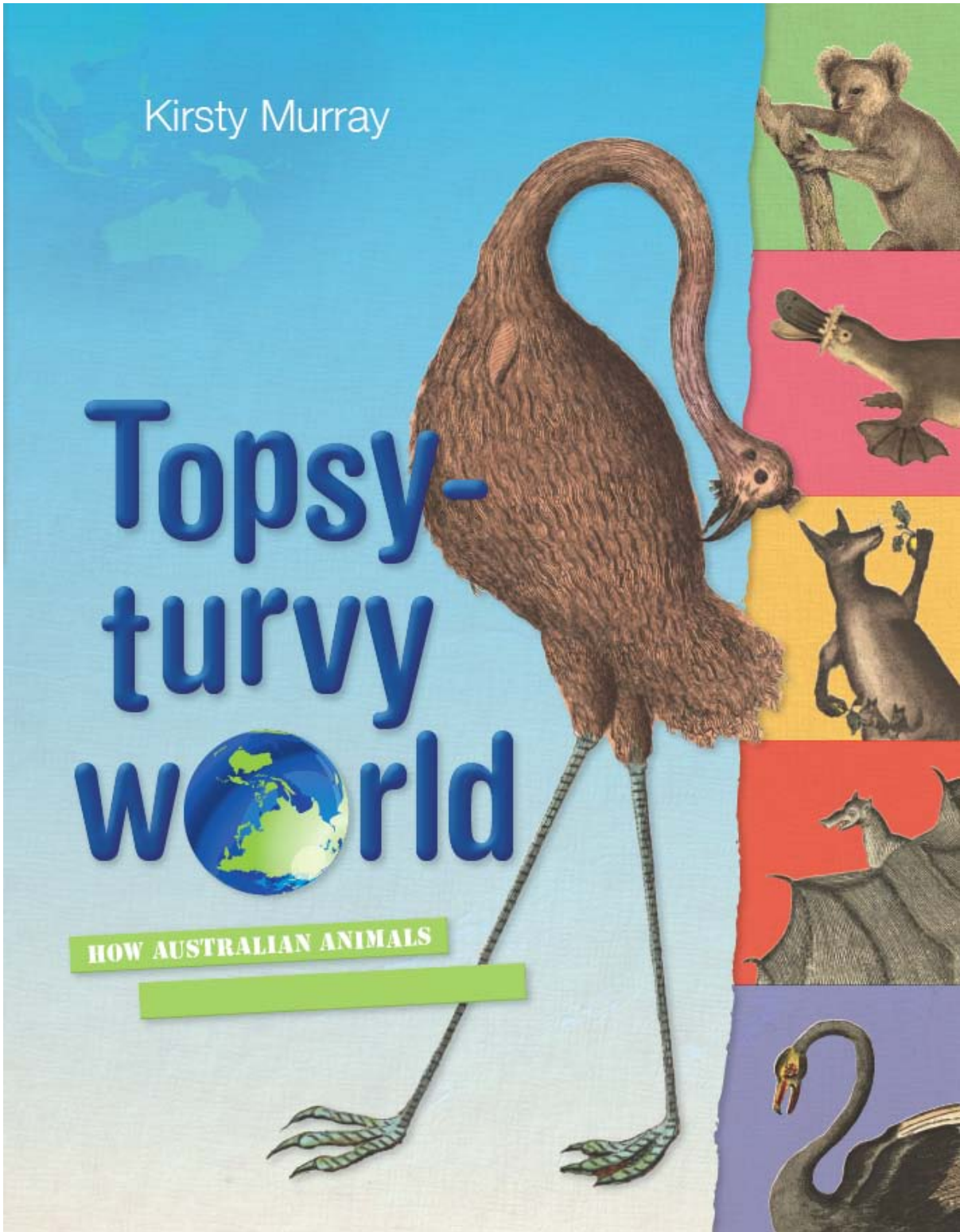


# Topsy-Turvy World

Kirsty Murray

# Topsy- turvy world

HOW AUSTRALIAN ANIMALS



# **Topsy-Turvy World**

*Topsy-Turvy World* by Kirsty Murray provides a fascinating insight into Australian natural history for middle and upper primary school students, as well as junior secondary students. The book is specifically targeted at readers aged between seven and 12 years of age. However, because much of the factual information in the book is conveyed through stories, *Topsy-Turvy World* has the potential to garner a wider audience. The stories are simple enough for young children to understand, yet the historical and factual information gives each story a depth that will engage older readers.

The book is invaluable for school projects focusing on many aspects of Australian history, including:

- early settlement
- European explorers
- changes in Australian habitat
- changes in attitudes to the Australian environment
- the complex effect that European settlement had on Australian native fauna
- local area studies focusing on natural habitats
- the consequences of European contact
- significant events and people that shaped the Australian colonies
- the contribution of early scientists to shaping ideas about the Australian environment.

This book meets all the aims of the Australian National Curriculum's history agenda. *Topsy-Turvy World* has the potential to:

1. Cultivate an interest in, and enjoyment of, historical study for lifelong learning and work, including their capacity and willingness to be informed and active citizens
2. Enhance students' knowledge, understanding and appreciation of the past and the forces that shape societies, including Australian society

3. Enrich students' understanding and use of historical concepts, such as evidence, continuity and change, cause and effect, perspectives, empathy, significance and contestability
4. Fortify students' capacity to undertake historical inquiry, including skills in the analysis and use of sources, and in explanation and communication.

## **REMEMBER**

- List the many things that would have made European settlers think Australia was a 'topsy-turvy' place (e.g. Christmas in summer rather than winter; trees that shed bark rather than leaves; birds that laugh and screech rather than sing; animals that hop on two legs rather than run on four).

### *Kangaroo*

- Who was one of the first European explorers to see a kangaroo?
- What were the Aboriginal names for the animal?
- Which animals did the Europeans compare the kangaroo to?

### *Platypus*

- List animals that, like the platypus, look like they could have been created by taking the parts of other animals and sewing them together.

### *Echidna*

- List the things about the echidna that both fascinated and puzzled the early explorers. Which European animals did they compare it to?
- Where did the name 'echidna' come from and what does it mean?

### *Thylacine*

- How and why did the settlers wipe out the thylacine, or Tasmanian tiger?

### *Tasmanian devil*

- List the reasons why the Tasmanian devil was given its name by explorers and early settlers.

### *Bandicoot*

- How did the name 'bandicoot' become associated with unhappiness or miserableness?

### *Koala*

- Early settlers compared koalas to bears, monkeys and sloths. Identify some of the similarities between koalas and these animals.
- List the unusual characteristics of koalas.

### *Wombat*

- Which European animal did the explorers compare the wombat to?

### *Flying fox*

- Why did the early settlers and explorers think the fruit-eating flying fox was a vampire bat?

### *Emu*

- List all the things that settlers used emus and their eggs for.

### *Black swan*

- Why did the early explorers think that black swans were strange and evil birds?

### *Kookaburra*

- Why was the kookaburra called ‘the bushman’s clock’?

### *Lyrebird*

- What was it about the lyrebird that captured the attention of Europeans? How did they show their appreciation for its beauty?
- How did the gentle lyrebird scare settlers and explorers in the bush?

### *Frilled lizard*

- Why does a frilled lizard have such an impressive collar?
- What other unusual characteristics does this dragon-like reptile have that fascinated early explorers?

### *Sea dragon*

- How does the sea dragon differ from a seahorse?

## **INVESTIGATE**

### *Australian native animals*

- Find out which Australian animals were wrongly identified as a bear, a pheasant, a dog, a rat and a porcupine. Why were they identified in this way?

- Research recipes from the 1800s in Australia. Which Australian animals and birds were included on colonial menus?
- Choose one of the animals in *Topsy-Turvy World* and research the Aboriginal myths and legends based on it.
- Select one of the animals in *Topsy-Turvy World* that lives in your area and find out as much as you can about it. What can you do to make sure that the animal will still be living there in 200 years time?

#### *Explorers and naturalists*

- Find out about Sir Joseph Banks and James Cook. Who were they? What did they discover? Why are they important figures in Australia's history?
- Locate places, plants, landmarks, suburbs and/or streets in Australia that are named after famous Australian explorers, scientists or naturalists. Are there any where you live?

#### *Platypus*

- Why did scientists in Europe think that the platypus could not be a real animal? Which animals did they think it was made up of?

#### *Tasmanian devil*

- Find out how and why the Tasmanian devil was thought to be a voracious and savage killer, and therefore shot and poisoned by settlers, when in reality it is a scavenger, feeding mainly on the carcasses of dead animals. Why is being a scavenger a good thing?

#### *Kookaburra*

- How did the kookaburra end up with a scientific name which places it in New Guinea, when it is only found in Australia?

#### *Lyrebird*

- Find out what a male lyrebird does to attract a mate. Research other Australian bird species which have strange or interesting mating rites (e.g. brolga, bower bird)

#### *Frilled lizard*

- Identify other Australian lizards which, like the frilled lizard, have unusual characteristics (e.g. goanna, blue tongue)

#### *Sea Dragon*

- How and what does the sea dragon eat with its thin pipe-like mouth?

## **UNDERSTAND**

### *Kangaroo*

- In colonial times kangaroos were featured in boxing rings fighting humans. How and why do kangaroos actually 'fight'?
- What is the difference between a kangaroo and a wallaby? Include information about their size, colour, habits and habitat.

### *Platypus*

- Research the platypus. For how long has such a creature existed on earth? Where does it live? What food does it eat? How does it sense its prey? What is unusual about its fur? When is it most active? How does it breed? Why does a male platypus have poisonous spurs on its feet?

### *Echidna*

- Research and illustrate the life cycle of an echidna. Include information on how it breeds and how it produces and feeds its young.

### *Tasmanian tigers and devils*

- Research Australia's meat-eating, or carnivorous, animals. Find out why most Australian animals are not carnivorous. How many types of carnivorous Australian native animals still exist? In what parts of Australia are they found? Are any threatened with extinction?
- Research why Tasmanian devils are only found in Tasmania and not on mainland Australia.

### *Bandicoot*

- Research the reasons why the pig-footed bandicoot became extinct.

### *Koala*

- The name 'koala' means 'no drink'. Find out if it is true that koalas do not drink water. Where do they get the majority of their fluids from? What should you feed a koala?

### *Wombat*

- Find out why the wombat has a backward-facing pouch for its young.

### *Flying fox*

- Find out how we can help to protect the vulnerable grey-headed flying fox from becoming extinct.

### *Emu*

- What breeding characteristics make emus different from most other birds?

### *Black swan*

- Explore the link between Western Australia and the black swan.

### *Kookaburra*

- Why did early settlers find the kookaburra's laugh unsettling?
- What part of the diet of the kookaburra helped to save it from being hunted by the early settlers?

### *Sea dragon*

- What do male sea dragons and emus have in common? Find out which other male Australian animals, birds or fishes take an active role in looking after their young.

## **COMMUNICATE**

- Make a list of as many words as you can which describe Australia's native animals from the perspective of early European settlers (e.g. topsy-turvy, strange, curious, remarkable, unusual)
- Debate the following topics:
  - The early explorers were justified in shooting and eating the many amazing animals they found in Australia.
  - Australians should eat the animals on their national coat of arms.
- Discuss the following topics:
  - Why the Tasmanian tiger was wiped out but the Tasmanian devil survived.
  - Why in the long term Australian animals did not replace cattle, pigs and sheep as the staple meat diet for Europeans in Australia.
  - What the early settlers could have done to stop the pig-footed bandicoot from becoming extinct, and what we can do now to stop the rest of the bandicoot population from becoming extinct.

- Identify and read a range of well-known Australian children's picture books which feature native animals as the main characters (e.g. possums, wombats, kangaroos and koalas)
- Write and illustrate a picture book about:
  - a koala who gets upset because people think it is a bear
  - one of the animals featured in this book that is not soft and cuddly.

## **INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATIONS TECHNOLOGY**

### *Explorers*

- Locate early maps of the 'Great South Land' and compare them with maps of present-day Australia. Which bits are missing?
- Find out more about Captain William Bligh. What is he best known for? The words 'mutiny' and '*Bounty*' will help with your search.
- Research Matthew Flinders' circumnavigation of Australia and the animal called Trim that accompanied him on his voyages.
- Select one of the European explorers, scientists or naturalists featured in the book who discovered something in your state or territory and research their life and achievements.
- Research Thomas Mitchell. What else did he discover other than the pig-footed bandicoot?

### *Kangaroo*

- Research recipes based on kangaroo meat. Is it a healthy cut of meat and, if so, why? How do you feel about eating kangaroos? Is it any different to eating cows, sheep or pigs?

### *Platypus and echidna*

- Find out what makes monotremes so unique.

### *Tasmanian devil*

- Find out as much as you can about the facial tumour that is now threatening the Tasmanian devil population.

### *Bandicoot*

- Research how many different types of bandicoots there were in Australia when Europeans first came here. How many are there now?



Compare them with the pig-footed bandicoot. What made the pig-footed bandicoot unique?

### *Koala*

- Find out what the early settlers did that threatened the koala population. Koalas are now a protected species, but there are still many threats to their existence. Identify these threats and what can be done to protect koalas from them.

### *Flying fox*

- Research whether or not Australia has any animals or insects that are blood sucking, like the early settlers thought the flying fox was.

### *Kookaburra*

- Find images of the kookaburra as a logo on products and household items (they can be found on everything from coins and stamps to food).
- Find songs about the kookaburra. Find out the link between the children's song *Kookaburra Sits in the Old Gum Tree* and the pop song *Down Under* by Men at Work.

## **CREATE**

### *Explorers*

- Examine the picture of a cross-section of Captain Cook's ship the *Endeavour* available at [www.nla.gov.au/nla.pic-an9537993](http://www.nla.gov.au/nla.pic-an9537993).
- Write a story about what life would have been like living on this ship for many months as you explored unknown lands and discovered rare and unusual animals, birds and plants that you had never seen before.

### *Australian native animals*

- Create three new 'animals' using parts from some of the Australian animals featured in *Topsy-Turvy World*. Draw pictures or make models of them. Give them a name, habits and a habitat based on what you know about the real animals they are based on.
- Make a children's book featuring pictures of animals. Cut the pages horizontally into three so that you can mix and match the head, body and legs of various animals to create completely new ones.

- Write and illustrate a picture book for young children about a kangaroo that thinks it is a dog.
- Write a story about the two wombats that lived with the famous painter and poet Dante Gabriel Rossetti, and even attended his parties. Include an explanation in your story of why the wombats died at an early age. Make sure it is based on facts about the eating and living habits of wombats.
- Make a papier-mâché and crepe paper model of a frilled-necked lizard.

## **COMPARE**

- Compare the following animals, taking into account what they have in common and what makes them different. Examine their habitats, habits, size, diet, reproduction and other defining characteristics:
  - the echidna and the platypus
  - the Tasmanian tiger and the Sumatran tiger
  - the koala and the sloth
  - the flying-fox and the bat
  - echidnas, anteaters and porcupines

**Teachers Notes prepared by Dr Stephanie Owen Reeder, BA (Hons),  
Dip.Ed, Grad.Dip.Lib, MEd, PhD**