

INTRODUCTION

If I ask kids, and probably adults too, to name ten animals they often mention cats and dogs and canaries, lions and tigers and elephants. Sometimes, but only sometimes, they might even mention a kangaroo. Isn't it amazing when we live in a country that has some of the most awesome animals!

I think that pets are fantastic and that every kid in Australia should have a pet. Many pets properly looked after make great companions and pet ownership properly undertaken develops responsibility, respect for wildlife, and teaches about life and death – the life cycle.

The problem is that many pets that people have are not friendly to our environment and especially to our native animals. And when these people allow those animals to escape into our Australian bush or roam our streets and alleyways instead of being restricted to our houses 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 as the first animals they recall.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- What are some of our native animals?
- How do people obtain pets? e.g., collecting from friends, buying at pet stores or through breeders.
- What are the responsibilities of looking after a pet?
- What are some of the special responsibilities of looking after native animals?
- Why should we keep native animals as pets?
- Why should we have to obtain a native animal from a license breeder? Why not get the animal from the wild?
- What is a feral animal?
- What is a native animal?
- What is the problem with feral and exotic animals in the Australian environment?
- What are some of the problems of maintaining native animals in schools and in homes?
- What are some ways humans can assist to preserve the native animal species?

- What are some ways that people can learn about being more responsible pet owners?
- Should people only be permitted to have pets who have undertaken pet ownership courses? What would be part of these courses?

ACTIVITIES

Construct a native animal habitat

Discuss native plants and animals and their requirements for a native habitat. What is required by these animals? Ask students to plan a native garden in school. Research the native plants and animals from the area. Students will need to talk to the local council, local gardening authorities. 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 retain the native animals in this environment once they are there eg; protection from dogs and cats. Students might also have to construct 'homes' for the native animals, homes such as nesting boxes and hollows, rock shelters, possibly even water courses. Visit pages 82 /3 of *Locally Wild* for more ideas.

Missing animals

Investigate the species of animal life that was native to your region before European settlement. Discuss reasons why these animals are not there anymore. 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.

Pet Care Manual

Discuss with students the responsibilities of pet care. See especially page 12 of *Locally Wild*. Have students prepare a collection of information pages about native animals. Students will first need to decide what animals would make good pets. They could also decide which of the pets that people usually keep can

be replaced by a native animal. Then prepare information sheets about the husbandry of these animals and what is required of the human animal who is looking after the animal.

Replacement Study

Conduct a survey of the pets that are looked after by students in your class/school. What species of animals are they? Who looks after the pet? What do the animals 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, easy to keep) that the 'usual' pet has.

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 to the school yard? Were there any unexpected visitors to the school yard? Students could construct charts of their observations.

Build-a-home

Locally Wild has plans for many forms of animal shelters, such as possum 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 from the school community or local council place these in the environment too ... remember that they would need protection from some of the non native animals that 'roam.'

WEBLINKS

Frog and tadpole study group of NSW

www.fats.org.au

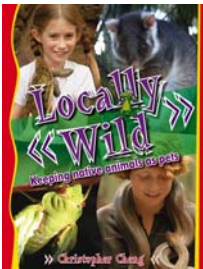
LOCALLY WILD – teacher notes

The Australian Herpetological Society	www.ahs.org.au
Gould League	www.gould.edu.au
Flora of Australia	www.floraforfauna.com.au
Department of Environment and heritage	http://www.environment.gov.au/

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

- The state and territory parks and wildlife.
- Zoos and marine parks
- Museums
- Animal suppliers and or husbandry materials

Many more weblinks can be found on pages 92 and 93 in *Locally Wild*.



Locally Wild, keeping native animals as pets

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Pluto Press Australia, ISBN: 978-0-9802924-5-9

Rrp: \$26.95

For more information about Chris and other Teaching notes visit his website at www.chrischeng.com.