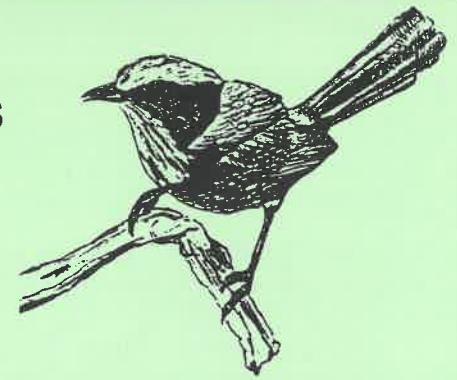




ASSOCIATION OF SOCIETIES
FOR GROWING AUSTRALIAN PLANTS

**WILDLIFE AND NATIVE PLANTS
STUDY GROUP**

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Newsletter No 22

July 1993

Dear Members

For many of you this will be a very long-awaited newsletter. I truly apologise for this state of affairs, my only excuse being pressure from other commitments which I am sure many of you can relate to. I have automatically updated memberships from 1992/1993 to 1993/1994 to compensate for the lack of a newsletter last year.

I will briefly (?) give you a rundown on your new study group leader. I have been a member of the Pine Rivers Branch of SGAP almost since arriving in Queensland from the UK at the end of 1988. My husband and I were overwhelmed by the beauty and diversity of the native flora and fauna and are constantly puzzled as to why everyone else in Australia does not feel the same. Why oh why are people still planting those awful exotics that may look very pretty but need lots of TLC not to mention that very scarce commodity (in many areas anyway) water? I know I am preaching to the converted but I would like everyone to do their bit to actively promote our cause. More in this regard a little later.

I am also a member of the Pine Rivers Branch of the Wildlife Preservation Society of Queensland and six months ago was fortunate in being appointed as the Office Administrator at the Head Office of the Society based in Brisbane. I answer numerous phone calls at work and I endeavour to spread the word about planting natives whenever the opportunity arises.

The Queensland Department of Environment and Heritage are conducting a two year survey (Nature Search 2001) of all flora and fauna in South-east Queensland. This survey covers 20 shires and relies on volunteers who are registered and assisted by area co-ordinators. I am the co-ordinator for my shire so I collate all the completed flora and fauna survey sheets the contents of which I find very interesting.

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Study Group Leader:

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We live on an acreage estate in the mountains north of Brisbane. This area consists of 32 4-5 acre blocks which was previously an old dairy farm with hardly a tree in sight just lots and lots of kikuyu grass! I instigated and co-ordinated (together with a like-minded neighbour) a landcare scheme involving the Queensland Forest Service. The outcome of many letters, maps and a meeting with Forestry staff was that each landholder was allowed up to 1000 free trees plus a 5000 community allowance for footpath plantings. This scheme finished at the end of June so everyone has been feverishly planting. My husband and I started planting four years ago when we first purchased our land. The only wildlife to be seen then was a solitary butcherbird that perched on our house site pegs. Regular visitors now include King Parrots (the very first to arrive much to our delight), Rainbow Lorikeets, Pale-headed and Crimson Rosellas, a solitary pair of Galahs, Bar-shouldered Doves, numerous honeyeaters, wrens and others such as the Satin Bowerbird that pass through on occasions.

The other wildlife which we now see include red-necked wallabies which spend the day hiding between some rows of acacias which were planted as windbreaks. We have several mothers with their joeys at the moment - they come very close to our windows at night as we supplement their diet with a dish of working horse pellets! The outside spotlights do not seem to concern them at all and they are usually far more interesting to watch than 'the box'. The wallabies have also been observed eating Grevillea flowers (Robyn Gordon). We regularly see a large bandicoot, nicknamed 'Stumpy' because he's lost his tail (probably to a cat or dog) that also enjoys the pellets. Echidnas are sometimes seen foraging in the mulch but unfortunately many more are seen dead on the side of the roads. Snakes are only encountered very occasionally - a two metre Brown cooling off in the swimming pool one summer lunchtime, a Marsh Snake appreciating the dampness of the shade house, a Green Tree Snake shedding it's skin on the pergola, a Dwarf Crowned Snake in the garage, and a Black Whip Snake in the bedroom. These snakes are never harmed as we feel privileged to have them around. The Verreaux Skinks (a legless lizard) are sometimes unearthed when digging. Blue Tongues and Eastern Water Dragons are also seen in the garden area.

We are also active members of the Brisbane Frog Society which held an excursion on our estate one warm damp evening last November. The members were all amazed at the number of different frogs that were identified - 17 species. There are probably another half a dozen that were not calling that particular night as well!

My final involvement is with O.N.A.R.R which stands for Orphan Native Animal Rear and Release Program. I joined this club when one of my first phone calls at work asked for help with a tiny furless bundle that had been found in the middle of a busy road the previous night. It was fortunate that I was already storing a fullsize humidicrib for a friend who was moving house. The humidicrib had been donated by a local hospital to one of the branches of the Wildlife Preservation Society. The 95gm Brushtail Possum thrived and now weighs over 1Kg. I also have another Brushtail plus three Ringtails and a furless red-necked wallaby all at very stages of development.

I can certainly recommend caring for orphaned animals as a very rewarding pastime but it can be quite a longterm commitment. Night-time bottle-feeding must be taken into consideration as well as being able to take them to work (another advantage of my job) if applicable. My husband has just finished building yet another cage (an hexagonal aviary around three small gum trees). Providing adequate housing together with a suitable release site is another consideration. A licence must also be obtained from the appropriate authority for keeping native animals in captivity.

I should now discuss why I decided to change the name of the Study Group from 'Birds' to 'Wildlife'. I have always endeavoured to attract everything to our land with the exception of cats, dogs and cane toads but more about those later. Of course it is very nice to see all the birds but they are far more mobile than most creatures and therefore have a greater choice when it comes to food, shelter and nesting sites. I also happen to be very fond of the frogs, lizards, snakes and the furry marsupials which are unique to our country. I hope that members are not opposed to the name change - no doubt those that are will let me know!

I was very interested to see that, on reading back issues, the introductory newsletter by Judy Smith in May 1983 asked whether possums, gliders and bats should be included? Newsletter No 1 (September 1983) stated that the general comment from the members was that they should and that perhaps 'Wildlife and Native Plants' would be a more suitable name for the group! It has only taken ten years to change the name! I would like to thank Judy Smith and Barbara Henderson for the very informative newsletters in the previous years. I hope I can carry on the good work.

I believe that we have to look at everything in the food chain starting with the things that either live or pupate in the soil, then within the leaf litter and mulch, the groundcovers and grasses, the shrubs and small trees, the creepers and climbers and finally the tall trees like the majestic eucalypts. Our group should therefore be thinking of how everything inter-relates within the food chain. A native plant may not be a direct source of food for the animal or bird we wish to attract but for something else within the chain. I think the easiest way to achieve our aims to think of the complete picture so to speak - plant a variety of natives suitable to your area using local species wherever possible.

Make sure that there is a constant source of POLLEN, NECTAR and SEEDS, and plants that attract INSECTS of all sorts - flies, beetles, caterpillars, lerps and butterflies plus all the other weird and wonderful creepy crawlies that abound in our gardens.

The next thing to consider is SHELTER - this can be the bare soil itself or even earth banks (we had a pair of Rainbow Lorikeets nesting in an earth bank one metre off the ground - we have the photos to prove it!), sand or compost heaps, piles of grass or leaves, old logs and bark, rocks, bricks, roof tiles - in fact anything that creatures can hide in or under or even bask on top of in the sun. You will be amazed at what can find its way into these shelters - lots of things that will be part of the food chain! Many creatures (particularly small birds) require protection from predators so very prickly shrubs such as Hakea Sericea are recommended for this.

Once we have provided the food and shelter for the animals we do not want them going elsewhere to produce their families (migratory species excepted) so next on the list is NESTING sites. Many of the shelters will also be suitable for nesting although not necessarily for the same creatures. Birds and possums utilise hollows in old trees but of course these days these can be very few and far between. A substitute can be made in the form of artificial nesting boxes. These can be made very simply - if you can saw a piece of timber and use a hammer and nails then you can produce a very acceptable nest box!

A list of suggested measurements courtesy of the Australian Littoral Society is included.

Scrap timber can often be begged from timber yards, carpenters or by scouting around industrial estates for substantial packing cases that are often discarded. Do not use treated (poisoned) timber. Thicker pieces are preferable as they afford better protection from the elements and also insulation from the heat and cold.

Make the lid so that it overlaps at the front. Ensure that there is access for cleaning - a nail (which will allow the lid to swivel) in one back corner of the lid and another removable nail through the diagonally opposite corner at the front - this system is far easier than a hinge and catch arrangement.

My own experience with possums is that it is not necessary to have a circular hole. It is a lot easier just to make the front piece of timber shorter than the rear - give them plenty of room - just think of a fully grown Brushtail with a baby on her back!

Drainage holes should be drilled in the bottom.

The completed box can be painted with an exterior grade paint (green or brown?) to protect the timber but avoid the area around the opening. For an environmentally friendly finish try 'Organoil external stain' or 'Bio all purpose exterior varnish'. You may wish to paint a number on the bottom if you intend placing several and wish to monitor them and keep records.

The box can be mounted using wire threaded through two holes in the back of the box, the wire being covered with old hosepipe where it has to wrap around the tree so as not to cause any damage.

Avoid placing the entrance of the box where it will be exposed to the prevailing winds, sun or rain.

Don't forget the insectivorous bats too - they can eat thousands of insects every night including mosquitoes!

A member mentioned that in Germany it is not unusual to see nestboxes everywhere in the forests. In England it is also quite a common practice in home gardens. So why not aim to put up as many boxes as we can - in gardens, school grounds, local parks, in fact anywhere there is a need. Nestbox-making workshops can be organised to involve local community groups and members of the public.

WATER is a very important factor for attracting all native fauna. Many of the food chain creatures start their life in the water - the mosquito is the one that springs to mind immediately but I am not suggesting that you set up lots of breeding grounds for them! Another would be the beautiful dragonfly and of course the frogs and the dreaded cane toad.

The simple way of providing water for the birds to drink and bathe in is to fill a shallow container (I use large plastic plantpot saucers) and either suspend it from a branch with string or chain or place it on some sort of pedestal. It must be kept well out of the reach of any interested cats.

The same type of dish can be used on the ground for mammals. All dishes must be checked regularly, cleaned and re-filled to prevent contamination, algae forming and mosquito larvae surviving.

On a slightly larger scale a small pond can be created for raising tadpoles of the local frogs. A very quick and easy pond can be created using a large plastic dustbin, the lid being used for a birdbath. If you are using townwater it will be necessary to allow the water to mature for about a week before adding the frogspawn or tadpoles. Try and use local pondweed from the creek and dams in your area. Introduce some small fish preferably the native Rainbow fish that will eat the mosquito wrigglers but not the tadpoles.

Tadpoles thrive on lettuce leaves boiled for about ten minutes and allowed to cool. Dry fishfood flakes sold in small tubs is also acceptable. Some of the water will need replacing every week or so depending on the density of tadpoles. Keep a bucket of matures water (or rainwater) for this. When the tadpoles start developing legs and maturing ensure that there are some floating weeds to allow them to come out of the water or they may drown. Alternatively they could be transferred at this stage to a shallow container with some rocks. Make sure there are plenty of groundcovers or small shrubs as protection from predators when they first emerge.

The Richmond Birdwing Butterfly - Ornithoptera richmondia

These beautiful butterflies can be found in South-east Queensland and northern New South Wales. The adults feed on nectar but the caterpillars are specialised feeders relying on the native *Aristolchia praevenosa*.

Unfortunately the female will also lay her eggs on the exotic *Aristolchia elegans* often known as the Dutchman's Pipe. The eggs will hatch but the caterpillars are poisoned by the leaves.

This is a very good example of how exotic plants can interfere with nature and why we should all be encouraging everyone to plant lots of natives suitable for their location, position and purpose.

Possums

The following are recommended as food plants for Brushtail and Ringtail possums:-

Eucalyptus torrelliana, *E. ptychocarpa*, *E. curtisii*,
E. tereticornis, *E. camadulensis*, *E. botryoides*, *E. andrewsii*,
E. ovata, *E. citridora*, *E. propinqua*. *Melaleuca linariifolia*,
Acmena smithii and flowers of most *Callistemons*, *Grevilleas* and
Acacias.

Eucalyptus torrelliana is definitely the favourite amongst my Brushtails and Ringtails although it is not one I would normally recommend planting in SE Queensland as I understand it has the potential to become a pest in National Park areas. Ringtails also enjoy a dense canopy of *Pandorea pandorana* and *Mucuna gigantea* for nesting purposes.

Sugar Gliders

Sugar gliders enjoy the flowers of the native frangipanni, *Hymenosporum flavum* and during the winter when there is a shortage of food they feed on the sap of *Acacia decurrens*.

Feathertail Gliders

Feathertail gliders prefer dense vegetation and like to travel around through the bushes. *Banksias*, *Melaleucas*, *Callistemons* and *Eucalypts* are their main foods. I found one recently sheltering beneath an old palm frond.

Koalas

Koalas eat a variety of gum leaves including Eucalyptus teretecornis, E. microcorys, E. robusta, E. signata, E. seaana, E. resinifera, E. nicholli, E. drepanophylla, E. propinqua, E. moluccana, E. punctuata and E. viminalis. If you are lucky enough to have koalas in your area then it is best to plant the local eucalypt species as they definitely seem to have localised preferences.

CAT-ASTROPHE - The 'Killing Fields' in your backyard

I have had a request from one of the members about how cats can be controlled as she feels that she is attracting birds and luring them to their deaths.

I feel very strongly on this matter as I attended a Cat Management Workshop held by the Queensland Department of Environment and Heritage. Experts from around Australia presented papers on this very important topic. Millions of native animals are killed by both feral and domestic cats every year. The only way to control domestic cats is by local authority by-laws and the education of the public as to the responsibilities of cat ownership. Some shires are already taking measures to this effect including registration and curfews. Victoria has an excellent leaflet compiled by the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (photocopy enclosed).

If you are experiencing problems with predation from cats and are unable to resolve it then perhaps it would be advisable to investigate practical solutions. Remove low-growing branches (particularly flowering ones) of shrubs and avoid planting dense low-growing shrubs (hiding places for cats) in the vicinity of bird-tables and bird-baths. A strong jet of water from a hose trained on the cat at every opportunity is also a good deterrent. Other measures include talking to the cat owners, writing letters to the local authority and newspapers and generally creating a fuss. I feel it will take public action before any legislation is considered.

Buy or hire a cat-trap for feral cats and advise your neighbours of your actions and hope that they can be persuaded to confine their cats during the hours of darkness. A collar with an identification tag and two bells may also assist but research has shown that bells are really only totally effective if used from the kitten stage. It may be a worthwhile exercise to contact neighbours and ask them to identify and claim their cats from the trap.

Echidna Care

I have enclosed a copy of the first Nationwide Echidna Survey which I hope some of you will consider completing and returning to help with this research.

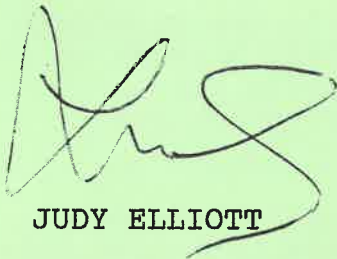
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I would like to thank those members who have written to me to share their experiences. Please let me know what topics you would like mentioned in future newsletters. I would particularly like to hear of any unusual plant/wildlife associations. I think that sharing are successes and failures with wildlife attracting plants would also be interesting. A member has told me of a Melaleuca Brassii which flowers for months and months and attracts the Scarlet Honeaters. Perhaps everyone could tell me about their favourite plant.

Financial Statement to 15 July 1993

<u>Inwards</u>		<u>Outward</u>	
From previous S.G. Leader	154.00	Stationery	20.35
Memberships	289.00	Postage	22.65
Interest	<u>.11</u>	Photocopying	<u>23.60</u>
	443.11		66.60

Balance = \$376.51



JUDY ELLIOTT

NEST BOX DATA

AUSTRALIAN
LITTORAL SOCIETY

Species	Inside dimensions	Diameter of entrance	Depth below entrance	Height above ground	Placement
Brushtail possum	100-200 mm	100-120 mm	280-300 mm	4 metres	vertical
Ringtail possum	100-200 mm	60- 80 mm	250-400 mm	4 m	vertical
Feathertail glider	100-200 mm	30- 50 mm	100-400 mm	2 m	vertical
Sugar glider	100-200 mm	30- 60 mm	200-450 mm	4 m	vertical
Insectivorous bats	250 x 180 x 250 mm	slit 15 mm	entrance at bottom	4 m	north-east not much foliage
Pale headed rosella	120-150 mm	70-100 mm	350-800 mm	5-6 m	vertical or horizontal
Eastern rosella	120-150 mm	70-100 mm	350-800 mm	5-6 m	vertical or horizontal
Crimson rosella	150-200 mm	70-100 mm	350-800 mm	5-6 m	vertical or horizontal
Galah	200 mm	120-140 mm	600-700 mm	6 m	vertical
Rainbow lorikeet	120 mm	50- 70 mm	600-700 mm	5 m	horizontal
Scaly-breasted lorikeet	120 mm	50- 70 mm	600-700 mm	5 m	horizontal
Kookaburra	300-500 mm	120-140 mm	level	5-10 m	horizontal
Sacred kingfisher	130 mm	75 mm	600-900 mm	5-10 m	horizontal
Waterfowl (eg Teal)	200-400 mm	80-120 mm	450-750 mm	1.5 m	vertical over water
Pardalote	120 mm	25- 45 mm	400-500 mm	5 m	horizontal
Barn owl	400 mm	platform	platform	5 m	horizontal
Kestrel	400 mm	100 mm	750 mm	5 m	vertical
Swallow	130 mm	platform	platform	3 m	horizontal
Little treecreeper	75-100 mm	50- 70 mm	300-400 mm	5 m	vertical
Owlet-Nightjar	100-150 mm	60- 80 mm	300-350 mm	5 m	vertical
Grey Shrike - thrush	150-200 mm	150 mm to open front	200-300 mm	?	vertical - shaded