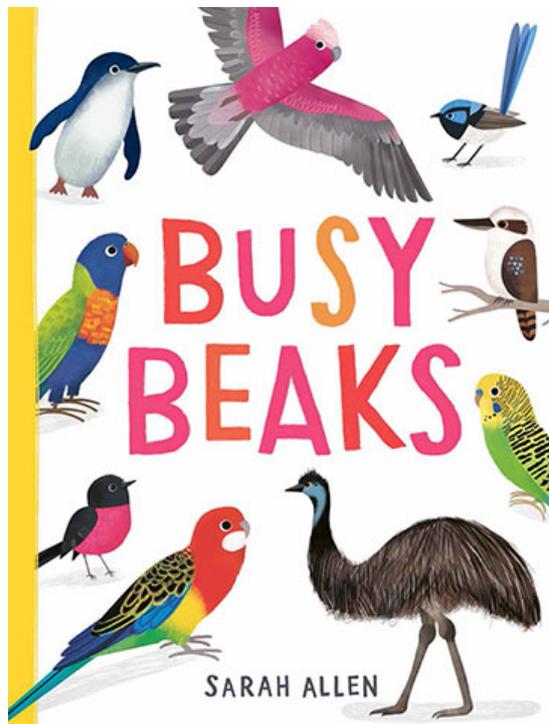


## Busy Beaks

### Exploring the 2021 CBCA Short List: Early Childhood



#### Parts in this unit of work

- [Reading, listening to and appreciating the book](#)
- [Using the book for speaking, writing and creating](#)
- [Relevant resources and links](#)

**Author:** [Sarah Allen](#)

**Publisher:** [Affirm Press](#)

**Synopsis:** Spend a day with Australia's most vibrant and unique feathered friends. Full of splashing shorebirds, clattering cockatoos, parading penguins and greedy galahs, *Busy Beaks* is the perfect introduction to birds of all shapes and sizes.

**Themes:** Australian birds, Australian habitats, scientific and common names, routines and timelines, descriptions

**Year levels:** Australian Curriculum: English, Foundation to Year 2; Science, Year 1

**Why use this book?** This story is a great example of a hybrid text that both entertains and informs. It introduces children to many common Australian birds in a variety of habitats, structured around the cycle of a day across locations in Australia. Brightly coloured and engaging illustrations will attract younger readers, and the short yet rich, descriptive phrases and sentences can be analysed and then used as an example to build students' descriptive writing skills. The text could also be used as a companion to studies of biological sciences in Years 1 and 2, focusing on living things, their habitats and lifecycles.

**Focus passages:** Pages 9–12, 21–26 and the 'Facts & Feathers' section.

**Unit writer:** [Sophie Honeybourne](#)

## Reading, listening to and appreciating the book

### Book introduction (big picture)

- Before reading, complete a [KWL](#) chart about Australian birds. Start with a walk around the playground/local area, recording birds that can be seen or heard. Complete the K (know) part of the retrieval chart to record observations, adding further information about Australian birds that students may know. Work with the class to develop some questions about Australian birds that students may want to find out about, then add these to the W (want to know) part of the chart. As the unit of work progresses, add relevant information into the L (what has been learned) part of the chart. [ACSSU017](#)
- Look at the front cover of the book. Can students name all the birds? What might the words 'busy beaks' mean? What do students predict the book might be about? What information did they use to make this prediction? Do they think this is a fictional text or a factual text? What information did they use to make this prediction? Is it obvious what type of text this is? Why, or why not? [ACELY1659](#)
- The book begins and ends with a bird sound (a cockatoo in the beginning, and an owl at the end). Can students mimic any of the other birds in the story? Ask students to make various bird sounds if they know them (many will likely know a kookaburra or magpie!). If studying this text as part of a unit over a number of days, you may like to listen to some of the short podcasts from [ABC Kids Listen: Noisy by Nature](#). These 7–10 minute nature podcasts include episodes focusing on bird sounds, which might be a nice lesson break or transition period between the playground and the classroom, and would support students to deepen their understanding of some of the birds from the text. [ACELY1666](#)
- After reading, ask students to each pick their favourite three birds from the book. Then hold a class vote to establish an overall top three. What do students like most about these pages? What is interesting or engaging about the pictures or the words? Why are these pages better than some of the other pages? [ACELT1583](#)
- Discuss the difference between fiction and non-fiction, then imaginative and informative texts and finally narratives (stories) and information texts. Which one of the options discussed do students think this book is and why? Which section of the school library would it belong in? Explain that many books are often both imaginative *and* informative and these are often called hybrid texts. Explore further examples of hybrid texts related to animals that can be found in the Walker Books [Nature Storybooks series](#), which is aimed at slightly older children but would still be accessible for this age group. [ACELA1463](#)
- Look at the end papers of the book. Discuss why the author and illustrator used a design of eggs, not birds. What additional information do the end papers provide the reader? [ACELA1466](#)
- Compare and contrast this story with some traditional Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander stories. Indigenous author Gregg Dreise has written four picture books based on traditional stories about birds; [Silly Birds](#), [Kookoo Kookaburra](#), [Cunning Crow](#) and [Mad Magpie](#), which would be a good starting point. After reading, discuss similarities and differences between this story and the traditional Aboriginal stories read. [ACELT1582](#)
- The illustrations provide lots of great information about birds' habitats and behaviours. Support students to recognise this by choosing a page and 'thinking aloud' to explain all of the information that can be found from the illustration on that page (for example, the environment — such as urban, woodland, coastal— the bird's specific habitat or home within that environment, what the birds eat, or how they behave). If students are able to independently write, provide them post-it notes on which they can label similar features from a different page, or annotate a photocopy of another page. For younger students, annotate post-it notes of their verbal contributions and use these to label the informative aspects of the illustrations. [ACELY1660](#)

## Close reading

### Study of pages 9–12

- Read aloud pages 9-12 then re-read, clapping a four-beat rhythm. Ask students what they notice about each page you when you read with the clapping (each page has four claps and it helps turn the book into a poem). If your class is confident with syllables and ready to learn the metalanguage, you can also introduce the concept in greater depth by discussing [meter](#). Re-read the whole story with a focus on the rhythm (also indicating stressed syllables if moving onto meter). Extend the concept by performing the book as a poem or rap (try a Google search for 'basic 4 beat beatbox background', or even adding your own beat and bird soundscape). Discuss how adding a rhythm helps the reader to understand and remember the book easily. [ACELT1585](#)
- Introduce the concept of alliteration (Graeme Base's book [Animalia](#) is a great place to start!). Read the focus pages together, identifying words that alliterate (for example, 'sweet, lorikeets live'). If students are confident at identifying sounds, you may also like to introduce the concept of consonance and identify repeated sounds on different pages. [ACELT1592](#)
- Underneath each bird's common name is their scientific name. Study examples on the pages suggested, using syllabification to slowly spell out the words. Explain that, in science, all of the plants and animals in the world have a special scientific name so that it doesn't matter which language you are speaking, the scientific name is still the same. Younger children of course do not need to know the scientific names, but being aware that language can name things precisely is a valuable understanding. [ACELA1470](#)
- Closely study the illustrations for the spinebills, lorikeets, rosellas and shorebirds. Create an information retrieval table with column headings: diet, habitat, behaviour (the meanings of these words may need to be unpacked for younger children). For each bird, use the information from the illustrations to complete the table. Suggest what else the illustrator could have added to some of the images to add more information in various columns. For further extension, compare and contrast the information from from this text with photographs from informative texts about Australian birds. [ACELA1453](#)

### Study of pages 21–26

- This page sequence clearly indicates a change in the time of the day. Re-read the book from the beginning, prompting students to think about the time of day indicated on each page (for example, where is the sun? what colour is the sky? when does the moon appear?). Now that they know that the book is organised from morning until night, what information does the time of day tell us about the birds in this sequence of six pages? Which birds are going to sleep, and which birds are waking up? Discuss how the time of day helps to provide both a setting and a timeline for the story. [ACELT1584](#)
- The illustrations in the text are extremely colourful and attractive, using warm colours to engage the reader. Look at each double page spread in the sequence, noting which colours are repeated. Point out that, in some stories, night can be scary and spooky, but in this story it is not. Why is that? Direct students towards the use of 'warm' colours and nighttime elements that are beautiful and comforting as well as the language of nesting, roosting and sleep. [ACELT1591](#)
- Prepositional phrases are evident on almost every page, providing information about where, when and how. Support students to recognise this detail by reading the pages and then asking 'which words tell us information about the time of day, or where the birds are going?'. Display (or copy the sentences) on an interactive whiteboard, then circle the key noun and verb (for instance, 'penguins parade') and ask students to underline the relevant phrases that give us information about where/when or how they are going ('from the sea to the dunes'). [ACELA1468](#)
- Identify the pair of words that rhymes over each two page spread. Do all the words exactly rhyme? Can you find other examples of rhyming pairs in the rest of the book that have different word endings but still sound similar? [ACELA1825](#)

### Study of 'Facts & Feathers' section

- Study some of the informative sentences that accompany each bird. What type of information is revealed in this section? How are these sentences different from the sentences in the main section of the book? This can be answered by identifying the poetic, descriptive, rhyming language in the main part of the text and the factual, informative language in this section. [ACELA1447](#)

- While the author included lots of great information about birds, there is obviously a lot of information left out. Discuss why the author might have wanted to keep the informative sentences relatively short (think about the audience the book is aimed at, and the type of text). If there was lots of information for each bird in this section, how would it change the whole book? [ACELA1463](#)
- Directly compare one of the descriptive sentences in the main part of the book with its comparative factual, informative sentence in this final section. Focus on the use of informative noun groups in the final section that include adjectives that tell us information about size, colour and what type (for example, *'live in tropical rainforest canopies'*, *'are large migratory shorebirds'*, *'are tall, elegant cranes'*). [ACELA1468](#)

## Word recognition, phonic knowledge and spelling

### Vocabulary

- The text begins and ends with onomatopoeic bird calls. Identify these and explain that these words are meant to sound like the sound that the bird makes. Can students think of any more words that sound like bird or animal calls ([this list](#) from Your Dictionary for Kids is quite useful)? Build up a word list of onomatopoeic words on the wall for reference in future writing. [ACELA1470](#)
- Re-read the book aloud, asking students to put their hands up in order to point out any word that is linked to a bird (such as feathers, nest, chicks or tree). Explain that topics often have specific technical words that help us to specifically name things. Build a vocabulary wall (or word cloud) with the examples from the book. Explore other technical word groups with different animals, such as fish, or farm animals, then expand to wider topics such as cars or schools. [ACELA1470](#)

### Parts of a sentence

- Explore noun groups in the text by focusing on the noun groups surrounding the birds. Start by jointly identifying and underlining the nouns on each page. Then discuss whether there is any extra information about these nouns. Are there words in front of the noun that describe number, colour or type (for example, *'sweet nectar ... cosy tree hollow ... a brolga pair'*)? Explain that these words together with the noun are called a noun group, and work to describe the noun. Further informative noun groups can be found in the 'Facts & Feathers' section. [ACELA1468](#)
- Identify action verbs in the text by asking students to find the word that tells the reader what each bird is doing (for example, *'strut ... soars'*). Help students to check that the word is an action verb by asking them to mime the action. If you can't carry out the action, then it is likely the word is not a 'doing word' or action verb! [ACELA1452](#)

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## Using the book for speaking, writing and creating

- Support students to choose one of the birds from the text and develop a short oral presentation about that bird. At an early level, students may wish to visually describe their bird and use the picture to explain where it lives. They can then deliver their presentation to a small group. For older students, you could develop a digital template to help students build their presentation, and they may wish to save some pictures that they can use to accompany their oral presentation. [ACELY1664](#)
- Research and write an informative text about a bird from the text. Enable students to engage in further research about their chosen bird using school readers, books from the library, or simple, student-friendly websites. Model how to record facts from research, then turn these into simple sentences. Develop a basic writing template with sub-headings such as description, diet, habitat, interesting facts and/or threats, so that students have a clear structure to follow. [ACELY1661](#)
- Choose one of the birds to become the main character in a narrative. First, explore some example narratives by reading some of [Rod Clement's picture book stories](#). Work with the class to identify a setting for the story, then brainstorm a problem and resolution. Depending on the ability level of your students, you may wish to jointly construct the new story, or develop a modelled example then enable students to independently write their own story. [ACELT1593](#)
- Create a new page for the book. Start by identifying a bird local to your school or area that is not included in the story. Discuss your chosen bird's diet, habitat and behaviours, then jointly or independently write some

notes. In small groups, ask students to create a simple noun group about their bird (for example, curve beaked ibis, glossy black currawong) then add a verb to describe what it is doing, including some more information after the verb to tell the reader how or where the action is taking place (for instance, searching through smelly bins, gliding through the treetops). Students may wish to develop their own illustrations, then neatly add their descriptive sentence in order to create their own page. [ACELY1671](#)

- Use the end papers as inspiration to write a story (or short play) about an egg that ends up in the wrong nest. What might happen when the egg hatches? Will the mother and babies realise that the new hatchling is an imposter? Does the egg have to end up in a birds nest, or could it hatch in a reptile's nest? [ACELT1832](#)
- Create a [readers theatre](#) performance of the book for a school assembly or similar. Discuss how students may like to bring the birds' characters to life with actions. What does the story tell us about the ways in which one bird can be different from another? How can we read the words aloud so that they sound interesting for our audience? [ACELT1580](#)

## Relevant resources and links

Find additional [Teacher's Notes and Activities](#) (.pdf 5.4 MB) for *Busy Beaks* from the publisher. The ABC has a kids podcast series of nature sounds, [Noisy by Nature](#). The Walker Books [Nature Storybooks series](#) has informative and narrative hybrid texts based on Australian animals. Kiddle has kids encyclopedia facts at [Birds of Australia for kids](#) (scroll down and click on your state to find links to common Australian birds). Use the [Birds in Backyards](#) site to identify local birds. Indigenous author Gregg Dreise has picture books based on traditional stories about birds; [Silly Birds](#), [Kookoo Kookaburra](#), [Cunning Crow](#) and [Mad Magpie](#). Graeme Base's [Animalia](#) is a good resource to introduce alliteration. Author [Rod Clement's picture book stories](#) about birds include *Olga the Brolga*, *Edward the Emu* and *Edwina the Emu*. See also [Circle](#) by Jeannie Baker.

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