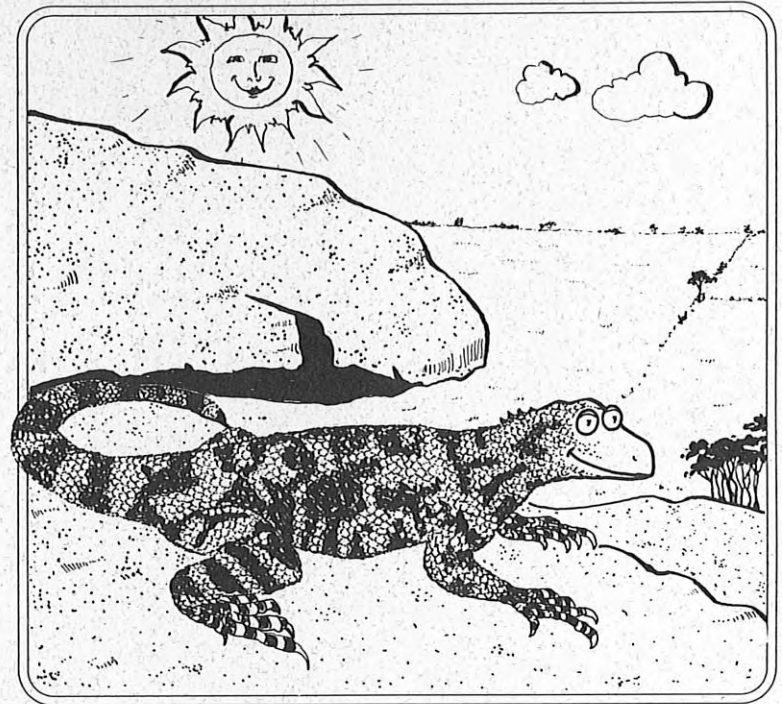


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GRANITE EXPLORER



Riccardo
the Dragon Lizard

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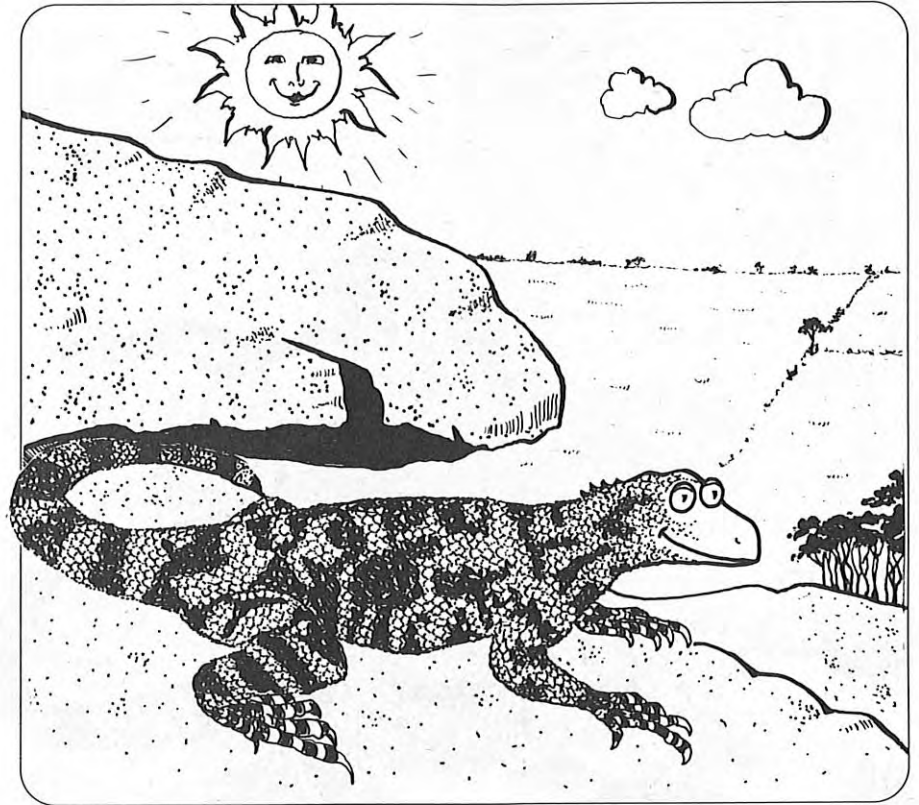
Riccardo
the Dragon Lizard

Written and Illustrated by
Louise Burch



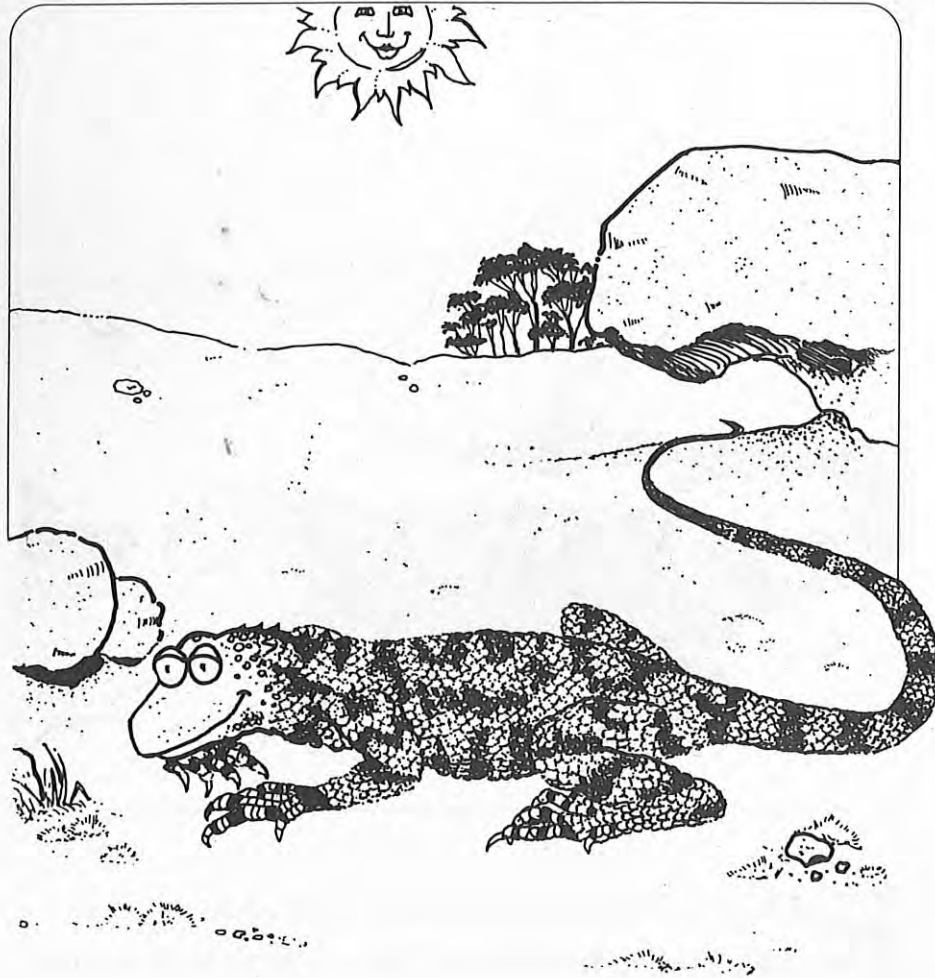
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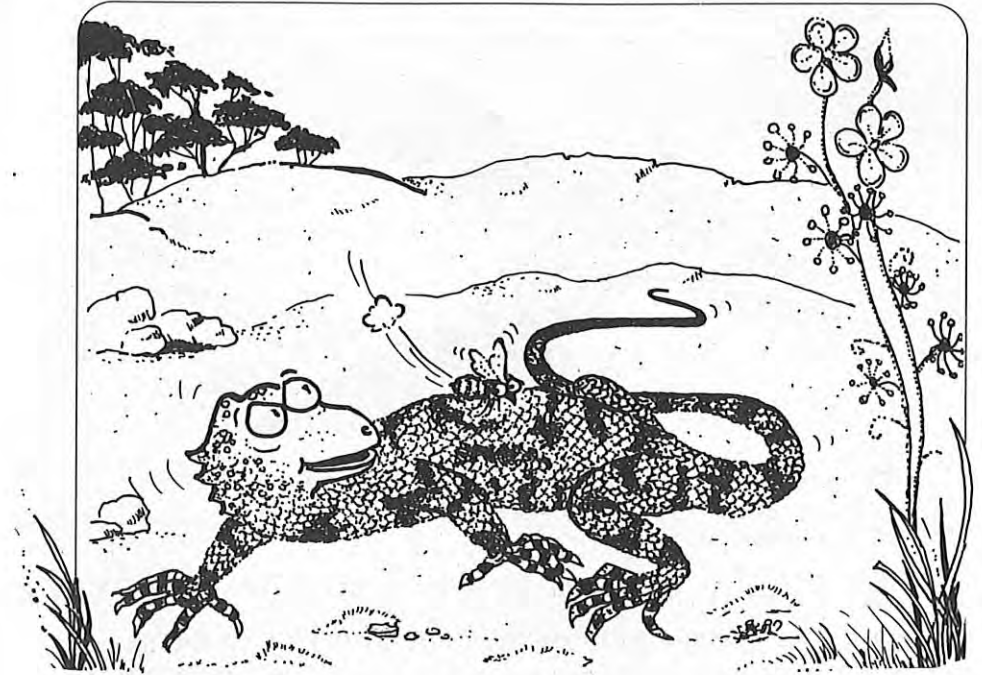


RICCARDO peeped cautiously from under his dark, rocky shelter. He blinked. The bright sunlight shone down and warmed the large granite rock which was Riccardo's home. Riccardo looked across to the wheat paddocks and trees. He felt the sun's warmth on his scaly head.

"Oh, I feel very slow and sleepy," he yawned. "I'd better get warmed up."



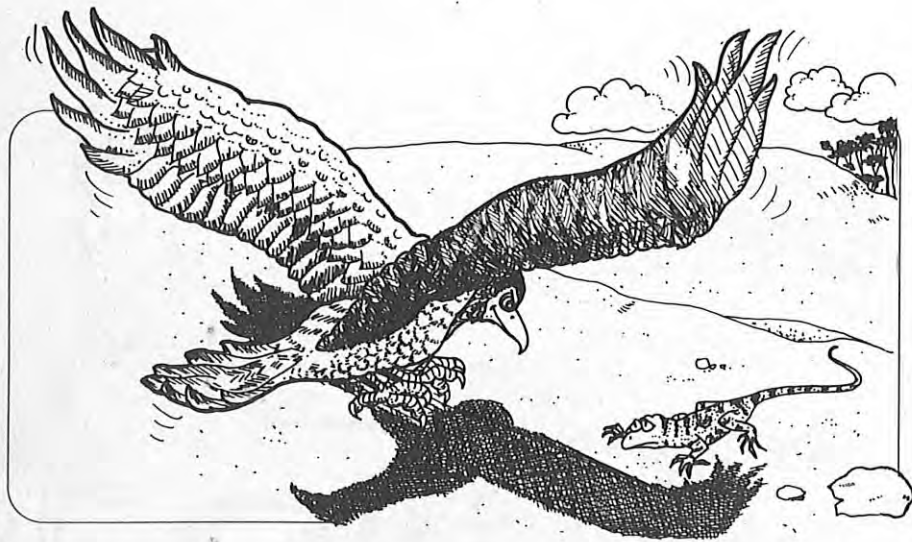
Riccardo was a great believer in making use of free energy. He stepped out from his shelter and found a good sunbathing spot. He lay flat on the rock and let the sun warm up his body. Very soon he was wide awake and feeling very hungry .



A fly buzzed past and Riccardo leapt at it, but much to his dismay, he missed it.

“Oh, bother,” Riccardo thought. “That was a tasty snack, right on my doorstep. But never mind. I know where there are plenty of insects.”

Riccardo scuttled across the rock in short bursts. Then he followed a crack in the rock that deepened and widened into a miniature valley. He looked around him and felt very pleased. Many insects were busily feeding on the flowers of some prickly pincushion plants. Riccardo wasted no time in snapping up a tasty meal.



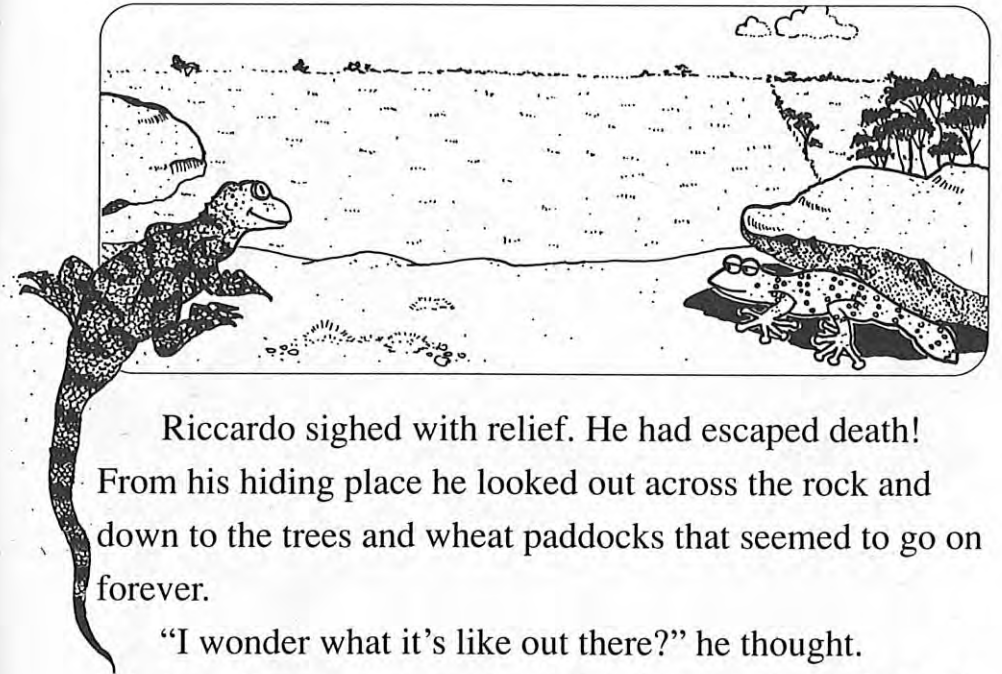
“It’s such a splendid day. I’ll just pop across to the sundews,” he thought.

But just then, a large shadow was cast across the rock. Riccardo looked up and saw an eagle hovering in the sky.

“Help! It’s looking for a meal, and that meal could be me,” Riccardo cried fearfully. “Oh, I wish I was safely hidden under a rock instead of being out here.”

Riccardo knew the eagle would see him if he moved. But his chances of staying alive in the open were very small. So he gathered all his courage and strength and sprinted across the rock.

The sharp-eyed eagle saw Riccardo. It swooped down and opened its large, powerful talons to grasp him. Just in time, Riccardo scuttled under a flat rock. He heard the eagle’s wings flap and felt a rush of air as it beat its wings to get back into the sky.



Riccardo sighed with relief. He had escaped death! From his hiding place he looked out across the rock and down to the trees and wheat paddocks that seemed to go on forever.

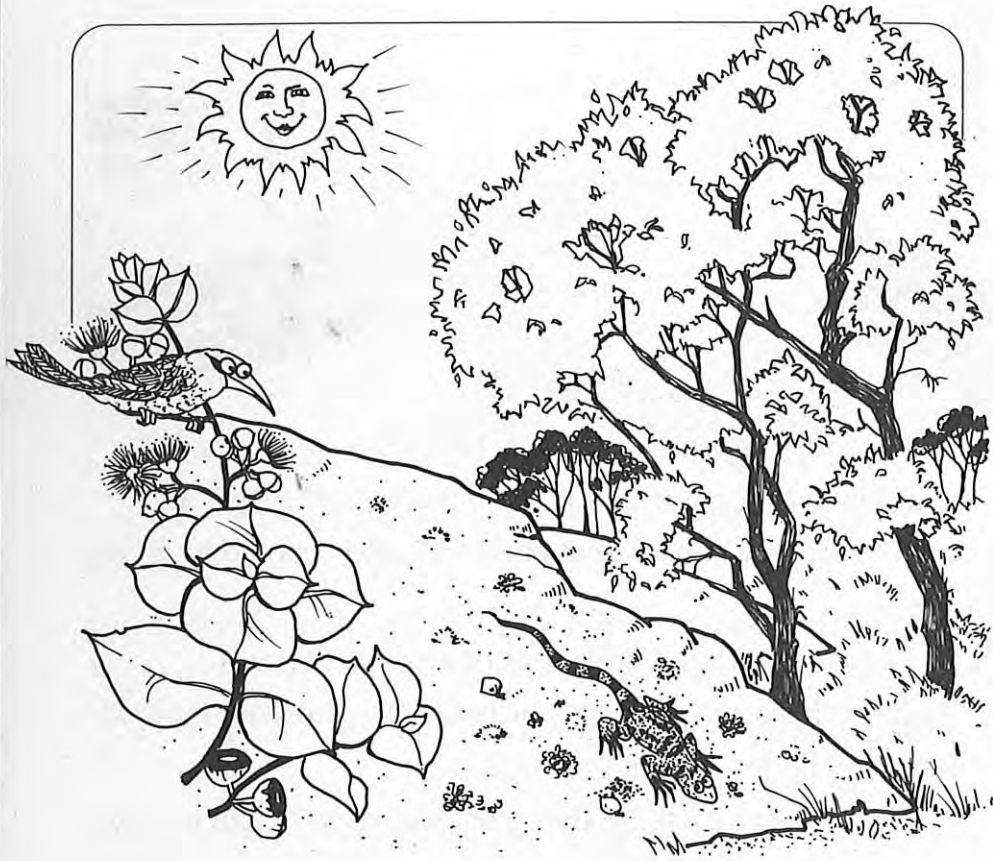
“I wonder what it’s like out there?” he thought. “Perhaps there are no eagles or hawks to grab me. Instead, there may be lots of juicy insects to eat.”

Encouraged by these thoughts, Riccardo began to feel brave and said aloud, “I’ll go exploring. I’ll get some shut-eye and tomorrow I’ll be off, I’ll be off.”

“Keep your noise down,” answered a sleepy gecko from his shelter under the rock.

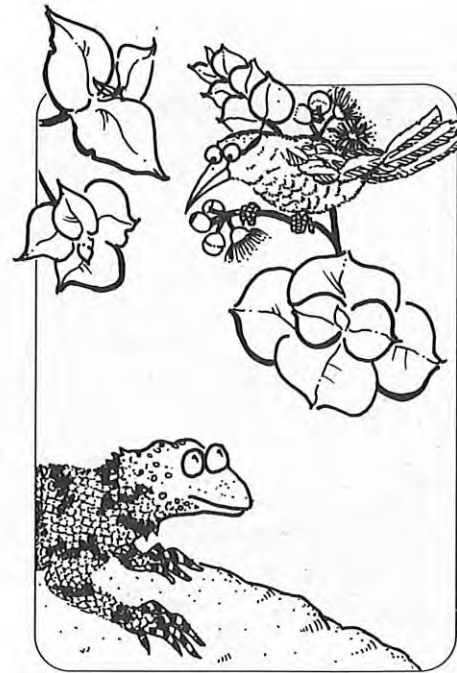
“Hey, Geck!” Riccardo shouted. “Do you want to come with me?”

“You’re crazy,” replied the sleepy gecko. “This place suits me fine. Now, just be quiet. I’m going hunting in a few hours when you’ll be fast asleep.”



The next morning Riccardo was keen to get going, but first he had to warm up in the sun. Then he set off down the rock slope. Now and then he stopped and stayed very still. The colours and patterns of his skin matched those of the rock so well that he seemed to disappear. It was Riccardo's way of being careful in case the eagle returned.

At last he reached the edge of the rock. Here, beautiful silver mallee trees grew.



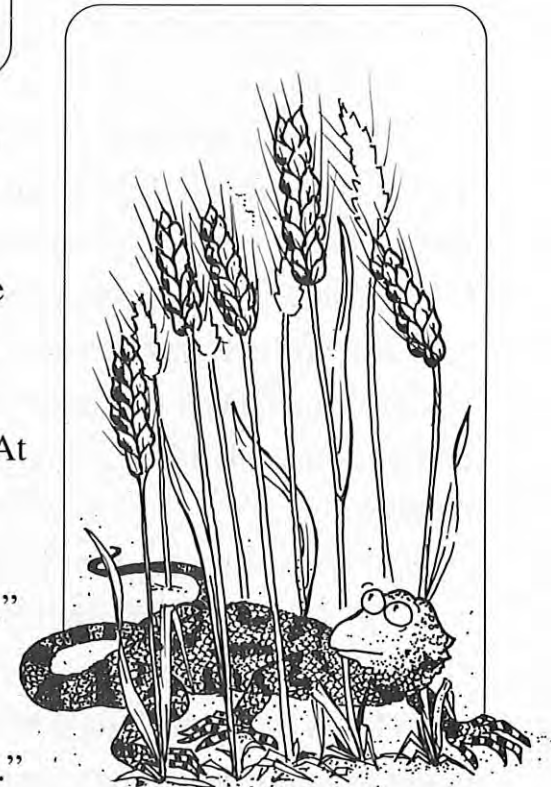
"Where are you going, dragon lizard?" sang a honeyeater, feeding from a mallee tree.

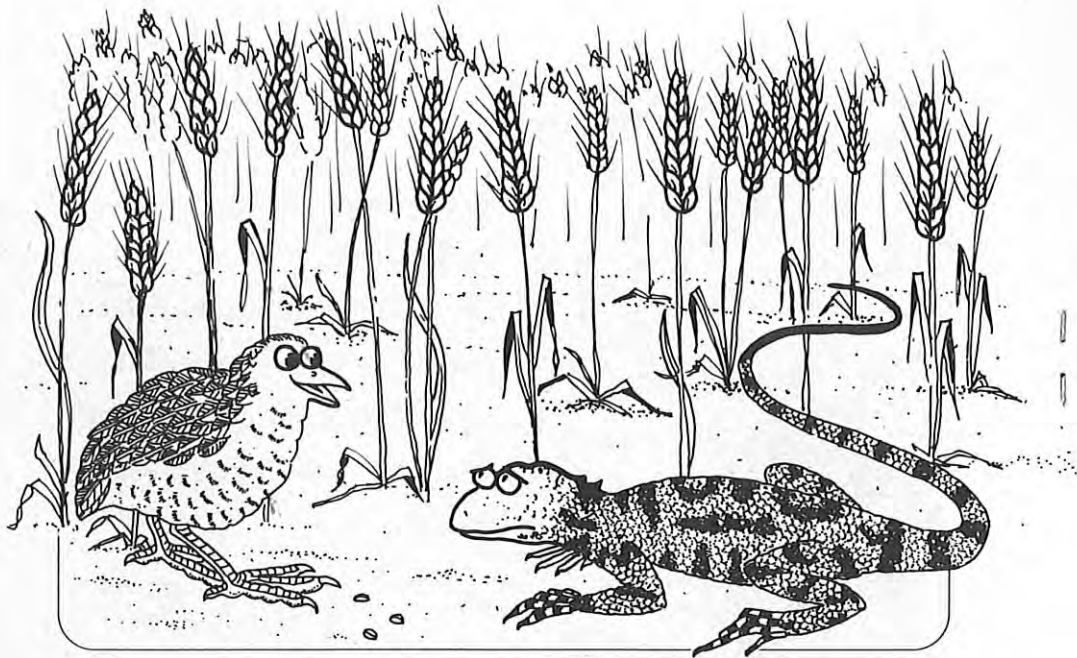
"I'm going to the wheat paddocks to look for insects," replied Riccardo as he jumped from the rock onto the leafy ground.

"Be careful," warned the honeyeater. "You'd be better off staying here."

Riccardo took no notice of the honeyeater's advice. He hurried past clumps of sheoaks and wandoo trees. At last he reached the edge of the wheat paddocks.

"What a strange place," thought Riccardo as he looked around. "All the plants grow in straight lines."





Riccardo walked between them but the ground was very soft. He was trying so hard to keep his balance that he didn't notice something move in the wheat.

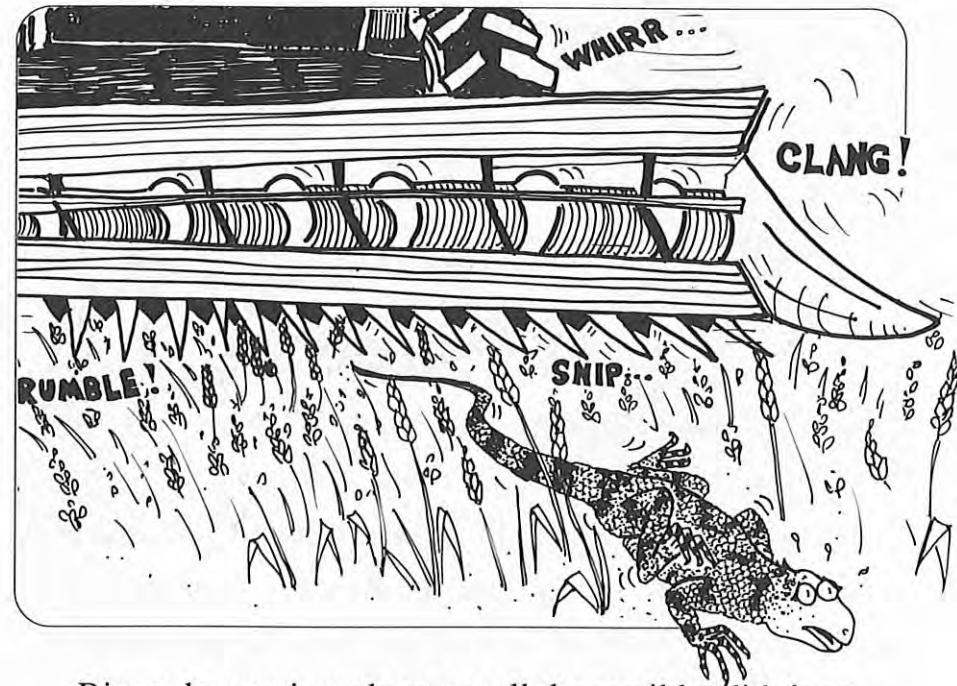
Suddenly, Riccardo came face to face with a small bird-like being. It had two legs, a beak and a coat of cream and brown feathers. Riccardo was so surprised that all common sense left him. "Are you an eagle or hawk?" he trembled.

"Me!" replied the bird indignantly, "I'm a quail."

"Oh yes," Riccardo sighed, very much relieved.

"Perhaps you can help me. Are there any insects here?"

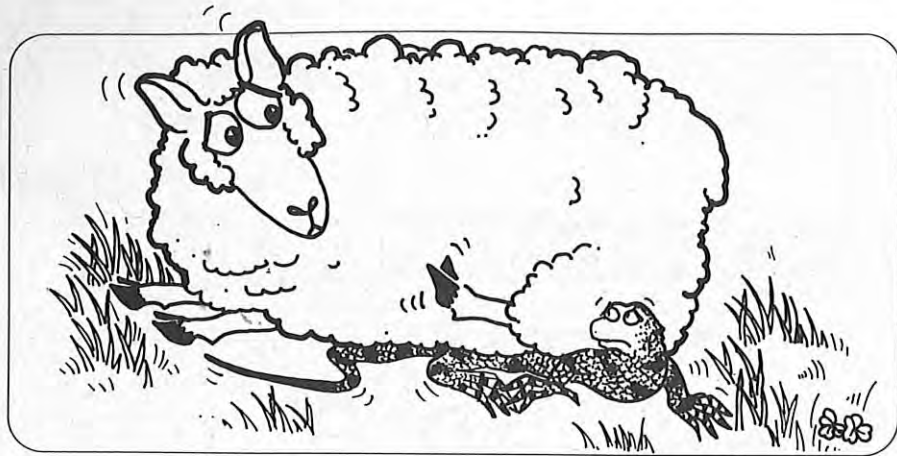
"There are some," replied the quail. "But it's much easier to find wheat grains to eat."



Riccardo was just about to tell the quail he didn't eat wheat when a deep rumbling sound shook the ground. The quail took off into the air as the sound got louder and louder...rumble...rumble...clank...clank...whirr...rumble.

The cause of the noise appeared. It was a harvester, driven by a farmer, but to Riccardo it was a monster. A huge, red monster with snapping jaws that was eating up all the plants and getting closer.

Riccardo ran as fast as he could down the rows of wheat, through a fence and into a grassy paddock. He didn't dare stop. He ran and ran until he came to a lumpy rock and dived under it.



“Safe at last,” Riccardo sighed. But suddenly the rock moved and made a loud Baaaaaa..Baaaaaa...Baaaaaaa noise. Sand went flying in all directions. Riccardo had taken shelter under a sheep that was having a nap!

The sheep and Riccardo ran in opposite directions. Riccardo ran as fast as he could towards some trees and at last found a log to crawl under. Feeling exhausted, frightened and unhappy he said to himself, “Ohhh, the wheat paddock’s a terrible place. The ground’s too soft, there are strange monsters and rocks that run away, and worst of all, there are no insects.”

He tried to look on the bright side. He was back among the trees and had somewhere to hide, but the ground felt cold. It was also hard to run across all the sticks and leaves. Riccardo started to sob because he was so unhappy.



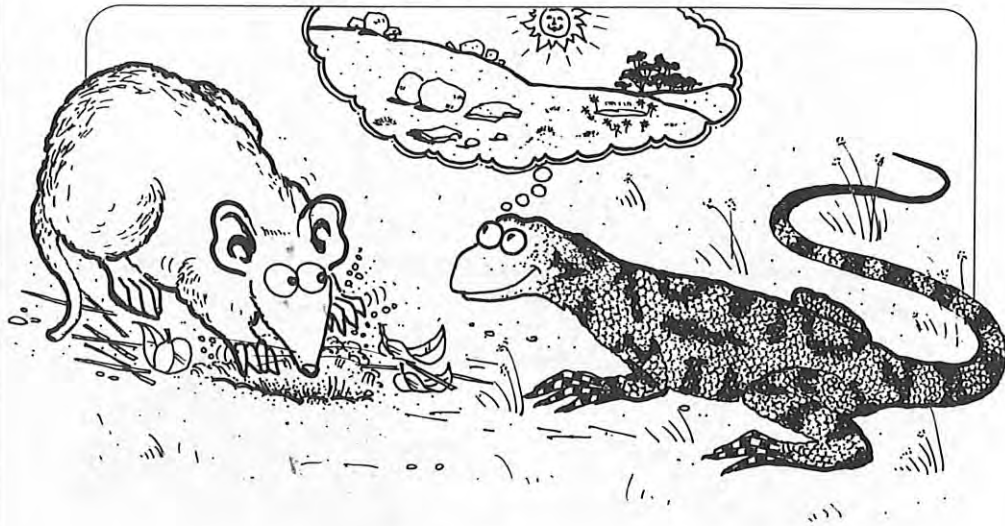
“What’s the matter with you?” asked a friendly voice. Riccardo looked up. A funny furry animal with a long nose and big ears was looking at him.

“What are you?” asked Riccardo.

“I’m a bandicoot,” the long-nosed animal replied. “But you haven’t answered my question. What’s the matter?”

“I’m lost,” Riccardo sobbed. “I can’t find my home. Oh, I really miss my home.”

“Well, let’s see. What does your home look like?” asked the bandicoot.



“It’s a rock,” replied Riccardo. “It’s a big, warm rock. It has pools and patches of moss, ferns and flowers, and lots of loose rocks for me to hide under.”

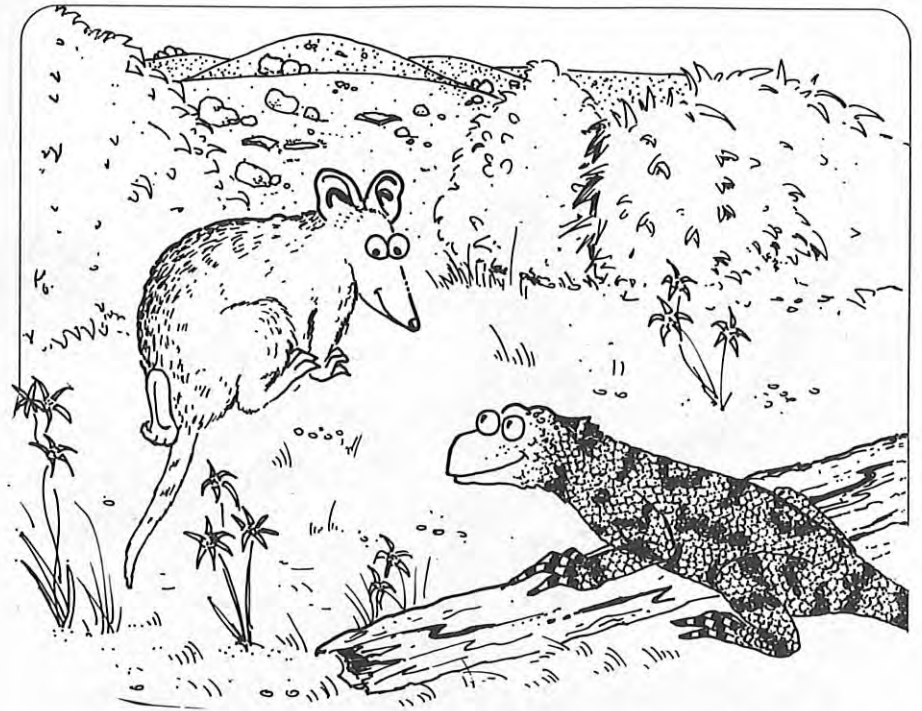
“Oh, that place,” laughed the bandicoot.

“You know where it is?” Riccardo said excitedly.

“Yes, it’s not far away,” answered the bandicoot. “I was up there this morning looking for a new home. I tried to dig a hole three times, but the place is too hard. It’s no good.”

“Will you take me there, please,” Riccardo interrupted.

“Yes, all right,” said the bandicoot. “But we must be quick.”

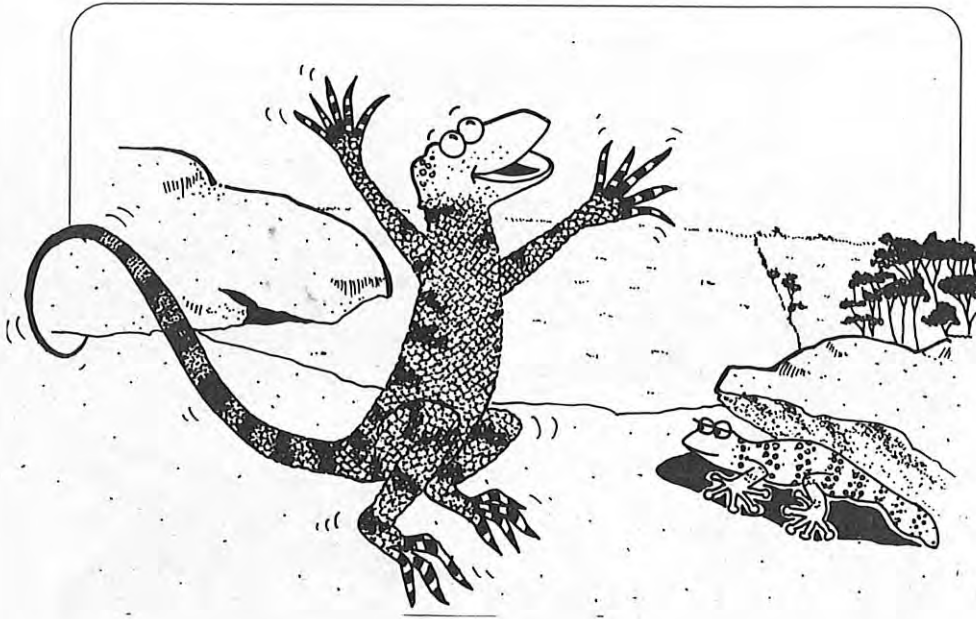


Riccardo followed the bandicoot over two logs, under a branch, through some blue flowers, and around a small shrub. Then he saw it. His rock stretched away in front of them.

Riccardo ran out onto the rock. He felt the warmth and hard surface, and saw lots of rock shelters.

He turned and called out, “Thank you, thank you for finding my home for me.”

“That’s all right, but it’s no good for digging holes,” replied the bandicoot as he shuffled off through the twigs and leaves.



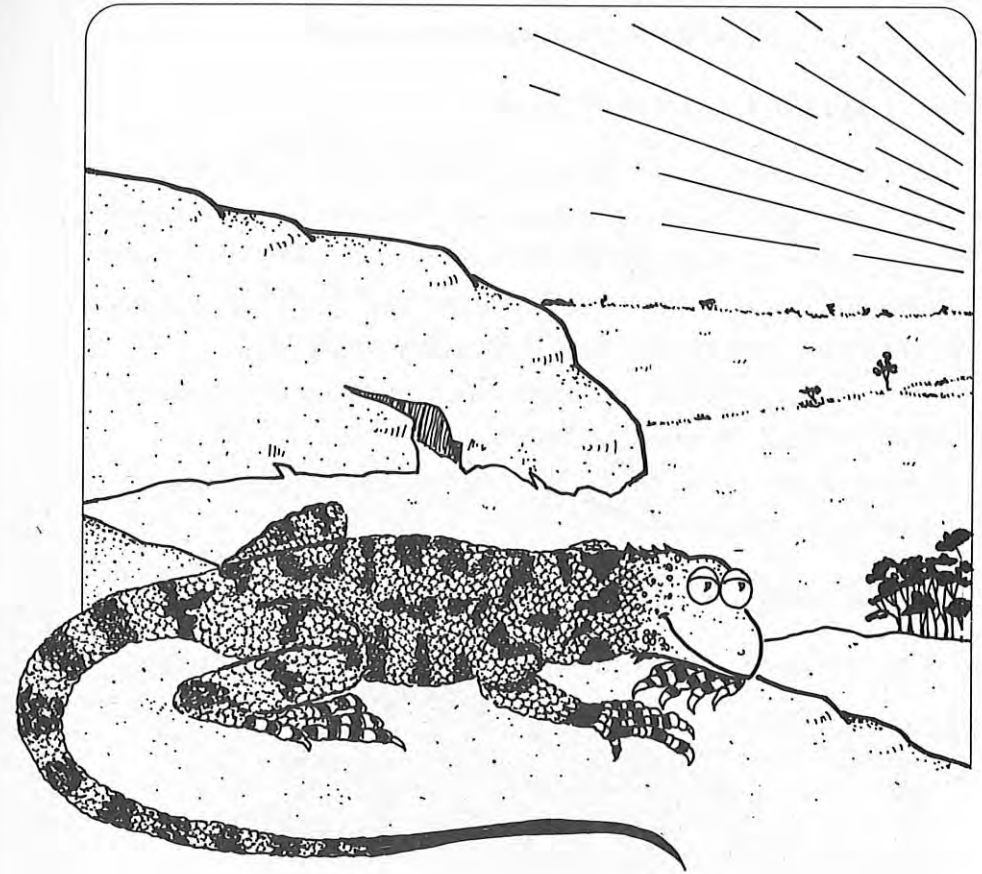
Riccardo felt so glad and called out, "I'm home at last and I'll stay here, forever."

"Is that Riccardo making a noise again?" asked the sleepy gecko.

"Oh, Geck, you don't know how happy I am to be back," danced Riccardo on his favourite patch of rock. "I had such a terrible time out there."

"So, this isn't such a bad place after all?" said the gecko.



"It's just fine for dragon lizards like me," replied Riccardo as he found a large flat rock to spend the cool night under.



The sun sank slowly in the West. Riccardo settled down to sleep and thought to himself, "I'll never leave the rock again. This is where I know how to survive. It's the place for me."

ACTIVITIES

On the Sunny Side of the Street

Look for a sunny spot to sit for 5 to 10 minutes.  Unlike Riccardo who is solar-heated and has tough leathery skin, you'll need protection from the sun. Wear a hat  and put sunscreen on your exposed skin.

Now, let's see who's out and about in the heat. As you see various creatures, name and/or draw them in the spaces provided.

Once you've got a short list, mark which ones Riccardo would like to meet and which he wouldn't. Why?

Now sit in the shade,  look for more creatures and compare your observations.

Riccardo's neighbours Food, Friend or Foe?

✓ Tick for friend ✗ Cross for foe ○ Circle for Food

Sunny Creatures

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Shady Creatures

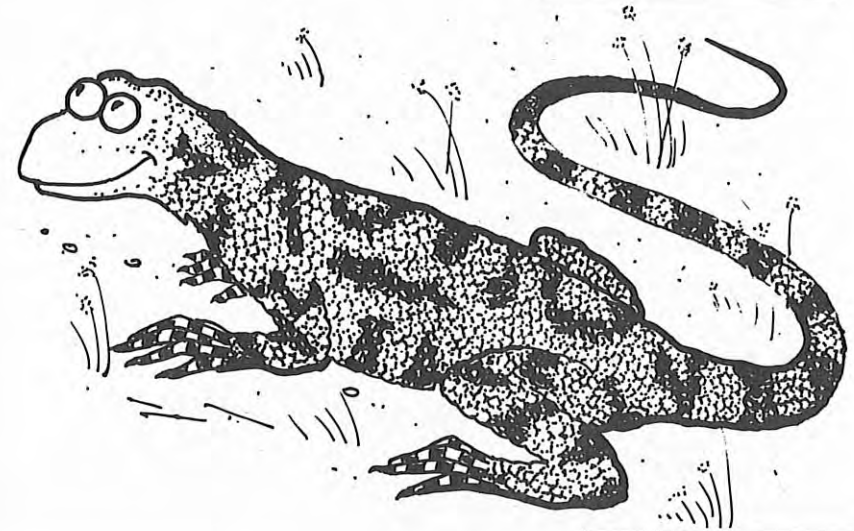
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ACTIVITIES

What special features and behaviour does Riccardo have to survive on a granite rock?

Tough leathery skin protects Riccardo from....

Patterned skin makes it hard for eagles to



Short strong legs are good for....

A low flat body is good for....

ACTIVITIES

Look about you for special places for you to hide if you were Riccardo. In this space draw a map of the area around you, name the special plants, and name the places where Riccardo could hide. Show the route Riccardo would take to reach the safest spot to escape from the eagle.

