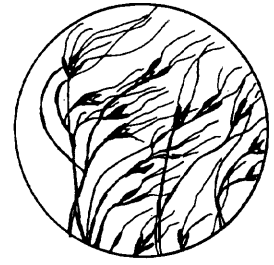


BUSH NEWS

from the Natural Areas of Kedron Brook & Environs



No 38, Spring 1998

GreenBrook Association

WEDGE-TAILED EAGLES ON SPARKES HILL

In early June a pair of wedge-tailed eagles was seen harassing the flying fox camp on Sparkes Hill. They were identified as one adult and one juvenile.

They returned as least four times over the space of a fortnight. On each occasion their arrival was heralded by up to 30 crows who escorted the eagles, crawling loudly. Below the flying foxes were in panic mode.



The eagles have a definite strategy. One circles up high, watching and ready to dive, while one comes in from the side and swoops low over the camp, creating terror as it passes.

As far as is known, the hunt was unsuccessful on each occasion.

Wedge-tailed eagles are described as being brown to black in colour with a wingspan of 2 to 2½ metres. The wedge-shaped tail is quite obvious.

While this is a rare bird in the inner city suburbs, a pair nest in the foothills of Mt Nebo and a second pair at Samsonvale. Sparkes Hill is well within the feeding range of both pairs.

CRESTED HAWK AT GRANGE FOREST PARK



Another raptor seen along the brook recently was a juvenile crested hawk. This is one of our most distinctive birds. It is unmistakable with a small crest on the back of its head and a reddish-brown barred belly.

Although a large raptor, it feeds mainly on insects. We watched the bird in Grange Forest Park for several hours, and its technique seemed to be to crash into the canopy of a tree in the hope that this would dislodge some prey. While it certainly seemed to be successful, this behaviour was not at all becoming for such a large and beautiful bird.

This individual also appeared to be quite tame, allowing people to approach within a couple of metres.

BLACK-SHOULDERED KITE BEHIND STAFFORD CITY

Another bird of prey found regularly in the area is the black-shouldered kite. This is a grassland specialist, taking mice, insects



and small birds.

It has the ability to hover in one spot with the tail depressed and wingtips quivering, ready to drop when prey is sighted.

The former grassland behind Stafford City was ideal habitat for this bird, as well as for the quail, finches, cisticolas, tawny grassbirds and pipits on which it hunted. Kedron Brook is desperately short of open unmowed grassland.

The black-shouldered kite can still often be seen in the trees overlooking the brook just downstream from the footbridge behind Stafford City.

AND THE AUSTRALIAN HOBBY



This is the smallest of the four raptors. It has a black head, slate-blue wings and rufous underparts streaked with black.

It is incredibly fast. Its hunting strategy is to swoop low over rooftops and trees to create an element of surprise. The pigeons of Stafford State School and the light industrial areas along the brook regularly scatter as the hobby comes through. The spotted turtle dove is also relished.

WHAT'S WRONG WITH MARSUPIALS?

Australia has two-thirds of the world's marsupials, and they have long been regarded as second-rate citizens. At first they were looked on as freaks; the first platypus that arrived in Europe was regarded as the work of a practical joker.

When it became clear that the marsupials were real enough, the following story emerged and it has been current virtually to this day.



Australia and South America (which also has marsupials) were isolated from the great linked landmasses of Africa-Eurasia-North America, and so the relatively primitive marsupials carried on in a kind of sheltered workshop, immune from the fierce competition of a free-market ecology prevailing in these more aggressive lands.

When a land-bridge was at length established between the Americas, the placental mammals dashed across it, and the backward marsupials of South America were soon displaced by the more efficient placentals. Only in Australia were they able to dodder on.

The biologists who have done research in this field tell a quite different story. It is now thought that reproductive differences had nothing to do with the success of the North American over the South American mammals in the Tertiary Period.

The North American mammals won because they had already begun to adapt to climatic changes, which were felt earlier in North America than Sth America.

As for the Australian marsupials of today, the first point is that they are not ancient relics at all, but have evolved over the past 10 000 years in response to climatic change, just like everywhere else.

Moreover, the marsupial fauna of Australia is a miracle of adaption to a harsh environment. The amazingly efficient production line of marsupials may involve the presence of three sequential stages of offspring associated with their mother at the one time (an almost-weaned joey, one in the pouch and an embryo waiting to develop).

Other evidence that life in the pouch is not a second-class solution can be found in the degree of sophistication of marsupial milk production. When a joey kangaroo returns to the pouch to feed, it is fed milk rich in lipids through a special nipple.

At the same time, the mother is producing a totally different kind of milk, rich in proteins, for the tiny joey still in the pouch. A four-star catering performance which makes lactation by 'higher' mammals look like a fast-food line.

Adapted from: *Landprints: reflections on place and landscape*, by George Seddon.

MILESTONES
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HELP CREATE HABITATS

It was a very unusual winter, warm and wet, with summer promising to be hot and wet. These are good growing conditions for both native plants and weeds.

In the two working bees that are left this year we will be putting in more rainforest plants (to shade out weeds in the future), and removing weeds from around them to give them a better start.

We have had support recently from a group of Community Service Order workers who are spreading mulch. The mulch is proving to be very effective in reducing weed growth.

To help, meet at 8.30am at the Blandford St entrance to Grange Forest Park, on 18/10 and 15/11.

Bob Devine

PLANT OF THE MONTH

Wahlenbergia 'Bonnie Bell' (A Bluebell)

A selected form of a native wildflower that can sometimes be seen on roundabouts and other disturbed sites across Brisbane.

It grows to 10cm and can spread to half a metre across. It becomes covered with delicate blue flowers during spring.

It likes a well-drained, sunny position. Also great in a hanging basket.

Available from Perrotts
Nursery, Elkhorn St, Enoggera

