



# Emblems



Samone Bos



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### GLOSSARY WORDS

When a word is printed in **bold**, click on it to find its meaning..

# Symbols of Australia

Symbols of Australia represent Australia and its people. They represent our land, governments and stories. Most importantly, symbols reflect our shared experiences as Australians.

## What are symbols?

Symbols can take many forms, such as objects, places and events. Some symbols are official, while others are unofficial. Official symbols include government flags, emblems, commemorative days and the national anthem. Unofficial symbols include folk songs, foods, landmarks and icons.

## Why do we have symbols?

Australian symbols have special meanings. They inspire a sense of pride and belonging in Australians. Symbols identify us as uniquely Australian.

## Who chooses Australian symbols?

Some symbols are created by Australia's governments and other authorities. Other symbols are items from our **culture**, natural environment and history that have become important to Australians over time.



The shape of Australia's coastline, as seen on this globe, is one of the most recognisable symbols of the country.

# Australian emblems

Australian emblems are symbols of our natural environment. These emblems include Australian animals, plants and gemstones. Australian emblems represent Australia and its states and territories, and the unique natural features that make up our country.

## Why do we have emblems?

We use Australian emblems to represent our country, state or territory. Around the world, people recognise these emblems as uniquely Australian. At home, Australian emblems connect us with Australia's natural landscape.

### **SYMBOL FACT**

On 11 November 1958, Victoria became the first Australian state or territory to proclaim a floral emblem – the common heath.



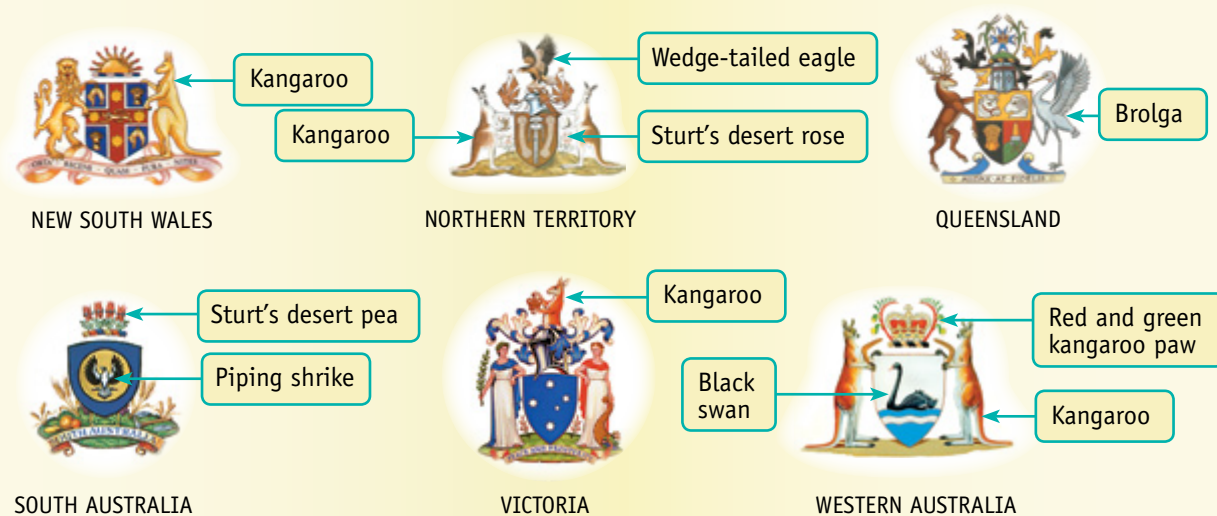
The kangaroo is a popular Australian emblem. During the 2008 Olympic Games in Beijing, China, members of the Australian men's hockey team wore cooling ice jackets with an image of the boxing kangaroo on them.

# How do emblems represent Australia?

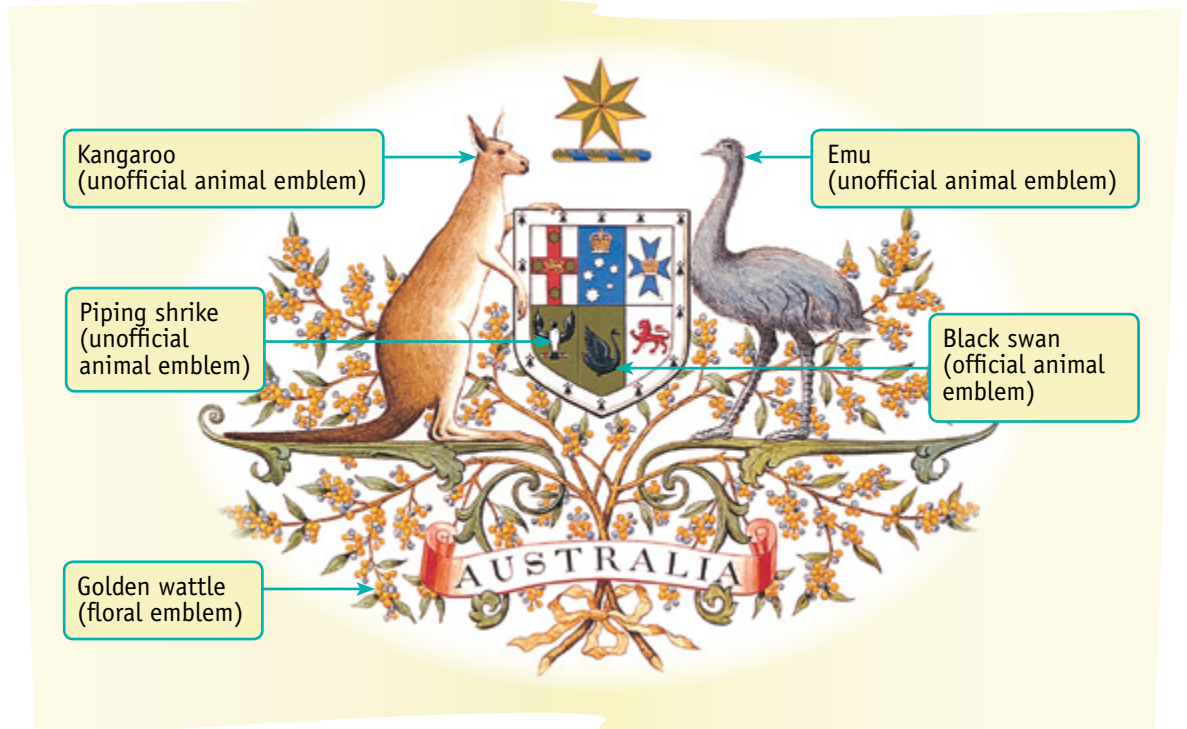
Australian emblems represent our country's wide range of natural features, from snowy mountains to hot deserts, tropical rainforests and dense bushland. The landscape and native plants and animals change from one state or territory to the next. These differences are celebrated in our many emblems. Together, Australian emblems represent Australia as a young country with an **Indigenous** heritage that includes the oldest continuous living cultures in the world.

## Types of emblems

Australia and its states and territories have chosen emblems that represent their unique plants, animals and **geology**. Australian governments have adopted floral emblems, gemstone emblems, mineral emblems, **mammal** emblems, bird emblems, marine emblems and **fossil** emblems.



Australian emblems can be found on the coats of arms of some states and territories.



The Commonwealth Coat of Arms features four animal emblems of Australia and our floral emblem.

## How are emblems chosen?

Governments choose emblems to represent things that are common or important to their country, state or territory. Sometimes, the public is asked to vote for their favourite emblem. Once a new emblem is chosen, it is proclaimed, or made official, by Australia's **governor-general**.

## Official and unofficial emblems

Not all Australian emblems are officially proclaimed by the governor-general. Some of our emblems are unofficial. For example, the red kangaroo and the emu are considered to be emblems because they are on the Commonwealth Coat of Arms. However, they are not official emblems of Australia.

**THE TASMANIAN DEVIL**  
The Tasmanian devil is a well-known **marsupial** that is connected to the state of Tasmania. However, it is an **unofficial emblem** because it has not been proclaimed by the governor-general.

# Floral emblems

Australia has around 24 000 species of native plants. Native fruit trees and orchids thrive in Australia's wet, tropical north, while our inland deserts are home to plants that grow with little water. Australia's national, state and territory floral emblems represent this amazing variety of native flowering plants.

## Golden wattle (NATIONAL)

In 1988, the golden wattle (*Acacia pycnantha*) became Australia's floral emblem. It is a tough, adaptable plant that can endure frosts and bushfires, and survive in different soils. The golden wattle symbolises the Australian spirit of survival. Its green and gold colours are used in national sporting uniforms to represent Australia.

Golden flowers

The golden wattle features in many Australian symbols, including the Commonwealth Coat of Arms.

### SYMBOL FACT

Wattle Day is celebrated on 1 September each year.

The waratah is commonly found along the central coast and mountains of New South Wales.

Pincushion-shaped flowers

### SYMBOL OF THE DREAMING

The waratah is a symbol of the Dreaming to Aboriginal Australians. In one Dreaming story, it is said that bush spirits made the petals of the waratah come together tightly so that the blind hunter Wamili could find them easily by touch.

## Waratah (NSW)

The waratah (*Telopea speciosissima*) became the floral emblem of New South Wales in 1962. Its bright-red flowers, shaped like pincushions, attract many native birds. In the Aboriginal Australian language Dharuk, 'waratah' means 'seen from afar'. The plant's Greek name, 'telopea', has the same meaning.

## Royal bluebell (ACT)

The Australian Capital Territory adopted the royal bluebell (*Wahlenbergia gloriosa*) as its floral emblem in 1982. The royal bluebell is tough and grows at higher altitudes in dry, rocky habitats, where it is often exposed to the sun and wind. In the ACT, the royal bluebell grows on the Brindabella Ranges, near Canberra.

### Common heath (VIC)

The common heath (*Epacris impressa*) has been Victoria's floral emblem since 1958. In winter and spring, tiny bell-shaped flowers grow along its spiky stems, attracting **native** birds. The common heath is strong and can survive Victoria's harsh winters and dry summers.

#### SYMBOL FACT

The common heath has pink, white or red flowers, but it was the pink heath that was chosen to represent Victoria as its floral emblem.

### Cooktown orchid (QLD)

The Cooktown orchid (*Dendrobium phalaenopsis*) was declared Queensland's floral emblem in 1959. Queenslanders chose this flower out of 13 species to represent the state. The Cooktown orchid attaches itself to tree trunks and rocks. Bright-purple flowers appear in autumn and winter. It is found in northern Queensland and in tropical areas of the state.

The Queensland government chose the Cooktown orchid as the state's floral emblem because it was looking for a flower with a colour close to maroon, which is the state colour.

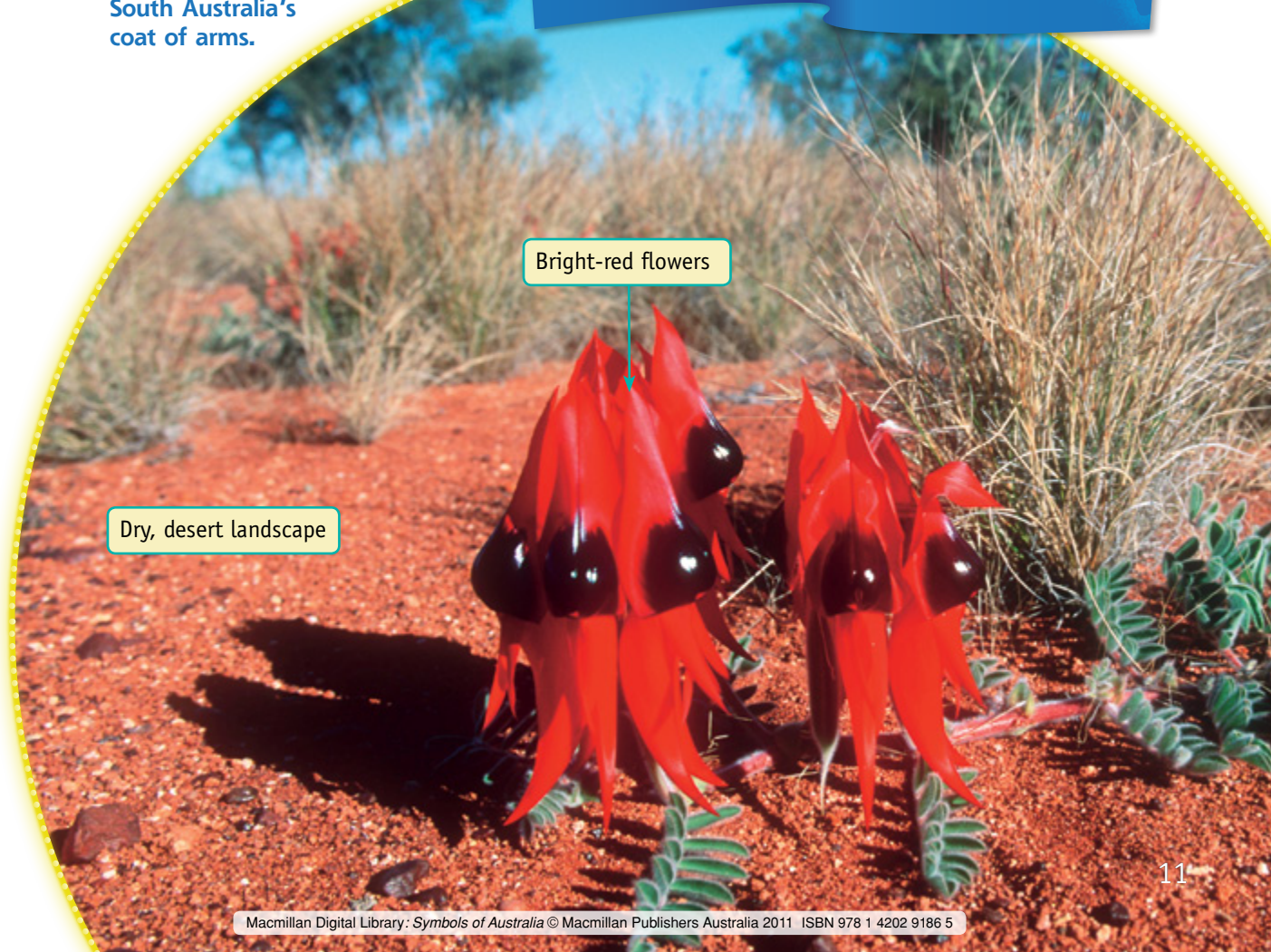
### Sturt's desert pea (SA)

Sturt's desert pea (*Swainsona formosa*) became South Australia's floral emblem in 1961. The explorer Captain Charles Sturt reported seeing clusters of the flowers while making his way from Adelaide, South Australia, to the deserts of central Australia in 1844. Sturt's desert pea is a symbol of South Australia's dry inland and Captain Sturt's exploration.

#### DESERT BLOOM

Sturt's desert pea grows in dry parts of South Australia that receive less than 380 millimetres of rain each year. Its bright-red flowers cover the sandy soil in autumn.

Sturt's desert pea is one of the emblems used on South Australia's coat of arms.



## Floral emblems

### Red and green kangaroo paw (WA)

The red and green kangaroo paw (*Anigozanthos manglesii*) is **native** to Western Australia. It was adopted as the state's floral emblem in 1960. Its red and green flowers look like the paws of another important Australian emblem – the kangaroo! The fuzzy, velvety flowers bloom in the dry, sandy soil of Western Australia from July to November.

The red and green kangaroo paw features on the Western Australian coat of arms.

#### SPREADING POLLEN

The red colour of the red and green kangaroo paw attracts native birds, such as wattlebirds and honeyeaters. When a bird perches on the red stem of the plant, pollen is transferred from the green flowers, or 'claws', to the bird's head. This helps the flower to spread around the sandy, coastal plains of southwestern Western Australia and bushland near Perth.

'Claws'

Green flowers

Red stem

#### SYMBOL FACT

The heavy, treated wood of the Tasmanian blue gum is long-lasting and suited to outdoor use. It is often used to build bridges, jetties and the bases of railroad tracks.

Fuzzy, cream-coloured flowers

The Tasmanian blue gum is a symbol of the state's rugged landscape.

### Tasmanian blue gum (TAS)

Australia's largest floral emblem is the Tasmanian blue gum (*Eucalyptus globulus*), which was declared Tasmania's floral emblem in 1962. The blue gum grows up to 70 metres high and has fuzzy, cream-coloured flowers in summer. The blue gum represents Tasmania's rugged bushland and its large timber industry.

### Sturt's desert rose (NT)

The Northern Territory adopted Sturt's desert rose (*Gossypium sturtianum*) as its floral emblem in 1974. The pale purple and red flower grows in the territory's rocky deserts and dry creek beds. The flower is an important emblem on the Northern Territory's flag.

# Gemstone and mineral emblems

Gemstones are hard minerals that have been dug from the ground, then cut and polished so they shine. Today, mines for gemstones and other minerals operate in all parts of Australia. Gemstone and mineral emblems represent Australia's rich geology and the mining histories of its states.

## Opal (NATIONAL; SA)

Australia declared the opal its gemstone emblem in 1993. This striking, rainbow-coloured gem is mined in the deserts of South Australia, Queensland and New South Wales. It is an important symbol of Australia's rich earth and its mining industries. In 1985, it was chosen as South Australia's gemstone emblem.

## Black opal (NSW)

The black opal was chosen as the gemstone emblem of New South Wales in 2008. It is one of the rarest gemstones in the world. The town of Lightning Ridge, in New South Wales, is one of only two places in the world where black opals can be found.



Rainbow-coloured gem

Opals are an important symbol of the unique resources that can be found in inland Australia.



Needle-like crystals

In Australia, crocoite is found only in Tasmania, which is why it is an emblem of the state.

## Crocoite (TAS)

Tasmania chose crocoite as its mineral emblem in 2000. Crocoite has needle-like crystals that range in colour from orange-red to a deep red. Some of these crystals may be up to ten centimetres long. For more than 100 years, the world's best crocoite has been mined at Dundas, in Tasmania.

## Sapphire (QLD)

In 1985, Queensland proclaimed the sapphire its gemstone emblem. This precious stone was first found in Queensland in the 1870s. Queensland's largest sapphire mines are found in the centre of the state. Sapphires are found in a range of colours, including blue, yellow, green and pink.

### SYMBOL FACT

The pink sapphire is a rare type of gem. It is also known as the pink ruby.

# Mammal emblems

Our national, state and territory governments have chosen **mammal emblems** that best represent Australia's unique wildlife. These emblems are **marsupials** and **monotremes** that are **native to Australia**.

## Red kangaroo (NATIONAL, UNOFFICIAL; NT)

The red kangaroo (*Macropus rufus*) is Australia's unofficial animal emblem. It became the official animal emblem of the Northern Territory in 1975. Red kangaroos live on dry plains throughout inland Australia. This marsupial is a famous symbol of Australia's unique wildlife.

Red kangaroos are native to Australia and a world-famous emblem of our country.

### THE BOXING KANGAROO

Australia's boxing kangaroo flag uses the red kangaroo as a symbol of our fighting spirit. Red kangaroos are known to fight to become the leader of their mob.

Female red kangaroos are actually blue-grey in colour.



Hind feet with poisonous spurs

Duck-like bill

### SYMBOL FACT

Male platypuses have poisonous spurs on their hind feet to fight predators and other male platypuses.

The platypus is the mammal emblem of New South Wales and is recognised around the world as one of Australia's most unusual native animals.

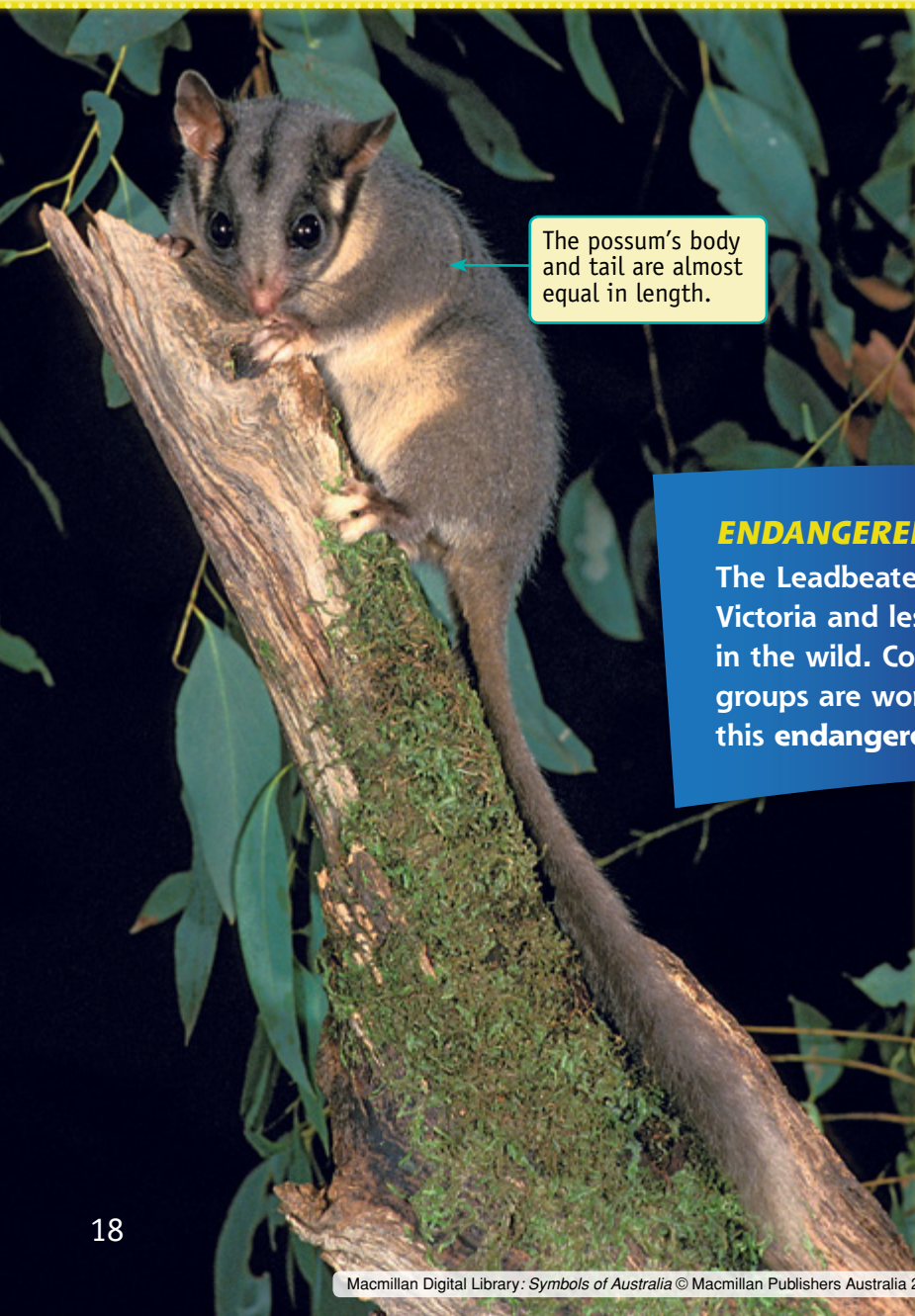
## Platypus (NSW)

New South Wales chose the platypus (*Ornithorhynchus anatinus*) as its animal emblem in 1971. This shy monotreme lives in burrows along creeks and rivers. It hunts freshwater creatures, such as yabbies, fish and tadpoles. Australia's platypus and echidna are the world's only monotremes.

## Mammal emblems

### Leadbeater's possum (VIC)

The Leadbeater's possum (*Gymnobelideus leadbeateri*) was declared Victoria's animal emblem in 1971. This **marsupial** is about 40 centimetres long and lives in Victoria's Central Highlands, which are also home to mountain ash forests. During the Black Saturday bushfires in 2009, almost half of the possum's **habitat** was destroyed.



The Leadbeater's possum is **native** to Victoria and is an important symbol of the state's unique wildlife.

#### ENDANGERED SPECIES

The Leadbeater's possum is found only in Victoria and less than 1000 possums exist in the wild. Community and **conservation** groups are working together to help save this **endangered species**.



The koala is a well-known and much loved emblem of Queensland and

### Koala (QLD)

Queensland chose the koala (*Phascolarctos cinereus*) as its animal emblem in 1971. Koala colonies are found in Queensland's southeastern bush. These marsupials eat leaves only from certain species of gum trees and rarely drink water. Koalas get most of their water from gum leaves and dew.

### Hairy-nosed wombat (SA)

The hairy-nosed wombat (*Lasiorhinus latifrons*) became South Australia's animal emblem in 1970. This marsupial lives in the state's dry south. It digs deep burrows to use as a cool shelter from South Australia's hot **climate**. It also uses its claws to dig tracks that it can follow when looking for food at night.

## Numbat (WA)

Western Australia declared the numbat (*Myrmecobius fasciatus*) its animal emblem in 1973. Numbats live in open forests in Western Australia's southwest. These **marsupials** have bands of white stripes on their reddish-brown and black coat, and can grow up to 40 centimetres long.

### SYMBOL FACT

Numbats eat around 20000 termites a day! They use their long tongues to scoop termites out of logs and tree trunks.



The numbat is found only in some parts of Western Australia and is an **endangered species**.



Tasmanian devils used to be found in all parts of Australia, but are now found only in Tasmania.

## Tasmanian devil (TAS, UNOFFICIAL)

The Tasmanian devil (*Sarcophilus harrisii*) is found only in Tasmania and is the state's unofficial animal emblem. Early European settlers called it 'the devil' because of the fierce barks and groans it makes when feeding at night. This small, black marsupial hunts other small **mammals**, birds and insects.

### UNDER THREAT

Since 1996, a terrible illness called Devil Facial Tumour Disease (DFTD) has been killing Tasmanian devils. Affected devils develop large growths mainly on their face. These growths become so big that the devils cannot feed. Conservation groups are working to stop the spread of DFTD.

# Bird emblems

Australia has at least 867 species of native birds. Australia's national, state and territory governments have selected some birds as important emblems. These bird emblems represent the wide variety of birdlife found in Australia's cities, deserts, rainforests and the bush.

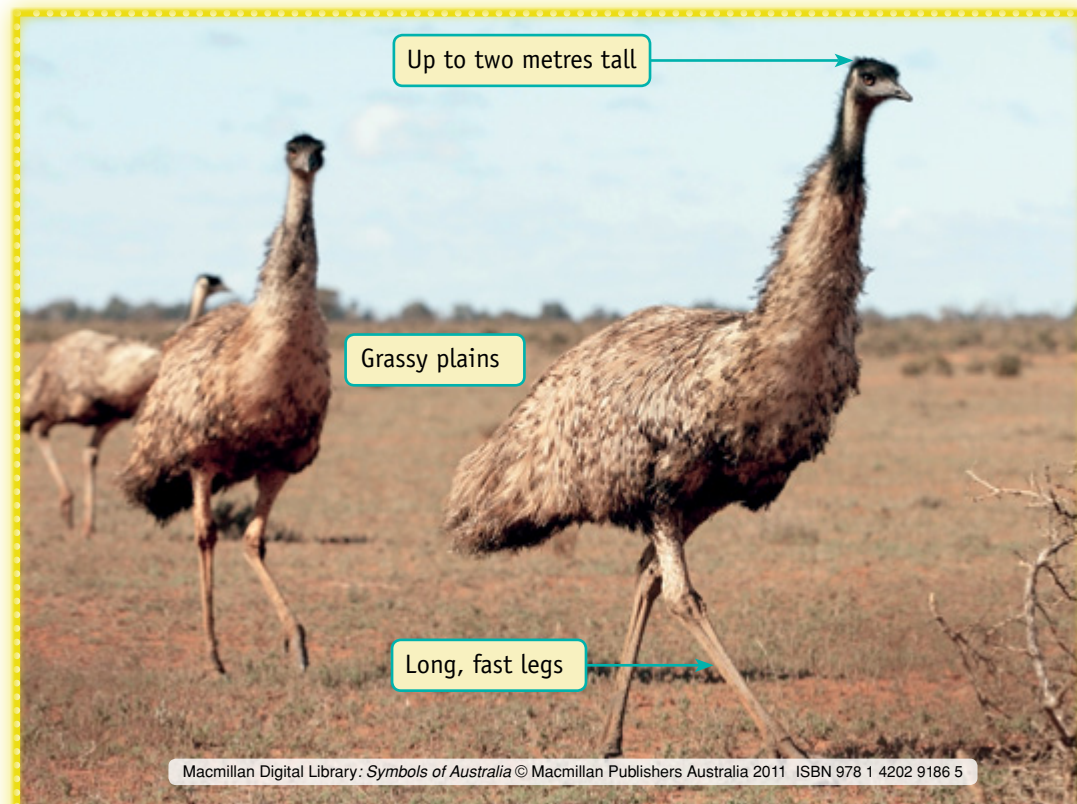
## Emu (NATIONAL, UNOFFICIAL)

Australia's unofficial bird emblem is the emu (*Dromaius novaehollandiae*). It grows up to two metres tall and is Australia's largest bird. The emu often travels long distances to find grassy plains and insects to eat. It can run at speeds of up to 50 kilometres per hour.

Emus live on grassy plains. They have two sets of eyelids to help protect their eyes from dust in these plains.

### SYMBOL FACT

An emu feather is used on the slouch hat of the Australian Light Horse military unit.



## Gang-gang cockatoo (ACT)

The Australian Capital Territory chose the gang-gang cockatoo (*Callocephalon fimbriatum*) as its bird emblem in 1997. Canberra is the only city in Australia where this dark-grey bird is found. Its loud call sounds like a squeaky gate. The gang-gang cockatoo is often heard in backyards and bushlands of the territory.

## Laughing kookaburra (NSW)

The laughing kookaburra (*Dacelo novaeguineae*) was declared New South Wales's bird emblem in 1971. It is a large type of kingfisher and is famous for its loud laugh. The laughing kookaburra lives in gum, or eucalypt, trees along Australia's eastern coast and eats insects, lizards and small snakes.



The gang-gang cockatoo is a symbol of the Australian Capital Territory's native birdlife.

### CREATURES OF HABIT

Gang-gang cockatoos eat seeds from acacia and gum trees, and cones from native pine trees. Flocks of gang-gang cockatoos will return to the same tree or bush until it is stripped of all its food.

## Helmeted honey-eater (VIC)

The helmeted honey-eater (*Lichenostomus melanops cassidix*) was chosen as Victoria's bird emblem in 1971. Tufts of yellow feathers grow from the olive-grey bird's crown, beak and ears. This **endangered species** has a black band across its eyes.

## Brolga (QLD)

Queensland adopted the brolga (*Grus rubicunda*) as its bird emblem in 1986. The brolga is a type of crane that lives in wetlands along Queensland's northern coast. The light-grey bird prances, bows and flaps its wings to attract a partner during the mating season.



### SYMBOL FACT

Brolgas are around one metre tall and have a very wide wingspan of two metres.

Helmeted honey-eaters are protected at Yellingbo Nature Conservation Reserve near Melbourne, in Victoria.



The piping shrike is a symbol of South Australia's large areas of bushland and farmland.

## Piping shrike (SA, UNOFFICIAL)

South Australia's unofficial bird emblem is the piping shrike (*Gymnorhina tibicen leuconota*), which is shown on the state flag. Another name for the piping shrike is the white-backed magpie. The piping shrike is found across South Australia and feeds on insects, lizards and the remains of dead animals.

### A SPORTING SYMBOL

The piping shrike is a strong and spirited bird. The Port Adelaide Magpies, who play in the South Australian National Football League, are named after the bird and use its image as their symbol.



A baby swan is called a cygnet.

The black swan is an emblem that is closely linked to Western Australian history.

### Black swan (WA)

The black swan (*Cygnus atratus*) became Western Australia's bird emblem in 1973. Dutch explorer Willem de Vlamingh first recorded black swans on the Swan River in 1697. As a result, the first European settlement in Western Australia was called the Swan River settlement. Since then, the black swan has become a recognised symbol of the state.

#### AN EARLY SYMBOL

In 1854, the black swan featured on Western Australia's first postage stamp. It was an early symbol of the new settlement.

### Yellow wattlebird (TAS, UNOFFICIAL)

Tasmania's unofficial bird emblem is the yellow wattlebird (*Anthochaera paradoxa*). It is Australia's largest honey-eater and is found only in Tasmania. The term 'wattle' describes the long lobes that hang behind the bird's ears. The yellow wattlebird's call sounds like a person vomiting!

### Wedge-tailed eagle (NT)

The Northern Territory chose the wedge-tailed eagle (*Aquila audax*) as its bird emblem in 1975. This bird is Australia's largest bird of prey. The wedge-tailed eagle soars up to two kilometres high to hunt for other birds, **reptiles** and small **mammals**, such as rabbits and lambs.

#### SYMBOL FACT

Wedge-tailed eagles have powerful vision and can lift objects that weigh up to half their own weight.



Wingspan of more than two metres

Wedge tail

Powerful eyes

Wedge-tailed eagles are a common sight in the Red Centre of the Northern Territory.

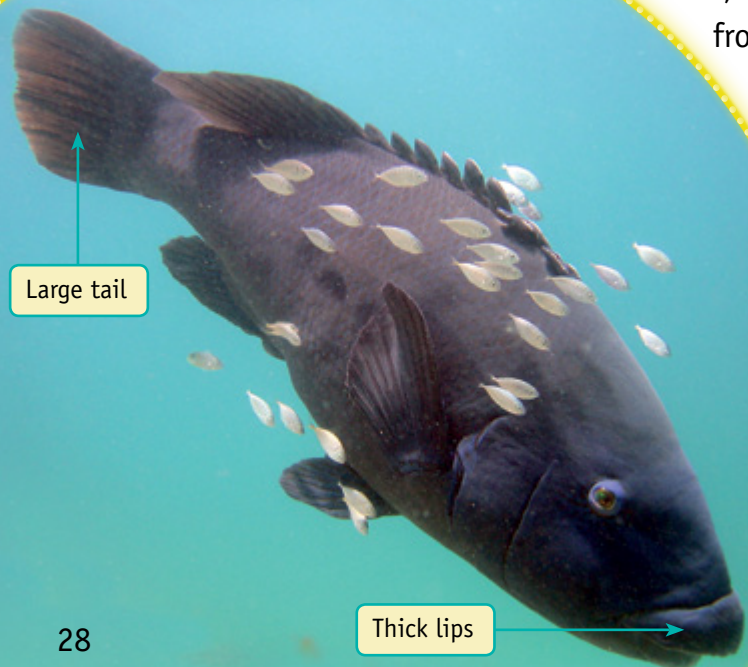
# Marine and fossil emblems

Australia is surrounded by water. Its waterways are home to a wide variety of native marine life. New South Wales, Victoria and South Australia have chosen marine emblems as symbols of their states. Australia is also very old and the remains of creatures from prehistory are often found here. Western Australia was the first Australian state to choose an extinct creature to represent it as a fossil emblem.

## Eastern blue groper (NSW)

The eastern blue groper (*Achoerodus viridis*) was declared New South Wales's marine emblem in 1998. This large fish can be found along the coast from southern Queensland down to eastern Victoria. However, it is most common in the waters of New South Wales.

Male gropers range in colour from grey to blue, while females range in colour from brown to gold.



### SYMBOL FACT

In 1998, New South Wales became the first Australian state or territory to adopt a marine emblem.

The eastern blue groper is a symbol of the variety of marine life found in the waters of New South Wales.

## Weedy seadragon (VIC)

The weedy seadragon (*Phyllopteryx taeniolatus*) was selected as Victoria's marine emblem in 2002. It lives in seaweed forests and seagrass beds along Australia's southern coast. The weedy seadragon can grow up to 45 centimetres long and has a long snout to suck up small crustaceans found in the seaweed.

## Leafy seadragon (SA)

South Australia adopted the leafy seadragon (*Phycodurus eques*) as its marine emblem in 2001. The leafy seadragon lives in rocky reefs and areas filled with seaweed along the southern Australian coast.

### HIDING FROM PREDATORS

Leafy seadragons use camouflage to hide from predators. The leaf-like flaps of skin that extend from its body help the leafy seadragon to blend into its seaweed surroundings.

## Gogo fish (WA)

Western Australia adopted the gogo fish (*Mcnamaraspis kaprios*) as its fossil emblem in 1995. Gogo fish fossils were found in Western Australia's far northern desert in 1986. About 375 million years ago, this desert was a giant reef. The gogo fish was 25 centimetres long and had a shark-like body and tusks.



The gogo fish fossil is a symbol of Western Australia's ancient history.

# Try this!

Symbols help us to remember things about our history. They also tell us what our **culture** values. Symbols of Australia exist all around us and are a part of our daily lives.

## Do you know?

These questions will help you to think about some of the emblems in this book. You can find the answers by turning to the page indicated.

- \* What makes the golden wattle a symbol of the Australian spirit of survival? (PAGE 8)
- \* Which opal is one of the rarest gemstones in the world? (PAGE 14)
- \* How many **monotremes** are there in the world? (PAGE 17)
- \* Why do emus have two sets of eyelids? (PAGE 22)
- \* What does the weedy seadragon eat? (PAGE 29)

## Think about it

Look around you at home, at school and in your local community.

- \* What symbols can you see?
- \* How do these symbols represent Australia and its people?
- \* What other symbols do Australians use to show who they are?

## Find out more

- \* <http://www.anbg.gov.au/emblems/index.html>

This Australian government website provides images and background information in the section on 'Floral Emblems of Australia'.

- \* <http://www.australianfauna.com/faunaemblem.php>

This website examines Australia's animal emblems. It provides information on their size, distribution, **habitat** and breeding habits.

- \* <http://www.birdsaustralia.com.au/>

The Birds Australia website aims to educate the community about our **native** birds.

- \* [http://www.mesa.edu.au/resources/marine\\_emblems.asp](http://www.mesa.edu.au/resources/marine_emblems.asp)

The Marine Education Society of Australasia website is a source of information on Australia's marine life.

- \* <http://australianmuseum.net.au/Gemstones>

The Australian Museum website explores the origins and distribution of Australia's gemstones.

# Glossary

**altitudes**

heights above sea level

**climate**

the weather conditions of an area or region

**conservation**

the protection of plants, animals, natural environments and landmarks from all kinds of human activity

**crustaceans**

types of animals that have hard outer shells and live in water

**culture**

the ways of living that a group of people have developed over time

**Dreaming, the**

the time when Earth was formed, according to Aboriginal Australians

**endangered species**

animals or plants that may soon die out

**extinct**

no longer existing

**fossil**

the very old remains of an animal or plant, usually preserved in rock

**geology**

the particular rocks and other substances that form an area

**governor-general**

a representative of the British king or queen in Australia

**habitats**

the natural environments of animals or plants

**Indigenous**

naturally existing in an area or region rather than coming from somewhere else

**mammal**

an animal that gives birth to its babies and feeds them milk from its own body

**marsupial**

a mammal that is fed and carried in a pouch by its mother when born

**monotremes**

mammals that lay eggs and are found only in Australia

**native**

growing naturally in an area

**pollen**

a powder spread by plants to help them reproduce

**predators**

animals that hunt and kill other animals for food

**prehistory**

a time before history was recorded

**reptiles**

cold-blooded animals that lay eggs and have a backbone



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