

Aussie Pop's **Oddities and Oddballs from Downunder**

About the author and illustrator:




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Preface

There is nothing more synonymous with Australia than its famous kangaroos and koalas. But my home country has an even greater variety of animals that many are not familiar with. Growing up I had a keen eye for nature. So, as a parent I loved nothing more than escaping to the Aussie bush (the great outdoors) with my own growing family. Sometimes the landscapes were searing and stark, which often contrasted with a brilliant blue sky and sea. But most times it was the remoteness and resulting tranquility that especially heightened or attuned one’s senses. There were no other distractions. It was just you, the land, and keen eyes and ears trying to spot those unique and often shy Aussie (pronounced ‘ozzy’, not ‘ossie’) creatures!

I’ve been so blessed to have travelled extensively as a manager, speaker, researcher and writer in my ministry position with *Creation Ministries International*. No matter what country or colour of the Christians I’ve met, we all serve the same God. It’s a great testimony to the truth of who He is, that the same God that I worship was so evident in the lives of the people I’ve met everywhere.

So, it should not be a surprise that I feel there is something unique about my downunder island home. In generations past, Australia’s indigenous Aboriginal population lived off the land learning to follow the animals and their behaviour and, thus, learned to ‘read’ the bush. So, it’s understandable when it is often said that they have a special tie to the land. Strangely, while I’ve never possessed such a skill set, I’ve always felt it too, and patently more now that I am living elsewhere. The Aussie bush has always felt like ‘home’.

I suspect songwriter Peter Allen (another expat Aussie who lived much of his life overseas) also had a sense of this when he wrote:

I’ve been to cities that never close down, from New York to Rio and old London town,
But no matter how far or how wide I roam, I still call Australia home.
I’m always travelling, I love being free, and so I keep leaving the sun and the sea,
But my heart lies waiting over the foam, I still call Australia home.

My wife Frances and I are now delighted to have ‘Ameri/Mexi/Aussie’ grandchildren. We love nothing more than showing them the wondrous imagination of our Creator God, by looking at Australia’s sometimes unique fauna. I’ve provided just a selection in this book. I hope you enjoy exploring them too.

Gary Bates

Dedication

To the glory of God in His Creation so evident in 'The Great South Land'.

To our precious grandchildren in both Australia and the US.
You light up our lives. Big hugs from Pop and Franma.

Acknowledgments

Per the normal *Creation Ministries International* style of in-house evaluation, I'd like to thank Keaton Halley, Carl and Margaret Wieland, Linda Coombe and Fran Bates for their assistance. I suspect their 'poetic advice' resulted in overdue 'poetic justice' for them! 😊

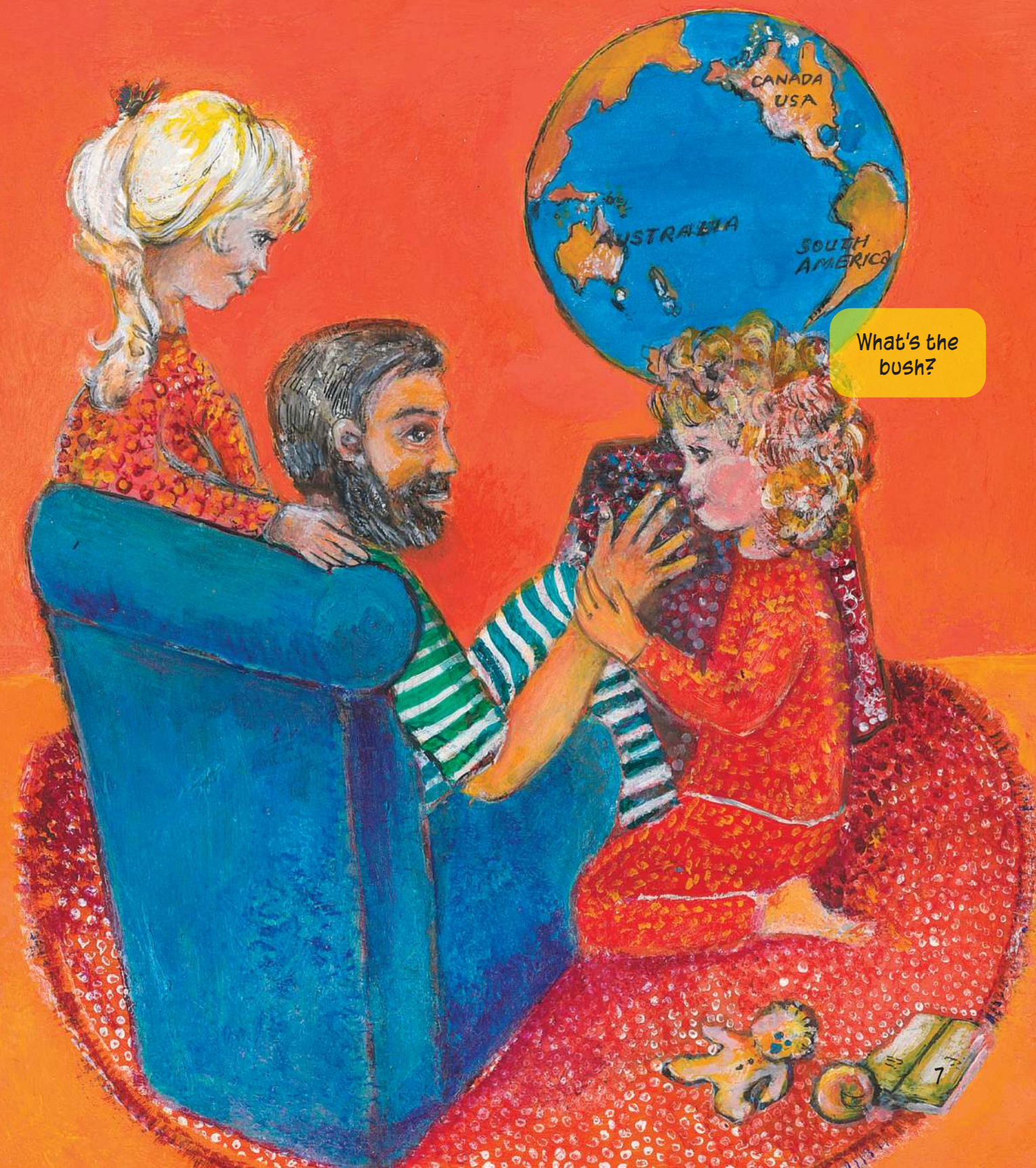


Pop and Nanna are originally from Australia. They live in America now and are looking forward to babysitting their granddaughters Bonnie and Hannah this weekend.

I am going to tell you some interesting things about the country where Nanna and I, and your Mum, were born. In Romans 1:20 it says: "There are things about God that people cannot see—his eternal power and all the things that make him God. And since the beginning of the world those things have been easy to understand. They are made clear by what God has made. So people have no excuse for the bad things they do." By looking at these fascinating Australian animals we will see how clever our Creator God is.



Australia is a country way downunder. It's as big as your country America, but we don't have as many people living there. Your Mummy and I used to go for long walks and camping in the bush and look for lots of really interesting and strange animals.





Haha, good question. We Aussies call anywhere in the countryside 'the bush'. It can be the forests, the deserts or even farming land. And we Aussies have lots of strange nicknames for all sorts of things. For example, we call little children like you, 'ankle biters'.



Don't bite my ankle, Pop!



My Mommy was born in Australia too, Pop.



The Australian bush can be a very harsh place for humans and animals to survive. A lady called Dorothea Mackellar wrote a poem called *My Country* when she was just 19. It was first published in 1908. Let me read you a couple of verses:

I love a sunburnt country,
A land of sweeping plains,
Of ragged mountain ranges,
Of droughts and flooding rains.
I love her far horizons,
I love her jewel-sea,
Her beauty and her terror
The wide brown land for me!

The stark white ring-barked forests,
All tragic to the moon,
The sapphire-misted mountains,
The hot gold hush of noon,
Green tangle of the brushes
Where the lianas coil,
And orchids deck the tree-tops,
And ferns the warm dark soil.

An opal-hearted country,
A wilful, lavish land
All you who have not loved her,
You will not understand
though Earth holds many splendours,
Wherever I may die,
I know to what brown country
My homing thoughts will fly.*





But let's talk about Australia's 'roos.' Kangaroos are marsupials. Their babies are called joeys, and they are born really tiny and also blind. But a joey just knows to climb up mum's fur and into mum's pouch where it attaches to a teat to suckle mum's milk. As the baby gets bigger it takes trips out of the pouch to explore the world around, learning to eat grass. The mum licks her pouch to keep it clean and healthy for the baby.



This pillowcase is like a pouch, right, Pop?

Adult kangaroos have a very large tail that is strong and full of muscle. It can lean back on that tail and then use its powerful legs to defend itself. And those same back legs can wind up like big rubber-bands or springs that allow them to jump long distances.



This world-class Aussie hopper doesn't need to run at all.
With strong and muscled legs he springs, just like a bouncy ball.
He leaps so very far when he is moving at his peak.
And in the land downunder, God has made these 'roos unique.

Dingoes are Australia's native dogs, but they are related to all other dogs in the world. They have a very lean, wiry build. This is ideal for running the long distances needed between water stops in the hot Australian bush.

They usually eat small animals but have sometimes been known to take down larger kangaroos when hunting in packs. A really long wire fence was built right across Australia to keep dingoes out of farming lands where they were known to attack sheep.





Koalas were wrongly called bears by people from Europe when they settled in Australia. Although they have a pouch like other marsupials, theirs opens at the bottom. And when the joey is old enough, it piggybacks on mum. She cannot reach her pouch to lick it clean, so God designed an amazing self-cleaning system. A clear liquid is produced that kills all the bad germs to clean it and keep it safe for the joey.

No, because he has a really strong grip on the teat. This allows them to live up high in the trees where they munch on delicious, juicy gum leaves from trees called eucalyptus. They get most of their liquids from these. Some think that the name 'Koala' means 'no drink' in a local Aborigine language. Smell this oil that's made from eucalyptus leaves.



Mummy rubs this on my chest.



Doesn't the joey drop out of the pouch?

When Aussie sun is beating down and it's a scorching day,
This grumpy chap will growl and moan, so let him rest away.
He likes to sleep and save his strength, to forage trees at night,
And when it's dark he'll jump around and give you quite a fright.

There are actually lots of different kangaroo types in Australia. While kangaroos are the largest, there are also wallaroos, wallabies, and pademelons. But there are some that live in the trees, and not surprisingly, they are called tree kangaroos. They are also marsupials like their larger cousins, but in addition to eating leaves, flowers, and fruit, they have also been known to eat other small creatures.

They are not as agile as other kangaroos when down on the ground, where they don't hop very well. Instead, they kind of shuffle their back legs. But when they are in the trees, they are great leapers and can jump huge distances between trees. Australian tree kangaroos are only found in the tropical rainforests in the north-east of the country.

