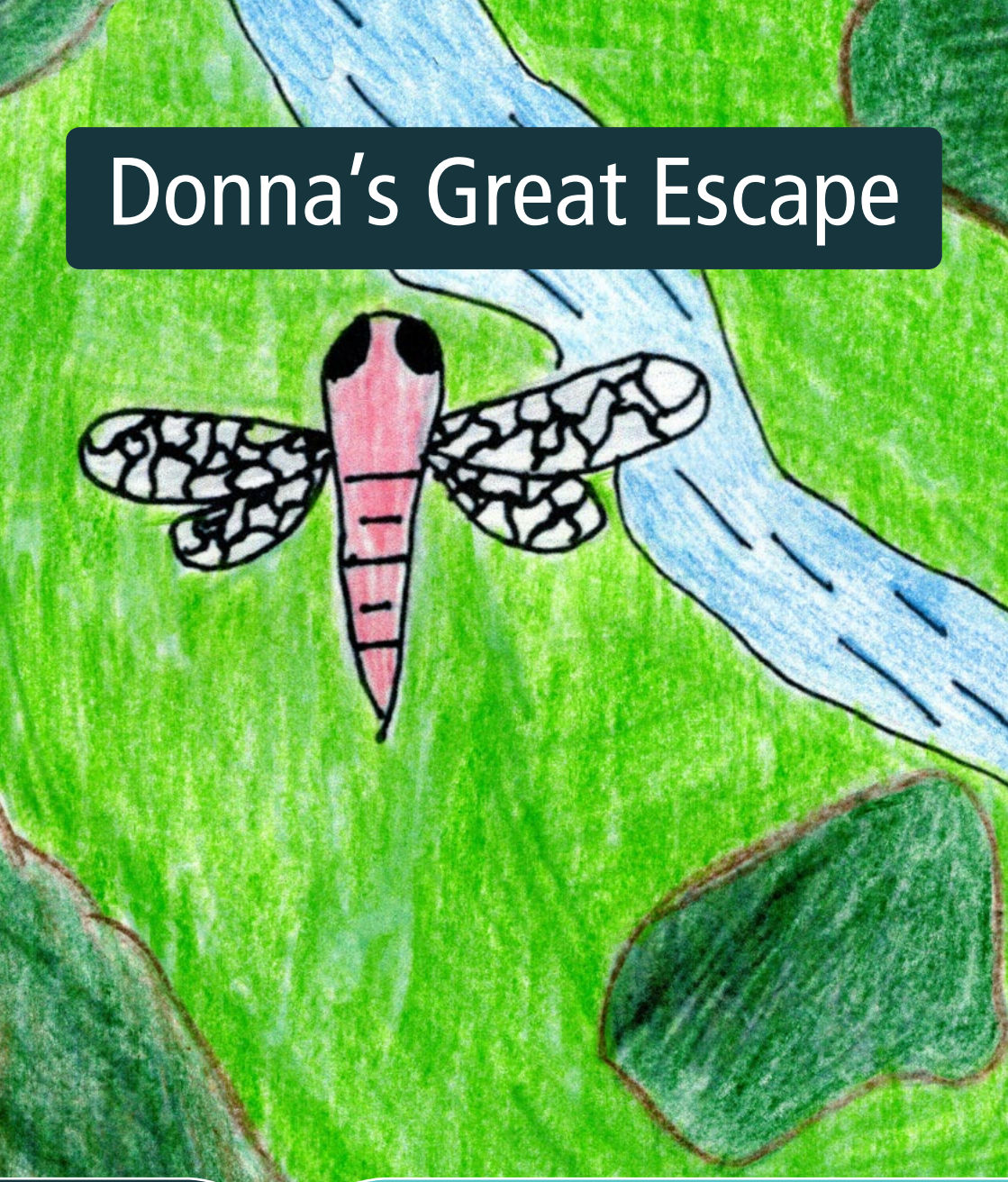
Donna's Great Escape



ENVIRO stories

Manning Valley Anglican College

Enviro-Stories

Enviro-Stories is a 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.

envirostories.com.au

MidCoast Council

The MidCoast ranges from beaches to mountains over an area of 10,000 square kilometres.The MidCoast is home to the Gathang speaking Aboriginal people, the Biripi and Worimi.

The MidCoast region has a large, unique mix of environments – coastal systems, estuarine wetlands and mangrove forests, rainforests, freshwater rivers and wetlands, open grasslands, woodlands and eucalypt forests. This diverse range of environments has led to a wide array of plants and animals calling the area home. Unfortunately, due to alteration of the landscape, introduction of feral animals and changing climatic conditions, many of the regions plants and animals have become vulnerable and their survival is under threat.

midcoast.nsw.gov.au

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Donna's Great Escape

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School: Manning Valley Anglican College

This book has been published as part of the Managing Our MidCoast Marvels Enviro-Stories program and involves schools learning about some of the precious animals, communities and habitats of the MidCoast region of NSW.

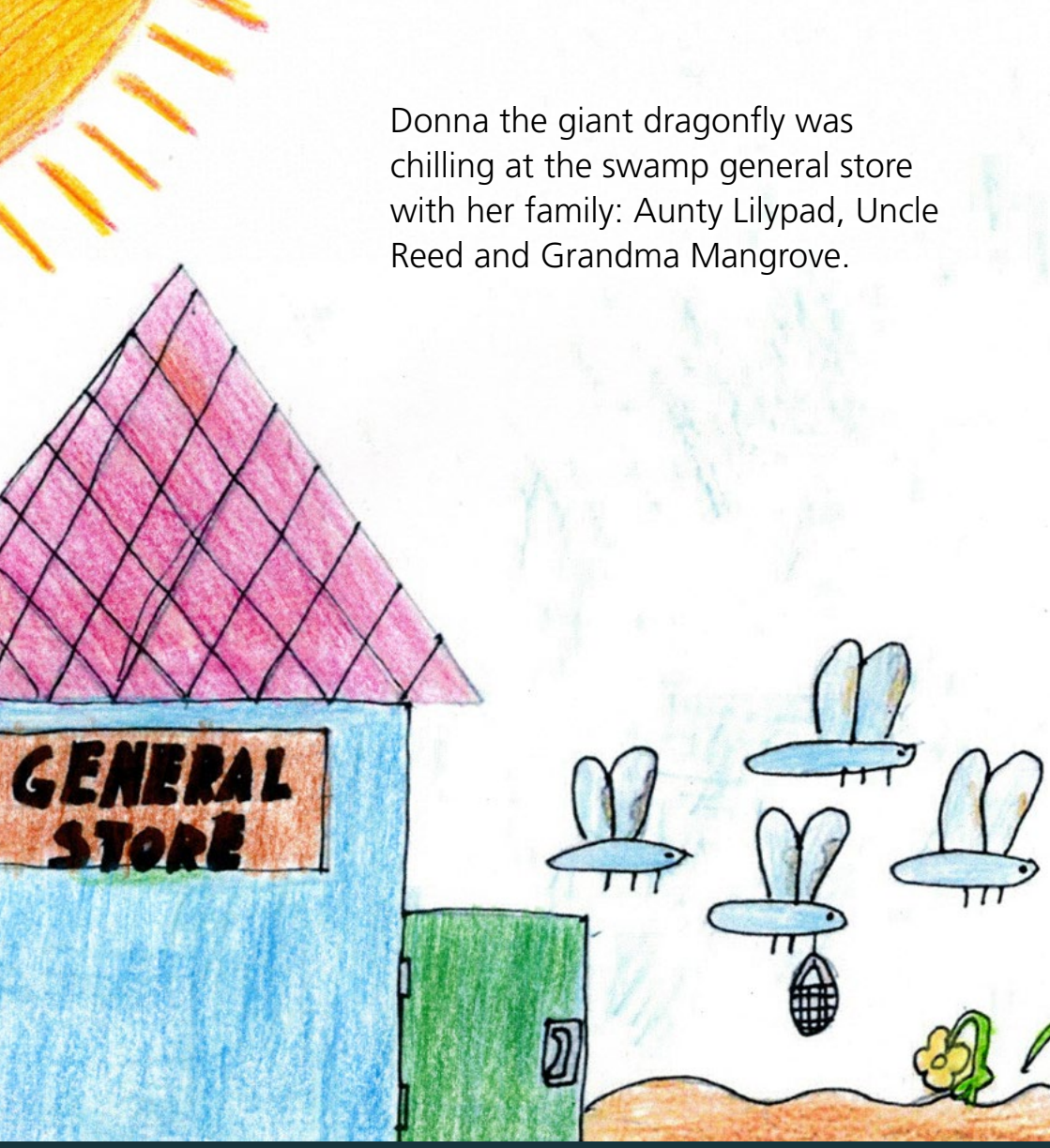
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Enviro-Stories is a PeeKdesigns initiative, peekdesigns.com.au

Manning Valley Anglican College. 2026. *Donna's Great Escape*. MidCoast Council, NSW.

Donna the giant dragonfly was chilling at the swamp general store with her family: Aunty Lilypad, Uncle Reed and Grandma Mangrove.



QUICK FACT

The giant dragonfly (*Petalura gigantea*) is one of the largest types of dragonflies. Giant dragonflies have widely spaced eyes, clear wings, and a thick brownish-black segmented body with light yellow markings along their back and sides.

Donna was buying sap-poles because the day had been boiling hot again. The waterholes were drying up, revealing the dry earth that had once been buried deep beneath litres of freshwater.



QUICK FACT

The giant dragonfly can be found along the east coast of New South Wales. They live in wetlands and swamps, heath and coastal forests.

Suddenly, Rosie the rainbow lorikeet came flying in.

"Fire! Fire! Fire!" she shouted, trembling with fear.

The warning pierced through the canopy and straight into Donna's ears. She quickly gathered her family close and held them near and dear.

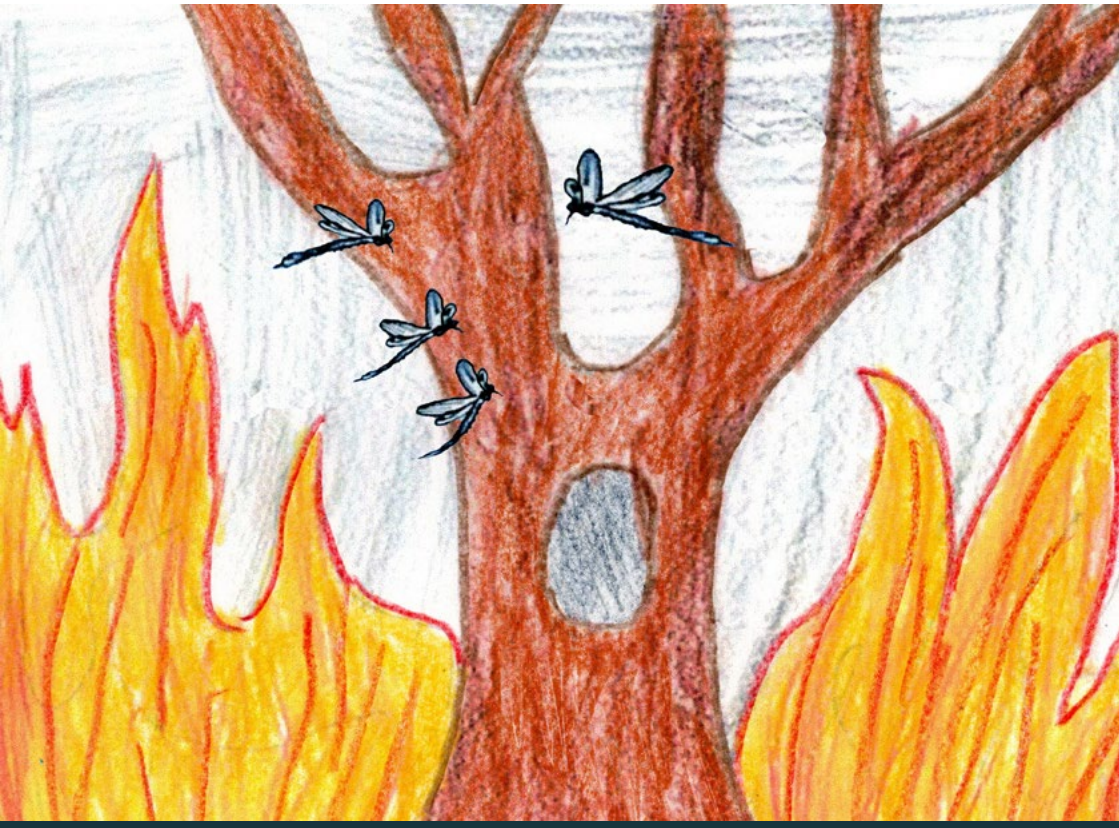


QUICK FACT

The giant dragonfly is a threatened species in New South Wales. They are considered endangered meaning they face a very high risk of dying out in the wild soon if not protected.

The fire kept getting bigger and bigger and BIGGER!

"The damage is too great, so we must leave our home again this year," Uncle Reed moaned.

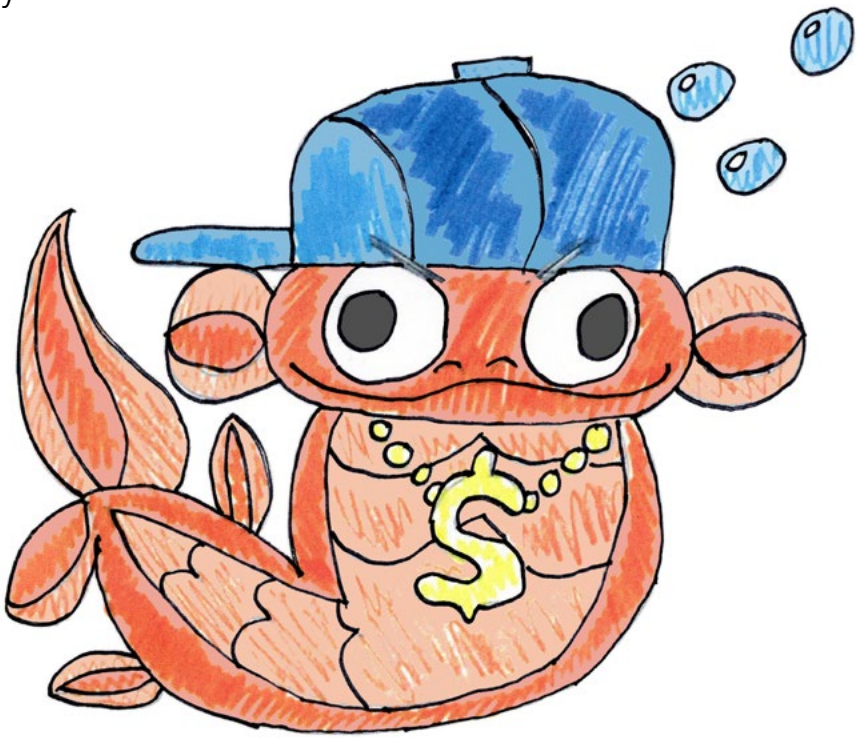


QUICK FACT

Bushfires are a major threat to the giant dragonfly as they can severely affect the coastal and montane peat swamps they need to breed.

Donna's family grabbed their belongings and launched into the air. As they travelled towards the river below, they found Fredrick the eshay fish. He thought he was the coolest fish in the river.

Donna's family politely asked if they could stay, but because of rising sea levels and saltier water, Fredrick replied, "Not today."



QUICK FACT

Climate change is a major threat to the giant dragonfly as it can cause higher temperatures, reduce groundwater, increase chances of fire, and cause more extreme weather events leading to erosion and degradation of habitat.

So off they went on their mighty flight, searching for somewhere to stay the night.

Just as Donna thought they were safe, Katy the killer kingfisher swooped down, causing a great big fright!

With glowing red eyes, she screeched, "Right in my tummy is where you can stay tonight!"



QUICK FACT

The giant dragonfly is an important part of the natural biodiversity. Biodiversity means the variety of animal and plant life in any environment.

Dodging and darting across the sky, Donna and her family weaved through the blades of grass, escaping Katy's evil grasp.

Donna's big family needed to rest. She spotted a nice green plant and thought, That will do!

Down they flew onto the soft green bed.

Then... SNAP!

The cosy bed suddenly clamped shut around Donna, leaving her trapped and fearing for her life.



QUICK FACT

Giant dragonflies are an essential link in the natural food web as they eat smaller insects and other invertebrates but, are prey for other species like Birds.

"Help! Help! Help!" Donna cried.

Her family pried and pushed until, finally, they freed her.



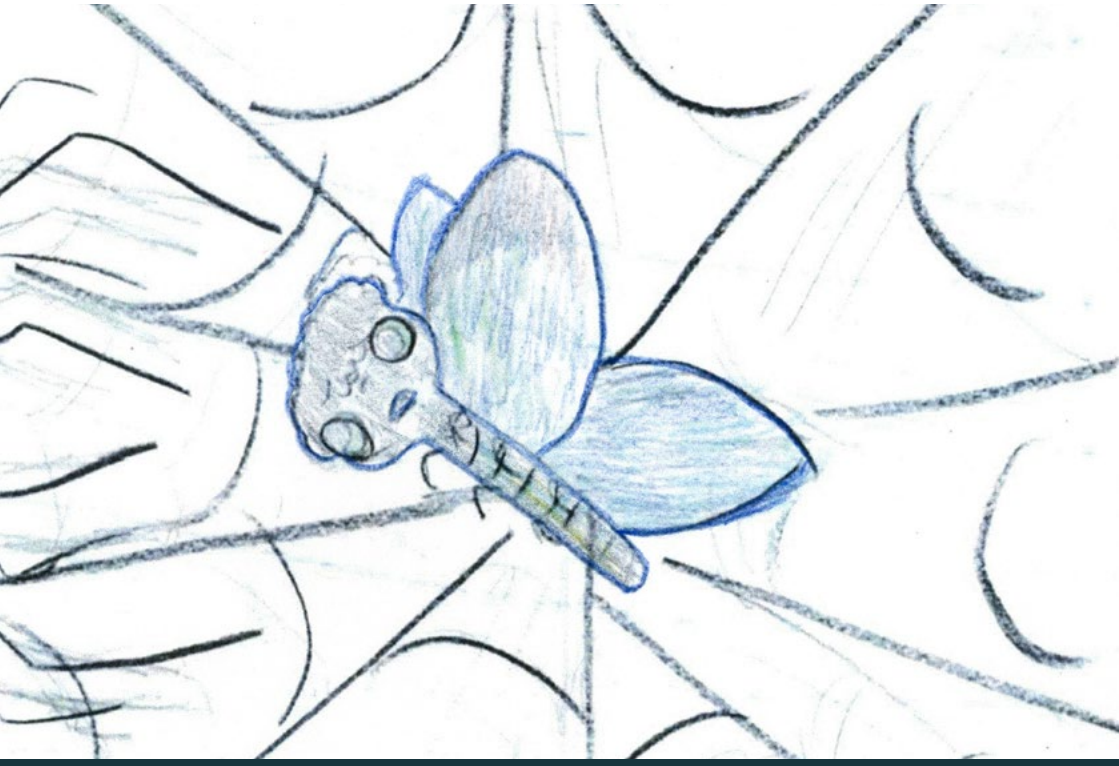
QUICK FACT

Female giant dragonflies grow to about 8–9.5 cm in length with a wingspan of 12.5 cm. They are larger than the males which grow to 6–7.5 cm in length with a wingspan of 11 cm.

Back on their great flight through the forest, Donna and her family skillfully dodged as much danger as they could.

Everyone stopped and turned around when Grandma Mangrove cried out. She had become tangled in Angry Andrew's giant spider web!

They saw a huge spider looming above Grandma Mangrove.



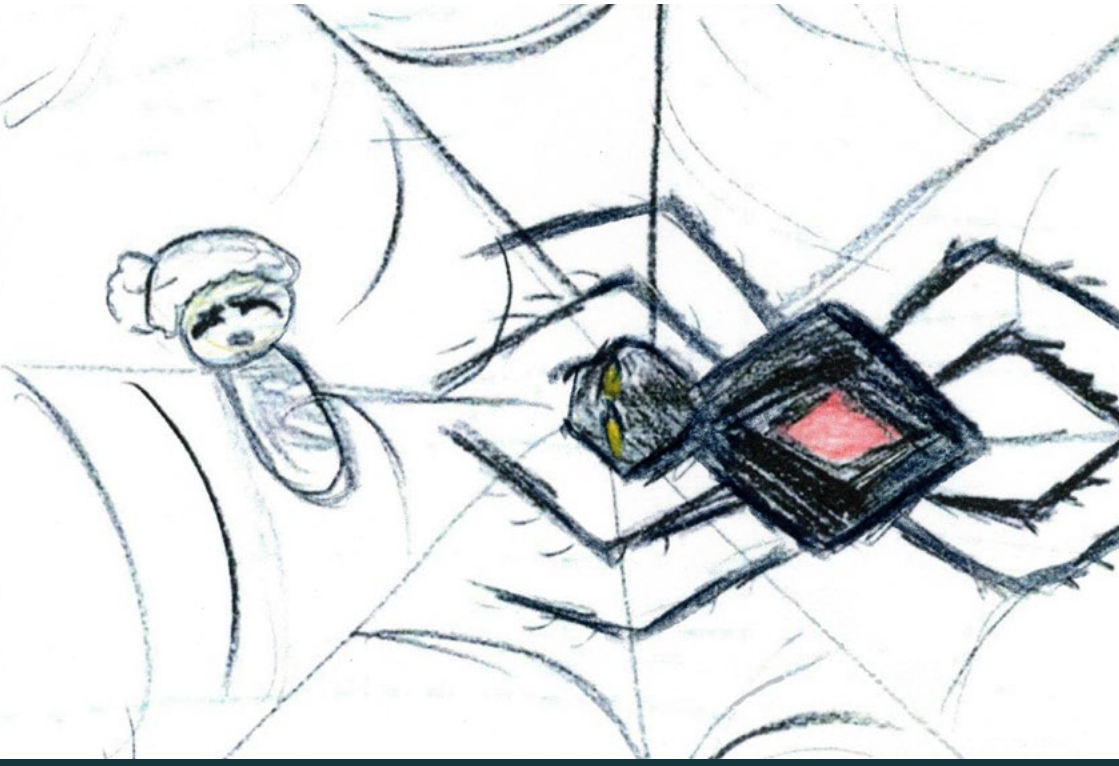
QUICK FACT

St Andrew's Cross spiders are highly active in local gardens during warmer months, building large orb webs with thick white zigzag bands.

The spider began wrapping Grandma Mangrove tightly in sticky silk. Then Uncle Reed came speeding in, brandishing his sword, and sliced the web apart.

"Get back here! I'm hungry!" the spider screamed.

The dragonflies escaped and flew away through the dense undergrowth.



QUICK FACT

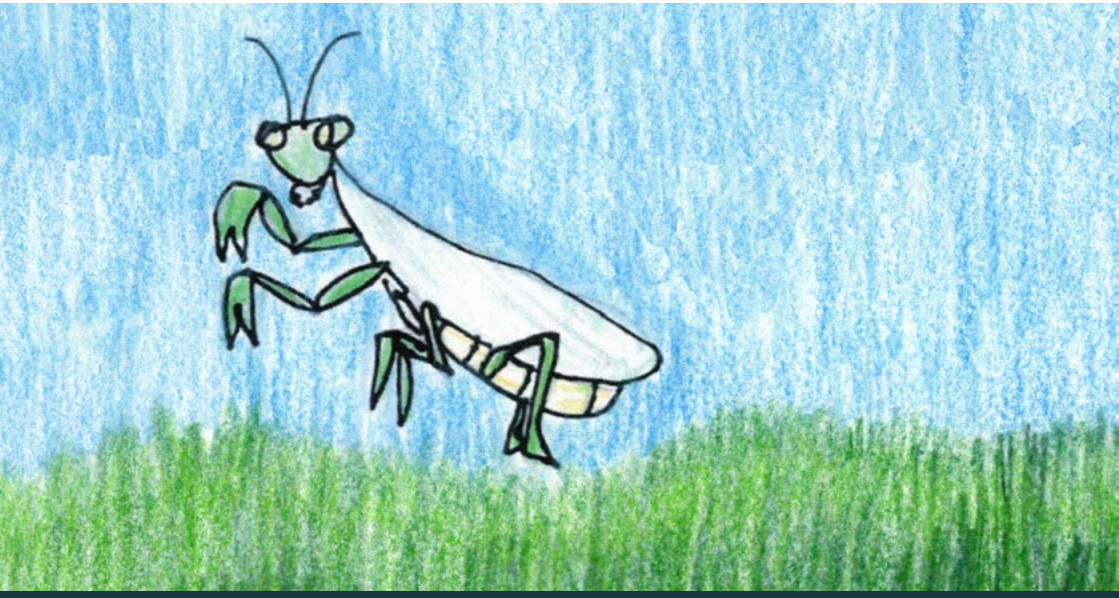
Female giant dragonflies lay eggs in ground-level vegetation like moss, moist litter, and soil where there is groundwater.

Just as Grandma Mangrove calmed down, they heard a rustle and shuffle from the bushes. A large shadow leapt forward.

A mantis, as green as grass, began yelling, "Hungry! Hungry! Hungry!"

It chased after Donna through the forest. Donna flew as fast as she could, but the mantis grabbed her tail and pulled her towards its hungry mouth.

Donna squirmed and squirmed, but she couldn't break free.



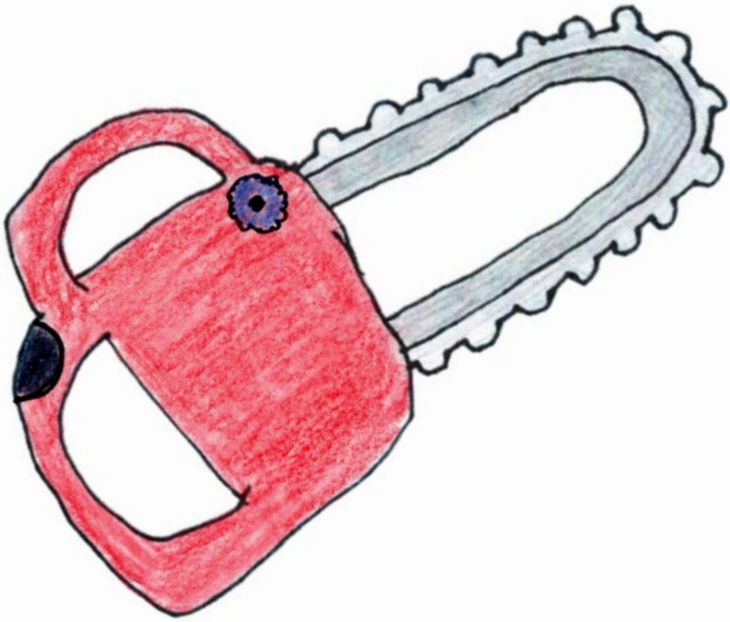
QUICK FACT

Giant dragonfly larvae dig long, branching burrows under the swamp. This stage is very slow-growing and can last from six to ten years.

The mantis opened its wide mouth and tugged Donna closer... and closer... and CLOSER!

She could feel her heart beating faster. She wriggled and squiggled, but still couldn't escape.

Suddenly, Grandma Mangrove appeared with her trusty chainsaw and chopped the mantis's legs away!



QUICK FACT

Adults emerge from late October and only live for one summer. They spend most of their time on low vegetation around the swamp, hunting flying insects.

“Run! Run! Run!” shouted Aunty Lilypad.

They flew deep into the undergrowth once more, hoping to find freshwater for their thirsty family. The fires had stretched far and wide, and the salty, rising tide was certainly no place to hide.



QUICK FACT

You can help giant dragonflies by controlling weeds on your property, planting native plants in your garden, and containing domestic animals at night.

Together, they searched and searched until they finally discovered a moist hollow to rest inside.

"C'mon, c'mon, get inside. We'll stay here tonight!" Grandma Mangrove sighed. "Hopefully, this will keep us safe and, one day, become our home."



QUICK FACT

Other ways to help giant dragonflies is to walk or drive only on designated tracks in bushland and swamp areas, keep livestock and other domestic animals out of wetland areas, and to not dump garden waste in these natural areas.

Donna's Great Escape is a humorous story that explores the very real climate risks that face our local region.

These particularly include increasing extreme heat days, bushfires, rising sea levels and saline intrusion.

The story also reveals the common predators of the giant dragonfly, such as birds, mantis and spiders.





ENVIRO stories



Manning Valley Anglican College, Year Y7 - Y9 2026

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