

NATURE NOTES

VOL. 17
NO. 10



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Editorial.



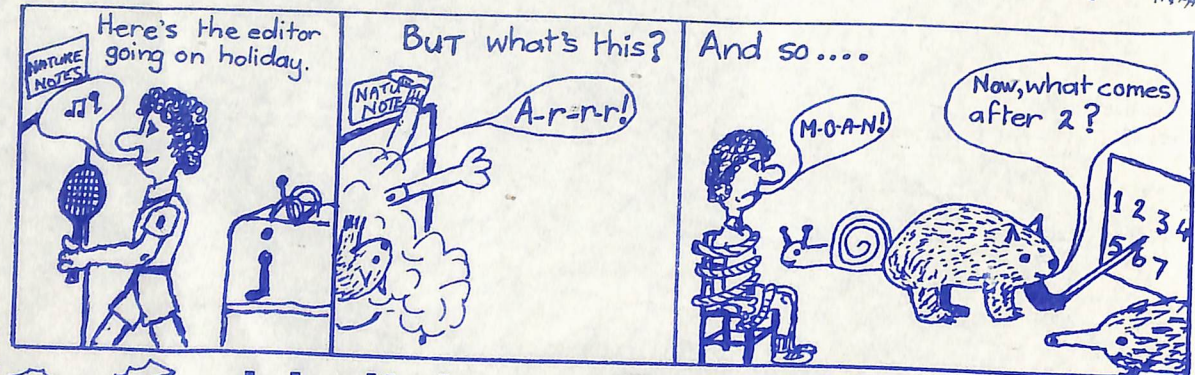
Well, another year is fast approaching its end. During this time I have found being editor of Nature Notes an interesting and rewarding experience.

I would like to thank our artist, Wilma Prohasky, whose drawings add a great deal to both our magazines, (N.N. & Probe). The Mothers' Club's work in collating and packaging done throughout the year is much appreciated. This year we have had some new helpers collating Probe: the students at Mitcham Special School. Thanks go also to the Nature Notes Committee, Mr Archibald, Mrs Ann Gibson, and especially Mrs Debra Brydon the Assistant Editor.

We thank you, the subscribers, and all the people who have contributed letters and articles this year.

We hope you have a safe and happy holiday. Merry Christmas!

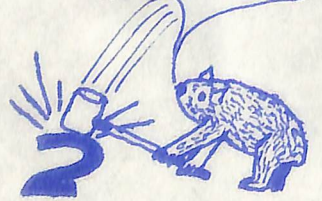
Editor,
Russell Hall.



Holiday Suggestions.



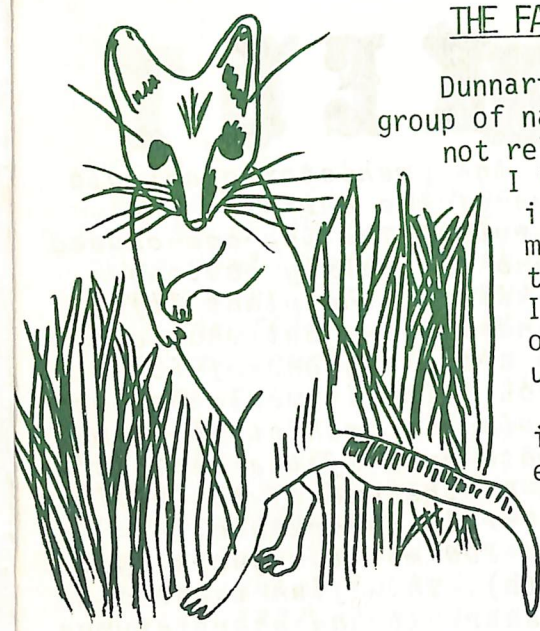
On second thoughts, we'd be better off without numbers.



- *Barringo Wildlife Reserve: Calder Hwy via Gisborne.
- *Botanical Gardens Zoo, White Hills, Bendigo.
- *Finnigan's Irish Donkey Stud and Miniature Zoo, Grubb Rd, Ocean Grove.
- *Serendip Wildlife Research Station: Lara. Open by arrangement. 'Phone: (052) 82 1584.
- *Sir Colin Mc Kenzie Fauna Park: Healesville.

Nature Notes....December, 1980.

THE FAT-TAILED DUNNART. By Helen Dexter.



Dunnart is the name given by naturalists to a group of narrow-footed marsupial mice. They are not related to domestic rodents. The animal I have drawn is the fat-tailed dunnart. It is small and mouse-like, with pointed muzzle, large oval ears and a short, fat tail. Its body measures about 9 cm. long. Its fur is ash grey on the body and white on the belly, and there is a dark triangular patch on the top of its head.

The fat-tailed dunnart and its relatives may be found in most dry land areas except in the far west of Australia. It lives in grassy woodlands or plains, where it nests under logs or rocks, under fenceposts or around buildings in townships. The fat-tailed dunnart lives alone or in pairs. It is active at night.

when it feeds mainly on insects (especially grasshoppers) and on spiders.

This award winning letter and great drawing was sent in by Helen Dexter, who goes to Our Lady's School in Ringwood.

You can see a fat-tailed dunnart first hand in the Nocturnal Display at the Sir Colin Mc Kenzie Fauna Park.
*The dunnart is in fact found in the south west of Western Australia. Dunnart is actually the aboriginal name adopted by naturalists. These interesting creatures store fat in their tails. Can you guess why? They are carnivorous and in captivity have displayed an enormous appetite- EATING MORE THAN THEIR OWN BODY WEIGHT IN FOOD IN A SINGLE DAY! These amazing animals also have the ability to perform a type of hibernation when food is very scarce.

QUESTION TIME?????? "I would like to know how a porcupine gets its spikes." I would also like to know when and where they are found!"
The porcupine's first spines are easily bent



They are born with these. About two days later they get a second set of darker spines. After roughly 3 weeks they grow a third set of spines. The first two sets of spines later fall out. They are found in Europe, Asia and Africa. Often found in hedges, bushes or in dry leaves. They are believed to roll on fruit, thus pinning it with their spines (see above).

THE KEY

Have you ever wondered why all the prehistoric animals should all disappear from the face of the earth at one time? WHY didn't a few of them survive? The ice age caused many species to vanish. The reasons are fairly obvious, aren't they; the ice covering or killing the plant life which the animals food chain depended upon. But what about life in the water? Even under the arctic regions of ice there is sea water unfrozen. Do you think it would be possible for some types of creatures living in prehistoric times to be still surviving in some remote area of the sea? It's amazing what some fishermen catch on the end of their lines. The variety of life in the sea is truly remarkable.

One such amazing creature lived 200 million years ago. It was the coelacanth (SEEL-a-kanth). This fish is so old it was alive even before the dinosaur. It had short stumps with which it could swim or walk on the ocean floor. It is believed to be the first animal to leave the water and spend time on land. The oldest fossil of a coelacanth has been dated as being alive 70 million years ago. Scientists believed that this creature had long since vanished from the world. THEN, 50 years ago a fisherman startled the world!



ABOVE:- A coelacanth.

RIGHT:- Professor Smith, the man responsible for its identification & capture. Pictures-"Purnell's Encyclopedia Of Animal Life." PAGES 483 & 481.



In 1938, the captain of a fishing vessel hooked a strange fish about 75 metres below the surface of the Indian Ocean. The fish was about 1 $\frac{3}{4}$ metres long, weighed 50 kgs. and was steel blue with very large scales.

The fish was taken to a South African museum. The fish LOOKED like a coelacanth, but how could that be? Alas, the peculiar fish died a few days lat-

TO 'NESSY'?

er before it could be identified conclusively (positively)

South African scientists offered a reward for anyone who could catch another such fish. It took 14 years, but they were finally rewarded.

The fish was positively identified as a coelacanth. It was caught off the eastern coast of Africa, and greeted by scientists as the most astounding discovery of the century.

What has this got to do with the Loch Ness monster? One theory about "Nessy", is that it is a ancient species trapped in the loch. Underwater photographs triggered by movements in the water, have shown a strange shape; something which looked like a flipper!

In 1977, a Japanese fishing boat brought up part of a recently killed animal. Unfortunately, they threw the animal overboard. Luckily, a picture was taken before it left the vessel. Scientists believed it could have been a plesiosaur. Below is a copy of the picture taken. See what you can find out about the plesiosaur.

RIGHT:-

The decomposed body of a strange, prehistoric sea animal that was brought up by a Japanese fishing boat.

(Plesiosaur was an animal with a small head, long neck, four paddle



-like limbs, and a short tail. Look Familiar?)

SURVIVAL

In

The Outback.

Have you ever thought or dreamed about being lost in very dry country? Early explorers found that surviving in the outback was very difficult. A few died trying to conquer the dry country. The Bourke and Wills expedition met with **tragedy**. Perhaps you could do a project about their journey. See if you can find out how they could have saved themselves.

A long time ago, long before BMX Rally-cross bicycles, even long before Mc Donald's hamburgers; in fact over a hundred years ago three young children were to "take on" the dry outback country, but weren't aware that they would have to. Perhaps your teacher read you their story, which is in the old grade 4 reader. It has also been made into a film. The film was actually made in the



YUM! Raw or cooked witchety grubs:- This one in an acacia root.

area where the adventure occurred. The children were aged 9, 7½ the youngest was not quite 4 years old.

The main thing needed for survival in the bush is water. One man who found fresh water was found alive after a month. His only food was the roots and stems of plants.

Don't leave your car if it breaks down. It can provide shade and be easily spotted from the air. If you have matches you can light a fire we can be seen from many kilometres away. Be careful not to start a bush fire.

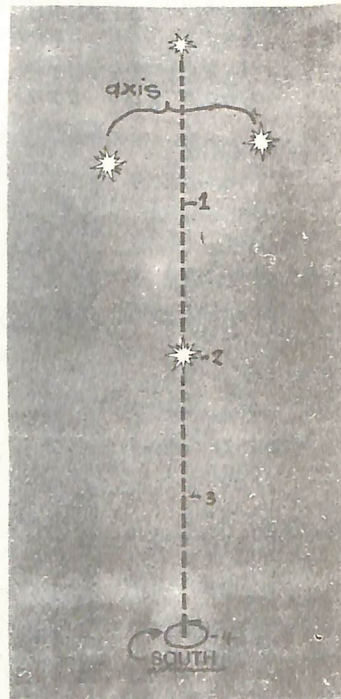


If there is a heavy dew fall water can be brushed off the leaves. The roots of trees such

(Pictures and "Still" drawing from Wildlife Heritage.)



Wild orange above. Fruit is green, with the blossom shown being yellow.



Find an approximate south, using Southern Cross.

eucalypts and banksias of great length located near the surface and between 3-6 cms. thick are a good source of water. The best time to dig these up is in the morning.

Water can be distilled from salty water. The still below can also be used to extract water from the ground and leaves as shown below. Tracks of kangaroos, cattle or sheep may lead to water. Seed eating birds such as: crested pigeons, zebra finches, galahs, etc. often travel to or from it in the mornings and evenings.

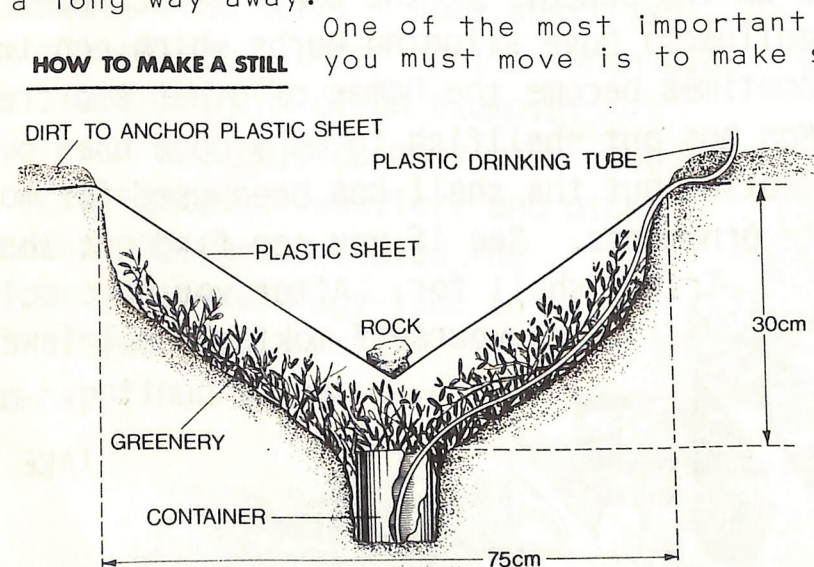
Feeling Peckish?

Try witchety grubs! Lizards of all kinds can be eaten, as well as snakes, termites and grasshoppers. Wild oranges are a native favorite.

Sometimes it helps to just sit down and think. This often calms you down and allows you to act without panic.

A box of matches is very important. A fire can be lit and this can be seen from a long way away.

HOW TO MAKE A STILL



One of the most important things to do if you must move is to make sure you maintain the same direction. Pick an object in the direction you want to go as far away as possible; walk to it, then choose another. If the axis of the Southern Cross is extended down 4 times, the bottom point will give you south.



A FEAST! This termite mound contains plenty of food.



S-N-I-P

SEASHHELLS

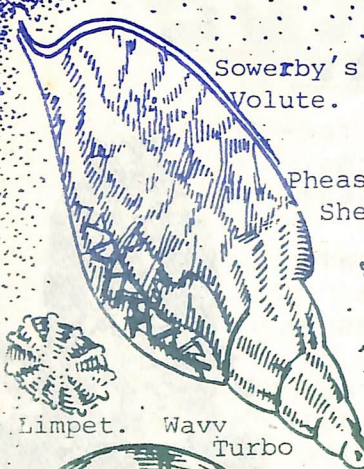
Look closely at these beautiful shells.
How many of them can you recognize?

Did you know that shellfish are not fish at all? They are really called MOLLUSCS which means "soft-bodied" and even includes the garden snail. This helps to explain why most of these animals carry a hard shell. The molluscs pictured here belong to either the bi-valve or the uni-valve group. Molluscs generally have a large muscular foot which helps the animal to glide over seaweed or is used for digging in the sand or anchoring itself to rocks. Some shellfish live on seaweeds, others are carnivorous (meat-eating). Different molluscs like to live in different parts of the seashore, so to find them you will need to look under rocks, in rock pools or in the sand. Sometimes they get washed up on the beach. If the shell is occupied by a creature, take care. Some shellfish (molluscs) have stinging barbs which can inject a nasty poison. Other shells, when old, sometimes become the homes of other sea creatures. Can you think of an example?

Man has put shellfish to many good uses over the years. Not only do many make good eating but the shell has been used for money, to make buttons, jewellery and other ornaments. See if you can find out what the ancient Polynesians used the Triton shell for. After you have collected your shells you may like to amuse yourself making shell jewellery or ornaments.

Happy hunting, and remember,

TAKE CARE.



Sowerby's Volute.

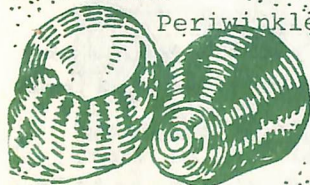
Pheasant Shells



Limpet. Wavy Turbo



Common Periwinkle



Adelaide Periwinkle



Southern Olive



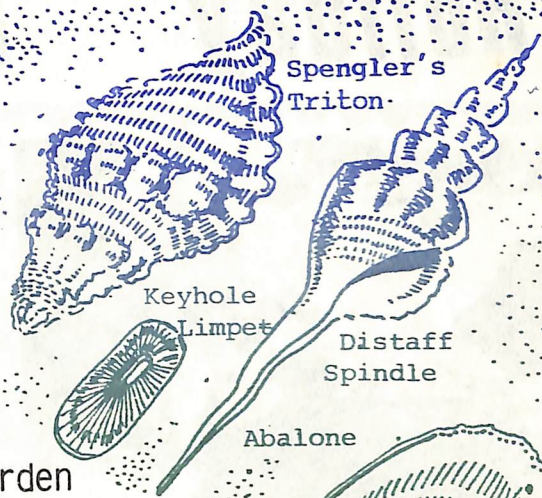
Limpet



Banded Kelp



Top Shell



Spengler's Triton

Keyhole Limpet

Distaff Spindle



Abalone



Cowries

Cowries



Dog

Welk



Limpet

Venus Shell

Corne Shell



Operculum

Holiday Dangers



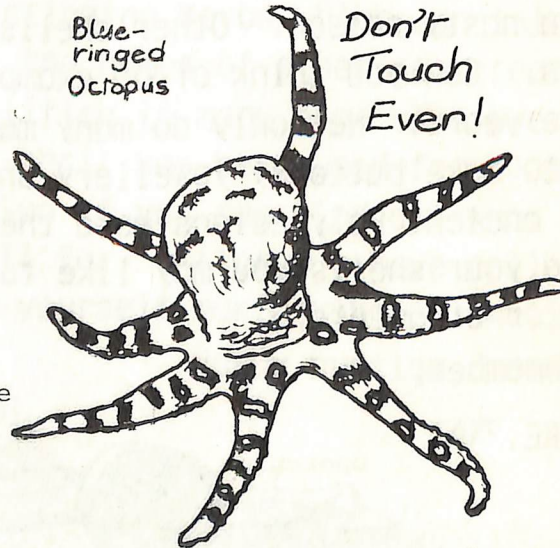
Cone Shell.

The BLUE RINGED OCTOPUS is another colorful mollusc that kills you.

This little eight legged creature is fascinating as it able to change color from a dull, dark blue rings on a brownish, yellow body, to a bright peacock blue. So it is very tempting to touch, especially by little children.

Its poison also paralyses like the cone shell, and so first-aid will also be artificial respiration and IMMEDIATE medical help.

Blue-
ringed
Octopus



THESE CREATURES HAVE APPEARED IN
IN NATURE NOTES THIS YEAR, CAN
YOU IDENTIFY THEM?



1. Heuber's Casemoth. 2. Kowari. 3. Cuckoo.
4. Dugong. 5. Helmeted Honeyeater.
6. Dingoo. 7. Native Cat.

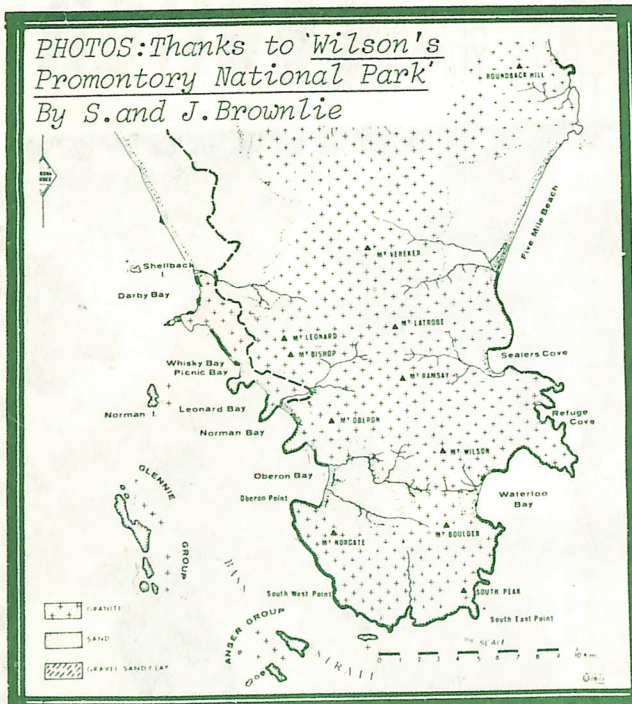
PHOTOS: Thanks to 'Wilson's
Promontory National Park'
By S. and J. Brownlie

Wilson's

One of my most pleasant memories is of a bushwalking and camping holiday spent at the Prom'. It is difficult to forget the masses of Crimson rosellas that land without a second thought on the hands and heads of anyone offering them the sunflower seeds they love. One rosella my sister can never forget made itself far too comfortable on her head with disastrous results! The tame Crimson rosellas are only one of a large number of

attractions at Wilson's Promontory National Park. Victoria's second largest national park, the Prom' is 241 kilometres south-east of Melbourne (only 3 to 4 hours drive). Camping facilities at Tidal River make it a popular weekend holiday spot.

Named by Governor Hunter after Thomas Wilson (a London merchant who traded with Australia), the Prom' began as an area used for sealing and timber felling. The still used lighthouse was built in 1859. Millions of years ago, at the end of the last ice age, the water level in Bass Strait rose by 50 metres. River valleys were drowned and only the higher parts were left



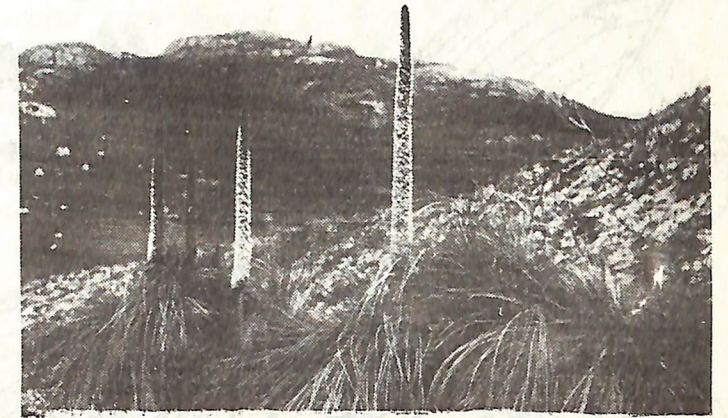
NORMAN BAY-FROM MT. OBERON

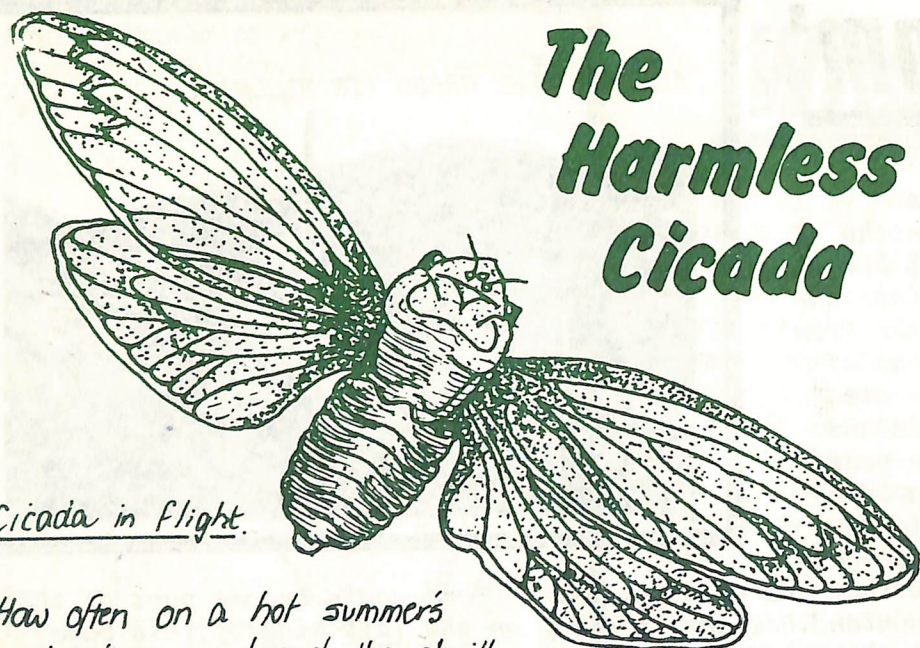
Prom'

BY D. BRYDON

uncovered as 'fingers' in the sea. With all but the high points under water, the Prom' became a group of islands separated from the mainland. Yet over the years, sand blowing between the islands caused sand to gather between them and eventually the Prom' again became part of the Victorian mainland. How does the map on the left side of this page help to tell this story? There are several well marked and easy walks close to the Tidal River area. Although the (3 hours return) Mt. Oberon walk is the most popular with day trippers, the quieter Lilly Pilly Gully track (2 hours return) is my favorite. The signposted track begins on the main road, 2 kilometres on the Melbourne side of Tidal River camping area. At first, the track passes through heathland in which clumps of Brown Stringbark, stunted Peppermint, Hill Banksia and Silver Banksia may be seen. For those of you who aren't sure what a heathland area is, the word heathland describes an area of sandy soil and low growing plants. One plant you are certain to see in this area is the well-named Prickly Tea tree. Common throughout the Prom', this shrub has pointed leaves and white flowers in summer. Also growing along the track is the Prickly Geebung, with its short narrow pointed leaves and golden, curled, tube-like flowers in clusters along the stem. Soon the track passes from heathland into shady forest. Here, ferns and orchids grow in the rotting leaves (humus) of the forest floor. Australian Clematis twists around the trunks and branches of the trees. As the track curves around the lower slopes of Mt. Bishop, the forest becomes much wetter. The giant Bluegum is easy to recognise by the large powdered gum nuts scattered about the bottom of its enormous trunk. The Lilly Pilly, after which the track is named, has eye-catching fleshy pink berries hanging in heavy clusters amongst firm glossy leaves. Some of you may even have these trees in your garden at home—they are quite popular. A small clear stream which eventually joins Tidal River marks the end of the Lilly Pilly track. Before heading back the same way, walk the pretty little loop track. Wilson's Prom' is surely one of the best places for a summer holiday!

AUSTRAL TREE GRASS (IN BLOOM)





The Harmless Cicada

Cicada in flight.

How often on a hot summer's evening have you heard the shrill pitched noise of the cicada. No doubt you have seen the outer shell or dried out skin once it has been shed from the young cicada.

The young cicada (or nymph) lives under-ground for some years living on sugary sap from the roots of plants while it grows. Then one night, as though 'fed-up' with this way of life, it makes its way up to the surface of the soil, climbs onto a branch or twig and waits for its skin to split open.

Did you know that it is only the adult male that sings? The sound is made by a sort of drum on the abdomen. As this drum is moved in and out by the movements of its muscles, the sound is produced.

The Nymph Underground.



The main reason for the singing of the cicada is to attract the female's attention. Cicadas have no ears, but the female cicada feels the vibrations.

The female cicada deposits her eggs in the bark of trees. Once the eggs are hatched, the tiny cicadas (about the size

of a flea) fall to the ground and dig deep into the soil to begin their long lives as nymphs. The cicada is a harmless insect, even though to some the insect may appear somewhat ugly.

Cicadas do not damage plant life nor do they bite or sting. Their enemies are birds and other hungry animals. Next time you see a cicada be aware of its unusual story and its harmless existence. - fossils found in the earth suggest that it has been around for some 400 million years and their form has remained remarkably unchanged.

P.S. If you are in the vicinity where cicadas are in full chorus, you may suddenly have heard them all stop. Old timers have it that this is the spot where they all turn their music to the next page..



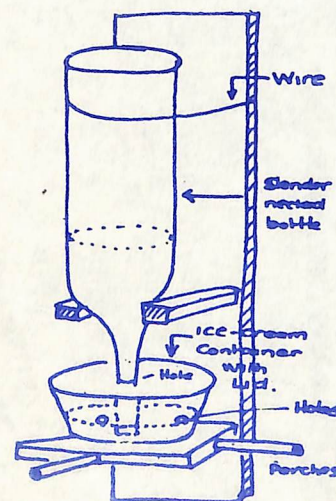
Invite Some Friends To Dinner

Garden enthusiasts are becoming more conscious of the need to attract and keep birdlife in the garden. Here's one idea:

- Build a nectar feeder as shown in the diagram and then keep it filled with bird nectar.

BIRD NECTAR RECIPE.

$\frac{1}{2}$ kg. honey., $\frac{1}{2}$ kg raw sugar, 900ml. water. Mix together in a saucepan over low heat, stirring until all sugar is dissolved. Keep in bottles in the 'frig. Serve in a ratio of two parts of water to one part of nectar.



RUMBLE --- RUMBLE ---



Nature Notes

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