BUSH NEWS

from the Natural Areas of Kedron Brook & Environs

No 29, Winter 1996 **GreenBrook Association**

THE EELS OF KEDRON BROOK

On the last occasion that Council dredged Kedron Brook the local boys had a field day, plucking dozens of writhing eels from the just-dug gravel. Although extremely common, one never sees any small eels, or any eels mating. Why this is so is explained in an article by Steve Van Dyck in the Spring 1994 issue of Australian Natural History, from which the following is drawn.

About every three years, and after exceptional rain, the larger eels in the brook migrate downstream to Moreton Bay. Some of these may have spent up to 35 years in fresh water, and yet they swim into the ocean and head north-east.

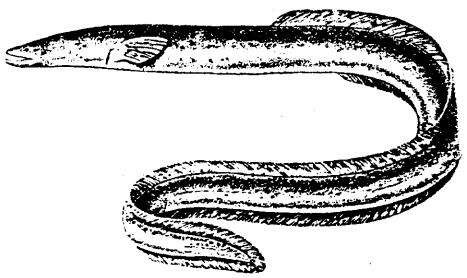
They migrate some 1500km to an area in the Coral Sea near New Caledonia, where they spawn. Females lay between 5 and 10 million eggs and then, presumably, die.

The eggs are laid up to 300m below the surface, and hatch after 2-10 days into minute ribbon-like larvae. These are carried back to Australia by the current over the next 12-18 months.

As they approach the Continental Shelf they change into a more cylindrical shape and, because of their see-through appearance, are known as 'glass eels'. Finally they develop pigment and increase in size, at which time they become known as 'elvers'. It is as elvers that the eels re-enter the brook.

Those elvers that migrate upstream to fresh water develop into females, while those that stay in the lower reaches become males. There is no further contact between the two until the cycle is repeated.

The migration of elvers upstream can be a staggering phenomenon. Like a squirming mass of thick rice noodles, the elvers have the ability to climb near-vertical dam walls, 20-metre sheer waterfalls, rock faces and, if needs be, travel over open moist ground.



Eels can thus find their way into isolated dams and concrete water tanks.

Sometimes, due to drought, eels miss out on their trip to the Coral Sea, and become isolated in deep pools. Some of these reach monumental sizes, growing thicker than a 4 litre paint tin and over 1.5 metres in length.

Those that do escape undergo dramatic changes to their bodies. They change colour from olive green or blotchy brown to grey-green above with silver-white bellies. Their reproductive organs grow in anticipation of the great Coral Sea slap-and-tickle, and their stomachs degenerate so they can no longer feed.

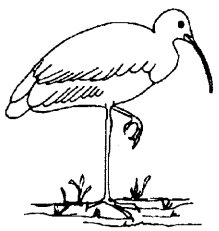
In their home ground, adult freshwater eels will eat almost anything. They eat insects, fish, molluscs and water plants. They also eat dead sheep (not common in the brook, thankfully), dead cats (now there's a thought), rotten eggs, water dragons, ducks and human toes. They will even leave the water to reach a tasty morsel.

On the other side of the coin, some say that an eel caught from a stony creek makes for one of the finest flavoured fish available. Nothing need be wasted: the practice of using dried eel-skins to whip errant boys extended from Roman times to at least the 16th century.

A further attraction stems from their uncanny habit of twisting and writhing in the pan, hours after being cleaned and cut up.

THE STRAW-NECKED IBIS

The straw-necked ibis is a regular forager along the brook, usually in flocks of a dozen or so. It is basically a bird of the creeks and swamps and their associated floodplains.



They will eat frogs, snakes, and molluscs, and love grasshoppers. They can form large colonies during locust plagues; one flock in the Riverina early this century was estimated at 240 000 individuals. Some were shot and their stomachs found to contain, on average, 2000 grasshoppers each. The researchers concluded that the flock was eating 480 million grasshoppers per day.

HELP NEEDED WITH SURVEY OF OLD TREES

The Wildlife Preservation Society of Queensland is conducting a tree hollow survey of Kedron Brook and its catchment. From the information gained, a nestbox placement scheme will be implemented to replace natural hollows as they are lost.

If you know of any tree hollows near you, particularly those used by animals, please notify me.

Pat Comben
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BANDICOOT NUMBERS INCREASE

One consequence of the recent rains has been an increase in the numbers of bandicoots along the brook.

As reported in *Bush News 27*, a female bandicoot can rear 7 young to independence in only 2 months, and give birth to another litter immediately. Sexual maturity can occur as early as 2 months.

"GLOSSY BLACKS"

One of the least understood of our parrots is the glossy black cockatoo. It is the same size as the sulphur-crested cockatoo, but looks quite different in that it lacks any sort of crest. Its call is soft and drawn out.

The glossy black has 3 requirements for survival. The first is a large number of casuarinas (she-oaks). The seeds of these provide the bulk of its food. It also requires large hollows high up in trees, and water, which it must drink daily.

It would once have occurred in Brisbane, and a declining population can still be found in the Gold Coast hinterland.

A **free** public lecture/discussion will be held on a recovery plan for the glossy blacks on:

Monday 29 July, 7.30pm
Queensland Museum

For further information, contact Roslyn Paterson (07)5530 5531.

BRINGING BACK THE BUSH

It is now 11 years since the GreenBrook Association started work in Grange Forest Park. During that time there have not been any large fires in the areas in which we have worked.

This is not co-incidental, but due to the efforts of those who have cleared away the tall grasses that were such a fire hazard. We are currently trying to re-establish some of the original native grasses.

If you would like to assist, the next working bees are on:

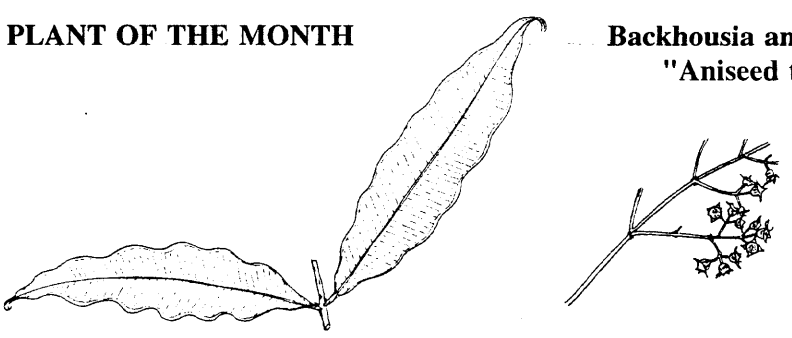
- 14 July
- 11 August
- 8 September

Meet at the Blandford St entrance to the park at 8.30am.

Bob Devine

PLANT OF THE MONTH

Backhousia anisata
"Aniseed tree"



If you are attracted to plants with aromatic leaves, this one is a beauty. The leaves, when crushed, give off a pleasant aniseed smell.

This is an uncommon rainforest tree from northern NSW. It grows to a large tree on rich alluvial loams, but would be a medium shrub on most Brisbane soils. Foliage is dense, and flowers are scented and carried in profusion.

Available: Perrotts Nursery, Elkhorn St, Enoggera