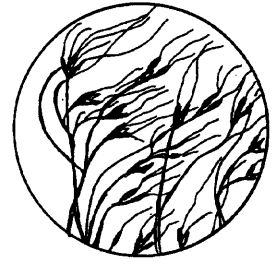




BUSH NEWS

from the Natural Areas of Kedron Brook & Environs



No 39, Summer 1998

GreenBrook Association

SCRUB TURKEYS BREED ON SPARKES HILL

The turkeys arrived in our front yard in early October after a new garden bed was prepared. Within a week their activities in the bed had become quite frenetic; the thick mat of lucerne hay under the soil was raked out, the seedlings had disappeared and the bed was looking quite chaotic.

On arriving home on 22 October we disturbed the birds deeply involved in some ritual in the bed. On inspection we found a white egg about 100mm long in the soil under the hay.



Some 3 days later another egg was laid. This time we witnessed the whole intricate ritual involving about 90 minutes of interplay between the male and female.

Initially there seemed to be a lot of running and sitting and arching the wings on the part of the male to attract the female. The female, also displaying wing-spreading and arching, seemed to be seduced by the male onto the mound.

Then a long process of digging and thrusting the head into the mound took place - the birds have a very accurate heat sensor in their beaks. Only a mound maintained by the male at the correct

temperature of approx 32°C attracts a female.

Eventually she chose a site and began a long and elaborate digging process. The male fussed around, never far away and continually making pecking motions in the air as if to say "Hurry up!".

She meticulously scraped out a deep basin, repeatedly thrusting her head deep into the mound and often lifting her tail, arching her wings and plumping out the feathers on her breast.

About $\frac{3}{4}$ of the way through the process the pair mated briefly. Finally, after some intense arching and plumping displays, spread her wings out wide across the mound, almost suspending herself over the excavation, pulled her head into her body and laid.

Immediately she stood up and very matter of factly began scraping mulch over the egg. When the egg was barely covered she wandered off. The male continued filling the hole and fussed around until the mound was completely reformed.

Egg-laying has been witnessed several times since then. The male is a meticulous tender of the nest, spending between 2 and 7 hours a day at the task.

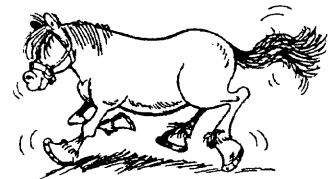
David Walters

[P.S. The first chick appeared on 26 December].

WEDGE-TAILED EAGLE TAKES A HORSE

The last issue of *Bush News* reported local wedge-tailed eagles hunting flying foxes, a favourite food item wherever they are found. In the southern states the rabbit is much more common as a staple, and the loss of rabbits due to the Rabbit Calicivirus is forcing the eagles to try other foods.

The following story is drawn from the magazine *Australian Birding* (Winter 1998), in an article by an employee of the Victorian Department of Natural Resources and Environment.



In March this year a breeder of miniature horses in central Victoria was horrified to see a foal seized and carried away by a wedge-tailed eagle. The foal was very much alive and healthy when taken. Its half-eaten carcass was found elsewhere on the property later in the day.

It is believed that this is the first record of a horse being taken by a wedge-tailed eagle.

THE HAZARDS OF LIVING IN THE SUBURBS

The impact of wedge-tails on flying fox numbers is negligible, but not so for carpet snakes. Flying fox camps are renowned for the numbers of pythons which prey on any young that happen to fall to the ground.

These snakes can reach 4m in length. They are generally harmless, and will attack only if someone tries to separate them from a meal.

So when they spread out from Sparkes Hill into the surrounding suburbs, as they regularly do, they should be welcomed as free controllers of vermin such as rats and mice.



What, then, was the justification for killing the carpet snake in Grange Forest Park recently, chopping it into pieces and scattering it along the track? Senseless.

Another animal whose strange ways are not wholly recognised is the spur-winged plover. Is there any other bird which lays its eggs in such stupid places? Pity the chicks, in one case, born onto a flat galvanised factory roof in the middle of summer.

So the little plovers born in Roy Harvey Park were some of the lucky ones. Tiny, almost perfect replicas of their parents, they freeze and become perfectly invisible when danger approaches. Life was easy, at least during the day. Each night one of the chicks disappeared, until finally all were gone. What, or whose, animal took them?

Surely one of our loveliest birds is

the boobook owl. This is the mopoke which calls softly (if incessantly) during the wee hours.

Boobooks are quite happy camping by day in backyards as close in as Spring Hill. At night they hunt moths, mice, rats and whatever else they can find.

Their numbers are almost certainly limited by breeding sites - hollows in old trees. They take readily to nestboxes and a pair has bred every year for at least the last six years in various boxes in Emerson and Hickey Parks.

So when I found a boobook on the ground early one morning, directly under a box in Emerson Park, it seemed a good chance that this was a chick which had fallen out.

Not so. It was an adult bird which allowed me to pick it up. It was attentive and looked around but did not attempt to fly. By the time I got home it was lying on its side, and was dead within an hour. Rat poison had claimed another victim.

We share Brisbane with some very special animals, but it is not easy for them. If we treat them poorly they will simply disappear.

MILESTONES

Consultants for:

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

Contact: Jeni Neary

Ph-3856 4771 Fax-3856 4702

HELP CREATE HABITATS

At last we have water on site. The Brisbane City Council has installed a drinking fountain at the Blandford St entrance and taps for watering. We thank those residents who have allowed us to use their taps for the last 14 years.

It was also good to close the year with a new group of helpers coming forward to assist. It is now crystal clear that, without help, bush surrounded by housing will evolve into a fire-prone assemblage of a few types of weeds supporting very few animals.

To help, meet at 8.30am at the Blandford St entrance to Grange Forest Park, on:

17 Jan / 21 Feb / 21 March

Bob Devine

PLANT OF THE MONTH

Helichrysum diosmifolium - 'Sago flower'

This is a native of Kedron Brook and a member of the daisy family. It has a stiff, upright habit and grows to about 2m.

The flowers are white and occur in dense clusters, with each one about the size of a match head.

Available from Perrotts Nursery, Elkhorn St, Enoggera

