

# The Bushland Whistler

Friends of Forrestdale Newsletter ♦ Edition 14 ♦ April 2015

## MOANING FROG (*Heleioporus eyrei*)

WHEN THE HOT summer days are over and autumn showers have settled in, the breeding cycle of the small burrowing frog, commonly known as the moaning frog, begins once more.

Named for its plaintive, high-pitched mating call, the moaning frog (pictured) is a Western Australian endemic that occurs along the coastal strip from approximately Geraldton to Esperance; it also lives on Rottnest and Bald Islands.

For nature-lovers, the clear, rising, drawn-out call of the moaning frog, delivered slowly and repeatedly, mostly at night-time, is a welcome sound looked forward to each autumn—it is a sound that embodies primeval wetlands that were once abundant across what today is metropolitan Perth, but which are now mostly gone.

Despite much of its habitat having been either drained, filled in or built on, the moaning frog is still reasonably common in and around the remaining wetlands in the Perth region and elsewhere.

The frog also occurs in suburban gardens near wetlands or where the winter water table is high, and it's in these situations that it sometimes comes into conflict with people who don't appreciate its night-time serenading—particularly if the calling frog is directly outside a bedroom window.

It can be argued that the innocuous sound of a serenading frog—lasting just a short time each season—is much less disturbing than the many dissonant manmade noises generally put up with in modern suburbia. But some people insist that the call of the moaning frog interrupts their sleep, and on occasion use unconscionable methods to put a stop to the sound.



Typical moaning frog habitat in Forrestdale.

Still, it is hoped that most people who share their gardens with these engaging creatures consider themselves lucky, and accept the sound for what it is: a part of the natural breeding cycle of an inimitable little frog that Western Australians can proudly call their own. ✧

*The female moaning frog lays her eggs in a chamber at the end of a burrow approximately 40cm long that the male has dug in sandy soil typically near a wetland. The eggs, which are contained in a foamy mass, usually hatch when the heavy autumn and winter rains flood the burrow.*

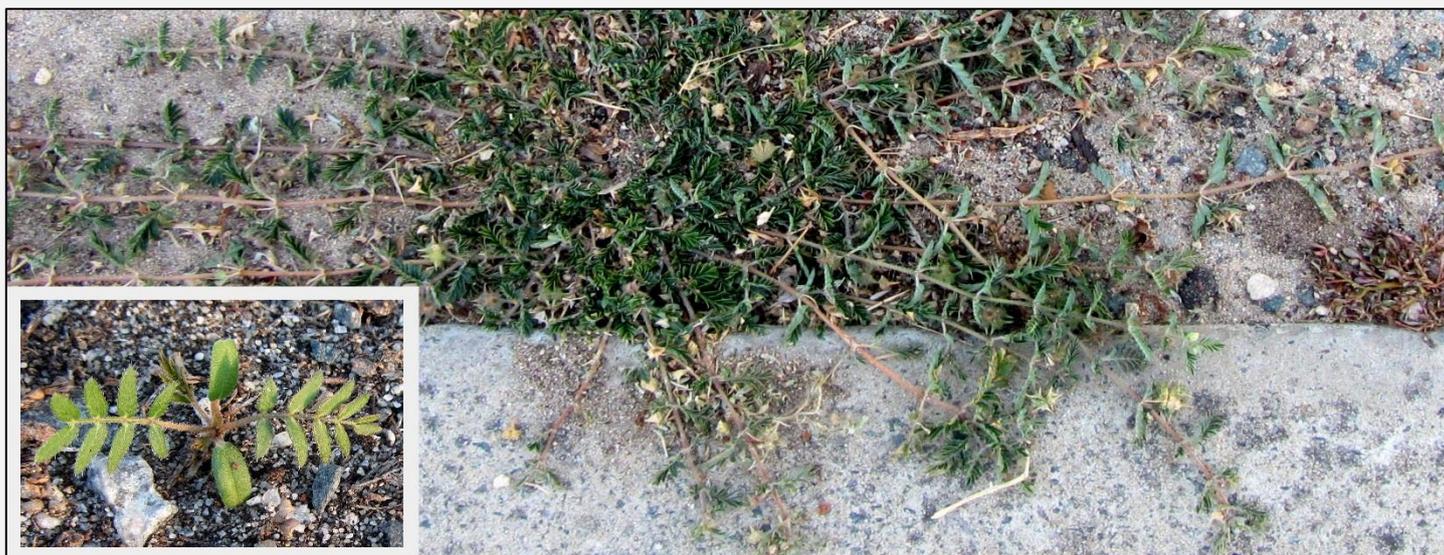
## CALTROP (*Tribulus terrestris*)

**T**HIS INSIDIOUS WEED, thought to have been introduced from west Asia and the Mediterranean, is spreading over much of the Perth region and is widespread along roadsides, footpaths and firebreaks in Forrestdale.

The spiny woody burrs which the plant produces in abundance during summer and autumn are the reason caltrop is particularly offensive. These needle-sharp burrs painfully penetrate not only people's bare feet and animals' paws, but they also puncture bicycle tyres, so in areas of serious caltrop infestation, popular activities such as cycling and walking the family dog are difficult if not impossible.



**Top left:** Spinier even than the similar, but unrelated, doublegee (*Emex australis*) which has three spines to each woody fruit, caltrop burrs can have twenty or more super-sharp spines. **Top right:** When caltrop fruits mature, they divide into five separate burrs, each equipped with two or more spines, at least one of which always points up. **Bottom, left and right:** Caltrop is a prostrate annual that can reach a diameter of over two metres; here it is spreading across the footpath in Broome Street, Forrestdale—the path that leads to the Forrestdale Primary School. **Inset:** The small yellow caltrop flower measures about 8mm. **Below:** Caltrop thrives in sandy soil along road verges and beside footpaths. The plant in the main photograph has begun to shed its seeds—for effective long-term eradication of this or any other weed species, plants need to be dealt with before they form seeds. **Inset:** A caltrop seedling.



## Eradicating caltrop

A drought-tolerant weed, caltrop thrives during the warmer months, especially after summer rain. It is quick-growing and can flower and form seeds in a very short time (the young plant pictured below already has a couple of well-developed fruits). The seeds stay viable for several years.

The spiny fruits containing the seeds stick to the rubber tyres of vehicles, lawnmowers and bicycles and to the soles of people's shoes—in this way caltrop gets spread from one area to the next.

To prevent the spread of caltrop, it's important to be able to identify the weed at the various stages of its growth, to act at the start of the growing season (when the warm weather begins) and to dig out or spray plants before they form burrs.

If a small number of plants are present they can be dug out with a sharp, long-handled tool such as a Dutch hoe, but this may not be feasible when dealing with severe infestations; in these situations, the use of herbicide may be more practical.

If plants with well-developed burrs are encountered, they should be removed from the site; there's little gain in digging out or spraying advanced plants loaded with seeds and then leaving them where they are—this simply enables future generations of weeds. So plants should be bagged with as many seeds attached as possible and disposed of in the household wheelie bin.

It should be mentioned that when dealing with plants with burrs, care needs to be taken to avoid contact with the spines. Heavy-duty gloves should be worn and tongs used to pick up plants that have burrs attached.



Caltrop (**main picture**) can sometimes be confused with a similar-looking weed, spotted spurge *Euphorbia maculata* (**inset**), a non-spiny, much less troublesome weed native to the eastern United States. The two species grow in similar locations, but they can be distinguished by their different leaf forms.

Though difficult, eradicating caltrop from a district is possible and one of the best ways to achieve this is for local residents to be on the lookout for the plants on their properties and on their verges and to remove them while they are still small and before they set seeds. If everyone cleared caltrop from their own immediate environment, eliminating the weed from the neighbourhood would be accomplished much more easily.

For this approach to be successful, however, a public education campaign in the form of letterbox drops and community newspaper coverage would be necessary to raise awareness of the problem caltrop presents, how to identify the weed and the importance of keeping it in check. ✧

## NATURE'S ARTISTRY

IN THE NEXT TWO PAGES are assorted sets of images photographed locally illustrating nature's creativity.



**Above:** Disused spiders' webs strung with dew drops. **Below:** Bark patterns on the trunks of local street trees.



## Birds in silhouette

The photos below were taken in dawn light with the subjects silhouetted against a pale sky. The silhouette effect was further enhanced on the computer. ✧



**Above, clockwise from top left:** Welcome swallows on power lines; a pair of Carnaby's cockatoos; an Australian white ibis; a black-faced woodswallow on a swamp cypress (*Callitris pyramidalis*); a raven. **Below:** Carnaby's cockatoos feeding on *Banksia attenuata*.



## CLEAN UP AUSTRALIA DAY - 1 March 2015

FOR OVER 20 YEARS, the Friends of Forrestdale have hosted Clean Up Australia Day events at various sites around Forrestdale and in recent years we have focused on Anstey-Keane Dampland. This year thirteen volunteers took part (some of whom are pictured below) and we spent from 8am-10am removing rubbish from within the reserve and along Anstey Road.



Photo: Bryony Fremlin



Photo: Caroline The

## Examples of abuse by rubbish dumpers of our local bushland and wetlands



**Re bottom photo in the above collage:** It should be noted that this waterhole—located within Bush Forever Site 342—is an important source of water for wildlife—but it is contaminated because of accumulated rubbish. Animal footprints in the mud at the water’s edge indicated that many wildlife species were coming to drink this polluted water which in late summer (when the photo was taken) is the last available water in the vicinity. Native birds and insects, honeybees as well, were visiting the waterhole to drink, dragonflies were laying their eggs and at least two oblong turtles (*Chelodina oblonga*) were observed in the fouled water.

### Twenty-fifth anniversary of Clean Up Australia

The annual Clean Up Australia Day event has been running for 25 years; and according to the organisers, approximately 526,268 volunteers across the country took part this year at 6,165 registered sites—which made this, the 25<sup>th</sup> Clean Up Australia Day event, “bigger and better than ever.”

And as a result of this momentous effort, an estimated 13,563 tonnes of rubbish was removed across the country from our local streets, parks, beaches, waterways and bushland.



## Sand bottlebrush (*Beaufortia squarrosa*)



After our hard work picking up rubbish on Clean Up Australia Day, Friends of Forrestdale members (having taken a few minutes to recuperate in the shade with tea and cold drinks) went for a short walk in Anstey-Keane Dampland to admire the sand bottlebrush (*Beaufortia squarrosa*), which at that time of year never fails to deliver a stunning display.

These flowers are usually at their best at Anstey-Keane between early February and the beginning of March and it's amazing that year after year the plants can present this dazzling show after having just been through punishing summers. It is also special that they bloom and provide nectar for birds such as white-cheeked and tawny-crowned honeyeaters and other wildlife when little else in the bush is flowering. ✧

