

Farmer Alastair and the Bush stone-curlews

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Lowesdale Public School





Enviro-Stories is an environmental education program that has been developed by PeeKdesigns.



www.envirostories.com.au

This program provides an education and learning experience for kids through their active engagement with natural resource and catchment management issues. The final product is a published story written about local issues, by local kids, for local kids and future generations.

Farmer Alastair and the Bush stone-curlews

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“Biodiversity of the Murray Catchment” Enviro-Stories Education Program

In 2012, the Creative Catchment Kids program delivered the “Biodiversity of the Murray Catchment” Enviro-Stories Education Program. The project was initiated by the Murray Darling Association and Burrumbuttock Public School. It was generously funded by the Murray and Murrumbidgee Catchment Management Authorities, the Murray-Darling Basin Authority and Teys Australia, Wagga. Additional support came from the Wirraminna and Riverina Environmental Education Centres.



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On a Riverina farm owned by farmer Alastair, there was a grassy open woodland area. It was the beginning of August and, unseen by the farmer, a male and female Bush stone-curlew had just laid two eggs because it was their breeding season.

The eggs lay camouflaged amongst lots of sticks and debris on the ground.



A couple of days later while incubating their eggs, the shy ground dwelling curlews saw through the low grass, a flash of red in the distance.

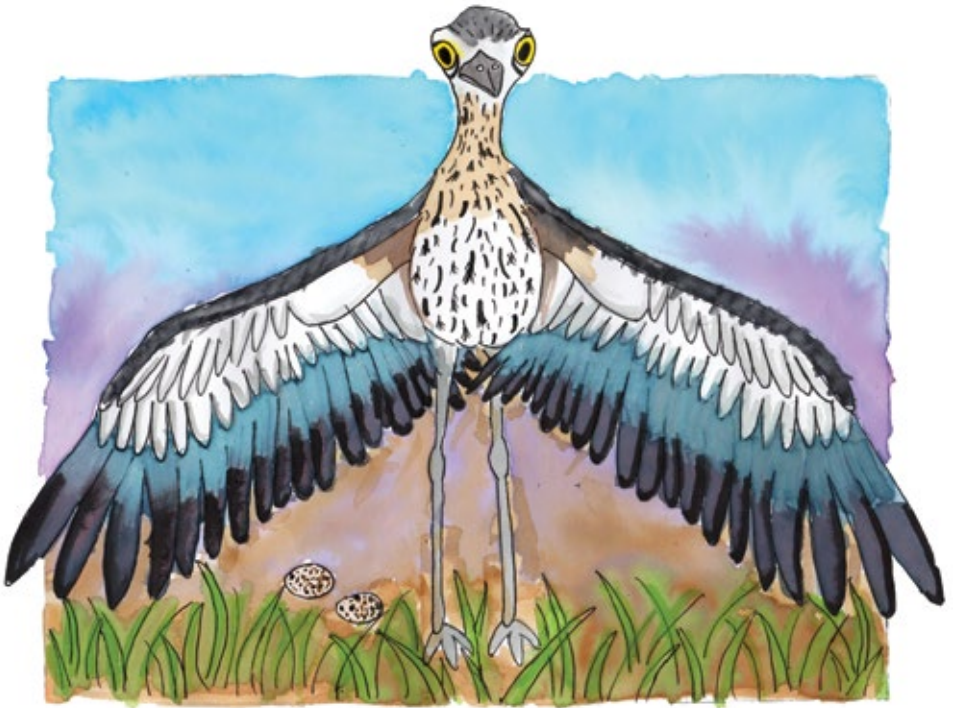


From behind a tree appeared a sleek figure. A predatory fox!



The curlews, which had been standing on their long, gangly legs, immediately crouched down and froze; motionless, to blend with their surroundings, so they would not be seen.





As the fox drew closer the male curlew felt threatened and came out of his dead still pose to try and protect his mate and the eggs.



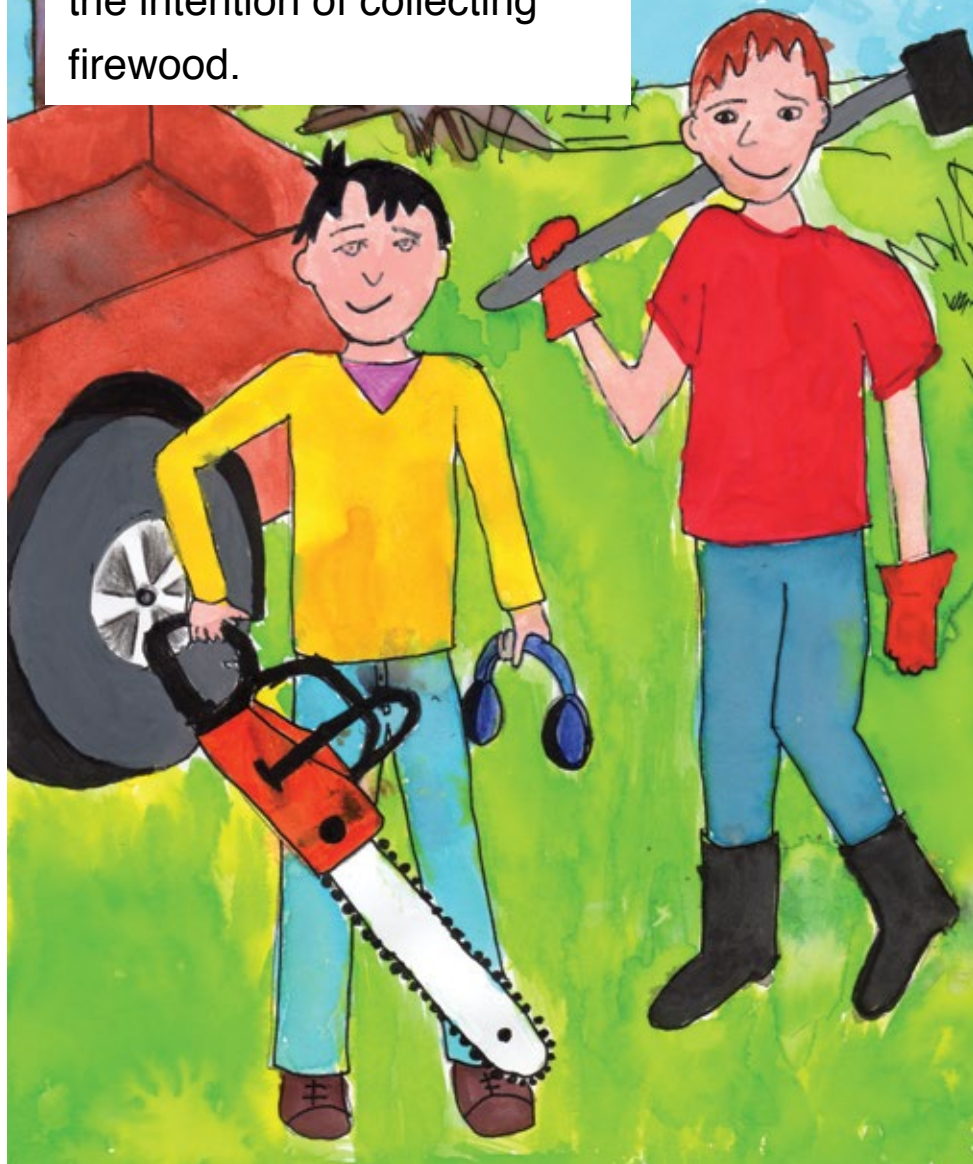
Just as the fox sighted the birds it was very fortunate that he was distracted by a rabbit which was hopping past. The fox turned and pursued this preferred prey.



As the birds resumed their incubating duties, a rusty old Holden ute approached across the paddocks. The pair again used their defence strategy and lay flat, camouflaged on the ground.



The occupants of the ute began unloading chainsaws, axes and block splitters with the intention of collecting firewood.





Before the chainsaws roared to life a young man noticed a very slight movement amongst the fallen timber and bush litter. On closer observation he was excited to see a pair of rare, nesting Bush stone-curlews and alerted his group to cease all activities immediately.



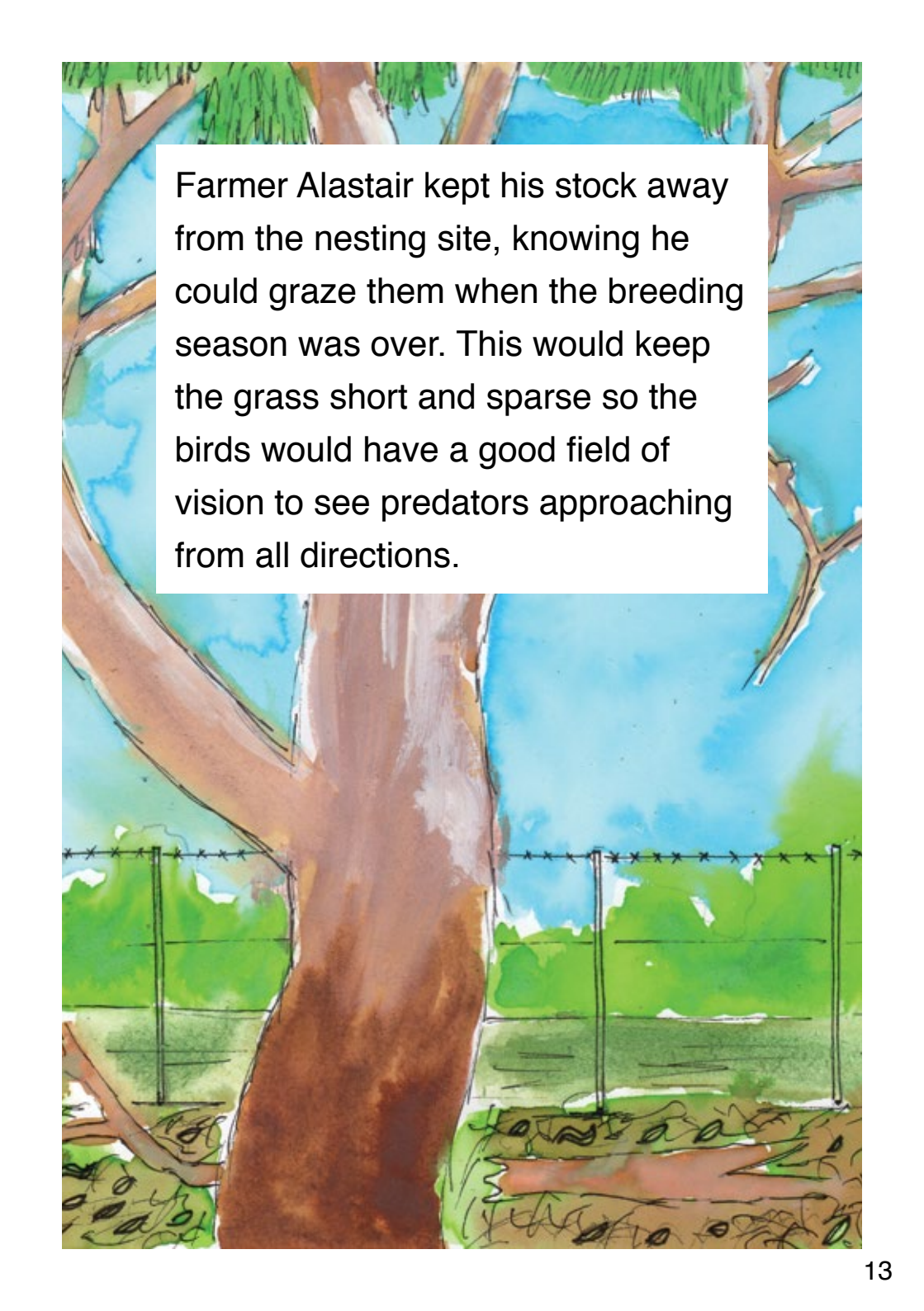
Recognising how significant it was that these endangered Bush stone-curlews had been sighted the man quickly contacted farmer Alastair to alert him about the birds' presence on his property.

Farmer Alastair was delighted to hear the news. Although he had heard the birds' eerie call at night, particularly on moonlit evenings when storms and rain were approaching, he had been unable to locate the curlews even though he had made many attempts.





With the guidance and assistance of the local landcare group, a safer habitat was created for the birds. The area was fenced off with 3 metre high fences to protect the curlews from predators, and fallen bark and branches were left to collect in the paddock.



Farmer Alastair kept his stock away from the nesting site, knowing he could graze them when the breeding season was over. This would keep the grass short and sparse so the birds would have a good field of vision to see predators approaching from all directions.

For all his efforts farmer Alastair was rewarded when, about four weeks later, the eggs hatched and the chicks soon became mobile.



Their parents led them away from the nest to a large Red gum with plenty of fallen timber lying beneath it.

Now that they had a suitable habitat the pair of curlews could settle down to raise their young and nest again and increase in numbers.



On moonlit nights the eerie, wailing “weer-lo” call would be heard again across the paddocks.

Facts about Bush stone-curlews

Almost always observed on the ground, the Bush stone-curlew stands about 50-60 cm. It has long legs that have thickened knee joints.

In the past groups of 50 to 100 birds were recorded but they are now endangered and, in some areas, almost extinct.

They are strong but reluctant fliers.

They are long lived for a bird - 20 years plus.

They are nocturnal birds, foragers who feed on ground dwelling invertebrates they find in landscapes covered in leaf litter, grasses and fallen timber.

About 3-4 weeks after being laid, the eggs hatch and the chicks are mobile soon after. They are partially independent by 4 weeks of age, and by about 8-10 weeks are able to fly. They stay with the parent birds from 3-9 months.





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