

TEACHERS RESOURCES

AUSTRALIAN

Backyard Birdies

Andy Geppert





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INTRODUCTION

This is a highly amusing factual guide to birds found in backyards around Australia written and illustrated by the entertaining Andy Geppert. In it he provides answers to questions such as 'What's the difference between a Beach Chicken, Roof chicken, Bin chicken and a Chicken chicken?' Some entries are meant to be ridiculous, eg. 'Flamingo (Ornamental)' or 'Swan (Giant inflatable)'.

Each double page contains a key to the geographical location of the bird; a colour key indicating what colours they are; and the scientific name for each bird. The text also offers facts and amusing jokes about each bird. This is a work of creative non-fiction which entertains as much as it informs. It will encourage students to enjoy bird watching and to observe the many types of birds which can be found in their own backyards.

THEMES & CURRICULUM TOPICS

Several themes are covered in this book which might be related to the Australian Curriculum, including:

STUDY OF HISTORY, SOCIETY AND ENVIRONMENT

ACTIVITY: Investigate how birds adapt to their environment.

DISCUSSION POINT: Invite students to observe the ecology of the environment in their own backyards. Apart from birds, what other forms of wildlife do they observe there?

DISCUSSION POINT: How do human beings interact with birdlife? For example, the magpie has an uneasy relationship with human beings and is often considered a pest. The ibis is often known as a 'bin chicken' because of its habit of eating rubbish left by humans.

DISCUSSION POINT: Some birds are endangered because of the intervention of human beings. Research and discuss endangered birdlife.

SCIENCE

BIRDS

DISCUSSION POINT: Choose one of the birds in this book and research it further. Then share your findings with members of your class.

DISCUSSION POINT: Create a 'fact file' on each of the birds in this book. Every time you discover an interesting fact, add it to the file.

DISCUSSION POINT: Create an alphabet of birds in Australia including those in this

book and add a fact to each entry. [See **Worksheet 2** below.]

ACTIVITY: Birds have many different types of beaks; study this aspect of their anatomy. Read *The Best Beak in Boonaroo Bay* by Narelle Oliver (2011) or Sarah Allen's *Busy Beaks* (2020) as an additional activity.

ACTIVITY: Teachers might conduct a 'bird count' with their students. See: 'Aussie Backyard Bird Count Primary School Lesson Plans' *BirdLife Australia* 2020 <<https://aussiebirdcount.org.au/Primary%20School%20Lesson%20Plans.pdf>>

ACTIVITY: Investigate the life cycle of one of the birds in this book.

ACTIVITY: Read fiction books about human beings interacting with birds, eg. *Storm Boy* by Colin Thiele (New Holland Publishers, 2019; 1964) or *Hoot* by Carl Hiaasen (Yearling Books, 2006).

ACTIVITY: Read some Indigenous picture books which explore our relationship with birds. [See **Bibliography.**]

ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERACY

The text of this book might be studied in relation to the following aspects:

ACTIVITY: This is an expository text, ie. it is a type of non-fiction text which investigates and explains a particular subject. Discuss the elements of expository writing with your students then invite them to choose a bird and write an expository text about it.

DISCUSSION POINT: Humour is one of the elements of his text which is very important to how it conveys information, eg. 'If you have a seagull in your backyard you must live near the beach. Or you've dropped your chips. Seagulls can't talk. They can only shout.' (p 2) What other examples of humour did you discover in this text?

DISCUSSION POINT: The collective noun for a flamingo is a 'flamboyance of flamingos'. What other collective nouns for birds can you discover?

ACTIVITY: Test your students' **comprehension** by asking them questions about the written and visual text. [See also **Author/Illustrator's Notes** below.]

VISUAL LITERACY

The visual text of a book combines with the written text to tell the story using the various parts of the book's design and illustrations, as explored below:

ACTIVITY: The **cover** of a book is an important part of its message. This depicts several birds and is eye-catching and humorous like the text inside the book. Draw your own cover for this book.

ACTIVITY: The **endpapers** are a solid mustard colour. Design endpapers featuring the birds in this book using a grid pattern. [See **Worksheet 4** below.]

DISCUSSION POINT: The **title page** contains an image of a cat looking skyward and a feather floating above the title. What does this image suggest?

DISCUSSION POINT: The **format** of the book is square. What effect does format have on the meaning made in a book?

DISCUSSION POINT: How does the **layout of the storyboard** and the **format and design** of the book influence your reading of it?

DISCUSSION POINT: Creating characters entails studying **facial expressions and 'body language'**. What do these images suggest about the bird characters in this book?

ACTIVITY: The **medium or style** employed is sketching and digital illustration. 'My technique is one that blends hand sketching with a soft watercolour feel.' 'Interview with illustrator Andy Geppert' *Sweets Workshop* <<http://sweetsworkshop.blogspot.com/2011/01/interview-with-illustrator-andy-geppert.html>>
Invite students to examine the artwork and then to create an image in a similar style.

DISCUSSION POINT: The **colours** used in this book are largely pastel shades. Invite students to choose a bird to draw and then choose a colour palette to paint it, based on research into what the bird actually looks like.

DISCUSSION POINT: Perspective can be used in interesting ways in an illustration, eg. the image of the chicken (p 7) depicts her with her head upside down looking at the reader through her legs. Where else in this book is perspective used in an interesting way?

ACTIVITY: Invite students to draw, paint, or collage an image of a bird you wrote above. Create a classroom mural using all the images. [See also **Worksheet 1** below.]

ACTIVITY: Create a graphic novel/comic version of a scene in this book. [See **Bibliography**.]

CREATIVE ARTS

There are many creative activities suggested by this text:

1. Create a **classroom display** of the images that students have drawn of birds.

2. Create an **origami bird** out of coloured paper.

See: 'Origami Bird Instructions for Kids How to make a Paper Bird easy step by step' *YouTube* <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pdsE5-GWK1Y>>

3. Create a bird mask. [See **Worksheet 5.**]

4. Create a poster to advertise this book.

5. Create a Book Trailer to promote this book. [See **Bibliography.**]

LEARNING TECHNOLOGIES

ACTIVITY: Research the topics above online.

ACTIVITY: Research the author/illustrator online. [See **Bibliography.**]

MATHEMATICS

ACTIVITY: Have fun counting things in this text.

ACTIVITY: See **Worksheet 3** below for mathematics activities.

FURTHER TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION AND RESEARCH

- Research the work of Andy Geppert. Compare this to his other books.
- Students might research this book in comparison to reading other picture books such as those listed in the **Bibliography**.
- Investigate any other topic not covered in these notes which you consider is suggested by this text.

CONCLUSION

Australian Backyard Birdies offers a humorous insight into the features of several birds. Andy Geppert has obviously observed birds closely and aims in this text to engage with young readers via a witty series of double page spreads which explore facts about each bird.

AUTHOR/ILLUSTRATOR'S NOTES

Birds are full of personality and when you watch them through the lens of a child, a beautiful, funny and entertaining world opens up.

During the creative process for this book I witnessed all kinds of hilarious feathery traits ranging from pigeons that spin round and round on a whirlybird (a metal air vent that spins; see evidence here: http://bit.ly/bb_whirlybird) to bush turkeys that always seem to have this 'not so sure if I should be here' look on their faces.

The goal for my book was to capture each species' personality and humour so that children can fall in love with our unique wildlife by learning a little and laughing a lot.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR/ILLUSTRATOR

Andy Geppert is an award-winning Art Director turned award-winning picture book artist and author. As a one-of-a-kind storyteller Andy takes his readers on a journey to discover some unique and beautiful characters while also discovering themselves. His stories captivate with delicately crafted illustrations which depict themes that are emotionally relevant and profoundly important to his readers' young lives. His work has been awarded the prestigious Crichton Award for new illustrators for his work on *Little Big Tree*. His follow up picture book *Meep* was selected as a Notable Book by the Children's Book Council of Australia. Andy currently works and resides in Brisbane Australia.

See his website: <https://www.andygeppert.com/>

'Interview with illustrator Andy Geppert' *Sweets Workshop*

<<http://sweetsworkshop.blogspot.com/2011/01/interview-with-illustrator-andy-geppert.html>>

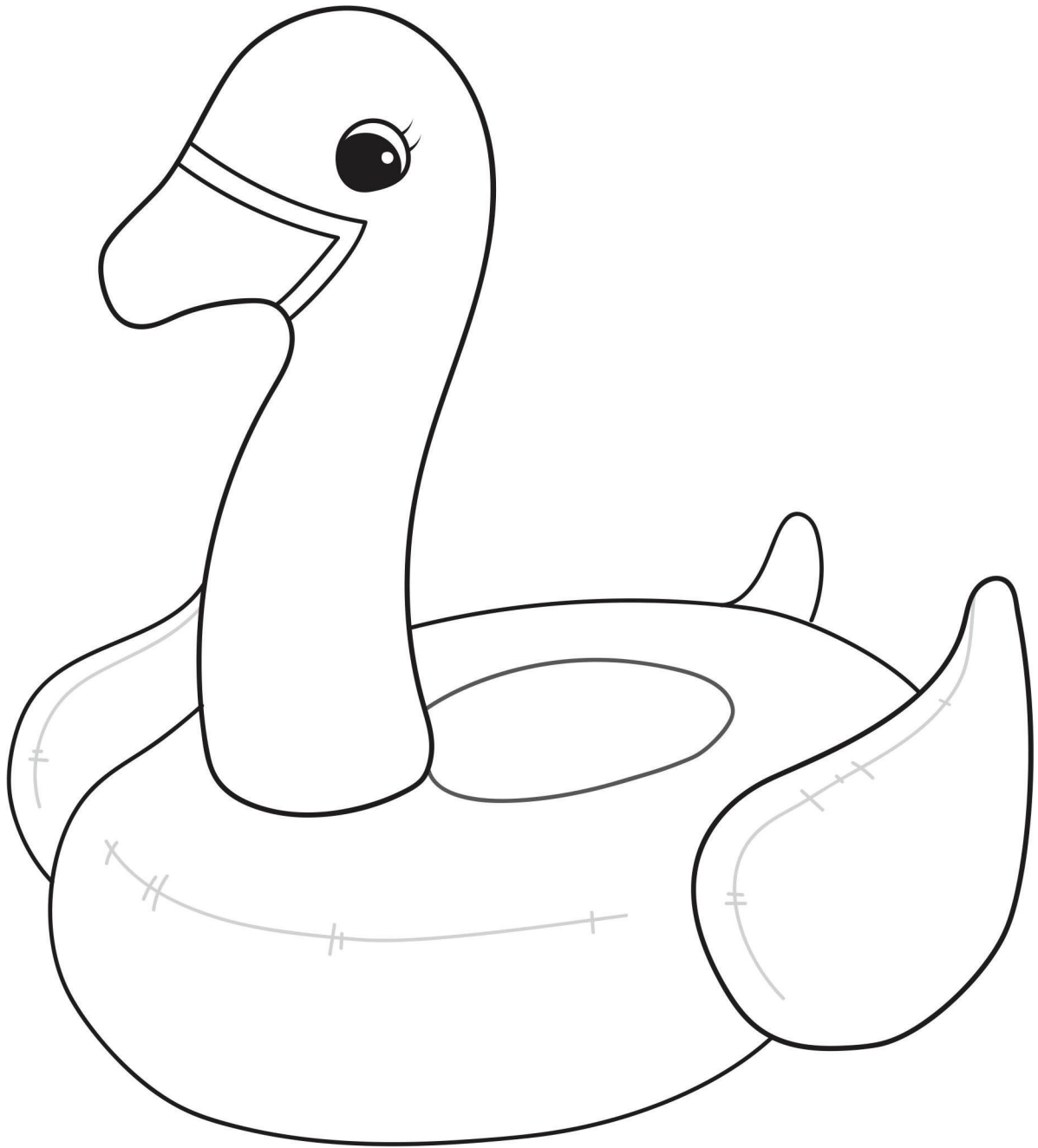
See also: 'Featured Artist: Andy Geppert' *The Finders Keepers*

<<http://www.thefinderskeepers.com/blog/2010/06/featured-artist-andy-geppert/>>

WORKSHEETS

WORKSHEET 1. COLLAGE THIS IMAGE

Draw a background to this image and then create a collage of it.



WORKSHEET 2. ALPHABET OF BIRDS

BIRD	FACT
A	
B	
C	
D	
E	
F	
G	
H	
I	
J	
K	
L	
M	
N	
O	
P	
Q	
R	
S	
T	
U	
V	
W	
X	
Y	
Z	

WORKSHEET 3. MATHS



1. How many swans are there above? How many flamingos?



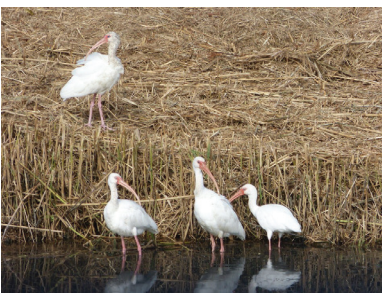
2. Multiply the number of seagulls above by three and what do you get?



3. How many budgerigars are in this picture?



4. If five more kookaburras joined the one above, how many would there be?

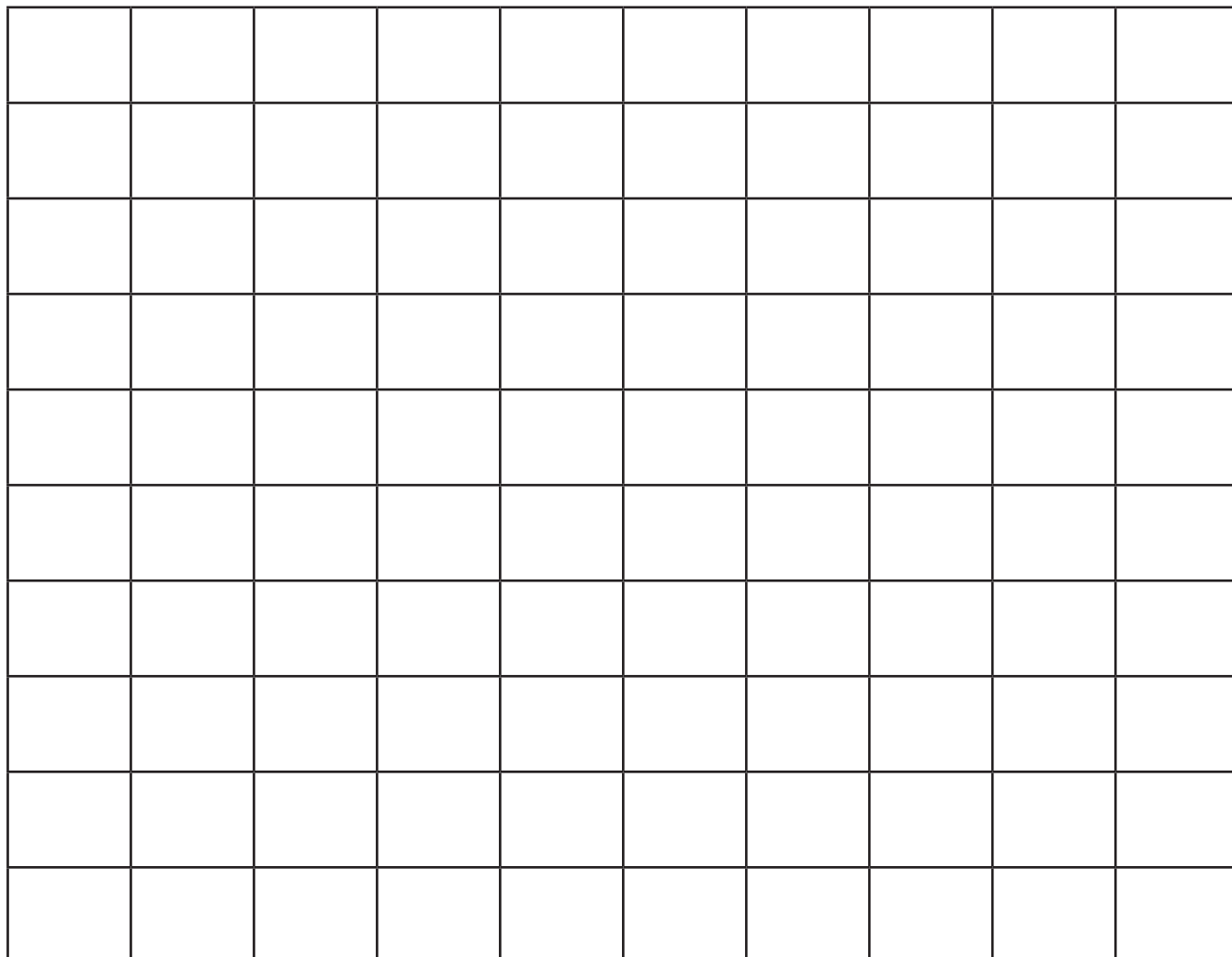


5. How many ibis would there be if those above were divided by two?

ANSWERS: 1. Five. Five. 2. Fifteen. 3. Four. 4. Six. 5. Two.

WORKSHEET 4. BACKYARD BIRDIES ENDPAPERS

Draw images of the birds in this book to the same scale. Then photocopy and reduce the images a number of times to fit this grid. Cut them out and paste into this grid. [Or you could design on a computer if you have access to a design program.]



WORKSHEET 5. BIRD MASK

Enlarge the mask below on A3 craft paper and cut it out. Colour it in and then add elastic to the sides to put over your head.



Image from: 'Bird Mask coloring page' *Paint the World Super Coloring*
<http://www.supercoloring.com/coloring-pages/bird-mask>

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR OF THE NOTES

Dr Robyn Sheahan-Bright AM operates justified text writing and publishing consultancy services, and is widely published on children's literature, publishing history and Australian fiction. In 2011 she was the recipient of the CBCA (Qld Branch) Dame Annabelle Rankin Award for Distinguished Services to Children's Literature in Queensland, in 2012 the CBCA Nan Chauncy Award for Distinguished Services to Children's Literature in Australia, and in 2014, the QWC's Johnno Award. In 2021, she was appointed a Member of the Order of Australia.