

# E-book Code: REAU1037



10+ years

Reading With Purpose



## If Animals Could Talk

Animal-themed reading and comprehension activities with a focus on consolidating word skills, writing strategies and reflection.



By Margaret Etherton



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## Rationale

The idiosyncrasies of animal behaviour, their habitats and characteristics are not always familiar to students. Many animals have endangered status and this situation may be directly or indirectly a result of human behaviour and practices. Their status may be extinct, endangered, critically endangered or at risk. Students are often unaware of what is being done and what can be done to help them. This book endeavours to educate students on some well-known, and less common animals, in a stimulating and quirky way. The plight of ten animals is told from the animal's point of view and each story has a twist in the telling. The migratory journey of a short-tailed shearwater is told in the form of a flight schedule, the survival of an Emperor penguin chick is conveyed in a letter to its dad, and the activities of a lion king are explained in a job description.

Each animal story is followed by a range of vocabulary, comprehension and writing activities. There is an emphasis on exploring the issues which threaten animal survival. The activities encourage students to think beyond application, knowledge and understanding to analysing, creating, synthesising and evaluating information.

Animal-themed extension tasks are included which involve drawing or design tasks, posters and discovery activities. The writing tasks include creative, factual, discussion, persuasive, letter writing and report writing text types.

This book has been designed for use in the upper primary school classroom, however, it could equally be used as a homeschooler resource.

## Objectives

- To foster greater understanding of animal behaviours, habitats and survival techniques;
- To expand environmental, biological and animal vocabulary;
- To provide a range of written text types;
- To develop skills in critical thinking, analysis and comprehension;
- To foster an understanding of the impact of human behaviour and development of the lives of native animals in different parts of the world.

## Website References

All websites listed in the **Reading With Purpose** series are linked from the Ready-Ed website listed below. This saves the teacher and/or student from typing in the addresses each time. External websites referred to in this book will be updated through the Ready-Ed site below should they disappear or modify their address after publication. Bookmark this site for ease of use:



**[www.readyed.com.au/urls/readers](http://www.readyed.com.au/urls/readers)**

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# If Only I Could Fly

I wish that I could fly. If I could fly I wouldn't be in the trouble I am in today. You might suppose that it's only a spot of bother, but actually for me it's my whole survival that's at stake; not only my survival but also that of my whole species. But perhaps I should start at the beginning ...

\* \* \* \* \*

I am a Lord Howe Island phasmid, commonly called a flightless stick insect, and sometimes called the land lobster because of my size. My family have inhabited a quiet peaceful part of the planet Earth for millions of years. "Have we ever been able to fly?" you ask. And my answer has to be no. It's true we have been a flightless species as long as that. Our resemblance to sticks has always protected us from predators and our enemies. That is, until the arrival of some new species, *Homo sapiens*, better known as humans, and their hungry friend, *Rattus rattus* – the rat!

\* \* \* \* \*

We lived in peace on the islands around Lord Howe where we hid in rocks and crevices. We only came out at night to feed and to mate. It was a happy existence for my ancestors for generations, until one fateful day in 1918 when a boat was shipwrecked off the coast and the dreaded rats escaped to one of our islands. The rest is history. We had no defences against these terrible predators. Gradually they ate us – one by one – on one island after

another. And because we couldn't fly we couldn't escape.

\* \* \* \* \*

For eighty years everyone thought that we were extinct or "dead as a dodo" as some people say. They gave up hope of ever finding our species alive again. And we were unique. An insect that cannot fly is almost a contradiction in terms, wouldn't you say? We are a pretty amazing species if I do say so myself!

\* \* \* \* \*

My family hit rock bottom. Until one day, some adventurous rock-climbing scientists scaled our rock called Ball's Pyramid. They climbed in the middle of the night and found me perched on a tiny bush growing out of the rock face on the steep-sided pyramid.





# If Only I Could Fly

\* \* \* \* \*

You have never heard such excitement when those men and women discovered two more specimens. Very carefully they placed us back on the cliff face. They knew that because they had found three of us, with at least one male and one female, that we would survive.

\* \* \* \* \*

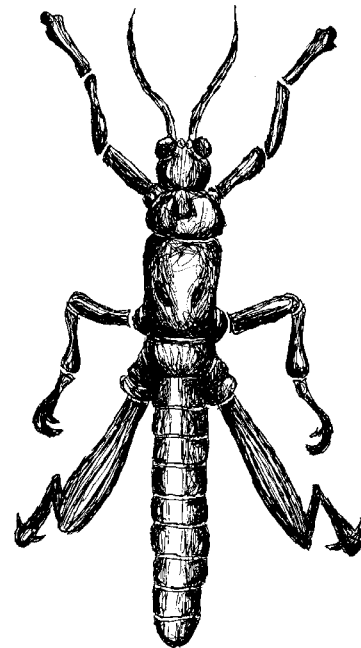
That's why I say "if only I could fly". There are not many flightless insects in the world and our chances of survival are slim even though we try to keep pretty much to ourselves. On second thoughts, I am amazing the way I am: I am quite happy looking like a stick, living on my pyramid mountain and minding my own business. I just hope we stay this way forever!

\* \* \* \* \*



## More Facts About Phasmids

- The Lord Howe Island phasmid is 15 centimetres long, which is quite long for an insect.
- More samples of the Lord Howe Island phasmid have been found since it was rediscovered in 2001 and scientists are planning a breeding program.
- The Norfolk Island phasmid, like other phasmids, eats leaves.
- The scientific name for the Lord Howe Island phasmid is *Dryococelus australis*. The order from which they come, *Phasmatodea*, means "like a ghost".





# Word Study

## Expressions

Write these expressions in your own words:

As dead as a dodo

I hit rock bottom

My chances of survival are slim

On second thoughts

Minding my own business

## Synonyms

Find the words in the text which mean the same as:

Not able to fly

Being the only one of its kind

A long narrow opening or crack

Opposition between two conflicting ideas

An animal which eats another animal for food

## Phasmid Find-a-Word

Find each of the following words.

•Ancestors

•Crevices

•Flightless

•Protection

•Predator

•Pyramid

•Species

•Survival

•Shipwreck

•Unique

D S N S S E L T H G I L F  
 A H S C O W T E E U Q N S  
 D I S T R A S E Y F S D C  
 O P R U F E W J C M P D T  
 J W O P E P V D T H E Z F  
 F R T M A O P I R B C T U  
 V E S P R O T E C T I O N  
 H C E V Y J R J T E E G I  
 K K C T Z R N A R F S W Q  
 E X N R O T A D E R P T U  
 J M A R E M H M Y P S B E  
 X C J M F S L Y I F H C D  
 S U R V I V A L M D Y T B

## Spelling

Some words end in **-or** and others end in **-er**.

Circle the correct spelling for the following words:

● survivor/ survivor

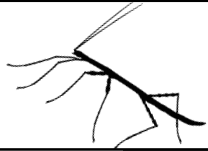
● ancestor/ancestor

● teachor/teacher

● developor/developer

● exploror/explorer

● creator/creator



# Comprehension

## Understanding the Text

What caused the phasmid to die out?

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How do you think this creature managed to survive?

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Why was it so hard for the scientists to find the Lord Howe Island phasmid?

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Imagine you found a species of insect which scientists had thought to be extinct.  
How would you feel? What would you do?

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## Animal Fun

Write down the advantages of being able to fly.

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A way of blending in with the surrounding environment is called **CAMOUFLAGE**.

What other animals use camouflage?

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Draw an insect which you think will survive in the future.

- How many legs does it need?
- Can it fly?
- What special features help it to survive?

## Creative Writing

On a piece of paper or using a computer, write a story about another animal which is close to extinction. Pretend you are the animal at risk.

E.g. If Only I Could Run Faster... *Asian Elephant*,  
If Only I Wasn't the Right Whale to Catch... *Southern Right Whale*.

- What is something good about you?
- What are the dangers you have to face?
- What features make you vulnerable?
- What other animals threaten you? How?
- Where do you live?

### HINT:



For a list of endangered species see the Redlist at:  
► [www.redlist.org](http://www.redlist.org)



# Reflection

## □ Reflection on Animal Survival

Why do you think the word *Phasmatodea* means “like a ghost”?

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The Lord Howe Island phasmid was close to extinction when the brave explorers found three living insects on Ball’s Pyramid.

What does it mean to be extinct? Write the meaning of extinct in your own words:

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## □ Definitions

The World Conservation Union, which records the animals that are in danger, defines these words for us:

<b>Extinction :</b>	An animal is <b>extinct</b> when “there is no reasonable doubt that the last individual has died”.
<b>Critically Endangered:</b>	An animal is <b>critically endangered</b> when it is “facing an <b>extremely</b> high risk of extinction in the wild”.
<b>Endangered:</b>	An animal is <b>endangered</b> when it is “facing a <b>very high</b> risk of extinction in the wild”.
<b>Vulnerable:</b>	An animal is <b>vulnerable</b> it is “facing a <b>high</b> risk of extinction in the wild”.

Do you think the phasmid is *critically endangered*, *endangered* or only *vulnerable*?

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A specimen is an individual animal of the species.

Why do you need at least two specimens to prove that a particular species is not extinct?

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Besides the dodo, what other animals, birds, or insects do you know of that are extinct?

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## □ Formal Writing

On a piece of paper or using the computer, write a letter to a government department or company asking for help to protect an animal such as the Lord Howe Island phasmid. Include suggestions on ways to save it, such as starting a breeding program. You can begin your letter like this:

Dear Sir/ Madam,

I am writing to you in regards to the plight of one of Australia’s most wonderful animals, the flightless stick insect from Lord Howe Island. Only a few specimens of this species are known to exist in the whole world so it is in extreme danger of becoming extinct. Let me tell you about how terrific this animal is ...