

Suzy's Mystery Critter

A children's story by John Sinclair

Suzy was an enthusiastic weed-buster who volunteered to help other weed-busters working on K'gari (Fraser Island). Her favourite job was working in the nursery because there were so many nice plants to deal with and grow. As the other weed busters progressively eliminated the weeds from the surrounding village they needed attractive native plants to replace them. Without replacing the weeds with suitable natives the weeds just came back so her work was very important.

Most of K'gari's weeds were in the villages because people had tried planting gardens with hardy plants that would survive in the sandy environment even when unattended for weeks on end. These are the same sort of plants that escaped from the gardens and spread all around the village. Most of the weeds that the weed-busters were dealing with had escaped from people's gardens.

To stop the introduction of more garden plants that might escape the Butchulla tradition owners and the National Park managers had established a golden rule— ***No plants or propagation material can be taken off K'gari and none can be brought on.*** That meant that the weed busters had to obtain their supply of suitable native plants to replace the weeds from K'gari. A key to the problem was the plant nursery. Here the weed-busters could grow the native plants that they needed from seeds and cuttings they found on the island. The work that Suzy and her friends were doing in the nursery was a vital part of the weed-busters' bush regeneration on this World Heritage island

While working potting up small plants into larger pots, Suzy noticed a huge pile of sand in the corner where two retaining walls met. It was a very large pile of fresh sand that would more than fill a wheelbarrow. Suzy wondered how the sand got there. It hadn't overflowed the retaining walls because it was all in a heap in the corner and not anywhere else along the walls. That made her very curious. She made a closer inspection and discovered a deep tunnel. It was too small to fit her hand down, but judging from the amount of sand excavated she guessed it went a long way down.

Then she spotted a little track over sand heap leading to the hole. She looked closer but the automating sprinkler system of the nursery made it impossible to detect footprints. As Suzy's curiosity grew she imagined all of the sorts of critter that lived on Fraser Island (K'gari) and couldn't think which one could have dug such a hole. She knew some birds like the colourful and elegant Rainbow Bee-eaters dug holes for their nests but they

preferred banks not downwards facing tunnels. The same for the Pardalotes that were even smaller. Besides when Pardalotes and Bee Eaters enter and leave their nests they flew straight out leaving no track

She thought it might be a goanna living down that tunnel. They sometimes dug holes to dig out food but the track leading to the mouth of the tunnel was too narrow for a goanna and she couldn't think of any other reptile that might have excavated such a large amount of sand

Suzy decided that the hole must have dug by a furry mammal. But here again she was stumped because Bandicoots dug in the sand to find grubs and truffles but they were conical holes. "*Maybe it's a native rat,*" she thought but she couldn't think of a rat or any other mammal that would dig such a deep hole. Suzy was mystified. She even invented a name for the mysterious critter. She thought of it as Misty.

She thought that she should consult a ranger who knew all about every critter on K'gari that ran, hopped, flew, swam, or slithered. Dan, the Ranger set up a camera trap to photograph whatever shy critter lived down the hole. He suspected that it might sneak out when nobody was about, probably at night. He said that as soon as Misty came out of the tunnel it would trigger the camera and they would then be able to identify the mystery animal.

The next day Ranger Dan came to the nursery to inform Suzy that he had identified the mystery critter. It wasn't a bird, reptile or a mammal.

"*A very large cane toad lives down that hole,*" Ranger Dan declared. With that Suzy and all of the weed-busters laughed because they didn't think that an amphibian would dig such a large hole. They could be forgiven because cane toads are unique in the amphibian world for their capacity to dig so deeply into the sand.



A cane toad called "Misty"