

Indigenotes

MAY 2008 VOLUME 19 TWO



It's an ill wind...

Destructive wind storms such as the one that ripped across Victoria on Wednesday, the second of April, are mercifully rare. They have brought human misery and even tragedy, but I couldn't help reflecting on the habitat bonanza they represent for animals along the Merri Creek where I work.

The maturing planted trees now produce large branches and logs that form substantial features for wildlife. Fallen logs and branches, or 'coarse woody debris' are a vital part of the habitat structure of woodlands. They provide lizard 'lounges' for basking on their sunny upper sides. The cool moist undersides harbour worms, springtails, centipedes and beetles. These spots also make good places for skinks and geckos to lay eggs. As the wood decays, animal life flourishes. Beetle larvae, ant and termite colonies, fungi and fungus gnats proliferate. These feed spiders and predatory insects which, in turn, are food for robins, shrike-thrushes and other ground feeding insectivorous birdlife.

The removal of fallen timber for firewood, has been recognised as a major threat to birds and other wildlife in Victorian woodlands. Where possible we will try to encourage retention of these logs in Merri Creek revegetation plots.

The broken stumps and scars remaining on the trees may also allow the development of hollows. So, in a decade or two, parrots, owls and tiny insectivorous bats may also be beneficiaries of that single wild Wednesday!

Brian Bainbridge, President.



COVER

Someone to watch over me

Comforting for a little fella, busily munching on an acacia, to know that a bigger friend is watching her back. Even an imaginary friend.

This caterpillar of a Mottled Cup Moth, *Doratifera vulnerans*, (on the cover and left) was photographed at The Grange Heathland Reserve in March 2008.

PICTURE: MICK CONNOLLY

My garden and I have issues.
I'll go first.
You never stop growing.

Get used to it, pal.

**Hang on – you're an Australian indigenous garden.
You can't talk in Americanisms.**

There you go, again – telling me what I can and can't do.

Well, if I left it up to you...

Hah. You did leave it up to me, didn't you? For about a year.

No, I didn't. I kept the weeds down. With Elspeth's help.

Fat lot of good that did. What proportion of the back yard lawn is still *Microleana*, would you say?

God, you can be spiteful. You know as well as I do that it's mostly *Microleana*.

'Mostly' as in 'at least 51%'.

But I have a plan for the future.

Go on, then, Mr I've-got-issues. Tell me your plan.

Well, I've noticed that the weed grasses seem to come to seed before the *Microleana*. So next spring, I'm going to go out every weekend for a few minutes and just strip the tops off the weed grasses before they drop their seed. When the *Microleana* starts seeding, I'll stop. Then there'll be much more *Microleana* seed on the ground than other grasses. And most of the weed grasses are probably annuals. It's bound to have some effect.

And how long are you going to keep that up? The rest of your life?

It'll only be a few minutes every weekend for a couple of months every spring.

And you're going to let the *Microleana* go to seed every year? So it'll be unsafe for socks, children and small pets every year?

Yeah, whose idea was that? To make *Microleana* seed so nasty?

Hmmph. OK. My turn. What is going on with those climbers on the back fence? They've pulled that poor *Lightwood* down to its knees. They're strangling it.

Hang on. That's my issue: you don't stop growing.

It's what I do. That's my part of the deal. Your part is to keep me looking good.

But I thought bush gardens didn't need a lot of maintenance. I thought you just stuck them in the ground and let them go.

So all those books you were reading five years ago, that said how difficult it is to achieve a natural appearance, left no impression on you?

Aw, yeah, but that was like Gordon Ford and what's-her-name, that Snape woman. They're probably perfectionists. I just wanted something near enough.

In that case, what do you mean by 'a lot' of maintenance? You do bugger all.

Yeah, OK. But every time I think about tackling



those climbers I think about the *Prickly Moses* growing right next to – in fact, growing into – the *Lightwood*. There's something uniquely painful about *Prickly Moses* prickles. It's like acupuncture using wasp stingers.

And to be fair, you didn't plant the *Passionfruit*. That was the neighbours.

Yeah, what is it with *Passionfruit*? Are all those vines suckers?

Don't think about it. Just pull them out.

But then they grow back.

Get used to it.

OK. My turn. Where the hell are all the worms?

Worms?

Yeah. I never see any worms in you. We've got two compost-a-bins full of preserved vegetables waiting for some kind of organism to turn them into methane...

Methane?

Will you stop repeating everything I say?

But seriously, wouldn't you rather have compost? Why methane?

Well, the compost in the bin (note: one bin) we had at Preston (note: full of worms) used to just disappear. It would take years to fill up.

But do you want methane?

No. But then, I don't really want compost, either. Where would I bury it? The garden's established, now. I don't want to go digging up bits of it in order to bury nasty lumps of partially-decomposed eggplants.

Whinge, whinge, whinge. I'm sick of this. **Piss off.**

No. You piss off. I was here first.

I've been here since 1970.

Bullshit. You're thinking of the garden before you. And look what I did to it. Chainsaws and glyphosate and pulling up by the roots. I could do the same to you, my darling.

But... but... what about the rose bushes that you left in? They're an important part of me. Remember when your son saw them for the first time, and he said, "Look. Someone's stuck a plastic flower on that bush."

Heh. Yeah. He'd never seen such a gaudy flower. *Wahlenbergias* and *Running Postman* and *Chocolate Lilies* – they're real flowers.

We've been through a lot, together.

'Kin oath.

Book Review

Aldo Leopold *A Fierce Green Fire*

By Marybeth Lorbiecki

Publisher: Falcon (an imprint of The Globe Pequot Press) Connecticut 2005.

212 pages, paperback. ISBN-7627-3663-1 RRP

A Sand County Almanac

By Aldo Leopold

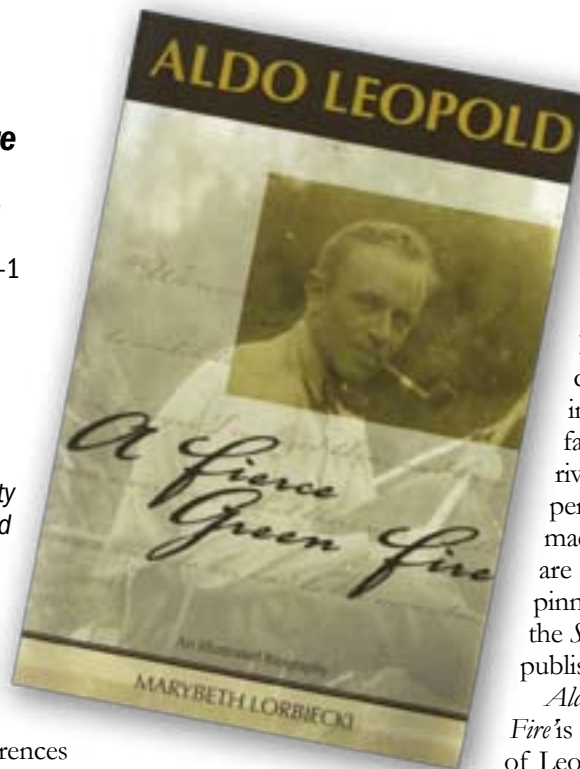
Publisher: Oxford University Press 1949 (reprinted many times)

(note that recent editions of *A Sand County* have been combined with the essay *Round River* edited by Leopold's son, Luna Leopold)

I first borrowed a copy of *A Sand County Almanac* from the Bird Observers Club library about 15 years ago, prompted by quotes and references in other natural history books. I recall that I doubted that a book published in 1949 would hold much relevance to the modern Australian conservation and ecological restoration scene in which I was interested.

Few books have so profoundly affected me. It was necessary to repeatedly stop and reread passages in order to understand why I had been completely overcome by joy, anger or grief. It was not just the richness of the language, but the shock of recognition. Leopold's words express precisely the experience of the beauties of natural world, the devastation that is inflicted upon it and the urgency to engage in its restoration.

Subsequently, I learnt how influential this man's words and actions were on the development of modern conservation philosophy. Other conservationists had similar notions but few have been so talented at inspiring action across so a wide constituency and over so many decades.



Mary Lorbiecki's biography of Leopold is a simple recounting of his life, hinting at his underlying character and identifying the influences on him and his achievements. Talent, curiosity and stamina, involved and energetic family, colleagues, students, rivals and adversaries, personal setbacks, mistakes made and lessons learnt; all are seen to contribute to the pinnacle of his achievements, the *Sand County Almanac*, published soon after his death. *Aldo Leopold. A Fierce Green Fire* is not a hard-hitting exposé of Leopold's life, nor is it a deep critique of Leopold's thinking.

Indiscretions and hubris are explored but hardly dent his halo. This gentle, readable biography is heart-warming and inspiring. It is amply illustrated with photographs evoking middle-class America of the first half of the twentieth century. At the same time, it has provoked the sceptic in me to seek out deeper, more critical accounts of the man and his work.

I suspect anyone who has read *A Sand County Almanac* will be eager to read this book to satisfy their curiosity about its creator. Importantly, many readers will relate to the price and the payoffs of a life dedicated to becoming an effective advocate and practical conservationist.

And to all of you who haven't read *A Sand County Almanac*? Get off your bums and do so!

Reviewed by Brian Bainbridge

**Lomandra longifolia,
The Grange,
January 2008**



Echidnas at Belgrave

I have lived in Belgrave for the last forty-one years and Echidnas have been regular visitors to my bush block over those years. Usually I am alerted to their presence by one of the dogs, but our present dog is almost seventeen years old and doesn't wander far from the house these days.

On the last day of October, 2007 I noticed that the resident Butcher-birds were harassing something underneath an azalea bush. These birds had recently been making a nuisance of themselves by attacking defenseless ring-tail possums who hadn't made it back to their drays by morning light. To my surprise I discovered the object of their attention this time was a young echidna.

I quickly raced inside to collect the digital camera just in time to see the echidna heading off into the un-mown native grass area. It seemed to be heading in a westerly direction so I positioned myself where it hopefully would come towards me. I couldn't believe my eyes when it actually came right up to me and sniffed my foot.

Ten days later a much larger echidna alerted me to its presence by trying to bury itself in some leaves, when I went to investigate what I thought was an indian miner with a piece of plastic.

Once again it headed in westerly direction, stopping to check for ants in an old blackwood stump and a wood heap. When it reached the fence line it was halted in its tracks by my neighbour's goat which was some twenty metres from the fence. Although the goat was on a chain the echidna decided it preferred my native grass and turned around, this time heading in an easterly direction.

Recently, the Shire of Yarra Ranges tried to change the area where I live from Bushland Residential to Residential One. It was eventually embarrassed into calling three public meetings that were all attended by about one hundred angry residents, both new and old. If passed, the change would mean that standard blocks of land could be used for unit dwellings, including two-storey town houses. This would have spelt disaster for the local wildlife. Can



PICTURE: VIVIEN FRESHWATER

you just imagine the solid fences, the removal of tall trees and the hard surfacing of areas around the dwellings.

Yes, this is the Blue Dandenongs we are talking about!

Hopefully the Shire of Yarra Ranges has received the message loud and clear that residents do not want their wildlife and bushland environment to be destroyed for the sake of more houses. It is this type of incremental development that we all need to be aware of if we are to save the local wildlife from governments and their bureaucrats! Native fauna such as echidnas need bushland corridors so they can safely move from one area to another in their search for ants.

Vivien Freshwater

Little Eagle in Decline?

I've had an inquiry regarding possible declines in populations of Little Eagle (in Victoria) and am interested to hear what people's thoughts are on populations of the species in Victoria. In particular whether anyone has evidence/observations of locations where they used to see Little Eagles and now see none.

It's worth noting that the ACT has recently declared the Little Eagle a 'vulnerable' species in that jurisdiction. I understand this listing was largely based on a crash in the population in the ACT.

Please advise me directly of your thoughts.

Martin O'Brien
Wildlife Biologist – Threatened Species & Communities Section
Department of Sustainability and Environment
Martin.O'Brien@dse.vic.gov.au



PICTURE: STUART HARRIS.
www.photogallery.canberrabirds.org



IFFA FIELD TRIP

Mt Rothwell Conservation and Research Centre has many of the animals that originally lived on the Volcanic Grassland Plains, including the Eastern Barred Bandicoot, Eastern Quoll, Red-bellied Pademelon and the Brush-tailed Rock Wallaby.

We will take a torch-lit, walking tour on Saturday August 16th.

Bookings are necessary and we will meet there at 5.45 pm for a 6pm start. Car pooling is a possibility. The centre is located on



Summer lovin'

The plant world slows and shrinks in the hottest months, but it is a time to shine for the extroverts of the insect realm. Activity can be frantic and the representatives here were chosen only because they lingered in front of a camera.

Top from left: Tau Emerald Dragonfly, *Hemicordulia tau*; Dainty or Dinky Swallowtail, *Papilio anactus*; Yellow-banded Dart, *Ocybadistes walkeri* (*Hesperiidae*).

Bottom: Copulating hover flies, possibly *Simosyrphus grandicornis* (*Syrphidae*). The wings on the upper fly are blurred because they are beating for two; a small 'stig', *Castiarina* sp. possibly *bilaris* (*Buprestidae*: *Stigmoderini*); nectar scarabs *Phyllotocus* sp. possibly *australis* (*Scarabacidae*: *Melolonthinae*); pintail beetle, *Hosbiananomia leucosticta* (*Mordellidae*); non-biting midge of the family *Chironomidae*; moths mating on a kitchen window in Camperdown, Western Victoria. They stayed connected for over five hours before flying away, still together. Photos: Ray Watson. Wendy Moore has identified these as Magpie or Senecio Moths, *Nyctemera amica* (*Arctiinae*) which is a day and night-flying moth common wherever its food plant Groundsel (*Senecio* spp.) grows. Disappearing Grasshopper, *Schizobothrus flavovittatus* (*Acrididae*). All except the Senecio Moth were found in Clayton or Dingley.

Little River-Ripley Rd near Little River. Melways Key map 11 – C10 (marked as Earth Sanctuary in old editions).

Please call Linda Bradburn 03-9416-7184 and leave a message or email lindaeliz@optusnet.com.au giving a contact phone number or email and the number of people. Alternately there are tours on the last Saturday night of every month. See <http://www.mtrothwell.com.au/gallery.html>

Lennon strikes up a monologue with a Rufous Betong, February 2008. PICTURES: LISS RALSTON





Straw-necked Ibis at Spring Valley Golf Course, Clayton, April 2008

Letter to the Editor

I have a property in Trevallyn, Tasmania. For well over 10 years I've been trying to establish an indigenous garden with limited success. My property is around 40m x 20m and about 100m from Cataract Gorge State Reserve which is over 500Ha. The house has been there for over 100 years and it was typically made up of grass, roses, fruit trees etc until I came along. I've never mown in 15 years and use a hedge trimmer and chain saw to create mulch. As I largely rent the property I've been planting local flora in tyres that I've been weeding regularly and given up on other weeds that are pretty rampant as this property. The major weeds include grasses, ivy, wandering creeper, onion weed and some oxalis. From the reading I've done in the past 24 hours my major mistake would appear to be not making use of fire, mulching too heavily and not leaving bare patches for regeneration.

The planting I've done includes *Acacia melanoxylon*, *Acacia dealbata*, *Eucalyptus globulus*, *Allocasuarina verticillata*, *Bursaria spinosa*, *Lomandra longifolia*, *Dianella tasmanica* (spreading well), *Diplanrena moreia*, *Poa sp*, *Epacris impressa*, *Drosera peltata*, *Lagastrobis franklini*, *Correa reflexa*, *Stylidium graminifolium*, *Bedfordia salisigna*, *Acacia verticillata*, *Eucalyptus viminalis*, *Acacia decurrens* and *Eucryphia lucida*. The dry sclerophyll stuff has done well.

I've tried planting here and there. I've also tried densely planting out patches. This seems to be a little more effective. There are species such as *Poa sp*, *Acacia melanoxylon*, *Dodonea viscosa* and *Dianella tasmanica* that have done well and appear to have grown disproportionately larger and faster than other plants. There are several large non-local trees including *Grevillea robusta* and *Melaleuca armillaris* which will go eventually.

I'm surprised I'm having so much trouble trying to locate other people who are interested in the same thing as it seems such a logical thing to do in order to reinstate the original ecosystem that was once there. I've built a small pond about 3m x 3m which attracts quite a few birds and there are numerous frog calls at night. There is a wealth of arthropods including insects, spiders, millipedes as well as numerous reptiles including blue-tongues, skinks, most local native birds and a few macropods including bandicoots, wallabies and echidnas.

I would really appreciate some direction as to how I can make this small patch of land as diverse and as ecologically rich as I can. I would also like to hear from others who've taken a reasonably small suburban block such as mine, that's been pretty much exotic, and turned in into something wonderfully indigenous. I'm also going to try firing several 4m² patches of the backyard, firstly with a before and after a litter layer has been applied and see what effect it has. I've also heard of impregnating weedmats with native seed.

Your comments and direction would be appreciated.

Paul Schluter

P.S.

Having a botany background and understanding the ecology doesn't help my relationship with my neighbours nor tenants who probably think I'm nuts wanting to recreate bush in the backyard. For years, while I had my place rented out, the backyard was purposely covered in sticks, twigs, branches and deliberately and

unappealingly messy but even a light covering of thin branches was enough to suppress weeds. It was also difficult to write in a rental contract that they were required to keep the backyard as is, water the plants in the tyres and don't clean it up.

Young families next door have complained to me that I need to "clean the place up" because of snakes. Unfortunately minimalisation of a garden while being visually more appealing opposes habitat diversity and family have repeatedly said "Why don't you just go and live in the bush?"

What I do find rather disturbing is the ability for many to clear away backyard bushland while clearing away exotics to make way for bushland. Never-the-less I'm passionate about an indigenous transformation.

From reading Bradley and Buchanan (*Bush Regeneration - Recovering Australian Landscapes*) there's a few things that I could do a little better.

Apart from a 20m blue gum there were no indigenous species on my 800m² property. Firstly it's clear that widescale planting is not the answer, however a dense cluster of a range of species found locally may act as a source of seed and suckers should none appear elsewhere. Secondly, it's unlikely that the soil will reveal species that have been dormant as the property has been exotic since the early 1900s.

There's a number of other strategies that I need to adopt. One of those is to increase bare space around the existing natives I've planted. Translocation of bush soil from neighbouring bushland and bush litter may also be beneficial.

Of the reading I've done it seems quite clear that in a dry sclerophyll area fire and the creation of an ash bed is immensely beneficial, providing:

- Reduced competition for light, water and nutrients;
- Reduced sterility of soil which improves the chance of small Myrtaceae seed to germinate;
- Increased sunlight and soil temperature;
- Decrease in leaf litter and suppressors;
- Kill exotic weeds;
- Reduced seed grazing from ants;
- Increased soluble soil phosphates, calcium, magnesium, nitrogen (ammonia NH₄) released from the top few millimetres of soil;
- Decrease in chemical growth inhibitors resulting in decreased allelopathy; and
- Increased seed scarification.

However bylaws in Launceston now prohibit backyard fires except for burning quarantine material, cooking and warming humans. Bush regeneration doesn't rate a mention so it looks like an almighty BBQ or NZ Hungi late one afternoon next week.

Bradley strongly suggests that soil disturbance is to be kept to a minimum while Buchanan almost suggests the opposite. Both agree that a litter layer will suppress germination.

For many years I have planted in tyres and mulched heavily so I've known where plants are amongst the weeds. While this has reduced weed competition it's not allowed suckers or seeds from those plants to grow. Therefore I need to start exposing bare soil around plants and maybe include soil disturbance in some of those areas.



***Xanthorrhoea minor* at Rowan Reserve, Dingley, February 2008**

*Austrodanthonia
duttoniana*



Membership

IFFA membership costs \$40 for non-profit organizations, \$50 for corporations, \$25 for individuals and families, or \$20 concession.

Membership includes

- 4 issues of *Indigenotes* per year,
- enhanced access to IFFA's website at iffa.org.au
- discount subscription to *Ecological Management & Restoration Journal* (2008 price is \$62.70 including GST)

Members should check the mailing label to ascertain the status of their membership. If an invoice is required, please send a purchase order requesting an invoice.

Membership applications and renewals should be sent to the Treasurer.

Indigenous Flora and Fauna Association

IFFA aims to promote the appreciation, study, conservation and management of indigenous flora and fauna through:

- research and discussion
- networking and advocacy
- information exchange

www.iffa.org.au

Incorporated Association No: A0015723B

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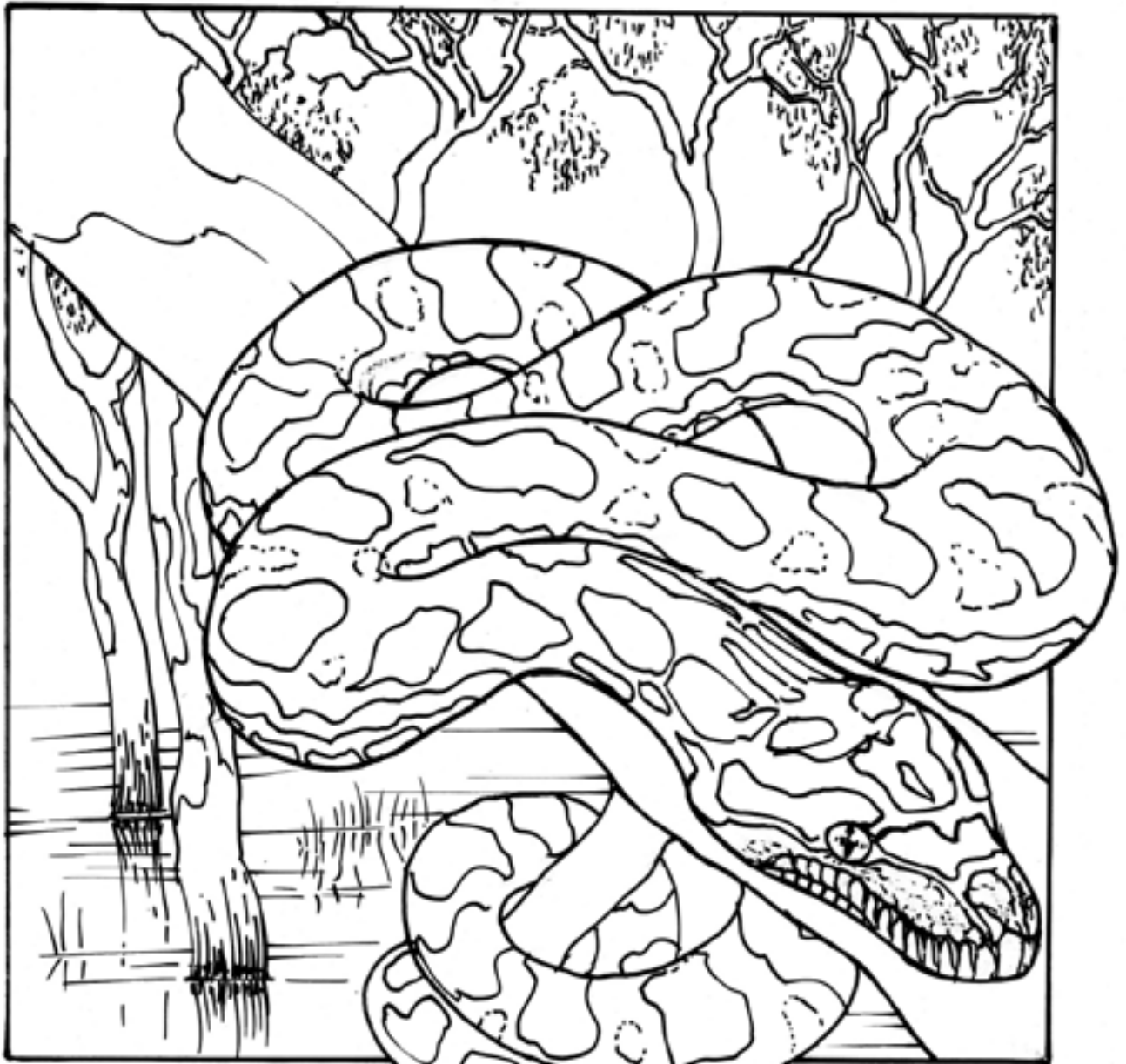
Call for articles

***Indigenotes* is a newsletter by IFFA members for IFFA members. Stories, snippets, photos, reports from members are always welcome. If it's something you're doing with flora or fauna or habitat, write it down and send it to the editor at editor@iffa.org.au.**

What you write doesn't have to be sophisticated or complicated, although it can be if you want.

***Indigenotes* is not a peer-reviewed journal, so it is probably not the best place for scientific papers, however short summaries of papers published elsewhere are welcome.**

Contributions must be in electronic form, either on PC formatted floppy disk or CD or can be sent to the editor by email.



Carpet Python, *Morelia spilota*

Drawing:
Brian Bainbridge

Unjumble the answer to the clue and find out what Carmen Carpet Python wanted to become when she joined the circus.

- | | |
|--|---|
| 1 Python's shy and should not be disturbed, but as they are non-venomous, we need not be . . . | aidraf (use first letter) |
| 2 The word used to describe the disguise when Carpet Pythons are amongst leaf litter. | ufecamogla (first letter) |
| 3 The name of the tree this Carpet Pythons need to live. (three words) | GrRevumedRi (first letter) |
| 4 An 'apartment' in the trees where Carpet Pythons like to live. | wolhlo (second letter) |
| 5 The two colours that create the striking pattern on Python's skin. Two words | wronb kbcla (first letter, first word) |
| 6 Describes animals such as Pythons that like to live in trees. | boaarlr (first letter) |
| 7 The length recorded for some of the longest Carpet Pythons (two words) | hrete trsmee (first letter) |

Write the letters from each of your answers, in order here: _ _ _ _ _

A MESSAGE FROM THE BIODIVERSITY CONSERVATION PROGRAM OF THE MURRAYLANDS REGION

What are we doing to help?

Research is required to understand why the Carpet Python is in decline, and what we can do to halt this decline.

We are also seeking to improve knowledge of the distribution and abundance of pythons through reports of sightings from the public, and need your help.

■ Report Carpet Python sightings to the Murraylands Regional Ecologist. We are maintaining a record of sightings.

■ If you see a Carpet Python please don't disturb it - observe it from a distance.

Reports and further information contact
Biodiversity Conservation Programs, Murraylands Region
Department for Environment and Heritage Telephone (08) 8595 2111 www.environment.sa.gov.au

arboreal, three metres. Overall answer: acrobat!
afraid, camouflage, River Red Gum, hollow, brown black,

Answers

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