



The Nostalgic Times



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“When the well is dry, we know the worth of water.”

Benjamin Franklin (1706-1790).



Since water is such a precious commodity and is essential to all known forms of life, it is only fitting that this issue be devoted to this natural resource.

Given its importance for the continued survival of the human species, it is astounding that water has been so ill-treated by those whose very lives depend on it.

Due to overpopulation, pollution and general misuse, the health of a great many waterways around our nation have degraded to unsustainable levels with the availability of drinking water in Australia's dams plummeting to record lows.

The crisis surrounding the water issues has serious consequences for our precious wildlife. The fate of the lungfish in the Mary River is one such example. For more information log onto: www.savethemaryriver.com



Stomping Grounds

By Simon Baltais

How disappointed I was when this January I visited Milang on Lake Alexandrina, my old stomping ground as a child some 40 years ago.

It was the place I first learnt to swim, to fish, and to row a boat. I watched the abundance of water birds during the day and chased frogs with my brothers at night. None of this is possible now.

Today it's a dying lake, but then so is the Coorong, another national treasure and for that matter so are many other areas along the Murray River's length. It seems that the inability of our political leaders to collectively focus on the big picture has meant that the nation's most important waterway, the Murray River, has been left to decline to a disgraceful state of health.

However, I do see a glimmer of hope. Surely there is a chance for politicians to work together to put some life back into the Murray River system.



The Jetty at Milang on Lake Alexandrina.

Living Fossils?

In the earth's oceans live animals that have remained virtually unchanged for millions of years. These critters are often named 'living fossils'. One such animal is the nautilus.

Nautilus provides us with an amazing insight into the lives of marine critters from the Ordovician and Silurian Periods, which was more than 416 million years ago.



Like many critters that inhabited the prehistoric seas, the nautilus was equipped with features to ensure its survival. Nautilus could withdraw into the safety of their shell and close the opening with a leathery hood.

Today, nautilus can be found in the Indo-Pacific and inhabit the deep slopes of coral reefs. The *Nautilus pompilius*, for example, has a diameter of up to 26.8cm and can be found off the coast of Western Australia.

Even though nautilus have survived millions of years, the effects of climate change on coral reefs, pollution to the earth's oceans, and the harvesting of these animals for their beautiful shells could see future sightings limited solely to the pages of history books.

Seahorses Protector of the Sea Traveller

Interwoven between leafy seagrasses, the twisted roots of mangroves and vivacious corals, lives the seahorse, a small marine animal that is renowned for its vibrant colour and remarkable appearance.

Seahorses belong to the genus *Hippocampus*, a name that comes from the Greek word 'Hippokampos' – *hippos* meaning horse and *kampos* meaning sea monster.

When considering the appearance of the seahorses, their Greek name is very fitting: having a horse shaped head, a body that is encased with hard bony armour, a strong prehensile tail that can grip tightly around objects, and eyes that can move independently of each other – monster sounding indeed! Though their description sounds ferocious, these whimsical creatures rely on their ability to quickly change colour to camouflage themselves with their surroundings, thus protecting them from their predators.

Oceanic creatures have long inspired many colourful tales of mystery and intrigue. Fanciful stories of sunken treasures that were guarded by mythical sea creatures and tales of giant seahorses that swam alongside beautiful mermaids have been passed down through the centuries via the aide of well-preserved manuscripts and artworks. Their appearance rendered in the mind's eye a vision of a sublime creature that stood apart from other marine animals.



Image: Seahorse Australia

In Greek mythology, hippocampi (seahorses) pulled the chariot of Poseidon, and the Nereides – who were the sea-nymph sisters of the sea – rode upon their backs. Legends suggest that the Nereides and their seahorses rendered assistance to sailors in need. As a result of these ancient legends, the seahorse was adopted as a symbol of safe sea travel. Citizens from seaport towns often portrayed the image of the seahorse on coins, heraldry and signs.

Severe weather often hampered sea vessels and placed the occupants in mortal danger. Venturing on the high seas needed more than a sturdy ship and a crew with unwavering nerves, it also needed the fortuitous blessing that came as a result of naming a sea vessel after the magical seahorse. Naval ships, such as the HMS Seahorse — a frigate that was built in 1748, were also named after this aquatic animal.

In 1808, the 42-gun frigate HMS Seahorse encountered two Turkish ships: the 52-gun Badere-i-Zaffer and a 26-gun Alis Fezan. Though the HMS Seahorse outnumbered, a two day fight saw the demise of both Turkish ships, with the Alis Fezan conceding to defeat and the Badere-i-Zaffer being reduced to a smouldering wreck. In this instance, it would appear that the mythical seahorse certainly protected the crew from harms way.



HMS Seahorse

Illustration by Tony Fernandes.

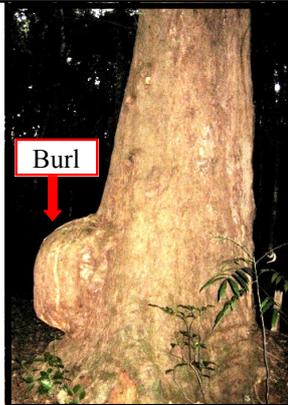
Invisibility Trick

Aborigines caught ducks in local rivers with the aid of a 'natural invisibility cloak'.

The hunters cut large burls of ancient trees, made their way down to local rivers and placed the hollow burls over their heads.

The Aborigines attached a hollow tube to the burl and sealed the joint with wax; this allowed them to breathe while being submerged in the water.

The burl was as an effective form of camouflage that allowed hunters to stealthily approach their unsuspecting prey.



Did You Know...

During the 19th century, the river Thames was in all sense an open sewer. Apart from the raw sewage that ran directly into the river, it also contained the waste from factories and general household garbage.

Deadly diseases such as cholera and typhus were a result of the poor quality of water. Surprisingly enough, the stench and associated health risks did not deter people from venturing into these grimy waters.

'Toshers' earned their living by entering the sewers to look for coins and jewellery that had been accidentally flushed down the loo. However, they risked drowning by the undulating flood of sewage that rapidly and unexpectedly filled the sewers.

As you might expect, toshers reeked of the smell of sewers, so not surprisingly they were not too popular with their neighbours!

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