



# Locally Wild

## Keeping native animals as pets

If you ask students, and probably adults too, to name ten animals they would probably mention cats, dogs, canaries, lions, tigers and elephants. Sometimes, but only sometimes, they might even mention a kangaroo. Isn't this amazing, considering that we live in a country that has some of the most unique animals on earth!

Pets are fantastic and many students in Australia would agree. When looked after properly, pets make great companions. Pet ownership, properly undertaken, develops responsibility and respect for animals. It also teaches kids about life and death—the 'life cycle'.

The problem is that many pets are not friendly to our environment and especially to our native animals, and when their owners allow them to escape into our Australian bush or to roam our streets and laneways, major problems occur.

If, instead of cats and dogs, people had native pets in their homes then our Australian kids would grow up knowing and talking about OUR Australian animals.

### Website resources

[www.fats.org.au](http://www.fats.org.au)  
(Frog and Tadpole Study Group of NSW)

[www.ahs.org.au](http://www.ahs.org.au)  
(The Australian Herpetological Society)

[www.gould.edu.au](http://www.gould.edu.au)  
(Gould Group)

[www.floraforfauna.com.au](http://www.floraforfauna.com.au)  
(Flora for Fauna)

[www.environment.gov.au/](http://www.environment.gov.au/)  
(Commonwealth Department of the Environment and Water Resources)

... and don't forget to check out the websites of:

- the state and territory parks and wildlife departments
- zoos and marine parks
- museums
- animal husbandry suppliers.

Many more weblinks can be found on pages 92 and 93 of the book *Locally Wild* (see feature at right).



### Curriculum focus

Science and Technology: Design and Make, Living Things, Investigation, Technology

English: Reading, Research, Writing

Mathematics: Number, Classifying, Mapping

PDHPE: Problem Solving, Communicating, Decision Making

Creative and Practical Arts: Visual Arts—Making

### Learning outcomes

Students will be able to:

- understand that living things show variation between species
- understand that the activities of people can change the balance of nature
- undertake an investigation as a result of individual curiosity or as a means of solving problems
- discover similarities and differences between living things
- discover the way that living things interact with one another
- discover how environments provide for the needs of living things
- discover how natural environments are affected by technological activities.

### Discussion questions

- List five Australian native animals.
- Specify some ways in which people obtain pets (e.g. by collecting from friends, buying at pet stores or purchasing through breeders).
- What are some of the responsibilities of looking after a non-native pet? (Consider the possible effect of your pet upon the environment.)
- What are some of the special responsibilities of looking after native animals?
- Why should we keep native animals as pets?
- What are some of the problems of maintaining native animals in schools and in homes?
- Why should we be required to obtain a native animal from a licensed breeder? Why not obtain the animal from the wild?
- What is a feral animal?
- What is the problem with feral and exotic animals in the Australian environment?
- What are some ways in which humans can assist to preserve the native animal species?
- What are some ways in which people can learn about being more responsible pet owners?
- Should people only be permitted to have pets if they have undertaken pet ownership courses? What should be taught during these courses?



## LOCALLY WILD

### Keeping Native Animals as Pets

Christopher Cheng

PLUTO PRESS, ISBN: 978 0 9802 9245 9

\$26.95

Order online: <http://www.plutoaustralia.com/p1/default.asp?pageid=389>

This book explains the practicalities of looking after a range of native animals from sugar gliders to native cockroaches. Instead of the usual cats, dogs, guinea pigs and rabbits, Chris Cheng, a renowned children's author, National Literacy and Numeracy Week ambassador and former educator at Taronga Zoo, would love to see more youngsters making pets of rhinoceros beetles, green tree frogs, hopping mice and even wallabies.



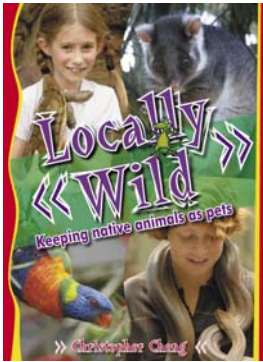
### Activities

#### Construct a native animal habitat

- Discuss some native plants and animals and their requirements for a native habitat. What particular habitat features do these plants and animals require?
- Ask students to plan a native garden at school. Research the native plants and animals from the area. Students will need to talk to the local council and local gardening authorities (such as nursery retailers). Long time local residents might also be of assistance. When planning the native garden consider what wildlife will be attracted to the plants and also investigate facilities and objects that will protect the native animals in this environment once they are present (e.g. fences to protect against dogs and cats).
- Students might also have to construct 'homes' for the native animals such as nesting boxes, hollows, rock shelters and possibly even water courses. Visit pages 82–3 of *Locally Wild* for more ideas.

#### Replacement study

- Conduct a survey of the pets that are looked after by students in your class/school. What species are they? Who looks after them? What do they eat? What are the features of these animals that make them good pets (e.g. bonds well with humans, easy to maintain)?
- After studying some of the native animals from *Locally Wild* prepare a replacement list that substitutes a native animal for one of the pets that the students have on their list. The native animal selected would need to have features (e.g. bonds well, is easy to keep) that the 'usual' pet has.



## **LOCALLY WILD:**

*Keeping native animals as pets*

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### ADDITIONAL ACTIVITIES

#### **Missing animals**

- Research one species of native animal that lived in your region before European settlement. Discuss reasons why these animals no longer live in the area. What are some of the methods for attracting these animals back to the region?
- Find out what the early European settlers thought of the Australian wildlife (the state and national libraries are wonderful sources for obtaining the documents of early settlers). Prepare a database of the animals missing from the region.
- Students can then prepare a presentation about those missing animals. Use this database and the presentations to create a document that can be submitted to the local authorities about the missing native wildlife. Don't forget to contact the local media authorities and advise them of the discoveries/document.

#### **Build-a-home**

*Locally Wild* has plans for many different types of animal shelter, such as possum boxes and bird nesting boxes. Maybe you have these animals in your locality. Students could undertake a building project and construct a number of these and, with permission of the school community or local council, place these in the environment. Remember that the shelters would need protection from some of the non-native animals that 'roam'.

#### **Animal survey**

Discuss with students the types of animals that they know use the school playground—feasting on food scraps from the bins, crawling along the ground, nesting in trees. Then spend some time observing the wildlife that visits the school playground. What do the animals do? How long do they spend in the school yard? Are they native animals or exotic animals? What would be some ways of increasing the presence of native animals in the school yard? Were there any unexpected visitors to the school yard? Students could construct charts of their observations.

### ***LOCALLY WILD: Keeping Native Animals as Pets***

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