



Junior Ranger

Review

October - November 1998

DISCOVERING URBAN WILDLIFE

WORKING THE NIGHT SHIFT

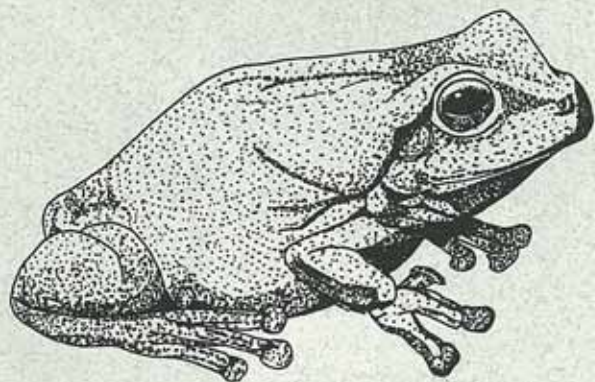
SNAKES IN YOUR YARD

BIRDSCAPING YOUR GARDEN

© Emily Wood '98

Life in the Back Yard

Territory towns are teeming with terrific wildlife. Wherever there's a tree, a patch of bush, an old log or a flower bed you'll find them. You may even find wildlife in your loo.

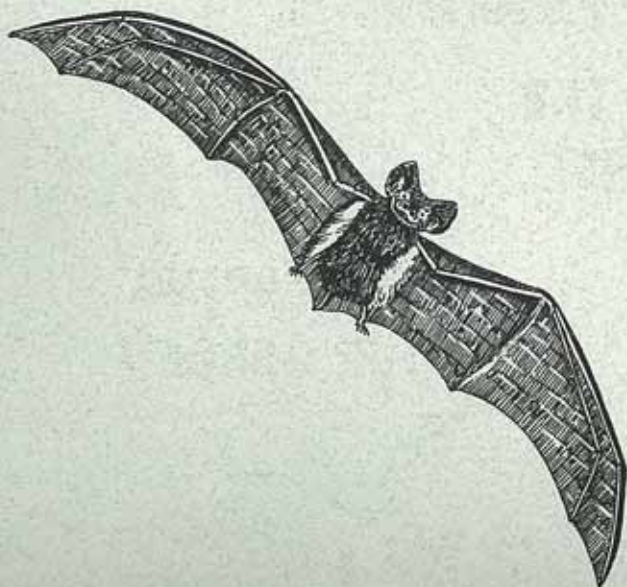
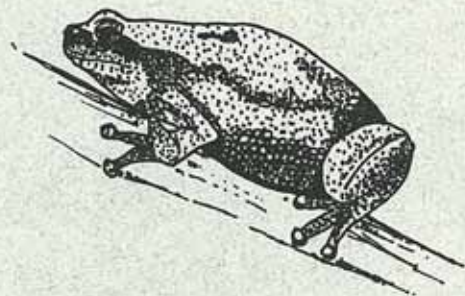


The Green Tree Frog

The large Green Tree Frog *Litoria caerulea* is a common resident of Darwin. Males sometimes call from within tree hollows and occasionally even toilet bowls. The sound bounces off these objects and makes it even louder.

The brown Desert Tree Frog

The smaller, brown Desert Tree Frog, *Litoria rubella* hangs around in dunnies because other water is usually hard to find.



Insect-eating bats

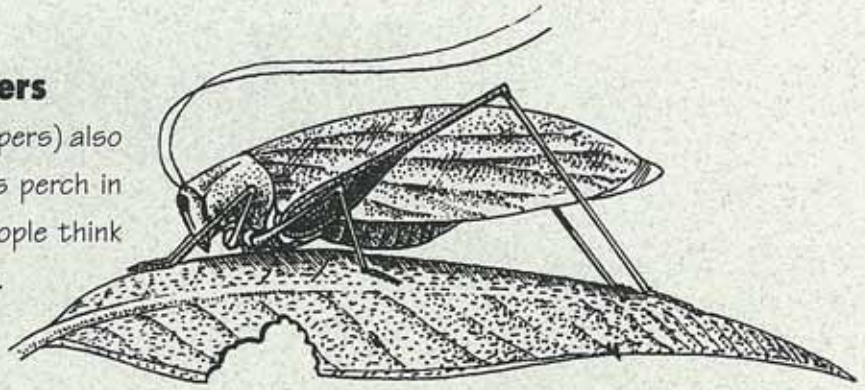
Small insect-eating bats are common in all Territory towns. They use echolocation at night to catch moths and other insects. We don't notice them because their calls are normally too high pitched for our ears to pick up.

An exception is Central Australia's White-Striped Mastiff-bat. Its metallic-sounding tik-tik-tik call is a common night sound, especially late in the evening.

Flying-foxes are not found in the Centre but are very common in the Top End. Unfortunately many are electrocuted and end up dangling from electricity wires.

Long-tailed Grasshoppers

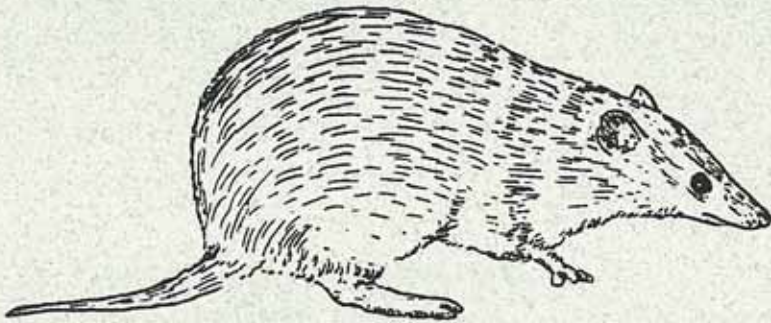
Katydid (or Long-tailed Grasshoppers) also call at night. These green insects perch in the branches of shrubs. Most people think that the noise is made by crickets.



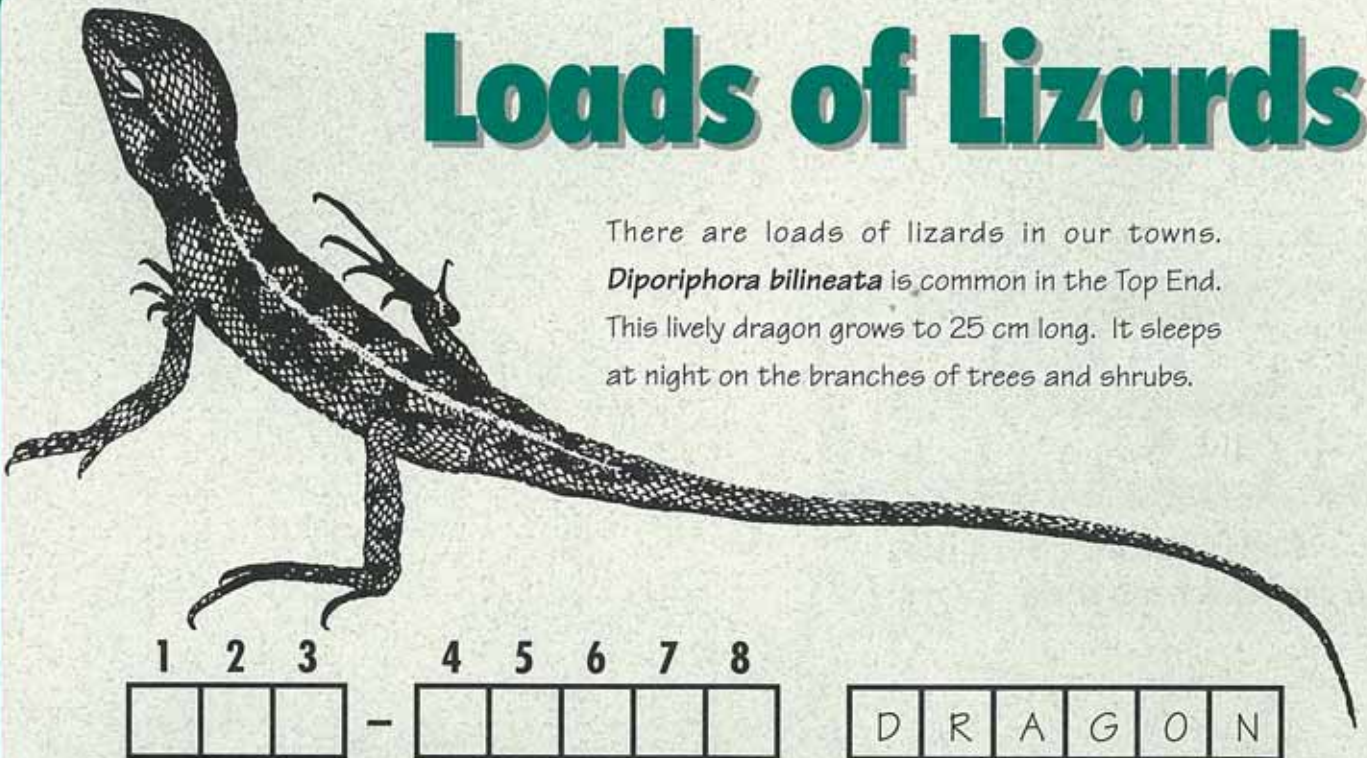
Bandicoots

Bandicoots have disappeared from Central Australia but are still common in Darwin parks and gardens.

They sniff around grassy areas at night for grubs, insects and worms. They may also raid your compost heap.



Loads of Lizards



There are loads of lizards in our towns. *Diporiphora bilineata* is common in the Top End. This lively dragon grows to 25 cm long. It sleeps at night on the branches of trees and shrubs.

1	2	3	-	4	5	6	7	8

D	R	A	G	O	N
---	---	---	---	---	---

To decode the dragon's common name: you must first match the animal on the left with the correct statement on the right.

- | | | | |
|-------------|-----|-----|------------------------------|
| Cockroach | (1) | (L) | can walk upside down |
| Kingfisher | (2) | (I) | loves flowers and fruits |
| Huntsman | (3) | (T) | very ancient animal |
| Gecko | (4) | (D) | a type of butterfly |
| Possum | (5) | (W) | perches on electricity wires |
| Kite | (6) | (O) | eats flies |
| Skink | (7) | (N) | scavenges at garbage dumps |
| Caper white | (8) | (E) | skinny lizard |



Working the

The Barn Owl

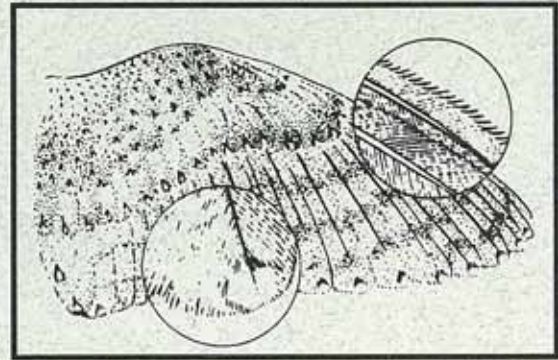
This owl is a supreme night hunter. It can capture its prey in total darkness.

Its distinctive, flat feathered face acts like a funnel, directing sounds to its ears.

Its eyes are so big, there is no room in its head for muscles to move them. Instead it is able to move its whole head in almost any direction without moving its body.

Silent Flight

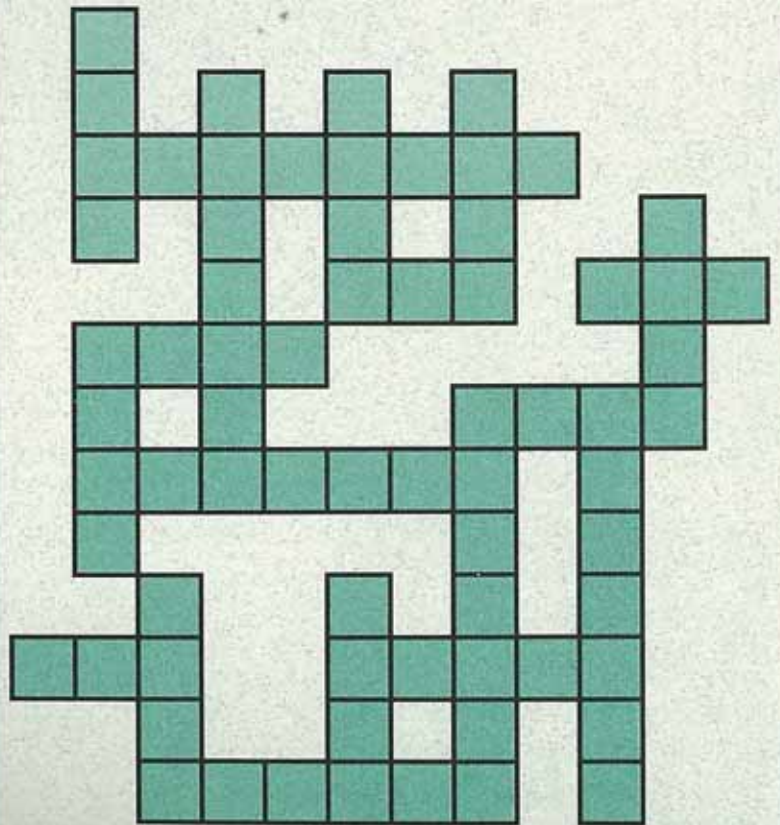
The small animals that Barn Owls prey on are very alert and have excellent hearing. To avoid being heard the Barn Owl has feathers that are specially adapted for silent flight. The leading edges of the flight feathers have a comb-like edge and the trailing edges are downy soft. So there's no rustling of feathers when they fly.



Barn Owl Crossword

Build your own Barn Owl crossword from these 19 words.

- | | |
|---------|-------------|
| 3. Day | 5. Alert |
| Hid | 6. Sounds |
| Shy | 7. Barn Owl |
| 4. Dawn | Pellets |
| Eyes | Shelter |
| Mice | Silence |
| Pose | 8. Feathers |
| Prey | |
| Shed | |
| Soft | |
| Wise | |
| Wood | |

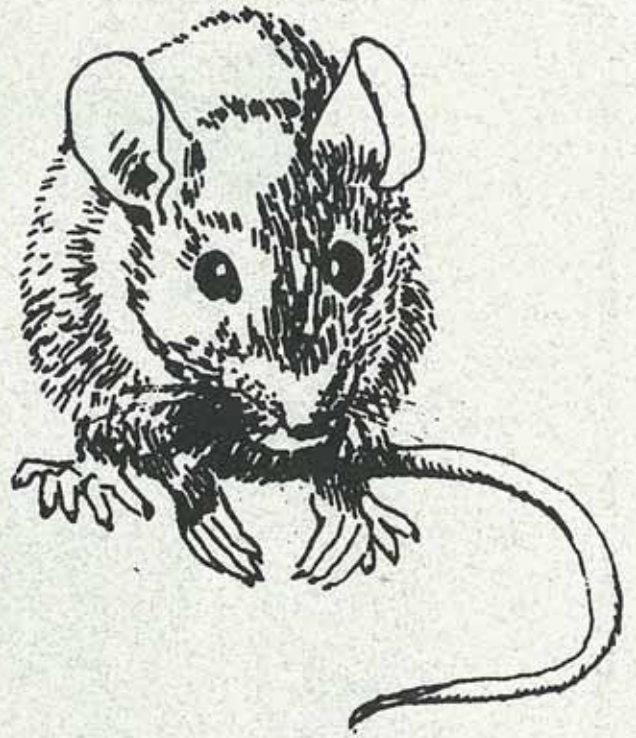


night shift

A Barn Owl's Diet

The diet of a Barn Owl largely consists of mice. Owls regurgitate pellets made of the indigestible remains of their meal: bones, fur and skin. You'll find these pellets under their roosts.

When they are fresh the pellets are covered with sticky mucous designed to protect the birds throat when the pellets are being brought up.



Did you know...

Along with the House Mouse and the two introduced Rat species, there are approximately 25 species of native rats and mice in the Northern Territory.

It seems that *Mus musculus*, the house mouse, originated in Central Asia but has now spread over most of the world.

House mice aren't just common in Territory towns. They are widespread in the bush as well.

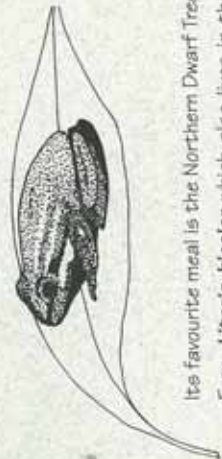
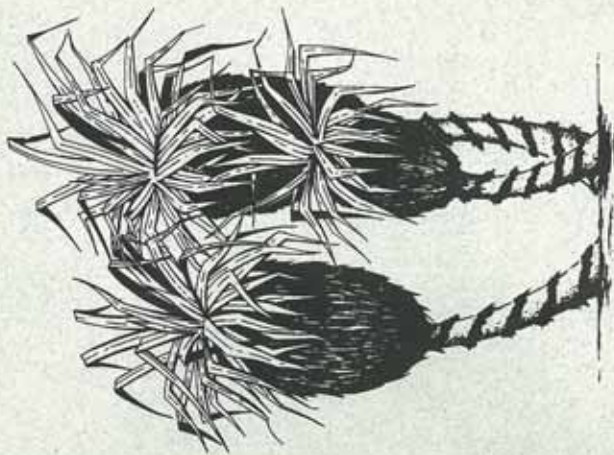
Mice are sexually mature when they're 8 weeks old. A female can produce up to 11 litters a year.

It is believed that there are 4000 mammal species in the world. Rat and mouse species make up half of this.

As Wise as an Owl

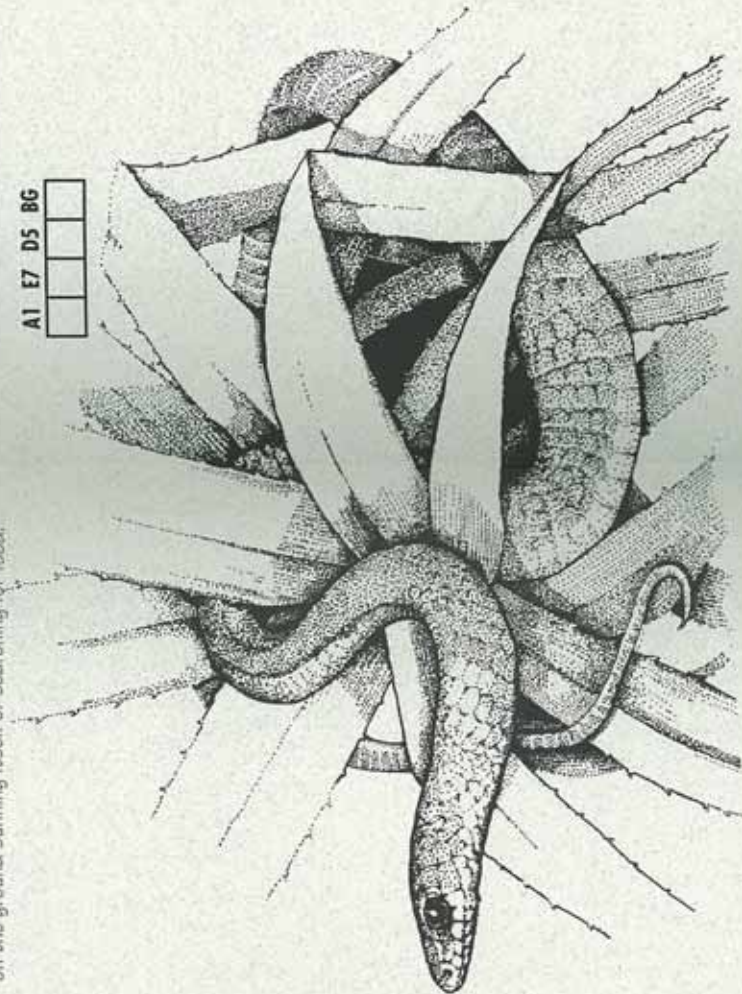
For centuries owls have been regarded as symbols of wisdom. Perhaps it's because of their habit of sitting still, listening to all that is going on around them, and swivelling their head from side to side.

Darwin's Common Tree Snake



Its favourite meal is the Northern Dwarf Tree Frog, *Litoria bicolor* which also lives in the pandanus. The frog gets swallowed alive and suffocates inside the snake's stomach.

Dendrolaphis punctulatus is called the Green Tree Snake in Queensland but our Top End ones are a golden yellow colour. They live in Pandanus palms but you may spot one on the ground sunning itself or searching for food.



A5 D8 D3 F6 A3 C7 B3 F4 F6 G7 C2 B7 G6 E2 A3

E4 G1 C9 C6 F8 B9 D5 G9 A8 C3 A2 G8 D9 E5 F9 D4 G4 D6 B4 B2

A1 E7 D5 B6

The Common Tree Snake is not venomous but it's a nervous creature and might bite if cornered. However, its little teeth don't do much damage. It has an unusual way of scaring off its enemies. Use this grid to find out what it does.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
A	V	O	L	D	I	I	I	O	H
B	B	S	A	T	N	T	F	A	I
C	A	A	D	I	A	L	E	A	E
D	T	O	R	O	N	I	I	T	R
E	S	U	N	S	F	H	E	G	S
F	H	S	M	S	N	E	W	L	R
G	M	C	R	M	H	O	S	U	G



Snakes are very active in the warmer months and you may get one in your back yard if you've got bush nearby. It's best to leave all snakes alone and call a wildlife ranger if you need them removed.

Most people cannot tell the difference between poisonous and harmless snakes, especially if they only get a fleeting glimpse. The size of their scales is a useful guide.



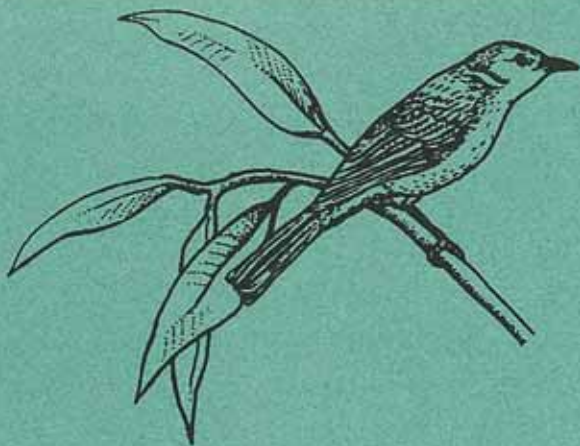
Any snake with big scales is probably venomous.



The harmless pythons have smaller scales.

Snakes in Your Yard?

Birdscaping Your Garden



The White-plumed Honeyeater is a small yellow-green bird. It is common in Central Australian gardens.

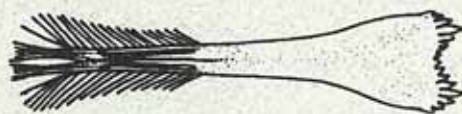
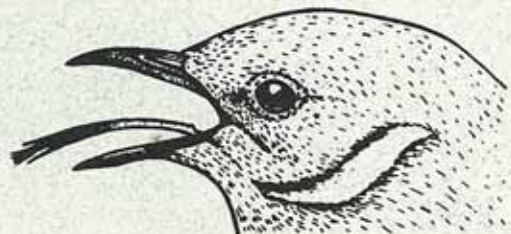
You can attract birds to your garden by planting native trees and shrubs. The best ones to plant are the ones that grow naturally in your area.

Honeyeaters love our unique bottlebrushes, grevilleas and eucalyptus. Their long beak is ideally suited for poking into the flowers.

The tip of a Honeyeater's tongue is like a paintbrush that can empty a flower of nectar in seconds.

Drunk Honeyeaters

Sometimes the nectar sits in the flowers for a long time and becomes alcoholic. It ferments like grape juice does to become wine. So if you see a wobbly honeyeater, it may not be injured, just drunk.



The brush-tipped tongue of a White-plumed Honeyeater.

Keep an Eye on the Cat

Cats make great pets but they also kill birds and other wildlife. In big cities such as Sydney and Melbourne, scientists estimate that millions of native birds are killed each year by family pets. You can help your back yard wildlife by fitting your cat with a bell, having it desexed and keeping it indoors at night.



Who am I?

I am another bird with a sweet tooth.

I admit I'm a bit of a loud mouth, especially around sunset.

I was the first Australian parrot to be illustrated in colour.

An Englishman called Peter Brown included me in his 1774 book, "New Illustrations of Zoology."

Like the honeyeaters, I also have a brush-tipped tongue. I really enjoy the sweet flowers of the Yellow Flame Tree *Peltophorum pterocarpum* which blooms late in the year. There are a lot of them planted on Darwin streets. The nectar ferments in the heat.



Use these two number codes to colour my feathers and spell my name.

1=orange 2=dark blue 3=green 4=blackish-blue 5=yellow

24 7 15 20 8 21 4

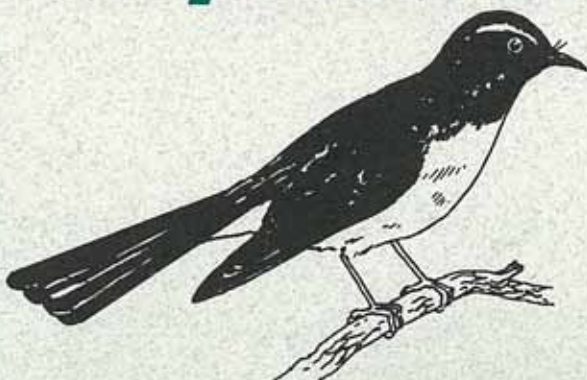
--	--	--	--	--	--	--

18 20 24 15 17 11 11 1

--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--

A = 7	F = 12	K = 17	P = 22	U = 2
B = 8	G = 13	L = 18	Q = 23	V = 3
C = 9	H = 14	M = 19	R = 24	W = 4
D = 10	I = 15	N = 20	S = 25	X = 5
E = 11	J = 16	O = 21	T = 1	Y = 6

Why does Willie wag his tail?



Willie Wagtails are common urban birds. Many birds flick their tails up and down. But Willie is one of the few to wag the tail from side to side. Willie Wagtails rarely wag their tails when they are sitting on a perch. So why do they do it when they're on the ground? Use the code above to help you find out.

1 21

--	--

12 18 2 25 14

--	--	--	--	--

15 20 25 11 9 1 25

--	--	--	--	--	--	--

21 2 1

--	--	--

21 12

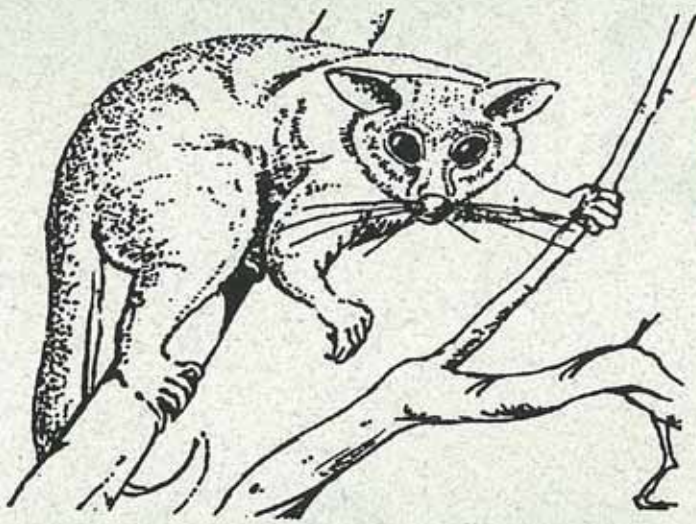
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1 14 11

--	--	--

13 24 7 25 25

--	--	--	--	--



Living with Brushtail Possums

How long does a baby possum stay in its Mums pouch?

Start at the arrow and trace the letters from A to Z. When you get to Z start again at A. You have finished when you reach one of the Z's at the bottom of the puzzle.

Start

D	X	U	H	V	H	A	W	B	T	D	A
Z	Y	U	V	N	D	B	C	D	E	D	C
A	X	W	U	F	K	F	B	N	F	C	Z
B	V	P	T	E	L	J	I	H	G	L	I
C	Q	S	S	F	M	D	R	T	D	O	I
D	Q	D	R	Q	N	X	C	H	L	R	L
E	F	A	P	P	O	P	W	J	R	Q	R
Q	G	G	W	M	G	P	M	N	O	P	S
K	C	F	H	S	Z	Y	L	M	F	U	T
H	S	O	O	I	J	K	E	A	T	V	W
D	E	P	Z	Q	M	J	P	B	Z	Y	X
M	C	O	I	H	G	F	G	C	R	I	F
Y	I	N	J	K	L	M	E	D	R	S	T
W	V	U	V	W	F	Z	N	X	Q	R	U
X	C	Q	Q	X	N	U	N	O	P	W	V
S	Y	B	P	O	Y	F	T	S	Y	X	M
Z	L	N	Q	G	R	Z	A	T	Z	D	H

3 Months

4 Months 5 Months

Brushtail Possums have survived in Australia's big cities even though other wildlife has disappeared. This is because they've been able to adapt to the urban environment.

Mature native trees are rare in the cities. The possums have learnt to shelter in the ceilings of peoples houses, instead of tree hollows.

In a recent study in Victoria, scientists showed that most Common Brushtail Possums removed from people's ceilings survived only a few weeks and only one survived long term. This sole survivor travelled more than 5km to find its way into the roof of a house.

Northern Brushtails

Northern Brushtail Possums are smaller than their southern cousins and their tail is not as bushy. They prefer areas with tall eucalypts that don't get burnt very often.

Nest Hollows

Possums and many other native animals use hollows in trees for shelter and nesting. The number of hollows available for these animals is decreasing as humans clear trees for development. We can grow new native trees in our gardens but it can take a long time for these to form hollows.

We can help our native wildlife by building nest boxes and putting them in our yards.

Some Unpopular House Guests



Many people don't like spiders, but they are an important part of our backyard ecosystem. Sometimes large, hairy huntsman spiders enter our houses, where our walls make good replacements for the trunks of trees that they normally inhabit. Luckily these spiders are harmless - unless you are a moth!

Suspicious Spiders

Be more careful with this spider because its bite packs a punch. It builds an untidy web in the corners of windows and flyscreens.

To find out its name, cross out all the letters F, G, J, M, N, Q, T, V, W, X, Y and Z. Then string together the remaining ones.



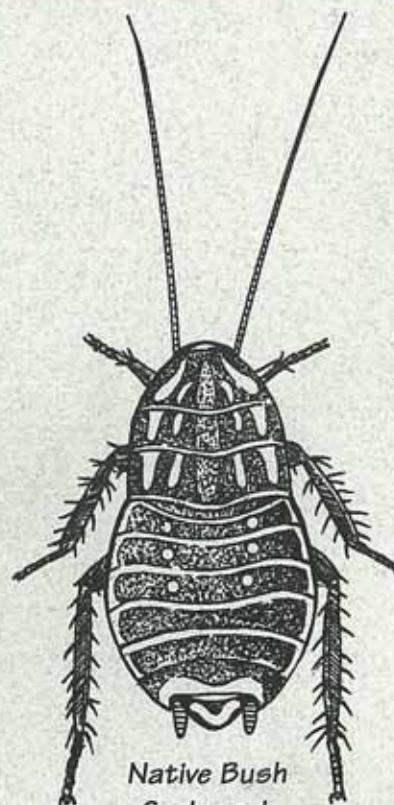
W	M	J	B	T	W	L
A	Z	G	X	F	C	Q
V	T	V	K	N	F	H
G	M	V	X	O	Y	U
Y	S	M	Q	J	E	Q
X	J	N	S	P	T	I
D	G	W	E	F	Z	R

Clever Cockies

Have you ever wondered why cockroaches are so hard to catch when you chase them with a shoe? The answer's in the tail.

Next time you have a close encounter with a cocky in your kitchen, notice its two little tails. They're actually an extra pair of feelers, covered with minute hairs. This is why cockies are so hard to catch. As you move around the room you disturb the air. The cockies feel you coming and are off in a flash.

Australia has over 400 species of native bush cockroaches. Unfortunately many of these get a bad name from the introduced roaches that invade our homes. The next time you see a cockroach in your garden take a second look, it might be a bush cockroach that has no intention of roaming indoors.



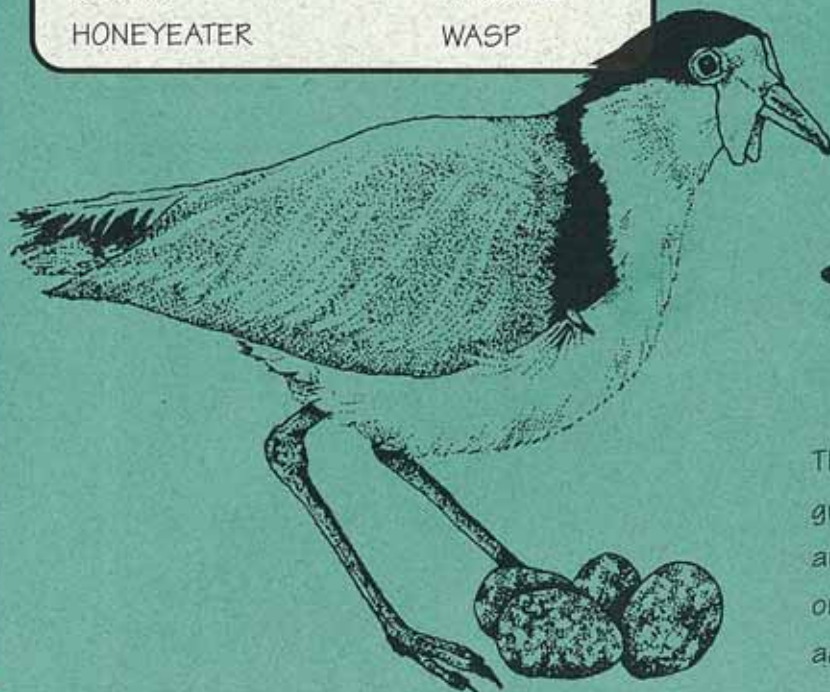
Native Bush
Cockroach

Urban Wildlife

These hidden words go in all directions and some are written backwards.
Colour the boxes as you find each letter.

- | | |
|---------------|------------|
| AGILE WALLABY | IBIS |
| ANT | INSECT |
| BANDICOOT | KITE |
| BARN OWL | KOEL |
| BAT | LORIKEET |
| CAT | MAGPIELARK |
| CICADA | MOPOKE |
| CRICKET | MOTH |
| CROW | MOUSE |
| DOVE | ORIOLE |
| EURO | POSSUM |
| GALAH | SKINK |
| GALL | SPIDER |
| GECKO | WAGTAIL |
| HONEYEATER | WASP |

B	B	A	T	E	E	K	I	R	O	L	Y
M	A	B	A	N	D	I	C	O	O	T	B
R	O	R	S	I	B	I	M	O	T	H	A
E	K	U	N	K	M	G	A	L	A	H	L
T	C	C	S	O	W	A	G	T	A	I	L
A	E	R	P	E	W	L	P	E	D	I	A
E	G	O	O	L	O	L	I	K	A	N	W
Y	K	W	S	O	R	U	E	C	C	S	E
E	N	W	S	E	I	A	L	I	I	E	L
N	I	A	U	V	O	N	A	R	C	C	I
O	K	S	M	O	L	T	R	C	A	T	G
H	S	P	I	D	E	R	K	I	T	E	A



Small, sun-loving skinks are common on Territory fences, walls and garden paths.



The Masked Plover hangs around on wet grasslands and open areas such as airports and school ovals. The female lays her eggs on the ground. Adult birds are loud and aggressive if you go near their eggs.

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