

# FATS on the road 2015

Kathy Potter



FATS display at the Sydney University Vet Centre Pet Fair

This year has been another very busy year for exhibitions both with displays and workshops. So busy, that people often ask me how I manage, or why I do it. I tell them that when you have a passion for something and you try to talk to non-enthusiasts about it, you can usually see their eyes glazing over after the first minute or two, followed by a visible urge to flee. Unless you only associate with other fellow enthusiasts this can have a devastating impact on your social life. But luckily for me, exhibitions really help. Organising and working on the displays gives me endless opportunities to talk to people about frogs. To learn from them, share and develop my knowledge and enjoy the feeling that maybe I am helping just a little bit with the continuing survival of these remarkable animals.

Putting on exhibitions usually means setting up a display of live frogs and information, or giving workshops to primary school children, but occasionally I do get requests that are a

little different. In May this year I was asked to provide “6-8 frogs of at least 3 different species that are child friendly” for a Sesame Street video shoot entitled F is for Frog. Never one to say never, despite the grim possibilities of working with small children and “child friendly” frogs my daughter Sarah and I accepted the job. I took several Green Tree Frogs, Red-eyed Tree Frogs and Striped Marsh Frogs, and hoped for good weather, an



Sesame Street crew photographing a Green Tree Frog

appropriate filming location and manageable children! We took along a list of OHS and frog safety rules to try to minimise stress to the frogs and ourselves, and despite a brief shock when I discovered all of the children participating in the shoot were under five years old and some of them were terrified of live creatures, it turned out to be a fun day. I think the children were too excited about being filmed dancing and running around to learn much from the experience, but the parents and crew certainly went home knowing a lot more: the “F” is for Frog!

A couple of years ago I re-established FATS involvement in the Australian Museum’s Science Festival. For many years Arthur White, Karen White and Punia Jeffery gave a fun workshop for primary school classes at this event, where children became frogs and participated in the Game of Life. This was an exceedingly tough act to follow, but with the help of Marion Anstis I adapted the original program and forged on. This year, at the Australian Museum, Sarah and I did two days of primary workshops, two days of primary displays, the public open day, two days of high school displays as well as putting on a large FATS display for the April School Holiday Program. The venue for our workshops this year was the Chapman Mineral Gallery which made an unusually interesting and colourful backdrop for our frogs, and most of our displays were in the Atrium, so that in between schools we were also talking to other museum visitors. Participating in Museum programs



Kathy with FATS display at Museum Science Festival



Primary workshop at the Museum

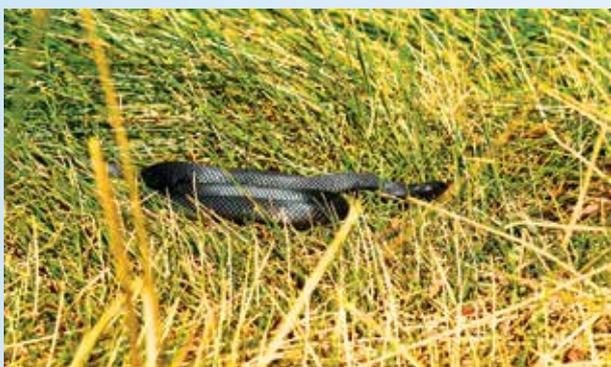


Kathy and Marion chat to visitors at the FATS display during the Australian Museum April School Holiday Activities

has become our biggest annual commitment and I am very grateful to Geoff Gardner, Jodi Rowley and all the lovely people working at the museum who have gone out of their way to make our participation in their events such a pleasure.

Another major event for the year is the Ku-ring-gai Wildflower Festival. Although I have participated in many environmental fairs and public events, this one really stands out for a couple of reasons. To begin with, this was the first event I ever participated in for FATS, when I dropped in to offer support to then exhibitions co-ordinator Sheila Briffa. But mainly because not only do I set up a display at this event, I also have to organise tadpole dip netting for kids as well. I must admit that I was a bit worried about having a group of children standing on a narrow platform overhanging a large pond vigorously swishing about with nets on poles, but actually it is a surprisingly calm and civilised event, and my husband David is becoming expert at making sure every child finds something and at identifying all the strange, wriggly creatures they manage to fish out. Some years the weather at this event has been too cold for tadpoles, but this year there was a huge number of them which the children had no difficulty collecting, and all survived the experience with usual tadpole equanimity, being returned to the pond at the end of the day.

We also had another exciting visitor when a large Red-bellied Black Snake began sunbathing on a raft of reeds in the centre of the pond! She is a well-known frequenter of the area, and although she hasn't previously made an appearance at this event, she was as unconcerned by the hordes of children as they were by her.



Red-bellied Black Snake enjoys the sun on reeds in the middle of the Ku-ring-gai Wildflower Gardens pond



David Potter points out some of the wonders of pond life to one of many excited children at Ku-ring-gai Festival

The Museum workshops have spawned a smaller sideline in school visits and primary school children's events. This year various family members and I presented workshops at Denistone East Primary School and for the Berowra Joey Scouts. Working directly with children at the Museum and in schools is incredibly rewarding because I have the opportunity to see the teachers, parent helpers and children engaging with a program that is not pitched as entertainment, but as a stepping stone to ongoing personal inquiry. As I was developing this program I found myself wondering if forty-five minutes of talking and frog activities was having any real impact. So, at the beginning of each workshop, when I talk



Kathy and parent helpers with some FATS frogs at Denistone East Primary School



Harriet Potter hangs out with Billy the Bandicoot at Dee Why Beach Festival

briefly about the eight or so different species the children are going to see, I started asking if anyone recognised any of frogs before I talked about them. In almost every session I have run, the Green Tree Frog is the only species most children recognised. Then, at the end of the workshop, I showed them pictures of the frogs again and asked the same question. I found that most classes were able to identify all of the species they had been studying, with some children having a go at the scientific names as well. A most encouraging result!



Harriet holds the fort at Stoney Range Spring Festival

I could provide a comprehensive list of all the activities FATS has been involved in this year, but I would rather share with you the reason I have been steering the collection towards the most common frogs of the Sydney region and why I think it is so important to continue this work. In my opinion one of the biggest problems facing anyone concerned with environmental protection is apathy. In a busy modern world it is too easy for people to rate their own everyday concerns above larger scale issues. Saving the planet? Protecting native species? Aren't there scientists or something somewhere doing something about that? Making people care enough to make good decisions about housing and infrastructure developments, or even just about household chemical use is an ongoing problem. Displaying common local frogs, identifying pictures of frogs people have found in their gardens, and sharing our enthusiasm for frogs with a public predisposed to like them is a very small step towards making people care about the environment they live in and the survival of the native animals they share it with. To love one frog is a step towards loving them all, and hopefully towards caring whether they live or die.

Some of the larger events FATS participated in such as the Ku-ring-gai Wildflower Festival, the Sydney Royal Easter Show and Centennial Park's Science in the Swamp are only possible because of the ongoing support of many volunteers, so I would like to take this opportunity to thank my family, the FATS committee and all the FATS members who have given so much of their time and energy to make these events possible.

If you are keen to get involved with the FATS displays and workshops please contact Kathy Potter at [kathy@the-pottery.org](mailto:kathy@the-pottery.org). I am sure you will find it rewarding. Upcoming events for 2016 will be listed on the website as details become available.