rail, tapping on the roller-shutter awnings, which were then down.

When I came home from work that evening, I found a Brushtail Possum in the nest. There can be no doubt that these animals were asking for help.

They disgraced themselves shortly after by taking a pet mouse belonging to one of our boys, and the nest was removed. Ever since they have returned every year, making the purpose of their visits quite obvious, and causing me again to wonder: do all animals possess far more intelligence than we give them credit for?

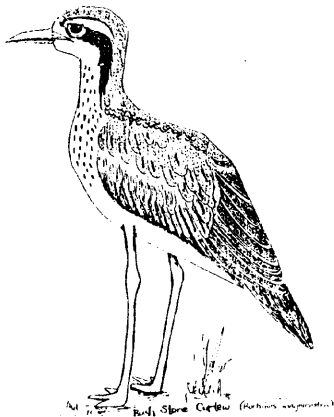
Frank Box



RECENT SIGHTINGS

A pair of **Bush Stone-curlews** have been sighted twice during August. Although these birds are rare in most settled areas of Australia, the Brisbane Wildlife Survey found them to be surprisingly common in Brisbane - particularly in the Kedron Brook and Enoggera Creek areas.

This species is seldom seen and is usually distinguished by its distinctive wailing calls at night. Their calls can develop an eerie tone especially when the weather is changing.



Bush Stone-curlews are a large long-legged bird standing 55 cm high. They breed between spring and mid-summer. Eggs are laid on the ground among leaf litter.

They gather their food on the ground and their favourite habitat is grassy woodland with ground litter. Being ground-living birds they are in great danger from cats and foxes.

An observer in the Brisbane Wildlife Survey noticed its disappearance from Corinda when foxes first appeared in the area in 1927. Significantly foxes are rarely reported from the areas of greatest Bush Stone-curlew concentration along Kedron Brook and Enoggera Creek.

FERAL CATS

Councils throughout Australia are grappling with the problems caused by feral cats. Along with the fox they are the main threat to the survival of native fauna.

Although research into cat predation is limited, the available scientific evidence is alarming. Studies show that cats take up to 28 items of prey each year. While this includes introduced pests such as mice, rats and rabbits, a large proportion is native wildlife.

Research in Victoria estimates the feral and domestic cat population at 1.2 million. If this is correct then the annual toll in Victoria alone could be in the 25 million to 40 million range. The toll Australia wide must truly be staggering.

What can be done? Probably the best that Councils can do at this stage is in changing public attitudes. The first step is to convince all Australians that the cat is a major threat to wildlife.

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Nevertheless cats are much loved members of many households and responsible cat owners can take steps to protect other smaller animals. Two simple steps that can be taken are to keep the cats inside at night and also to attach a small bell to their collars.

CAN YOU HELP US?

The final working bees for 1993 will be held on -

10 October
7 November
5 December

Meet at 8.30 am at the Blandford St entrance to Grange Forest Park.

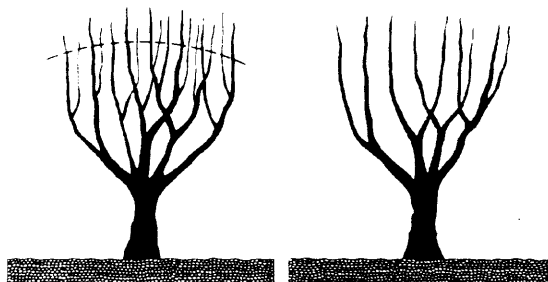
Bob Devine

PLANT OF THE MONTH

Nectarine 'Sunwright'

Stone fruits are traditionally cold-climate plants, but there are now a number of proven sub-tropical varieties available. 'Sunwright' was developed in northern NSW from plants that originally came from Florida.

The only major pests are fruit flies, which can be controlled with the Q Fly Wick.



Available from
**Perrotts Nursery
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Characteristic growth of nectarine trees, before and after pruning.