



Wild about Seatrees

October 2017



Issue 6: Button



A very rare, state significant form of Prickly Moses (*Acacia verticillata* var. *latifolia*) dominates the vegetation in front of our Seahouse. In spring it blossoms into a carpet of yellow flowers. The sight is greatly appreciated by us and the resident birdlife enjoy feeding on the flowers. It also provides a perfect cover for our endangered, ground nesting Rufous Bristlebirds.

Meet Button - a tiny Eastern Pygmy possum

Button came into care at our Seatrees Shelter as a 9-gram orphan. Before us was a teaspoon bundle of grey/brown fur with long black whiskers, white tummy and a long, sparsely-furred, prehensile tail which is able to wrap around twigs and branches. He had the most beautiful, large liquid eyes surrounded by dark fur.

Having never rehabilitated a Pygmy Possum before the challenge was to feed him marsupial milk and a special nectar mix from the tip of a miniature spoon. He happily lapped using his brush-tipped tongue but the biggest problem was capturing him for his feeds. These marsupials are lightning fast and can easily escape their basket and hence get lost – a carer's nightmare.

While persons brought up within literate culture often speak about the natural world, indigenous, oral peoples sometimes speak directly to that world, acknowledging certain animals, plants, and even landforms as expressive subjects with whom they might find themselves in conversation.

David Abram, Becoming Animal



Once Button had more than doubled his weight it was time to soft release him back to the wild. He was transported in his box to our forest heathland release site with lots of tree ferns and hollows. His box was hung near a feeding station providing him with supplementary food and water over the first few months.

Over the Winter Button would have spent time in torpor for a few days at a time. This state prevents loss of body heat due to his small size and allows him to reduce energy expenditure by lowering his metabolism. Button's body temperature would have dropped to near that of his surroundings.

How clever is that?

He needs this ability as in the wild he and his species have to be agile and active climbers and fast movers to avoid predation.

Button quickly gained weight and reached the stage where he was weaned from milk and able to feed himself from small bowls placed in his enlarged enclosure. He began eating mealworms and feeding on nectar and pollen from banksia, bottlebrush and flowering gum. He slept in a tight ball during the day in his specially designed box, emerging at night to eat, to hoon and scurry around the branches gaining the essential motor skills he needed once released.



Button's release box and food station



And off goes Tilly back to her fishing and soaring



‘Sea Swallow & Fisherman’

Tilly, the Lesser Crested Tern should have been out there with her flock winging it over the ocean and expertly plunge-diving in search of fish. Instead she was found exhausted and lifeless on the beach at Mounts Bay and needed to come into care for treatment.

Tilly’s scientific name is *Thalasseus bengalensis* – which originates from the ancient Greek word, *Thalasseus*, meaning "fisherman" and *thalassa*, meaning "sea". The Lesser Crested Terns have graceful flight patterns and forked tails, which have earned them the nickname of “Sea Swallows”.

They are often found in large colonies and can be seen dive bombing into the sea from our house. It is a spectacular sight, as is the sight of them roosting on the rock shelves in front of Seatrees.

Tilly had to be given a lot of rest and fed fish dipped in seawater for a few weeks before she was released

The ‘Big Wet’ this season has resulted in spectacular rainbows, sunrises and sunsets. So far this year Apollo Bay has had 177 days of rain, more than 50 days above the average since 1888. The total rainfall has been 937.8mm – 132.6 mm higher than the average. As a result we have been treated to a plethora of rainbows.

Sir Isaac Newton identified the seven colours of the visible spectrum that together make up white light, all of which are present in a rainbow in the order red, orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo and violet. We can only see these colours when sunlight and rain combine in a specific way to separate the colours of sunlight, which is usually seen as white.



Whale Ahoy!

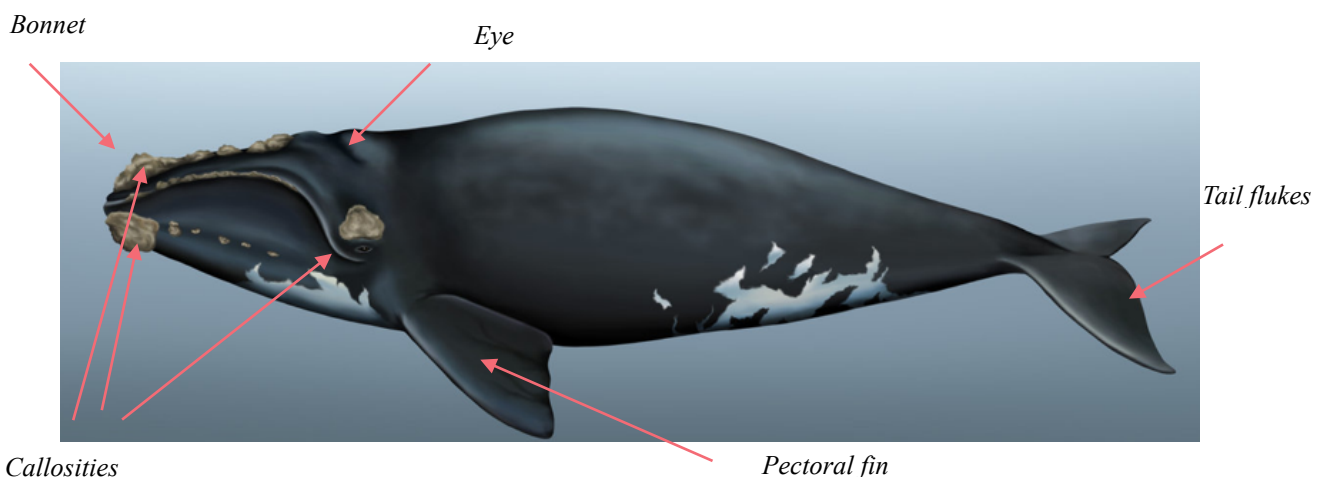
With great delight in July we saw our first whales for the season, cruising by in front of Seatrees. They were two Southern Right Whales with water spraying out of their blowholes and breaching. A great display!

The Southern Right Whale is easily distinguished from others because it swims relatively slowly, has a broad back without dorsal fins, a long arching mouth and white callosities (raised rough patches of skin) on its head.



These callosities form a unique pattern for each whale and allow researchers to tell them apart. Once abundant in the waters of southern Australia their numbers became drastically reduced during intensive whaling in the 1800s. It was called a 'right whale' as it was the right whale to catch because of its meat and high oil content. Fortunately all marine mammals in Australia became protected in 1978 and the Southern Right Whale is making a slow recovery, with its numbers gradually increasing.

The really great news is that it's been a bumper baby season off Victoria's south-west coastline, with a fourth Southern Right Whale calf born at the traditional whale nursery at Warrnambool. While that's good news, there's still a long way to go before the mammal can be taken off the critically endangered list — with only about 300 individual whales now found around the south east of Australia.



Molly and Scruffy...



Molly and Scruffy in the Brumby

Introducing Molly and Scruffy, our third generation Seatrees Farm dogs following in the pawprints of Topsy, Toby, Rosie and Buffy!

Molly and Scruffy are both rescue dogs, Molly, a Border Collie from Moree in New South Wales, Scruffy, a small Chihuahua x Silky Terrier mix from Shepparton in northern Victoria.

Molly and Scruffy are totally different in personality, behaviour and attitude! Of the two, Scruff is more confident, playful and full of tricks. He gets 'bees in his bonnet', has the wildest imagination, all aided and abetted by his basket of toys. There's not a mean bone in his body and he loves everyone he meets. Molly is more anxious, frightens easily and has confidence issues but is loosening up and starting to play. Her great love is the beach, progressing from being scared of the water to wild running, swimming and wave surfing. Molly craves acceptance and kindness.

Scruffy adores Molly, copying just about everything she does. Molly is more reserved and patient, tolerating Scruff's endless requests for play and games. More than anything she enjoys their sprints on the beach, face licks in the morning and having a super little dude to round up.

How blessed we are to have Molly and Scruffy and hats off to the Shelter carers who gave them a second chance.

The more clearly we can focus our attention on the wonders and realities of the universe about us, the less taste we shall have for destruction.

Rachel Carson, American marine biologist, author and conservationist

Which creature lives at Seatrees and can survive fire, charred earth, asteroid impacts and is the oldest surviving mammal on the planet today?

It's our remarkable echidna, the only surviving member — along with the platypus — of an ancient clade of animals called monotremes, or egg-laying mammals. Researchers have now found that echidnas have a secret super power that allowed them to survive the asteroid attack that killed the dinosaurs. They didn't attempt to flee the fire, they simply went to bed, went into a hibernation state called "torpor" and slept through it.

Torpor allows them to lower their metabolism and their body temperature and makes them fire-resistant. Torpor also enables echidnas to sleep through the times of scarcity that follow major bushfires and allows them to save energy until their insect food source returns.



Other interesting facts about echidnas:

- Their spines are actually modified hairs with tiny muscle bundles connected to the base of each spine so they can control the spine's movement and direction.
- Their long snout or beak and sharp claws enable them to break up rotting logs and termite mounds when searching for food and their long sticky tongue helps them collect their diet of small invertebrates, including ants, termites, grubs, larvae and worms.
- In breeding season they form mating trains. Males line up nose to tail behind a single female, forming a train of up to a dozen individuals. Trains can last more than a month, with males dropping out and rejoining. When the female is finally ready to mate, the males dig a trench in the ground around her, competing for mating honours by pushing each other out of the trench. The last one remaining gets to mate with the female.

- Even though they are mammals, they lay eggs. Along with the platypus, the echidna is a member of the monotremes, an order of egg-laying mammals found in Australia. After mating, a female echidna lays a single, soft-shelled, leathery egg, about the size of a grape into her pouch. Ten days later, the baby echidna (called a puggle and smaller than a jelly bean) hatches.
- Like all mammals they feed their young milk but not with nipples. Instead, female echidnas have special glands in their abdomen called milk patches that secrete milk, which the baby puggle laps up.
- Once the puggle starts to grow spikes (around 50 days of age), it will be removed from the pouch and left in the burrow whilst the mother forages for several days on end. The mother then continues to suckle her young when she returns to the burrow every 4-6 days, until the puggle is around 200 days of age.
- Their long life span — up to 50 years— is due to their low body temperature and slow metabolism.

Seatrees Wildlife Booklets

Fungi at Seatrees



Our *Fungi at Seatrees* booklet is the third in a series on the Seatrees environment, following on from the previously published *Seatrees Birds* and *Seatrees Mammals*. Although there are hundreds if not thousands of species of fungi that grow on the property, this booklet provides photographs and descriptions of sixteen quite common ones, ranging from the tiniest to larger. There is also information on the crucial role fungi play in contributing to the health of all plants and its role in recycling organic matter, as well as being a source of food for our Seatrees wallabies.

Fungi at Seatrees was produced in conjunction with Alison Pouliot, environmental photographer and fungus expert.

Copies can be purchased for a \$15 (per book) donation to our wildlife shelter. Contact us on 0407 530 960 or email jenny@life.net.au if you would like a copy.

www.coastcottages.com.au/wildlifeshester.html

Donations to our Seatrees wildlife shelter are greatly appreciated.