Louise

Wildlife & Native Plants Study Group Newsletter.

Issue 28

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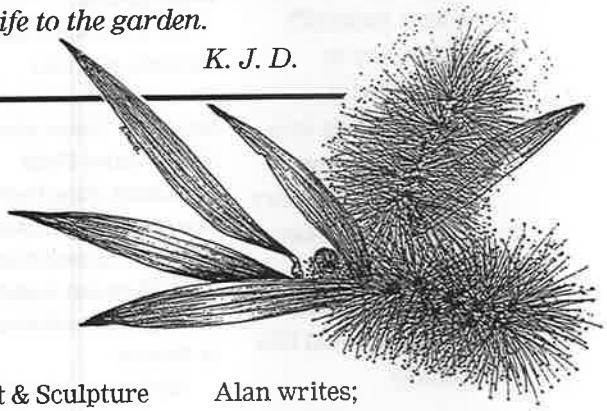
News for Members

In This Issue:

• *As I will be resigning as leader, I hope the new leader finds the position as interesting as I did and I wish you all well in your encouragement of native wildlife to the garden.*

K. J. D.



'While the cat's away the animals play, the birds will sing and dance! If you want them all to visit you, grow Australian native plants.'
by K.J.D.

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Membership fees: $5. per year. $10. per year for overseas members.

Welcome to all members!

Hello again!

As always, written contributions are welcome as additions to the pages of each newsletter.

So, if you have any interesting observations or questions you'd like to ask, feel free to write in to the study group.

The Art & Sculpture Exhibition in Maclean Council Foyer went very well, with many enquiries about membership, the artwork and what the study group does. The Council has invited the exhibition back again to brighten the foyer and attract interest. So, maybe I will organise it again next year.

A special thank you to Alan Baker from New Zealand for his thoughts, and an observation he made which may be of interest to us all.

Alan writes;

"Over the past year, I have been noting the food plants of Admiral Butterflies in my father's garden in North Otago. I saw the Yellow Admiral, which I believe is also found in Australia, feeding on the nectar of one Australian plant - *Banksia media* (in March)."

For butterflies anywhere, the lure of food in the form of nectar is a most overpowering attraction.

Most animals adapt to the sources of available food around

them. They usually have three choices. Adapt, move on in the hope of finding a particular food source elsewhere or perish.

Insects are some of the most adaptable and will be attracted to most flowering plants, even if that plant was originally from another country.

Have you ever tasted the nectar from some of the Banksias, Bottlebrush and Grevilleas yourself?

It is so easy to understand why insects and birds love this potent mixture.

Some of the flavours are richly sweet, some have a distinct alcoholic aftertaste and others are just like pure honey.

Who's Been Sleeping In MY Garden?

Have you ever spent time outside wandering around your garden in the early morning light and wondered just how many birds (or other creatures) there are in your immediate vicinity?

Who is a regular visitor to the garden? Who pops in once in a while? Who lives there permanently?

I have many times.

I keep a written record of sightings. If I have time and film in the camera, I keep photographic records as well.

If you are keen to know who visits your garden, this is a good way of finding out who's been, who's still around and who's likely to show up in the near future.

By introducing a new plant here and there, you increase the chances of attracting another visitor to the garden.

By this I mean as an example, planting *Casuarina sp.* or She-oaks. These attract Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoos, King Parrots, insectivorous birds such as Babblers (searching for spiders and insects amongst the seed cones) or Miners.

Sitting quietly and patiently outside will reward you with good observations of birds and other wildlife going about their daily routine of looking for food, setting up home and protecting territories.

After a while, your presence will be ignored, so long as you don't make any sudden movements or loud noises.

My records are kept in a ledger style book with space for photographs or other samples collected. I note down the time, place, date, season, type of plant the animal was seen at, type of food it was seen collecting, nesting materials it was seen collecting, whether it was a mature or juvenile animal (you may need field guide books for this), and any other points of interest I think might be important.

To date, I have collated the following list from my property. You might have similar animals in your area and may observe them collecting different food or nesting materials to mine. This is all part of nature's way of helping animals adapt to their ever changing environment. (Not in alphabetical order).

I have included a sample (back page) of the ledger style records I keep on sightings for your information and possible future use as a guide to follow.

ANTS PANTS.

Ants, believe it or not, are one of the most important groups of insects.

There are an estimated 4,000 species.

Ants are colony creatures - workers, winged females and males.

The ants we most often see are the minor workers, who forage for food, build and repair nests and attend the ant nursery.

On our property there are eight species at the very least, with many more not seen yet.

Ants are foragers. Their diet is varied, sometimes specific among species. Some are predatory, some scavengers, some eat plants or fungus, others prefer to have a combination of food sources.

There are plants which have formed special relationships with some ant species.

The plants provides living quarters or food for the ants in return for protection from herbivorous creatures that would otherwise eat the plants.

Drop that can of insect spray back in the cupboard and go outside to your garden.

Find some ants - any ants will do.

What are they doing? Follow them. Photograph them if you have an appropriate camera handy, and catalogue the photos if possible.

You will soon learn to recognise the regular ants in the area, new species moving in, and what each species ' habits are.

You'll be able to get a good idea as to what foods they prefer, who does the work, how far individuals travel from the nest site, and so on.

Many plants rely on ants to store their seed for germination. Other plants attract other insect species for ants to 'farm' such as aphids and scale insects.

Ants perform tasks such as aeration of the soil by digging intricate

and extensive tunnel systems underground, allowing water to infiltrate the hardest soils.

This is particularly important for the health of the plants in our gardens.

Studies such as this help us to understand how the natural environment works. How species interact to form workable partnerships.

(Take care around ant nests and certain individuals. Some have nasty sting).

Chain Reaction.

Your observations in the garden or natural environment will reveal that the removal of an element from the environment or any disturbances, can cause a chain reaction.

Nature can often rectify the fault or disturbance in time, but in many instances the damage or problem may be too great, and we are left with an unbalanced ecosystem.

This in turn causes problems for us when we have to resort to using chemicals and sprays to address the issue.

GOOD BOOKS.

Wickler, W. (1968), *Mimicry in Animals and Plants,* Weidenfeld and Nicolson, London.

Bradley, J., *Brining Back the Bush,* Lansdowne, Sydney, 1988.

Harrington, G. N., Morris, B., Sadler, T., *Our Rainforests and the Issues,* CSIRO, Victoria, Australia, 1992.

'Nature Conservation On Farms', NSW Agriculture, Farming For The Future, Australian Nature Conservation Agency. Shows how conservation of nature can improve the appeal and productivity of your farm. Simple techniques of observation and measurement to achieve a valuable and productive resource. Shows how to increase biodiversity on the farm.

'Plan For Trees - A Guide to Farm Revegetation', NSW Agriculture. Details of how to re-establish shrubs and trees on the farm. Revegetation program plans and assessment notes. Includes native seed collection, natural regeneration, weed control, plus.

'Managing Wetlands on Farms', Greening Aust. & other Agencies. Benefits of wetland areas, biodiversity and catchment protection. Case studies.

'Brining Back The Rainforest - the Tocal Experience', available from NSW Agriculture - Tocal. Case study of a remnant rainforest and its riparian zone.

All books available at NSW Agriculture stores.

TERMITES.

Termites are colony animals existing within a main foundation nest.

Termites are the 'clean-up crew' in almost all Australian environments.

They dispose of grasses, bark, wood, leaves, fungi, detritus and droppings from herbivores (due to the high cellulose - plant material - content).

Many species (over 300) found in Australia have little impact on the human way of life.

Termites provide a nutritious and valuable food source for a wide assortment of birds, mammals, insects and reptiles.

They also perform a vital role in nutrient recycling and soil formation.

SAMPLE RECORD SHEET.

SPECIES (COMMON & SCIENTIFIC NAME)	DATE	REASON FOR SPECIES IN AREA (IF KNOWN)	NUMBERS SIGHTED	FOOD SOURCE IN AREA	PHOTOGRAPH
King Parrot (*Alisterus scapularis*)	15 - 10 - 1999	food, nesting sites, known habitat.	5	native fruits & flowers, garden crops	
Eastern Grey Kangaroo *(Macropus giganteus)*	10 - 10 - 1999	food, known habitat, dense cover for shelter, open spaces to gather & feed.	10	native & introduced grasses	
Red-necked Wallaby (*Macropus rufogriseus)*	10 - 10 - 1999	food, known habitat, native vegetation cover & open spaces when feeding.	1	native grasses, introduced grasses, favourite clover, garden vegetables.	
Eastern Blue-tongued Skink (*Tiliqua scincoides scincoides)*	5 - 9 - 1999	food sources, known habitat, plenty of vegetation cover	1	snails, insects, native fruits, flowers, fungi, soft plant material, carrion	
Green Tree Snake (*Dendrelaphis punctulata)*	6 - 5 - 1999	known habitat, close to good food supply	1	frogs, lizards, tadpoles.	
Sugar Glider (*Petaurus breviceps)*	8 - 2 - 1999	known habitat, food, nesting sites	1	insects, acacia gum, nectar, spiders, honeydew, lerps, fungi, manna, pollen, fruits	