

Children's Stories About Fraser Island Pests

From Fraser Island Bush Regeneration Adventures

These stories have been written during various FIDO Bush Regeneration working bees conducted by the Fraser Island Defenders Organisation. This is a growing volume of work.

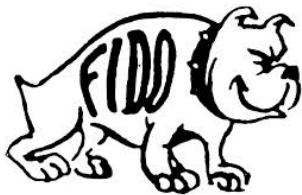
As well as stories to entertain and inform children about the impact of weeds they include some bush verse by some of the many volunteers who have participated in the working bees.

In November 2011 when the first of these FIDO bush regeneration trips was held Russell Close (aka Wamut or Shonky or various other names) composed the following entry placed in the "Talinga" Visitors Book that summarized the week:

Not Just Hard Work

By Russell Close

*From Fraser Island a call went out
To make a garden at the Eurong Roundabout of
native plants and shrubs and flowers
A job that took about five hours.
And then the plants the Council brought Were
placed to hide the Tennis Court.
The weeds were pulled, the rubbish cleared All done
by those who volunteered —
Pat & Jane, Helen & Harold, Michael, Russ, Su and
John —
A week well spent, a job well done, Not just hard
work but lots of fun*



One of FIDO's teams of Bush Regeneration volunteers

In November 2013 a little poetic license was used by Miles Pritchard who produced a bush ballad to recognize a couple of unteers who didn't recognize some lantana they walked past.

The Saga of Fraser's Lantana

A bush ballad by Miles Pritchett

"Twas into the bush they were sent in search of a
noxious weed,
A nasty perennial beast, that propagates from seed.
Pommy Tony was on the team; no better man you'd
hire! He hails from Old Blighty's North, a place called
Yorky shire.
Aussie Greg made up the other half; surveying was his
trade
Off they trudged into the scrub wielding pick and
spade.
Their Fearless Leader dropped them off at the start of
the track,
Till they'd killed all this weed they'd not be welcomed
back.
The Boss went out to check their work, to see how
they'd progressed;
Their eyes were diverted from the task as we should all
have guessed.
The passing traffic contained young ladies many of
whom were Swiss,
Occupying all their attention, hence many a weed they
did miss.
The Fearless Leader needless to say a happy man was
not. A verbal spray he served them up before giving
them another shot.
Off they set this time with vigour and a steady canter,
Eager to impress their chief diligently swinging tools
whilst limiting the banter.
The Englishman pulled out all stops to prove he wasn't
slack,
Whilst Aussie Greg was found beneath a gum tree
sleeping on his back.
But in the end the job was done and the boss was very
pleased,
He even told his lady friend and all the tension eased.
So if you ever traverse this island to shelter in a
cabana,
Thanks to the lads hard work, you'll never see any
more lantana.

How Two Pretty Plants Became Fraser Island Weeds

A children's story by John Sinclair

Clive and Clivea were two lilies growing in pots in a nursery. They had nothing else to do in the nursery except to sit and look pretty and hope that somebody would come to the nursery to pick them up. They produced nicely shaped bright orange flowers but most people who came to the nursery seemed not to notice them.

Then one day one of the nurserymen came along with two people and pointed to Clive and Clivea and said, *"These may be just what you are looking for. They will grow almost anywhere. They don't seem to mind being very close to the sea and getting salt spray on their leaves and you can see how pretty they are."*

The woman said, *"Ooh! They are nice and they would add a touch of colour if they were growing in our Fraser Island garden"*.

The man asked the nurseryman, *"There sometimes might be many weeks between the times that we can get up to Fraser Island. Do you think that these lilies could survive in sand without water for weeks on end?"*

"They have huge bulbs under the ground and these babies could survive for a year if they had to without any water," the nurseryman replied.

So that is how the two *Clivias minata* were crammed into the back of a Four-wheel drive vehicle with the man and the woman along with a lot of luggage and supplies and taken to Fraser Island.

When they were taken out of the pots and put into the ground, both Clive and Clivea couldn't believe how good it felt. They wriggled their roots that had been tightly packed inside the pots and felt freedom. Their roots began to grow quickly in the loose sand and stretch out as they established themselves in their new home.

They only saw the man and the woman occasionally and they were left alone for most of the time and they thrived. They had some babies and over the years established a garden full of Cliveas around them. When it became so crowded Clive said to Clivea, *"Instead of just producing baby bulbs that grow around us why don't we set some seeds and get future babies to grow up elsewhere instead of around us."*

They did. Soon little Cliveas were spreading outside the garden where Clive and Clivea had been planted and along the Fraser Island foredune where they just loved showing off the bright orange flowers and begging the lovely cool wind off the sea to spread their seeds ever further.

The babies were making good progress. Some started wandering and growing far away from their parent

plants. Then one day the babies who were furthest away saw a group of people looking at them who didn't like their pretty flowers nor their dark shiny leaves growing where they had settled.



Clive, Clivea and their babies had started taking over Fraser Island

The leader of the group said, *"These aren't natural here on a World Heritage area. We will have to get rid of these before they go any further. They look as if they are spreading and invading new areas."*

The next day the Leader and a team of eager bush regenerators turned up with garden tools and dug up every relative of Clive and Clivea they could find and put them in bags and took them to the dump. Then they found the garden where Clive and Clivea were crowded in with babies all around them and feeling very unhappy in such a crowd. The group leader told the man and the woman who owned the yard, *"These Clivias are becoming very invasive weeds. Our team is working on Fraser Island to get rid of weeds and to stop them invading the bush. Do you mind if we take all of these out of your garden and we will replace them with very attractive native plants?"*

The man and the woman agreed. *"We didn't think that Clivias would become weeds,"* they said.

Soon the bush regenerators had eliminated all of the Clivias and replaced them with very attractive native plants that had grown from seeds collected on Fraser Island. The man and the woman were happy and another garden plant that had threatened to spread widely.

The team leader explained, *"Any plant, even as pretty as Clivias, can become weeds if they are grown in the wrong place. On Fraser Island we should only grow native plants from seeds collected locally."*

The Last Easter Cassia

A children's story by John Sinclair

Despite being the very best mates, Jacob Jones and Herbert Hancock were fiercely competitive. These two ten-year-olds challenged each other to see who could get the best marks in every subject at school, and who was the best athlete, who scored the most runs in cricket or who had the best computer game score. Life was an endless competition between these two friends. The competition was good for both of them because they were so evenly matched in both scholastic and sporting ability and the competition helped both of them improve their achievements.

It wasn't surprising that Jake and Herbie should be such good friends because their mothers were also very good friends and enjoyed many activities together. Their mums share many interests and passions. One of them was their passion for the bush and wildlife. Because of this they both became involved in bush regeneration.

When the September school holidays were approaching the two mothers wondered how they could share this break from school and keep their two energetic boys happy and busy and away from the television and the computer games that occupied them when there was nothing else to do. They decided to take them on a holiday to Fraser Island. They rented a house in Eurong for a week and decided that they would show the boys this beautiful World Heritage island.

They had a wonderful time going to Lake McKenzie (Boorangoora) with its pearly white beach and crystal clear water. They loved most Wabby Lake where the water had a slight green tinge but they loved it because of the big sandblow in front of it. They loved all of the lakes and they enjoyed the trip they did along the beach one day to Indian Head seeing the great outcrops of coloured sands and Eli Creek. Their favourite creek though was Wangoolba Creek that ran through the rainforest. Jake and Herbie had competitions to see who saw a fish or an eel in the clear water first.

For the whole holiday Jake and Herbie were competing as to who saw the most birds or the best birds or who saw a dingo first.

The outings though didn't occupy all of the time of the Hancocks and the Joneses. Whenever they were walking around they would remove any weeds they found. They always carried large plastic bags with them so that they could carry any weeds they found off to the rubbish bins at Eurong. They found cobbler's pegs and Mossman River Burr in surprising places. A ranger told them that the seeds and burrs of these nasty weeds got caught in the fur of the dingoes and

the dingoes were unintentionally spreading them through the island. It wasn't long before the two boys were vying to see who was best at finding and removing these little weeds.

Their mothers though were concerned also about the bigger weeds especially lantana and Easter Cassia. These were too large for the boys to see but they told the boys to keep an eye out for any Easter Cassias because over the years the bush regeneration volunteers had removed nearly all of the Easter Cassia from Eurong and they were keen to get every last one of them so that the village grew only native plants in future.

That gave Herbie and Jake a new challenge. They went off Easter Cassia spotting. They couldn't find many because the more obvious ones had all been removed. So they explored every nook and back yard in Eurong. After a while Jake found one lurking in a back yard and proclaimed that it was the last Easter Cassia. That was a challenge to Herbie who walked around the perimeter of the village until he found just one. He said that was the last Easter Cassia in Eurong but their mothers weren't so sure.

"With weeds you always have to keep your eyes open because if you leave just one it doesn't take long for them to multiply into hundreds or thousands and then you have a real problem," Mrs. Jones told them. "So thanks for being so vigilant. If these are the last Easter Cassias and if no more seeds grow we might see Eurong free from these invasive weeds forever."



Easter cassia (*Senna pendula* var. *glabrata*) is a native to tropic America. It has been declared under Fraser Coast Regional Council's Law No.3 (2010) for Fraser Island ONLY.

Wilfie's War On Woody Weeds

A children's story by John Sinclair

Wilfie and his Scout Patrol found a wonderful project for their Bob-a-Job week to raise money for their Scout group. An old man had offered to give the patrol 50 cents for every woody weed they removed from his valley on Fraser Island but only as long as they removed every single one. Wilfie and his patrol didn't mind because there were hundreds of woody weeds and they expected to make a lot of money. Besides it would give them a chance to spend more time on beautiful Fraser Island. Even Wilfie's dad was happy to help take the patrol over and do a spot of fishing while he was there.

The old man who had given them the project was very particular that they got the very last one or they wouldn't be paid at all. He explained, *"I can't remember there being any cherry trees here when I built my house here 50 years ago. Then one of my neighbours planted a tree in their backyard. I only noticed it when it was quite big and bearing lots of berries. The figbirds came in droves from far and wide to feast on the fruit. They just loved those bright juicy berries. The problem was that when those birds went to the toilet they passed out the seeds. Very soon those cherry trees were sprouting up all over the valley. Soon quite a forest had sprung up. More trees brought more fruit and more birds. The forest kept spreading."*

"If you leave just one woody weed in this valley it will be just like that very first cherry tree planted in my neighbour's back yard. Soon there will be another forest of woody weeds to haunt us. That is why you must not leave a single stem," the old man told them.

Wilfie and his patrol worked very hard to remove the woody weeds. Some were quite big trees, but although they looked attractive, they were out of place on Fraser Island. They cut, hacked and sawed their way through the valley. Some of the trees were four metres tall but the patrol was careful not to leave a single seed on the ground remembering the old man's words.

At the end of the week they had removed over 1,000 trees and shrubs but they were exhausted. There was just one corner of the valley that nobody went near and Wilfie didn't have the energy to check it out. They were

ready to see the old man in the morning to get the money that would help the Scout troop but new equipment.

That night however Wilfie had a dream. A green ghost appeared calling out a mournful "Whoo-whee". It really scared him. Wilfie had never seen a ghost before let alone a green ghost who had a really haunting call that made the hairs on his head stand straight up.

"Who are you?" asked Wilfie.

"I am Whoo-Whee, the ghost of the woody weeds and I am here to haunt you because you left me in that corner of the valley that nobody looks in and as long as there are any of us left in this valley I will be around to haunt you," the green ghost declared.

That really scared Wilfie and so he had his patrol up before breakfast the next morning to make sure that not a single woody weed was left in that secret corner or any other part of the valley.

The old man was thankful and appreciated their effort. Wilfie and the other Scouts went home with Wilfie's dad, happy that they had achieved so much. But Wilfie was especially happy because he knew that he would be able to sleep well at night without being haunted by Whoo-Whee, the ghost of the woody weeds because he knew that not a single one was left.



Tommy Tuckeroo Sees the Light

A story from Fraser Island Bush Regeneration in May 2012 for John Sinclair's Grandchildren

Tommy Tuckeroo was a small native tree growing on beautiful Fraser Island although Tommy didn't know how beautiful his island home was. That was because a giant, thorny Bougainvillia was smothering him so that he couldn't look out to see anything but Bougainvillia leaves, flowers and evil looking thorns. Every time a strong wind blew and rocked the Bougainvillia, those wicked thorns pricked his soft dark-green leaves. Tommy hated that Bougainvillia that was holding him down.

Tommy was lonely and didn't have a friend in the world and nobody could see how he was suffering under the weight and thorns of the dreaded Bougainvillia. He seemed to live in suspended animation wondering if there was anything more to life for a small tree.



The evil, thorny Bougainvillia holding Tommy as a prisoner

Then one-day Tommy heard some strange noises. Two brave men were attacking the awful Bougainvillia. They were complaining how thorny it was but they kept cutting off branches and then one big man got an axe and started chopping the biggest branches away. They worked hard and got lots of pricks and scratches from the thorns.

Tommy heard the men say, "Ouch!" many times as they were pricked by the wicked thorns on the Bougainvillia. If he could speak he would have said, "Now you know what I have to put up with all the time."



The men cut, hacked and removed the Bougainvillia branches

Finally, one man said, "We have cut away all of the branches. But we will need help to remove the stump."

Tommy could see them now. They backed a big Four Wheel Drive up to the stump and wrapped a big strap around the stump. Then one of the men drove the big four-wheel drive forward very fast and "Pop!" the Bougainvillia stump and roots were torn from the ground. And lay dead on the ground. Tommy was free at last of his nasty tormentor and at last he could see all around him. Tommy at last could see the light.



They put a strap around the Bougainvillia stump and pulled it out — Pop

Tommy looked around and saw other small Tuckeroo trees growing around him about the same size as he was. They had all been kept as prisoners of the evil Bougainvillia. Tommy at last had friends. As he looked around he could see bush regenerators like him going around and freeing other small native plants being kept prisoner by nasty weeds.

Soon these people had cleared away all of the weeds in the areas around him. They even returned to plant other native trees with Tommy and the other Tuckeroo's so that they could form a small forest free of thorns and weeds and live happily ever after.



A nice team of bush regenerators cleaned up the area around Tommy who could now see other small Tuckeroo's around him

Spotto Easter Cassia

A story from Fraser Island Bush Regeneration in April 2013 for John Sinclair's grandchildren

Wendy was very excited when Grandma invited her to go to Fraser Island with her during her Christmas school holidays. Wendy loved Fraser Island with its beaches, surf, lakes, coloured sand cliffs and the grand and diverse forest. She was also pleased to be going with Grandma who was always full of fun and doing interesting things. Even when she was doing boring things she always made them seem like fun. Grandma was never one to sit around and knit or watch TV. She always had projects to keep her busy.

It didn't take Wendy long to learn that Grandma's project while on this Fraser Island holiday was removing weeds in the village. Grandma soon had Wendy working with her. They were on their hands and knees crawling through parts of the forest where some vine with pretty orange flowers had gone wild.

"These are Coral creepers," Grandma announced as she introduced Wendy to the vine. *"These plants were planted in a garden but the wind blew the seed outside the garden and look at it now. It is a weed that is hard to get rid of, but we have to get rid of it before it gets out into the forest and is totally out of control."*

Grandma showed Wendy many weeds that were brought to Fraser Island as garden plants that then had spread far and wide outside the garden where they were first established.

"That is how some of our worst weeds like Lantana and Easter Cassia got started," Grandma explained.

Wendy knew what Lantana was but she didn't know what Easter Cassia was so she asked Grandma what it was.

"It is hard to see just now but when it is in flower you just can't miss it. It is a big shrub sometimes even tree size and has the brightest buttercup yellow flowers," she said as she reached out for a plant nearby and pulled off some leaves.

"This is the leaf of an Easter Cassia" Grandma explained. *"See it has pinnate leaves. That means that the leaf is made up of several leaflets. This Easter Cassia has five pairs of leaflets, but there can be anywhere between three and six pairs. See how they grow out opposite!"* said Grandma.

Wendy was really fascinated and she was getting a botany lesson while working on weeds. As they moved on Wendy got very excited every time she recognized an Easter Cassia plant. She would excitedly call out, *"Spotto Easter Cassia!"*

Grandma was most impressed by Wendy's enthusiasm and decided to encourage her. *"Wendy, see how those*

leaflets of the Easter Cassia are the size of a five cent piece. I will give you five cents for every Easter Cassia you can pull out."

That really made Wendy very sharp. She found that while she could pull the smaller Easter Cassias out of the loose sand by the roots on her own, not even with Grandma's help could she pull out many of the larger plants. Still by the end of the first day she had earned over three dollars as she ran from smaller plant to smaller plant calling out, *"Spotto Easter Cassia!"*

When she got home Wendy told her parents how she had fun with Grandma and earned money while on a holiday to buy her a birthday present. Her mother told her that she would see many more Easter Cassia if she went back when they were in flower at Easter.

Wendy thought she would trick Grandma. She asked Grandma if she could go to Fraser Island with her on her next school holidays. Grandma said, *"Yes,"* not realizing that the next school holidays would be at Easter when the Easter Cassia would be in flower and more easily spotted.

On their Easter holiday Wendy earned lots of five cents per plant. She saved enough money to buy her grandmother a beautiful birthday present that was a book on weeds. Grandma laughed at how she had been tricked but she loved her birthday present paid for by the money she gave to Wendy for helping to get rid of all of the Easter Cassia around the village.

In a way Grandma also tricked Wendy because when they went back during the next Christmas holidays there was hardly an Easter Cassia to be found and the village was almost completely rid of these weeds. However, Wendy had become an expert on the weeds Grandma was always plucking from the sand. She changed her calls to, *"Spotto Asparagus Fern!"* *"Spotto Painted Spurge"* and *"Spotto Brazilian Nightshade"* and *"Spotto lots of other weeds"*.



Coral and Milly's Competition

A children's story by John Sinclair

(Inspired by encounters with weeds at Eurong on Fraser Island in February 2014)

Once upon a time Milly and Coral were lying low in someone's garden when they heard a big discussion between two very big loud-mouthed shrubs nearby bragging about which one was conquering the most territory.

"I reckon I am on a winner" said Cass Ear. *"I have pretty flowers in the autumn around Easter and when people see them, everyone wants to grow some of my seeds or seedlings and if we are lucky some birds will carry off seeds and drop them in the bush."*

"I have it made," said Lana Tanner. *"I have such sweet small black berries that all of the birds like to sample, even the very small ones and so they carry my seeds far and wide into the bush. I reckon I am rapidly conquering more of Fraser Island, than you are."*

Milly who got her name because she was a Mother-In-Law's Tongue, listened intently. She thought that her babies should be able to spread out and have space to grow up in. However unlike Lana and Cass she didn't produce any flowers. However, she did have pretty variegated sword like leaves that stood erect like silent sentries and some people did grow some because they considered them attractive. Unfortunately, though, some were squeezed into pots like Milly herself and there was no room to get out. There was not enough room left in her pot to squeeze in another shoot.

Coral was also in a pot. She also thought how good it would be if her babies had plenty of space to spread out in especially here on beautiful Fraser Island. She thought how good it would be to have her babies spread far and wide like Lana Tanner's.

Coral turned to Milly and said, "If ever I can get out of this pot I am going to spread my family as far and wide on this island as Lana Tanner has done. In fact, they could even grow all over Lana's offspring."

"It's all right with you but I have no chance of getting out of this pot and I don't have any seed to throw about," said Milly sadly.

What Milly didn't know was that the humans, who had put her in a pot, had grown tired of her and they took her out of the pot and threw her over the road into the bush and filled up the pot with asparagus fern.

When Milly landed in the bushes her tightly bound roots bounced out like coil springs released from their compression. The young roots all had sharp tips that

headed like spears into the loose sand and started springing up nearby and sending out more shooting roots. In no time at all Milly's offspring had a large and ever expanding and yet interconnected colony. They were strong and impervious to drought.

Milly looked around and saw that some seeds of her friend Coral Creeper had germinated nearby. She said to Coral Junior, *"I think my mob has a bigger brighter future on Fraser Island than your mob."*

"Look. My seeds can blow in the wind and spread much further than you can and so I reckon my mob can out run your mob," Coral Jr replied.

"I reckon that with your bright flowers those pesky bush regenerators will find you much sooner than they find me with my green camouflage and once they know you are out there, they will start tracking you down until they have found every one of you," said Milly.

They argued and argued about who would outlast and outcompete the other just as Lana and Cass had. While they were arguing some bush regenerators did see Coral's flowers and did exactly as Milly had predicted.

What Milly hadn't predicted was those pesky bush regenerators would also find her in the process of hunting for every lantana bush, every Easter cassia and every coral creeper. They were all doomed.



There is a happy ending to this story. The Bush Regenerators went home very tired and happy knowing that they had fought off so many invaders and helped the Fraser Island bush to remain beautiful and natural without weeds taking over.

When Wendy Wildflower Was a Weed for a While

A children's story from Fraser Island by John Sinclair

Once upon a time on Fraser Island there were no weeds at all. That is because weeds are only plants that are growing in places where people don't want them. Any plant can be a weed if it is grown in the wrong place. Fraser Island Aborigines never wanted any other plants than the ones already there and so there were no weeds.

The problems began when new settlers arrived on Fraser Island. They had to clear patches to put in their new houses. Then any plant that was growing where they wanted to put their houses were weeds. That is how beautiful Wilhelmina Wisteria was cut down to make room for a new house.

Wendy was very sad because Wilhelmina was a fellow vine that grew close to her. Wendy was a Twining Guinea Flower that grew near the fence that the new people had put around their house and that is how she escaped being replaced with lawn.



Wilhelmina Wisteria was regarded as a weed

Then one day a "For Sale" sign appeared on Wendy's fence. Wendy wondered what might happen next. Not long after some new people arrived and moved into the house. One of the first things Wendy heard from the new people was a woman say, "We will have to get rid of most of the plants in this garden. They are weeds. We need to replace them with nice plants like that native over there." She looked at Wendy.

Soon the new people were out getting rid of many of the plants that the people who built the house had planted. "We have to get rid of the Easter Cassia and those lilies over there," the woman said.

When they had finished the yard looked very bare. That is when the woman turned to Wendy again. "I think we should transplant that Twining Guinea Vine over there and put it next to the house. We can train it so that instead of those lovely yellow flower never

being seen they will be on display where everyone can admire them," the woman said.

And so they did. Wendy was in a wonderful spot where her flowers were seen by everyone who passed by. What made Wendy even happier was that the woman replaced the Easter Cassias with a Banksias, Hop Bushes and other scrubs. It wasn't long before the garden was filled with the wonderful songs of birds, the buzzing of bees and the chirping of many other insects.



A bee gathers some of Wendy's nectar

Then the best news was when the woman planted a new wisteria next to her. The new Wilhelmina and Wendy became great friends and they competed to see who produced the most admired and photographed flowers — Wendy with her bright yellow or Wilhelmina with her festoons of flashing purple and lilac flowers. However, Wendy won. Wilhelmina could only make flowers for the spring whereas Wendy was always flowering.



Wendy flowered all year round.

How many "W's" can you count in this story.
Could you use more "W" words?
What Other "W" words would you use?

Candy, Queen of the Cane toads

A Children's story by John Sinclair

Candy was the Queen of the cane toads when her army was invading Fraser Island. She was ugly, cruel and venomous.



As her followers invaded Fraser Island and started to spread out and multiply, Candy declared that she would have no mercy on any creature that stood in the way of the cane toad invasion. As they spread out they swallowed up countless bugs, beetles, small lizards and other frogs. If they could jump like other frogs, they would have swallowed small birds. Whenever they came across small pools of suitable fresh water they jumped in and laced the pools with strings of eggs so that the pools looked like a bridal couple setting off on their honeymoon festooned with countless streamers.

Candy's armies did meet some opposition but it was short-lived. Many Australian birds, reptiles and mammals just love eating frogs. The trouble is that most Australian frog-eating critters had never seen cane toads before and thought that they were like any other frog but just ugly. They didn't know that Queen Candy had decreed, "*Any critter that eats one of my cane toad subjects will die a cruel and agonizing death.*"

They did because, unlike most frogs, cane toads are poisonous to almost any critter that eats them.

Fraser Island once had lots of cute and playful Eastern quolls. They liked to vary their usual menu of grasshoppers and other larger insects with frogs when they could catch them. Sometimes they even caught small lizards. When they saw their first cane toads, they quickly pounced on them thinking that would be nice. Instead they were poisoned as they swallowed the evil cane toads. Soon there were no more quolls left on Fraser Island.

Many different species of snakes like eating any frogs they can catch. But soon there were very few frog-eating snakes left on Fraser Island. The same thing happened with birds. For example, most kookaburras

often dined out on frogs. When they tried eating toads assuming that toads were like other frogs, they died.

Luckily not every wild critter eats frogs. Because dingoes don't eat frogs, they don't touch cane toads. Fraser Island goannas weren't fussy about eating frogs. They preferred to pick up food scraps if they could. It saved them climbing trees to rob birds' nests or digging up buried critters. Goannas survived the invasion.

The cane toads poisoned any creatures that touched them or their young. Fish that ate the eggs or tadpoles in the pools also died. But nothing the cane toads ate affected them. That was until they tried to eat large bull ants.

Queen Candy's cane toads had conquered most of Fraser Island and killed off their opposition and then they tried to spread into every corner of the island. That is when they met the bull ants. Cane toads could survive bee stings. They sat outside some bee-hives and just gobbled up the bees as they came out to look for nectar. So when they saw the big bull ants that were the size of bees they thought that they would have more juicy sweet morsels. What they didn't know was that bull-ants could not only sting but they could bite even through the cane toad's leathery skin.

When the bull ants saw the cane toads' long tongue shoot out to catch their mates they swarmed on to the backs of the cane toads and bit them so ferociously that the toads coughed up the ants that had tried to eat. The bull ants bit the toads on their faces. The toads hated it. So after the cane toads discovered how aggressive the bull ants could be they kept right away from their colonies. The bull ants' opposition meant that Queen Candy's declaration that "*Any critter that eats one of my cane toad subjects will die a cruel and agonizing death,*" didn't apply to bull ants and so Queen Candy didn't rule over all of Fraser Island. She certainly didn't rule over the bull ant colonies.



Bull ants wouldn't be conquered by cane toads

Abbie and Crabby — the Abrus Twins.

A Children's Story by John Sinclair

With relevance to Happy Valley on Fraser Island

Abbie and Crabby looked identical. It was very difficult to tell them apart by looking at them. However, their behaviour was very different. Abbie was very strong and aggressive and wanted to be always dominant. Crabby though, despite her name was very gentle and knew her place and stuck to it. Although they behaved very differently they Crabby got her name because their seeds looked like crabs' eyes and Abbie was named first. Their seeds were so attractive that they were used in some jewellery and to make necklaces.

However, Abbie and Crabby looked so much alike that, to avoid confusion, they had to be kept apart. Abbie (*Abrus precatorius subsp. africanus*) was allowed to spread her seeds in tropical Africa, Madagascar and some islands in the western Indian Ocean while her twin Crabby (*Abrus precatorius subsp. precatorius*) lived in northern Australia south-eastern Asia (e.g. Indonesia), tropical Asia (e.g. India and Sri Lanka) & western Pacific islands.

All was going well until some careless humans spread some seeds. Spreading the seeds of Crabby didn't matter as much because although her pretty seeds were very poisonous, they only grew north of the Tropic of Capricorn. However, when Abbie's seeds escaped they could grow in subtropical areas and Abbie was determined to take over as much as she could. Abbie not only thrived in the subtropics but she loved growing in sand where she could send her large taproots deep into the ground. That enabled her to get the strength to climb really big trees.

Abbie found many places to her liking but when someone carelessly introduced one of her seeds into Happy Valley on Fraser Island she grew wild with delight. At first the people in Happy Valley mistook Abbie for her gentle twin Crabby even though there were no Crabbies south of Gladstone. Soon and Abbie's seedlings were spreading their seeds right through the village. Although the seeds were too heavy to be blown far by the wind and the birds avoided them because they were poisonous, Abbie found a tricky way to spread her seeds far and wide.

Abbie found that the Fraser Island dingoes loved lurking around the houses in Happy Valley. These hungry animals were always on the lookout for any food scraps they could find. Whenever they were chased they quickly got out of sight and hide in the bush until the danger was past. However, every now and then one of Abbie's millions of bright red and black (poisonous) seeds would get stuck for a while

in between the pads of some poor dingo's paw. Then while the dingoes hid in the bush the seeds fell out and

a new Abrus colony would be established. Once the taproot was down the vines grew up smothering the trees and bushes they were climbing on. From the top the thousands of seeds rained down and soon the colonies grew ever larger.

Abbie came to the attention of the Weedbuster's of Fraser Island. They were concerned that Abbie might end up spreading right through Fraser Island killing and smothering many trees and being very difficult or even impossible to stop so they decided to make a big effort to put Abbie in her place and that was not for one of her seeds to survive on Fraser Island. They tried many ways to discover the best way to stop before they went in to battle.

It was a long battle because Abbie had left so much reserve ammunition to help with millions of her seeds left on the ground that might be picked up by a small child or a dingo. However, the dingoes were fenced out of Abbie's stronghold and couldn't spread them further and soon the people of Happy Valley became worried that one of the small children might swallow one of the poisonous seeds and when they joined the battle there was no doubt that Abbie would be removed from Fraser Island altogether and to everyone's relief.



Photo: Robert Whyte

Mickey Melomys Meets the Weedbuster's

A children's story from Fraser Island by John Sinclair

Mickey Melomys was a very cute native rodent that lived on Fraser Island. While scientists considered him one of the *Melomys burtoni* species he was happy to be called "Mickey" because he had Mickey Mouse like ears. However, unlike most other Melomys that lived in the bush Mickey had found a good home.

Mickey had found a nice warm dry and most comfortable place to live inside the kitchen of one house in one of the three small villages on Fraser Island. He was happy to enjoy the comforts of a human house while most Melomys lived in the bush and built small ball-like nests in trees. After some of the heavy rain downpours when many of Mickey's looked like drowned rats, Mickey was dry and never upset.

Like all other Melomys, Mickey slept all day, every day but came to life at night and spent most of his time searching the cupboards and pantry. He particularly loved it when people left bowls of fruit on the table and he would sneak out when everyone had gone to bed and chew a little bit off every apple. Like all rodents he had to gnaw away to stop his two prominent front teeth growing. They never stopped growing and if he didn't keep gnawing at things he would have serious dental problems.

His gnawing habit was once very helpful when the people in the house closed a drawer he was hiding in and then went away on holidays. Mickey was able to gnaw a big hole in the wide of the drawer to escape. The house owners were very angry when they saw what Mickey had done to their drawer.

Most Melomys are mainly vegetarian. Their diet consists of plant stems, seeds, fruits and insects. In the bush this helps to spread around the seeds of some plants. Mickey's mates went out every night though searching the bush or rainforest for bush tucker, (or some poor innocent campers' food if they got half a chance). Because Melomys are arboreal, meaning that they climb trees, they are able to pick fresh fruit. However, Mickey usually got his fill because there was always plenty of food in the house and if the owners went away, he could always chase down cockroaches.

Mickey was very happy and comfortable in his Fraser Island cottage until one day when some Weedbuster's turned up to stay in the cottage. They were most upset when they woke up to find that Mickey had been wearing away his two front teeth gnawing up their precious apples. They decided to end his nocturnal antics but they didn't want to hurt him. They just wanted him out of the house so that they could leave their fruit bowl safely out on the table at night.

They borrowed a special trap that could catch Mickey without hurting him. In fact, they weren't sure that the critter that chewed apples in their fruit bowl was a Melomys. They wanted to discover who it was. They loaded the trap with juicy pieces of apple and peanut

paste. Like most Australian bush animals Mickey couldn't resist the peanut paste and walked straight into the trap but at least he was healthy and alive.

Mickey was in a panic but he quietened down when the Weedbuster's started moving around. He heard them discussing his fate. *"We should let him go out in the bush where he belongs and far enough away so that he won't come back here,"* they all agreed.

So Mickey waited until they had finished their weeding. Then they took him a long way along a bumpy old track and then while the Fearless Leader checked some measurements the other Weedbuster's opened the door of the trap to see what sort of animal they had caught. The quickly recognized those cute Mickey Mouse ears and knew they had caught a Fawn footed Melomys and not a small Antechinus Marsupial mouse.

When they let Mickey go he raced through the forest very fast. The Weedbuster's were most impressed with his speed. He went a long way and was still going fast when they lost sight of him. *"He could outrun a dingo at that pace,"* the Fearless Leader said. *"He should be safe enough in his proper bush home and maybe he will start making ball like nests in trees instead of living in the cottage cupboards."*

Mickey did build proper Melomys nests. They were so good that soon he had a lovely female Melomys to share his nest. Then it was that Mickey realized that although he had some company with humans he had been craving friendships with fellow Melomys. Soon Mickey was a father and he just loved his new life in the bush. Mickey did miss the cockroaches that he caught so easily but he did enjoy chasing and catching butterflies whenever he got a chance.



Mickey Melomys checks out his new Banksia bush home. It is very different to the Fraser Island house he was living in before he was trapped but he soon learnt to love the bush.

Melva Melomys Wins Over the Weedbuster's

by John Sinclair

A children's story from Fraser Island bush regeneration trip August 2014

It was late one August afternoon when Melva Melomys who had been dozing all day in her hidey-hole woke up with a sudden shock. She recognized the sounds of a team of Weedbuster's taking over the house on Fraser Island that was her domain. She was really scared because the last time the Weedbuster's had stayed in her beachside cottage some months earlier, they had caught her big brother Mickey and taken him away. She had been left there all alone ever since. Now she was scared that she too would be taken away.

Melva didn't want to be caught or taken away so Melva decided not to let the Weedbuster's know that she was also living in the same house as them. She was as quiet as a mouse (or a very quiet Melomys) and the Weedbuster's didn't hear her on the first night. However, she made one mistake she just couldn't resist tasting a ripe avocado that the cook had carelessly left out.

Next morning Cook pointed out the small tooth marks on the avocado to Chief Weedbuster. "What sort of animal do you think might have had a nibble at this avocado?" asked Cook. "We can't have any animals nibbling away at our food. We will have to catch it," Cook said

"It can't be Mickey because we took Mickey a long way away and let him loose in the bush. Then we set the traps again for the next three nights but we didn't catch any mate. So I reckon that it might be an Antechinus. Antechinus are smaller than Melomys and that isn't a big bite", Chief Weedbuster replied.

But Cook wanted to be sure that the phantom nibbler was an Antechinus because she wanted to see these small marsupials. Next night she put out some special food to see if the invisible animal might come around again. As well as leaving out the avocado, Cook put out some peanut paste on bread. Someone had told her that no Australian animal can resist eating peanut paste. That's how they caught Mickey.

Next morning all of the small peanut paste and bread were gone and there were more chewing marks on the avocado. Then both Cook and Chief Weedbuster knew that they had a hungry little animal living with them. They were determined to stop it but first they needed to see what it was so they could work out the best way to catch it. There was a problem. It seemed that the animal they wanted to catch could only be seen at night. However even at night Melva was determined to stay hidden until all of the Weedbuster's had gone to bed. When the lights went out, Melva who could see so well in the dark came out to see what she could find to eat.

That night Chief Weedbuster had just turned off all of the lights got into bed when he asked Cook, "Did you leave out any peanut paste for the Antechinus?"

Cook told him that she hadn't. Chief Weedbuster then reluctantly got out of bed to put some peanut paste out so that it would be easier to lure Melva into a trap. But when he turned on the kitchen light he saw a tail disappear behind the bowl of avocados. He also saw that the little nibble on the avocado had grown into a much bigger nibble. Carefully he looked behind the bowl and there was Melva with her Mickey Mouse ears frozen with fright and fearing for her life. She timidly stared up at him with her black innocent eyes waiting for some action.



Melomys are such sweet little rats that they win hearts

However, instead of trying to catch her, Chief Weedbuster called Cook to see the culprit who had nibbled at the avocado. Cook almost immediately fell for the cute little furry creature. Her annoyance just melted away. Instead of being angry at the endearing animal for nibbling the avocados, she only wanted to be kind. So they went back to bed and left Melva keep nibbling away at the avocado.

In the morning Chief Weedbuster started making plans to borrow the trap that they had used to trap Mickey Melomys. However, he wasn't so enthusiastic. All day he put off going over to borrow the trap. That night all of the Weedbuster's went out visiting. When they returned home all of them found Melva happily nibbling away at the avocado that the soft-hearted Cook had left out for her. Everyone liked her and liked to think that they were sharing the house with such a cute animal.

Next morning instead of going to get the trap Chief Weedbuster declared that he wasn't going to catch Melva as long as she kept looking at him with those lovely innocent eyes.

"We have many more important jobs to do here getting rid of those aggressive weeds that have no right at all to be here. They are threatening the natural integrity of Fraser Island. Busting weeds is more important than throwing a sweet little native animal out of her home. She has more right to be here than we have," he said.

Ding, Dong and Dang — Three K’Gari Dingoes

A children’s story by John Sinclair (February 2015)

Most Fraser Island (K’gari) dingoes are very secretive. They try to keep away from humans and hunt for food. It is only the weaker dingoes that can’t get enough food by hunting for themselves that hang around camps and settlements looking for food that they don’t have to hunt. This is a story about what happened to three dingo cubs that grew up on K’Gari.

Ding, Dong and Dang were born in a den hidden away in K’Gari’s forest. It was a warm, dry and well concealed hollow log. It needed to be a warm den because that August was cold. Unfortunately, two of the other cubs didn’t live long so that Dong was the biggest cub. She had a sister, Ding, and a brother, Dang. Their mother had plenty of milk when they first suckled her but as they grew bigger Dong, Ding and Dang needed more than just the milk that their mother could provide. So both her mother and father spent more and more time away from the den hunting for food to feed the cubs. Their parents needed food for themselves especially their mother who was producing milk, but they also brought back some bandicoots or bush rats to share with the rapidly growing cubs.

The cubs used these opportunities while their parents were away to play. They would leave the den and play outside wrestling and cuffing each other. It was fun but as they each grew stronger it became a contest all of the time to establish who was the strongest. As they grew their wrestling became more boisterous and their mother’s milk was not enough. Eventually they were weaned and had to rely entirely on game caught by their parents.

Their parents could not keep up the demands of their hungry rapidly growing cubs and soon they were taking the cubs away from the den and they began to help hunting. The cubs thought it was fun finding and chasing bandicoots and rats and because their parents were still feeding them. Dong was a strong and a very good hunter. By the end of summer, she was able to catch all of the bush food to feed herself without her parent’s help. Dong grew stronger than Dang or Ding.

Then came that April day when their parents left them entirely on their own and they had to catch their own food. Dong was OK and Dang was almost up to it.

Ding though wasn’t such a good hunter and she couldn’t catch enough food. Ding was always lean and hungry. She took her chances and could smell the food in a small Fraser Island village so she prowled around that village night and day to see what she could pick up. Someone in the village took pity on Ding and occasionally fed her because she was so thin. Then the people who fed her went away so Ding thought other

people might feed her and she pestered them. When they wouldn’t feed her she got angry and bit them. She became such a pest that the Rangers had to remove her.

Dang was a better hunter but he found that whenever he tried to catch bandicoots or rats, other dingoes became angry because he was hunting in their territory. He couldn’t find a territory for himself and so he was always having to fight other dingoes whose territory he hunted on. The continual fighting made him tired and weak. One day another bigger stronger dingo killed him in a fight because dingoes have trouble surviving if they are forced to share their territory with others.



Dang got into so many fights he was left too weak to defend himself when attacked by a rival

Of the three cubs only Dong survived. She was able to join a pack and the next year she was a full grown dingo and the strongest female dingo in the pack she became the Alpha female and was allowed to mate with the Alpha male and have her own cubs. But even though Dong was strong and a good hunter, only a few of her cubs grew up to be adults and make Dong a Grandma. Life as a dingo on Fraser Island is hard and there is only enough wild food to support about 100 adult dingoes. So every year only about one dingo cub out of three or four survive to replace the old dogs that die naturally. The population remains constant.



Hide and Seek

A children's story about weeds and weeding on Fraser Island by John Sinclair

Mary was bored. She had come to Fraser Island for a holiday with her parents but there were no other kids of her age to play with. She had read her books and was sick of the games she had brought with her and so she was just bored.

Mary's Mum though wasn't bored. She didn't like fishing so when her husband went off to fish she went around the village they were staying in searching out for weeds that shouldn't be growing on such a beautiful natural place as World Heritage Fraser Island. She saw how bored Mary was and then she thought up a plan. She would take Mary with her and turn weeding into a game.

At first Mary didn't like Mum's plans and wasn't interested. It sounded like work and she was supposed to be having a holiday but when her mother said that it was a very tricky game of "Hide and Seek" that they would be playing Mary became more excited.

Mother said that someone had sprayed an area weeks before that had killed most of the weeds but some Coral creepers had hidden away from the spray and had to be found or else they would spread their seeds and in no time at all it would be as bad as it was before the spraying. Mary thought that that was fun so she soon learnt to recognize Coral creeper so while her mother was carefully removing any Coral creeper that Mary found and placing them in a bag, Mary went ahead.

"You're caught!" Mary would exclaim as she found each one and soon the last of the Coral Creepers were in her mother's bag. Soon the whole area was cleared of the tricky coral creepers that had hidden away from the spray.

"That was fun", Mary told her mother. "What do we do next?" she asked.



Mary's Mum worked on weeds like Coral Creeper

"Well if you liked that I could take you to a patch where some Singapore daisies also missed the spraying," her mother replied. "But, these may be harder to find because they are hidden in the grass and without their yellow flowers they are much harder to find," Mother added

So soon Mary had learnt to identify Singapore daisy and a new game began in a different area. Then as they were walking home Mary who had very sharp eyes saw some coral creeper outside that had escaped outside the dingo fence. Soon she was helping her mother to clean up those very tricky weeds.

"It is important if we are going to keep this village free of weeds that we never let any weeds such as Coral creeper escape or otherwise their seeds could be blown all over Fraser Island by the wind," Mother said while telling Mary how important her spying the hidden patch had been.

Mary's Dad realized that his wife and daughter were having more fun weeding than he was getting from his fishing, so he decided to join the Hide and Seek game. However, he wasn't interested in itty-bitty weeds like Singapore daisies. He wanted to get out the big weeds. Brazilian cherries, Easter Cassia and Lantana can be metres high. These were his main targets.

These were big plants and should have been easy to see but it was surprising how they seemed to blend in with the rest of the bush. While looking for Easter Cassia, Mary found Coral creepers lurking underneath them. She found many other weeds were hidden away so if she hadn't looked hard she would never have found them. Mary didn't like the spiky Sisal plants she found many of them while hunting weeds with her Dad.

Mary found many weeds in places nobody expected them to be. Thus it became a competition between Mary and Dad to see who discovered most plants. However, it didn't matter who saw them first because as soon as one was spotted Dad raced in and uprooted it so that it could never grow again and if it has any seeds or berries Mary would race in to pick them and put them in a bag so that they could never start a new plant.

It was all fun and playing Hide and Seek with her Mother and Father Mary had the most fun that she had ever had on Fraser Island. What made it even better was that Mary realized that she had done something very useful in helping to preserve the natural integrity of her this beautiful island.

Stowaway Antics

A children's story from Fraser Island by John Sinclair May 2015

Once a group of ants overheard Fearless Leader tell some people about what a wonderful place Fraser Island was for ants and other sand swimmers. *"The sand is so loose that many insects, worms, and other critters have adapted to moving through it as though they were swimming. Over 280 species of ants were discovered in just Cooloola alone and we expect there to be more on Fraser Island,"* he said.

He described the place as teeming with ants that harvested honey from flowers and some even looked after the caterpillars of butterflies.

Just at his feet in Suburbia the ant group listened with amazement.



There are hundreds of species of ants on Fraser Island that play a critical part in the island ecology. They pollinate flowers and many also turn over the top soil to recycle nutrients and help plants grow.

Ant Tidote that was always good at solving problems started the discussion. *"I would love to be able to have our colony in a place like that. If so many other ants can find Fraser Island so good, it would probably be better than here in Suburbia with all of its pollution."*

"It would be great to have so much food that so many ant species thrive there," said Ant Ticipate.

"I think that we should try to go there but how would we get there?" asked Ant Ler.

"Fearless Leader is always going up to Fraser Island in his 4WD. I reckon that we should stowaway in his 4WD and he will take us all up there," replied Ant Tique

Ant Ithesis always took the opposite view and said, *"That is such a silly idea. Why should we leave a place like Suburbia*

where our colony has lived safely for countless generations and go where we may not be welcome?"

"If it means taking territory and food from other ants, I am against it," chimed in Ant Iwar.

They argued and discussed for days and couldn't all agree. In the end Ticipate said, *"We have argued and discussed and we can't agree. However, I want to go and look at Fraser Island and see if it is as great as Fearless Leader said. I am going to go and those who want to join me can start stowing away in Fearless Leader's 4WD. Those like Ithesis and Iwar who are against going can stay behind and look after the home colony but to me Fraser Island sounds like a much better place than Suburbia."*

Soon hundreds of ants were heading for Fearless Leader's 4WD. They had to hide inside the car because they knew that, if they stayed outside, they may be sprayed with salt water before they could get out.

Ant Onym found a place where they could hide in a special place between the door and the floor. There were four doors. Hundreds of ants were crammed into these special places to hide until they reached Fraser Island.

In their special stowaway place they were safe but they didn't know how long they would have to wait before the Fearless Leader headed off to Fraser Island again. They began to get hungry.

Ant Igen said, *"We can't stay hidden for weeks and starve. We need to take turns to sneak out and get some food as long as we have to wait in Suburbia."*

Soon there was a procession of hungry ants tracking backwards and forwards between their stowaway place in the 4WD and Suburbia.

Fearless Leader came to get his 4WD ready to go to Fraser Island and noticed the ants moving back and forward.

"We can't go to Fraser Island with all of these ants or they will change the ecology," he said. *"Already there have been many Brown Crazy Ants who hitchhiked to the island and they have displaced the special ants who were living there before. I am responsible for helping preserve the natural integrity of Fraser Island and if these ants get there Fraser Island native ants will suffer in many ways. These invaders could cause some of the species that are there to become extinct before we even know anything about them."*

With that he began spraying his 4WD with insecticide. Then the ants in the stowaway places came out from their hiding and they got sprayed and the hiding places were opened up and every ant was killed.

Ant Ithesis who never wanted to leave the safety of Suburbia felt sad but Ant Iwar who had heard of the damage that Brown Crazy Ants had caused on Fraser Island driving other ants away said the insecticide had saved the lives of many native Fraser Island ants.

It is very important not to take any plants or animals to or from Fraser Island. Even small creatures like new ant species can damage the ecology. Visitors should inspect their vehicles and loads to ensure they don't carry stowaways.

Happy Birthday Grandpa

A Children's story by John Sinclair from Fraser Island July 2015

Kit wondered how he came to be climbing out on a very thin tree branch swaying high above the ground on Fraser Island. It was a long story.

Kit was happily helping Grandpa carry out his monitoring projects on Fraser Island. They were taking photos and measurements to record the amount of erosion and to show how weed control was working. Grandpa was very observant. Because he was so familiar with Fraser Island he noticed anything unusual. Some people might think that this was boring job but Kit enjoyed it. Kit was happy to assist Grandpa, as he was getting older and not as strong and agile as he once was. Kit learnt about the impact of weeds and 4WDs in this sandy environment and much more. This trip had been most enjoyable because Grandpa had invited along a couple of his mates that were great fun to be with. They were here to help him celebrate his birthday.

Uncle Long Nose got his name while living with Aborigines in a remote part of the Northern Territory. That was because his nose was longer than any Aboriginal nose there. Him thought that it was funny because Uncle Long Nose's nose wasn't as long as Grandpa's. But then the Northern Territory community hadn't met Grandpa. Uncle Long Nose was always studying and photographing anything in Nature that took his eye. Grandpa told Kit that ULN was the best naturalist in Northern Australia.

Grandpa's other mate was Jimmy, a Butchulla man. Fraser Island was Butchulla territory, although Jimmy called it K'Gari. He was a very funny man, full of energy and constantly making clever wisecracks. He, Uncle Long Nose and Grandpa had adventured across Australia together. Jimmy was very excited to be back on his beloved K'Gari, sharing his passion and knowledge with Kit.

During this trip Grandpa was installing new marker posts to help photograph the roads and troublesome weed areas. He was also taking measurements and checking the rain gauges that measured the intensity of the rainfall. Heavy rain influenced the rate of erosion along K'Gari's roads.

All was going well until they arrived at Lake Coomboo to check on the rain gauge there. Grandpa said that it could operate for months without being checked, recording and storing data without anyone being there to check it. He said that that was very handy because it wasn't easy to get to Lake Coomboo. It was often months between his visits. He needed to gather the rainfall data to help scientists and others.

They were gathering the data from the rain gauge and downloading it on the comport when a sudden gust of wind from a mini willy-willy passed the group. They were too intent on their task to see it coming Suddenly the folder with all of Grandpa's records exploded and the papers inside were scattered all around. Soon everyone was chasing the loose pages through the bush to retrieve them.

They caught up with every paper they could see. Then Jimmy's sharp eye saw one page that got carried upwards. It was stuck amongst the leaves of a tall Scribbly gum tree.

Grandpa hadn't yet sorted through the scrambled papers to see what might be missing, but he knew if they didn't get the page up in the Scribbly back quickly it could be blown far away. He might never know if it was important or not. He had to get that page before it blew away.

Uncle Long Nose offered to climb the tree but although he was big he couldn't get up to the first branch. Jimmy was an excellent tree climber and he tried but he couldn't get out to the small branch where the paper was stuck because the light branch would not carry his weight.

"Are you good at climbing trees?" Jimmy asked Kit.

"I'm the best tree-climber in my class", Kit proudly replied. *"I have built my own tree-house but I can't reach the first branch",* he added

"Come here then", Jimmy told him. With that Jimmy cupped his hands together and made a step for Kit to stand on. Then Jimmy lifted Kit high enough for him too reach the first branch. Despite the Scribbly's smooth bark, Kit was able to scramble out to reach the piece of paper.

"What does it say?" asked Grandpa anxious to know if the effort and risks were justified.

"It is in your handwriting Grandpa and it only says, 'Don't forget the Birthday cake', Kit replied.

Everyone laughed. Then they remembered that it was Grandpa's birthday but they had been so busy and having such fun that they had over-looked it. So Kit brought the paper down to avoid leaving any litter on K'Gari and they all sang *"Happy Birthday"* to Grandpa.



GPJ setting the rain gauge as the willy-willy struck

Snow White — the K’Gari Bandicoot

A children’s story by Fraser Island Weedbuster, John Sinclair

Life is tough for any bandicoot on K’Gari with dingoes always out hunting them. They have to avoid snakes and other critters that can do them harm or even swallow them whole. But if you are a Long-nosed Bandicoot (*Perameles nasuta*) as white as snow it is doubly hard because without camouflage they can be easily seen. That is the way it was for Snow White, a rare albino bandicoot.

Snow White had pointed ears, a short tail, snow-white fur and, of course, a long nose. She had a hunched-looking posture. Like all of her kin, she was a rather charming, nocturnal Australian native marsupial and a loner at heart

Most Long-nosed Bandicoots have a mousy greyish brown colour and it makes it easier for them to be camouflaged as they sleep during the day, but at night they are hungry. They don’t have a refrigerator to raid and they have to find their own food. They are quite secretive, needing ground cover for shelter and looking for food close by. With their long sensitive noses these bandicoots sniff out the food they are seeking that is mainly buried. So with their three long, clawed toes on their front feet they dig small, round conical holes seeking out underground food at night.

They have to do this very quietly because while Bandicoots are out hunting for food under the ground, there are other animals like Carpet Pythons and Dingoes also prowling around the forest hunting Bandicoots that are their favourite food. So they not only have to avoid being heard, they also have to avoid being seen. That though was difficult for Snow White because without camouflage she stood out like a target.

Wherever she went Snow White had to be ready to outrun Dingoes. Once one chased her and was just about to grab her. She could feel the hot breath on her back but then she saw a square hole surrounded by wire and with one desperate bounce she squeezed through just as the dingo almost had her. She panted hard to recover her breath and heard the dingo howl in frustration because he had just missed her. Because she was about the size of a rabbit and she could just squeeze through the wire but the hole wasn’t big enough for a dingo. The fence was to stop Dingoes getting into one of the Fraser Island (Kgari) townships.

Snow White thought, “If the dingo can’t get through that fence I am safer this side than the outside. I will make my home here.” She could see the human houses nearby so she made her nest in the bit of bush between the houses and the dingo fence. Her nest was shallow depressions on the ground amongst thick Midyim bushes. Except for any carpet snakes she would have been completely safe there if it hadn’t been for a pesky Weedbuster.

She was enjoying here usual daytime sleep when one day a big Weedbuster almost stood on her nest as he charged through to remove some Lantana bushes. The Weedbuster’s boot was a bit bigger than Snow White.

Snow White didn’t mind the Lantana. As she dodged his boot, she gave a high-pitched squeak and charged off as if she was being chased by a Dingo. Until then the Weedbuster hadn’t seen her. He had never seen a pure white Bandicoot before and will probably never see another. Lantana was a good place for bandicoots to hide in. She wondered why this Weedbuster hated Lantana so much.

The Weedbuster went away and Snow White continued living alone in her little patch of bush digging neat conical holes with her front feet, just big enough for her long, sensitive snout to reach in and detect insects, grubs and any other small invertebrate prey. But what Snow White loved best were the small native truffles that were the fruiting bodies of the underground fungi. Snow white was responsible for keeping this patch of forest healthy by spreading around the spores of those fungi that are so important to passing the nutrients from the sand to the plant roots.

Like most Long-nosed Bandicoots Snow White lived a solitary life for most of the year but one moonlight night she found another Bandicoot. He wasn’t white but Ben fell in love with Snow White and in only twelve and a half days Snow White was the proud mother of a family of three baby bandicoots. Long-nosed Bandicoots have one of the shortest gestation periods known for any mammal, but being a marsupial the babies were far from fully developed. The babies were no bigger than a pea when they crawled into her rear-facing pouch. When the babies began to grow fur Snow White could see that they were all normal Bandicoot colour like their father and that they wouldn’t have as much trouble hiding as she did.

In her three-year life Snow White had three or four litters a year. She lived alone but she was happy. The Dingoes couldn’t get to her and only occasionally the Weedbuster’s came by looking for Lantana or any other weeds. Snow White she died naturally unlike many of her babies who were eaten by Dingoes or Carpet Pythons.



Ben Bandicoot — Snow White’s occasional mate