

## **Forward by Mike Archer from Locally Wild.**

Something happened to me in 1970 when a friend gently placed in my hands a playful, bright-eyed, white spotted baby western quoll. It was instantaneous, gob-smacked love—an affair of the heart that bound that mischievous quoll and I together for years and changed my whole outlook on conservation.

In the wild, this species once thrived in all mainland states of Australia. Regrettably, when Europeans arrived, native animals of all kinds began to steadily disappear as feral cats, foxes and land-clearing took their toll. Conservation parks and reserves are great beginnings, but in themselves they are not enough to guarantee our native animals a future.

Today, the only western quolls that survive cling to life in a steadily shrinking corner of Western Australia. Add the threat of climate change to existing reserves and it's only a matter of time before the last western quoll disappears. Will Australians who have never seen, let alone held, one care enough to do something—anything—to save it from extinction?

For most of us, the only animals on which we lavish love are the growing millions of introduced, environment-damaging cats and dogs—the animals we live with and hence value most. Kids no longer have a kangaroo or a possum in the house or even in the backyard. In contrast to previous generations, the vast majority of Australians now live their entire lives in cities which are, as currently managed, hostile deserts to all but a few native creatures. Fragile, threatened in the bush and no longer cherished, one after another they are vanishing. Our only encounters with them have become flickering pixels on a TV screen.

My worry is that the increasing loss of direct contact between children and native animals, reinforced by some laws that prohibit their domestic habitation, will lead to a steady loss of care about what happens to these beautiful creatures in the wild. It's a simple truth that we only value the things we live with or depend on. Television screens can't trigger the mind-meld that occurs when you hold the real thing. If kids don't get the chance to experience the heart-binding magic of cuddling a possum, quoll, lizard or a turtle, increasingly they won't care whether these creatures vanish or not.

We must find ways for kids to build the genuine emotional bonds that ensure they will care what happens. My strategy since I first loved that quoll has been the same as the one presented in this book: diversify the ways we value wildlife to maximise their chances for survival. And one of the best ways to do that is to enable more kids to keep suitable native animals as pets. That's what this extraordinary book is all about.

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