

c7 - (2nd Prize)
"How high you jump depends on how hard you try."

Which animals and birds in another part of the Empire would you like to see? Give your reason.

I am going to write about Australian animals and birds for it seems to me that they are unique and very different from those in any other part of the world. Pouched animals (marsupials) are rarely found anywhere else. They belong to a very ancient order of mammals which millions of years ago lived all over the globe. Yet as time went on higher forms of animals evolved and these primitive creatures died out — outstripped in the race of life by stronger, fiercer, more intelligent beasts. During this time Australia became separated from the mainland before the newer types of animals could gain a foothold there and has for millions of years been cut off and so there has been no passage of animals from the other land masses. So, protected by the ring of water the marsupials have lived (un)molested and having few foes to fear have not altered during the passing years as much as animals in other countries.

Species have evolved and disappeared in other lands while Australia remained apart.

First of all I should like to see the Duck-billed Platypus for its name has always fascinated me. It is a strange mixture of many animals. It lays eggs like a turtle but suckles its young like a cat; has horny pads for teeth and a bill like a duck; its front

feet are webbed and both back and front feet ~~at~~ have claws. It lives in a burrow in the river bank and if I saw one I should think I was having a nightmare.

The best known Australian marsupial the Kangaroo I have seen at the Zoo, but I should like to see its babies who are so tiny when they are born they are less than an inch long, just like baby mice. Writing about mice reminds me that I read that there are even tiny pouched mice in Australia. If Kangaroo's babies are less than an inch long I cannot imagine the size of a baby mouse in a mouse's pouch. Wallabies, a smaller kind of Kangaroo also interest me, they can travel by series of great hops at 15 miles per hour.

As for the little Koala Bear I think ^{he} is sweet. His woolly coat and his sulky, babyish, blunt nose are so like a Teddy Bear as to make ^{him} quite irresistible. He spends his days among the swaying branches of the tall eucalyptus tree to which he clings so tightly with his short, sharp claws that he is never shaken from his hold.

Next I would ^{like} to see some of the many Opossums. They all live in trees and have thick woolly coats and come out at night. The one with the queerest name is the "Spotted Cuscus." It has pretty pale grey fur with large red patches. The one I am most interested in is the "Flying Opossum" which can fly from one tree top to another. This is because it has membrane stretching from the wrists to the

ankle joints. The babies cling to their mother's fur while she glides through the air. They are beautiful creatures with soft, silky fur, long tails and large liquid eyes. I wonder what the babies think of their first flight?

The Woolly Opossum often carries its whole family on its back, each member winding its tail round that of the other. It is this animal that is adept at pretending to be dead and we get the phrase "to play possum".

The Tasmanian Devil is a fiery little creature always ready to start a fight. He attacks and over-comes creatures much larger than himself and will fight to a finish. He is ruthless slayer yet he looks like a harmless puppy.

For funny sights there are two Australian animals I should like to see, one is the Echidna or Spiny Anteater. It is covered with prickly spines over a short coat of fur. Its fellow in England is the Hedgehog. It has a long, round snout and a long, sticky tongue with which it catches insects to eat.

The other queer creature is the Moloch Lizard. I have a picture of it in my "Zoo Book." In Australia it is called York's Devil. It is quite harmless but I should run if I saw one for it looks like a piece of barbed wire walking.

Australia has just as many interesting birds as animals and some of them the most unusual in the world. Here live birds that have forgotten to fly. Most birds had to fly to pursue their food or to

escape their enemies. Many of these Australian birds must have had happier times for although they had learnt to fly they had no need to do so, so they neglected the use of their wings.

Such a bird is the Cassowary which looks like a big turkey on stilts.

The Emu is six feet high and the female lays about forty eggs in the course of the summer. The male has to sit on them and hatch them.

The Kiwi also cannot fly but kicks with surprising power. It has no tail and looks very amusing.

Almost surprising bird is the Kookoo-burra or Laughing-Jackass. All at once through the quiet bush come loud peals of mocking laughter. (I have actually heard a recording of this.) When the source is found it turns out to be a silly looking bird with a square body and an open mouth sitting unconcernedly on a stump. Although it sounds so silly you cannot help being fond of it because it is so friendly.

Another unusual bird is the Lyre bird with its wonderful tail shaped like the old Greek instrument. It is great mimic and a rival of the mocking bird.

Cockatoos are as common in Australia as sparrows are here. Some of them are excellent talkers and most are gorgeously dressed.

Bush-warblers, Reed-warblers, Bush-larks, Cuckoos and Willy Wagtails all make a sweet singing choir, and many,

many others.

Perhaps the happy day will come, when this war is over, when I shall be able to visit Australia myself and see all these interesting creatures.

Books used:-

Geographical Magazine.

The Zoo Friend

The Animal and Zoo Magazine.

Children's Encyclopædia

Children's Encyclopædia of Wonder.