

Understorey plants of the Julimar Forest

Julimar Conservation and Forest Alliance

Sharon Richards

ONLY small portions of the 28,600-hectare Julimar Forest have truly been explored and those are mainly close to the tracks.

To date at least 500 plant species have been identified.

As you walk through the forest it is easy to identify the beautiful jarrah, marri and wandoo trees.

They stand like sentinels alongside the tracks with their contrasting rough brown and smooth creamy white barks.

Between the tall trees, the under-storey plants provide the ground floor greenery with a multitude of zamia palms, which are not palms at all, and the iconic Grasstrees, also known as Balga trees or Blackboys, of many shapes and sizes, the Xanthorrhoea.

The Xanthorrhoea are easily recognized with their rough blackened trunk and long thin fronds adorning the head.

It's quite a complicated tree. Some roots grow upwards into the trunk and have been used for woodturning producing exquisite bowls and lamp bases.

During a bushfire the Xanthorrhoea leaves can burn in an explosive fashion but it responds well to being burned.

It survives the fire and then sends up tall, thin flower spikes up to three metres high.



One of the many varieties of Xanthorrhoea trees in the Julimar forest.

The flower spikes provide nectar for butterflies and honeyeater birds in an otherwise blackened landscape.

When the nectar has finished, the small white flowers develop into hardened seeds and then the parrots enjoy a good feed.

Historically the Xanthorrhoea was a staple plant used by First Nations people as a food and material source.

The leaves produce a resin which softens when warmed producing a glue-like substance that dries hard and waterproof.

The resin was highly prized for waterproofing and also traded between different tribes.

The dead skirt of the grass trees has also been known to house such delightful creatures as the Western Pygmy Possum, providing a warm, protected environment for a nest as well as a banquet of insects who also live within its fronds.

With the constant deforestation of our environment the number of grass trees has decreased over the last 200 years.

In some forests the presence of dieback (*Phytophthora*) is a serious threat.

While it may have been growing for hundreds of years, a grass tree can be dead within a month if infected by dieback.

Luckily at this point in time, there is no known dieback in Julimar Forest.

As far as we were aware at least three species of Xanthorrhoea grow in the Julimar forest. *Xanthorrhoea preissii* and *Xanthorrhoea gracilis* have been found and documented.

A Toodyay Naturalists' Club excursion into the forest with an experienced environmental consultant and botanist in May 2024 resulted in observations of four species of Xanthorrhoea.

None of these match any named species (i.e. neither *X. preissii* nor *X. gracilis*), indicating a potential for six species in the area in total.

Further taxonomic research into these Xanthorrhoea has commenced (personal correspondence from an environmental consultant).

Depending on which area of Julimar you enter you will encounter these different trees, some taller up to three metres with slimmer trunks, others shorter, with wider, thicker trunks.

It can be very difficult to tell the species apart, with the shape of the frond at its base one of the indicators, whether it is more square or diamond shaped.

One thing we can say with surety is that Julimar has a great array of Xanthorrhoea to be enjoyed and all deserve our protection.

The Osprey

Bird of the Month

Desraé Clarke

THE MAGNIFICENT bird featured, the Osprey, was perched on its 'lookout' in the Peel wetland area south of Mandurah during a weekend away by Toodyay Naturalists' Club members.

This large bird of prey, measuring 50 to 63cm in length, is found around coastal Australia and may be sighted in inlets and up the larger rivers.

As with all birds of prey, the female bird is larger than the male.

The Osprey has a white head and body with rich brown-coloured wings with both birds having a thick, dark brown marking through the eye and down the neck.

The female has a streaking of brown on her neck described as a 'necklace'.

Another name given to the Osprey is the Fish Hawk and, with its method of catching its food, the name is apt.

The bird will fly with a flap flap, glide –

flap, flap, glide – flight, quite high above the water and, on sighting a fish, will plunge into the water to snatch its quarry with its large talons.

It has a particular talon structure together with a rough surface area on the feet to securely grip slippery fish up to a metre below the surface.

Breeding in the southern areas of the West Australian coastline is around August to November with both birds assisting in nest building or repair work.

Osprey nests may be used for decades with new materials added annually to result in massive structures of sticks, seaweed, driftwood, bones and human debris.

When visiting the Abrolhos Islands an Osprey's nest had the embellishment of a washing machine hose.

Three large course-textured white eggs, with red blotches, are laid and incubated by the female for about five weeks.

The chicks are fed only by the female; the male does the hunting.

This bird species generally pairs for life.



The Osprey. Photo: Beth Walker.

Gould's Hooded Snake

Python Watch

Desraé Clarke

A SMALL reptile of up to 55cm, the Gould's Hooded Snake (*Rhinoplocephalus gouldii*), is found over rocky outcrops, in heath vegetation, banksia areas, in termite nests, stick-ant nests, under logs and bark, rocks and dead grass trees.

Its ground colour may be orange-brown, pinkish brown or reddish brown.

The scales are small and glossy with each scale edged in black to give a reticulated pattern.

Its black hood has a tiny pale mark in front of its black eye and the species has a pearly-white belly.

It is active at night and observed on roads over June and July suggesting it may be quite cold tolerant.

It would be searching for its main prey of geckos, skinks and sleeping diurnal (daytime) lizards.

The Gould's Hooded Snake produces three to five live young in March and April.

This small reptile is quite docile but it may attempt to bite if handled. Fortunately the bite is not considered to be harmful.

The Toodyay Nats are most grateful to Lindy for taking the time to send us photos of two of these small snakes found beneath a large rock.

The photo was sent to Ron Johnstone from the Western Australian Museum for positive identification.

It is sighting and reporting such as this, particularly with an accompanying photo,

that allows further knowledge of natural history and environmental data to be stored for future reference.

Contact can be made with the Secretary or Toodyay Nat's members per email: secretary@toodyaynats.org.au or 9574 5574.



Gould's Hooded Snake. Photo: Lindy Connor.