Bush Buddies

Volume 2

BUSH HERITAGE
AUSTRALIA

Ask an Expert

Do you have nature questions that you'd like answered by our team of ecologists and other experts? Send them to communications@bushheritage.org.au or better still, make a video question and tag us on one of our social media channels. We have answers!

Sylvie asked:

Can you please tell me which lizards use camouflage and are poisonous?

***Ecologist Alana De Laive**:*
That's a really good question. Most lizards are totally harmless to us humans. But there are a couple of species that can produce toxic poison from venom glands in their jaws. They are the Gila Monster and the Mexican Beaded Lizard, and they're both found in North America.

As for camouflaging, there are lots of lizards that use camouflage and many of them are found here in Australia. We have Earless Dragons, which are tiny round little lizards that are able to camouflage in really well with their rocky surroundings by looking a bit like a pebble.

But I think the masters of camouflage are the Leaf-tailed Geckos. They have amazing colours, patterns and textures that help them camouflage in with the trees and mossy rocks. They also have spiny fringes that break up their body outline and flattened bodies so they don't cast much of a shadow to give them away. Very cool lizards.

Word search

Our Carnarvon Reserve in Central Queensland is home to around 170 different animal species. But finding them can be a challenge. Are you any good at finding animals?

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

Emu
Frog
Koala
Quoll
Glider
Goanna
Python
Redgum
Turtle
Dunnart
Wallaby
Brigalow
Cockatoo
Bluegrass
Planigale

Dirt track detectives

We need to know which animals are on our reserves so we can look after them. But some are very hard to find!

Some animals only come out at night and others like to hide. One of the ways we can see which animals are around is looking for footprints.

Have you ever noticed how clear your footprints can be at the beach? Sand is great for capturing footprints. So on reserves where we have sandy tracks, we set up several sites to be swept clear and then monitored for new footprints.

Jessica Stingemore manages our Charles Darwin Reserve in WA, and has a big job ahead of her sweeping all the sandpad monitoring sites. But the fun part is trying to figure out which animals made which footprints.

Would you like to have a go at playing detective?

Can you figure out which animals made these footprints?

You'll need to think carefully about the foot shape and weight of each animal. Where does each live? Do they have tails that drag? How do they walk? Do they have hard hooves, soft paws, claws or toes?

Q.1

Which animal made these unusual tracks that are all in a straight line?

Dingo
Malleefowl
Kangaroo or wallaby
Thorny Devil

Q.2

Which animal has left this huge three-toed footprint in the sand?

Emu
Wombat
Cassowary
Koala

Dirt track detectives

Q.3

Who left these paw prints behind?

Platypus
Honey Possum
Goanna
Dingo

Q.4

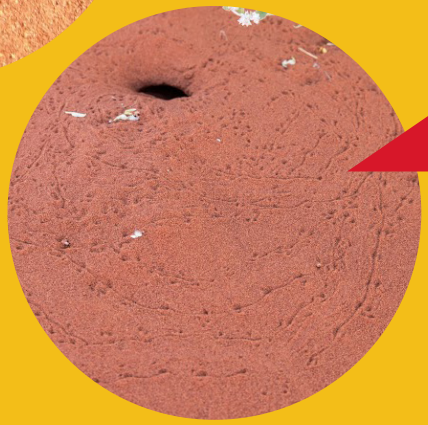
Mmm. What has left this swirling trail?

Snake
Bearded Dragon
Malleefowl
Goanna

Q.5

Look at these tiny tracks. Which animal has waddled through? There's almost no space between each print, which suggests it may have moved slow.

Goanna
Thorny Devil
Dunnart
Brolga



Q.6

Something has left tiny little tracks around its desert home. What do you think it was?

Lizard
Spider
Budgerigar
Bearded Dragon

Answers: Q.1 Malleefowl. Q.2 Emu. Q.3 Dingo. Q.4 Snake. Q.5 Thorny Devil. Q.6 Spider.

Thorny Devils

(Moloch horridus)

The Thorny Devil is marred with a wicked common name, and its Latin species name *horridus* doesn't seem much better. In reality, it's a slow-moving ant-eater, and *horridus* means bristly, referring to the reptile's erect stance!

The Thorny Devil is a **diurnal** (day-active) reptile reaching 20cm in length. It's covered in thorny spines and sports a **'pretend' head** on the back of its neck, which is thought to warn off predators.

Devils can change colour to blend into their surrounds, appearing mostly grey, red, orange or yellow.

Their gait is also remarkable: tail lifted, they walk along with **slow, jerky movements** backwards and forwards. This might be a defence mechanism to confuse predators when they're spotted in the open.

How do these lizards survive in water-parched arid Australia? During the night dew condenses on their bodies, and in the morning they brush up against dew-covered grass. Then the hygroscopic (moisture-attracting) grooves between their scales channel this water to their mouths! The same process occurs when it rains.

Essentially, capillary action allows the lizard to suck water from all over its body – an amazing adaptation! They're also thought to bury themselves in sand, in extreme circumstances, to draw moisture from it.

The species holds cultural importance for many Aboriginal groups – for example, the Anmatyerre/Alyawarr people of the Northern Territory have a dreaming story surrounding the species.

Where do Thorny Devils live?

Their range covers most of arid Australia – large parts of Western Australia, the southern half of the Northern Territory, South Australia and western Queensland. They live in dry sand country, spinifex grasslands and scrub.

It may be a well-known species, but scientists are still somewhat unsure about its distribution and population size. The International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) has graded it as 'Of least concern' on its Red List.

Thorny Devil behaviour

Head-bobbing and **leg-waving** is how a male Thorny Devil attracts a mate. Courtship complete, the female then lays 3 to 10 eggs in a chamber burrowed 30cm deep in the soil. Depending on the temperature, the eggs hatch after three to four months. Young start eating almost immediately.

Thorny Devils eat ants. In the morning and late afternoon they locate a trail and lap them up with their short, sticky tongues. In one day an individual can eat thousands of ants! This diet seems to suit them just fine: they can live to be **20 years old** in the wild.

A face that only a mother could love. This Thorny Devil was found at Bon Bon Station.
Photo Gillian Carter.

They can be very well camouflaged.
Photo Leanne Hales at Eurardy Reserve, WA.

Threats to Thorny Devils

Natural predators include Goannas and **predatory birds** such as the Brown Falcon. Being entirely reliant on ant populations, the Thorny Devil is vulnerable to habitat loss and disturbance.

Being ectotherms (which get their body heat from external sources) they're at risk of being run over while basking on warm roads.

What's Bush Heritage doing?

Thorny Devils are found on our Charles Darwin, Hamelin and Eurardy reserves in Western Australia, as well as Cravens Peak and Ethabuka in Queensland.

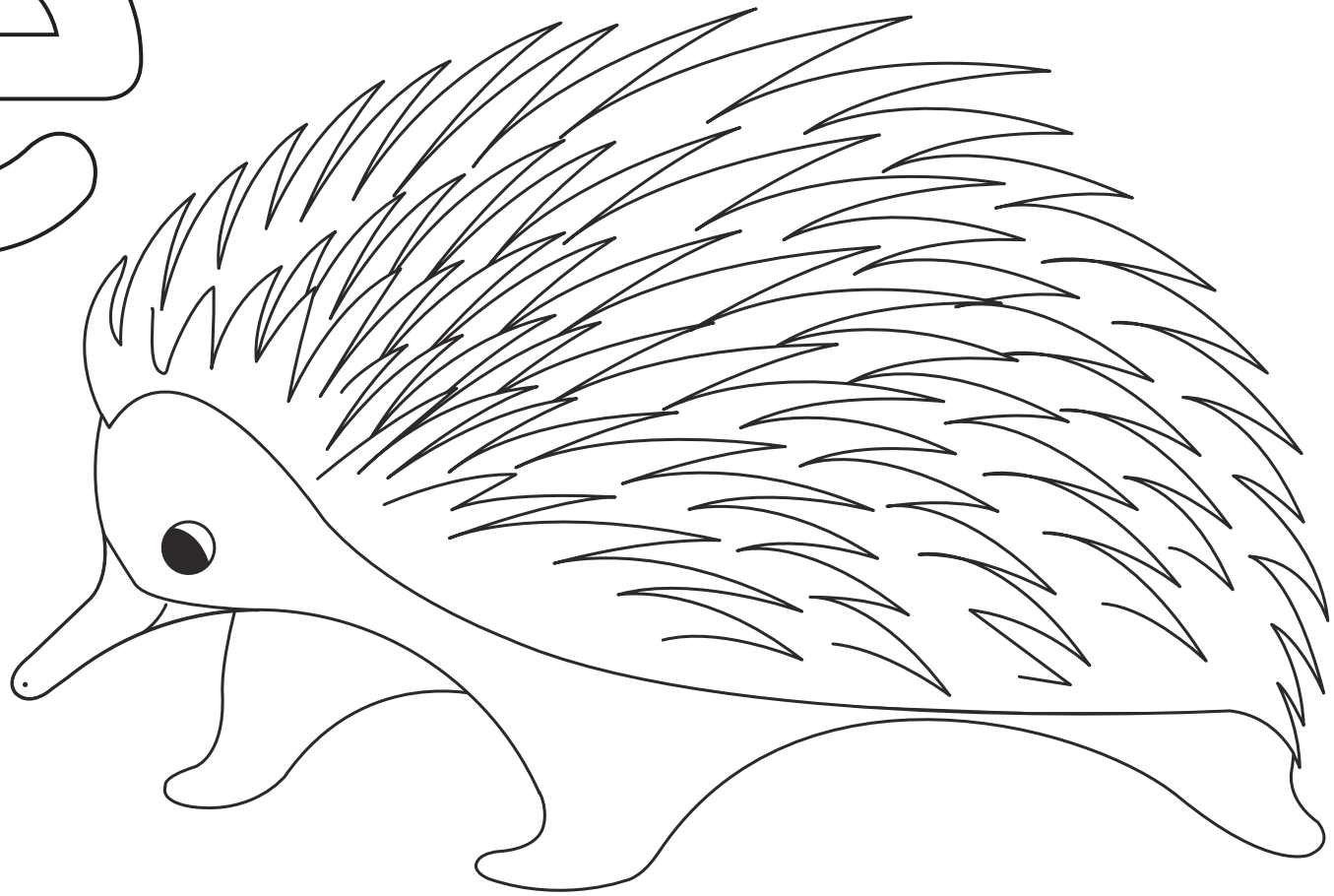
They're also found in the Birriliburu Indigenous Protected Area where we partner with the Martu people – Traditional Owners of this country – to support important work such as reinstating traditional fire patterns, Bilby monitoring and conducting baseline fauna surveys.

The Thorny Devil looks frightening up close. Photo Ben Parkhurst.

Many of our staff love Thorny Devils. Photo Nella Lithgow.

Ee

is for
Echidna



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Jj

is for

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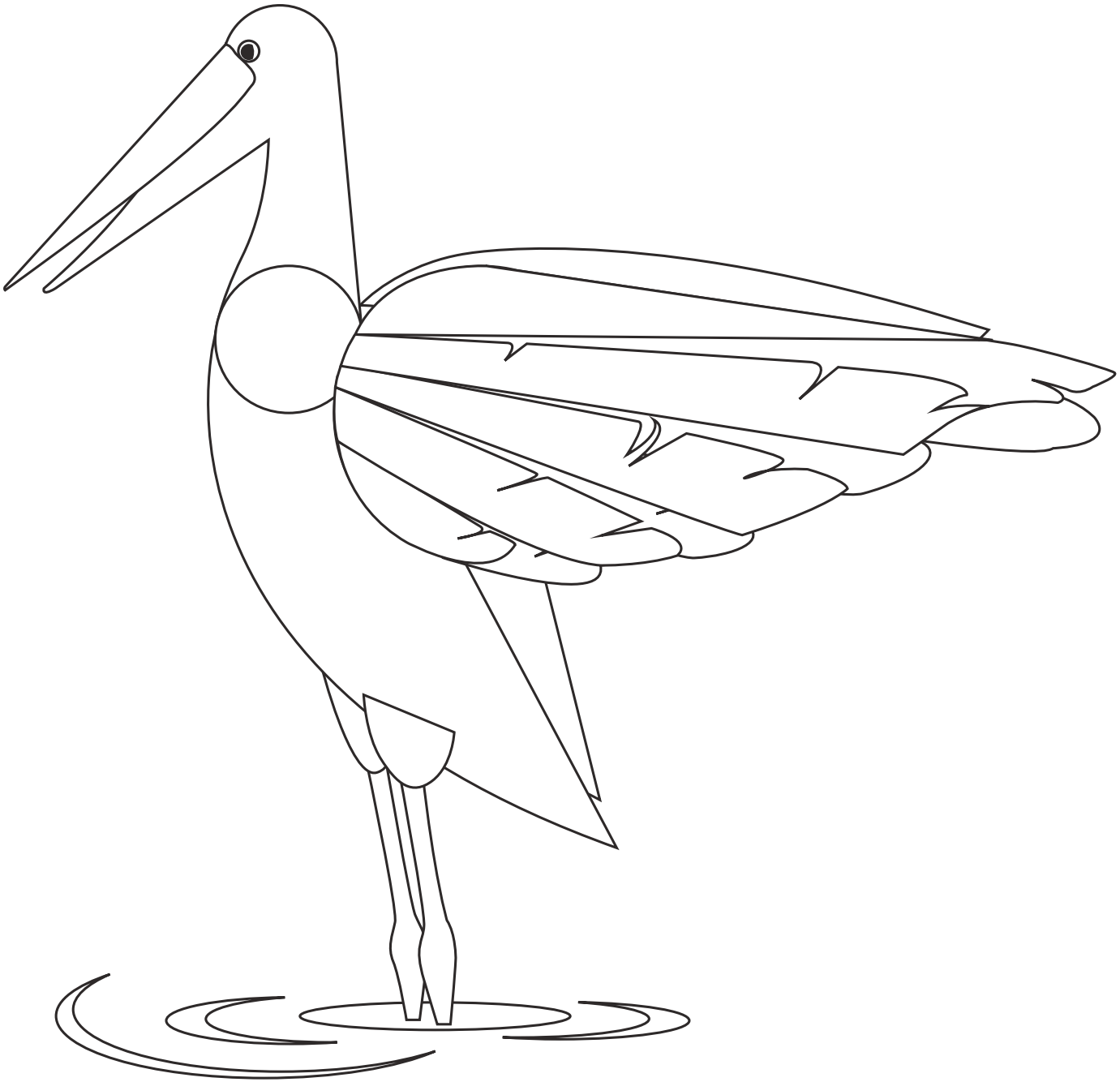

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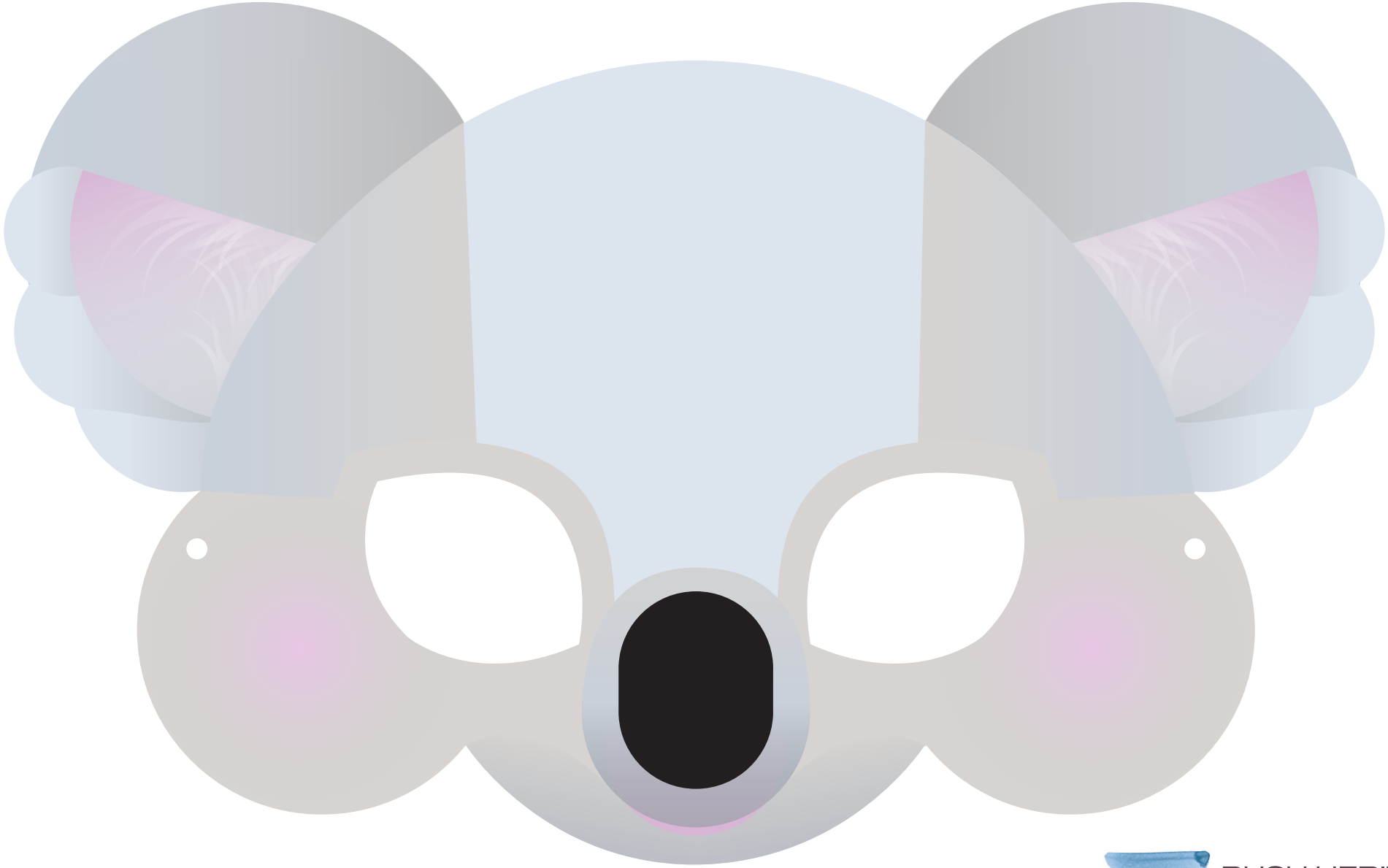
Dressing up is lots of fun and it really gets you thinking. Do you know how Koalas behave?

What are some of the problems they face?
And what are some things they do that people can't do?

Print off and cut out this face mask. You can attach it with some elastic or glue it to an icy-pole stick. Then take some time out to be a Koala!



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