

WILD AUSTRALIAN LIFE



LEONARD CRONIN
ILLUSTRATED BY CHRIS NIXON

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Recommended for: 6–12 years old

Themes: Australian animals, environment, sustainability

Applicable to learning areas: English language, nature and science

Summary

From a leading expert and talented visual artist comes this celebration of the astounding diversity of Australia's animal kingdom.

More than one million animal species make their homes in Australia – from the deepest oceans to the tops of mountains and the harshest deserts. But just how do they survive? Discover the remarkable stories behind some of the world's most extraordinary animals in this must-have collection for every Australian school.

About the Author

Leonard Cronin is one of Australia's foremost natural history authors. Trained as a biologist, he is a prolific writer of books and articles about the Australian flora, fauna and environment, bringing his own fascination with the natural world to the general reader. His books include the bestselling Cronin's Key Guide series of field guides, *Australian Flora* and *A Journey Through Ancient Kingdoms and Natural Wonders*.

About the Illustrator

Chris Nixon is a multidisciplinary artist creating across illustration, graphic design, creative direction and public art. Based in Perth, Chris's work is inspired by the West Coast and classic surf culture with an emphasis on the handmade and crafted, using colour, texture and pattern across a wide range of media from children's books to animation, commercial large artwork installations.



Suggestions for Classroom Discussion and Application

Before Reading

Look closely at the cover of *Wild Australian Life* and discuss what kind of a book you think this will be.

Discuss the following:

- Count the number of creatures on the cover and name as many as possible.
- Where might you expect to find each of these creatures? In the sea, on land, in the sky?
- What is the difference between a fiction and non-fiction book?
- Would you describe *Wild Australian Life* as fiction or non-fiction? Why?

Comprehension

The Animal Kingdom (pp 4–5)

- Roughly how many animal species live in Australia?
- [Fill in the blanks] The name given to the place where an animal makes its home is h.....t.
- What is the name given to animals without a backbone?
- [True or False] There are more types of invertebrates than vertebrates.
- [True or False] Snakes are vertebrates.
- [True or False] Worms are invertebrates.
- What differentiates Mammalia (Class) from Marsupialia (Order)?
- [Fill in the blank letters] The science of classification is known as t.....my.
- [True or False] An animal can have many Latin names.
- [True or False] The Latin name for the red kangaroo is *Macropus rufus*.

Mammals (pp 8–9)

- What is the characteristic that sets mammals apart from other animals?
- What kind of a mammal is the platypus?
- What kind of mammals are humans?
- What is the key difference between placental mammals and marsupials?
- Which mammal is the world's largest animal?

Marine Mammals (pp 12–13)

- Which animal produces ambergris?
- What is a baby humpback whale called?
- A baby humpback whale can drink six bathtubs of milk every day. True or false?
- Dolphins are a type of whale. True or false?
- What is the name of the nostril that blue whales breathe through?

Nature story

- Head outside into the playground or a safe outdoor space close to school, and collect interesting natural objects (e.g. pine cones, acorns, leaves, interesting shaped stones, shells, bark, flowers, sticks etc.). Back in the classroom, students choose one (or more) of the items collected to spark an idea for a story. Encourage students to think about the object, what it is, where it might have been found, or who might have found it. Some items might make them think of a place – the leaves and sticks could be from a forest, or the shells could be from a beach.



Using their imaginations (is the conker a little football for a pixie, or the shells tiny boats? Could the leaves be currency or magical tokens?) start writing their stories and include characters (or feature in the story themselves). Remind students that the stories should have an intriguing beginning, an exciting middle, and a gripping ending.

- Once the story is written, they can illustrate it or photograph and print some photos of the objects they have used.

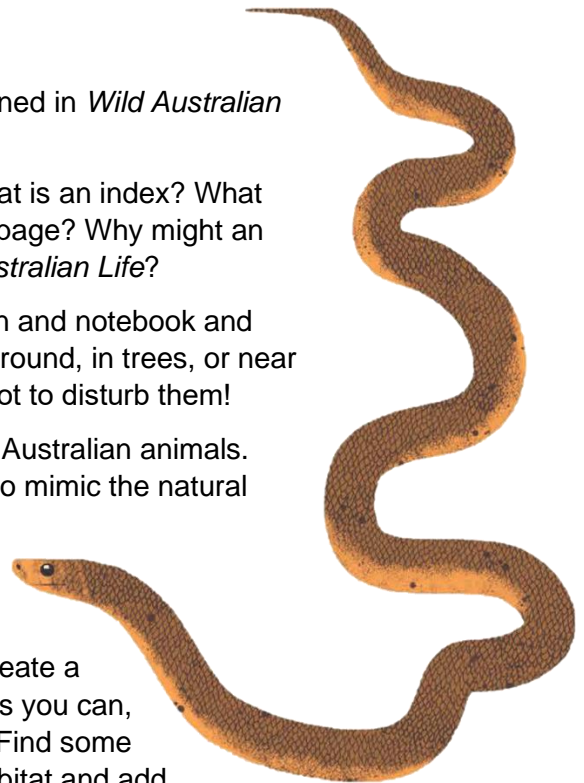
Surviving the Desert: Adapting to Habitats

- Briefly describe in your own words how each of the following animals have adapted to desert living.
 - Water-holding frog
 - Thorny devil
 - Shield shrimp
 - Spinifex hopping mouse
 - Budgerigar
 - Black-footed rock wallaby
- Choose one of the **predators** in *Wild Australian Life* (pp 24–27) and research it further. Some questions to consider include:
 - Where does it live?
 - Where in Australia is it found?
 - What does it eat?
 - Does it have any special features?
 - How does it reproduce?
 - How long does it live?
 - Does it have any predators?
 - Is its population under threat? If so, why?

Gather all the information you have found, along with some pictures of your animal, and present them to the class in a PowerPoint presentation or a poster.

Venomous Animals

- Why do animals produce venom?
- Research the habitat for five venomous animals mentioned in *Wild Australian Life* and mark each on a map of Australia.
- Turn to the very last page of the book, to the Index. What is an index? What purpose does it serve? How is it different to a contents page? Why might an index be useful in an information book such as *Wild Australian Life*?
- Go on your own playground safari at school. Take a pen and notebook and see how many animals you can find in the sky, on the ground, in trees, or near the play equipment. But be careful, it's very important not to disturb them!
- If possible, visit a local zoo or animal park that features Australian animals. How are the enclosures in zoos and animal parks built to mimic the natural habitats of the different animals?
- Discussion: If you could be any creature featured in *Wild Australian Life*, which would it be and why?
- Choose a habitat featured in *Wild Australian Life* and create a shoebox diorama of it. Use as many natural elements as you can, e.g. sand and twigs, to make it as realistic as possible. Find some models of the different animals you might find in this habitat and add to your diorama or create your own with modelling clay!



In the words of the author

'I've always been inspired by the stories behind found objects: a cuttlefish bone, animal tracks, cast-off feathers and snake skins, or bleached bones in the desert. What can these tracks and traces tell us about the lives of the animals that left them?

'I wanted to take young people with me on this journey of discovery. So to begin the book I created a virtual cabinet of curious discoveries containing a collection of interesting found objects: each leading to a spread in the book revealing deeper insights into the life of the animal and others with similar characteristics.

'A striped seashell found on the beach, for example, takes us to a spread where we learn that it is perfectly crafted to protect the soft body of the nautilus (a marine mollusc), while also ingeniously engineered to carefully control its position in the water column. That same spread looks at the marvellous creations of bower birds, paper wasps and other animal architects. Want to know more about marine molluscs? Flip to Marvellous Marine Invertebrates, a spread that looks into the lives of some of our most astonishing sea creatures.

'Readers can begin with Curious Discoveries or follow their own pathway through the book. Every double page spread looks at a different topic. How do animals fly? How do they defend themselves? How do they survive in Australia's harsh deserts? What creates the Great Barrier Reef? Each topic, although intrinsically intriguing, is part of a mesmerising story about the natural world that helps us understand how every part of every animal is exquisitely adapted to work in harmony with the world they live in.

'In this book you will encounter the fascinating and strange animals we share our continent with, from the dazzling colours of shape-shifting octopuses to the towering clay cathedrals of tiny termites. You will learn how they live their lives and how they survive and flourish in some of the most challenging habitats on Earth.

'Teachers can use this book to generate ideas for discussion, to complement the curriculum, to sow seeds for further research, and to engender awe and wonder at the fascinating living world that is Australia.'

