

## Nature Notes Lesson 1 – Spring in the Wheatbelt

*The wheatbelt countryside during late winter/early spring lay across the path of successive eastward-moving anticyclones. These high pressure systems caused fine warm days with inland winds and cold nights when frost still glazed the ephemeral ponds. The creatures in the ponds on the tor and the clay pans in the flats continued to be subjected to a daily range of temperature of sometimes 20°C...*

*By mid-spring the reptiles stirred in their burrows and improvised hybernaculae and some sloughed their skins. The old bungarra and the mountain devils in the untampered terrain on the ridge, bobtails and blue-tongues in the wodjil and the scrubby clay flats, the geckos and snakes in the timber stands, the dragon lizards and geckos and snakes on the granite tor – all were awakening. Over the succeeding weeks, on warm sunny days, one by one the reptiles would emerge; the old bungarra would sun itself outside its burrow, mountain devils would forage on the ground for ants, the bobtails and blue-tongues would be out foraging in the warmth of midday, the dragon lizards would again warm themselves on the sun-warmed slopes of the granite tor, each lizard maintaining its own “basking” area. Even an occasional snake would bask in the mild sunshine.*

*And in the vacated shelters of logs and stony rubble and under the rock slabs of the tor, in burrows and “borrowed” tunnels of other creatures, there would lie the dry, scaly, shrinking skins of other reptiles. In a tunnel in the thicket of a hakea bush lay the perfect skin of a bobtail. From the fragile hollow sculpture, with each rugose scale complete, each toe a stiff bent tube, the rigid horny eyelids stared vacuously. A few ants lingered still within its drying cavity. The test would be there in the summer until it rotted in the rains of next winter.*

*The nights were still and mildly cold and on clear nights the tor, the valley and the southern ridge were spanned obliquely by the great broad streak of the Milky Way which glittered with a brilliance undimmed by the glare of metropolitan night. The tremendous quietude around the tor was disrupted inly by the intermittent, broken chorus of crinias and the resonant bonking of “banjo” frogs; in the swales, only by the plangent harping of plovers or the railings of curlews. These cold nights continued into October, but the days were warm and sunny, even hot.*

*The anticyclonic belt moved further south, the depressions with rainbearing, westerly winds occurred less frequently. The sun now set, not in line with the northern ridge of the valley near the lumpy outline of the tor, but beyond the great wide scoop and creeping each week a little toward, the line of the southern ridge.*

*Bush flowers had budded and bloomed. Everlastings were turning brittle and papery, the globular marble-like fruits on the quandongs gleamed red with their ripeness, while out in the open spaces, the crops were in head, the pastures tinged with brown. Spring was dying.*

Excerpt from *Between Wodjil and Tor* by Barbara York Main © 1967

### Suggested Dictation Passages

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