

Gumnut Gazette

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Animals and Mud

Let's Get Muddy!

Have you ever heard the saying "happy as a pig in mud"? Well, a lot of our Australian animals also love mud!

They use mud for all kinds of reasons—like hiding from predators, cooling down, and some eat mud! While other animals can even build their homes out of mud.

Although animals don't put on their gumboots and play in the mud like us, animals also use mud as a form of playing called 'enrichment'.

Let's get 'stuck' into this edition of the Gumnut Gazette!



Photos above: Wombats running and kicking up sand – photo credit to Brett Hartwig, DEW. Legs in mud, Australian white-bellied swan, kangaroos in dirt, lizard in dirt, bilby in burrow and bilby in dirt photo credit to Cleland Wildlife Park staff.

Acknowledgement to country

The Department for Environment and Water acknowledges Aboriginal people as the First Peoples and Nations of the lands and waters we live and work upon and we pay our respects to their Elders past, present and emerging. We acknowledge and respect the deep

spiritual connection and the relationship that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have to Country.

The Department works in partnership with the First Peoples of South Australia and supports their Nations to take a leading role in caring for their Country.

Inside this issue

Let's Get Muddy	1
Find-a-Word.....	2
Home	3
Useful Mud	3
Mud Defenders	4
Mud Engineers	4
Colour Me In	5

FUN FACT

Mud makes you happy! Research has shown that playing in mud stimulates your immune system, which makes your brain release chemicals that help you feel happy.



Fun and games

Hidden in the Mud

Find-a-word

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

MUD
PROTECTION
BURROWING
SOIL
THERMOREGULATION
DIRT
HOME
DUST-BATH
DIGGING

GARDENER
NEST
IBIS
WOMBAT
KOOKABURRA
KINGFISHER
FROG
BILBY
BANDICOOT

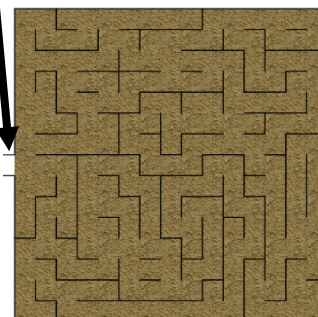
Animal word Jumble

B R O K O R A U A K

Y L F R E T T U B

Mud Maze

Make your way through
and try not to get stuck!
(Start on the left)



True or False

(Circle the correct answer)

Some animals use
mud to protect their
skin from the sun.

TRUE / FALSE

Maze credit to: aardwolf.com



Wombats running and kicking up sand.
Credit to Brett Hartwig, DEW

Did you know?

Wombats, bilbies and bandicoots have backward-facing pouches. This stops dirt from getting inside when mum is digging!

Home...

...is where the mud is!

Muddy areas are a natural part of Australian wetlands, where a lot of animals make their home. Some of these animals include frogs, turtles, and various birds like our Australian white ibis.

Mud is also important for burrowing marsupials, such as bandicoots, wombats, and bilbies, which are all native to Australia. Wombats and bilbies dig in soil and mud to create burrows for homes. Bandicoots and bilbies dig in the ground for food.

Fun Fact! Scientists can identify the type of animals that may live in certain areas by looking at tracks in mud. They will look for footprints or even animal poo!

As mud dries on an animal's skin, the water in it evaporates, taking heat away from the animal. Mud evaporates slower than water, meaning the cooling process lasts longer!

Useful Mud

Mud is important to a lot of our Australian animals for many reasons.

One of those is 'thermoregulation', which is how animals can keep a healthy body temperature. Animals with little hair or few sweat glands rely on mud for cooling down, especially in hot climates, such as pigs, elephants, rhinos, or even echidnas.

Wallowing (roll around) in mud creates a layer that helps reduce body temperature and protects from sunburn. A layer of mud on top of an animal's skin can also protect them from insect bites or parasites. Or it can help hold moisture in their skin, stopping it from drying out and cracking, especially in dry environments, like the middle of Australia.

As well as keeping animal's skin healthy, mud is used for building homes. Some birds use mud like glue to bind materials together using dried grass for building their nests.

Muddy bottoms of wetlands are rich in nutrients and support a variety of invertebrates like worms, snails, and insects, which in turn serve as food for larger animals.

Many animals rely on the mud and vegetation of wetlands for shelter, nesting, and breeding. For example, some frogs lay their eggs in shallow, muddy areas, and some birds build nests on the ground near the water.



Did you know?

The female Mud-dauber wasp builds her nest out of mud or clay, usually in protected areas of houses, buildings or rock overhangs.



Mud-dauber Wasp and nest, photo by Rosie Nicolai, via backyardbuddies.com.
Australian white ibis nesting, photo credit to Cleland Wildlife Park Staff.

Mud Defenders



Did you know?

Many burrowing frogs can store up to 50% of their bodyweight as water in their bladders. This keeps them supplied with moisture during the months underground.



Top: Eastern banjo frog, photo by Jodi Rowley, via Australian Museum
Bottom: Painted Burrowing Frog, photo by Steve Walker via Frogwatch SA

Some animals use mud as a way to protect themselves from predators or from the harsh environment.

Mammals like wombats and kangaroos take a dust bath, which is very common in the animal kingdom. Why would they want to take a bath in the dirt? Well, dirt can help keep their fur healthy and cool them down. Kangaroos and wombats also use mud to get rid of parasites like fleas or mites.

Reptiles will hide underground in rock cracks during colder weather, or they will hide in mud, or in burrows to stay warm.

'Brumation' is what happens when reptiles slow down during the cold winter weather.

Around a third of Australian frog species will burrow into the ground for part of the year. These burrowing frogs will dig deep into the mud and soil using their special back legs, shaped like a shovel. Burrowing frogs can stay up to a metre underground during dry periods and will only come up after enough rain has made the surface nice and muddy, for them to breed.

Fun Fact: Some burrowers, such as the Eastern banjo frog will dig a shallow burrow, a few centimetres deep in leaf litter or mud to protect themselves.

Mud Engineers

Termites:

- Make mounds out of soil, saliva and poo for their home
- It looks solid on the outside but is built like a sponge: the walls are filled with tiny holes so termites can flow through the mound.
- The base is the coolest part, it absorbs moisture from the colony above, cooling the air around the nest. The top part of the mound helps ventilate the rest.
- Termites spend most of their time in a nest within the base of the mound, or underground.

Sacred Kingfisher:

- They don't make their own mud nest; they use already constructed mud formations for protecting their eggs.
- They nest in tree hollows, mud burrows, riverbanks and mud-built termite mounds.
- They fly headfirst into the mud with their pointy bill to loosen the soil, then start digging a tunnel. These tunnels can be over a metre long and at the end, they make a wider chamber for the eggs to stay safe. How amazing!

Australian White Ibis

- They nest in large groups, often near other waterbirds, like spoonbills, cormorants or herons.
- Their nest is shallow and shaped like a dish, made from sticks, grasses, reeds, leaves, and held together by mud.
- Their nests are usually found near a body of water such as a river, swamp or lake and they build their muddy nests in trees.

Greater Bilby:

- Bilbies dig a new burrow every few weeks and these are often used by other native animals such as spinifex hopping mice, echidnas, even some reptiles and invertebrates.
- They use their strong legs and claws to build complex tunnels, that provide shelter from the heat and predators.
- A bilby's home can have up to 12 burrows! Each burrow can be up to 3 metres long and 2 metres deep. Because they're so strong, bilbies can even make spiral-shaped burrows.
- At night, they eat lots of bulbs, spiders, termites and fungi, but they also ingest large amounts of dirt or sand - which you can see in their poo!



Colour Me In!



Do you know?

Ibis have nostrils at the base of their beak so they can breathe when their beaks are underwater or deep in mud, looking for food!

Did you know?

Butterflies eat mud for the healthy nutrients it holds!