

The bandicoot and the frog Sarah Lloyd OAM

Many Westbury residents are justly proud to share their town with two very special animals, the Eastern Barred Bandicoot and Green and Gold Frog.

Eastern Barred Bandicoots (*Perameles gunnii*) thrive in Westbury because the town has everything they need – open grassy areas where they can search for food (insects, spiders, fungi and earthworms) close to dense vegetation where they can shelter, build nests and hide from cats and dogs.

Sadly, in the rest of the country, this pointy-nosed marsupial is now among our most endangered animals because of habitat destruction and predation. Once widespread across eastern Australia, it is now extinct in the wild on the mainland but has fared better in fox-free Northern Tasmania where it is mostly found on private property.

Bandicoots have a high reproductive rate with females theoretically able to produce 3-4 litters of 1-4 young each year—potentially 16 offspring annually! Although this means their population can increase rapidly, they have a high mortality rate caused mostly by predation, disease and collisions with cars.

The modification of habitat that caused the bandicoots' decline, also contributed to the local extinction of the Green and Gold Frog (*Litoria raniformis*) in areas where it was once common, including the Midlands, Derwent Valley and north-west coast. The frog and bandicoot are now legally protected under state and federal legislation, and their 'Vulnerable' status means that populations will continue to decline if habitat continues to be cleared.

Many people think (wrongly) that frogs live in water. Tasmania's frogs BREED in water, and tadpoles stay there until they turn into frogs. Adult frogs LIVE where vegetation, rocks and logs provide shelter and their food of skinks, insects, and other frogs.

The Green and Gold Frog is also known as the Growling Grass Frog because of its distinctive guttural call and its liking for grassy areas. It often basks in sunny places well away from water. In early July 2020 members of the Central North Field Naturalists visited Westbury Reserve to add to the list of plants and animals we've found at the site. On this sunny afternoon we observed a green and gold frog on the proposed prison's 'development area'.

In August 2015 NRM officers from Tamar NRM and the Meander Valley Council initiated 'Westbury Backyard Birds'. This project supplied residents with locally grown native plants to encourage native birds to their gardens. As advisor to the project I wrote 'The Feathered Tribes of Van Diemen's Land', a book about Tasmania's birds and what we can all do to ensure their long term survival. Considerable time, energy, and funding was expended to see this project to fruition. It therefore seems contradictory—and outrageous—that part of the Westbury Reserve, a repository of birds and other animals that can repopulate areas now devoid of these species, is destined to be cleared for a prison.

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