



**RANDOM HOUSE AUSTRALIA  
READING GUIDES**

***30 Amazing Australian Animals* by  
Chris Cheng  
Illustrated by Gregory Rogers**

Random House Australia  
RRP: \$19.95  
ISBN: 978 1 74166 191 0  
Reading Level: 7+

**SYNOPSIS  
ABOUT THE AUTHOR  
WRITING STYLE  
THEMES  
DISCUSSION POINTS AND ACTIVITIES**

## **SYNOPSIS**

Australia is an extraordinary country and many unusual creatures call it their home. On land and in the sky, under the ground and underwater, that's where you'll find them. This non-fiction collection of animal stories lovingly places each amazing creature in the spotlight - with facts, figures, scientific names, gestation periods and breakout boxes to help bring them to life.

Thirty of our most amazing animals have been selected from a parade of potential stars, from bilbies to dugongs, from koalas to blue-ringed octopi, from cicadas to kookaburras, from crocs to goannas, they're all here. And you'll find some invaders too. So beware!

## **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Christopher Cheng was born in Sydney. He is a primary school teacher by profession, and has taught in schools in Sydney and country NSW. He also spent 8 years as Education Officer at Taronga Zoo, Sydney, where he created and implemented Australia's first Zoomobile. It was here that he acquired his knowledge and developed his love for our amazing Australian animals and where he wrote his first published book . . . about animals, of course. Since then Chris has had more than 20 books of fiction and non-fiction published in Australia and overseas.

Chris has worked as the children's specialist for a national book chain. He also coordinated a science-based CD-ROM series at Purdue University in the USA – from

deep in a basement – and gave the occasional lecture in Aussie children’s literature. He is also Co-Regional Advisor for SCBWI, (the Society of Children’s Book Writers and Illustrators).

In recent years Chris has been seen promoting literacy for the Federal Government’s National Literacy and Numeracy initiative ([www.literacyandnumeracy.gov.au](http://www.literacyandnumeracy.gov.au)). He has created book lists, hints for parents and podcasts, and been actively promoting Australia’s wonderful children’s books.

Chris is married and lives in Sydney’s inner west, in a renovated terrace (big enough to hold his book collection). He is a full-time children’s author and regularly visits schools to hold workshops and talks about his writing.

Chris says that he has the best job in the world. For more information about Chris visit his website at [www.chrischeng.com](http://www.chrischeng.com)

## WRITING STYLE

Christopher Cheng says:

*'30 Amazing Australian Animals* was just a wonderful book to write, especially because I was able to delve into the history of European discovery of some of these animals. I am fascinated now by what Europeans first thought of our animals and how they described them. Hopefully this book will make people more fascinated by our wonderfully unique and amazing Australian animals and go out and find out more information about the animals. Hopefully it will also help people become aware of how fragile our ecosystem is and how much we need to look after our animals and the environment.'

*30 Amazing Australian Animals* contains native and introduced animals that are well established in the Australian environment. Some of these introduced animals are also *killers!*

The animal information is written in narrative style, but the book also includes facts, lists, information boxes and fun trivia about animal names and the animal emblems of Australia.

## THEMES

- How are animals classified?
- Extinction
- Animal discovery
- Cloning
- History
- European settlement
- Classification
- Scientific names
- Animal biology
- Animal adaptation

## DISCUSSION POINTS

*30 Amazing Australian Animals* is relevant to a number of curriculum areas. Here are some suggestions:

### Science

- How are animals classified?
- Why do we classify animals?
- What is an Australian animal?
- What is an exotic animal?
- Why are some Australian animals not classified as native?
- How do scientists name animals?
- What did naturalists first think when they saw Australian animals? See p. 150 for about the wombat, p. 94 about the kookaburra, or p. 112 about the platypus for examples.
- What do you think is the future for Australian animals?
- List the animals in *30 Amazing Australian Animals* that are native to Australia and those that are not. Remember that animals that originate in Australia can be non-native to specific areas of Australia.
- One of the methods proposed for returning an animal from extinction is cloning. Is this the right thing to do ethically? Would there need to be limitations or restrictions?
- What are some other species introduced into Australia since European settlement?

### Environment

- What are some of the environmental problems facing Australia and Australian wildlife?
- What are some of the causes for animal extinction?
- Why are camels such a problem for Australia's wildlife? Can you think of any other non-native animals that are causing damage? Are there any native animals that are causing problems for the environment? Why?
- Jumpers (p. 105) and tunnels (p. 107) are some of the human creations made to help conserve our amazing Australian animals. What are some other human creations that help our animals in the environment? Can you think of any of your own?

### History / Geography

- Why did the first naturalists that arrived in Australia find the animals so unique?
- How does Australia's diverse landscape provide geographic barriers?
- How have the animals adapted to the environments they live in?
- The early fleets that travelled to Australia came with non-native animals. What were these animals used for? What happened to them?
- Page 56 mentions emus being sent back to England by Governor Macquarie. Why do you think this was done? What special arrangements would have been made for the transportation of these animals? Would this be done now?
- What are some of the descriptions used by the early naturalists to describe Australian animals?
- Why were some of the descriptions based on European animals?

## ACTIVITIES

### Redesigned Animals

- Most animals have specific adaptations that enable them to survive in their natural habitat. Take an animal from *30 Amazing Australian Animals* and redesign it to live in a totally different environment. For example, you might redesign a platypus to live in the desert, or an emu that must fly!

### Amazing Animals

- Imagine you were a biologist on the first fleet amazed by the sights and sounds of Australia's unique creatures. Write a description of the first time you heard of or saw one of our 'strange' animals, and try to describe the animals. You could examine historical records for examples of what scientists on the first fleet wrote.

### A New Animal

- Imagine you have discovered a new animal today:
  - write a report of the discovery, (where you were, what you were doing, how many specimens you found, whether the specimen was alive or deceased, and so on)
  - write a scientific description of your animal's features
  - draw the animal
  - create names for the creature (scientific and common). You will need to decide a classification for the animal as well; what group does this animal belong too (e.g.: birds, mammals, reptiles)? Consider what other animals it is similar to. This will assist you in naming your animal and in writing a description of it.

### Animal Names

Pages 155–157 list names for the animals in the book; names for the animals' young; male and female names; and names for groups of each animal (collective nouns). Names for some other animals are listed in the table below.

- Can you find out the various names for some other animals that aren't included in this table?
- Not all the animals in *30 Amazing Australian Animals* have collective nouns. Create collective nouns for those that don't already have one.

Animal	Male	Female	Young	Collective Noun
ant	drone	queen/worker	larva	swarm; colony
ape	male	female	infant	shrewdness
chicken	cock	hen	chick	brood; clutch; flock
crow	male	female	chick	murder
donkey	neddy/jack	jenny/jill	foal/colt/filly	pace
duck	drake	duck	duckling	paddling; team; company (wild)
elephant	bull	cow	calf	herd
goose	gander	goose	gosling	skein (flying); gaggle
rhinoceros	bull	cow	calf	crash
seal	bull	cow	pup/whelp	pod
swan	cob	pen	cygnet	flock

### Animal Emblems

Pages 158–159 contain a list of animal emblems of Australia. They only contain mammal, bird and marine animal emblems (and some states don't have all of those). For each state and territory, choose another animal that could be an

emblem. What reptiles and insect emblems could be chosen for each state and territory? Remember to choose animals that are especially important or dominant in that state or territory. Don't forget to include (or create) scientific names for the animals.

- Now choose one state or territory and write a complete list of animal emblems (existing and your creations) and also information about these animals.
- Design your own animal emblem. Choose features from some of the animals that you really admire and create your own emblem.

### **Searching History**

Use the web to find other historical sources and documentation for the animals included in *30 Amazing Australian Animals*, and some other animals of your choice. Read some more of the accounts of discovery of these animals. Summarise some of the reports written by the naturalists.

The book includes extracts from historical records written by early European settlers about native Australian animals such as the emu, kangaroo, wombat and platypus. See if you can find these and other historical records about these animals online and discover more about the early settlers' thoughts.

To get you started: the State Library of NSW ([www.sl.nsw.gov.au](http://www.sl.nsw.gov.au)) holds many original documents that are available online, and the National Library of Australia has the Digital Collection ([http://www.nla.gov.au/digicoll/books\\_and\\_serials.html](http://www.nla.gov.au/digicoll/books_and_serials.html))

Aboriginal Australians also have information and stories about our native animals. Find some of the traditional tales and paintings about these animals.

### **Animal Verse**

Page 94 has an excerpt from the picture book *Who Killed Cockatoo?* See if you can find the book, then create a similar verse for each of the animals in *30 Amazing Australian Animals*. You will need to find a remarkable feature for the animals on which to base the verse.

### **Animal traps**

Introduced animals cause an enormous amount of destruction to the Australian environment and our wildlife. Some of them, such as the cane toad, (pp 21–30) also eat our native animals.

One of the problems for scientists today is creating methods for the capture and eradication of these animal invaders. The technique must be humane and must not cause problems for our native population. Just look what happened when scientists introduced the cane toad (p. 21) into the Australian environment.

Choose a non-native animal from the book that is causing problems for the environment, including our native Australian wildlife. See if you can find information about what attempts have already been made to control this animal. How successful have these attempts been? Did they have an unexpected positive or negative effect on the environment and native Australian animal populations?

### **Human Construction**

Jumpers (p. 105) and tunnels (p. 107) are some of the human creations made to help conserve our amazing Australian animals. Research an animal that needs some human assistance and then design and build, construct, sew or knit, that device.