

## Activity 1: Disappearing Habitats

### All years

**Warm up activity designed to improve student understanding of clearing, the necessity of habitat, the impact of feral animals and the problem with irresponsible pet ownership**

The word 'habitat' has not been talked about yet in this lesson plan. Habitat, however, is one of the most important words to describe the natural environment, it is 'home' to all plants and animals. Habitat enables shelter, food availability, water and the carrying on of plant and animal life cycles by allowing pollination or breeding, nesting and, the development of young. These factors maintain healthy and viable living populations of plants and animals in natural communities. Without 'habitat', plants and animals cannot pollinate or breed, and therefore do not survive in the long term. 'Habitat' is evidently vital to the survival of species.

***Materials required:** 12-20 patches of material varying in size from 100 to 1000 square centimetres. You can also play this game with no material at all, and improvise with a newspaper (as long as it isn't a windy day). Play some music, or alternatively, utilise a musical instrument or the clapping of hands. Two teacher assistants would be good; one to play the music; one to be the bulldozer.*

Place the pieces of material randomly on the ground in an open area. Ask the students to imagine that the patches on the ground are 'habitat' for native animals (the trees, shrubs, grasses, rocks, logs and creeks that make up most natural environments). Let the students know that they are the animals. The object of the game is for the animals to move around with the music (as they would at different times of the day in search of food or water). Like musical chairs, when the music stops each student needs to find suitable habitat to be safe (by standing upon a material patch). In the interim, whilst the music is playing, someone needs to have taken away a piece of habitat (like a bulldozer clears trees). The 'clearing' will be more effective, with bulldozer sounds and movements. More than one person is allowed to stand on any piece of habitat as refuge when the music stops, but the students will find that if the remnant patch is too small it cannot house many animals... the result will be a student/s left standing without the safety of habitat, because a remnant piece of bushland (or 'woodland') has been cleared.

Without refuge of this type, the animal is now vulnerable to foxes (a 'feral' animal ie. one not native to Australia); to dogs wandering around the neighbourhood; and, to a cat out after the hours of dusk – or before dawn. Any animal (student) without habitat is officially 'out' of the game. The first 3 students out can play the role of fox, dog and cat to 'out' further students. This needs to carry on until only one or two remnant habitats remain, and hence only one or two scared animals... The message to the students should be one that illustrates what happens to the number of animals when their habitat is cleared... a drastic reduction in animal numbers because clearing of habitat also removes any safe refuge for an animal vulnerable to feral animals such as the fox, or badly behaving pets like the dog or cat.

*Please refer to 'Survivor', Cumberland Plain (Activity 3) to see how we can all help keep foxes, dogs and cats under control.*

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