

Ringwood Inspectorate

Volume 10

Nature NOTES

No. 6

Primary School 4860 Blackburn Lake



6 Cents

Special
Edition

P.O. Box 30, Nunawading, 3131.

878 1403

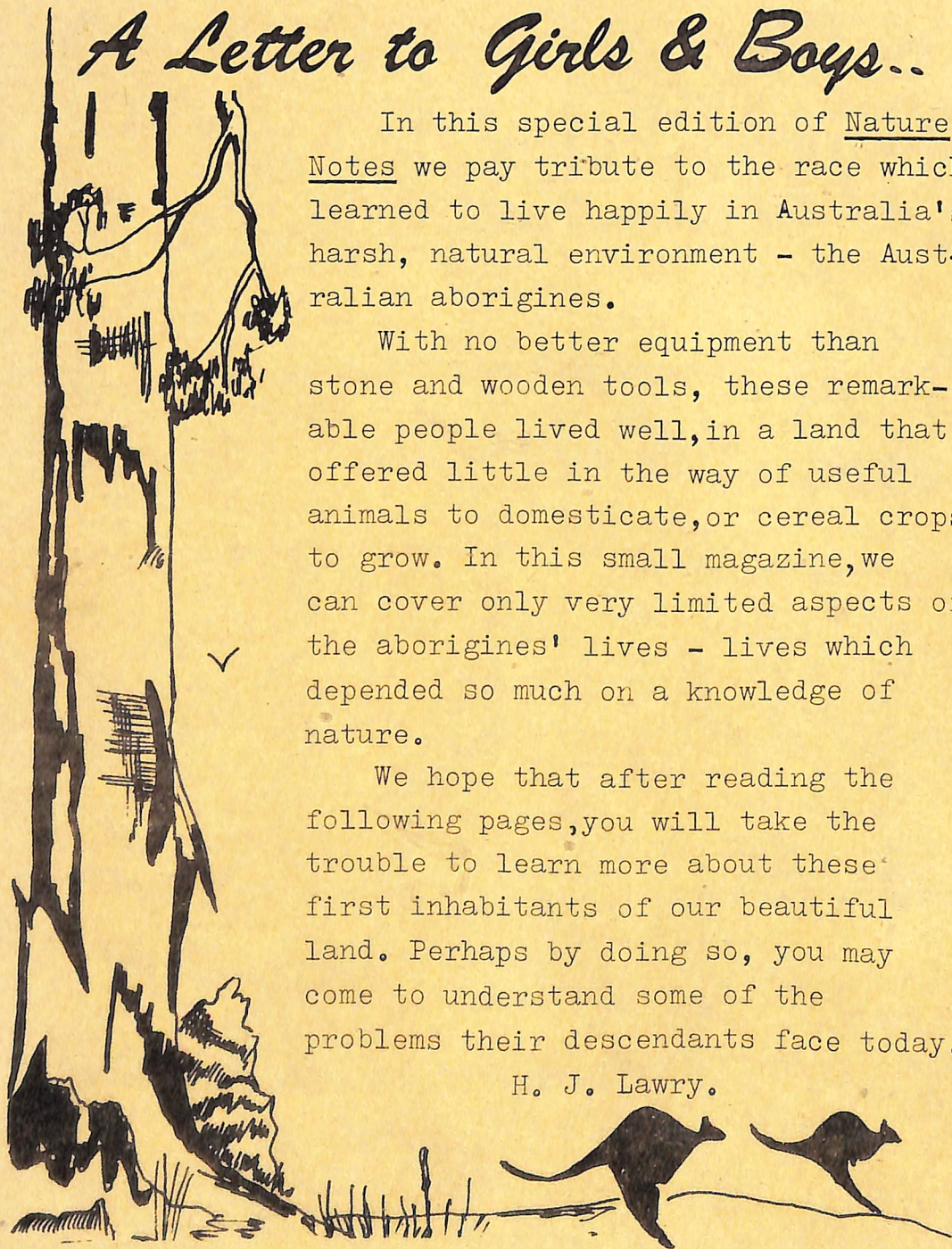
A Letter to Girls & Boys..

In this special edition of Nature Notes we pay tribute to the race which learned to live happily in Australia's harsh, natural environment - the Australian aborigines.

With no better equipment than stone and wooden tools, these remarkable people lived well, in a land that offered little in the way of useful animals to domesticate, or cereal crops to grow. In this small magazine, we can cover only very limited aspects of the aborigines' lives - lives which depended so much on a knowledge of nature.

We hope that after reading the following pages, you will take the trouble to learn more about these first inhabitants of our beautiful land. Perhaps by doing so, you may come to understand some of the problems their descendants face today.

H. J. Lawry.



Index

Living With Nature.	
G. Nielsen.....	3
This 'n That.	
L. Delacca.....	6
Foods of the	
Aborigines.	
F. J. C. Rogers....	8
Starting Point.	
F. Tyrell.....	10
Operation Bark	
Canoe.	
H. J. Lawry.....	13
Crossword	
H. J. Lawry.....	15
Let's Play	
Detectives.	16
Cover Drawing:	
Mrs. M. Sharpin	



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LIVING WITH NATURE

G. Nielsen

The early explorers found survival difficult in Australia's harsh conditions when their food and water became scarce. The aborigines had no such trouble; in fact they sometimes saved the white man from death.

Unlike Europeans, Australia's aborigines live directly with nature - with the ground, the air, the wind, the weather, with animal, insect and plant life. They look for nature's signs to tell them when and where to find



'Neath the shade of the
old mulga tree.....!

foods. For example, some aborigines of northern Australia know that when certain wattles bloom, it is the sign that crocodiles' eggs can be found in sandy nests along the banks of streams.

Aborigines of the desert know how and where to find water by digging through the sand. If necessary, they can obtain water from the tap roots of desert kurrajong trees.



And So To Bed.....

The desert natives are hardy and their shelters are made mainly to protect them from the wind. Spinifex plants in clumps around a shallow hole in the sand or shelters made from boughs and bark give this protection. Desert nights are very cold so the aborigines huddle together close to their camp fires. On very hot days, stunted desert trees like the mulga provide shade from the scorching sun.

When the men are out hunting, the women look for

food too. Some roots and bulbs can be pulled up for eating. Witchetty grubs and termites may be found in old logs. Honey-ants can be dug up from their burrows in the ground and even flour can be made by grinding grass seeds between flat stones.



Grinding Seeds Into Flour.

Although there are desert tribes living today much as their ancestors lived thousands of years ago, many aborigines today live on outback land set aside for church mission stations. Here they learn to farm the land and make their handicrafts for sale to tourists.

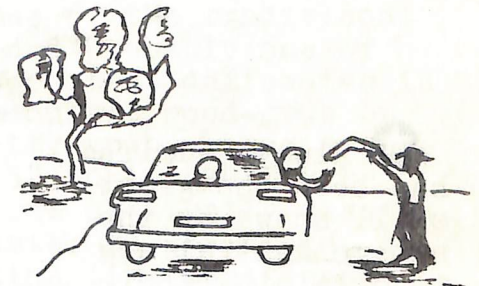
Sketches by the author.



Witchetty Grub.



Termite



Highway sales.

THIS 'N THAT

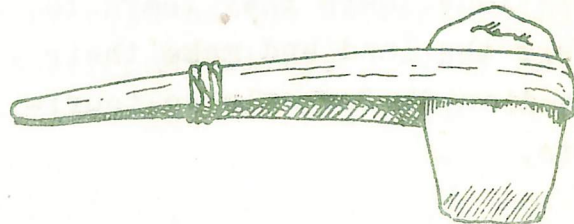
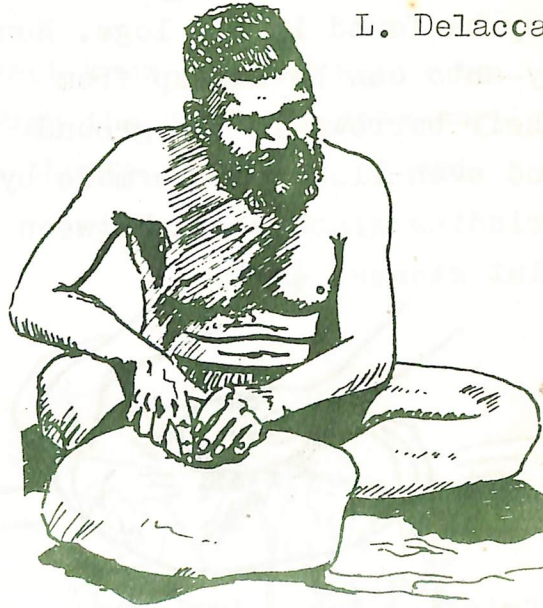
★ The skill of our native people at making and using stone tools, never ceases to amaze.

The first skill involved is in the choice of the stone for the axe-head and the striker or hammer stone for shaping it. Then there is the actual shaping of the stone itself.

When the head has been shaped a metre stem is taken from a hakea or acacia, cut in half lengthways and the bark removed. The middle of one half is slowly heated to make the wood pliable enough to bend in two. The haft is then bent around the axe-head and tied together with two bands of hair or fibre. Finally, a lump of resin softened by heat is pressed between the withy (split wood) and stone. The part of the head above the haft is often covered too and the lot smoothed over with a smouldering stick.

★ Always admired has been the great skill shown by the native Australians in obtaining their food. With no domestic animals, they were of necessity clever and patient hunters.

L. Delacca



★ One smart trick was used to catch ducks on a creek. Two men would stretch a net across the water while a third would frighten a flock of ducks towards the hidden hunters, throwing a boomerang above them if they flew too high. Thinking this to be a hawk, the ducks would swoop low and become entangled in the net.

Another method was for a hunter to don a head dress of green twigs and swim slowly towards a group of swimming ducks. Choosing just the right moment he would quietly grab a leg and pull the luckless duck under.



★ It is said that aborigines love to eat sugar in any of its many forms. In central Australia they get this from the honey-ant. In a large chamber at the bottom of the ant burrow, storage ants are fed until their abdomens are swollen to about the size of a marble. The aboriginal takes an ant by the head, places the abdomen in his mouth, squeezes and gets a mouthful of rich pure honey. Sometimes they make a sweet drink from these ants. So who's for an ant honey-shake!



★ One of the traditional foods and probably one of their greatest delicacies is the succulent wood-grub or witchetty grub. These grubs, up to 5" in length may be eaten raw or lightly toasted. The taste, so I am told, is something like sweetened scrambled eggs. So line up for a plate of witchetties, medium rare.

Sketches: Mrs. G. Hensler



Foods of the Aborigines



Sketches: Mrs. M. Sharpin



The plants that were used by the aborigines for food were many and only a few can be mentioned.

- Seeds that were ground into a paste.

Brachychiton (Kurrajong)* - particularly *B. gregorii* of Central Australia.

Acacia maitlandii - These seeds when ground were used with water to make a mixture like pea soup.

- Seeds that were eaten.

Casuarina decasneana - (Desert Sheoke)*

Araucaria bidwillii (Bunya Bunya)

Bunya Bunya is a tall tree which is restricted to certain rainforest areas in south-eastern Queensland. It produces large cones from which the seeds are extracted. The seeds are large - $1\frac{1}{2}$ " to 2" long and up to 1" thick.



Desert Oak*



Grinding Seeds



were Tomato-like fruits. Kangaroo Apple. This plant produces fruits in autumn to winter which were eaten by the aborigines when ripe. When the fruits are still green they contain a poison which will make the eater ill.

- The flowers of certain plants were either eaten or steeped in water. Such plants included many *Grevillea*, *Hakea*, *Eucalypts* and *Banksia*.

- The leaves of the grass tree were used for food. The outer leaves are hard and not palatable but the inner leaves, which have a soft white base, were eaten either raw or roasted. The flower spike, with its thousands of flowers, is rich in honey and was sucked by the aborigines.

- In Victoria, the bark of the *Acacia implepa* (Lightwood) was used to stupefy fish.

- Fruits from the native fig-trees (*Ficus*), Quandong* and Native Orange (*Capparis mitchellii*) were also eaten, as



Quandong*

STARTING POINT • A TALL TREE

F. Tyrrell.

• BARK PAINTINGS

• BARK FIBRES
FOR ROPES

• PAPER BARK
COVERINGS FOR
RITUALS:

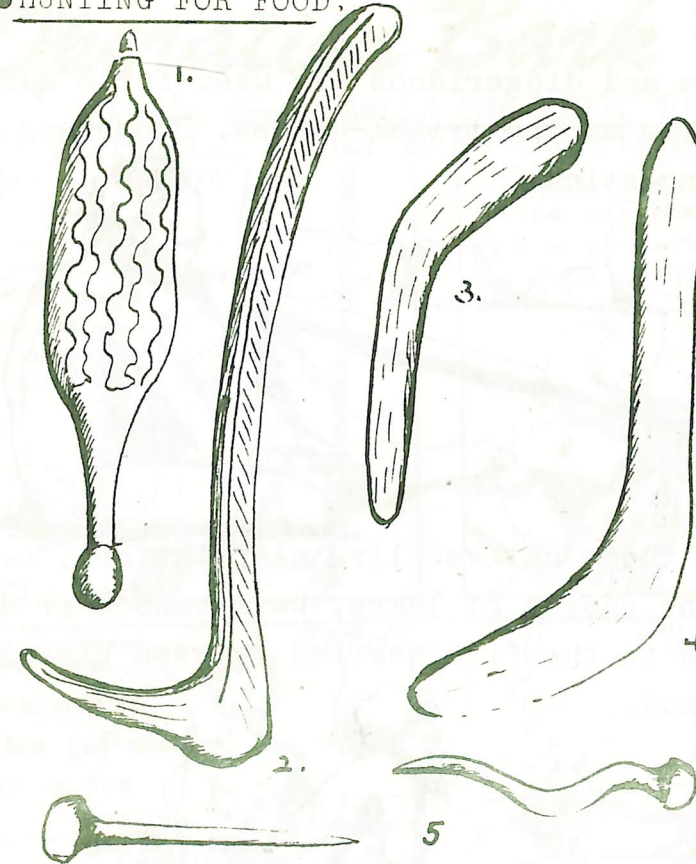


• WOOD
CARVINGS

• GUM AND
RESIN

Our Australian aborigines are experts at living "off the land." This means they use what ever nature provides. Various types of trees provide many of their needs. Here are some examples, but with a little help you will be able to add to the list. Perhaps you might be able to organise a visit to the State Museum where you will see an excellent display of aboriginal relics.

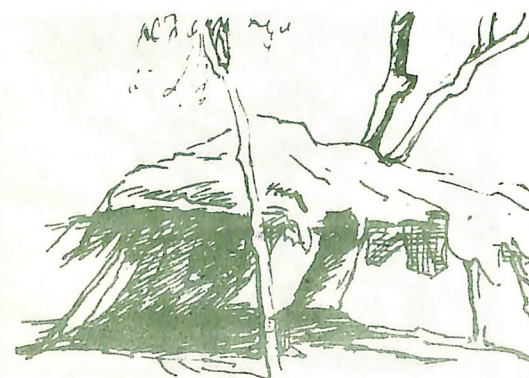
• HUNTING FOR FOOD.



1. Spear thrower.
2. Hooked boomerang.
3. Boomerang.
4. Boomerang.
5. Wirris.

Below is a picture of a fish trap made from bark fibres.

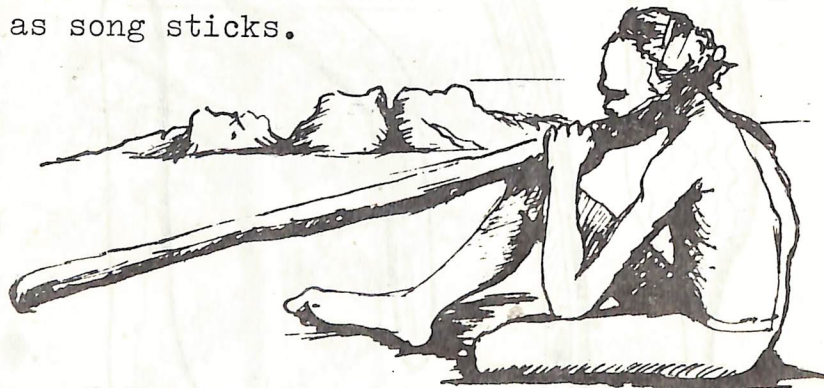
• SHELTER



These people don't stay long in one place so their shelters are only temporary.

MUSIC

Song sticks and didgeridoos are used for a musical background to some of the tribal dances. Boomerangs are also used as song sticks.



TRANSPORT

As many of these natives live near the sea, near rivers, or on the shores of lakes, bark canoes or dug-outs are used. Note the fire carried between pieces of bark raised on mud.



DEATH

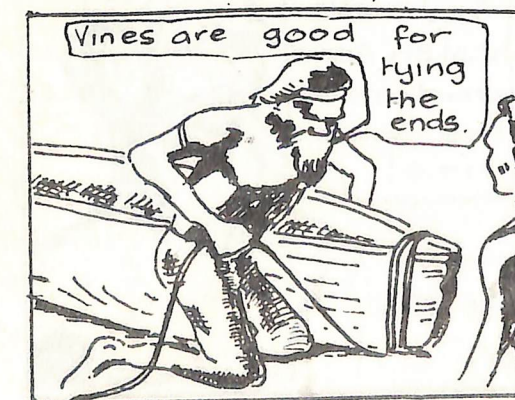
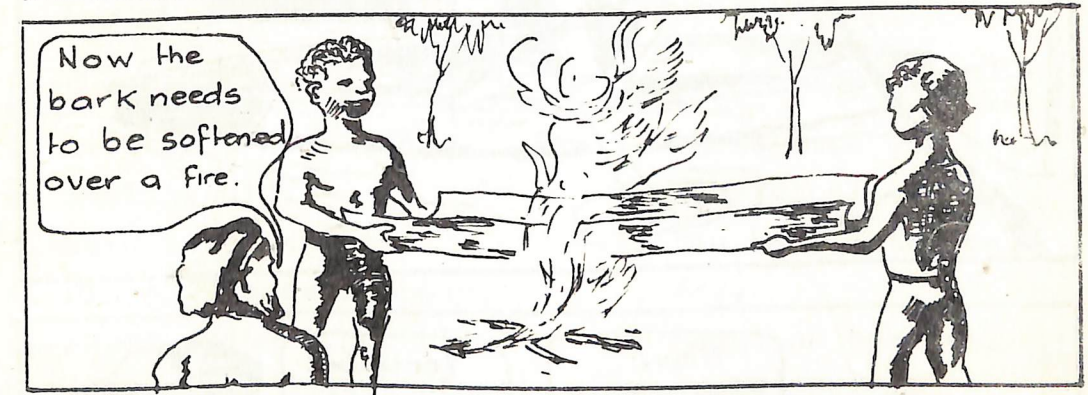
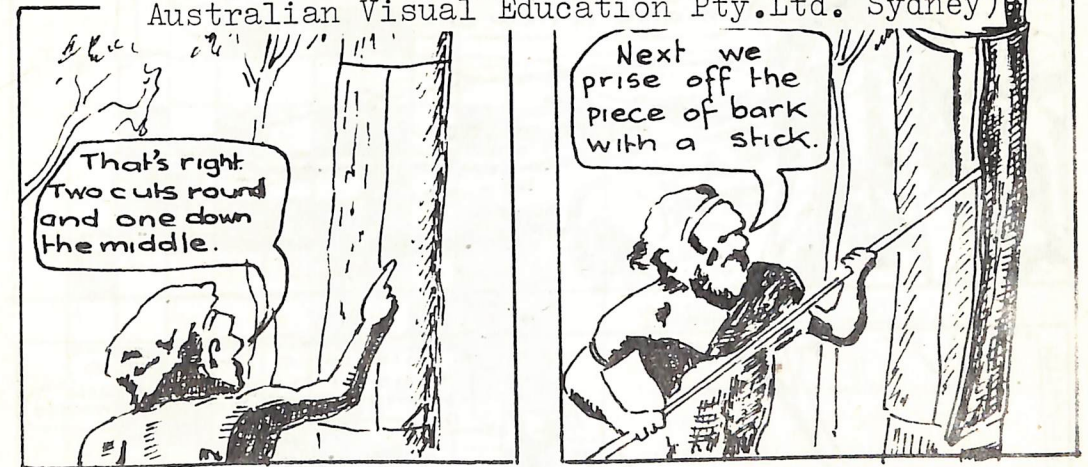
Strange customs surround death. Bodies are often left on a platform built in a tree.

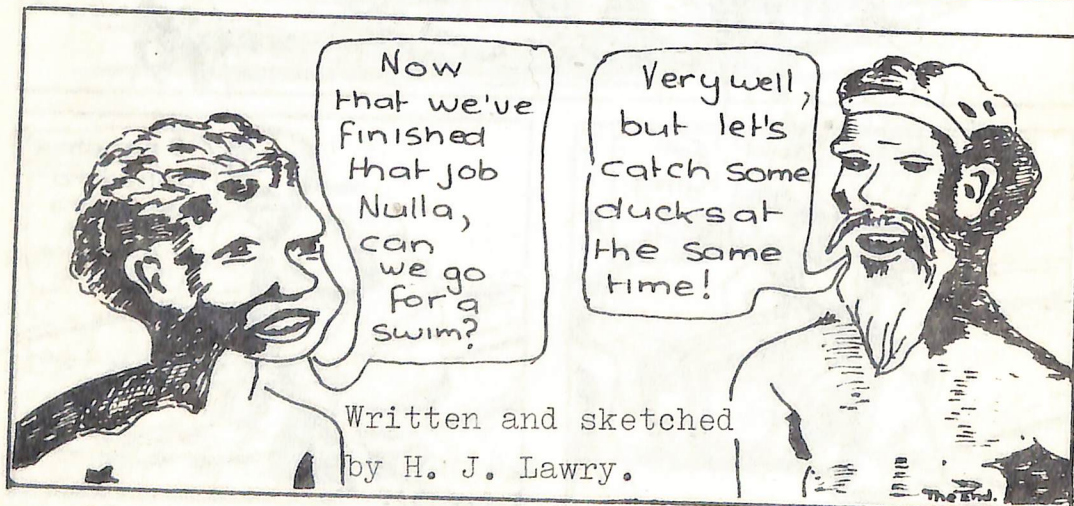
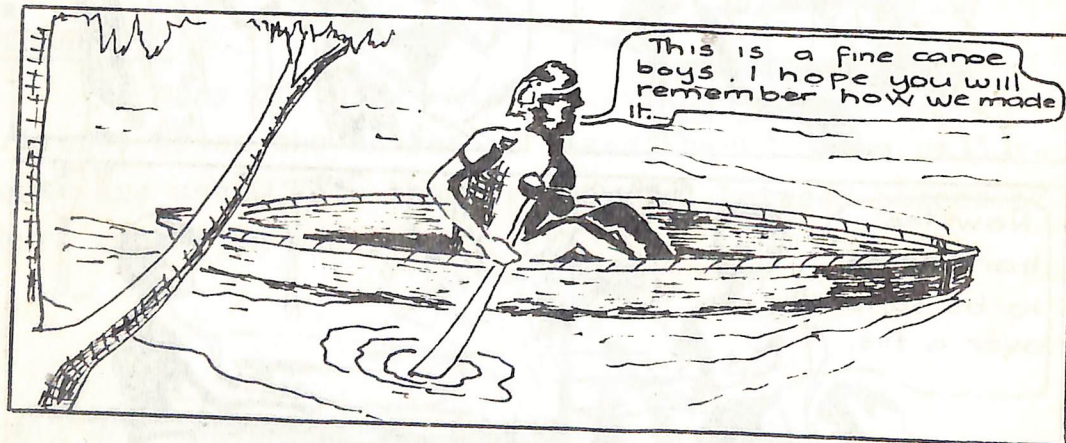


Sketches: Mrs. A. Shoobridge

Operation Bark Canoe.

(Adapted from AMONG THE FIRST AUSTRALIANS
Australian Visual Education Pty.Ltd. Sydney)





Crossword



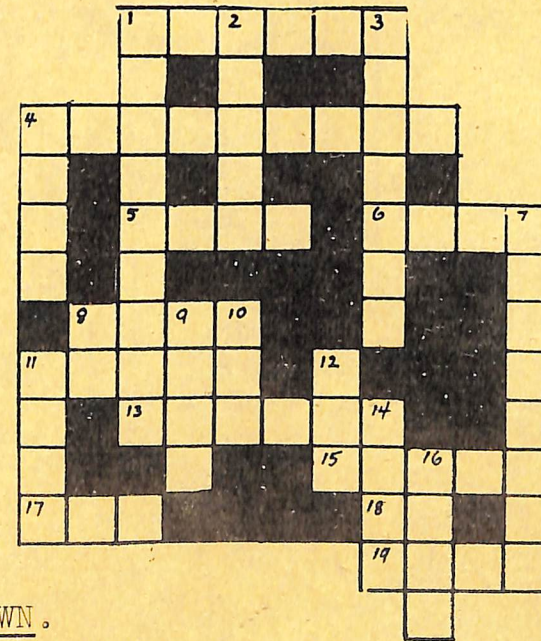
H.J. Lawry



Red Wattle-bird

HELP WANTED

See an important message about the Red Wattle Bird on the back page.



DOWN.

1. It should come back.
2. Hunting aid.
3. Make sweet.
4. Distant heavenly body.
7. Furry grasshopper (!)
8. Australian State. (Init.)
9. Naming word.
10. Animal lair.
11. Container.
12. Friend.
14. Worn by Saints.
16. Aboriginal food.

ACROSS.

1. These give shade.
4. Aboriginal tools.
5. You hear with them.
6. Job.
8. Found on beaches.
11. Small craft.
13. Aboriginal shelter.
15. A deposit of material.
17. Stray.
18. Los Angeles (Inits)
19. Victorian mountain town.

Let's Play Detectives!

H.J. Lawry.

Last year at about this time reports began to come in of sick and dying birds - particularly Wattle-birds. I would like you to look out for similar occurrences this year, because if it happens again it would be interesting to find out: (a) what is wrong with them, and, (b) how widespread the sickness is.

HOW CAN YOU HELP ?

- If you live near the Blackburn Lake School you could bring the birds in to me and I will send some specimens in to the Fisheries and Wildlife Department for examination.

- If you live in other parts of Melbourne, I would appreciate a 'phone call giving details. (878 1403 School Hours, Monday, Tuesday or Thursday. 870 9481 any day after 4 p.m. or any time at weekends or during the holidays.)

- If you live out of Melbourne, a letter giving the details listed below would be most helpful.

- Let's see if we can discover the reason(s) for these deaths if they occur again this year. Got your note-books and pencils ready ? Good. Now go to it !



Name of bird.
the name.

Description, if unsure of

Symptoms.

Did the bird die or recover?

Where found. (Exact location)

Have you observed these birds eating anything in particular?

Has there been any unusual activity in the area? (Spraying fruit trees, blackberries etc.)

Your name:

Your address: