



FROM THE EDITOR

BY SAREN STARBRIDGE

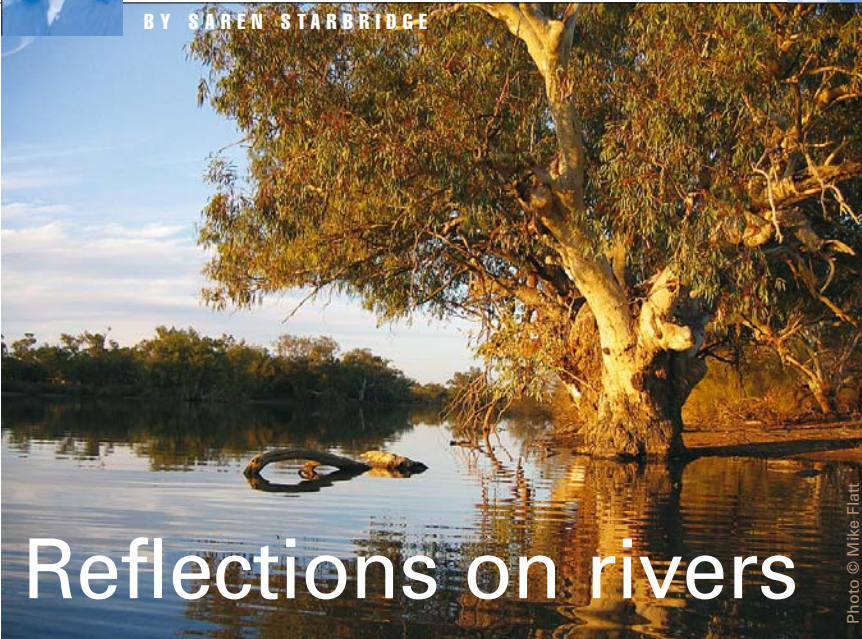


Photo © Mike Platt

Reflections on rivers

A quiet June day on the Paroo River near Wanaaring.

We farm their floodplains, build major cities on their banks, draw off their water for drinking and irrigation, tap their energy, give them our waste to carry away. And this issue hardly touches on those aspects. Rivers are also tremendously important wildlife habitat. Steve Wilson and Angus Emmott's arid zone frogs (pp32-35) are wonderfully adept at keeping themselves damp in trying conditions, but even they need at least a good puddle for breeding. Angus Duguid (pp24-29) has seen pelicans, ospreys and other fish-eating birds in arid central Australia, sustained by the permanent waterholes of the Finke (and other) rivers. Along their banks, trees can grow long and large enough

to form the hollows where parrots and some of the other more than 300 species of Australia's hollow-dependent vertebrate wildlife can shelter. Even when the river moves on, it has created landscapes such as the deposits of sandy loam where yaminon – the endangered northern hairy-nosed wombat – dig extensive and life-supporting burrows (pp16-23).

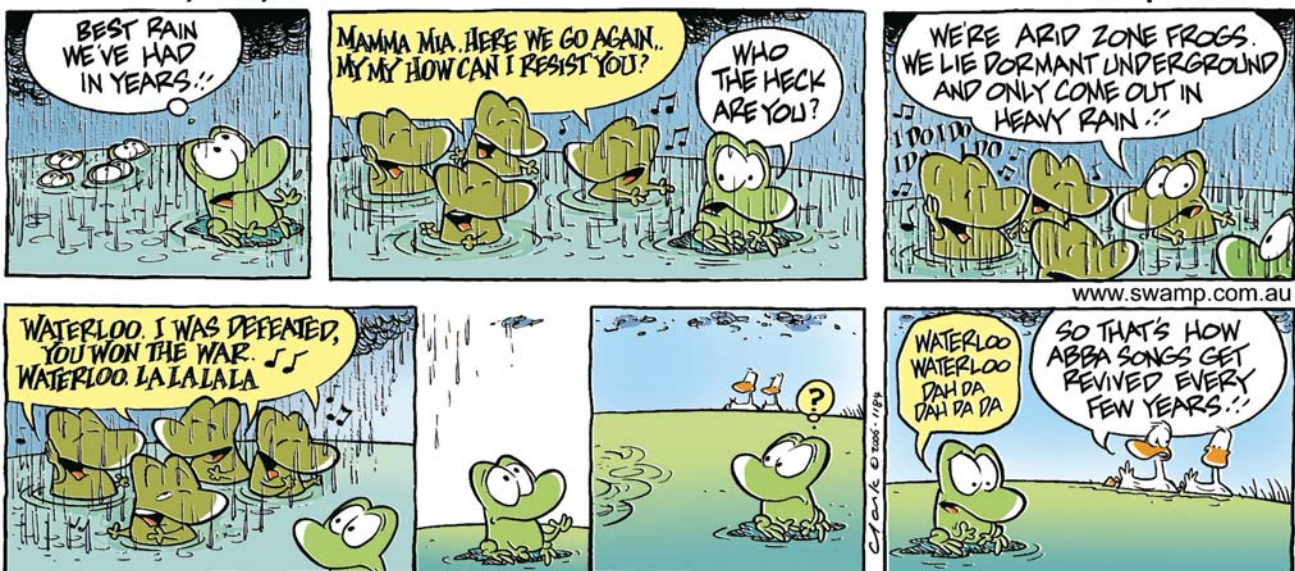
Rivers carry sand from eroding mountains right out to the edge of the continental shelf where it tumbles down into deep ocean deposits. Or is that the whole story? Ron Boyd and Kevin Ruming (pp12-15) have made some fascinating discoveries about eastern Australia's coastal sand – a longshore transport system they call the river of sand.

We're getting more conscious of our rivers and waterways, as Lee Curtis notes in her story on the revegetation of Peterson Creek (pp30-31) but they are still under threat, as Antonia and Warwick Deacock warn us in their letter on p43. The plan to raise the wall of the Tallowa Dam on the lower Kangaroo River in order to supply more water to Sydney has been halted – but do we still see dammed rivers as the major supplier of fresh water for agricultural, industrial and urban use? We are such a clever species. We've developed technology to explore the marine canyons and deep sea floor as we follow the journey of sand off the northern tip of Fraser Island. Mike Salisbury (pp9-11) gives us a glimpse behind the *Undergrowth* scenes into the technology that allows Sir David Attenborough to show us how dragonfly wings work and take us into the homes of scorpions, trapdoor spiders and the pheromone-driven world of ant nests. As Salisbury observes, nothing replaces the craft and patience of skilled photographers, but the tools they are developing are opening doors we've only dreamed about. If we can create these technologies, surely we can develop effective, hygienic systems for using and conserving fresh water without draining or diverting our rivers, leaving wildlife high and dry and cutting down our own opportunities to be refreshed by the wild places and experiences that our rivers support.

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