S.G.A.P. BIRDS AND NATIVE PLANTS STUDY GROUP

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EASTERN YELLOW ROBIN

Eastern yellow robins are usually found searching for insects and spiders in the shrub layer and leaf litter. They extend the length of eastern Australia, from Cooktown, Qld. around into S.A.

Janet Houghton's report of them at Roto, N.S.W. is interesting for here they are probably at the western limit of their distribution:

"Yellow robins visit here each winter usually from early May and they leave by September. I have found them in two areas both of which are thick White Cypress Pine (Callitris columellaris). Early last year both areas were badly burnt but the yellow robins still returned to one area for a couple of months in winter".

They are inquisitive birds and can become extremely tame as evidenced by Val Maher, Cranbourne Sth, Vic.:

"Each morning I open the kitchen door and whistle 'Pop Goes the Weasel'. Then I cut up a small amount of cheese and 1,2 or3 robins come to sit on the bench, and peck at the cheese. I love to look down on their backs and see the greenish tinge which must give them a good camourflage in trees."

Nests are small well built cups of sticks, grass and bark. They are usually placed in thickets or dense shrubs, often low to the ground. Melaleuca armillaris, M. wilsonii

SPOTTED BOWERBIRDS ..... Janet Houghton, Roto, N.S.W.

The Spotted Bowerbirds have two bowers between the house and the woolshed. The bower at the woolshed is moved each year to alternate Pepper trees (Schinus araira) about 20 yards apart. The other bower is nearer the house and has not been moved since I found it two years ago. It has far more interesting bits and pieces.

In the middle of the bower, which is made from grasses and sticks, is a very neat and tidy pile of about 20 small, smooth, grey rocks, two pieces of glass the same size, one green and one white, two brass cartridge shells and two pieces of silver paper. Leading up to each end of the bower are many pine nuts, Callitris collumellaris, and Hakea seeds dropped with a few white bones and glass, green and white. At each entrance to the bower again are a large pile of small grey stones, glass, cartridge shells, bones, roofing nails, bolts, silver can tops, Hakea seeds, pine nuts and unknown green berries. Most interesting of all are five pieces of pink-mauve glass and two bits of blue glass. For a while there was a piece of brown glass but that has now been discarded quite a distance from the bower.

The Spotted Bowerbird usually favours grey, white, silver and green colours. The pink and mauve glass is very old and would have been carried about 2km from the tip. I think it interesting that the colour matches the pink so well that the Spotted Bowerbird has on the top of his head!! and also can he count? There are exactly five pieces of pink glass at each end and two of each article in the centre bower!!

On either side of the bower are clumps of green objects. Green fruit from the Pittosporum phylliraeoides, tops from the Callitris trees, seed pods from mulga, Acacia aneura, and Acacia calamfolia (Wallowa) and blades of grass.

The brown birds feed on the pepper corn berries and love our peaches when in season. They visit the garden every day in summer for water. I have heard them mimicing the Apostle bird, Crow and Brown Falcon and others which I can't identify.

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GERMINATION OF LILLY PILLY SEEDS .....Colleen Werner

Firstly the seed must be fresh. Before the seed is sown remove the flesh of the fruit and make sure the seed is alright. Quite often the seed has been eaten by a grub rendering it useless. Seedlings transplant very easily when young.

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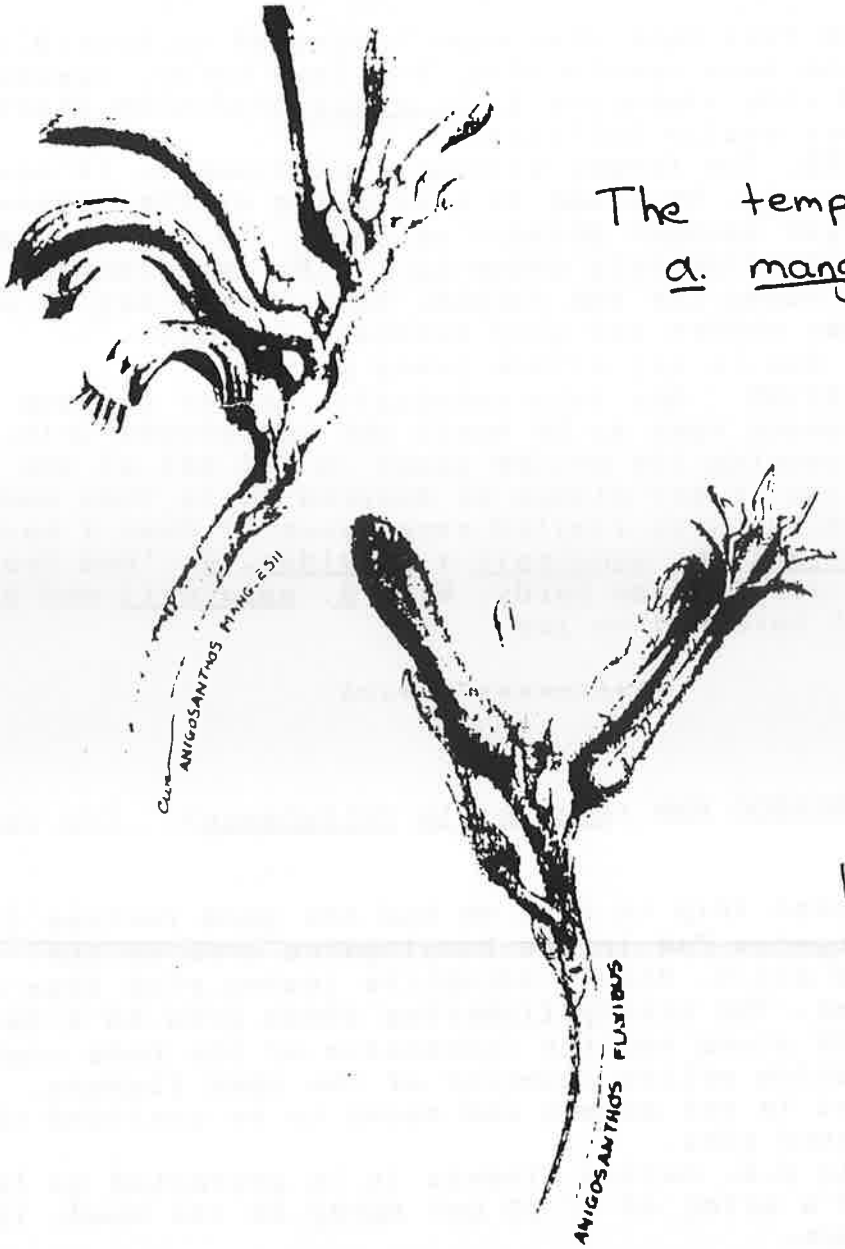
ALTERNATIVE USES FOR HOLLOWS ....Janet Houghton, Roto, N.S.W.

Hollows in old trees and stumps are not only used here (at Roto) by birds for nesting, e.g. Crested Bellbird, Grey Shrike Thrush and Chestnut Thornbills have all nested in hollow tree stumps recently, but one of the most interesting uses for the stumps is protection for young kurrajong trees



The temperamental
a. manglesii

and the
hardy a. flavidus

from Colleen
Werner.

The Red and Green Kangaroo Paw (Anigozanthus manglesii), the floral emblem of W.A., was once the best known of the kangaroo paws. Now however a variety of Paws are both well known and grown in the esatern states. Plant form is well known. Different species offer an array of colours - lime green, pink, orange, scarlet, brown, dark green, dull red brown and golden yellow.

Flower spikes may reach 2m in height as with A. flavidus In dwarf forms flower spikes may reach only 40cm.

The Paws are bird pollinated. The honeyeaters of eastern Australia flock to them. Noisy friarbirds, yellow-faced , New holland, White-eared and white-cheeked honeyeaters and eastern spinebills are amongst those which feed at them.

PROPAGATION is from seed, by division or by tissue culture.

Seed: At maturity the fruiting capsules become hard and swollen. Some may require the capsules cutting open to get the seed. Germination takes approxiamately 14-21 days,

Division: The Anigozanthos produce short rhizomes or underground stems. Clumps may be divided simply by cutting up with a knife, keeping at least one vegetative shoot to each division. These cuttings should then be treated as root cuttings.

Tissue Culture: This has been the subject of much work at the Canberra Botanic Gardens. The need for tissue culture arose witk the Black Kangaroo Paw (Macropidia fuliginosa). This species is difficult to propagate from seed. It can be divided but there is not sufficient material

Kangaroo Paws have also been subjected to hybridisation. Several of the more spectacular, but less hardy, species have been crossed with vigourous A. flavidus producing plants which are more easily cultivated.

DISEASES. The fungal disease, Ink Disease, is caused by Drescheria irisid. It leads to blackening of the leaves and much heartbreak amongst growers of Paws. The spectacular A. manglesii is particularly prone to it. No satisfactory controls are known for the fungus. Some clones may be more resistent than others and good drainage may help.

PESTS. Snails may attack young plants.

CULTIVATION. One very successful grower of Paws tells me that he treats them as he would the introduced iris. Following flowering the entire plant is cut off at the base. Should division of any clumps be desired it is then made.

VARIETIES. With limited experience of Paws I have found A. flavidus, A. manglesii x flavidus, A. 'Red Cross" and A. 'pink joey' to be hardy. With A. manglesii and A. pulcherimus I have had no joy.

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THE BLACK KANGAROO PAW (Macropidia fuliginosa)...Ida Jackson

On a recent trip to W.A. we had the good fortune to see the Black Kangaroo Paw in the Badgingarra area on the northern sand plain. Stout, straplike leaves rise from a strong rhizome. The sturdy flowering stems grow to 1.3m. The velvetty black stems and the indumentum of the buds contrast with the greenish yellow interior of the open flowers.

The plant is not common and seems to be confined to a quite restricted area.

Like all W.A. native flowers it is protected by law. However, with a price of $1.50 per spray on its head, it is very vulnerable.

We saw some specimens in the Badgingarra National Park and others in roadside vegetation.

We did not see any birds around the plants.

MACROPIDIA differs from ANIGOZANTHOS in the one-seeded cells of the ovary which fall as "fruit".

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BIRD BATHS AND WATER ..... Janet Houghton, Roto, N.S.W.

We have no cats so water can be left safely anywhere in the garden for birds. During the drought 1982-3 I had four watering places. Each morning we would waken to the Pink Cockatoos and Galahs, Red-rumped, Blue Bonnets, Mulga and Mallee Ringneck Parrots drinking. The honeyeaters and bowerbirds came all day. As many as ten Spotted Bowerbirds were seen drinking together one lunchtime.

Now with the normal season and plenty of water most of the birds drinking at the birdbath are honeyeaters. They include Spiny-cheeked, White-plumed, Singing, Yellow-throated Miners, Blue-faced and Striped. During the winter a Grey-fronted came into the garden and had a bath, which seemed most unusual. These birds are usually found out in the dry mallee country far away from water. The Zebra Finches and Southern Whiteface also come to the birdbath. The Spotted Bowerbirds seem to prefer to bath in the spouting which seems to hold water for some time after rain

Norm Bone, Kialla, Victoria, talks of the problems of cats at bird baths and ponds, and writes:

"The first essential is to locate the structure in an open area and i have found that the middle of a lawn is best as it gives the birds a chance to see if a cat is about.

My bath is situated near a Eucalyptus leucoxylon which has some low hanging branches which enable the birds to reach the bath very easily. It also enables them to fly to safety if disturbed.

I find that the best way to keep cats out of the garden is to have a dog. My old labrador not only keeps the cats at bay but the birds have no fear of him at all and when he is losing his coat the birds use his fur as nesting material. I have even seen Brown-headed Honeyeaters flying after him as he does his rounds of the garden.

With regard to using water to attract birds I have found that it is a good idea to direct a hose with a very fine spray at a tree or shrub. In no time at all you will have every bird for miles around arriving to have a free bath. The smaller ones bathe in the foliage and the larger ones like mudlarks, thrushes and parrots wait until puddles form and they then have the time of their lives."

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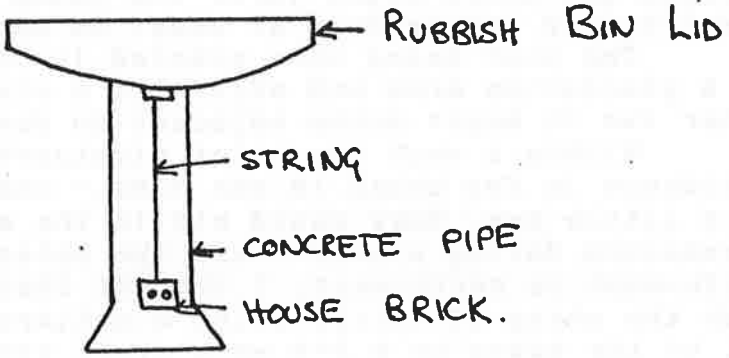

Above: A simple, economical recipe for a bird bath, from Norm Bone, Kialla, Vic.

Below: Cross-section of an attractive garden pond. From "Independent Australian, No 4 Vol 1"

At Avalon, one of Sydney's northern beachside suburbs, a small isolated population of koalas has, to date, survived the encroachment of suburbia.

In June last year we spent a week investigating this population.

Trees in the area include Eucalyptus botyryoides, E. haemostoma, E. paniculata, E. punctata, E. robusta, E. gummifera, E. maculata, E. piperita, E. resinifera, E. umbra, Angophora costata and A. floribunda.

All of these trees, apart from E. umbra, are known to be eatern by koalas.

At Avalon we found E. punctata, E. robusta and E. botryoides to be the preferred trees of the koalas.

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ARTIFICIAL NESTING HOLLOWS

Bela Bard-Brucker (Hoppers Crossing, Vic.) has, with financial assistance from the Bird Observers Club, erected a number of nest boxes in the You Yangs region of Victoria.

Boxes are made of hardwood since parrots and cockatoos could make short work of softwood.

Two sizes were constructed - 300 x 300 x 750 for larger birds such as cockatoos, galahs and possums and 150 x 150 x 750 for smaller birds such as tree-creepers, red-rumped parrots and owlet night jars. The boxes were stained a swamp green colour and erected at about 6m above the ground.

The nest boxes were erected in three localities - one in a plantation area and adjoining a cleared area and the other two in burnt areas adjacent to dams.

Within a week two owlet nightjars had taken up residence in two boxes in one area - one in a big box and one in a little box. They would sit in the entrance and sun themselves during winter - all the holes were faced north, north-east or north-west. I thought that we would definitely hear the cheep of little owlet nightjars. Alas, I have only got to the boxes on a 3-4 week cycle since the initial erection. I was shocked to discover that seven of the large boxes were occupied by swarms of bees - including the large box in which one of the nightjars used to roost. I can only find one nightjar coming to an entrance although this needn't preclude them from nesting in one of the smaller boxes. I have seen an Eastern Rosella coming out of one of the large boxes, but they haven't nested in them. I would say Brush-tailed possums have tried the boxes as fur was caught in one of the entrances.

Starlings occupied all the small boxes in the area adjoining the cleared land. This is the administration site of the park with green lawns. Only one small box in the other two sites has been occupied by Starlings, due to the drier, more natural bush conditions existing there.

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NEXT NEWSLETTER

My apologies for the lateness of this newsletter. I hope that the next one will be out on time, that is, in MAY.

Bird of the Newsletter will be the BROWN THORNBILL. Plant of the Newsletter will be the CORREAS. Any contributions about these particular items, or any other matters of interest, would be most welcome.