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Expert warns of Roe woe

by JENNY D'ANGER

THE proposed Roe Highway set to stamp a concrete footprint between Bibra and North Lakes will add pressure to already struggling wildlife, says local biology expert Rob Manning.

His comments add to the growing community concern about the plans. A mass rally and picnic gets underway 10am Saturday 3 February at Bibra Lake recreation reserve, opposite the gold-painted tree, to voice opposition to the road.

Local campaigner Robyn Mandal has told the Herald that somebody's gone and pinched more than 80 posters she painstakingly put up around Cockburn suburbs, alerting locals to the rally.

"It's sabotage!" she told us, none too happy that her hours of work was undone. The only question to be answered is, who dunnit, and did their vehicles have official crests on them? Perhaps eagle-eyed readers could let us know.

Mr Manning, a former CSIRO and Murdoch University environment department staffer, lives on the last five-acre block in St Paul's estate in Bibra Lake.

Just over 10 years ago St Paul's was marketed as large bush blocks of 1-5 acres, but as developers moved in the area was subdivided and, with smaller blocks, large areas of native trees and vegetation were destroyed.

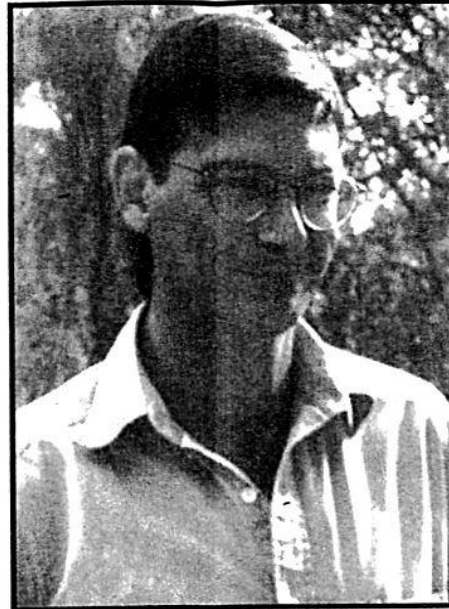
Instead of gum trees and native vegetation for fauna habitat there are palms and potted gardens, Mr Manning says bitterly.

"There was originally supposed to be trees around to give an extra buffer for Bibra Lake," he told the Herald.

"But when Thomsons Lake changed zoning it allowed for urban infill."

The bush around Bibra Lake and St Paul's is home to bandicoots, bobtail goannas, a wide variety of bird life and diverse native flora.

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• Rob Manning says the Roe Highway cutting between Bibra and North Lakes will have a devastating effect on wildlife.

Expert warns of Roe woe

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But with habitats fast disappearing for housing and now a large swathe set to be cleared for the Roe Highway, Mr Manning says many will disappear.

"They need a large area to forage, for food they need a certain amount of hectares - and in dry years they need even more," he says.

Main Roads Roe Highway project manager Tony Missokos says the extension east of the freeway had gone through an extensive community consultation processes to allay local, social and environmental concerns and the Bibra and North Lakes area would see more.

"We listened, debated and consulted and will do that and more because we realise the significance of the area," he says.

And while the bottom line was the need to balance economic and transport needs for the whole metropolitan area against

environmental issues, he was hopeful solutions could be found.

"So long as we maintain as much of the natural environment as possible it can lead to healthy communities of native animals," Mr Missokos said.

But Mr Manning and wife Linda say they have seen an increasing number of bandicoots and tawny frog mouth owls dead on the road, hit by traffic; the situation can only worsen with more heavy haulage, he says.

"Bibra Lake is one of a few breeding areas for black swans," Mr Manning says.

Adding to the problems for native species, the spread of noxious introduced plants could increase dramatically, smothering native species, if a six-lane highway was allowed to cut through the sensitive wetland area.

"Even fire breaks create a bit of problem with noxious weeds," says Mr Manning.