



TWO TINY TREASURES

These tiny jewels were photographed at Pelican Point in early July. They are female (top) and male Variegated Fairy-wren (*Malurus lamberti*).

Only 14–15cm long from beak tip to tail tip and weighing a miniscule 6–11grams, the species is notable for its marked sexual dimorphism, males adopting a highly visible breeding plumage of brilliant iridescent blue and chestnut contrasting with black and grey-brown.

It is a very shy bird found in low, often prickly and ‘messy’ scrubland with plenty of vegetation providing dense cover. It feeds on insects and a small amount of seeds around the base of small shrubs, and seldom strays into the open. Some food may be found among the bark and foliage of short trees and grasses.

The Variegated Fairy-wren is a cooperative breeding species, with small groups of birds maintaining and defending small territories year-round. Their nest is an oval-shaped dome, constructed of grasses, and placed in a low shrub. The female alone constructs the nest and incubates the eggs, but is assisted by other group members in feeding the chicks. Groups consist of a socially monogamous pair with several helper birds who assist in raising the young.

Pelican Point bushland is believed to be the most southern reach of this species in Western Australia.



Photographs courtesy T Graham-Taylor

ESTUARY-SENSITIVE PLANNING PLEASE!

From *One Hundred and Fifty Years*
by Jack Davis

*I walked slowly along the river.
Old iron, broken concrete, rusted cans
scattered stark along the shore,
plastic strewn by man and tide
littered loudly mute on sparse growth
struggling to survive.
A flock of gulls quarrelled over debris,
a lone shag looked hopefully down at turgid water
and juggernauts of steel and stone made jigsaw
patterns against the city sky.*

Davis, J (1988) John Pat and Other Poems
DENT, Melbourne 1988

Most of us are aware of the deep cultural and spiritual connection between the Swan River and the Aboriginal community over many thousands of years.

Many of us have admired AB Webb’s delicate woodcut prints and watercolours of Estuary life, and appreciated George Seddon’s perspectives on the fragile Swan River Plain through *A Sense of Place* and *Swan River Landscapes*. Many have agreed with travel-writer Nick Burningham’s description of the River as ‘the soul of the city’, and empathised when columnist and author Robert Drewe has fondly described the River’s lasting impressions on him.

The community celebrated when in 2004 the Gallop government awarded it the status of Western Australia’s first ‘heritage icon’: *‘The Swan and Canning rivers are environmental, cultural and historic icons - they are the crowning glory of our beautiful city’*.

Though often poorly treated over many years, the Swan River remains much-loved - and thousands of people from across Perth actively engage in river-care tasks to support its ecological health and mitigate past policy or planning mistakes.

Thirty years on from Jack Davis’s lament, **we trust the current government will not put at risk a significant part of the little that is left of the fragile natural values of the Swan River Estuary** for a private wave park development totally unsympathetic to its proposed location - on the foreshore of Alfred Cove.

WHAT ABOUT ME ?

In an effort to draw attention to the inappropriateness of a proposed wave park development on the banks of the Swan Estuary Marine Park at Alfred Cove, SERAG has encouraged a rather shy but impressive local identity to speak on behalf of the rich diversity of birdlife and other native fauna whose habitat is at risk.

Yoondoordo has agreed to drop in to a few special functions. She will be generally accompanied by some of her supporters, singing the refrain from *What About Me* (written by Garry Frost and Frances Swan and made popular by Shannon Noll):

*What about me, it isn't fair
I've had enough now I want my share
Can't you see? I want to live!
But you just take more than you give.*

Yoondoordo, and the landscape on which she and other native wildlife depend, deserve far more consideration in planning decisions than they usually get.



Yoondoordo's friend Ossie
Photograph courtesy I Nielsen

LITTERED LINE KILLS BEAUTIFUL RIVER DOLPHIN

Discarded fishing line has once again impacted tragically on our Estuary wildlife - this time causing the death of an adult female river dolphin and placing at severe risk her dependent calf.

While DBCA staff successfully freed the mother and calf from some of their massive entanglement, unfortunately much of the fishing line and plastic litter was not able to be removed from *Highnitch's* flukes.

Highnitch will have required more than 15 kg of fish a day to feed herself and to suckle her young, so her inability to swim freely and effectively because of the entanglement has meant a long, painful and distressing death - as is likely to be the case for her calf, who is too young to fend for itself.

She washed up on the shoreline just north of the long Como Jetty, next to the Freeway. As she quite often frequented Deep Water Point and Matilda Bay, it was no surprise that she was found between the Canning and Narrows bridges.

The effect on the small population of around 20 resident river dolphin will be great. Dolphins live for 35 to 40 years. *Highnitch* was 17 years old. Females are between 10 to 12 years old before they first calve, and thereafter calve only once every four years, with gestation periods of twelve months. A calf needs to stay with its mother for about 3 to 5 years.

If you see the poor calf **please call the Wildcare Helpline on 94749055.**

Given the totally avoidable horror of *Highnitch's* death, we urge all fishers and anglers to dispose of their fishing lines and nets and related waste more responsibly and carefully.



Line & plastic entanglement on the deceased mammal's flukes
Photograph courtesy DBCA

THIS IS WHAT 10.5 KG OF LITTER LOOKS LIKE

Our August litter collection at Milyu totalled 10.5 kilos - the lightest amount we have collected so far this year in our monthly cleanups.

This is what the pile looked like dumped on a large tarpaulin for sorting.

From this mass only about half dozen plastic bottles, two glass bottles and four aluminium cans were recyclable. The rest was comprised mainly of small bits of hard plastic, polystyrene, bait bags and other plastic bags and caps, chocolate wrappers, straws, cigarette butts and various lengths of rope and fishing line. It completely filled a large *Sulo* bin.

In June our team collected over thirty-two kilos of rubbish in the two-hour session! The usual amount collected is between twelve and sixteen kilos.



Photograph courtesy C O'Neill

IN THE LAGOON AT PELICAN POINT



The lagoon at Pelican Point is one of the few areas of the threatened ecological community of coastal saltmarsh remaining in the Swan River Estuary. Relatively protected and rich in benthic organisms, it provides a wonderful nesting, resting and feeding habitat for many bird species.

These photographs of a foraging Yellow-billed Spoonbill (*Platalea flavipes*) - in breeding plumage - were taken at the lagoon in early August.

This large water bird feeds on aquatic insects and their larvae, using its bill to sweep shallow waters for prey. The spatulate bill has many vibration detectors, called papillae, on the inside of the spoon. These allow the bird to feel for prey items even in murky water - and by day or night.

It often nests in colonies. Nests are built in high forks of trees over water, or in among reed beds, forming a shallow, unlined platform of sticks, rushes and reeds. The male collects the nest materials while the female builds, and both sexes share incubation and care of the young.

During the breeding season, facial skin is outlined in black, lacy outer wing plumes are tipped black and there are long hackles on their upper breast.

Photographs courtesy T Graham-Taylor



THE PROTECTIVE ROLE OF COASTAL SALT MARSHES

The importance of the Estuary's riparian vegetation in providing a protective buffer is clearly shown in this photograph, taken on a winter's day when a high tide and stormy weather combined with force.

Where you see the sedges of the coastal saltmarsh community forming a margin between land and the Estuary, two processes are at work: *wave attenuation* and *shoreline stabilization*.

Wave attenuation is the reduction in wave energy or wave height that occurs when a wave passes through marsh vegetation. In this case, the energy of the waves and the tide is being weakened through frictional drag caused by the vegetation, and by bottom friction in what is a shallow water area.

Shoreline stabilization describes the processes by which salt marsh vegetation encourages sediment deposition, increases marsh elevations through below ground production, and stabilizes marsh sediments.

These processes help maintain shorelines and reduce erosion.

Where there is an insufficient vegetation buffer left to protect any nearby infrastructure, walling or revetments are often constructed - to the great detriment of natural environmental values.

When waves hit hard barriers such as revetments and river walls, scouring of the soil substrate occurs, destroying habitat for the benthic flora and fauna that are important as food for water birds and fish.



Storm surge at Tompkins Park (east)
Photograph courtesy R Napier

SMAC & UWA@PPTEAMS HARD AT WORK

Over the past three months our Saturday Morning at the Cove and UWA student teams have taken advantage of good winter rains, planting hundreds of native seedlings as part of our various Alfred Cove and Pelican Point project commitments.

Supported by DBCA, SALP and NRM funding, these projects aim to conserve and recover the condition of the bushland surrounding two of the Estuary's three Marine Parks, thereby maximizing habitat values, contributing to general River health and endeavouring to diminish the disturbance to wildlife relying on the sites.

As summer approaches, our focus will transfer to weed-management.



UWA@PP planting

Photograph courtesy T Graham-Taylor

PLANTING MORNINGS AT MILYU

Over winter two planting sessions at Milyu were organized by SERAG to support DBCA's efforts to strengthen the resilience of the vegetation buffer between the Marine Park edge and the dual-use pathway and Kwinana Freeway.

The first morning concentrated on planting dry-land species with a team of SERAG volunteers. The second focused on wetland species, and took place on a Sunday morning, with the additional support of *Curtin Volunteers! (CV!)*.

In all, hundreds of seedling sedges, shrubs and trees were planted, as well as large pots and enormous bags of mature sedges, better able to withstand erosive forces.

This short ribbon of native vegetation is the only length of the Como foreshore that seems able to withstand intensifying storms. In other places massive ugly sandbag walling has been constructed to protect transport infrastructure.



SERAG volunteers enjoy a break & the group of CV!

Photographs courtesy M Matassa & C O'Neill

TASKS AT TOMPKINS PARK

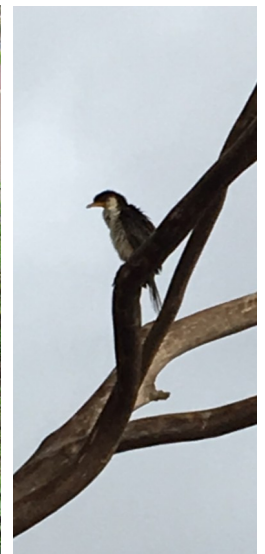
Our terrific TREEmendous Tuesday team has devoted many sessions to the *Coastwest* project site at Tompkins Park over the past few months.

Efforts have focused on weeding and planting dry-land species along the degraded edge of the dual-use pathway, as well as collecting marine debris thrown up by storms.

Many types of weeds flourish at the site, but at this time of year wild radish has been the major challenge. Like summer's fleabane, wild radish must be carefully hand-weeded, there being no safe selective herbicide available to assist in management.

As was the case during the early years of our restoration work at the western end of Tompkins Park, weeding is proving a repetitive task, with each fall of rain encouraging a new crop of seedlings.

However, there is always something lovely happening nearby to divert us: a dolphin family or flock of grebe feeding in the shallows perhaps - or a sopping-wet Little Pied Cormorant drying itself on a branch.



Photographs courtesy C O'Neill & M Matassa

THE GRACEFUL *CASUARINA OBESA*

Along the Estuary shoreline we are fortunate to find pockets of the graceful *Casuarina obesa* - commonly known as swamp sheoak.

The Noongar peoples know the plant as *Goolee*, *Kweela*, *Kwerl* and *Quilinock*.

It is a small dioecious tree, having male and female flowers on separate plants. Female plants produce woody cones in an indehiscent state, with crops from two seasons sometimes present.

It is one of the more upright sheoaks and has relatively short branches that become more rounded with age. It grows to around 14 metres in height and has a life span of more than 60 years.

Casuarina obesa is a nitrogen-fixing tree with excellent potential to remediate saline sites as it is one of Australia's most salt tolerant trees. The species is found on sand or clay soils often in brackish or saline environments, along rivers, creeks and salt lakes.

Its cones are an important food-source for black-cockatoos - red-tails often seen feasting on the trees along the Attadale foreshore.



Male flowers (top), female buds and cones, & lovely little red flower
Photographs courtesy C O'Neill

SHARING OUR STORY

Probus Clubs 'bring together retired and semi-retired people in fellowship and friendship for monthly meetings with stimulating guest speakers and a wide variety of outings and events and interest groups', so it was with pleasure that our Chairperson, Margaret Matassa, accepted an invitation to address a meeting of a local group in July.

Using a 'power-point' loaded with terrific photographs, Margaret shared her understandings of some of the superb natural values of the Estuary - especially its visual landscapes and native flora and fauna. She also spoke about some of the urban pressures impacting on the River and various restoration projects SERAG volunteers have undertaken over the years.

Her presentation was warmly received.

Photograph courtesy N Woodward



COMMENT INVITED ON PERTH WATER PRECINCT PLAN



Perth Water Precinct Plan Study Area

DBCA has commenced public consultation to assist in the development of the Perth Water Precinct Plan, which covers the section of the Swan River and its foreshore between the Narrows and Windan bridges.

The website bit.ly/perthwater invites the Perth community to be part of the conversation around the major issues and opportunities for the site.

Rather than cluttering Perth Water with even more private commercial ventures, SERAG hopes that the rich natural and cultural heritage values of the River can be celebrated, and the community's long-held desire for a foreshore 'ribbon of green' to be maintained is reaffirmed and rejuvenated.

The local community, a burgeoning international eco-tourism market and short-stay visitors will all appreciate and benefit from the protection and restoration of the natural grace and beauty of the Perth Water landscape as a much-loved and highly valued public asset.

A DOGS' BREAKFAST – PAWSING FOR CHICKS

Through the collaborative efforts of the City of Melville, Birdlife WA, SERAG, DBCA and the Rotary Club of Attadale a *Dogs' Breakfast* will be held on the Attadale foreshore in late October.

The aim of the event is to share information on how we can better protect our wonderful native creatures while at the same time fully enjoy the companionship of our dogs.

With care, **pets and wildlife can co-exist safely!**

At the event, dog owners and their dogs will have the opportunity to enjoy a sausage-sizzle breakfast, hear experts talk about the habits of shorebirds and other wildlife, peruse displays and information stalls, celebrate 'dogs on catwalks' and participate in competitions.

Most people love and want to protect our exquisite native flora and fauna. They are generally familiar with the devastating impact feral dogs and cats have on our wildlife, and for a long time have recognized all cats as lethal hunters of smaller vertebrates, such as birds, lizards, frogs and mammals.

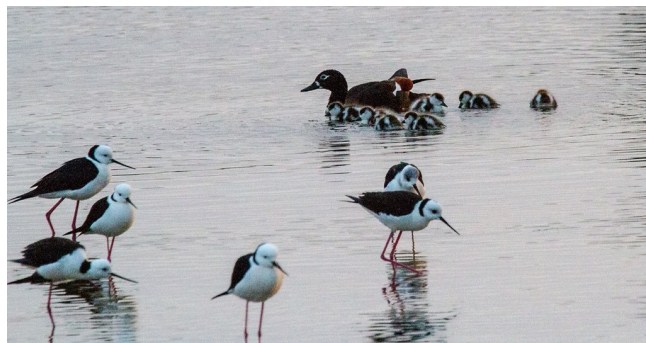
However fewer people know that, if left to roam freely, our much-loved canine companions can also pose a serious threat to wildlife - that the ecological 'pawprint' of domestic dogs is greater than previously realized, impacting on at least 188 threatened species worldwide.

Dogs love to chase things and to snuffle interesting smells. Unfortunately - where the focus of their game or the source of the smell is wildlife - they can disturb and cause injury to vulnerable species.

Shorebirds are at particular risk, due to their habit of resting, foraging and nesting on open beaches with little or no cover. If disturbed, their energy is wasted due to unnecessary flight; foraging is interrupted, less food is consumed, leading to loss in condition; nests may be damaged and eggs or chicks exposed to other predators, and incubation and chick-care is interrupted.

Some of the beach-nesting birds at risk at this time of the year in the Swan River Estuary are Fairy Terns, Red-capped Plovers and Pied Oyster-catchers. Disturbance of foraging and resting trans-equatorial migratory wading birds, which need to recoup energy levels for their yearly flight to Siberia, is also a major problem.

We hope that the event will enhance dog-owners' understanding of the welfare needs of native wildlife, and thus encourage them to take extra care to keep their pets on leads in and around the diminishing number of natural bushland and wetland habitats in our urban communities.



The nest of the Black-winged Stilt may be anything from a simple shallow scrape on the ground to a mound of vegetation placed in or near the water. Water birds need extra protection during the breeding season.

Photographs courtesy T Graham-Taylor



FOR YOUR SEPTEMBER CALENDAR

National Biodiversity Month

- TREEmendous Tuesdays: Alfred Cove 7.00am - 9.00am
- 01 (Sat) UWA@PP 8.30am - 10.30am
- 04 (Tues) Landcare Corporate Day Alfred Cove 9.00am - 3.00pm
- 07 *National Threatened Species Day* Display at Grove Library
- 08 (Sat) John Curtin Weekend Pelican Point 9.00am - 1.30pm
- 10 Monthly Monday at Milyu 7.30am - 9.30am
- 22 Saturday Morning at the Cove 8.00am - 10.00am
- 30 *World Rivers Day* Corporate bushcare morning

Please contact SERAG to register your interest and for further details.
Please check our website for a calendar of events for the year.

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

Members are reminded that our
Annual General Meeting is scheduled for
Wednesday 17th October,
commencing at 6.00pm.



Swan Estuary Reserves Action Group Inc.

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