

NARPULUNGUP NEWS

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Nuytsia floribunda - aka **Western Australian Christmas Tree**

Happy Holidays!

Most people in Western Australia know that the appearance of the dazzling orange blooms points to the start of the warm weather and with that, fire season.

Fire is one of the main constraints to survival facing all southwest species.

Moodjar, as this parasitic mistletoe tree is known in Noongar language, is so distinct there is only one species.

In addition to having some unique features to survive fire and other constraints, the Moodjar (dates back 45 million years) is also of great spiritual importance to Noongar people, especially the Wardandi and Bibbulun people of southwest WA.

The dazzling flowers of the tree are believed to represent the spirits of people who have passed and are on their way to Kurannup or the home of the dead.

For many Noongar people it is disrespectful to stand in its shade or to collect its roots or sap.

'No living Bibbulmun ever sheltered or rested beneath the shade of the tree of souls; no flower or bud or leaf of the tree was ever touched by child or adult; no game that took shelter beneath it was ever disturbed.' (Bates 1938 in Bridge 1992: 153)

It is also believed that a cluster of Nuytsia has been used as a ceremonial space for women to conduct 'women's business'.

Like many of the diverse plant life of Western Australia, this spectacular tree represents the heating up of the weather, traditional culture and displays extraordinary features that enable its survival in our unique and demanding conditions.





Western Bristlebird (*Dasyornis longirostris*). Photo by Alan Bell (iNaturalist Australia)

Western Bristlebird surveys near Fitzgerald Track

By Gil Craig

It was 40 years ago that Shapelle McNee and Brenda Newbey first surveyed for Western Bristlebirds (*Dasyornis longirostris*) in the Jacup South area of the Fitzgerald River National Park. This was motivated by Brenda finding them on the Fitzgerald Track, where it ran north of Roes Rock, in 1985.

Eighteen field surveys have been conducted between 1985 and 2019 by Shapelle and Brenda where they listened for the presence of these elusive birds, which are listed as Endangered.

Over this period there have been four major fires in the area, with some sites being burnt three times, others once or twice, and others long unburnt (65+ years).

Their surveys have found that Western Bristlebirds have home ranges and they move to nearby unburnt vegetation after a fire. Once the vegetation has regenerated, the birds often return to the same home ranges they were displaced from.

Between 2002 and 2006, to gain a better understanding of structural changes of vegetation over time since fire, 15 quadrats were established. Pre- and post-fire measurements could be made at some sites after subsequent fires in 2008 and 2019.



Shapelle McNee assesses 68-year-old vegetation at site FT07, near Fitzgerald Track. Photo by Gil Craig.

A further 10 quadrats have been established over the years to include vegetation with different fire histories.

In October this year, I had the opportunity to join Shapelle as she monitored the quadrats for species presence and to assist with the identification of the *Melaleuca* species.

Although the weather was perfect for listening during the dawn chorus, Shapelle heard only four Western Bristlebirds calling over the four days we were in the field, as a novice and late riser, I heard one.

Shapelle believed the poor calling was due to a combination of low rainfall in recent years and reduced available habitat following the 2008 and 2019 fires. Although the current survey was not comparable to previous surveys which had more people listening over longer periods. Peak number of birds heard were in 2004-2006 when 41-48 birds called along the Fitzgerald Track.

Shapelle is currently writing up her research findings for Birdlife Australia, continuing the extraordinary effort both she and Brenda have done with various volunteers for forty years. Understanding the habitat requirements for this cryptic bird is another reason why fire management in the park needs to be based on sound ecological knowledge.

SAVE THE DATES

Sat 14th March

AGM at Twertup with Guest speaker Matt Macdonald
'Fitzgerald Biosphere vegetation research for appropriate
fire regimes'

Sun 15th March

Twertup Open Day - fun activities for adults and kids -
sausage sizzle lunch, courtesy buses

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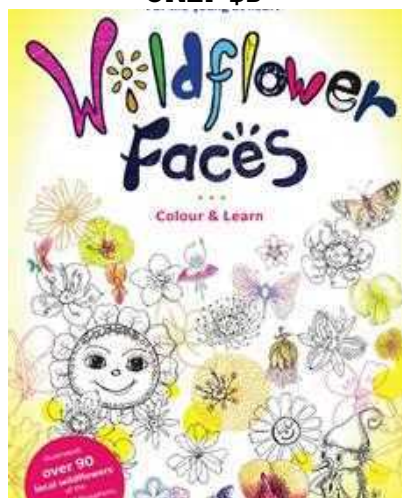
Tea towels by Rowena Howard.

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Contact Annie at: projects@fitzgeraldfriends.org.au

All proceeds go to Friends of the FRNP! 🌿🙏



We respectfully acknowledge the Noongar People as Traditional Owners of Country.

We recognise their continuing connection to land, waters, culture and community and pay our respects to Elders past, present and emerging.

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