

## These notes are for:

- Primary - kindergarten - year 5

## Key Learning Areas:

- English
- Art
- Science
- HSIE

## Example of:

- Picture book
- Narrative non-fiction

## Experience of:

- Narrative style
- Informative style
- Visual Literacy

## Values addressed:

- Responsibility
- Care and compassion

## Themes:

- Australian animals
- Endangered species
- Independence
- Survival

\*Notes may be downloaded and printed for regular classroom use only.

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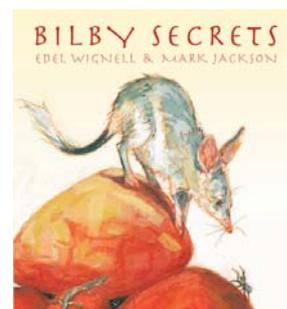
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## Bilby Secrets

### Bilby Secrets

Author: Edel Wignell  
Illustrator: Mark Jackson  
ISBN: 9781921529320  
ARRP: \$29.95  
NZRRP: \$31.99  
No. of Pages: 32  
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## Synopsis

*Bilby Secrets* is a beautiful non-fiction picture book which follows the life of a bilby, an Australian marsupial. The story depicts a young bilby's birth, habitat, behaviour and diet, tracing his journey from his mother's pouch to his first independent excursion into the desert.

The book is an innovative fusion of storytelling and non-fiction, with each page containing both a narrative section and factual information about bilbies. The two distinct writing styles are highlighted by the use of contrasting fonts, giving readers an understanding of language conventions, as well as drawing them into the wonders of the bilby world.

## Author/Illustrator Information

**Edel Wignell** is an Australian freelance writer, compiler and journalist. She has been writing full-time for children and adults since 1979: short stories, articles, verse, novels, scripts and non-fiction. Edel, who has five sisters, grew up on a sheep farm in northern Victoria, becoming interested in animals, birds, nature and the environment at an early age. Edel says that the satisfaction of being a writer comes from both the joy of writing, and the thought that children around the world turn the pages of her books and gain pleasure from reading them. More information can be found on her website: [www.edelwignell.com.au](http://www.edelwignell.com.au)

**Mark Jackson** is an illustrator based in Melbourne. He has co-illustrated several books with his wife, Heather Potter, and their work has been featured in several exhibitions. Mark has three previous titles published by Walker Books Australia: *The Truth About Penguins* by Meg McKinlay, *Not Like Georgie* by Scott Hatcher and *Stuck!* by Charlotte Calder. *Stuck!* was short-listed in the Young Children Category of the Speech Pathology Australia Book of the Year Awards 2010 and received a Notable mention in the Picture Book Category, Children's Book Council of Australia Awards, 2010. For more information, please visit his website: [www.jackpot-art.com/index.html](http://www.jackpot-art.com/index.html)

## How to use these notes:

These notes have been adapted from original notes prepared by Edel Wignell, author of *Bilby Secrets*. Edel has eight years' experience teaching primary school, both in Australia and the UK, and also taught at a teachers' college for seven years.

The text works on many levels. The suggested activities are therefore for a wide age and ability range. Please select accordingly.

**Edell Wignell on writing *Bilby Secrets***

I'm interested in endangered animals worldwide, and my favourite is the bilby. Before English settlers arrived, bilbies lived nearly everywhere in Australia. Soon settlers imported a few rabbits, and they multiplied – fast. As a kid, on a sheep farm in northern Victoria, I saw rabbits every day. Imagine bilbies instead!

I've been delighted in the last ten years to see the bilby becoming popular at Easter. For a long time, the Easter creature was a rabbit. Then an imaginative person created a chocolate bilby, and now you can find chocolate bilbies everywhere.

Since then I've been intrigued to see a surge of bilby titles and, in most of them, bilbies are engaged in amazing activities, such as pirate and space adventures. Bilbies live in nursing homes and public parks; bilbies fight bushfires; one bilby's quest is the moon; another searches for his relations in the outback. ...All great fun!

I thought it was time to write a story about a real-life bilby – a rare and endangered creature living in a remote place, never encountering people, so I researched the Pilbara, Western Australia, for the setting.

And which chocolates do I buy at Easter – bunnies or bilbies? Guess!

**Mark Jackson on illustrating *Bilby Secrets***

This story, about a desert-dwelling animal and its environment, is quite different from the other stories that I've illustrated, so I felt that a whole new approach was required – so to a different medium! I worked in acrylic paints and conté, and on a larger scale than I'm used to, in order to capture the vast, open spaces: sparse vegetation and the intense red soil and rocks. I also drew and applied colour in a broader, more robust manner. This is quite different to my other books where I've rendered things with more delicacy and far more detail. The landscapes that I created were pieced together from various images and I always tried to maintain a semblance of the desert's unique and distinct colours and topography.

The bilby, with its thin legs, long tail, pointed snout and large, rabbit-like ears would have been so easy and fun to caricature, but after doing a number of sketches I decided that something more realistic was appropriate for this particular text that celebrates the distinctive characteristics of this lovely and solitary marsupial. I think that the curious and wide-eyed baby bilby will appeal to children, simply because it is so small and so very dependent. You want it to succeed!

**INTRODUCTION**

The endangered Australian marsupial, the greater bilby (*Macrotis lagotis*), has captured the attention of many people in the last twenty years. Since the arrival of white settlers, its range has been severely reduced from about 70% of the mainland to scattered populations in remote areas.

The destruction of the bilby's habitat by the grazing of cattle and rabbits contributed to the bilby's decline and to the extinction of the lesser bilby (*Macrostis leucura*) which has not been seen since the 1930s. The greater bilby's survival is threatened by foxes, dingoes and feral cats.

Splendid efforts are being made to assist the bilby to survive, and twice yearly, there is a special focus on the animal: Easter and National Bilby Day (the second Sunday in September). The cleverly named annual Queensland Children's Choice Book Awards – BILBY (Books I Love Best Yearly) – also draw attention to this endearing creature.

**ACTIVITIES****1. Bilby Habitat**

- Shade a map of Australia to show how the bilby's habitat has been reduced since the arrival of white settlers – from about 70% of the mainland to scattered populations in deserts, spinifex plains and acacia shrublands in isolated and semi-arid areas (the Tanami Desert in the Northern Territory, south-western Queensland, the Great Sandy and Gibson Deserts and the Pilbara of Western Australia).
- Have any members of the class seen rabbits in the wild? Where did they see them? How many were there? How did this experience make them feel? Discuss what would it have been like to live 200 years ago and see bilbies instead.
- Research the arrival of rabbits in Australia in the mid-1800s and discuss the rate at which rabbits can multiply.
- Research the Pilbara of Western Australia (the setting of *Bilby Secrets*) to discover the creatures that inhabit the area with the bilby today: for example, olive pythons, golden orb-weaver spiders, red kangaroos, yellow spotted monitor lizards, galahs, wedge-tailed eagles, ring-tailed dragons, termites and foxes. Choose one animal and present a report on it to the class. Include information about its appearance, diet, life-cycle, behaviour and threats to its survival. You may like to incorporate pictures; graphic organisers such as flow charts; props and other visual stimuli into your presentation.
- In small groups, create a diorama in a cardboard box to represent the bilby's desert habitat. Try to incorporate materials from the natural environment into your display.
- Develop a one-minute scene depicting the young bilby's first journey out of his burrow. Pay particular attention to what the bilby would be feeling and how you can convey this through body language and movement. Perform your scene to the rest of the class.

## 2. Bilbies underground

- Visualise the classroom underground and estimate how much space would be needed for a burrow.
- Illustrate the shape and size of a burrow by drawing a diagram on a whiteboard and marking the “surface of the ground” on the classroom wall. Alternately, if you have an asphalt playground, draw your diagram in chalk on the ground.
- Imagine the early life of a bilby, living in constant darkness in a burrow. Write a monologue in the voice of a young bilby describing this experience.
- Discuss the ways in which the illustrator, Mark Jackson, overcame the problem of showing the bilbies in the underground darkness.

## 3. Physical Characteristics

- Draw and label a diagram of a bilby. Include key characteristics such as their snout, pouch, whiskers, claws and tail.
- Bilbies have poor eyesight, but their senses of hearing and smell are acute. Research:
  - how this affects bilbies in terms of their lifestyle and chances of survival
  - the senses in humans – how they differ from bilbies in this regard, and how the loss of one of the senses affects them
  - the senses of other creatures, including a comparison between the lifestyles of nocturnal and diurnal ones. (You may like to focus on one particular animal.)
- Go on a class excursion to a zoo or wildlife park to see real bilbies. Record your observations as if you were a zoologist. Include a map or diagram of the bilbies’ enclosure.

## 4. Bilby Conservation

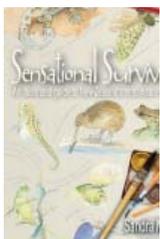
- Use the following websites to research efforts to save the bilby. Use this research to design your own poster promoting bilby conservation. Display these posters around the school.
  - The Easter Bilby – [www.easterbilby.com.au](http://www.easterbilby.com.au)
  - The Australian Bilby Appreciation Society – [www.members.optusnet.com.au/bilbies/](http://www.members.optusnet.com.au/bilbies/)
  - SA Zoos – Conservation Ark – [www.zoossa.com.au/conservation-ark/conservation/conservation-programs?program=Greater Bilby](http://www.zoossa.com.au/conservation-ark/conservation/conservation-programs?program=Greater+Bilby)
- As a class, brainstorm things you could do in your community to help raise awareness of the plight of the bilby.

## 5. Language activities

- Working in pairs or threes, create a new, amazing adventure for a bilby and describe it to the class.
- Select a creature, put it into an unlikely location and weave a story around it: for example, a crocodile in the classroom, a penguin at a birthday party or a kangaroo at a football match. Write and illustrate your story, then give a dramatic reading of it to a younger class.
- Compare *Bilby Secrets* with another book featuring bilbies. Consider plot, characters, setting, themes, and messages.
- Make a list of verbs (doing words) the author uses to describe the way bilbies move. For example, “canter” and “fling”. Devise actions to demonstrate each of these words. Take turns performing an action to the class and see if the other students can guess which word you are demonstrating.
- Alliteration is where words beginning with the same letter or sound are placed near each other for poetic effect. For example, “steeply sloping, spiral tunnel”. What other examples can you find in *Bilby Secrets*? What is your favourite example from the book? Why have you chosen this one?
- Two different fonts (types of lettering) are used in the book. Why have these been used? How does the style of language differ in these two sections?
- Which writing style do you prefer: the descriptive storytelling style or the informative, factual style? In what types of texts would each of these writing styles usually be used? For example, novels, short stories, newspaper articles and reference books.
- The author uses descriptive language, or imagery, on many occasions in the book. For example, “tail aloft like a banner” and “cocoon of silence.” What other examples can you find? How does this description help bring the world of the bilby to life?
- Punctuation, such as exclamation marks, dashes and ellipses (...), is used to create excitement and suspense in the book. What examples can you find?
- By the end of the story, the young bilby has become independent. What are some things he has had to do in order to become independent? What are some of the things humans do to become independent? What do you think the human equivalent of leaving the burrow would be? Some ideas could include starting school or moving out of home.

For further teaching suggestions please see [www.edelwignell.com.au/teachers-notes.htm](http://www.edelwignell.com.au/teachers-notes.htm)

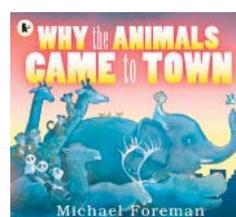
## Other Great Books about Endangered Species and Survival



### Sensational Survivors

Sandra Morris  
9781921150661  
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Teachers’ Notes available



### Why the Animals Came to Town

Michael Foreman  
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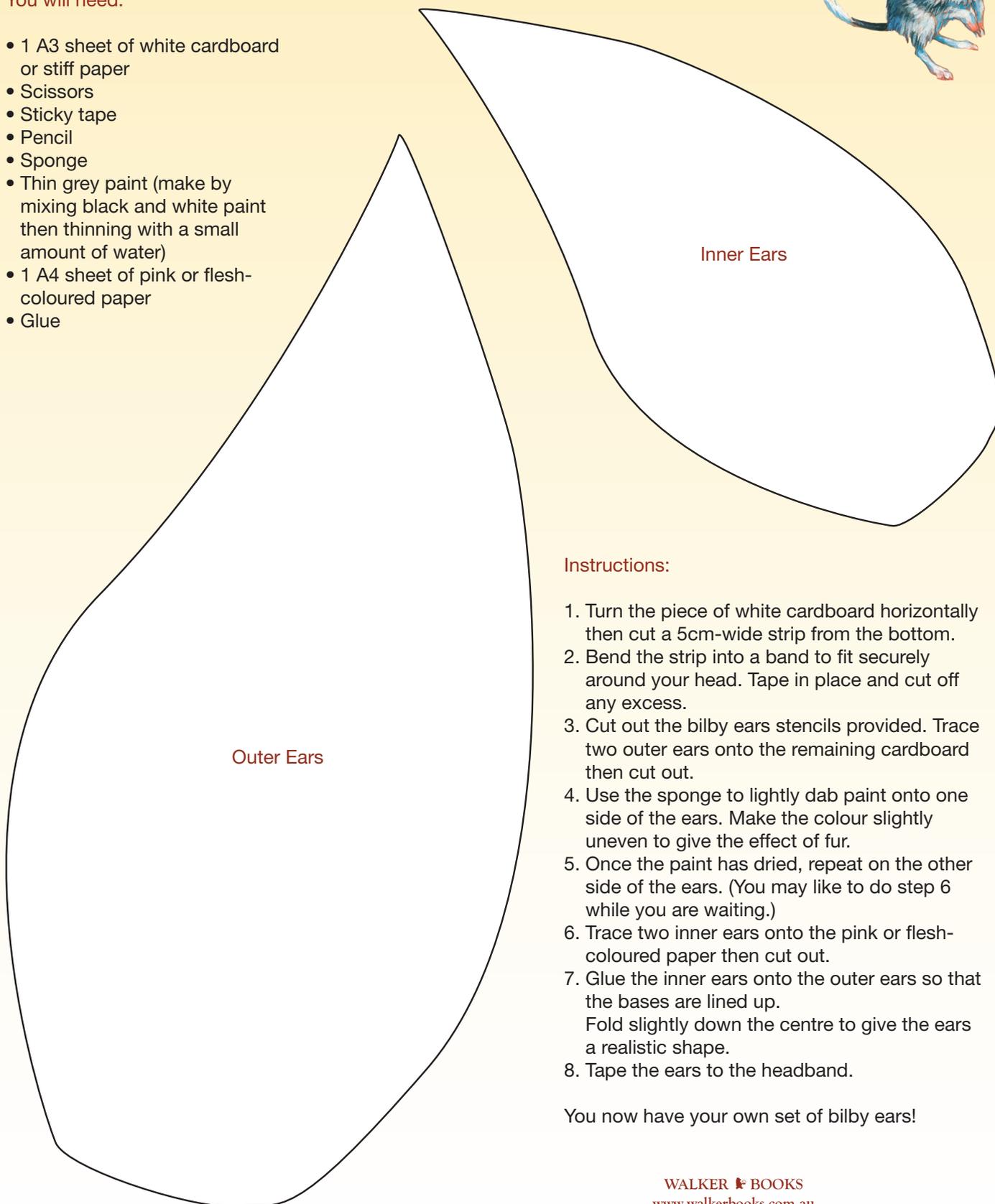
# MAKE YOUR OWN BILBY EARS

EDEL WIGNELL & MARK JACKSON



## You will need:

- 1 A3 sheet of white cardboard or stiff paper
- Scissors
- Sticky tape
- Pencil
- Sponge
- Thin grey paint (make by mixing black and white paint then thinning with a small amount of water)
- 1 A4 sheet of pink or flesh-coloured paper
- Glue



## Instructions:

1. Turn the piece of white cardboard horizontally then cut a 5cm-wide strip from the bottom.
2. Bend the strip into a band to fit securely around your head. Tape in place and cut off any excess.
3. Cut out the bilby ears stencils provided. Trace two outer ears onto the remaining cardboard then cut out.
4. Use the sponge to lightly dab paint onto one side of the ears. Make the colour slightly uneven to give the effect of fur.
5. Once the paint has dried, repeat on the other side of the ears. (You may like to do step 6 while you are waiting.)
6. Trace two inner ears onto the pink or flesh-coloured paper then cut out.
7. Glue the inner ears onto the outer ears so that the bases are lined up. Fold slightly down the centre to give the ears a realistic shape.
8. Tape the ears to the headband.

You now have your own set of bilby ears!

# BILBY SONG

EDEL WIGNELL ©

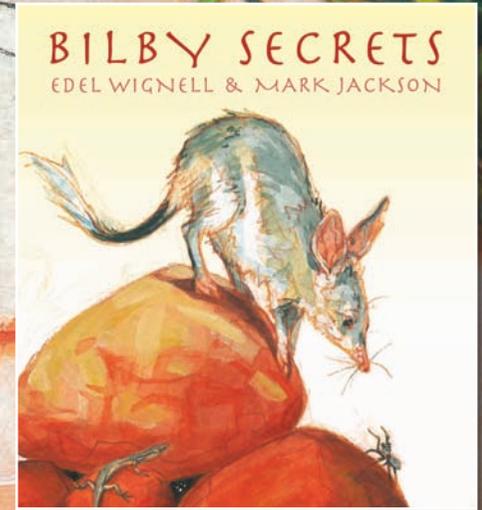
(SING TO THE TUNE OF THE 'WALTZING MATILDA' CHORUS)

LONG LIVE THE BILBY,  
LONG LIVE THE BILBY,  
BILBY SURVIVAL – SURVIVAL WE SING.  
SECRET IN YOUR BURROW,  
SLEEPING THROUGH THE LONG, HOT DAY;  
LONG LIVE THE BILBY, NOW HEAR THE WORDS RING.

LONG LIVE THE BILBY,  
LONG LIVE THE BILBY,  
BILBY SURVIVAL – SURVIVAL WE SING.  
SECRET IN YOUR FOOD QUEST,  
SEARCHING THROUGH THE LONG, COOL NIGHT;  
LONG LIVE THE BILBY, NOW HEAR THE WORDS RING.

LONG LIVE THE BILBY,  
LONG LIVE THE BILBY,  
BILBY SURVIVAL – SURVIVAL WE SING,  
ESCAPING YOUR PREDATORS:  
SLIDING SNAKE AND WILY FOX;  
LONG LIVE THE BILBY, NOW HEAR THE WORDS RING.

LONG LIVE THE BILBY,  
LONG LIVE THE BILBY,  
BILBY SURVIVAL – SURVIVAL WE SING.  
EASTER CHOCOHOLICS - \*  
BUNNY, NO! BILBY, YES!  
LONG LIVE THE BILBY, NOW HEAR THE WORDS RING.



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\*Easter chocoholics will find bilbies in the Darrell Lea and Haigh's chocolate selections. The website, [www.easterbilby.com.au](http://www.easterbilby.com.au) is a joint initiative of the Save the Bilby Fund, the Queensland Park and Wildlife Service and chocolate manufacturer, Darrell Lea. [www.savethebilbyfund.com](http://www.savethebilbyfund.com) The Foundation for RFA (Rabbit Free Australia) functions in association with Haigh's Chocolates. [www.rabbitfreeaustralia.org.au/easter\\_bilby\\_campaign.html](http://www.rabbitfreeaustralia.org.au/easter_bilby_campaign.html)

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