ESCAPING THE FLAMES

One of the most common claims by proponents of the aerial incendary programme, in their frenzied efforts to demolish any argument that is raised against them, is that these burns, being so slow and of such low intensity, allow our native fauna to escape and avoid a death by way of the effects of the fire. This, oddly enough, seems to satisfy those raising the question. However, this claim presented as fact, I feel, is mostly a false appraisal of the situation. Are there more ways of killing an animal than by incineration?

Let us take two examples of mammals and their environments. One being Rattus lutreolus - the eastern swamp rat found in the marshy Inga Creek hanging swamp, the other Antechinus stuarti - Stuart's marsupial mouse found in the Portal Waterhole area containing callistemon and Banksia thickets. These are examples of our forgotten wildlife - they are not cuddly. These are the mammals that burning will most affect.

Inga Creek swamp is a large hanging swamp. When fired, it burns remarkably well - having been in the midst of such a fire, I speak from experience. The dominant plant type is the tussock grasses around which the life of Rattus lutreolus revolves to a great extent. The whole swamp is isolated by dry schlerophyll forests from the similar but smaller swamps of the region.

Isolation from similar environments is not the situation for the Antechinus stuarti at Portal Waterhole. Acres of the land surrounding Portal is "Antechinus country" but not as rich as the Portal Waterhole. This land, like those other swamps in the Inga area, has populations of the same species in balance with the sources available. Moist conditions, banks of dry grasses and shrub thickets give the conditions that has raised the Antechinus population to the highest we have encountered in our mammal survey.

So we find that cover - the thickets of Portal and the dense swamp grasses of Inga - to a large extent affects population size. Thus when we have trapped in areas of Portal and Inga with little cover, we have caught few to no animals. This cover of these mammals' environments is, to the control burner, "fuel". Fuel reduction and hazard reduction - these are the terms of the control burner. Control burning attempts to reduce and destroy fuel or cover - thus destroying the environment of those mammals we have looked at.

Our areas are burnt - let us look at the result. Cover and food supply are destroyed. Insect populations dependent upon grasses drop, vegetation food sources are destroyed. Open to predators and subject to a drop in food supply, the population of Antechinus and Rattus must be displaced.

We may assume that the population of a section of land is only as high as the supply of resources allows. Thus an increase in population of animals causes a drop in resources, as competition increases, this is followed by a drop in population.

The displaced Antechinus could possibly be absorbed in the surrounding environment to a point. But the swamp rat must cross inhospitable environment to reach smaller swamps that could never hold the displaced populations. When our authorities talk of burns of hundreds and thousands of acres, the effect is magnified. (Chequerboard burning is no exception). The results of increased population have been mentioned - ultimately, the population drops. They didn't even burn.

Ultimately, the population will rise. The burnt areas will be recolonised. In a wildfire, many animals would die - fewer would be displaced - the end result in a number of cases would be the same. But I am dubious when figures of controlled burns every 5 years are mentioned. Will cover be built up to a satisfactory level - will recolonisation be complete - will such a burning cause a decline in mammal populations relying on this cover. These are questions to be answered. But I would say that, in my opinion, the fact that animals escape the flames <u>does not</u> ensure their survival butcauses population chaos. The control burning argument in this case is not valid.

- Michael Smithson.

FIELD TRIP REPORT

On Sunday, 22nd October, the first field trip since the Annual General Meeting was to Muogamarra Nature Reserve. The roll up of members was gratifying considering the short notice and the previous night's activities (the annual Nature Conservation Dinner). Members walked over the Djara Nature Trail, the northern end of the Park and the National Park's animal enclosure.

The highlight of the day was the discovery of a large area of Aboriginal rock carvings. These included several fine examples of fish, spirit figures, and one kangaroo.

- David Cook

Kangaroo Island

Kangaroo Island is a very large island, approximately 90 miles long and 20 miles wide, situated 8 miles from the tip of Cape Jervis, South Australia. The island is reached by flight from Adelaide, boat from Cape Jervis or by boat from Port Adelaide (a $6\frac{1}{2}$ hour journey).

The island was first settled by sealers and their Tasmanian aboriginal wives and servants and they set about exterminating everything that moved. The Kangaroo Island emu disappeared at this time, large pelican breeding grounds were diminished and the following figures should give some idea of the slaughter of seals, kangaroos and wallabies that occurred:

Seal Skins	Wallaby and Kangaroo Skins
5,000 - 1810	1,300 - 1831
2,500 - 1812	10,000 on the "Elizabeth" 1832
6,740 - 1814	2,500 - 1829
2,000 - 1816	1,500 - 1844
4,250 - 1817	
5,014 - 1818	

The seal skin trade continued until numbers were so reduced that it became unprofitable, while the slaughter of kangaroos continued until the late 1800's.

The figures quoted above are in many cases from the tally sheets of merchant vessels departing from Kangaroo Island and may not reflect the total for that year. In 1905, E. H. Hallack wrote - "the kangaroo, which in the days of Flinders was so abundant, was until recently in danger of total extermination. Thanks, however, to Prof. Stirling and others, it is now safe".

The Tammar Wallaby (Thylogale eugenii) was not protected at that time.

In 1884, Kangaroo Island came to the fore of world news in a startling way. Dr. W. Haacke (Curator of Adelaide Museum) found a damaged egg in the pouch of an echidna, thus providing the first conclusive evidence of the echidna's egg-laying habit.

Today, the outlook of the natural inhabitants appears to be rosier and more secure. Not only has an area approximately 1/5th of the area of the island been declared a reserve, but the attitude of the present human inhabitants is conservation orientated. In the reserve can be found large numbers of wallabies, kangaroos and Cape Barren Geese together with introduced animals such as emus and koalas. The bird and insect life has also been added to by the introduction of mainland species. Wedge-tailed Eagles are not an uncommon sight, they are most often seen feeding at the roadside on the animal victims of modern day transport.

Prior to our trip to Kangaroo Island, we spent a little time at the library gleaning information from the few books that are to be found referring to Kangaroo Island. From this and information we gained from Michael Smithson, we rapidly developed a fair yearning to be there and see it at first hand. You can't imagine our surprise and delight when, as we drove over the last cattle grid into Flinders Chase Nature Reserve, our headlights picked out numbers of Cape Barren Geese, Tammar Wallabies and a few Sooty Kangaroos (Macropus fuluginosus). We were to stay in the original homestead of the old Rocky River Station (now the reserve) and as we went to sleep we were surrounded by the pig-like sounds of the nesting geese. I distinctly remember picking out the call of a Mopoke in the tree outside.

The large, well-grassed area surrounding the homestead was a constant source of delight to us during our stay. At night, it was virtually alive, during the day it was sure to contain a few Cape Barrens and Sootys, house calling emus, flitter-flat Scissor Grinders, Kestrels and carolling Magpies. We would sit in the car and eat our tea as we watched the behaviour of the Geese and the Sootys. The Geese were a bit territorial minded and would chase each other, often landing side by side and commencing to feed again before returning to where it all started from. Most of the does were carrying sizeable joeys, often with the previous offspring still tagging along at foot and the joeys were a constant source of amusement. One joey hopped about sparring at all of the other members of the mob (37 in all) until one sizeable oldy lost his temper and swiped him one. He retired to warmer regions by somersaulting into mother's pouch.

At the rear of the homestead was an underground water tank and across the road from it was a pair of nesting Cape Barrens who had made their nest at the base of a sizeable gum. This gum was on the side of a hill and it was from behind this our first Sooty visitor came. He shot up to me and applied the brakes when he was about 18 inches away, leaving me on the back-pedal at this stage, never having been approached by an uncaged animal in this manner. A couple of biscuits later and we had won a friend who never ceased to delight us.

In the late afternoon, the emus would come and inspect us. Frightening the life out of us the first time, we saw one swallow a whole Sao sideways - I was afraid the ranger would end up throwing us out for killing one of his emus.

If the editor accepts this for publication, perhaps we can continue later and describe the coastal scenery and our meetings with the aquatic creatures on the island.

Carol and David Cook.

PRESIDENT'S REPORT 1972

This year has been an unfortunate one for the Society. At the February meeting, Keith King announced his resignation as president as he was leaving the district. Don Perrin also left at about the same time so we lost the services of two of our most useful members. For the rest of the year, we have been functioning unfortunately, but unavoidably, with an absentee president. A farewell barbeque at Euroka was held for Keith, when he was presented with a book on Australian butterflies to remember the Society by. The occasion should be well remembered by all who were there.

We have heard three very interesting talks during the year, Mr. Ormsby on snakes and lizards, Mr. Pat Lee on the Arctic and Antarctic regions, and Mr. Tom Grant on kangaroo behaviour.

The nature trail proposal for the National Park Visitors' Centre at Glenbrook was favourably received by National Parks and Wildlife Service and permission was granted to build it although work has not started yet.

The new constitution was passed at the July meeting at a marathon meeting lasting into the small hours.

At the August meeting, a policy on the development of the escarpment was decided on. The credit for this very impressive and professional-looking document must go to our Vice-president, Michael Smithson.

During the year, we also joined Zero Population Growth and offered our support to the groups opposing the International Airport proposal for Richmond.

The trapping programme has continued intermittently but successfully through the year and a very interesting spotlighting run was held in Blue Gum Creek.

Excursions, on the other hand, were noticable by their absence. Only two were held, one fairly well attended to Long Neck Lagoon, and the other, attendance three, to various waterfowl habitats.

In conclusion, I would like to point out that while these are all useful activities, we seem to be approaching a crisis in the Society. Membership has hardly risen during the year. We have gained only one new member, in fact active membership has dropped. I don't know how long we can remain functional at our present rate of active membership, but I suspect not very long. Most of us (and I include myself in this category) could have worked harder for the Society during the past year. If we work more consistently in the coming year, maybe the next president's report will end on a more optimistic note.