

learn Herald Sun NEWSbeat

CHILDREN'S NEWS PAGE ▶ heraldsun.com.au/learn



27°C CITY: showers



Help needed for a wild native

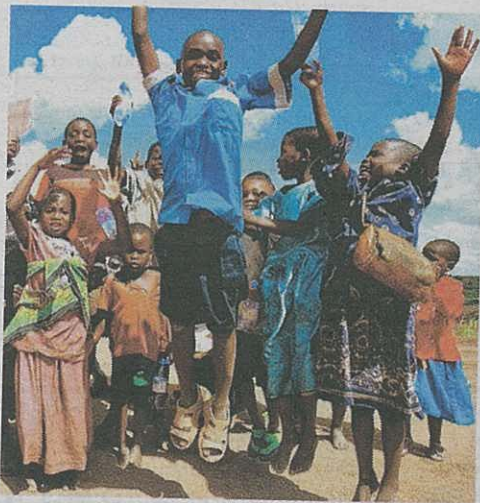
WHAT do a rock star and an eastern barred bandicoot have in common? They both like staying up all night, sleeping all day and living fast. But unlike celebrities who can afford million-dollar mansions, the poor eastern barred bandicoot is troubled finding somewhere to live. The native grasslands and grassy woodlands of western Victoria were once its home. But extensive clearing of these grasslands and

the introduction of foxes and cats has left little room and food for this marsupial. The eastern barred bandicoot is about the size of a small rabbit. It has a pointy snout, sharp teeth, a hunched back, a pouch and a long thin tail. There are only 100 to 150 of them in the wild in Victoria. These are either the offspring of captured bandicoots, which were reintroduced to special nature reserves, or the offspring of the captive breeding program led by Melbourne Zoo.

What can you do to stop other creatures suffering the same fate?

This month Act4nature is asking students to take the pledge to plant local native plants in their garden at home and at school, and to create a wildlife habitat for birds, butterflies, skinks and frogs.

Make a pledge at www.act4nature.org.au/Act-now.html



CHILDREN in Malawi were jumping for joy when Madonna visited their town this month, though it might have been the idea of getting their photo taken rather than meeting the celebrity singer that excited them. Madonna placed the first brick to mark the building of her multi-million-dollar Malawi Academy for Girls in Chinkhota, about 15km outside the capital, Lilongwe. Madonna says she wants to enable young girls to become the next generation of leaders in one of Africa's poorest nations. Malawi is the native land of her two adopted children.

GIRL TALK

Quake alters the Earth's axis

David Reneke

JUST how big was the February 27 Chilean earthquake? Officially it was 8.8 on the Richter scale, but it did something scientists were not expecting.

It shortened the length of an Earth day.

It was reduced by 1.26 microseconds — not a lot to most people but important if you work with GPS systems or rely on precise timekeeping.

But there was a more disturbing surprise.

Scientists found the shaking might have affected the planet by shifting Earth on its axis.

US Jet Propulsion Laboratory scientist Richard Gross has calculated that the quake should have moved Earth's figure axis, our balancing axis, by as much as 8cm. It happened once before. The even stronger Sumatran earthquake of 2004 shortened our day and shifted our axis 7cm.

Of the two, the Chilean earthquake was the most dangerous and made the most difference. When you change the axis of any planet, you change the weather as well



because the tilt determines the seasons. It may be something we need to look at when addressing the issues of man-made versus natural global warming.

Ecological change may very well be a natural consequence of planetary evolution.

David Reneke is an astronomer and editor of *Astro Space News*. Visit davidreneke.com

Illustration: nomoref.com

write on



OLYMPIAN Sally Carbon has powered on to a career writing children's books, with the latest, *I Want to be an Olympian* out this month.

At what age did you catch the Olympic bug?

At 12. The average age Australian elite athletes realise they wanted to pursue a sport is 11.8 years. I desperately wanted to represent Australia. I ran every afternoon. I would run nine sprints — each sprint representing a letter from the word Australia. I wanted to be a track-and-field athlete.

What sports did you play at school?

I played all sports: tennis, softball, swimming, athletics and hockey — never netball.

You also did ballet. Does that have anything in common with hockey?

I think it taught me so much about body control and posture. I didn't get many injuries as a hockey player and I believe it was ballet upbringing that helped in that area.

When did you decide to become a professional hockey player?

Around the age of 13 or 14. My body changed and was becoming too muscly for ballet and I changed emotionally. I enjoyed the competition surrounding hockey.

What part of the Olympics did you love best?

Where do I start? Really the best part, apart from your actual competition, would have to be the opening ceremony. It's the moment where we all thought, at last, we've made it.

How did you cope when you lost a major game?

We (the Australian hockey team) won an Olympic gold medal (at Seoul in 1988), and four years later we came fifth.

That means we didn't even get to play off for a medal. We cried for six months. But it was a good lesson in life.

How long did it take you to write your book?

Almost 18 months. After four months of planning, writing and rewriting the fictional story, I work with an illustrator for another six months. Then it takes three months to print a book and get it ready for distribution.

www.sallycarbon.com.au



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read me

▶ **On this day** 1770: English explorer Lt James Cook arrives in New South Wales, the first recorded European to encounter our eastern coastline.

▶ **Worth quoting** "All my life through, the new sights of nature made me rejoice like a child."

Scientist and Nobel prizewinner Marie Curie (1867-1934)

▶ **Believe it or not** Jordan Romero, 13, of California, plans to climb Mt Everest, in a quest to reach the summits of the highest peaks on all seven continents.