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Village Eco News

A publication of Bangalow Land and Rivercare.

Meet Rakali - Cane Toad eater



Rakalis, are one of Australia's beautiful but lesser-known semi-aquatic native rodents and these intelligent mammals have revealed another talent: they are one of the only native mammals to safely eat toxic cane toads.

Most people aren't aware of the existence of the Rakali, a native Australian water rodent that looks a lot like a little otter. Rakalis were commonly referred to as a 'water rats' until they were re-christened with their traditional Aboriginal name back in the 1990's.

Rakali are nocturnal and specially adapted to live in waterways, with webbed feet and soft water-resistant fur. Their fur is so impressive they were once part of a thriving fur industry in Australia.

They can be found in lakes, rivers and estuaries, often living alongside people, in New South Wales, Queensland, Tasmania, South Australia, far north and southwest Western Australia, Northern Territory, and Victoria, where they can even be seen along St Kilda Pier.

Despite several attempts to boost the profile of the Rakali, people continue to mistake them for pests and their ecological value goes unnoticed.

Previously there was only anecdotal evidence that they were able to consume cane toads without being poisoned now, not only proven but caught on camera several times. They neatly dissecting the toads to eat their hearts and livers while avoiding the poisonous skin and glands.

They also assist farmers by eradicating the introduced black rat that damages crops and livestock feed. In Tasmania it has been documented that they feed on the introduced Northern Pacific Seastar that have a disastrous effects on the inhabitants of the Derwent Estuary.

Like so many of Australia's native rodents all of which live in different habitats and niches, they all have a bad name because of the introduced species and sadly a lot of natives rodents get killed in error.

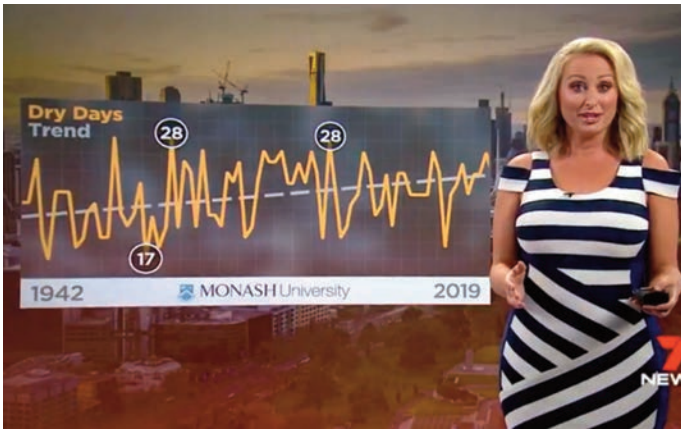
Rakalis have long been a victim of this mistaken identify but hopefully with their new found fame they will be seen in a more favourable context - perhaps even lovable!

Sources: ABC, Nat Geographic, Nature Australia

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Landcare Working Bee

Our team of friendly volunteers work every Saturday morning, weather permitting from 8.30am to 10.30am rotating through the various sites around Bangalow. All welcome. **Raffle winner August/September: Katrina**



Weather Presenters Trusted on Climate Change

One of the great paradoxes of climate change communication in Australia is that politicians command the most attention on the issue, yet are among the least trusted sources of climate information.

In Australia, the four most trusted information sources on climate change are climate scientists, farmers, fire fighters, and weather presenters, according to Monash University Climate Change Communication Research.

This suggests people want to hear more from scientists about climate change if only they had greater visibility. Farmers and fire fighters may have won the public's trust because they work at the frontline of climate change, in figuring out how to grow our food with diminishing rainfall or put out fires in an ever-expanding fire season.

Of this exclusive group, only weather presenters have the distinction of being both trusted and skilled communicators, and having access to large audiences. As such, they can play a very important role in delivering factual, apolitical information to millions of Australians.

The research at Monash shows that even Australians concerned about climate change have surprisingly low levels of climate literacy, relative to the immense scale of the problem. Facts, in themselves, will not necessarily influence people but when they are delivered by trusted sources they can be very powerful.

Television remains the single largest source of news in Australia. Weather presenters can fill the same place in a viewer's day for decades, providing a sense of constancy and many presenters find that incorporating climate information improves the bulletin.

Monash University has engaged weather presenters in three major networks proposing that as they present the day's observed temperatures they also present observed climate trends over a longer time scale.

Another finding of our research shows that the public is most receptive to information that is "non-persuasive" or does not attempt to advocate one way or another and that viewers were generally fascinated with weather trends anyway and this is just giving them more of what they want.

When surveyed, 91% of Australia's 75 weather presenters were interested in presenting local historical climate information and generally present observed climate trends over 30-50 years because that is what the science says is needed for a strong climate signal, but less than 50 years because most people don't care about the time scale beyond that.

Our research consistently shows that audiences connect with local information much more than national and global data, because the local information is seen to be far more relevant. Audiences may also link the information to stories about local extreme weather events associated with climate change, such as floods and more violent storms.

The appetite of Australians for information about climate trends is also very high. A 2017 survey of Australian television audiences found that about 88% of respondents were interested in learning about the impacts of climate change in a weather bulletin.

So if trusted sources such as weather presenters can show leadership in the public conversation by normalising climate data, this will disseminate vital information and hopefully prompt more discussion of how to respond to the climate crisis. *edited by Dawn Lotty*



The PM defending coal mining

What's the Issue with Tissues?

It's time to stop investing in single use tissues and reach for a hankerchief.

This is most likely not an issue that many have thought too much about – you have a blocked or runny nose and reach for the nearest tissue box. The idea of carrying around a hankerchief to most people is a bit 'old fashioned', however a bit of research may make you stop and think before reaching for the tissue box next time.

Did you know each year Australians consume around 273,000 tonnes of tissue products and almost all of it is made from virgin fibre. Unfortunately tissues cannot be recycled as they are contaminated after use which means they've got a one way ticket to landfill.

Why is the handkerchief a better option?

Although they receive a bad rap as a germ piece of material that's unhygienic, it's actually not the case if they're used correctly. If you use a hankerchief properly and fold it after use, and pop it in the wash once it's used three or more times you are not at any more risk of spreading germs that you would be with a single use tissue.

One of the biggest arguments towards single use tissues is to stop the spread of germs but let's be honest, how many people put a tissue in the bin straight after use? It's normal for tissues to end up on desks, bedside tables, at the bottom of handbags or in our pockets which means the germs are still hanging around until you dispose of the tissue.

Hankerchiefs take considerably less toll on the environment as they can be washed and reused many, many times over. Also if you fold them and pop them in your bag/pocket etc you are not spreading any germs at all.

Source: *The Conversation*



Something to Read

by Dawn Lotty

We don't usually do a book review but with the holiday season fast approaching we would like to suggest the following two books.

***Dark Emu* by Bruce Pascoe**

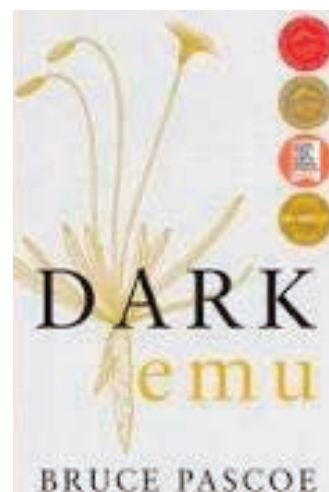
Bruce puts forward a compelling argument for a reconsideration of the hunter gatherer label for pre colonial Aboriginal Australians.

The evidence gathered from the diaries of early explorers and settlers shows that Aboriginal people right across the continent were sowing, harvesting, irrigating and storing all manner of grains and foods without pesticides or fertilisers in a manner that over thousands of years protected the country side from harsh climate variations. It is interesting that a number of modern farmers are now consulting Aboriginal elders to help them introduce this farming method on their properties as explained by Charles Massy in his book *Call of the Reed Warbler*.

***On Eating Meat* by Matthew Evans**

Matthew's book not only looks at the farming and processing of meat, chicken and fish often to meet the needs of the large supermarkets, at the detriment of the animals wellbeing, but also provides the damning statistics of the number of native animals and birds slaughtered in the growing of rice and vegetables. You may not look at the packet of frozen peas in the same way again.

Just when you think it could not get worse he itemises the small mammals and insects that get caught up in the manufacturing of processed foods that you and I eat each day and challenges both vegans and carnivores in the battle for a new ethics of eating.



"Compelling, illuminating and often confronting... Matthew Evans brings his unflinching honesty – and a farmer's hard-earned experience – to the question of how to be an ethical carnivore." HUGH MACKAY

**ON
EATING
MEAT**

The truth about its production
and the ethics of eating it

MATTHEW EVANS



Why Drilling for Oil in the Great Australian Bight is a Bad Idea.

by Noelene Plummer

I have just spent weeks in Adelaide, the Eyre Peninsular and traveling across the Nullarbor and it's breathtakingly beautiful, aqua blue waters and white sandy beaches.

We need to protect these habitats of thousands of flora and fauna species including iconic Australian Sea Lions, Leafy Sea Dragons, Bottlenose Dolphins, Great White Sharks, little Penguins, Southern White Whales and Australian Pelicans. The marine parks conserve places of strong cultural and Indigenous significance.

Up to 85% of marine flora and fauna species are found nowhere else on earth. It is the longest south facing coast on earth and is of extraordinary ecological significance. 80% of the worlds population of Australian Sea Lions, pictured above, including the largest known breeding colony at Dangerous Reef.

Leafy Sea Dragons, above right, are a threatened species found in the waters off Southern and Western Australia and very vulnerable to habitat destruction and pollution such as proposed by *Equinor Oil and Gas* exploration in the Great Australian Bight.

There are studies showing the effects of seismic testing on the lobster industry which is



already suffering the effects from warming oceans and loss of biodiversity.

Equinor the company currently trying to drill for oil has already had 239 spills. In 2007 they had a spill of nearly 4 million litres of oil into the Arctic of Norway.

The Southern Right Whale are found to give birth and aggregate along the coast of the Great Australian Bite. Commercial whaling in the 18th and 19th centuries severely reduced their numbers to as few as 300. The western group are now recovering at the rate of 7% a year to about 2,600. Their main food source is zooplankton which would be greatly effected by an oil spill and the effects of climate change.

There is limited public support for the project and it does not have the support of the local Indigenous custodians who said they have not been consulted.

For more information and how you can become involved go to:” Fight For The Bight” and “Great Australia Bite Alliance

Village Eco News

Our aim is to inform, interest, amuse and educate our readers on all things environmental. We welcome you to submit your contributions or to subscribe to this free Newsletter send your name and email address to:

bangalowlandcare@gmail.com

Please pass this publication on to your family and friends. Receiving our Newsletter online will help to save the environment we work to preserve.

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