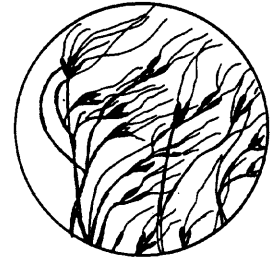




BUSH NEWS

from the Natural Areas of Kedron Brook & Environs



No 35, Summer 1997/98

GreenBrook Association

TURKEYS GALORE

For several months now there have been four scrub turkeys prowling Grange Forest Park and surrounding suburbs.

While the presence of turkeys along the Brook is not uncommon, rarely has there been more than a single bird at a time, and rarely do they stay. Perhaps these birds were dumped here.

To the best of my knowledge they have not tried to breed - does anyone know of any serious mound building?

The scrub turkey is one of 22 members of the family of mound builders. These birds originated on the ancient supercontinent of Gondwana, and are now found only in Australia and the islands to the north of Australia.

The scrub turkey builds a mound 5-6 metres across at the base and perhaps 2 metres high, which is quite large if it happens to be sited on a suburban allotment. (I recently spoke with a lady at Oxley who had them breeding in her front yard for 20 years, and thought the whole experience fascinating).

Mounds can get bigger. The largest belongs to the Orange-footed Megapode, widespread to the north of Australia. It's mound involves several tonnes of material, and a small one is a

veritable hill about 12 metres diameter at the base and 5 metres high.

They are added to each year, with a single hill being in use for up to 40 years. The mounds can remain as features in the landscape for more than 1500 years.

Another member of the family, the Maleo, has learned to utilise the volcanic heat so common in Indonesia. They excavate pits in the ground near hot springs.



Whereas the mound builders monitor temperature after laying and regulate it by adjusting the volume of compost, the Maleo selects a site just so far from the source of heat. Good sites are very popular - one on New Britain, just north of PNG, attracts an estimated 53 000 birds during the June to September breeding period.

Other Meleos have learned that black volcanic beach sand is nearly as good. They dig a pit about 1 metre deep just above the high water mark, lay an egg, and partially cover it.

The eggs are huge - about the size of a tea cup and weighing 1/3 of

the weight of the female! It takes her 2 weeks to develop another egg, and she will return to the same hole to lay again.

While mound builders are essentially ground birds, it appears that the young can fly quite well. There are regular reports of young turkeys on the coral islands off the central Qld coast, some 40 km from the mainland where they must have come from.

Being such good fliers, they have dispersed into Asia across the Wallace Line, that deep sea trench that separates Australasian from European-Asian plants and animals.

Despite this, they have survived only on certain isolated islands in Asia - islands devoid of mammal carnivores that live on the ground.

In the pre-European Australia, as on Gondwana, there were no cats or tigers, no wolves, bears, foxes or hyenas. Instead there were marsupials such as kangaroos, possums and wombats - animals which are no threat to a bird that scratches around on the forest floor all day, and especially one that needs to poke its head deep into a mound to sense temperature.

Today Australia is recognised as having one of only six major faunal types in the world. It provides the best insight to the ancient fauna of Gondwana, and is due largely to Australia's isolation from other continents.

MILESTONES

Consultants for:

- Organisational Change
- SAP
- Change Management
- Training Design & Dev't

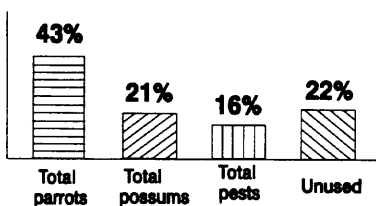
Contact: Jeni Neary
Ph-3856 4771 Fax-3856 4702

NESTBOX SUCCESSES

The 1996 breeding season saw the largest survey of nestbox usage ever conducted in Brisbane.

A total of 67 boxes were inspected. A range of box sizes were involved and all had been installed in parks or reserves during the previous 12 months. The survey therefore measured usage during the first year.

Overall usage was as follows:

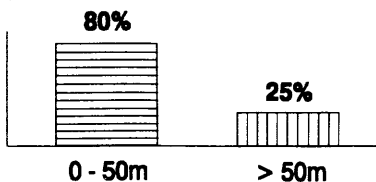


The total exceeded 100% because some boxes were used more than once.

Of the 67 boxes, 52 were used. If the boxes used by pests (bees and mynas) are excluded, the effective utilisation by native animals was a massive 77%.

The survey found that both scaly-breasted and rainbow lorikeets used a particular vertical box. Half of these boxes were used during the first year.

However this rate increased dramatically with distance from the nestbox to an existing breeding site:



Lorikeets are, of course, social animals, but the extent to which this influenced their breeding behaviour was dramatic.

Frank Box

COTTAGE GARDENS

The renowned Australian gardener and landscape designer Edna Walling specialised in cottage gardens. She once described her type of garden: "The plants are nice and thick, the ground is well covered and there is an air of wildness about the garden".

Cottage gardens are ideal for small yards and also offer nooks for animals to shelter in. Here are some tips on how to create a cottage garden.

Plant in clumps of 3-5 rather than mixing up varieties.

Most plants suitable for cottage gardens tend to be drought tolerant, which means that they require well-drained soil or mounded beds.

Don't mulch heavily, especially during summer, as the roots tend to "sweat".

Using gravel or pebbles under the plants will control weeds, and often lengthens the life of these sort of plants.

Stephen de Weger
(Perrotts Nursery)

SUPPORT YOUR PARK

Grange Forest Park is home to many animals that cannot live anywhere else. It is also surrounded on all sides by weeds and these will take over if not controlled.

We are now entering the Christmas period. Like everyone else, our members take a break over Christmas. Unfortunately this is also the peak growing season, and the start of a new year is always a heavy catch-up time.

If you can help, our next working bees are on:

- 18 January
- 15 February
- 15 March

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

Bob Devine

PLANT OF THE MONTH

Graptophyllum ilicifolium 'Holly Fuschia'

The foliage on this shrub is magnificent - large, bright green and glossy. It produces masses of 5cm tubular flowers which are attractive to honeyeaters.

It likes a well-drained position with light shade to full sun.

Available from Perrotts
Nursery, Elkhorn St, Enoggera

