

Huff the Magic Dragon

by Ed Parker

All living things need their own particular environment, or habitat, for their continued existence. This includes humans, too, as we also rely upon many aspects of our natural environment for survival. Much of this we take for granted, such as safe and secure water supply, clean air and productivity of soils for food production.

Humans, alone among living creatures, have the most profound ability for wreaking major modifications to our environment in pursuit of perceived benefits beyond mere survival.

Often this quest brings with it destruction of other life forms - our perception of what constitutes human survival unfortunately often entails environmental destruction. Ultimately, loss of biodiversity in our natural world runs contrary to a sustainable future, for we humans as well.

Reminders of excessive changes to the natural environment exist in our local area, such as land subdivisions where trees are totally obliterated and landscape flattened with huge cuts and fills, merely for the fickle human desire for a 'flat block'.

Defences for most living things are inadequate against such extreme examples of human-induced environmental destruction. Where, however, some concession is made to retain examples of the natural environment in suburbia, we can have pleasure and satisfaction of continued existence of native fauna and flora.

Defence mechanisms have evolved over eons as a necessary part of existence for many animals, but often depend intrinsically upon aspects of the natural environment as it existed before human onslaught.

A case in point is one particular reptile that survives in suburban gardens. But its survival is only where we humans have retained concessions to the natural environment: nearby remnant bushland refuges coupled with aspects of an inviting, bushland habitat in our own yard.

I refer to the Bearded Dragon, *Pogona barbata*, a master of disguise when in a conducive environment of rocks, leaf litter and filtered sunlight where its physical features blend almost seamlessly. Camouflage is one common form of defence but this creature also exhibits the opposite extreme. Instead of taking the low profile of motionless blending into the background, it may choose instead the 'huff and puff' of bravado if challenged, puffing out its beard and belly.



Bearded Dragon, *Pogona barbata*, in camouflage mode (above).



... and in 'huff and puff' defence mode!

Photos by E Parker

This regular Nature Watch column is contributed by your local Centenary bushland care groups.

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