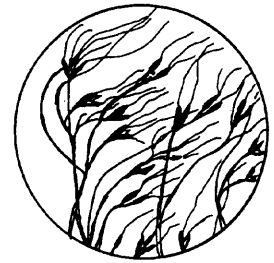


# BUSH NEWS

from the Natural Areas of Kedron Brook & Environs



No 28, Autumn 1996

GreenBrook Association

## FLYING FOX MUMS

*The following is an edited version of an article in an American book titled "The kookaburras' song: exploring animal behaviour in Australia", by John Alcock.*

The females in a flying fox camp tend to cluster in small portions of the camp, while males compete for harems within these groups. Much of the jabbering and aggression so obvious in a big camp occurs as males struggle for possession of small territories (about a metre or so of limb) from which hang one or more desirable females.

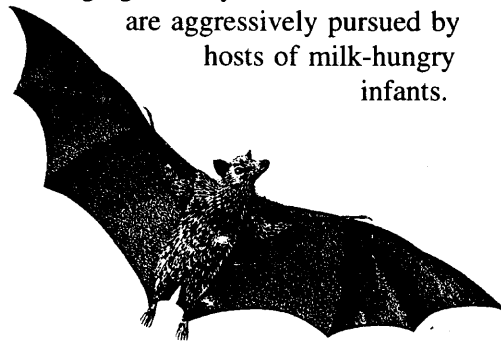
Males announce their ownership of a branch section by rubbing it with secretions from a shoulder gland. If a male is successful in maintaining possession of a site, he may eventually mate with the females that use the limb as their habitual hanging place.

After mating, females undergo a six-month gestation period, terminating in the birth of a single large baby who weighs almost half as much as its mother. At first, mothers cart the young around with them while they feed, but after a week or so they leave them behind, suspended from a limb in the camp.

Problems can arise when a mother returns to nurse her offspring, for the young frequently move about in dense clusters. Several young bats may mob a returning female in an attempt to get some milk

from someone other than their mothers.

Similar 'milk-thievery' has been observed in other highly colonial bats, such as the Mexican free-tailed bat. This insectivorous species gathers by the millions in suitable caves in the American southwest. Lactating females return to masses of babies left clinging thickly to cave roofs and are aggressively pursued by hosts of milk-hungry infants.



The first biologists to study Mexican free-tailed bats were convinced that it would be impossible for mothers to find the correct offspring, and that females therefore picked pups at random to receive their milk. They argued that with up to 40 pups jumbled together on a patch of cave roof no larger than a small floor tile, a female coming back from a nights feeding could hardly be expected to find her infant within the creche in total darkness.

But despite thinking that the task is impossible, one researcher used a sophisticated technique that involved taking blood samples from females and their young. He proved that females offer parental services to their own offspring around 80% of the time.

## DEPT OF TRANSPORT REFUSES TO TALK ABOUT GRINSTEAD PARK

In a truly surprising move, officials from the DOT have refused to talk to the Grange Forest Park Management Committee about the proposed road through Grinstead Park West (see BN26).

This park is a valuable breeding area for parrots and frogs, as well as a place for local residents to relax. It would be totally destroyed by the road.

The purpose of the road will be to allow residents of the Hills district to commute to work. The Dept has advised that the road will not be needed for some years.

As a community, we have the right to ask what the Dept is doing now, to prevent the need for a road being built later.

They know, as well as we, that doing nothing will ultimately require the road to be built. This reactive behaviour is not what the public should expect from its servants.

## NESTBOX MONITORING - VOLUNTEERS REQUIRED

The old gum in Grinstead Park which was discussed in BN26 became a casualty of the savage storms over the Christmas period, with about  $\frac{2}{3}$  of the tree being felled.

This represents a loss of some 20-30 breeding hollows for parrots.

Council has proposed to replace some of these with artificial hollows, to be erected before the next breeding season.



Would regular users of Grinstead Park West, who are willing to monitor usage of these nestboxes, please contact the Editor.

### INSECTIVOROUS BATS

As well as hosting a large colony of flying foxes, Kedron Brook also supports some of the smaller, insect-eating bats.

These are sometimes visible at dusk, or at night under streetlights, flying very erratically. For most of us, they remain just a fleeting shadow in the night.

Recently, however, one flew into our kitchen, where it circled at a fast rate, making occasional forays along the verandah.

Finally, and presumably exhausted, it landed on an indoor palm. It was amazing how this animal, so impressive on the wing, reduced to almost nothing when stationary. With its wings folded, it was about the size of a matchbox.

We took the plant downstairs, but the bat remained for about half an hour, giving us ample time to identify it as a northern broad-nosed bat.

Plains and open woodlands adjacent to creeks are its favourite habitat. It eats small insects such as mosquitos, and drinks while skimming along the surface of a

creek or waterhole. It roosts in tree hollows, fence posts and buildings, and has been known to use nestboxes. All insectivorous bats appear to be becoming less common along the brook.

Frank Box

### CREEK REHABILITATION

Last December's issue of *Habitat* magazine carried an article on a proposed project to 'deconstruct' a 2.5km section of concrete stormwater channel, and to construct, in its place, a 'natural', meandering and tree-lined watercourse.

The site is Clear Paddock Creek, a tributary of the Georges River in Sydney.

One of the main objectives of the project is to control pollution in the Georges River, by attempting to filter out pollution in the creek before it reaches the river.

It will seek to do this by creating wetlands, retention basins, and sediment ponds after the concrete is removed.

The project is expected to take the next 3-4 years, and the lessons learned should be directly relevant to Brisbane's concrete waterways.

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### CAN YOU HELP WITH BUSH NEWS?

*Bush News* is published every 3 months. All of the delivery is done by volunteers, most of whom also give their time for bush regeneration work.

To distribute 100 newsletters in the streets near you takes only about 30 minutes, and carries the National Heart Foundation 'tick of approval'.

It is an excellent method for people who have limited time, but would also like to make a contribution to keeping our area green. Ring 3356 6577 for details.

The next working bees are on:

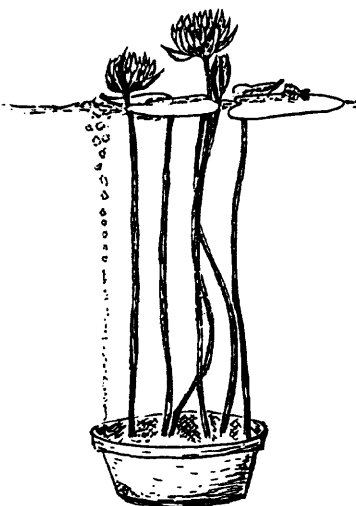
- 5 May
- 9 June
- 14 July

Meet at the Blandford St entrance to Grange Forest Park.

Bob Devine

### PLANT OF THE MONTH

### "Water Lilies"



Now available to suit all sizes of pools. A wide range of colours are available, as are different sizes of leaves. Easily grown, provided they receive full sun.

Water lilies one of the best plants to use in a pool since they reflect the rays of the sun. This cuts down the problem of algal bloom, and controls wrigglers by providing the even temperature which fish need to survive.

**Available: Perrotts Nursery,  
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