

READING MAGAZINE

YEAR

7



2008

Dale Richards



Dale Richards is one of Australia's top young surfers. Some people say he is like a snake on the waves. One day he hopes to be world champion so he can surf in different countries around the world.

Dale was born in Townsville in Queensland in 1988. When he was eleven years old he hurt his leg playing football. This is why he decided to start surfing. He picked up surfing right away — other surfers said that he was a natural.

Throughout his time at school, Dale tried to surf every day. This was difficult because of homework, but he always got plenty of help and encouragement from his family and teachers.

Now that he has left school he can focus completely on surfing. He gets up at 4 am and surfs for eight hours each day.



LACY

This story is narrated (told) by a woman who has a small farm in the bush.

I met her in the drought, when the air was baked thin above the shed and the casuarinas shivered in the heat.

It was too hot even to sleep by the creek. I came back to the shed and lay on the bed and dreamt of ice-cream and glaciers.

I don't know what woke me. I went to the window.

Something moved in the vegie garden. It was as long as I am, and even wider, a mottled yellow grey. It lifted its head and stared at me.

'There's a dinosaur in the potatoes,' I thought.

And then: 'No, I'm hallucinating — there can't be a dinosaur in the potatoes.'

'Maybe I'm not hallucinating,' I decided. 'Maybe someone is making a dinosaur movie in my potato patch and a model dinosaur has escaped ...' when I realised ...

'It's a giant goanna and she's heading for the chookhouse.'

I slammed out the door. The goanna saw me. She lurched in the other direction, up the hill towards the chooks. I ran after her.

'Stop! Hey stop! Get out of it!'

The goanna turned her head, gave me a disgusted glance and lurched faster. Not much faster — when you're as big as Lacy goanna you don't go very fast. Goannas do walk like dinosaurs — or rather movie makers have modelled the way they make dinosaurs walk on komodo dragons, close relatives of goannas.

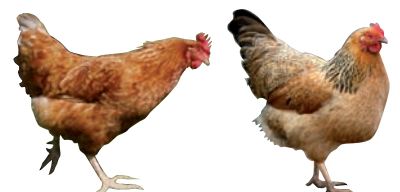
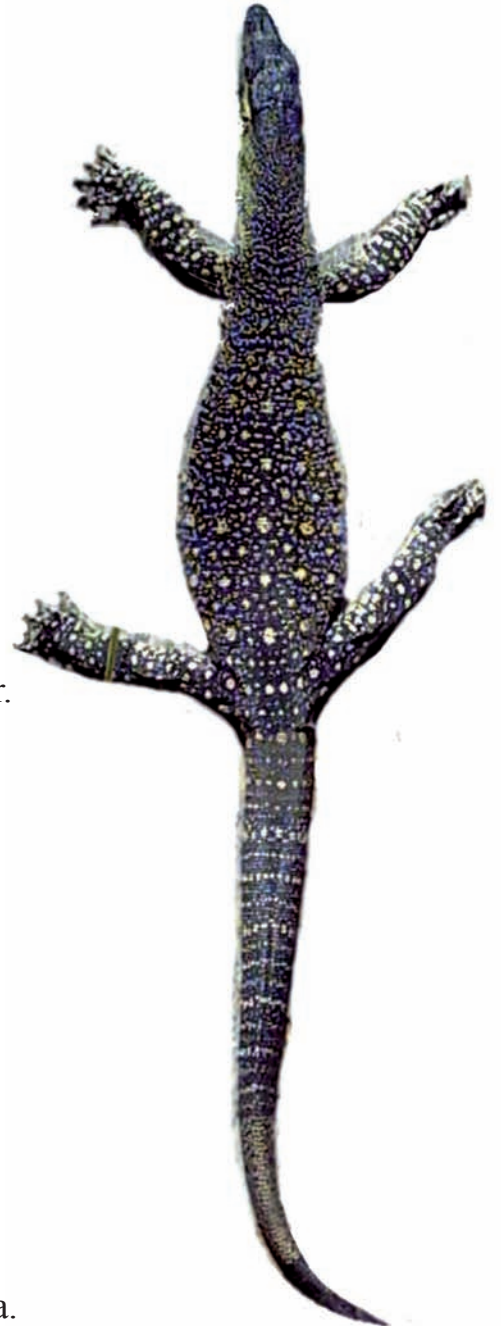
This goanna was the largest I'd ever seen. Goannas keep growing all the time, as long as they live. Lacy goanna was probably a couple of hundred years old, older than white settlement in this country.

I ran faster. The goanna kept lurching up towards the chookhouse. It was obvious I was gaining on her. She swerved to one side and began to clamber up a wattle tree instead.

It was a very small wattle tree and she was a very large goanna. The further up she climbed the more the tree bent down, till finally I was eye-to-eye with a confused goanna.

Lacy blinked a couple of times as though to say, 'No, you can't see me really. I've climbed a tree. I'm way up here! You really can't see me at all.'

I spent the morning guarding the chookhouse. Lacy goanna spent the morning up the tree, trying to pretend it wasn't swaying with her weight, probably about to break.



Pet dogs – what do you think?

May 21

Dear Editor,

Dogs are working animals, not pets. They belong out on the farm, rounding up sheep and cattle. In the city they are just a smelly, noisy nuisance. They leave their mess all over the streets, and some of them never stop barking.

Where are their owners? Why are these supposedly wonderful friends left alone to pine and whine and dig up the garden, or to bark at anyone who dares to walk past ‘their’ house?

If we must have dogs in the city, they need to be trained properly. Aside from the street-poopers and the barkers, there are the chasers and the bounders. These dreadful creatures rush up and almost knock you flat before you have time to decide if they are greeting you or attacking you.

Farm dogs earn their keep, but these city slickers consume far more than their fair share of the world’s resources. And of course, it’s not just scraps. It’s gourmet cuisine, individually tinned or freeze-dried, which the pampered darlings can eat at their leisure from personalised doggy bowls, before having a home-visit haircut and shampoo or retiring to their fur-lined baskets.

Sarah Williston



May 28

Dear Editor,

Yes, Sarah Williston (May 21), we do give dogs a good life, but they pay us back generously, with affection and intelligence and good humour.

Dogs are wonderful companions, loyal and trustworthy. They will play safely with the kids, or keep a house-bound person company all day long. Dogs are increasingly being used in nursing homes and hospitals as a welcoming and calming presence, and in some places, teachers even have a pet dog in the classroom.

It is true that training a dog takes considerable time and effort, but it is time well-spent. Taking responsibility for a canine pet builds character, as well as offering a lot of pleasure.

Sincerely,
John Bonavista



‘Oddball’ idea protects island penguin population



Oddball the maremma and Allan ‘Swampy’ Marsh at Middle Island in Warrnambool. The chicken-loving dog spent last month guarding the island’s penguin colony, with great success.

Lorna Edwards

January 22, 2007

A SOUTH-WEST Victorian chicken farmer known as Swampy and his dog Oddball may have found a way to save some of Australia’s endangered wildlife from predators.

After Warrnambool’s once flourishing penguin population was decimated by foxes and dogs until only 27 remained, Allan ‘Swampy’ Marsh hatched a radical plan to save the birds.

His four maremma sheepdogs had been protecting his chickens against predators for a decade. He figured they could do the same for the penguins.

‘The difficulty was trying to convince all the wildlife wallies to think outside the square,’ Mr Marsh said. ‘It’s not an altruistic view of penguins or chooks but an ingrained sense of territory that makes the maremma dogs work, and it is far stronger in these dogs than any other domesticated breed.’

Oddball’s stint as guardian of Middle Island’s colony last month was a success.

At the end of the month, 70 pairs of happy feet were counted returning to the island. About 2000 penguins inhabited the island in the 1990s.

‘Oddy is really protective of the chooks, so to her the penguins were only chooks in dinner suits,’ Mr Marsh said.

Highly territorial dogs, maremmas have been bred in Italy to guard livestock for 2000 years. They instinctively ward off intruders such as foxes and dogs.

The trial’s success has generated interest from overseas. The use of guard animals such as maremmas — and even alpacas, which also deter foxes — is now being considered to save other endangered species such as the eastern barred bandicoot.

Across the Pacific



The Pacific Ocean covers one-third of the Earth's surface. Small islands are sprinkled across the enormous blue expanse and often isolated from each other by great areas of sea. The islands that make up Polynesia (meaning 'many islands') were settled by seafarers from places that are now called Indonesia and Malaysia. These people spread gradually across the Pacific looking for new lands to settle. Between 2000 BC* and 1000 AD**, they navigated incredible distances in sturdy dugout canoes, 'reading' changes in the swell of the sea, the patterns of the stars and the easterly winds. They brought with them a patterned pottery called Lapita (above left), which has become an archaeological clue to their movements. The settlers adapted to the different environments they found, from the dry atolls to the lush and fertile volcanic islands. They reached Tonga and Samoa by at least 1000 BC and developed their own customs and a society that was ruled by chiefs. By about 1000 AD, Polynesians had reached Easter Island, New Zealand and the easterly islands of Hawaii.



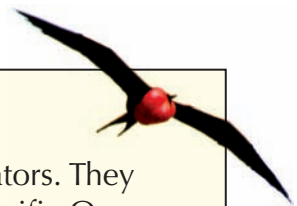
Did You Know?

Gigantic stone statues line the coast of Easter Island. The people carved these guardians of the island from soft volcanic stone, then dragged them to platforms on the cliff edges.

READING THE SEA AND THE SKY

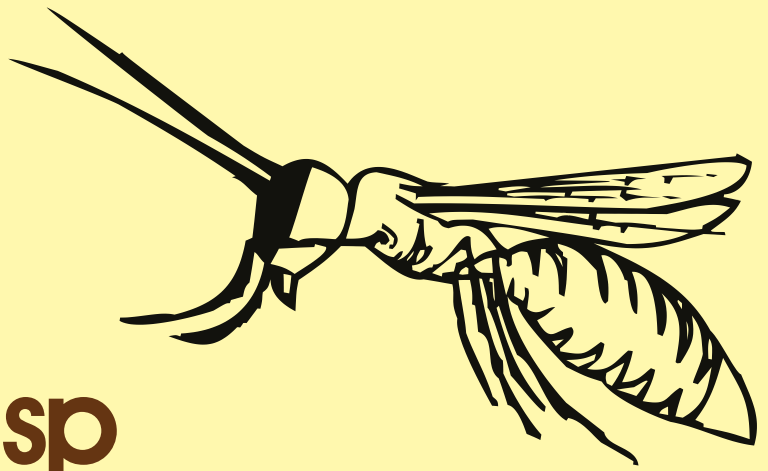


The Polynesians were expert navigators. They found islands to settle in the vast Pacific Ocean by reading the sea and watching for land-based birds such as frigates (above right). They travelled to and from these islands using maps they made from palm sticks and cowrie shells (left). The sticks represented the swells and currents of the sea, while cowrie shells marked islands.



* Also known as BCE

** Also known as CE



Wasp

Well wasp what's
To do about you
Battering at the windscreen
You can't get through?

World's all wrong,
Air itself in treason
Turns a sudden solid
And shuts you in prison.

And still through the wall wasp
The long green paddocks sweeten
With trigger-flower and daisy
And gold billy-button;

But up wasp down wasp
Climb wasp and fall,
Can't beat your way
Through the clear strange wall.

Out and away then
When the car stops;
World's come right again
And happy goes wasp.

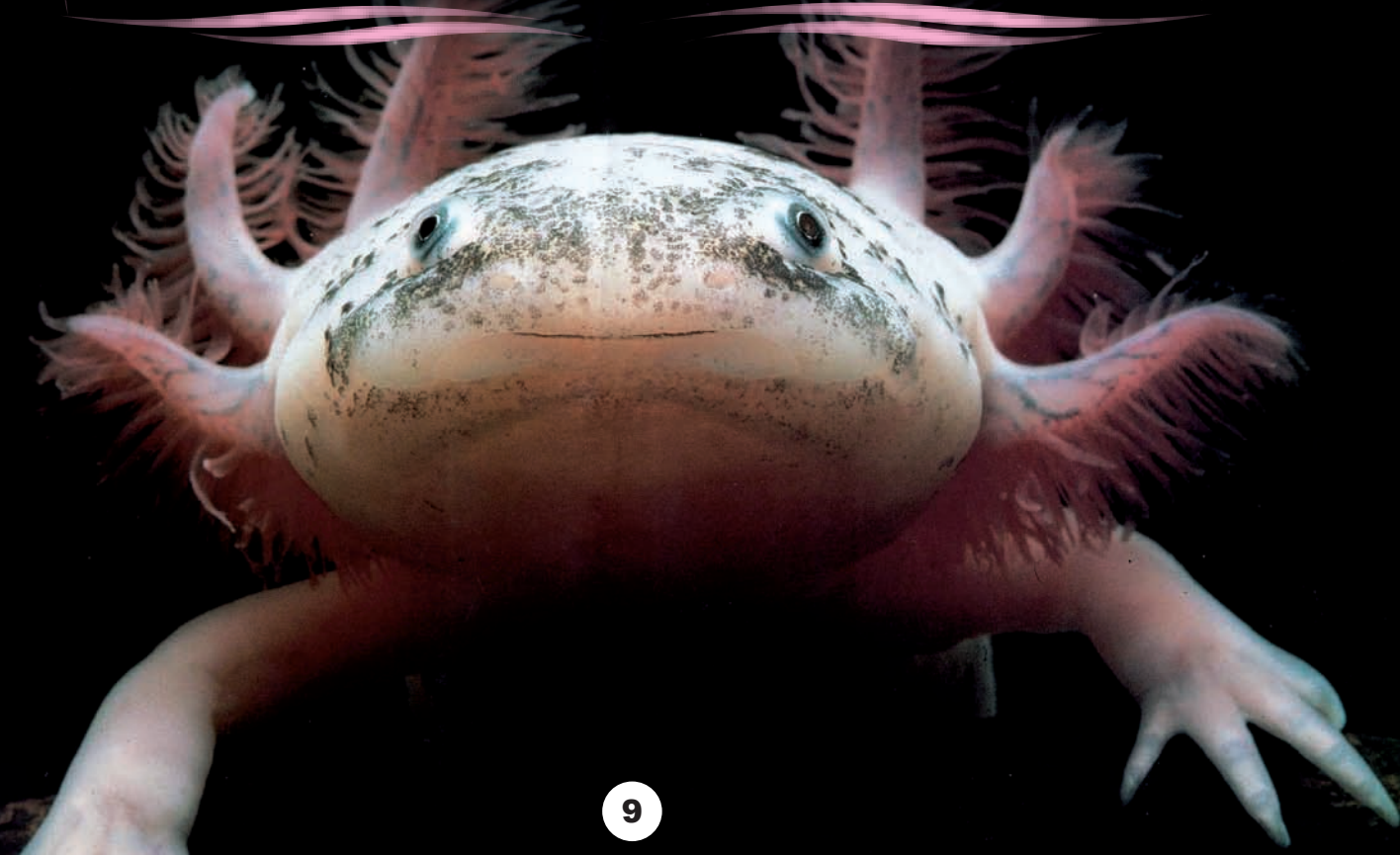
Douglas Stewart

The double life of a slippery axolotl

In 1865 scientists were surprised when some of the Mexican axolotls at an exhibition in Paris turned into yellow-spotted, brown salamanders. Very surprised, in fact, because scientists had thought that the axolotl and salamander were different species, not different life stages of the same animal. What they had observed was an axolotl metamorphosing into a salamander. They had not seen this occur when the axolotl was in its natural habitat.



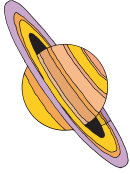

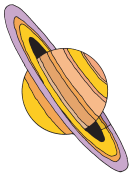

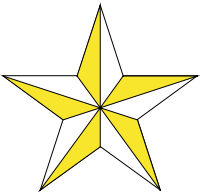
So why don't axolotls always metamorphose into salamanders? Well, the lakes in Mexico where axolotls are found are surrounded by barren, dry country which is an unsuitable environment for amphibians like salamanders to survive in. The lakes, however, are full of food and good water, the perfect place for an axolotl to survive. This environmental pressure has caused the axolotl to adapt and retain the aquatic, larval (immature) form of the salamander. At the same time it has developed the ability to increase in size and reach sexual maturity. This is called neoteny. The axolotl never has to change into the adult salamander form to grow and reproduce. But this does not mean it cannot do so.

If an axolotl is taken out of water it will most probably die. But if its lake or pond slowly dries up it may metamorphose into a salamander. Other changes in environmental conditions such as temperature and day length can have a similar effect. The change in environment affects a part of the brain called the hypothalamus which controls the release of a hormone called thyroxin. Thyroxin is essential for metamorphosis in amphibians. In its natural state the axolotl has adapted to switch off this biological signal so it can remain in its watery paradise.



Space Exploration: Is it worth it?

Participants in an online forum were asked whether space exploration was worthwhile. Here are some of the comments they posted:

Planet Girl		7.17 pm
	Our world is ravaged by war, famine and poverty. Billions of people struggle just to survive from day to day. Meanwhile the US space agency has US\$16 billion to play with every year. We must deal with the world's urgent problems. Space exploration is a luxury we cannot afford.	
Dragon		7.18 pm
	That \$16 billion spent on space is nothing compared to the \$370 billion spent on the military.	
JJ		7.20 pm
	Exploring space is investing in the future. Everyone knows we're running out of resources. There's massive over-population too. The solar system has heaps of resources we can use for mining, and maybe we can colonise other planets. If we don't do it now, it might be too late.	
Planet Girl		7.22 pm
	We have to tackle problems of over-population and resource depletion here on Earth, instead of chasing science fiction dreams. Otherwise we will just export our unsustainable lifestyle to another planet. We might consume the whole universe!!	
JJ		7.23 pm
	Space explorers rock! They know what they are in for, and they still do it anyway. That's what I call courage! We humans have always struggled to expand our horizons. We want to know what else is out there. Who knows, maybe we'll discover the solution to all our problems out there!	
Switched-on		7.25 pm
	Space exploration has had a huge effect on our lives. Want to talk to someone halfway around the world? Sure. Get the weather forecast? Coming right up. Check exactly where you are? Absolutely. It's all possible, thanks to satellite technology, global positioning systems, and the rest. If there was no space exploration, we'd be sitting around in the dark, not talking online!	
Penny		7.50 pm
	Satellites are launched by private companies — for profit. Planet Earth doesn't always benefit. Exploring remote planets certainly does not contribute to life on Earth.	



Barn Owls

Barn Owls are hunters.

They have large forward-facing eyes,
excellent night vision and exceptional hearing.

Barn Owls often sleep during the day
when their prey is also inactive.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Cover image: Craig Jewell / stock.xchng

Dale Richards

Images: (portrait image) joliphotos.com; (surfing image) Association of Surfing Professionals (ASP) © Covered Images

Lacy

French, Jackie, *Dancing with Ben Hall*, HarperCollins Australia, 1997.
Images: (chickens) Gravicapa / stock.xchng; (goanna) photographer Michael A. Zimmer

'Oddball'

Adapted text from Edwards, Lorna, "'Oddball' idea protects island penguin population",
The Age, 22 January 2007.
Image: Robin Sharrock

Across the Pacific

Adapted text and illustrations from page 16 of *Discoveries: Explorers & Traders*, Weldon Owen, 1996. Consulting Editor: Dr Anne Millard. © 1996 by Weldon Owen Pty Ltd.
Images: Auscape / Tui De Roy (bird); Auscape / J.P. Ferrero.

The double life of a slippery axolotl

Adapted text from 'Of teeth and axolotls' which appeared in *The Helix*, No. 46 February / March 1996, published by CSIRO Education. Reproduced courtesy of *The Helix* / CSIRO Education.
Image: Stephen Dalton / Animals Animals – Earth Scenes

Wasp

Stewart, Douglas, *Selected Poems*, HarperCollins Australia, 1973.



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