

# Our Champion: Dr. Matt Cameron



*Catchment Champion*

Paris Rawqa, Ben Walther,  
Courtney McKenna, Ellen Paterson  
and Alana Cameron

James Fallon High School



## *Creative Catchment Kids*

Creative Catchment Kids is an initiative of the Murray Darling Association and Wirraminna Environmental Education Centre. It aims to improve engagement between the Murray Catchment Management Authority and school students by providing opportunities for positive and authentic ventures that encourage students to develop creative solutions to natural resource management issues. [www.murray.cma.nsw.gov.au/creative-catchment-kids.html](http://www.murray.cma.nsw.gov.au/creative-catchment-kids.html)

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## *Wirraminna Environmental Education Centre*

The Wirraminna Environmental Education Centre is located in Burrumbuttock, north of Albury in southern NSW. Since 1995, the centre, which is adjacent to Burrumbuttock Public School, has provided opportunities for discovery and learning about the natural environment, the ecology of the local woodlands and the beauty of native plants. [www.wirraminna.org](http://www.wirraminna.org)

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## *Murray Darling Association*

The Murray Darling Association has membership of over 100 Local Government councils in the Murray-Darling Basin, as well as community groups, businesses and individuals with an interest in ensuring that the Basin continues as a valuable asset for all Australians. Since 1950, the Association has initiated various school and community education programs on managing the Basin's land and water resources. [www.mda.asn.au](http://www.mda.asn.au)

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Enviro-Stories is an innovative literacy education program that inspires learning about natural resource and catchment management issues. Developed by PeeKdesigns, this program provides students with an opportunity to publish their own stories that have been written for other kids to support learning about their local area. [www.envirostories.com.au](http://www.envirostories.com.au)

# Our Champion: Dr. Matt Cameron

Authors: Paris Rawaqa, Ben Walther, Courtney McKenna,  
Ellen Paterson and Alana Cameron

Teacher: Brendon Finn

School: James Fallon High School

## *Catchment Champions*

In 2013, students involved in the Creative Catchment Kids program researched and wrote stories about 'Catchment Champions', people who have made important contributions to managing natural resources in their local community. The program was generously funded by the Murray and Murrumbidgee catchment management authorities.

The Catchment Champions books are part of the Enviro-Stories Education Program.



**Catchment Management  
Authority**  
Murray



CARING  
FOR  
OUR  
COUNTRY



**Catchment Management  
Authority**  
Murrumbidgee

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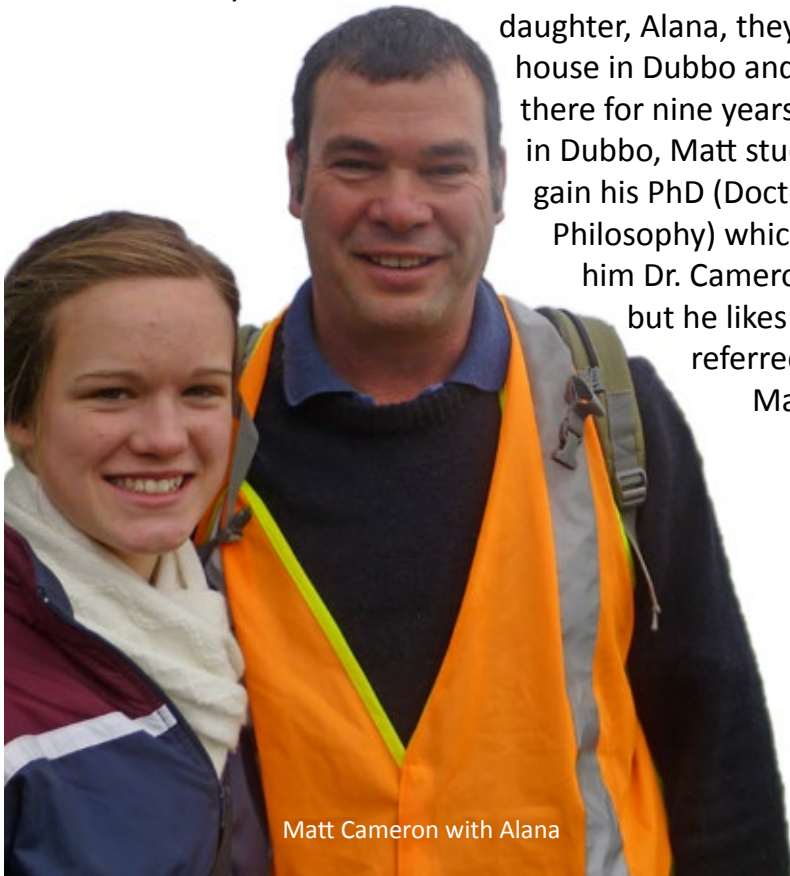
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## *Who is Dr. Cameron (Matt!)?*

Matt Cameron was born on April 26th, 1964 in Griffith. His parents are Pat and Skin (Athol) Cameron and he is one of six kids (three brothers and two sisters). Throughout his childhood, he always had an interest in the environment and helping threatened species. He continued this interest during high school studying HSC Biology.

Matt met his wife to be, Christine Barwood, through mutual friends and they married in 1992. Together they had two girls, Katelyn and Alana. Matt lived in Griffith until he went to university in Sydney. He later moved back to Griffith, where Katelyn was born. After the birth of his second

daughter, Alana, they built a house in Dubbo and lived there for nine years. While in Dubbo, Matt studied to gain his PhD (Doctor in Philosophy) which made him Dr. Cameron, but he likes to be referred to as Matt.



Matt Cameron with Alana

## *Mini Matt*

Some of Matt's interests as a child were nature and the environment. He would spend the vast majority of his time with his older brother at Scenic Hill in Griffith, which was right near his house. Matt had a big family which meant there was very little spare money, but every week his parents would buy Matt and his brother a magazine called Australia's Wildlife Heritage. They were fascinated by it, and covered their walls with the posters from the magazine.

Matt was educated at St. Patrick's Primary School, Catholic High and then moved to Wade High School in grades 11 and 12. During his time in high school, his favourite subjects were Geography and Modern History. He wasn't sure what he wanted to be during high school, but considered being a P.E. teacher.



Speckled Warbler



## *Reptiles, with Honours!*

After Matt finished high school (1982), he was accepted into the University of New South Wales where he completed a Bachelor of Science in Physical Geography. This course explains how things like soil type, landscape and climate affect the types of plants and animals that can live in an area. While at university Matt realised that he really wanted a career working with wildlife and this led him to complete his Honours degree.

Over his summer vacation (summer is the ideal time to study reptiles!) Matt worked with a local CSIRO scientist who taught him skills in trapping and handling reptiles. He used these new skills to look at whether or not the width of a strip of vegetation had any influence on the reptiles in the area. Matt established that the wider the area, the more reptile species could live there. He also found that the type of vegetation in each area was important because particular vegetation made a better habitat for different reptiles.



*Ctenotus robustus*

## *There's leftovers in the larder!*

After university Matt was unable to find an ecology job so, while working at a local petrol station, he studied the Peregrine Falcon. During the 1950s and 1960s the falcons were badly affected by the use of a pesticide called DDT, which was sprayed on crops and then passed through food chains. This was very bad news for the apex predators, including the Peregrine Falcon. The DDT in the food chain caused their eggs to have thin shells, making them easy to break in the nest, and also made the falcons act strangely, which caused problems with breeding.

The Peregrine Falcon was saved from extinction when the use of DDT was banned and people like Matt helped rebuild its population.

Matt specifically studied the unique way that falcons store their food. When the male falcon collects too much food the female stores it in “larders” on cliffs near the nest. When the chicks are hungry and the male is late with a kill, the female retrieves the stored food so that the chicks are well fed. This way the male doesn't get worn out and it allows him to take advantage of times when hunting is easier!



Peregrine Falcon



### *Lake Lifeline*

Matt became more determined to get a job in wildlife management after completing his study on the Peregrine Falcon. In 1988, he completed a Diploma in Natural Resources (Merit) in Wildlife Management at the University of New England.

Matt studied the effect of goldfish upon the waterbird community in Lake Llangothlin. This lake community is a significant refuge for waterbirds because it often holds water when inland wetlands are drier. Many other similar refuges have been drained. The lake provides homes and food for more than 40 types of waterbird!

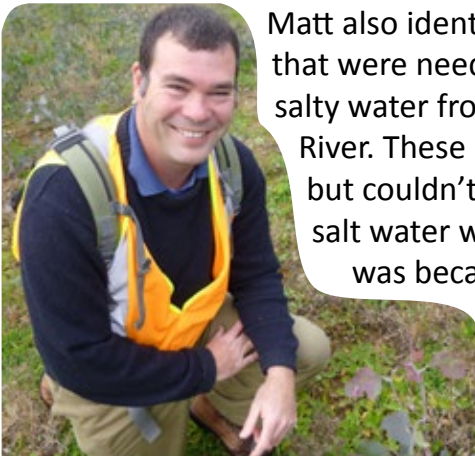
After this study Matt got his first job working on platypus research at Taronga Zoo. He was involved in the early stages of a program to study platypus in the wild and to find out how to breed them successfully in captivity. Captive breeding had only been achieved once in 1943, and it wasn't until 1998 that Healesville Sanctuary in Melbourne was able to again achieve this task!



## *A Salty Solution!*

While Matt was living in Hamilton (South West Victoria) in the early 90's, he met his future wife Christine Barwood who he married in 1992 in her home town, Ballarat.

Matt was working as a Wetlands Biologist for the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources in Victoria concentrating on wetlands and salinity. His job was to identify specific thresholds which would need urgent attention if reached as they would have a great impact on the aquatic plant and invertebrate community.



Matt also identified the environmental flows that were needed to flush out pockets of salty water from deep holes in the Glenelg River. These holes were good fish habitat, but couldn't be used if they were full of salt water which contains no oxygen. This was because fresh and salt water don't mix, therefore no oxygen could get into the deep holes.





### *Keeping it clean!*

From 1992-1994 Matt was Head of the Regional Operations Unit, NSW Environment Protection Authority (EPA) in Griffith. At this time his first daughter Katelyn was born.

Matt was mainly involved in controlling pollution from industry and agriculture. He worked with businesses and farmers to set up programs that would reduce the pollution they were producing. Having these programs in place helped protect ground and surface water, ensuring wildlife and humans would have access to healthy water. It also ensured that everyone had access to clean air, uncontaminated by harmful pollutants like dust, smoke and chemical odours.



## *Connecting Koalas*

Matt and his family moved to the rapidly expanding town of Coffs Harbour in 1995 and stayed there for two years. During this time, he was the manager of Environmental Planning in the NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service.

During this period of time the town was rapidly expanding and subsequently destroying important koala habitat for new housing estates. Matt's role was to minimise the damage done to Koala populations by this development. This included ensuring that important habitat patches were protected and that the koalas could move safely between these areas without being hit by cars or attacked by dogs.





## *Road to Recovery*

Living in Dubbo from 1997 – 2005, Matt was the Threatened Species Manager for the Department of Environment and Conservation, New South Wales and celebrated the arrival of his second child, Alana. As manager, he was responsible for the preparation and implementation of recovery plans for threatened species, populations and communities.

During this time, he produced around 20 recovery plans for threatened species occurring in two thirds of NSW.

These plans ensured that these species were protected and everything was done to ensure they were rescued from extinction.

Matt mostly oversaw the preparation of recovery plans on threatened species by other people in this particular unit. Plans he co-authored included one for the Salt Pipewort - a small endangered herb, and a plan to optimise the survival chances of Bolam's Mouse - a small endangered nocturnal mouse.

During this time, Matt took a year off work to write his first book, *Cockatoos*.



Salt Pipewort



Bolam's Mouse

## *Doctor Matt!*

During Matt's time as Manager of Threatened Species for the Department of Environment and Conservation in Dubbo, he worked on gaining his PhD on the ecology of the Glossy Black-Cockatoo in central NSW, focusing on the foraging ecology and breeding biology of this particular cockatoo. He did this study by distance at the University of New England, Armidale NSW.

Matt found out that the birds preferred to eat a specific type of seed from two species of shrubby sheoaks. The plants produce seeds during the winter, which was also the time the Glossy Black-Cockatoo breeds. Matt discovered that the cockatoo would only breed when there was enough seed around to feed their young, which meant they didn't waste energy breeding when it would be unsuccessful. Overall, Matt's work showed that the cockatoo wouldn't breed during drought periods.

Matt became Dr. Matt Cameron when he gained his PhD in 2004, after 6 years of investigation and research.



Glossy Black-Cockatoo





Crimson Spider Orchid



Wildlife tunnel under Hume Highway

## *Threatened in Albury?!*

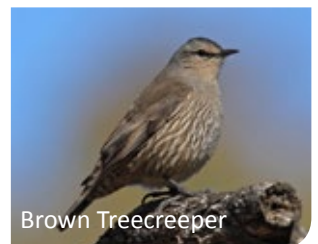
Matt and his family moved to Albury in 2006 when he began his current job as a Regional Biodiversity Conservation Officer, working for the Office of Environment and Heritage.

One of his major projects is protecting the Crimson Spider Orchid, Sandhill Spider Orchid and Oaklands Diuris from extinction in local areas. There are only a handful of the Crimson Spider Orchids left in NSW, which are found on Nail Can Hill in Albury. Matt protects these orchids by collecting, storing and growing orchid seeds at the Australian Botanical Gardens in Mount Annan. The aim is to have a safety net and to increase the number and size of populations.

As part of this project, Matt goes out to farms looking for orchids in danger and helps plan strategies with the owner of the land to protect them. This can include building a fence around the orchid, preventing livestock from grazing in that particular area while plants are flowering, and removing weeds to stop them from out-competing the orchids. These projects are successful and the orchids are slowly coming back.



Wildlife using rope bridge



Brown Treecreeper



### *Gliders and fliers*

Matt also works with Squirrel Gliders and woodland birds in the hope of increasing their populations. Squirrel Gliders are a species of gliding possum of the marsupial family. They are the size of a large rat with soft grey fur and a large bushy tail.

Squirrel Gliders and some woodland bird species are vulnerable because of the destruction of their habitat. This is due to the construction of buildings, roads and estates. Interestingly, more than one third of Australia's bird population depends on woodland to survive.

Some major projects Matt has been a part of include:

- Putting up rope bridges and glider poles over the Hume Highway to allow Squirrel Gliders to cross safely.
- Building a large cement arch under the highway specifically designed to encourage woodland birds to fly through it rather than over the road.

During this time, Matt wrote his second book, *Parrots: The Animal Answer Guide*.

*The amazing writing team consisted of Paris Rawaqa, Ben Walther, Courtney McKenna, Ellen Paterson and Alana Cameron.*

*Thank you to Mr. Brendon Finn for helping us to write this book. We also appreciate the support given to us by Ms. Sheridan Lysons, Mr. John Skillington, Mr. David Johnson and Mr. Ross McGarvie.*



Photo credits for this book include James Fallon High School, Chris Tzaros, James Val, Matt Cameron, Tobi Edmonds, Dave Hunter, the Australian Research Centre for Urban Ecology and the Office of Environment and Heritage.







Paris Rawaqa, Ben Walther, Courtney McKenna, Ellen Paterson  
Matt Cameron and Alana Cameron

2013 Year 8 & 10, James Fallon High School

The 2012 and 2013 Creative  
Catchment Kids writing  
program was showcased  
at the Seventh World  
Environmental Education  
Congress, held in Morocco  
during June 2013.



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