

Locally Wild ... Keeping native Animals as Pets

Locally Wild is a fully illustrated how-to guide for children 8-14 (and parents) about caring responsibly for native animals as pets, a growing trend under the various state and territory government licensing provisions.

The author, Christopher Cheng introduces readers to a nation of native animal enthusiasts whose hobby is caring for fauna as diverse as turtles, frogs, cockatoos, bats, native honeybees, native cockroaches, and marsupials like quolls and possums in all types of situations from suburban yards and flats to farms and schools. We also meet the kids who have transformed their communities, schools and neighbourhoods into native animal sanctuaries, and their own yards into havens of animal life. It explains how to care for those native animals we are allowed to keep under existing laws; from caging, feeding and keeping them healthy; to where to get them and the local hobby groups you can join, and also highlights how to attract native animals to local areas through local projects.

Locally Wild's theme is if children get to know and care for our native animals they will also come to value them, and also learn about their environments.

Some environmentalists think native animals are best conserved by keeping them away from humans, but this book takes the alternative view, that through familiarity people come to know and value them.

Locally Wild takes its lead from the innovative views of Professor Mike Archer, (Dean of Science at University of NSW and author of *Going Native*) that Australians will value their unique environment if they come to know and appreciate the fauna and flora that is adapted to survive here. Ironically since the 1980s urban children had become less familiar with native animals, in contrast to older people who have fond memories of keeping or living in close proximity with native reptiles, amphibians, birds and mammals. However, in recent years the enlightened and educative licensing systems initiated by state and territory governments have encouraged a revival in families keeping as pets native animals such as turtles, frogs, birds and some mammals. Likewise state and local government policies have supported the creation in local communities of environments that are havens for native animals, such as wetlands, and bushlands. *Locally Wild* shows children, parents and school groups how to care for licensed native animals as pets, and how to create environments in the back yard or neighbourhood (native planting, ponds, wetlands) in which wild natives such as birds, frogs, bats and blue tongues can thrive alongside people.

Ever wanted to keep a pet turtle, wallaby, a yabbie, sugar glider or a colourful barrier reef fish? Have you wanted to turn your yard into a refuge for parrots, blue tongues or Green tree frogs? Would you like your school to adopt a native hopping mouse or a possum or build a wetland full of waterbirds, native fish and tadpoles? Then *Locally Wild* will show you how with easy to read text chock full of interesting information and stunning pictures.

Locally Wild aims to reintroduce Australians to our animals and by doing so teach them about how to live in the Australian environment. It's also a fun guide showing kids how to build their own mini-environments in the back yard, home, schools and neighbourhoods. Its brim full of projects kids and parents can do together. The book has photos of animals, interesting facts about their biology and behaviour, advice on where to how to get an Aussie pet (including the best web sites in each state), vital advice on how to care for each of the animals, instructional how-to diagrams and real life stories and pictures about kids and adults who keep native pets. It also contains a glossary of terms and appendixes directing children, parents and teachers to further care information.

Locally Wild is a resource in an expanding community campaign that brings together native animal enthusiasts and fauna groups, parents keen to engage in activities with hobby-hungry children, educators interested in conservation and science, media, and public institutions like the Environmental Protection Agency, museums and schools. There are a number of schools that have adopted one or more licensed native animals as part of an environmental learning experience and this has proved extremely popular with students, parents and teachers. Opinion leaders like Professor Archer have suggested that 'adopting a native animal' be expanded into an initiative across interested schools in various state education systems.

The book has been verified by scientists and education officers working with public museums and state government native animal protection authorities.

Locally Wild is written by well known award winning children's author and former primary school teacher Christopher Cheng (www.chrischeng.com), known for his innovative work as education officer at Sydney's Taronga Zoo developing and implementing the first Australian Zoomobile, his talks and writing workshops in schools, and more recently his new children's historical fiction. Chris is Co-Regional Advisor of the international Society of Children's Book Writers and illustrators and is a National Ambassador for the federal government's Literacy and Numeracy week initiative.