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White Tale *by Renee Schipp*

'Numbers are believed to have fallen by tens of thousands due to the loss of habitat from land clearing in the wheatbelt and metropolitan area...Environmental Scientist, Paul van der Moezel, believes the recent agreement by the State Government over the new Fiona Stanley hospital site at Murdoch has set a costly precedent for future development in the Perth metropolitan area'.

– *Stateline ABC 25 July, 2008 on the future of the White-Tail Black Cockatoo.*

The thing is, now we know.

The thing is, before when we slashed and burned
and those ancient Karris came crashing to the ground while
old Jarrah became sleepers on the street,
we were babes in the endless wood
trying to make it look like home
trying to make it worth it
trying to make it.

We have made it now, this and so much more,
we sprawl and sprawl along the coast
built to breed but feel the need
for a pool, the lawn, the palm, the porch,
the drive in and lock up.

The thing is now we know,
can see what we have and
what we stand to lose,
standing by our barbeques, hose in hand.

The thing is, now we document decline,
table it, map it, file it and shake our heads,
shake hands, then roll out the development plans.
I am smothered by white, gloss and lines.
They'll save the seeds they say but
two hundred year old trees are hard to come by
in the suburbs.
Yet the bulldozers roll in and
oh how the mighty fall taking
the nesting hollows with them until
all I see is white, white sand, their white gloss plans
that sit above it all,

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and the silenced.

But, you say, I see them every day
and yes, I see them too
a remnant population, massive and evasive,
their ghost screech bringing down the sky.
There they are, you say,
but somewhere else, by swing, by slide, by sidewalk
falls a stark, black statement of starvation.
And there they are with
their sing-song talk giving them away in high branches,
half the population left and counting
half the population left until I
switch on the nightly news, now
one hundred and fifty fallen from the blue.
'The heat' they said, it's a news weary world –
pesticide did not make the headlines later.

So, yes, I can see them now,
and each live and each limp body
should shame us through and through
one hundred and fifty, how many more vital cockatoos?

Yet all the while

we knew

we knew

we knew

and still we know.

Renee Schipp is an award winning co-ordinator of Sustainability at a public primary school in the Fremantle area. She has taken a year of leave in 2010 to travel and write, and enjoys photographing the beauty of the natural world around her. Through her work, experiences and creative pursuits, Renee has come to see hope and connection as two highly dependent concepts.