

Vol. 18
No. 4



NATURE NOTES

20c.

EDITORIAL

WHY IS WALLY
LOOKING FOR
CRABS??



Hello there,

Get your gumboots and raincoats ready for action! This month's 'Nature Notes' is looking at the backyard in winter. What on earth could be interesting about the backyard in winter you might ask? The trees have lost their leaves and the flowers that brighten up Spring and Summer have disappeared. Are there any flowers in your garden still in bloom? What are their names?

NEWS FLASH

Attention all bird feeders: Any honey mixture used to feed native birds should not be placed where bees can land on it. This spreads the disease, American foul-brood. This is against the law in Victoria.

INSTEAD: Use a 50/50 mixture of brown sugar and water. Write and tell us here at 'Nature Notes'.

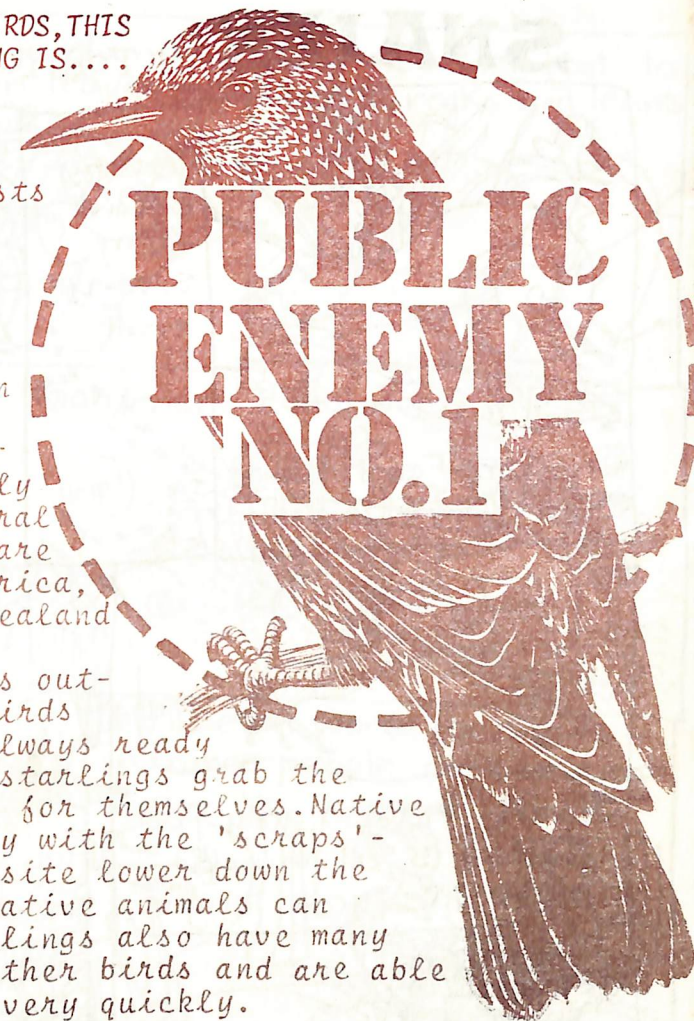
FRONT COVER: Thanks to Mark Richardson. Cheerio for now.

FOR AUSTRALIAN NATIVE BIRDS, THIS INNOCENT LOOKING STARLING IS....

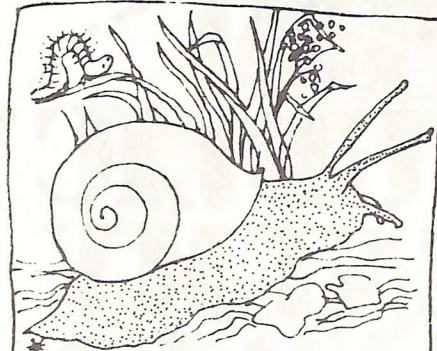
Native birds of Western Australia- watch out! Scientists have been watching the movements of starlings over the years and they're worried. Starlings are the most common wild bird in the world. At one time they were found only in Europe and central Asia but now they are found in North America, South Africa, New Zealand and south-eastern Australia. Starlings out-strip the native birds wherever they go. Always ready and able to fight, starlings grab the best nesting sites for themselves. Native birds are left only with the 'scraps'- perhaps a nesting site lower down the tree where other native animals can find the eggs. Starlings also have many more babies than other birds and are able to crowd them out very quickly.

Unlike some native birds, starlings are able to eat many different foods. How would this help them to spread to new places? The huge and empty Nullabor Plain has so far kept starlings out of Western Australia. In 1972, and several times since then, starlings were reported along the south coast of W.A. as far along as Albany. Most of these were destroyed by farmers. Grapes and grain are two favorite foods of a hungry starling swarm. In California, where the weather is similar to our own, flocks of 50,000 starlings are common. No wonder the Western Australian farmers are so afraid!

Today, people working for the Agricultural Protection Board patrol the Nullabor destroying any wandering starlings they see. Perhaps the native birds of Western Australia can feel safe for a while? PAGE 2

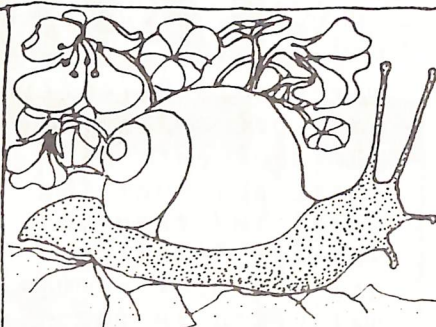


SNAILS ... FOR YOU TO COLOUR IN !

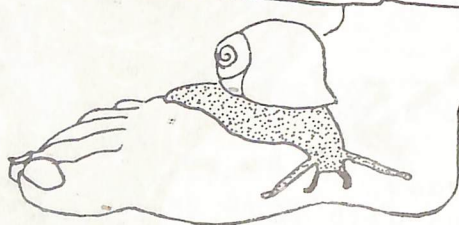


leaving
behind
a
silvery
trail

On damp cool nights
snails like to go out



which protects them
as they travel over
sharp objects.



Snails have a grey "foot"
which is all muscle -
rather like your tongue



They stretch the "foot" out and
shorten it to move along.



The tentacles on the
snail's head are used for
"seeing" their way about.



On the right side
under the shell is a hole
which opens and shuts so
the snail can breathe.

Not all snails live on land. Where else
might you find them ?

Snails like to live in damp
corners and under leaves



They use their 'foot' to
cling to rocks and leaves



The snails' tongue
is covered with
little teeth which
saw pieces off
young leaves, plants
and vegetables.

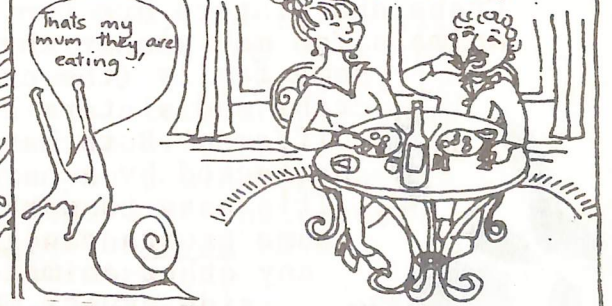
Gardeners call him a **PEST**



Birds like snails
for a quick snack



BUT even worse for snails -
in France people cook and eat
them as a great treat.



SNOOPING ON SNAILS

Watch a snail moving up a bottle. The bottle should have had
some water shaken around inside it first, so that the snail
does not dry out. How would you describe the way a snail moves?
Gently touch the snail's eye (the eyes are on the longer
stalks and the feelers are the shorter stalks). What happens?
What do you think would happen to our eyes if they were on
long stalks like the snail's?

As the snail crawls up the glass, look out for his breathing
hole. It should be on the right side and when open, big enough
to fit the point of a pencil inside it - not that you would do
this, of course! What do you think you should do with the snails
after you have looked at them. Why?

CRABS IN THE BACK GARDEN?

Do you have crabs in your back garden? Unless your house backs right onto the beach, your answer will probably be no. For those of you who are fond of crabs, don't despair. Your gardens are probably full of their cousins-the slaters. If you don't know what slaters are, they're the brownish-grey 'bugs' that scurry away into hiding when you turn over flowerpots and stones in the garden. On winter mornings, too, you will see them running over the garden path or on the foot-paths. They mostly live under rotting wood or plants. Decaying grass clippings and fallen leaves are also a favorite home. Anywhere cool and moist in the garden is a likely place to find slaters.

Crabs and slaters are two very different looking animals. You may wonder why they are part of the same family (the crustacean family). Yet crabs and slaters are not really all that different. Both have soft bodies which are protected by a hard crust on the outside. It's easy to work out how they earned the name crustacean, isn't it? Can you think of any other animals protected by an outside crust? What do humans have to hold them together and to protect their bodies' soft (and very important) parts?

Perhaps the best way to learn about slaters is to catch one and study it through a magnifying glass. This is not easy. Slaters are very small and

are able to move very quickly on their 7 pairs of legs. What shape is the slater's body? How many pieces is the crust divided up into? You will notice that the slater's body is flattened and quite thin. How would this help it move about in the garden? Where are the slater's eyes? What are their shape? How would their shape help the slater?

Studying slaters can be interesting. An ideal place to keep them would be a terrarium - anything from an old glass coffee jar to a disused aquarium, in which plants could grow in an enclosed environment. Fill your container with charcoal, small stones and soil, in that order. Plant ferns or small plants. Choose ones you think may be of some use to the slaters, who eat most sorts of rotting plant matter. Put in a few pieces of half rotted wood for the slaters to hide under. Water the plants sparingly-the glass will produce a very humid environment. What does this mean? Wait until you are sure the plants will live and then put in a few slaters. Supply them with old potatoes and lettuce or cabbage leaves.

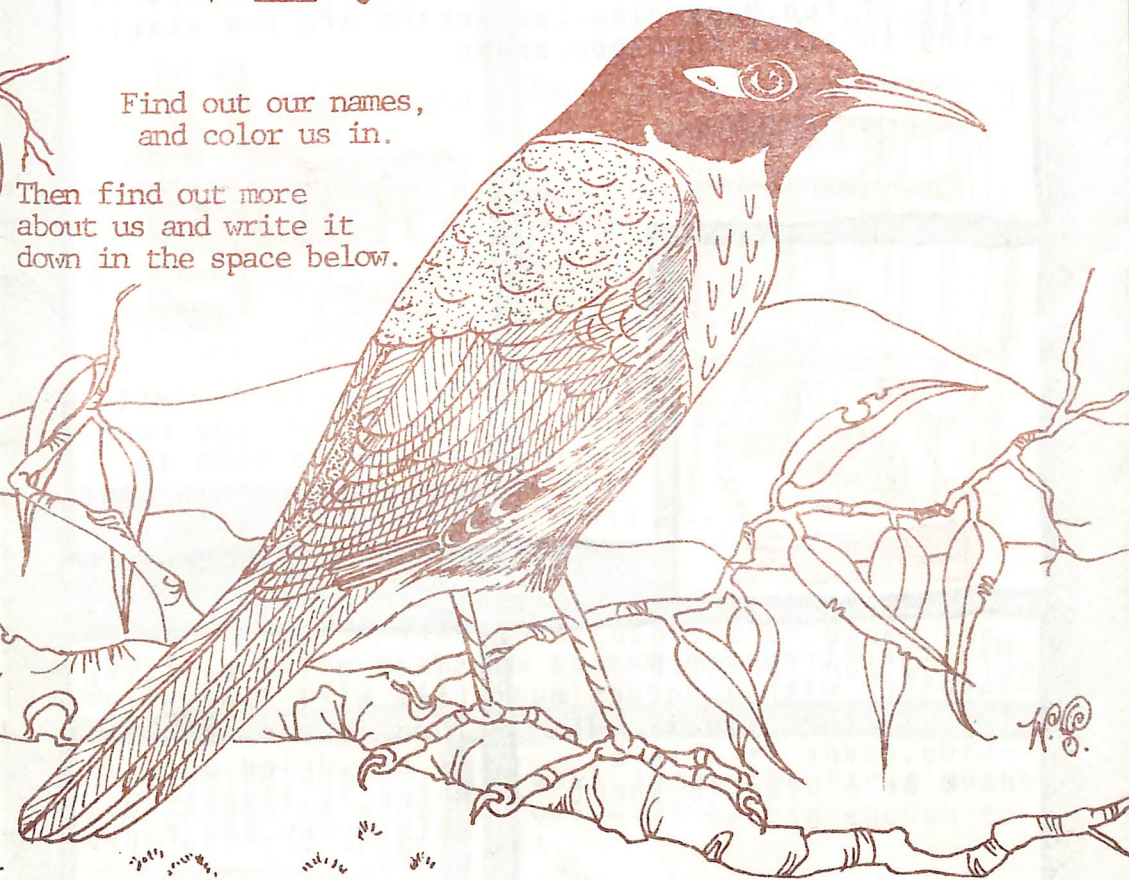
Perhaps you could keep a daily record of their activities. When you have finished with them, return the slaters to where you found them. Slaters are not garden pests, eating only the dead and rotting rubbish in the garden.



WHO ARE WE?

Find out our names,
and color us in.

Then find out more
about us and write it
down in the space below.



I am a _____

7 _____

I am an _____

8 _____

Try growing Mushrooms

In winter, eating a steaming hot steak and mushroom pie is a delicious way to warm up. Growing your own mushrooms is not that difficult and is lots of fun. Many plant nurseries are now starting to stock mushroom spawn.

1 OR 2 WAXED BOXES.



YOU WILL NEED:



3 Buckets of Manure



If you have trouble collecting all the things you need, use your telephone book to find mushroom growers in your area. It's worth the effort!

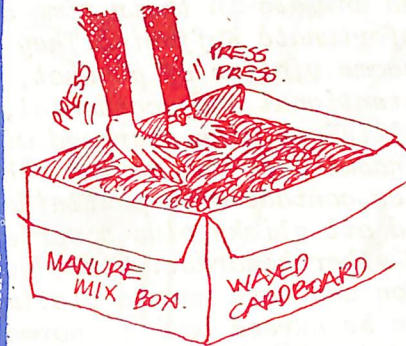
Mix the straw and manure together with a gardening fork. If the pile is outside, cover it with a sack or a plastic sheet.



After a few days, the pile will feel hot. Turn it over and if it has dried out, water it lightly. Do this every day for 3 weeks.



When it is brown and crumbly, the manure mix is ready. Pack it firmly into the boxes so they are almost filled.

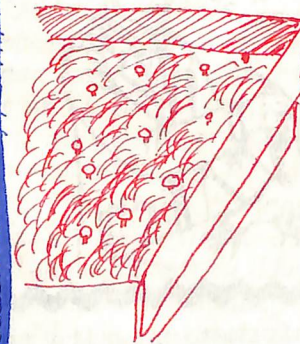


Crumble up the spawn, pressing it firmly into the surface of the manure. Then fill the boxes right up with a layer of garden soil.

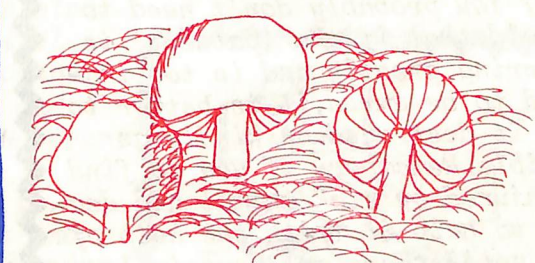


Put the boxes in a sheltered place where there are no draughts-like in a cupboard or under the house. Keep the mushroom beds damp but not wet. Too much water will kill them.

Tiny white dots will begin to appear after 6 weeks.



A week later, the first mushrooms will be big enough to eat.



Many more will keep on appearing for several months.

EMERGENCY?

THE CARE OF SICK INJURED AND ORPHANED NATIVE BIRDS AND ANIMALS



By Jack Wheeler

"We frequently hear it said-let nature take its course but with our wildlife in danger from so many of man's activities, we should be prepared to do our utmost to aid birds and animals in their time of unfortunate suffering. They can become victims of gunshot, intentional and accidental, collisions with overhead wires, windows and fast moving vehicles, contact with pesticides and oil slicks, plus a variety of other hazards... With devotion and care many a victim can be nursed back to normal and in the case of orphans, successfully reared for eventual release in their own environment where they belong!"

W. Roy Wheeler

At least once in your life, most of you will come across a sick or injured animal. Would you know how to help it? For those of you who aren't sure, Mr. Wheeler's book gives some of the answers. Of course, he says, the book is ONLY FOR EMERGENCIES. If it is at all possible, injured animals should be taken to the nearest vet'. What do you think is the reason for this rule? You probably don't need to be told that if the 'patient' is suffering greatly and is too injured to be cured, it is better to have it destroyed as kindly as possible. Remember- if you do find an injured or sick animal and decide to help it (with the help of your vet') there are certain laws to obey. The Fisheries and Wildlife Department in your state must be asked first.

AGE 11



For information: write to Mr. Jack Wheeler, 72 James st., BELMONT, Vic. 3216



Artist: Carol Measures

Why do you think it is against the law for many native animals to be kept without the Fisheries and Wildlife Department's permission?

CARING FOR WINDOW CRASH BIRDS

Isn't this a common problem in many of our schools? We all feel sorry for the poor bird who beats and batters his own body trying to escape from the classroom that traps him. Many of us have been startled by the 'bang' of a bird from outside flying into the window. Ouch! The huge area of glass in most of our classrooms is not the only culprit to blame. Today, many of the sprays used in home gardens and orchards poison the unlucky birds feeding in them. There is nothing you can do

to save the crooked flyer who has eaten his last meal of sprayed caterpillar.

Here's what Mr. Wheeler suggests to do with the bird that has been stunned by crashing into a window. First, examine it thoroughly to see that nothing is broken. This should be done as quickly as possible. Wild animals usually hate being handled. Perhaps the bird will be suffering from shock. What does this mean? How can you tell if an animal or a person is 'in shock'? If this is the case with your bird, place it in a half darkened container (a shoe box would be alright for a sparrow). It is also very important that the bird is kept warm. Luke warm water in a hot water bottle would be a good mattress for the bird's 'hospital bed'. It is also important to keep the 'hospital area' quiet. As the bird recovers, it will become more lively and try to get out of the box. However, do not release it if it is getting close to sunset. It is better to hold it overnight and release it early the next morning. How would this help the bird? What would you do with a bird if it did not appear to be getting better?



'migrants' that

I wonder if you realise that not all the familiar birds you see in and around our suburbs have always been a part of the Australian scene. Many species which are a common sight in our streets and backyards were released in Melbourne in the early 1860's. Many of the new English settlers were homesick and wished to be reminded of their homeland. Probably the most common of these 'migrant' birds is the....



ARTIST: W. Prohasky

HOUSE SPARROW:

In just over a century, he has managed to spread all over Australia except Western Australia, where he is strictly banned because of the damage he does to wheat crops. You can see these birds nesting from September to January.

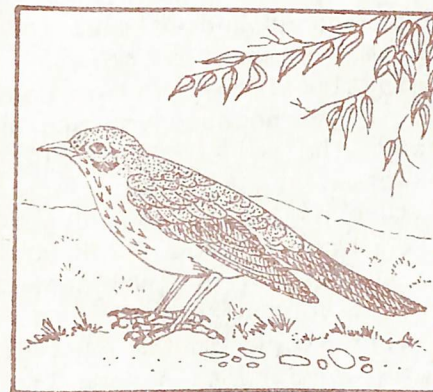
Another migrant is the....

INDIAN MYNAH:

"an I swagger an' scold an' strut an' I swagger" says the Indian Miner in the poem by C.J. Dennis. Although he is a noisy fellow, do not confuse him with the Noisy Miner which is an Australian native bird of the honeyeater family. The Indian Miner is slowly spreading throughout the countryside. He is a great scavenger and I'm sure you've seen him rummaging through your rubbish bins at school. Because of his scavenging habits and because he eats great numbers of insect, gardeners consider him a useful bird. In 1883, a large number of these birds were trapped in Melbourne and released in Queensland to eat beetles and grasshoppers. Unfortunately, the Indian Mynah is using up a 'lion's share' of the hollow tree nesting places while the native birds just miss out.



stayed... INTRODUCED BIRDS, by L. Delacca.

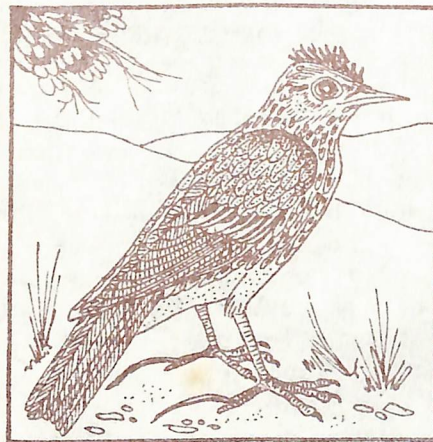


SONG THRUSH

A welcome visitor to my Nunawading garden was the shy but friendly Song Thrush (or as we call him: the Speckled Thrush). Last spring, a pair of these useful birds brought up their family in one of the trees in our garden. The Song Thrush is one of the few birds to eat the garden snail (another of our migrants). We have often watched the Song Thrush as he cracked open the snail's shell by banging it against a rock, then eating the snail with great gusto.

THE BRITISH SKYLARK

On a recent trip to South Australia we often saw a small grey bird hovering above the grassland singing its heart out. This bird is one of the few introduced birds protected by law. He is called the British Skylark. Many poets have written about his song. He is difficult to see when on the ground but easy to spot when he rises, often vertically into the air.



I have mentioned only a few of our many introduced birds. Make up a list including all the others and their country of origin. Some have become pests in many areas (eg. the Starling and the Blackbird). See if you can discover why. If you can find out their feeding habits this may help you. Finally, watch out for these birds and work out by observation whether you feel it was a good idea to bring them to our shores.

EDITOR: Birds unfortunately were not the only migrants brought to Australia by the early settlers. Thanks to their home-sickness we are stuck for good with bush wreckers like the rabbit and the blackberry. Do you know of any other introduced animals or plants that became pests - sadly, there are countless of them busy spoiling the Australian bush.

You can collect earthworms either by digging for them or by gathering them at night after a warm, soaking rain, when they will be found on the surface of the ground. Collect the worms in a jar or tin containing a small amount of moist leaves or grass. Worms can be kept in almost any kind of container. A see-through one would be best because you are able to watch the worms tunnelling through the soil. A three litre container can hold up to a dozen worms.

Inside the container put a mixture of fine sand and good loamy topsoil. Avoid hard soils like clay that you think would be hard to burrow through. Keep the soil moist but not soaked. Keep your worms in the coolest part of your classroom. If the worms become too hot and dry they will die. If the weather is warm, try covering the container with damp rags to keep it cool. Keep the container in a dark place. One way to keep out the light is to tape black paper or cardboard around the container. Use a dim light when you watch the worms. DIRECT SUN-LIGHT WILL KILL THEM.

Find out which kind of leaves your earthworms prefer to eat. Take two fresh leaves from different kinds of trees. Wet them and put them on top of the soil in the earthworms' container. After a week in a cool, dark place, check which leaves remain. Try feeding your worms different kinds of vegetable leaves. Try celery leaves, carrot tops, lettuce, cabbage or any other leafy greens.

