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Bulletin
of
Lower Blue Mountains Wildlife Conservation Society

SOCIETY ACTIVITIES

CENSUS of WILD LIFE: (continuing activity)

A census form is available from the Secretary if you have not already obtained one.

This form lays out areas of habitat and various other details that are required to form a complete survey of our area.

The purpose of this census is : Scientific - to determine what wild life exists at the present time so that it can be calculated in the future years the increase or decrease of individual species; - Educational - to create an interest among the members of the natural history around us.

It is necessary that this census be made so we can follow through the functions of conservation and the protection of indigenous flora and fauna.

LYREBIRD SANCTUARY: The society has determined to continue in its efforts to have the areas of Vacant Crown Land in the Yellow Rock area declared as a sanctuary and study area for the Lyrebird.

Much more work is needed to determine populations and habit in this area and to such end any information gathered by members would be extremely useful. For further information contact Mr. F.Martin of Singlas Ridge Road North Springwood.

Members of the Society investigated the area off the Long Angle Gully Trail. This was an area of wet sclerophyl forest along a creek that led back to Singlas Ridge Road.

Some evidence of the Lyrebird was found and the area seemed of the type that could lead to a form of management that could increase the number of the species.

Plenty of audible evidence is available that the bird habits the area but it was decided that much more investigation would be required before we had a case to place before the Minister.

THIS SOCIETY has been constituted to further the aims of Conservation and it would be pleased to receive any information on any aspect of wildlife (flora and Fauna) that we could investigate or help in any way.

If you have any information that you consider would be of value to us, or have any specific undertaking that you would like us to help with, please drop a note to the Secretary Mr. G.Croghan, 3 Gwen Crescent Warrimoo.

BIRD OF THE MONTHThe Lyrebird *Menura novae-hollandiae*
Menura alberti

Menura - (large tail-greek) of New Holland

MENURA novae-hollandiae

DISTRIBUTION: South-eastern Australia, from Stanthorpe in southern Queensland to Victoria.

NEST: Bulky structure of twigs sticks and fern with entrance at the side - usually located on rocky ledges or in the end of hollow logs, the top of Tree Fern or between the trunks of small trees.

EGG: Light stone grey to purplish brown, regularly blotched with deeper tones. Breeding season May to July. Young leaves the nest about September.

MENURA alberti

Similar to the Lyretail *Menura* but restricted to an area in the northeast of N.S.W. from the Macpherson Ranges to the Richmond River.

NOTES. These two Australian birds are the survivors of a very ancient race of birds, this is indicated by certain small bones around the eyes that are only found in a few other species of birds all descended from ancient types.

This bird discovered in the bush by a party from Parramatta in 1798 it was in danger of extinction by the ^{end} of the 19th century. It was much prized as a table bird and also for its magnificent tail plumage which sold for as much as five shillings in those days.

The haunt of the Lyrebird is in the dense palm brushes and fern gullies of rain forest areas and wet sclerophyll forests where they feed on the small crustacians and grubs to be found in the forest litter.

One bird may form a number of mounds in its area or territory of which all are used, one however being a favourite dancing place.

The main enemy of the bird these days is the fox and the feral cat, they seem to avoid bush fires in the main probably by their agility.

The bird is totally protected by law and it is even an offence to have a set of tail plumes in your possession.

(Refer to Cayley's "What Bird is That" - Barrett's "Australian Animal Book" and others)

THE FEATHER.

Feathers are the exclusive product of birds, there have been some imitations - the tail of the Sugar Glider, the plumes of some crustaceans - the true feather is of complex detailed structure with a multiplicity of functions.

A typical feather consists of a midrib (rachis) with a large number of parallel filaments on each side forming vanes. These filaments are in turn 'feathered' with tiny barbules which in turn carry a series of hooks which engage with neighbouring barbules not only of their own filament but those of the adjoining filament. When the hooks are so engaged the whole feather is interlocked to form a nearly airtight surface of amazing strength and lightness.

The complicated structure of the feather makes it almost immune to damage - with rough handling the tiny barbules disengage without breaking and automatically reengage when preened. Thus the birds have an invisible mending service and quick repair with all ordinary accidents.

The feather performs at least four functions - the two most obvious being to provide a covering for the body and to provide efficient wing and tail surfaces for flight, these being distinguished as contour feathers and flight feathers respectively.

In addition to the above there are the down feathers which are very important in maintaining the warmth of the body and powder down, a feather that breaks up into a powder and is used by the bird like fullers earth for the drycleaning of the plumage generally.

The structure of the down feather is much finer and the barbules lack the little hooks so the whole can be fluffed up into a mass whose function is to entrap air. Fluffing of the down is controlled by the internal temperature of the body, this is why birds look plumper in the cold weather, and in the heat they press the feathers close to the body to reduce the insulating layer.

Some birds, notably the ducks, moult much of their down during nesting time, the moulted down is used to make the nest snug and warm. The Eider Duck is the most famous for this, true eiderdown giving the maximum heat insulation for the least weight for human sleepers. The bird has been almost exterminated but to some people this does not seem to matter. The birds pay the penalty for producing something more efficient than man can make.

FILM NIGHT.

At the February meeting of the Society three films were shown which were both entertaining and informative. The films were projected by Mr. Garrick who provided the projector and gave of his valuable time to help us make this an enjoyable night.

The films shown were all of a natural history theme and showed that learning could be fun.

"The Web of Life" a series put out by the Britannica led us through the basic formation of a habited area from bare rock and the production of soil to a climax forested community. The film emphasised the interdependence of all living things on each other, underlining the axiom of the survival of the fittest and the natural control of animal populations by predation and the availability of the feed supply.

"Natures Half Acre" by Disney needs no amplification. This is one of the classics of film land both in its execution and its subject matter. This film would stir even the most hard to the wonders and beauty of nature.

"Menura" a tale of the Superb Lyrebird was a film of the activities of that bird through all its life history. Some beautiful sequences of the nest care of the fledgeling were shown. This was a film the like of which further showings would be viewed with continuous enjoyment.

Our thanks go to Mr. Croghan for the organising of this night - it was such a success that we are considering another night of films soon.

JANUARY - MARCH PROJECT.

This study involves the reptiles of the area as it is at this time that they are most active.

Information is required on the breeding habits, number and survival rate of young, occurrence of species, any real life stories of interest.

For our records we need any photographs, slides or prints, newspaper or magazine articles, any records associated with these animals.

The project covers all types of reptiles - snakes, lizards frogs, tortoises etc.

Please submit any papers etc. to Mr. Paish Lee Road North Springwood or contact same for further information.

CAMP FIRES OF THE PAST.

The oldest camp fire yet found by scientists in Australia was discovered to have been lit about 24350 B.C.

Remains of this ancient cooking fire were located near Lake Menindee. It is expected that similar relics will be found during the present drought when old sand ridges will begin to move.

What a story these campfires could tell of the peoples who built them and of the great changes that have taken place. During that time we are told, there were periods when the area was much more like desert, and other periods when heavier forests grew.

Other very old cook fires have been unearthed in the Nullarbor Caves (16350 B.C.), Capertee (9700 B.C.) and the Royal National Park at Curracorang (5500 B.C.)

So next time you are camping you may be building your fire over a camp site that is four times as old as the pyramids of Egypt.

(Extract from the Junior Tree Warden)

Mr. Udall, Secretary of the Interior of the U.S.A. who was talking about America - but his remarks could be applied to Australia too. He referred to what he called "the quite crisis"

America stands today poised on the pinnacle of wealth and power, yet we live in a land of vanishing beauty, of an overall environment that is daily diminished by pollution, noise and blight - what can we do about this blight that is spreading over our country side as a result of modern development.

Landscape preservation is only one facet of the whole complex business of Conservation - it is as much a form of planning for the future as saving the past. Now and then we are able to say 'Here's a magnificent piece of scenery - let's save it for all time' - this we must do. But we must do far more.

We do not want a country consisting of a few "beauty spots" and nature reserves separated by great stretches of devastated countryside and linked by featureless highways.

SATIN BOWER BIRDS.

Some notes and impressions from a lecture by Mrs. Vellenger.

Under the direction of the C.S.I.R.O. a program of banding the Satin Bower Bird has been undertaken and continued observations of the banded birds is underway. As well as the obvious necessity of obtaining information of our native fauna this project is aimed at determining the age of the males when they obtain thier blue plumage, the nesting and feeding habits and the range of the birds.

To band the birds a simple trap is made with a catching box at the end. The trap is of wire netting with food placed in it with a simple drop stick flap operated by a string. The birds are attracted to the vicinity of the trap by food trays placed around the area of the trap. The birds are not effected by the trapping and are unharmed by the handling of experts such as the Vallengers. Banded birds have been repeatedly recaptured which shows they are not harmed or fearful of the contraption.

When captured, each bird is banded using a numbered tag (aluminium) and two coloured bands of plastic. By various combinations of six different colours and the metal bands a large number of variations can be obtained. Over 300 birds have been banded in the last two years and each individual has its own colour sequence so that a bird can be recognised without capture and reading the numbered tag. If any banded birds are seen, the location of the bands should be noted (i.e. left leg black on white; right leg metal band) and the information to the location of the bird and its actions should be contacted to Mrs. Vellenger, Coniston Road Leura, or the secretary of this organization.

As each bird is captured details of its weight, colour of eyes and beak, colour of gape, condition of molt and general physical condition and other relevant information is noted. All these details are noted in a banding book and each individual is noted on a card. Subsequent sightings and physical condition is entered on each individuals card, so in time a history of each birds habits travels, age and physical condition is obtained.

The job of conducting a banding program is arduous, tedious and painstaking and Mrs. Vellenger is to be congratulated on undertaking such a worthwhile job.

BLUE MOUNTAIN TREES

by Don Perrin

No. 1 of a Series in which we spotlight for you a tree from that beckoning wilderness, the Blue Mountains Bush.

ANGOPHERA costata;

Probably the most talked about tree on the Blue Mountains and probably the tree most often spared by the axeman, is the smooth-barked Angophora. Despite one of its common names "Sydney Red Gum" it is not a Eucalypt although very closely related. It is however commonly taken for a Eucalypt and is even referred to in some council and surveyors maps as 'gum' to distinguish it from neighbouring stringybarks, bloodwoods etc.

HOW TO RECOGNISE THE ANGOPHORA COSTATA:

Angophora costata is a smooth barked, ultimately large tree. In summer the bark peels in irregular oval pieces leaving a dimpled effect. The newly disclosed bark is bright orange-brown or pink-brown but changes in Autumn and Winter to a salmon-pink or leaden grey brown.

The foliage is distinctly greenish contrasting with the grey-green of most Eucalypts.

Having singled out a tree that you suspect is an Angophora costata examine the leaves, leaves of Angophora are always oppositely arranged on the stem. If the leaves confound you by appearing alternate as in Eucalypts make a closer inspection and you may find that some leaves have broken away from their opposite partners.

To be sure of your identification obtain some 'nuts' from the tree and you should discover that these are ribbed.

The word Angophora refers to the vessel shaped fruit - the word costata refers to the ribbed nature of the fruit.

The essential botanical difference between Eucalypts and Angophora: the Eucalyptus bud has a cap (operculum) and the flower has no petals - The Angophora has no cap and the flower has petals.

NATURAL REGENERATION: You will often discover seedlings under this tree. For the first few weeks of life they appear as two kidney-shaped leaves, bright green and each about the size of a five cent piece. Marked and spared from the lawn mower and the cultivator these will quickly grow into delightful saplings.

PROPAGATION: Without regeneration it is all too evident that the tree will gradually disappear from our parks and gardens. It would be gross neglect to allow such a distinctive element of our Blue Mountains environment to be wiped out - in default of a little effort

SEED SOWING: Collect brown coloured fruit from the tree; place in a box or paper bag in a light sunny position. Seeds will soon emerge, sow these seeds in the usual way.

THE TREES PRAYER

Ye who would pass by
and raise your hand against me
Harken
ere you harm me.

I am the heat of your hearth
on cold winters night,
The friendly shade
screening you from the summer sun,
And my fruits are refreshing draughts
quenching your thirst as you journey on.

I am the beam that holds your house,
the board of your table,
the bed on which you lie
and the timber that builds your boat.

I am the handle of your hoe,
the door of your home,
the wood of your cradle,
and the shell of your coffin.
I am the bread of kindness
and the flower of beauty.

Ye who pass by,
listen to my prayer -
'Harm me not;
I am a Tree'

Contribution of the Tree of The Month by D. Perrin

President:
H.L. Paish
32 Lee Road
NORTH SPRINGWOOD
phone 511545

Secretary:
G. Croghan
3 Gwen Crescent
WARRIMOO
phone 402

Treasurer:
P. Gregory
Grose Road
FAULCONBRIDGE
phone 511684

