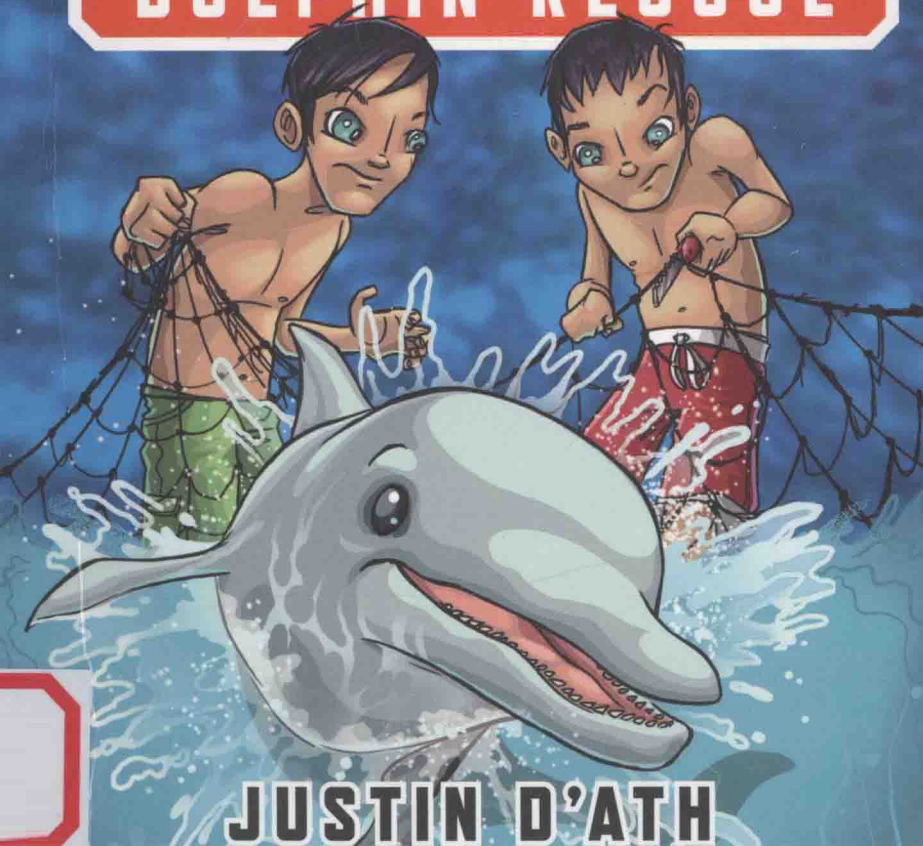


MISSION FOX

DOLPHIN RESCUE



JUSTIN D'ATH

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MISSION
FOX
DOLPHIN RESCUE



with illustrations by **HEATH McKENZIE**

Puffin Books

FOR JORDAN AND ASHLEY

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1

REEF ISLAND

Jordan Fox gazed up at the tall coconut palms that grew around his family's villa by the beach.

'I can't believe there are no gum trees!' he said.

He and his twin brother, Harry, had searched the whole island.

'Well, *I* can't believe you brought a box of caterpillars with you on holiday!' said their dad. He was reading a book in a deckchair further along the veranda.

'It said you can't bring pets,' Harry said.

‘It didn’t say anything about caterpillars.’

‘And it didn’t say there were no gum trees,’ added Jordan.

Their mum came outside in her bathers. She had a towel wrapped around her. ‘You should have checked on the internet before we came,’ she said.

Harry shrugged. ‘Reef Island is part of Australia. We thought gum trees grew *everywhere* in Australia.’

‘Live and learn,’ said Mr Fox, turning a page of his book.

Jordan sat on the veranda stairs and opened the shoe box. Eight half-grown emperor gum caterpillars clung to a skeleton of chewed twigs and branches. There were no leaves left – not even one. A big teardrop ran down Jordan’s nose and landed – *plop!* – in the bottom of the box.

Mrs Fox sat down next to him and put an arm around his shoulders. 'Can they eat anything else?' she asked gently.

Jordan shook his head. He'd looked it up on BRAIN when they rescued the caterpillars from a fallen gum tree on the last day of school.

MAIN

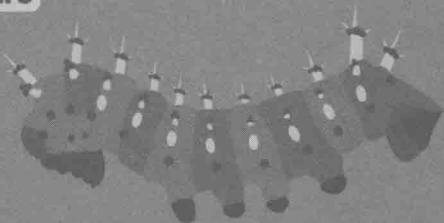
DESCRIPTION

HABITS

ORIGIN

OTHER INFO

Emperor Gum Caterpillars only eat the leaves of gum trees.



Emperor Gum Caterpillar _

Q	W	E	R	T	Y	U	I	O	P	7	8	9
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BRAIN

BRAIN was a special app on the FoxPhone that had a million facts about wildlife. It only said they ate gum leaves.

'We could ask in the restaurant if they have any spare lettuces,' Mr Fox suggested.

Harry laughed. 'They're caterpillars, Dad – not rabbits!'

Mr Fox got out of his deckchair and stretched. 'I happen to know a thing or two about caterpillars,' he said smugly. 'When I was a boy, I used to keep silkworms. Everyone said they only ate mulberry leaves. But one year we ran out of leaves, so your grandma suggested I try a lettuce from the garden. And guess what?'

'What?' asked the twins.

'They turned into the fattest, healthiest silkworms I ever had!'

Jordan wiped his eyes. 'I guess we could try.'

He and Harry went with their dad to the restaurant, where everyone at the resort had their meals. The kitchen was closed, but there was a lady putting flowers on the tables. When Mr Fox told her about the caterpillars, she disappeared through a door and came back with a whole lettuce.

‘Don’t tell the chef!’ the lady said, giving Jordan and Harry a wink. ‘And if you’re going out today, boys, keep an eye out for Tilly the dolphin, and her new baby, Pip. They’ve been spotted close to shore.’

Back at their villa, the twins put four cut-up lettuce leaves in the shoe box with the caterpillars, then watched to see what would happen.

Nothing happened.

Jordan crouched over the box for nearly an hour, long after Harry had given up and gone snorkelling with their mum.

But the caterpillars just ignored the lettuce leaves.

‘Any luck?’ said Mr Fox, bringing Jordan a glass of juice.

Jordan shook his head. ‘Dad, do you think they’d bring some gum leaves on the supply boat, if we asked?’

‘I reckon they would,’ his dad said. ‘But the next supply boat isn’t due for three days.’

Three days, Jordan thought sadly. The caterpillars couldn’t go without food for three whole days.

2

M.F.A.T.

Jordan couldn't get to sleep that night. He felt too guilty. He and Harry were secret agents for Mission Fox Animal Rescue. They helped animals, pets and wildlife that got into trouble.

But this time they'd done exactly the opposite. They had brought eight hungry caterpillars to an island where there was nothing for them to eat. It was a rescue in reverse.

Mission Fox Animal Terminators!

3

BRAIN-XTRA

'Holy torpedo!' gasped Jordan, and sat bolt upright in bed.

He had just remembered something: moths are nocturnal! They sleep in the daytime and wake up at night.

Moth caterpillars must be nocturnal, too, Jordan thought. No wonder they hadn't been interested in the lettuce leaves. It was daytime when he and Harry tried to feed them, and the caterpillars had just wanted to sleep. But now it was night-time.

They might be eating the lettuce leaves right now! thought Jordan.

He was so excited that he forgot where he was. For a second Jordan thought he was in his own bed back at Mission Fox Headquarters. He tried to jump out on the wrong side.

Crunch!

'Hey, what's going on?' asked a sleepy voice from across the room.

Harry switched on the bedside lamp and saw his twin brother kneeling on the other bed, facing the wall.

'I got lost,' Jordan said, rubbing his nose.

Harry looked puzzled. 'How can you get lost when you're . . .'

'Just be quiet and listen!' Jordan interrupted.

He told Harry his idea about the caterpillars waking up and eating at night.

'You're a genius!' cried Harry, jumping out of his bed on the proper side.

But when he and Jordan lifted the lid off the shoe box, nothing had changed. The caterpillars hadn't touched the lettuce leaves.

They were starting to look skinny.

'I wish we hadn't come here,' Jordan said miserably.

'But it's a pretty cool island,' said Harry, trying to cheer his brother up. 'Sam was crazy to stay home.'

Sam was their big brother. He'd stayed home to study. He was looking after the twins' other animals, including Myrtle their dog, Harry's tarantula, Max, and a baby ring-tailed possum that didn't have a name yet. Jordan wished they had left the caterpillars there, too.

He broke off a tiny piece of lettuce leaf



and wagged it in front of one of them. The caterpillar turned its head away, like a baby refusing a spoon of mashed vegetables.

‘Eat your greens, guys!’ Harry said in a stern voice, shaking a finger at the caterpillars. ‘Don’t you want to grow up to be big strong moths like your mums and dads?’

Jordan almost grinned. Harry was pretty funny. But this wasn't something to make jokes about.

'It's the wrong sort of greens,' Jordan said sadly.

'There must be *something* on this island they can eat,' his brother said.

Jordan had an idea. Crossing the room, he pulled a black and orange backpack out of his luggage. In big yellow letters on the black part were the letters MF.

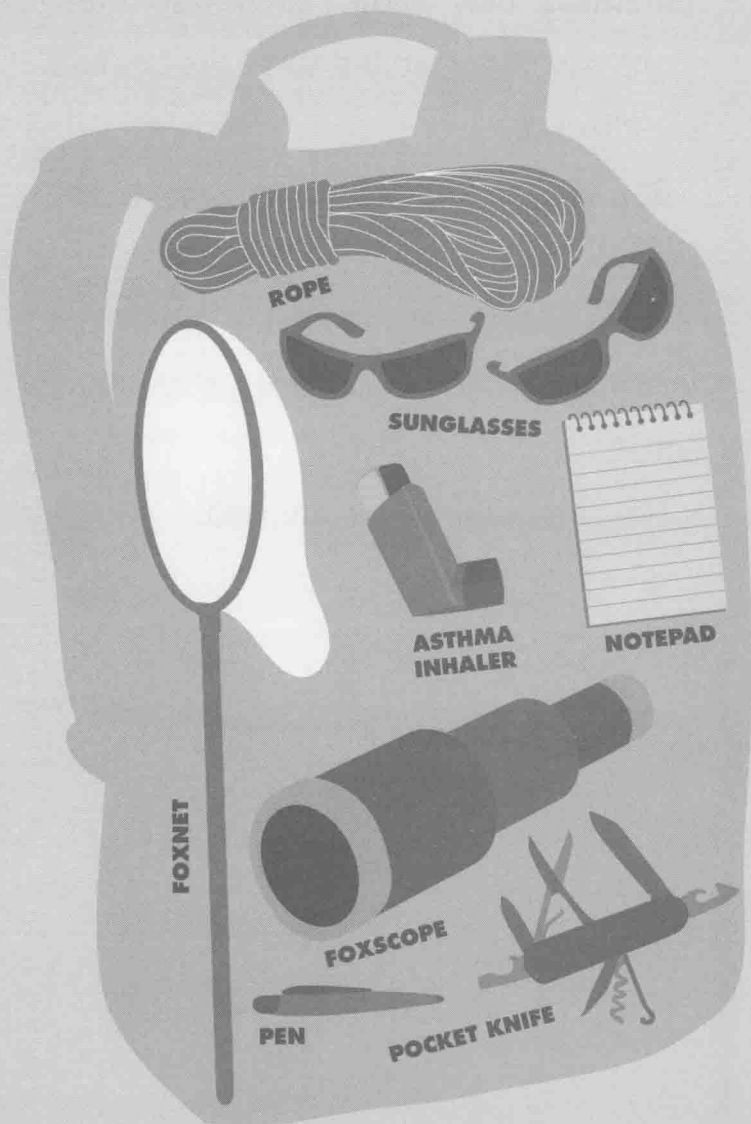
'You brought the FoxPack!' said Harry.

'I thought there might be an emergency while we were here,' Jordan explained.

And now there *was* an emergency. Starving caterpillars.

Unzipping a hidden pocket inside the pack, Jordan slid out the FoxPhone. 'I'll check on BRAIN X-TRA,' he said, hitting the power button.

FOXPACK



BRAIN X-TRA was the latest BRAIN update. It had only been out three days. Something new about caterpillar diets might have been added since Jordan had last checked.

But then *No Signal!* flashed across the screen.

Reef Island was too far from the Australian mainland to pick up a phone signal.

The caterpillars were doomed.