



Published by the Peter Underwood Centre

September 28, 2020

Fancy some 'cat poo' coffee?
Page 2



Follow us on Facebook



www.facebook.com/UnderwoodCentre/

Find your way through the cobra maze:
Page 2



POO FACTS

PART ONE

Today's edition is the first of a two-part series in *The Wonder Weekly* all about the fascinating subject of poo. The bottom line is you better prepare yourself for Part Two (or perhaps number two) next week.

HOW much do you know about poo?

For example, could you tell possum poo from the droppings of a feral cat?

For vets and scientists, animal poos, which are usually referred to as scats, reveal very important information.

For one thing, if you know how to recognise one poo from another, you can identify which animals are or have been in an area.

This is valuable because often animals are hard to find.

For example, mammals are spread throughout Australia but you rarely see them.

But studying scats can reveal a lot more information, including what the animal has been eating, and where and how they live.

If you are a regular reader of *The Wonder Weekly* you will remember the article on University of Tasmania researchers Tristan Derham and Matthew Fielding, who are studying the poo of emus in Wilsons Promontory, Victoria.

Wild emus are long gone from Tasmania, but Matt and Tristan are interested in finding out what the effects on Tasmania's environment would be if they still existed here.

Emus help plants to spread, because they roam far and wide and their poo is full of seed, so if we still had them in Tasmania our landscape would be quite different.

DNA analysis of scats is now enabling scientists to identify not

just the species of animal, but an individual animal.

It is a way of studying things like movement patterns without having to capture an animal.

Another good friend of *The Wonder Weekly*, University of Tasmania wildlife ecologist Dr Scott Carver, was involved in research to unlock the secret of the unique 'cubed' poo of wombats.

Dr Carver, fellow University of Tasmania researchers Dr Ashley Edwards and Alynn Martin,

and Professor David Hu, from Georgia Tech in the United States, received an Ig Noble Prize for this study.

The Ig Noble Prize is awarded for research that "makes you laugh, and then makes you think."



Picture: iStock/ andrewburgess



They found that the answer to the wombat poo mystery could lie in a wombat's intestines, which are extraordinarily long - about 10 metres in length (human intestines are 7m long). Wombat intestines are also not entirely flexible, some parts are rigid, while other parts are soft. But let's get back to identifying the poo of wildlife.

Dr Rob Wiltshire, from the University of Tasmania, has produced a life-size guide to the scats of Tasmanian native mammals, called *PooFlip*.

The guide, which features illustrations by Jane Burrell, is a fantastic reference for identifying native mammals in your area.

Your challenge is to have a look around you next time you are out walking where native animals might be living, and see if you can find any scats.

Perhaps take paper and pencil with you, and draw and make some notes about what you see. Or if you have a camera or camera phone in your family, perhaps you could take photos of the scats.

See how many different scats you can find, and present these findings in a creative way. Perhaps go online or head to your local library to access some reference materials, and try identifying which animals the scats belong to.

Continued Page 2



Special brew is in the poo

Take on the native scat challenge

From Page 1

Children's University Tasmania members can earn stamps in their passports for this challenge at the discretion of their school coordinators.

Here are some tips from *PooFlip* when looking for some of our favourite Tasmanian native mammals' poos:

Echidna poo - U-shaped cylinder up to 10cm long, but can break into pieces when dry.

Colour varies, but always glistening with shiny ant and sand particles.

Found under hollow or decaying logs, on rock piles or ant mounds.

Wombat poo - 'Cube-shaped', about 2.5cm.

Straw-coloured to dark when dried, with finely textured plant material inside.

Deposited in groups of four to eight, on elevated rises, logs or clumps.

Tasmanian devil poo - Wide cylinder shaped, about 10cm-15cm long with a twist at the end.

Usually contain fur and fragments of bone, or light and crumbly with digested bone when dry. Smelly!



WOULD anyone pay up to \$80 for a cup of coffee?

Surely not?

Well some people do, but it is not just any coffee.

Kopi luwak is produced from coffee beans collected from the poo of a little mammal native to South and South-East Asia.

Asian palm civets, commonly referred to as civet cats, are omnivores, but feed mostly on pulpy fruit and berries, including coffee.

In Indonesia they are called luwak, and lend

their name to the brew some coffee lovers are prepared to pay a high price for.

We will have to take their word for it, but apparently kopi luwak has a very special flavour.

The coffee tree, *coffea*, is a flowering evergreen plant.

Coffee beans, are actually a seed rather than a bean, which are found inside coffee cherries.

They contain caffeine to discourage animals from eating them.

But this is no defence against palm civets, which only partially digest the coffee cherries.

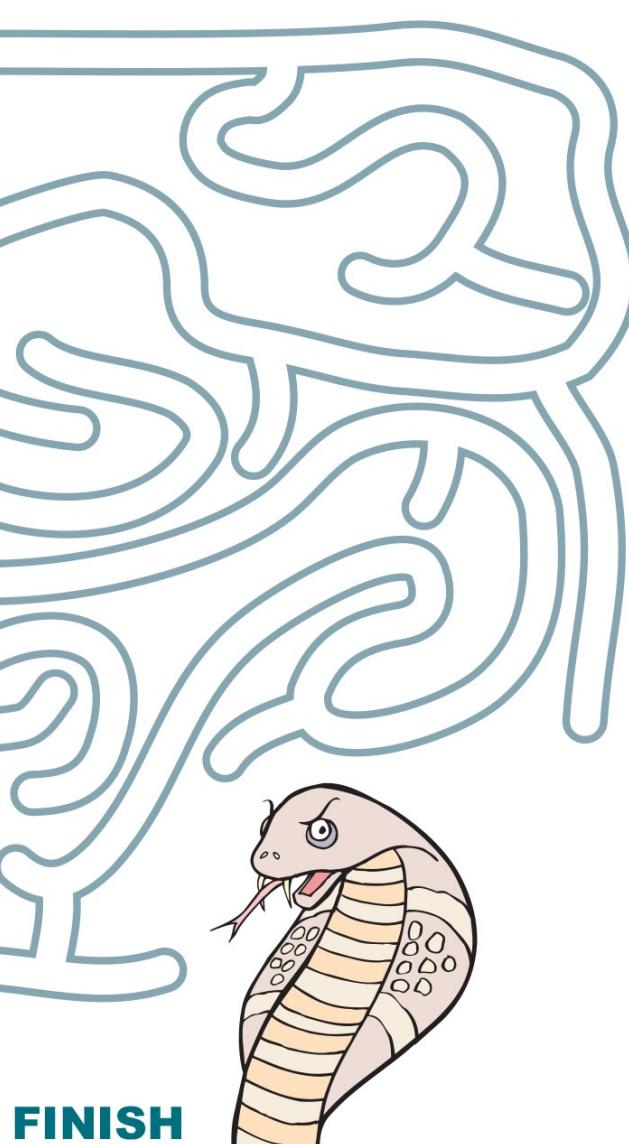
The beans are collected from their poo and processed into coffee.

There are a couple of theories as to why kopi luwak has a special flavour:

- Palm civets eat only the ripest cherries.
- Some special biological and chemical reactions occur as the beans pass through the animal's digestive track.

The Cunning COBRA

START



FINISH

Artwork: www.johnpollyfarmer.com.au



DID YOU KNOW?

Indian cobras are sometimes called spectacled cobras. This is because they have a mark like a pair of spectacles on their hoods.



TMAG has holiday fun covered

THERE are some great activities on offer for children at the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery (TMAG) in the upcoming school holidays.

The Super Spring Holiday Program will run from Tuesday, October 6, to Friday, October 9.

Activities include: creating a clever moss pot out of a plastic milk carton; building an icebreaker like the RSV *Nuyina* with Lego blocks; enjoying story time; learning how signs and symbols can be inspired by the natural world from Aboriginal learning facilitators; and a two-day workshop on stop-motion animation.

Numbers are limited and activities will be filled on-site each day from 10:30am.

But there are other great activities available daily, for those who miss out.

Bookings to visit TMAG are essential.

For more information go to: tmag.tas.gov.au