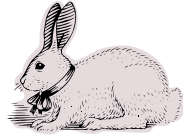


The Easter Bunny and Australian Bilbys



Easter is a great time of year, especially in Australia as it is autumn here and our often too hot weather is slowly going.

On the other side of the world it's spring and new life is appearing – chickens and ducks are hatching from eggs and the rabbits, well known for being able to produce lots of babies, are doing just that.

It was on the other side of the world in Germany when Easter first started to be celebrated with eggs and the Easter Bunny first appeared. It has been traced back to as early as 1600, about four hundred years ago. Obviously a magical bunny, it must be very old or be passing on the job to its eldest child down through the generations.

By the way, no one has ever found out if the Easter Bunny is a male or a female, so I will have to continue calling him or her 'it', but I do apologise if you happen to read this Easter Bunny!

The first edible Easter Bunnies were made from pastry and sugar in the early 1800s, but I think the chocolate ones we have now would taste much better, don't you?

Traditionally children used to build brightly coloured nests in the caps and bonnets that they wore then, and then hid them in secluded areas around their home. If the children were good the Easter Bunny would place brightly coloured eggs in their 'hat' nests.

As fashions changed over time the nests turned into baskets, but we still have fun finding eggs that have been hidden by the Easter Bunny.

In Australia we have a little native animal called the bilby, which looks like a long eared rabbit. The Australian aboriginals have wonderful legends about the bilby, with some tribes seeing it as a sacred figure that has helped them for thousands of years to find food. So there is a distinct similarity between bilbies and the Easter Bunny!



Bilbies are now even more special because they have been reduced in numbers since white people first came to live in Australia in the 1700s. They used to be seen in a lot more places around Australia than they are now. This makes them very precious and unfortunately one of the reasons there are fewer of them is that they've had to compete for food with the rabbits that produce so many children.

This doesn't mean that rabbits are bad, nor are the foxes or house cats that were allowed to go wild and kill some of the bilbies. It just means we need to be aware of what's happening and see what we can do to help them.

An example of what can be done is to build a special fence to keep them safe in National Parks where they are living, as they are doing in Currawinya National Park in Queensland. You and your friends or your school can help raise money to buy fence panels for the fence they are building there. See http://www.easterbilby.com.au/save_bilby/fence.asp, to help or email bilby@epa.qld.gov.au for more information.

You never know, one day the Easter Bunny's job of delivering eggs to well-behaved children everywhere in Australia may be quietly taken over by a magical Easter Bilby. After all, the Bunny must be pretty tired by now!