



Toodyay Naturalists' Club Inc.
THE TNC NEWSLETTER

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wheatbelt
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*Cover photograph -
Christmas (or Jewel) Spider (Austracantha minax)
Photo Michael Sinclair-Jones*

PRESIDENT'S REPORT

September developed into an unusually wet month but it did not stop the visitors to the Chittering Wildflower Festival. The display was exceptional and educational in the numbers and varieties of plants that our State has to offer.

The meeting in September at Koolyanobbing and Windarling, the latter area that holds the rare and endangered *Tetratheca paynterae*, was a celebration of ten years of the Community Reference Group interacting with the Cliffs Mining Company (formerly Portman Mining). The Reference Group has played a very important part in working with the Company in the rehabilitation of mining areas. The Company began, initially, with an environmental staff of one to, currently, 8 full-time personnel. There has been much research into the effect of weather change on plants, top soil storage and management, natural revegetation, direct seeding, inhibiting of dust on plants from both the mines and the haul roads and feral animal control.

The Avon Nature Conservation Advisory Committee (ANCAC) met at York, on Friday 13 September, to look at the work that has been achieved for a bike track and the environmental impact such a track may have. The area is well-designed with the environmental impact kept to a minimum under the watchful eye of the Shire Ranger. Entry and exit to the area is through one access only. There is no interference with adjacent vegetation and the track is graded on a monthly, plus necessary, schedule. The meeting of the group was held at the wildflower garden within York, an area that is well maintained by the York Wildflower Group.

It was very pleasing to find, on the Tuesday following the ANCAC meeting that the Shire of Toodyay councillors have agreed for the Department of Parks and Wildlife to take on the care of the Dawn Atwell Reserve. This will relieve the Shire of the environmental load of responsibility of monitoring a reserve that contains a rare and endangered plant.

At the September Club night Project Officer, Greg Warburton, gave a presentation on Georgiana Molloy (1805-1843), a gentle English lady who, as a newly-married, left her country to live in Augusta in the lower south west of Western Australia. Georgiana became an amateur botanist loving the Australian wildflowers she found around her country property; she collected specimens and seed to send to botanists in England. Greg's excellent photography of seascapes, bushland, rivers and the exquisite wildflowers all added to a most enjoyable presentation.

The annual Toodyay Agricultural Show gave wonderful exposure for the Toodyay environmental groups. Much attention was given, by both children and adults alike, to the baby animals in the care of Wildlife Carers and the beautiful White-tailed Black Cockatoo, from Karaakin, a rehabilitation area for both the White-tailed and Red-tailed species.

The Club members, together with members of the Toodyay Friends of the River, spent a most enjoyable 'end-of-year' evening at the home of Eva and Don Smith mid-November. It was a celebratory evening with so many environmental achievements during the year including completion of the beautiful Bird Hide, recognition of the environmental contributions to the Tidy Towns projects, launching of the Friends of the River project of the Bilya Walk Track and, of course, Greg's success as winner of the Individual State Landcare Award. *What a year!*

A 'planning meeting' for 2014 was very well attended with the forthcoming programme to be of great interest to all members and their friends. The first meeting of the year is to be held in the CWA hall on Saturday 16 February. Gill Basnett is to speak on her work with endangered Gouldian Finches and also northern Australian fire regimes.

Sincere gratitude is extended to the Wheatbelt Natural Resource Management for, once again, printing the newsletter for the forthcoming twelve months –it is *very much appreciated* by the Club!

Desraé Clarke

CHRISTMAS SPIDER

By Michael Sinclair-Jones

The advent of Christmas when I was a kid always meant the appearance in Perth of brilliantly coloured Christmas Spiders and Orange Christmas trees.

Banksia woodland near Manning was the perfect habitat for a pale, pommie kid, fresh off the boat from England, to discover Aussie wildlife such as Christmas Spiders, Redbacks, Bobtails - and huge Huntsman Spiders that sometimes appeared scarily inside our home.

My sisters and I soon learnt to look for the first Christmas Spiders in our garden as a sure sign that Santa was on his way to visit our new home in faraway 'Down Under'.

I spent summer days riding a push bike barefoot on sandy bush tracks, sometimes pausing with a stick at a flimsy web to touch the tiny beaded spider at its centre while cicadas clicked loudly in the stifling heat and cockatoos shrieked loudly overhead.

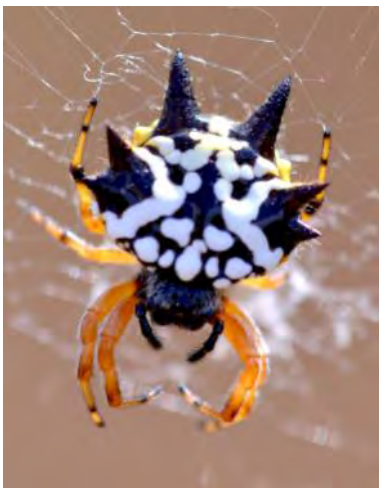
Much of Perth's remnant bushland was later cleared for housing, taking with it hundreds of Christmas Spiders, Christmas Trees and – even for a while – Willie Wagtails.

So it was a surprise and a delight while walking near kangaroos on the back boundary of my Toodyay bush block - where Christmas Trees have recently burst into spectacular flower - to discover another old friend not seen for many years.

Austracantha minax is described as a distinctly Australian spider that is easy to identify because of its striking appearance. Known also as the Jewell Spider, the species is found over most of Australia, although friends in Perth and Bunbury - where Christmas Spiders were once common - say they have not seen any for years.

The small spiders usually appear in the months leading up to Christmas but can be very timid when approached and may try to hide.

The female is most easily identifiable with a spiky ring of six black spines around its lower abdomen and a distinctive pattern of yellow, white and black armour on its back. The underside of the female is jet black with bright yellow spots, and fierce orange tips under its rear spines.



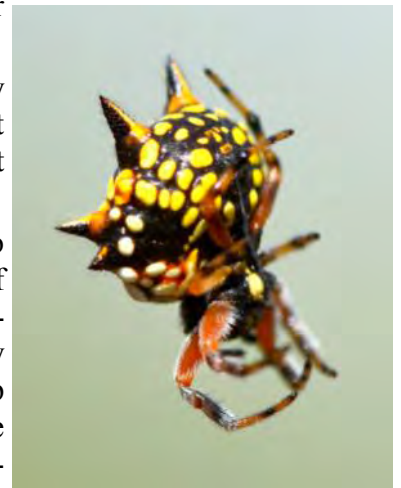
The male is less colourful with a shiny brown body and dark dots on its back. It grows to about 4mm - half the size of an adult female.

Christmas Spiders build a small circular web in shrubby woodlands about 1-2 metres off the ground and may wait anywhere – including at its centre – to trap flying insects. They sometimes build large communal webs of up to 1,000 spiders, although the three female predators on my Toodyay block live as individuals only a few metres apart.

Their bite is said to be mildly painful but generally harmless.

We used to say that finding a Christmas Spider meant good luck, which may come from a German tradition of decorating Christmas Trees with spider webs made of silvery tinsel.

Today's Christmas Spiders and Christmas Trees certainly bring good luck of discovering nature's precious gifts in this special place we call home.



Toodyay Tidy Towns a WINNER



Above (L to R). Ms. Debbie Rice (Department of Regional Development), Stan Scott (Shire of Toodyay CEO), Greg Warburton (TTT Chair), Cr Bethan Lloyd Deputy Shire President, Desrae Clarke (TNC President), Kim Angus (Shire of Toodyay Community Development), Shelley Kingston (Toodyay and Districts Community Bank), Beth Frayne (TTT Secretary, TNC Treasurer), Bob Frayne (TNC), Wayne Clarke (TNC Secretary), Mel Hay (Keep Australia Beautiful Campaign WA Chairman)

Toodyay has been very well rewarded for the Tidy Towns efforts of its community members in 2012-2013. Not only did Toodyay win the combined Central Wheatbelt and Goldfields Regional Award, presented at York on 20 September, but also, the **Community Action and Partnerships** Category at the Tidy Towns State Awards luncheon on 22 November at the Royal Perth Yacht Club.

Firstly, the Regional Awards! Toodyay won the Community Action and Partnerships Category, being described as a highly proactive community, strongly involved in many elements of sustainability. Then Toodyay was awarded a **Special Commendation for our strong community commitment to natural environment conservation**. Kalgoorlie-Boulder was the Category winner. Then, at the end of the function, in recognition of our overall performance in all Categories, Toodyay was judged as the combined **Central Wheatbelt and Goldfields Regional Winner for 2013**. So, **congratulations are due to all TTTers!**

Below is an extract from the Tidy Towns Judges' Report for our Natural Environment Conservation Regional Category performance:

"Toodyay is blessed with several groups and partnerships focused on the natural environment in the region such as CARE (Conservation of Avon River Environments), Toodyay Friends of the River, Northam Friends of the River, River Conservation Society (York), Friends of the Dale River (Beverley), Friends of Malkup Brook, Toodyay Community Resource Centre and the Shire. Their work is strongly

Toodyay Tidy Towns a WINNER cont...

promoted in the Toodyay Herald – with pages and pages of reports and information. Some activities for the year are summarized below but this does not do them justice. It is a highly proactive community effort, doing wonderful things and their actions have contributed strongly to Toodyay's success."

The work of the Nats was then singled out, along with that of TFOR, the Community Resource Centre and the Shire: "Toodyay Naturalists' Club: Promotes environmental protection and delivers education events, quarterly newsletter, via website, monthly activity and an information column in the Toodyay Herald; Tree planting days, cleanups and developments in local reserves; Reserve bushfire re-generation studies; and Instigated a new bird-hide at Redbanks Pool (Avon River) Wheatbelt NRM small grants funded."

To top the Regional Awards, Toodyay won the Community Action and Partnerships Category at the State Awards luncheon on 22 November, as an acknowledgement of our 500 plus volunteers and more than 40 groups and partnerships which are focussed on litter prevention and **conservation of the natural environment**. TTTC Chairman Greg Warburton gave a short speech of thanks, acknowledging the co-operation between the Toodyay & Districts Community Bank Branch, the Shire of Toodyay and TTTC that achieved such a fantastic result with the Toodyay Adopt-a-Spot program. Shane Love MP joined us at our table for the lunch, and even took some photos. Walpole won the overall State Title, and Bremer Bay won the State Natural Environment Conservation Category.

TTT Chairman Greg was invited to give a TT presentation at the AGM of the Toodyay and Districts Community Financial Services Ltd. on 29 October. Greg, Kim Angus (Shire of Toodyay) and myself were honoured to have been presented with gifts in recognition of our assistance to the Bank in getting the Adopt-A-Spot program up and running.

The TTT Committee will meet in the New Year to plan its 2014 TT Challenge! The Nats' John Masters Bird Hide project completion will still be a major component of the 2014 Campaign!

Beth Frayne, Secretary, Toodyay Tidy Towns Committee and TNC Treasurer

Bobtail Flu by Rebecca Megan-Lowe

I am writing to alert your readers to the plight of the local bobtail skinks.

'Bobtail flu' is having a serious impact on these skinks, also known as shingle backs. If you know the signs to look for, you can spot the sick ones. If sick skinks receive expert veterinary care, they stand a good chance of survival.

Skinks with 'bobtail flu' become lethargic. Their eyes gradually become gummy and their tails flatten. The gum that affects the eyes and nostrils prevents lizards from seeing and feeding normally. Without treatment, they ultimately die of dehydration or suffocation.

I recently found a bobtail with flu symptoms. I took it to Kanyana Wildlife Hospital T 9291 3900 (120 Gilchrist Rd, Lesmurdie) where it is now half way through its treatment. This is free of charge. I look forward to releasing the skink into the bush at the spot where I found it.

Bobtails are monogamous and mate for life so there's probably an anxious partner waiting out there for its mate's safe return.

I encourage everyone to help the Toodyay bobtail community by looking out for sick ones and contacting the Wildlife Helpline T 9474 9291 for advice. Also, if you find a bobtail that has been injured in some way, these same expert carers can assess and help these skinks as well.

Wildcare 9474 9005 Sarah Dudley 9574 2118 or 0428 129 477 Kanyana 9291 3900

Morangup Nature Reserve Survey 1992~1993

In 1981 the area around Beelaring Spring, an area within the now designated Morangup 'A' Class Nature Reserve, was cleared, windrowed and burnt. Nearby farmers had raised concerns that the Beelaring Springs area was one of a potential 'fire hazard'.

In 1991 a biological survey of Beelaring Springs was instigated by the Department of Conservation and Land Management [CALM], (as the Department of Parks and Wildlife was then known), to determine whether the biodiversity of the area had stabilised following the 1981 illegal clearing. A plan was developed to ascertain whether both flora and fauna had re-colonised from the uncleared areas (island refuges), to the 1981 cleared areas. If this re-colonisation had not occurred then the species located on these 'island refuges' would have nowhere to go if the habitat was destroyed by fire. The uncleared areas of the Morangup Nature Reserve represented only 40% of the total Reserve area.

In the winter of 1991 fourteen fires were lit in the Beelaring Spring area. The fires, fortunately, extinguished themselves not causing a major impact. Three metre width fire access tracks have since been installed and are regularly maintained.

Guided by the Regional Manager of CALM, Peter Keppel, and assisted by staff members John Carter, Ian Gale, Barry Hooper, David Atkins, Bradley Walter, Jeni Alford, Norm McKenzie, Tony Start and five Toodyay Naturalists' Club members, Dawn Atwell, Ray Paynter, Wayne Clarke, Ross McDougal and Desraé Clarke, a twelve month climatic season survey was organised beginning spring 1992 for completion spring 1993.

The survey objective was:

'To survey the habitat surrounding the Beelaring Spring to gather extensive information on the flora and fauna that is present'.

The fauna survey comprised of ten days, of each season, with the flora surveys carried through the entire survey period with a 'one-off' bat survey and spotlighting evenings. The role of the Toodyay Naturalists' Club members was to *'inspect the pits and traps daily as soon after daybreak as possible'.*

Four pit trap lines were set for the fauna survey with two in the regrowth area (post 1981 clearing) and two in the undisturbed area. Each pit line was of fine wire netting thirty metres in length with pits set every five metres. Two lines of traps, consisting of ten cage and ten Elliot, were placed in the undisturbed areas. The cages and Elliot traps had baits made of a mixture of rolled oats, peanut butter and sardines. Flora quadrats of ten by ten metres were staked. Unfortunately, vandalism of the quadrats and interference with the pit trap lines was a problem.

Flora

Vegetation types included woodland, low woodland, thicket over low heath, thicket over scattered dwarf scrub and open woodland. Twenty six families of plants were identified with many species of each family making the listing within the report very large. However, should a member wish to peruse the list it is available.

Results of the 1992/1993 Surveys

Birds

Emu	Grey Shrike-thrush	Splendid Wren
Common Bronzewing	Western Warbler	Yellow-rumped Thornbill
Baudin's Black-cockatoo	Tawny-crowned Honeyeater	Varied Sittella
Galah	Brown-headed Honeyeater	Red Wattlebird

Morangup Nature Reserve Survey 1992~1993 (cont)

Red-capped Parrot
Port Lincoln Ringneck
Pallid Cuckoo
Rufous-tailed Cuckoo
Shining Bronze Cuckoo
Laughing Kookaburra
Sacred Kingfisher

Brown Honeyeater
New Holland Honeyeater
White-cheeked Honeyeater
Mistletoe Bird
Western Spinebill
Rufous Whistler
Grey Fantail

Little Wattlebird (Western)
Black-faced Cuckoo-Shrike
Silvereye Australian
Magpie-lark
Black-faced Woodswallow
Australian Magpie
Australian Raven

Previous results of bird surveys numbered thirty one species with ten species considered 'scarce'. The 1992/1993 survey recorded thirty four species, including the Baudin's Black Cockatoo, identified in the Beelaring Spring area in pursuit of food and nesting sites. As nesting tree hollows were minimal there were few tree-hollow nesting birds recorded.

NB Research by CSIRO states some species of birds do not nest in a post-fire area for two to five years.

Mammals

Introduced fox, rabbit and the house mouse were common.

The Brush-tail Possum was caught in a cage trap. Its long-term survival in the area was not promising due to a limit of resting tree hollows and food source availability.

The Honey Possum – significant captures in pit traps which demonstrated good prospects of survival as it had re-colonised the regrowth area.

Western Grey Kangaroo
White-striped Mastiff Bat
South-western Mastiff Bat
Gould's Wattled Bat.

Reptiles and Amphibians

Three frogs - *Crinia georgiana*, Western Banjo Frog, Gunther's Toadlet

Eight Skinks - Bobtail, *Ctenotus fallens*, *C. sererius*, *Lerista distinguenda*, *Menetia greyii*

One snake-Carpet Python

The reptile and amphibian captures were mainly in the undisturbed area as they depend on the ground litter for habitat and food.

Conclusions from the twelve month seasonal survey

Low numbers of native terrestrial fauna present.

Honey Possums were caught in all vegetation types and ages.

Lizards and geckos were mainly caught in undisturbed areas.

Frogs were only caught in undisturbed areas.

House mice abundant over all areas related to close proximity of cleared farmland.

Hollows, logs and other specific nest sites in very low numbers in the disturbed area.

Flora in disturbed area has 50% of the flora species as in the undisturbed area.

Diuris amplissima- the northern-most range of the species (at that time).

Heavy flammable fuels are restricted to the swamp area and immediate surrounds.

Each of the Toodyay Naturalists' Club members received a letter of gratitude dated 28 June 1993 from Peter Keppel stating '*With the information you have gathered, CALM can now make a decision on the fuel reduction at Beelaring Spring. This decision will be based on information that you have gathered in a scientific manner*'.

I acknowledge the kind permission of Penny Hussey allowing me to use these records of the history and research that has been carried out at the Morangup 'A' Class Nature Reserve. It is valuable information and I thank her most sincerely.

Photographs taken during the survey can be seen on page 8

Morangup Nature Reserve cont...



Above : Diuris amplissima, the Giant Donkey Orchid, flowering from late September through to November.



Above: Brush-tailed possum, with a good section of white tail.

Photographs by Wayne Clarke

Snake Drama

by Naomi Millett

We had a snake drama recently and my friends Sarah and Ken Gilbertson and I were in a tizzy. Ken had opened the front door and almost put his thronged foot onto a two metre long, olive green, adult banded Gwardar. What a beauty! It slid beneath a tarpaulin on the verandah.

What to do? We did not want to kill it for three reasons: we are environmentalists, the risks of not dispatching it properly could compound the problem, and there is a hefty fine for destroying these important native creatures.

We herded our six (mostly shoeless) kids, dog and cat inside.

Ken, feeling a little queasy, retired to the couch: he's from New Zealand, which is apparently free of potentially dangerous reptiles.

I rang a few numbers but, unfortunately, the ranger, vet and representatives from the Naturalists' Club were unavailable.

Thank goodness for Miss Hiss Reptile Handlers. I remembered seeing them at the Ag Show and had luckily grabbed a flyer with their details.

Jonathon Hill and Hailey-Anne Harper answered immediately and instructed us not to take our eyes off the snake. We kept watch and followed it around the side of the house where it took refuge under a pile of bricks. The team, armed with special long handled catching devices and a big black cloth bag, came directly from Northam in 28 minutes and, about an hour later, after Jon had shifted almost the entire heavy pile of concrete, the snake was captured.

Miss Hiss Reptile Handlers charge to come out and pick up creatures, as they do not receive any funding. Surely they deserve some kind of financial assistance, given the importance of the work they do.

We would like to thank Hailey and Jonathon (Miss Hiss) for their dedication and swift response to our call. The snake will be released somewhere safe – for it, and us.

Sarah's 'thought for the day'

A thought ...

There is nothing in which the birds differ more from man than the way in which they can build and yet leave a landscape as it was before.

Robert Lyn

Photographers page



Above: Red-capped Parrot
Below: Brush-tailed Possum

Photo: Viv Street
Photo: Beth Frayne

Above: Rainbow Bee-eaters Photo: Julie Lewis
Below: Spotted Burrowing Frog Photo: Don Ward and Bev Casey



Right: Gwardar visiting Rob and Renee Photo: Renee D'Herville
Below: Chuditch checking out the wood shed Photo: Brian Foley



Celebrating the 160th Anniversary of the Toodyay Agricultural Show

Each year the 'Environment Matters' marquee at the Toodyay Agricultural Show draws a great attendance of both children and adults - 2013 was no exception! There was much to see and learn from the variety of displays which included those of the Naturalists' Club, Wheatbelt Natural Resource Management (NRM), Birdlife Australia, Wildcare, Toodyay Friends of the River, Karaakin Rehabilitation Centre and a weeds display.

It was particularly exciting to have the Governor of Western Australia, His Excellency, Malcolm McCusker, AC CVO QC, bring his wife and his young daughter, Mary, to spend time at the marquee and to show interest in the displays. Of course, Mary was attracted to the Wildcare babies including, a very young Frogmouth, a Brush-tail Possum, joeys and a Brush-tailed Phascogale.



Above: Michalie holding a Brush-tailed Phascogale, an orphan needing very specialized care

Another very beautiful little lady present was Harmony, a White-tailed Black Cockatoo. Harmony was brought to Toodyay by volunteer carers from Karaakin, a wildlife rehabilitation centre for both the Red-tailed and the White-tailed Black Cockatoos. The Toodyay Friends of the River had a large, recently completed display that had been made by Wheatbelt NRM staff and had its first showing at the Royal Perth Show. It highlighted the watershed of the Avon catchment.

The 'Environment Matters' marquee contributors thank the Show Committee for arranging a large, safe venue for their displays and extends best wishes on the celebration of attaining the amazing milestone of:

160 years of community participation.



Above and left: Who doesn't remember Harmony, once you have met her!

Harmony has been to a couple of Toodyay Shows now, and still brings joy to those who meet her.

A rescued Carnaby's Black-cockatoo, Harmony can't be released back into the wild.

*At the top, she is making short work of a honkey-nut (Marri (*Corymbia* (formerly *Eucalyptus*) *calophylla*) seed capsule).*

Left, she is pondering on what mischief she can get up to next.

Celebrating the 160th Anniversary of the Toodyay Agricultural Show cont ...



Above: A very busy Environment Matters marquee.



Above: Setting up the Environment Matters marquee for the 2013 Agricultural Show

Below: One of the exhibits gets a feed. A very young Tawny Frogmouth.



Above: As usual, the Wildlife Carers are busy giving out information, and showing off the animals they care for.

Below: A busy marquee.



ENVIRONMENT MATTERS

~ Helena Aurora Range - Bungabbin ~

The Toodyay Nat's Club has become a member of the Helena Aurora Range Advocates Inc. (HARA).

Like the close-by Windarling Range (where *Tetratheca paynterae* is found), the Helena Aurora Ranges are a magnificent banded ironstone formation (BIF) range, currently under threat from mining.



The photograph at left was taken in March 1993, and is a view from Windarling Range towards the Helena Aurora Range. The rocks in the foreground are of banded ironstone formations.

A beautiful twelve-minute long 'you-tube' video, filmed from a helicopter, has been taken of the Range and released for viewing. It is twelve minutes of journey over the most breath-taking pristine area, exquisite country of Western Australia that **MUST BE PROTECTED!**

The Helena Aurora Range was named in 1869 by the explorer, Sir John Forrest, for the daughter of John Henry Monger, known as Henry Monger, and his wife, Henrietta Joaquim (nee Manning), Helena Aurora.

The Geographic Names Committee (GEONAMA database) formalised the name in the 1970s for use on maps.

You can enjoy this spectacular video by going to:

www.youtube.com/watch?v=RUpIcxeqLIA&feature=youtu.be

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