

AUSTRALIAN BIRDS TEACHERS NOTES

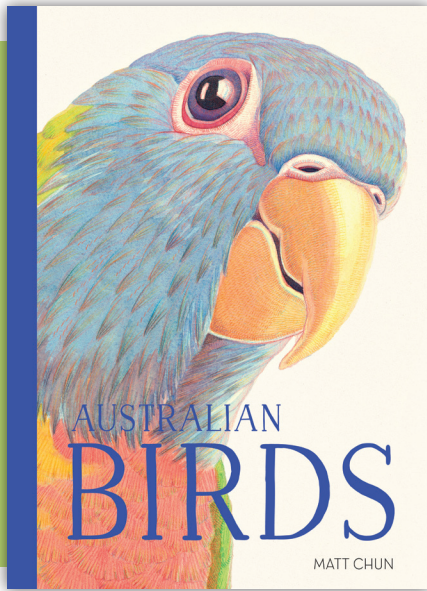
Written by Matt Chun
Published by Hardie Grant Egmont in October 2018

SYNOPSIS

It took millions of years of isolation and a diverse range of habitats for Australian birds to evolve the way they did. The result is many of the world's most striking and beautiful birds, including some that are stranger than fiction.

In *Australian Birds*, acclaimed artist Matt Chun showcases sixteen remarkable species that have captured the imagination of the world. From the iconic cockatoo to the endangered cassowary, *Australian Birds* has been carefully curated to inform and entrance readers of all ages.





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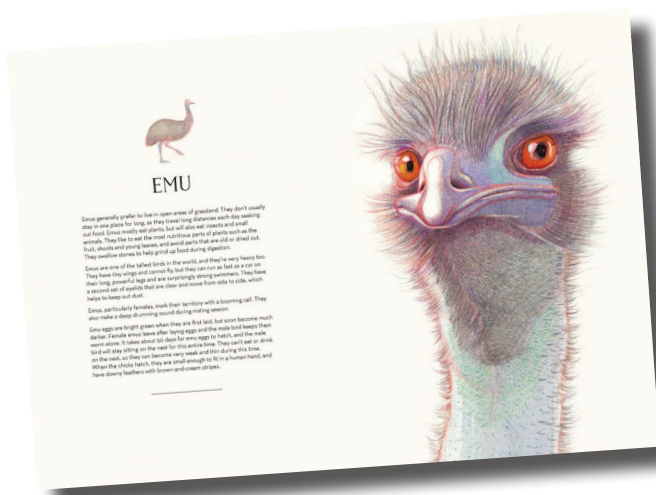
ABOUT THE AUTHOR

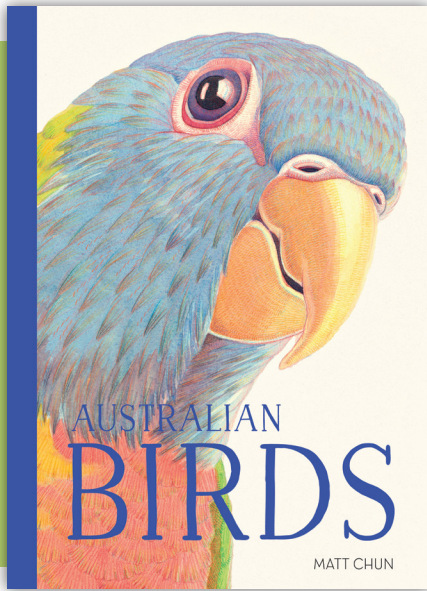
Matt Chun is an artist and writer working from his studio in a small fishing village on Yuin Country, on Australia's east coast.

Through mixed-media drawing and installation, Matt documents landscape, portrait and intimate travelogue subjects. He is currently working towards three solo exhibitions: May Space in Waterloo, 107 Projects in Redfern and Pon Ding Space in Taipei. As a writer, Matt explores Australian visual culture and national identity, most recently for Meanjin Quarterly and Runway Experimental Australian Art.



Since 2016, Matt has undertaken several tenures as artist in residence, including at Canberra's Nishi Gallery, Casula Powerhouse Arts Centre in Western Sydney and in Taipei at both Guandu International Art Festival and Bamboo Curtain Studio, the latter as an Australia Council Grant recipient.





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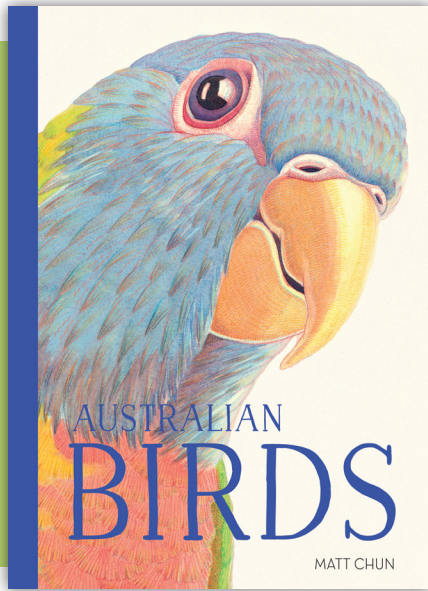
THEMES

Australian Birds is an exquisitely illustrated nonfiction book that has broad appeal. The simplicity of the text and brightness of the illustrations make it an excellent book for younger readers who are curious about the world they live in and the animals they share it with. The detail of the illustrations, combined with the unique facts presented about each bird, make it worthy of study by older readers as well. The book is a great way to initiate a number of conversations about wildlife, Australia, evolution and conservation.

There are many ways to engage with this book, and the following themes make a good entry point for discussion:

- Australian birds
- evolution
- conservation
- climate
- bird families
- survival





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WRITING STYLE

This is a nonfiction book, where the words on each page match the accompanying illustration. They are not presented as random facts, but instead make up a paragraph that serves as an introduction to the bird in question, offering some insight into the unique evolutionary traits of that bird, their family dynamics and breeding habits, and their basic survival needs and instincts.

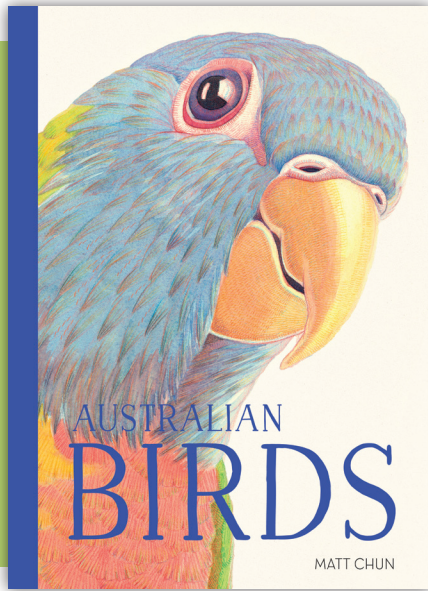
The prose is straightforward, but not overly simplistic; it will pique the curiosity of young readers and offer new information to older readers already familiar with some of the birds. More broadly, the text invites the reader to be curious and thoughtful as they observe the world around them, providing a model for documenting what they see in the world and recognising the importance of coexisting with our feathered friends.

ILLUSTRATION STYLE

Matt Chun's illustrations are wonderfully vivid, using bright colour and detailed line work to capture the spark of life in each bird. The long, sharp beak of the magpie juts across the page into the text, while the colour in the eye draws attention to the naturally inquisitive gaze of the bird. It is a strong picture, and instantly recognisable, meaning that the image (as with all the images in the book) can be used almost as a field guide for students to identify birds in their local area.

Chun's illustrations draw attention to the significant features of each bird – the colour, the severity and direction of the gaze, the strength of the beak and the movement in the feathers. They capture vulnerability, in the case of the wrens and robins, which are smaller on the page, and represented in realistic pastels, as well as dominance, as in the image of the wedge-tailed eagle, which juts similarly across the page to the magpie pictured earlier in the book. The tilt of the head gives the reader some insight into the personality of each bird – is it curious? Is it a hunter?

Our attention is drawn to the beak in each image, which invites questions around eating habits – the large swollen beak of the pelican, for example, dominates the picture and showcases the bird's ability to



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catch and hold onto the slippery fish they eat, while the strong, pointed beak of the kookaburra indicates the brute, swift force it uses to catch its prey.

There is also a strong emotion to the images, which suggests empathy towards the subjects. It is clearly a work of conservation, which will encourage readers to not only recognise the birds around them, but to find them beautiful, curious and intelligent – and worthy of looking after.

Despite the simplicity of each image – the pictures are large and clear, easily understood by young readers or those unfamiliar with some or all of the birds – there is a complexity that encourages thought and engagement, and asks the reader to reflect on the relationship between the words and the images, rather than allowing a shallow reading of one or the other.

The images, paired with the text, suggest deep thoughtfulness, and set a tone of quiet contemplation, which is a remarkable starting point for conversations about our natural world.

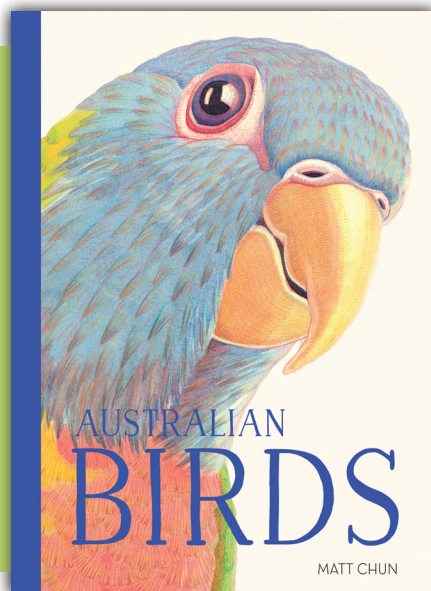
STUDY NOTES

1. Read the book closely and think about where each of the birds live, what they use to build their nest, what they eat, how they move and the way they look after their young.

Using this information, what threats do you think these birds face? Is there anything that would be more of a threat to some of the birds than others? Why?

2. This collection is simply named *Australian Birds*. Why do you think the illustrator has chosen Australian birds to work with specifically?

Looking at the facts and the illustrations, can you identify anything that all (or some) of the birds have in common? How could you group these birds further? Why might it be helpful or important to be able to categorise birds into different groups?



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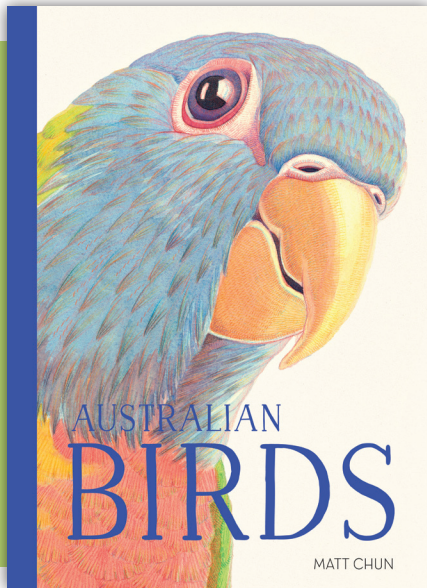
3. Look closely at the images, specifically at the beaks. Can you tell (without checking the accompanying text) what each bird might eat based on their beak? Make a list of food that you think each bird might eat, and how their beak would help them hunt/find/catch it. Check the text – how many did you get right?
4. Colour is central to the illustrations, which are lively and vibrant. Are there any birds that are more colourful up close than they seem from a distance? Are birds colourful just so they look nice in pictures? What is significant about colour for each of the birds? What does it tell us about them? Are all Australian birds colourful in this way?
5. Birds have family groups that are in some ways similar to human families and in some ways different. Do any of the birds in the book live in groups or families that are similar to your own? In what ways are birds different? When you think about birds having children, parents, families and friends, does it make you understand them more? How much attention did you pay to the birds around you before reading the book? How much attention will you pay to them now?

ACTIVITIES

1. One of the reasons that Australia has such a wide variety of birds is the diversity of the landscape. Trace a map of Australia and map out where each bird in the book lives. Choose one of the birds and closely research the places they live. Draw a detailed map of this location – what does it look like? What protection does it offer? What other kinds of animals live there?
2. Be a bird detective. Do you recognise any of the birds in the book? Choose a bird that you've seen around your local area and try to find it out in the wild. Spend some time watching your bird (this will take time, and patience!).

Keep a diary of your time spent birdwatching. What time is it? What is the weather like? What is the bird doing? What do you notice about their colour or behaviour? Does anything surprising happen? What other types of birds are around and how do they interact with each other?

Use the details you've noticed to write a short story about your bird. You could write the story as yourself, as someone you saw during your outing, or as the bird itself. Take some photos or draw your own illustrations to accompany your story.



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3. Illustrations are used to identify the birds in the book, but also to give the birds personality and character, which helps build empathy between the reader and the bird. Talk about how illustrations can be used to create an emotional tone and to raise awareness of a particular subject.

Design a postcard that you could use in a campaign to raise awareness about one of the birds in the book. Draw your own illustrations for the front of the card using some of the detail and colour techniques you see in Chun's illustrations. Write your own paragraph for the back – try to think about sharing a fact that readers might not already know that might make them see the bird in a new light.

4. Using your map, do some more detailed research of your chosen bird's habitat. This time, look beyond the natural world. What kind of buildings, roads or other developments are nearby? How close are these being built to the bird's home? Add these developments to your original map.

Write a short paragraph that outlines the way humans have changed the natural landscape, exploring the way development or human interaction might be a threat to the birds. Come up with a list of five ways people in the area could protect the birds they're living alongside. What can people do to protect these animals? Why should they?

