

NATURE NOTES

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**OCT
1969**



GECKO

PHOTO 1

F.J.C. ROGERS

Our prize letter for October is from John O'Shea of Marcellin College and John appropriately wins the Periwinkle book Australian Spiders by John Child. This excellent book has 16 pages of full colour photographs plus many black and white illustrations and sketches. Well worth having in any library.

★ I am a member of the newly formed Naturalist's Club, Montmorency. A few months ago I came across a nest of Red-Back Spiders

The female is the deadly spider, the male is completely harmless and is eventually eaten by the female in the breeding season. The female is a satiny-black creature with long slender black legs and a red streak down the abdomen. The eggs are light brown and spherical in shape, (there are up to 300 spiderlings inside but few survive for they are eaten by each other in order to survive.

● ED. Your letter John is a timely warning to beware of these dangerous spiders, which seem to be on the increase in suburban Melbourne of late. So girls and boys be very careful when handling any old rubbish, particularly any that has lain about for a length of time.



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3..

Dear Girls and Boys,

In Black Rock, there is a normal-sized private garden which is regularly visited by more than a hundred species of Australian birds.

The birds are attracted by the great variety of honey-bearing native plants growing there. These not only supply the birds with nectar, but also attract many insects, which are just as important to some birds. In addition, the rich and varied vegetation provides both nesting sites, and cover for the smaller birds.

The Black Rock garden was planned by its owners Mr. and Mrs. Arthur Salter, specially to attract birds. As the vegetation developed over the years, more and more birds, particularly honeyeaters, became "fixed" to the garden.

This story illustrates the close relationship which exists in Nature between the environment and its creatures.

It also shows that each of us, in a corner of our garden, by growing carefully-chosen native trees and shrubs, can create our own bush setting which will be a source of great pleasure and at the same time, help us to learn more about Nature.

JOHN HOOK
Sec. Blackburn and District
Tree Preservation Society.

Oct. '69.

CONSERVATION!

■ In previous articles we have talked about the need to look after our native plants, the need to protect our native animals, making the best use of our soil and water and so on.

■ Have you ever asked yourself why we should be concerned with these things? Is it that perhaps, by doing these things, we are making the world a better place in which man may live and of course that means a better place in which boys and girls may live?

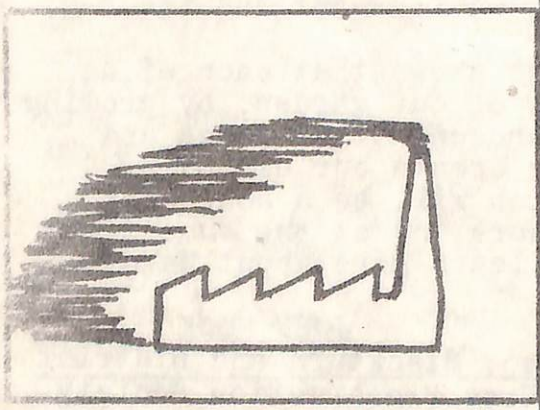
■ If we're really interested in making this a better world in which to live doesn't it seem odd that so far

we have been able to make our world extremely untidy. We have "filled" the air with smoke from factories. We have destroyed some of our wildlife by tipping our waste into the streams and thus killing fish and birds. We even leave our rubbish behind when we go for a picnic.

■ You might think since you didn't make this mess that it's not your place to clean it up. However you can teach the "oldies" a little about being tidy.

You can become a conservationist.

■ You can set an example and show others that we can make this world a better place in which all can live.



Nature Notes

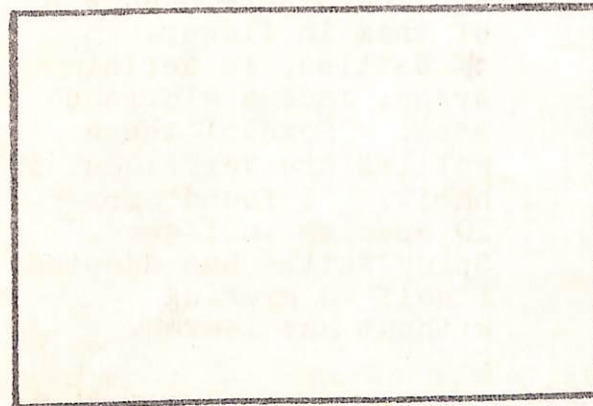


or Common-sense Living

■ Lets start at school.

Here are some questions for you to answer, and don't forget an answer by deed is stronger than an answer by word.

1. Is the yard kept tidy?
2. Do you always place waste papers in the bin?
3. Do you always replace the lid on the bin?
4. Do you always report damaged equipment?
5. Do you often tidy up your room without being asked?
6. Do you ever throw away part of your lunch?
7. Do you look after the plants in your school garden?
8. If someone's coat is lying on the floor would you pick it up and place it on a peg?



■ Your school is part of your world. Help make it a better place in which you and your friends can work.

- In the space illustrate another way you could practise being a conservationist.
- 5..

Little Desert!

* Much interest has been shown lately by many people in what is known as "The Little Desert". This area of land is not "desert-land" at all but an area of land, often sandy with a low rainfall. It grows many interesting plants which provide food and homes for many Australian animals.

* In 1944-45, there was a drought in the Mallee. Because most of the trees and shrubs had been removed there was nothing to stop the soil from blowing away and there were many severe dust storms. Plant roots serve to anchor both the plant and soil in place preserving the contour of the land and the top soil. Top soil is irreplaceable and must be considered a national loss. Can you discover how top soil is made? How long does it take nature to make

an inch of top soil?

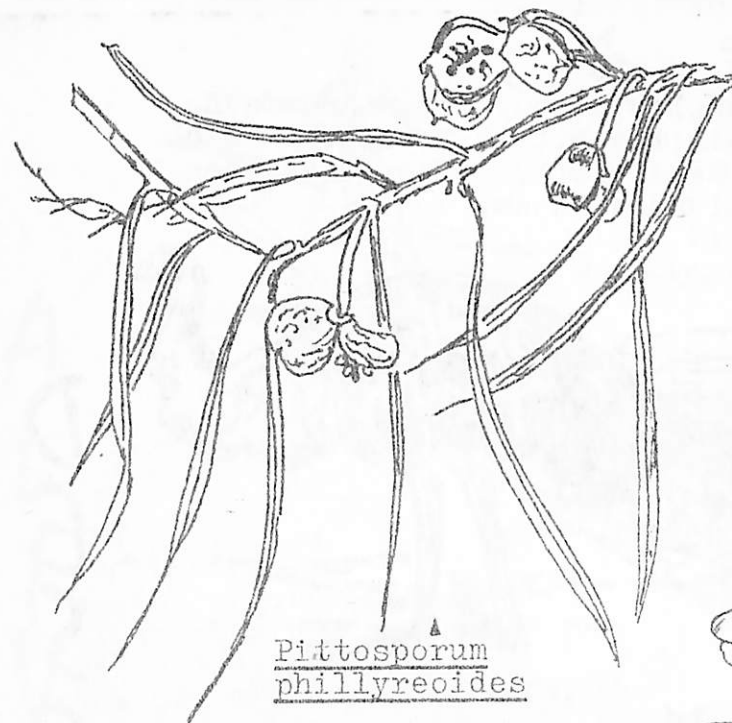
* If trees and shrubs are left along the roadsides they act as a wind-break and help prevent dust storms. They also act as nesting and shelter places for birds most of which are of benefit to the farmer.

* It is not possible to tell you in a list all the plants which grow in the Little Desert, but when I was through it some weeks ago there were hundreds of them in flower.

* Wattles, in certain areas, made a glorious show. Some of these wattles are very local in habit. I found over 20 species in flower. Spiny Wattle has adapted itself to growing without any leaves.



← Spiny Wattle
Acacia spinescens



Pittosporum
phillyreoides

* Red Mint-Bush is a delightful plant of this area. It is a rounded bush about 2 feet high with masses of red flowers in spring - flowering for most of the year.



↑ Melaleuca
wilsonii

* Weeping pittosporum is one of our most hardy plants. It will grow as a small tree about 15 to 20 feet high and has grey drooping foliage. Like all pittosporum it's seeds are very sticky.

It likes to grow in groups and it also grows very well in gardens.



→ Prostanthera
aspalathoides

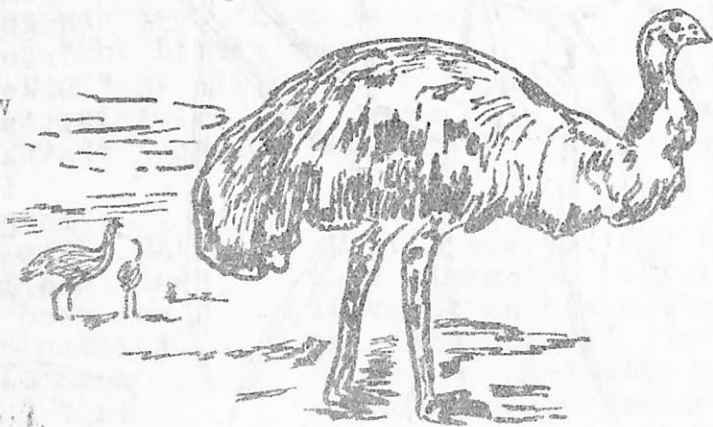
* Many people already know well the Little Desert with its great variety of plants and animals. By growing many of these plants in their home gardens they are reminded of the happy place from whence they came



↑ Calythrix tetragona
Oct. '69

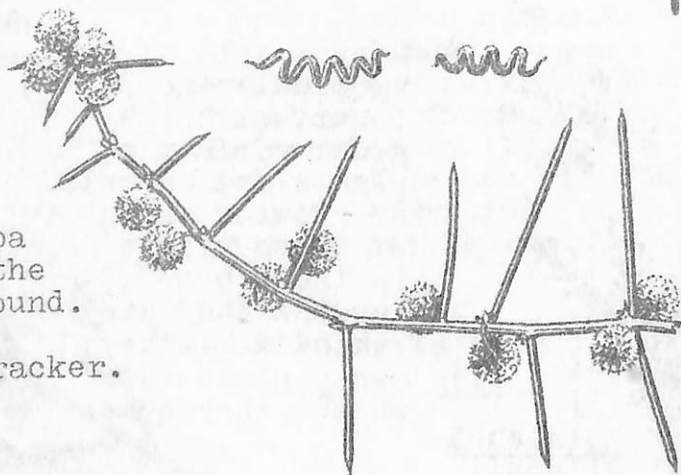
★ All these fine examples of our flora and fauna are found abundantly in the Little Desert. Watch out for them on your next visit. See if you can find something special about them.

★ Emus are now only found in inland areas. They feed on wild berries, insects and grass.



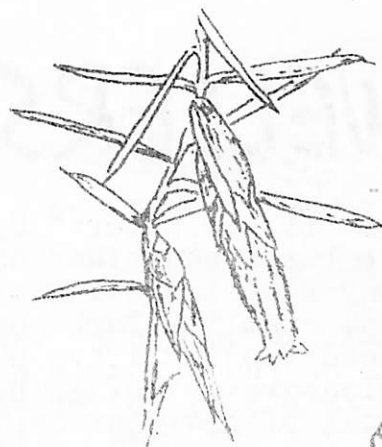
★ Hollows in trees are very useful to several groups of birds. They use these to make their nest. Parrots are one of these groups. What are the other groups? What other uses are hollows in trees?

★ *Acacia enterocarpa* is very limited in the areas where it is found. The pods resemble a jumping jack fire cracker.



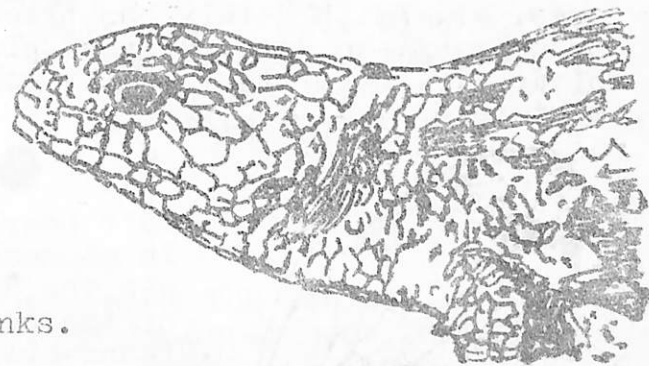
DESERT

ALIVE



★ *Astroloma conostephioides* (Flame Heath) is often called Emu Bush. Can you guess why? The flowers, a brilliant scarlet are rich in nectar, while the fruit is round and succulent.

★ Lizards are very useful creatures, none of which are venomous. This blue tongue is one of our largest skinks.



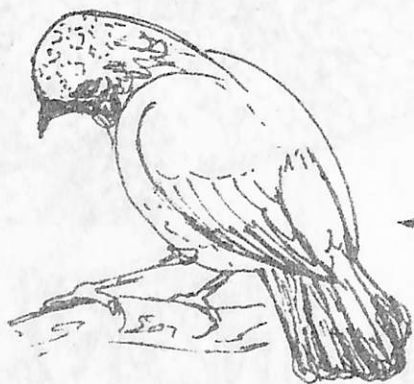
★ The Mallee Fowl lives in the hot sandy areas where it makes an incubator for a nest.



★ *Acacia glandulicarpa* is a dense shrub with deep yellow flower heads. It is restricted to a few areas of Victoria only, including the Little Desert.

DESERT DWELLERS

★ During a recent visit to the "Little Desert" National Park near Kiata, we met all the birds and other animals pictured on this page, plus many more including of course the famous Mallee fowl or Lowan. At the Park camping area, Mr. Keith Hately has placed feeding trays and water troughs and we derived great pleasure watching these birds fly in for their daily meal of grain or nectar mixture.



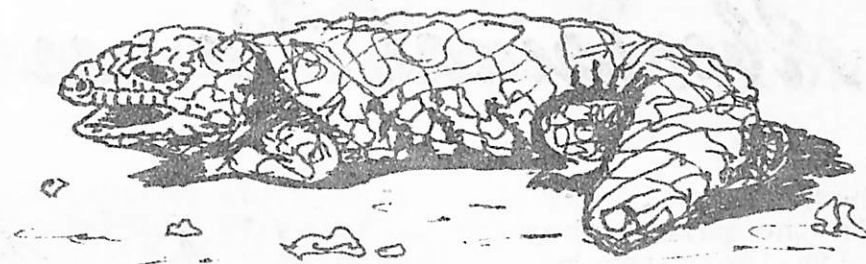
Just near the camp in an acacia bush was the domed nest of the buff-tailed thorn-bill, bound together with cobwebs.



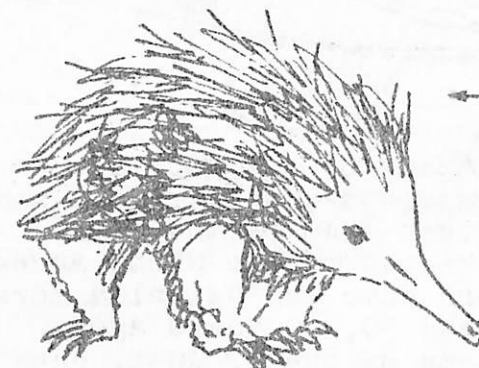
The peaceful dove was a delicate yet friendly visitor to our camp. Much more timid was her large cousin, the Forest Bronzewing. Both these birds have a distinctive call.



The Red-backed Parrot or Mallee Red Rump (an apt name given to him by Mr. Hately) was a most frequent visitor. These birds are ground feeders and have a pleasing whistle. The Mallee Red Rump is very widespread in habitat.



★ Here is one of Mr. Hately's pet stumpy-tail lizards, also a common sight in the desert. This slow moving, docile fellow is a most unusual member of the Skink family. When you are walking in the bush be careful not to stand on him. His colouring blends in perfectly with his dry surroundings.



← The Echidna is very much at home in this area. I found a pair of large ones on my first day. Why do you think this area suits him so well?

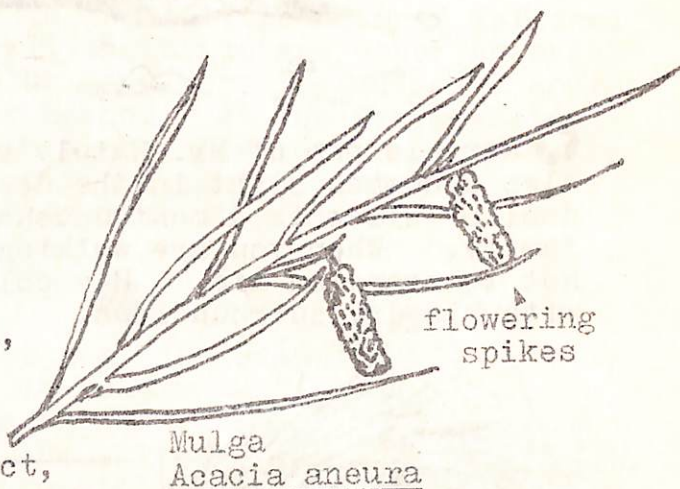
It was a pleasant surprise to see a Red-Capped Robin after being used to seeing his scarlet cousin on the plains in winter only. Find out how he differs from his cousin.

★ Put the Little Desert high on your visiting list next Spring. You will soon come to see why so many people feel so strongly about retaining the Little Desert as it is - a natural garden.



Aboriginal Names in

When city folk say 'up in the mulga' they mean 'in the outback country'. Mulga wood souvenirs are made from the MULGA, a kind of inland wattle tree, (Acacia aneura). Other acacias known by aboriginal names are WIRILDA, COOBA, BRIGALOW, NEALIE, WALLOWA and many more. Cootamundra Wattle takes its name from the district, 'cootamundra' meaning low-lying place.



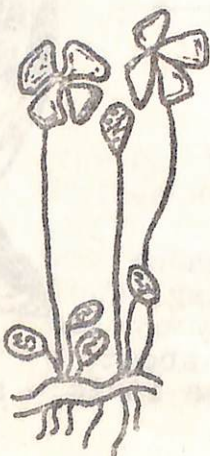
Mulga
Acacia aneura

Many of our gum trees or eucalypts, too, retain names given them by the dark-skinned people whose ancestors came to Australia more than 30,000 years ago. Some of the W. Aust. ones are well-known here, such as JARRAH and KARRI (good timbers), but others have names much used in W.A. like TUART, MARRI, ILLYARRIE, YATE, WANDOO, GUNGURRU, MORT, MARLOCK and many more. MOTTLECAH (Eucalyptus megastigma) is a small tree with the largest gum-nut of all. This name is preferred to 'Rose of the West' or 'Desert Gum'.

Nardoo
Marsilia drummondii



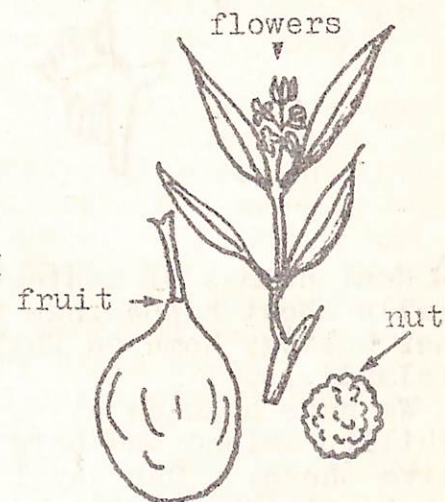
Moonah
Melaleuca pubescens



spore-cases

Common Use Part 2 FLORA

MALLEE was an aboriginal name for several kinds of stunted eucalypts that have given their name to Victoria's dry north western region. An aboriginal name for Majogany Gum is BANGALAY, Victorian Blue-gum is EURABBIE, and the COOLIBAH of 'Waltzing Matilda' is Eucalyptus microtheca. 'Flour' from the spore-cases of NARDOO, a kind of fern (Marsilia) was not nourishing enough to save Burke and Wills from dying of starvation. 'Wild cherry' trees (Exocarpos) are called BALLART. A She-oak (Caquarina) is BELAR. N.S.W.'s floral emblem is the WARATAH.



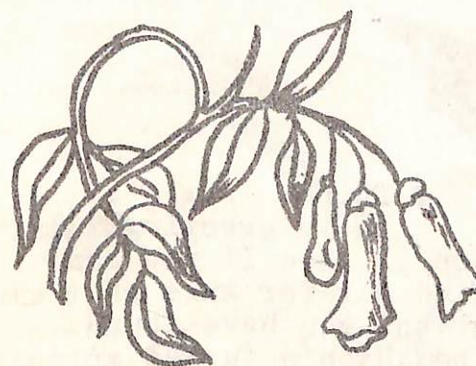
Quandong
Santalum acuminatum



Muntries
Edible berries of
Kunzea pomifera

Try to find out what kinds of trees, shrubs or wild-flowers are known by these aboriginal names:-

BOOBIALLA, GEEBUNG, WALLUM, QUANDONG, BUT BUT, CARBEEN, GYMEA, BURRAWANG, KANOOKA, BUNYA BUNYA, BERRIGAN, KARRALLA, BANYALLA, PITURI, BIDGEE-WIDGEE, KURRAJONG, MOONAH, BURGAN and TANTOON.



Wonga-Wonga Vine
Pandorea pandorana

Drop a Line



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★ Noni Holmes of Canterbury tells about happenings at her holiday home on Phillip Island.....

We have a house at Phillip Island and bats live there. One day I accidentally banged the side of the house and heard an angry chittering. Looking down, I saw one of the bats. It was about 2 - 2½" long and 1 - 1½" across and about 6" from wing tip to wing tip. It's fur was dark brown but lighter and greyer

underneath with a few grey hairs on its head. Its eyes were small and black, ears rather large and thin like mice ears and its mouth was an ugly horseshoe. It bared it's teeth and chittered angrily at me before disappearing down a hole. We do not know what sort of bat it was but we think it might be a chocolate bat.

● ED.

An interesting letter Noni. See if you can find out for sure what kind of bat you have found. Froughton's furred animals may help you - Don't forget to check the habitat in the book.



★ Letter No. 2 comes from Stephen Ray, Gr. 2 Blackburn Lake.

I have a blue-tongued lizard which is very fat and might soon have babies. My mother and father brought two toads back from Queensland. One of them might lay eggs soon. They lay about 3,000 and like warmth more than dampness. This kind of toad came from America. Some bugs came into the cane fields and cane toads were brought over to eat the bugs.

● ED. Another example of the "Balance of Nature" Stephen only this time man assisted. Can you think of any other examples of man using an animal or insect to fight a pest? Perhaps your teacher can help you to find out.

Black Faced
Cuckoo Shrike



■ CORRECTION ■ Last issue in the Quiz on P.16 we asked "Menura is the aboriginal name for?" This is incorrect as Menura comes from the Greek: Menos = might and - oura = tail; hence Menura means mighty tail.

★ Also from Blackburn Lake from Pam Halliwell and Robert Laird, Grade 4B come letters about a frequent visitor to the schoolground. They write.....

On Friday morning our two grade fours saw a black faced cuckoo shrike sitting high in a tree in our grounds. The bird, mainly grey, flew to the next tree and hid himself. All we could see was his tiny black face. You can guess why it has its name because it has a black face and looks and flies like accuckoo.

● ED. Yes Robert and Pam, and you can find a little more about this graceful bird in Nature Notes, Vol.6, No.2, also in Cayley, Leach and Hill's Bird Books. See if you can find the answers to the questions on Page 12 of No. 2.

CAN YOU NAME THESE BIRDS?

ANSWERS NEXT MONTH



NATURE NOTES COMMITTEE

MR. F.J.C. ROGERS

..

S.S. LILYDALE

MR. G. WHITE

..

S.S. BLACKBURN EAST

MR. L.J. DELACCA
(Editor)

..

S.S. BLACKBURN LAKE

NEXT ISSUE WILL BE AT DEPOTS ON WEDNESDAY NOVEMBER 5th