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Giddy galahs

Most Australians will have seen a galah. It is a colourful bird that is found all over Australia. The galah has a pink front, a grey back and a striking white crest.

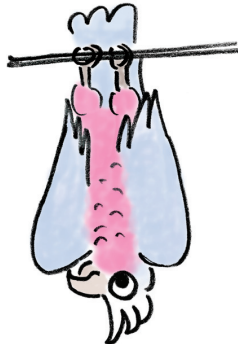
Galahs are usually found in groups. They can be seen sitting in trees, foraging for seeds on the ground, or frolicking on powerlines. When a flock of galahs flies towards you, it looks like a bright pink cloud.

When galahs get together in the evenings, they can be very noisy. So, if you haven't seen a galah, you will have probably heard one!

Galahs are intelligent birds that seem to like having fun. Here are some of their antics.

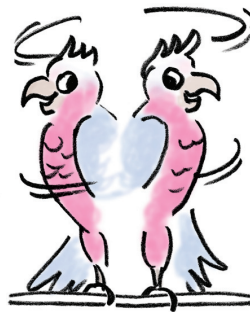
Hanging around

The galah hangs upside down.



In a spin

The galah turns around in circles.



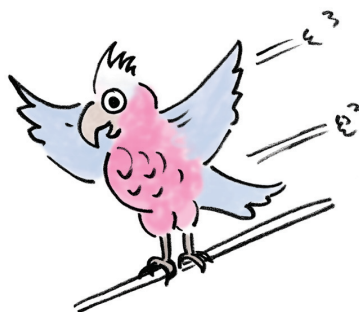
Hopping mad

The galah stands on one leg.



Slide away

The galah slides down the powerline.



Postal cats

Leon was a postman. Every day Leon would wake up and feed his 37 cats. Leon didn't really want 37 cats, but one by one they had turned up on his doorstep, and Leon had taken them in.

Every day, after feeding the cats, Leon would collect the mail from the red postboxes in the village and take it home to sort.

'If only I had 37 helpers instead of 37 cats, my job would be so much easier,' Leon thought. Just then, the cats started meowing for their dinner. That gave Leon an idea.

That night, Leon stayed up making 37 cat-sized postal backpacks. Each backpack fitted neatly onto a cat's back. Then, he went around to each postbox, putting signs up that read: *Postbox closed. Please use the Postal Cat Service.*

The next day, Leon put a backpack on each cat and dropped off the cats around the village. Leon knew that the cats would be happy lazing around all day. He also knew that they would always come home for dinner.

Leon spent the day relaxing, waiting for his helpers to return.

Leon was right. The cats *did* return, but they did not bring home many letters. Somehow, the cats had managed to wriggle out of their backpacks. Or lose their letters. Or get the letters wet. Or, in one case, nibble the corners of the letters.

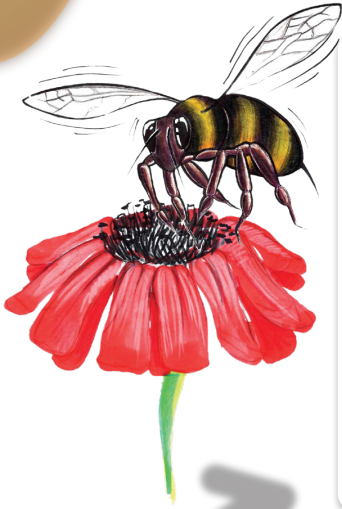
'Cats are just too unreliable,' Leon thought.

Just then, there was a scratching at Leon's door. A scruffy dog was waiting to be invited inside.

That gave Leon an idea.



Honey bees



The honey bee sucks nectar from flowers using its long, tube-like tongue and stores the nectar in its nectar sac. A bee's nectar sac is also known as a honey stomach.

If the bee gets hungry, some nectar is released from its honey stomach and passed to its real stomach to give the bee energy.

When the bee's nectar sac is full, the bee returns to the hive, where it passes on the nectar to other worker bees.



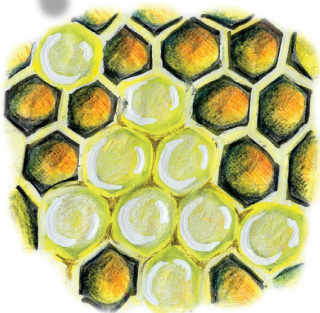
The honey is used to feed the larvae that have been produced by the queen bee.

Within a few weeks the larvae will develop into fully grown bees.

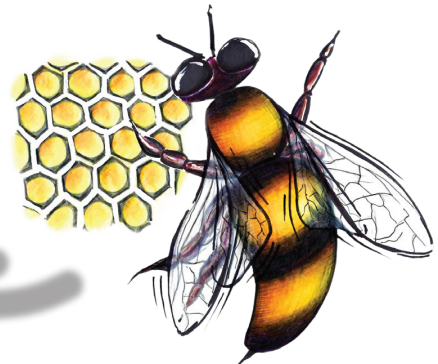
Soon, young honey bees will be flying around looking for nectar ...

Inside the hive, the bees chew the nectar to reduce its water content. The nectar needs to thicken to become honey. The bees then put the nectar into the cells of a structure called a honeycomb.

The bees also fan their wings to dry the chewed-up nectar, helping it turn into honey.



When the honey is thick enough, the bees cover the cells of the honeycomb with a layer of beeswax. The beeswax comes from glands on the sides of the bees' bodies.





Chooky Dancers go global

Imagine this situation: you live on a tiny island off the north coast of Australia, and you and most of your friends have never even been to Darwin. You all love dancing: any style, any time, but especially at the local disco, where hundreds of local kids gather every weekend.

Then one day, on a dusty basketball court, your group is doing an up-beat version of the Sirtaki dance from the 1964 movie *Zorba the Greek*. Someone films it, and the film is uploaded to the Internet. It's so funny that suddenly you are a sensation, with thousands of hits in the first few days. Before long, you are receiving invitations to perform all over Australia.

This did happen in 2007 to the Chooky Dancers, an Indigenous dance group who live on Elcho Island, off the coast of Arnhem Land.

Since then, the energetic and very amusing Chookies have performed at numerous comedy festivals and cultural events all around Australia. They have also appeared in a full-length feature film. These young Yolngu men absorb and then reinvent dance moves from everywhere: from traditional Indigenous dance styles and ideas, to techno and hip hop, kung fu and Bollywood.

And now the Chookies have gone global. In early 2011, they travelled out of Australia for the first time. They went to Beijing, the capital of China, where they performed their particular brand of zaniness to a Chinese TV audience of probably close to one billion.

The Chookies' act was part of one of China's biggest annual shows – the Spring Festival Gala. Over the years the festival has hosted a huge variety of acts from all around the world and of every imaginable style and content. Even so, the audience had seen nothing like the Chooky Dancers, who began, as usual, with a traditional Yolngu dance, before breaking out into their signature Zorba. The Chinese were totally won over.

It's a great international, multicultural, outback youth success story – an Indigenous Australian dance troupe performs a techno version of a Greek dance on Chinese TV!

Through the break

Breakers rise like hulking sea eagles. They glide, then crash, tossing their prey of bodies and surfboards to the sand, hissing to retreat and hurl again.

Shai has been coming all summer, catching three buses to stand at the shoreline, close his eyes and crunch warm shell grit between his toes – like he did on his old island home, where currents were lazy and the waters warm and calm. He watches surfers spear through waves. Counts one ... two ... three ... until they emerge, then watches the practised flick of their hair. He'll be out there with them ... one day.

He grips the pitted second-hand board to his chest. 'Today,' he murmurs. 'Today.'

Heart hammering, Shai wades in, flings his legs onto his board and strokes towards the looming curve of green crystal until it's too late to turn back. The water wall shimmers and fragments above him. He dips his board's nose as he's seen others do, spearing into his fear. Ears, eyes and nostrils are swamped. He feels the shove of the wave, hears nothing but the dull rumble of the sea. Counts one ... two ... three ...

Suddenly, body rigid, blue-knuckled, he shoots upwards, into the silk water beyond the wave that is now billowing behind him to shore. He yelps with joy and paddles until the breakers can no longer drag him back, feeling freer and freer with each pull.

Bobbing, drifting, he rests his head on his arms. The people on the beach dip in and out of view. The boy from far away, who all hot summer cringed in the shallows, fearing the waves, is no longer stranded on the sand.

Turning his board, Shai claws his way until he is picked up by a swell and carried in a roaring rush towards the shore. He tumbles as his board is ripped from beneath him. He rolls with the sand and froth and shells until, panting and grazed, he lies on the land's edge, the edge of his new country.

Shai staggers to his feet and looks out to the horizon. He says goodbye to another island, out there somewhere, beyond the break. He smiles, collects his board, limps up onto the dry sand and breathes deeply the air of the place he'll now call home.



Space junk

Letters to the editor

Dear Sir – Matthew Haymin suggests that concerns raised about space junk are just hype and that the media are trying to cause panic ('What Rubbish?', 15 April). This is further evidence of how poorly understood this issue is. His solution, simply to send satellites to higher orbits when the current levels get overcrowded, is, quite frankly, misguided.

It is well established that the space junk problem is at a critical point. There are an estimated 500 000 objects – spent rockets, redundant satellites (over 200!), metal fragments (many of which are the results of collisions), nuts and bolts, paint chips and so on – with some whizzing around the Earth at 30 000 kilometres an hour.

The suggestion that we can just shoot new satellites up to higher orbits when things get too busy is preposterous. Does Haymin realise that his solution just defers the problem? How far can we keep sending satellites into space, adding layer upon layer of space junk?

It is inevitable that the debris will increase, even if we stop adding to it now. A collision between two satellites would produce thousands of chunks of debris, all of which would be capable of destroying billions of dollars worth of valuable satellites. Services such as telephone connections, television signals, GPS and weather forecasts would all come to a smashing halt.

Haymin suggests that the collision between two satellites in 2009 was an 'unprecedented event'. A more accurate description would be that it was 'a taste of what's to come'.

The human footprint in space has become too big to ignore, but as usual, nobody wants to take responsibility. No government sees it as their job to implement change.

Enough is enough. It is high time that international treaties be put in place forcing countries to take responsibility for cleaning up the mess they have created.

Kevin Barker

Sara's early morning

On Saturday morning, Sara got up early to play football.

She put on her football shirt and black shorts. Then, she pulled on some long socks. Next, she carried her football boots to the door and put them on.

'I thought you played football on Sunday, not Saturday!' said Sara's Dad.

'Oh, yeah!' said Sara, and she went back to bed.

