

Read the following three stories before illustrating your template. Choose one animal (the cassowary, the Fairy Possum or the southern right whale) to draw!

The Southern Right Whale

MICHAEL GERARD BAUER

The southern right whale drifts along, just beneath the ocean surface. Slowly, her large, curved jaws part. The cool water, rich in plankton, krill and other tiny crustaceans, rushes through her mouth. She is feeding, building her strength.

Up ahead, a charter boat sits bobbing in the water. The giant mammal is curious. With a slow sweep of her wide tail, she moves closer. On board, adults and children crowd at the rails, aiming their cameras at the big head and the smooth, broad back coming their way.

The whale drifts in beside them. She could easily cause harm with her great bulk, or with a careless thrust of her tail. But she is gentle and playful. She sprays a burst of water from her blowholes and slowly raises her encrusted head until her eyes appear above the waterline. Shouts of joy and squeals of delight erupt from the deck. She arches her body in a forward roll, lifts her tail high into the air and slaps it down on the ocean surface. There are lots of 'oohs!' and 'aahs!' as the cameras whirr and click madly.

The big whale doesn't understand these strange beings, but she senses that they mean her no harm. She doesn't know that, in decades past, others like them also came in boats. They, too, cried out in excitement at whale sightings. They came, not armed with cameras, but with razor-sharp harpoons.

It is soon time for the southern right whale to leave. A peaceful bay calls her on. She rolls and raises two paddle-shaped flippers into the air, before continuing on her steady path to the safe and warm waters where her calf will finally be born.

She doesn't know how dangerous a journey it once could be.

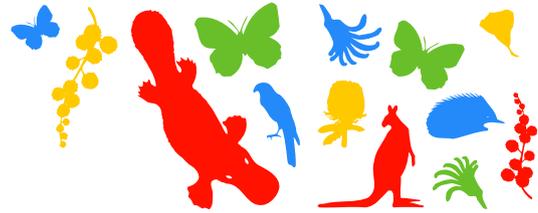
Hopefully, she never will.

A Night with Fairy Possum

NARELLE OLIVER

Mother Fairy Possum peeps out into the misty darkness. The other possums in her family group are still curled up together amongst the cosy bark strips in their hollow in a giant Mountain Ash. She is the hungriest – there are two tiny joeys in her pouch drinking her milk. She checks the tops of other tall trees for any sign of owls before she creeps out into the night.

With her tiny claws gripping the tree trunk, the Fairy Possum clammers down, down, down to a place where shorter trees are close.



Then she

LEAPS!

through the cool forest air.

Suddenly, wattle leaves swish and sway as she clutches a thin wobbly branch, her claws holding like Velcro. Along the branch she stops and her whiskers twitch. There is sap oozing from a small break in the bark. In a flash she is feasting on the sticky sweetness.

Whirrrrr...

A fat tree cricket flits past her and settles on a wattle leaf closeby.

Once again, the Fairy Possum leaps...

Then pounces on the cricket and grasps it in tiny, clenched paws. There is a flurry of crunching and nibbling until nothing is left.

That's when the forest quietness is broken by the deep whoo-hoo call of the Powerful Owl.

The Fairy Possum freezes. The owl is still distant enough, but there is no time to waste.

She makes one giant leap, then scuttles at the speed of lightning up her giant Mountain Ash trunk.

The hollow is empty. The other fairy possums are out hunting. Mother Fairy Possum curls up amongst the bark strips and closes her large round eyes.

The chilly forest air is still.

Cassowary Crossing

BY SAMANTHA WHEELER

Birds and mammals hide in their nests. Snakes slither away under rocks. Everyone is afraid of the storm, but not the cassowary. He's brave and strong and fierce. The most feared of all the forest animals. One swipe of his giant claws could kill a grown man. He ignores the rain pelting against his wet feathers and runs, legs outstretched, long neck thrust forward. There's a native cherry tree fruiting across the road, the delicious berries too high for him to reach. But today, with the wind, maybe some swollen berries have fallen to the ground.

He's halfway across the road, his sharp nails clattering against the bitumen. A loud roar stops him in his tracks. The car is coming fast. Its headlights flicker in the rain. The wipers slap against the windscreen. The cassowary stares. His long lashes blink. His high casque is wet and drips water down his face and onto his proud, dangling wattle.

The car is nearly upon him. But he doesn't run. He's frozen to the spot. Two seconds to go. The car will clean him up. The driver finally swerves, skidding onto the gravel shoulder. Tyres screech and burning rubber fills the air. The occupants of the car are shaken but safe. And the cassowary? He takes one last look before darting across the road and sheltering under the rain soaked branches. When his heart stops thundering, he eats his fill of red juicy berries. The berry seeds will pass out whole, and make more cherry trees for his children to eat.

If only he can survive that long.