



GINA CRANSTON

BACKYARD

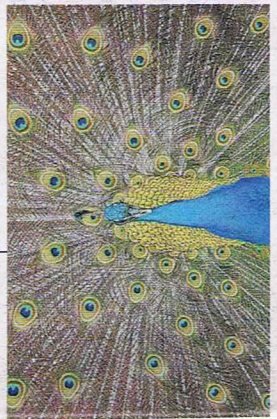
THE DEFT BOWER

I left you last week with a reference to the incredibly quirky satin bowerbird which is found in this area, along with the striking régent bowerbird, which can be spotted in Blackbutt and Glenrock.

The adult male satin bowerbird pinches blue things to decorate his bower. If you're short of blue clothes pegs, I know where I'd be centring my investigation.

The bower boys start by building two parallel walls of twigs about 10 centimetres apart – the bower – and they place their blue booty in front of the two entrances to attract the girls. They have to keep close watch for other males, who will steal the choicest blue pieces for their own bower if they get half a chance. The females build their nests in the trees to raise their young. The bower is but a bachelor pad, not a family home.

My birdwatching neighbour Alan Stuart tells me there are two common night birds in our area, the tawny frogmouth, which is not an owl, and the southern



boobook, which most certainly is an owl. It is not unusual to see a family of tawny frogmouths, though they camouflage themselves brilliantly against a backdrop of bark, because they tend to hang out in everyday places – backyards, school playgrounds.

And while we hear boobooks, we are unlikely to see them as they tend to find quieter spots to avoid harassment from other birds.

The powerful owl (perhaps the avian equivalent of the Lion King) is in our midst too. Alan says there is a pair resident in Blackbutt and others can be seen in large bush reserves around Charlestown and Glenrock, for example. They are three times the size of a tawny frogmouth and they eat fruit bats, ringtail possums and the odd brushtail. True story.

"Although it's a bit scary to think there is such a large predator almost on our doorstep, the powerful owl is a threatened species in NSW [because of habitat loss for suburban expansion] and it's good to know that they are doing well here and helping to keep the fruit bats under control," Alan says.

We got onto the subject of birds and

water, because I told Alan I had been worried about whether our resident peacock (pictured) had an adequate supply.

Many birds – namely the ones that eat insects, including the aforementioned squatter – don't need a lot of water because they get plenty of moisture from their food source.

A lot of honeyeaters like to drink and bathe in birdbaths but it is important to place your birdbath near understorey branches where the lillies can escape if they come under attack by other birds, or, god forbid, our two cats.

Granivorous birds, on the other hand, such as finches, doves and pigeons, rely on a constant supply of water because they don't get it from their food.

The Hunter Bird Observers Club meets on the second Wednesday of each month (except January). The meetings are held downstairs at the Wetlands Centre in Shortland, starting at 7.30pm. The club also has regular Tuesday and Sunday outings plus it organises weekend bush camps. Visitors are welcome to sample any of the club activities, which cater for inexperienced birdwatchers and seasoned campaigners. Visit hboc.org.au for more information.

Coming up: Unorthodox cut flowers and inadvertent ringbarking.

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