



Thanks for checking out this brand new issue of Kind Matters!

In this issue, you'll learn about the incredible Betta fish, also known as Siamese fighting fish. These fish are common companions, but there are a lot of myths about how they should be kept. Read on to find out what these fish need to be happy and healthy and how to be the very best Betta guardian.

In addition to learning all about Bettas, this issue brings you an introduction to our very exciting Learning at Home Booklets, our brand new Kind Matters competition, fun activities, a new craft, a helpful Kind Conservation action, and heaps more!

SPCA Competition: Book Review

Be in to win an awesome surprise prize, including the book, *Kingdom of Blong!*

How you ask? Send us a book review of your favourite animal-themed book!

A book review should help the reader decide if they'd like to read the book too. It should be interesting, creative, and catchy. You can use the template at the end of this issue or create your own!

Email your book review to education@sPCA.nz by 18th October, 2021. Please include your name, age, and mailing address.



What's Inside



A Closer Look at:
Betta Fish



Kind Conservation:
Nest Helper



Craft:
Needle Felted Bird



A Closer Look at: Betta Fish

Betta fish, or Siamese fighting fish, are beautiful freshwater tropical fish with long, flowing fins of bright blue, red, green, orange, purple, or any other colour under the rainbow!



However, just like other animals, Betta fish are much more than something pretty to look at – they're sentient beings with their own thoughts, feeling, emotions, and needs.

Unfortunately, there is still a big myth when it comes to keeping betta fish as companions. Although many people think that Bettas are low-maintenance companions that only need a small, simple environment, the exact opposite is true. Betta fish, just like other fish, need to live in large aquariums, with enough room to swim and exercise. Filling your aquarium with lots of plants, substrate, hide-outs, and heaps of other exciting things will also help your Betta feel safe, happy, and allow them to express their natural behaviours!

Another important thing to know about Betta fish, and the reason they're often called Siamese fighting fish, is that it's normal for male Bettas to fight with one another. As a responsible fish guardian, it's key to provide males with their very own environment, or they can sometimes be housed with other short-finned, compatible fish of a different species. If you have more than one Betta, ensure they cannot see each other from their separate aquariums as this can cause them a great deal of stress. Not only do they need an enriched environment, but good water quality is essential for the health of your

Betta. This means you will regularly need to test their water for pH, nitrate, nitrite, and ammonia levels, to name a few.

Since Betta are tropical fish, they also need an underwater aquarium heater and thermometer so that their water stays at the right temperature. They also need a filter to help clean and aerate the water. Even with oxygen in the water, Betta will need a gap between their water and the tank lid because they may also need access to surface air.

There's so much to know about being a responsible fish guardian. Check out the [Fish Care](#) section on SPCA's Kids' Portal and to ensure you're providing your Betta with everything they need to be happy and healthy, always talk to a fish veterinarian or fish specialist!

Introducing SPCA's Learning at Home Booklets

Can't get enough animal knowledge?!

Well, you're in luck – with SPCA's brand new Learning at Home Booklets, you can play games, colour, make fun crafts, and complete lots of other different animal activities until your heart's content!

There are three sets of exciting booklets, each set having one booklet that focuses on companion animals, one on farmed animals, and one on wild animals. You can ask an adult in your whānau for help choosing which one will be the most fun and challenging for you. Check them out [here](#).



Fun Fact



- > Betta fish need a specialised, varied diet and should be fed 1-2 times a day.
- > Betta fish are native to Southeast Asia.
- > Bettas are excellent "tail-flip" jumpers. This is why your Betta aquarium will always need a lid, so they can't jump out!
- > Happy and healthy male Bettas will often create bubble nests at the surface of their aquarium.
- > When cared for properly, Betta fish can live for around 5 years.



Responsible Guardianship

Tip: Happy, Healthy Companions!

Being a responsible animal guardian is all about ensuring that your companion is happy and healthy. One way to do this is to keep your animal at a healthy weight.



Unfortunately, companion animals are getting bigger, mainly caused by overfeeding and under-exercising and not everyone realises how serious this issue is for their furry family members. That's why there is a **National Pet Obesity Day** (14th October, 2021).

Overweight animals have health issues that need to be taken as seriously as underweight animals. In fact, it has been proven to shorten their lives by as much as 2 1/2 years. Additionally, not only does being overweight affect an animal's ability to express their natural behaviours,

but they can face several health problems such as:

- > **diabetes**
- > **heart disease**
- > **respiratory distress**
- > **high blood pressure**
- > **cancers**

To help keep your companion from becoming overweight, ensure you provide them with a healthy diet and provide them with plenty of exercise. If you're worried about your animal's weight, it's always best to talk to your vet.

 **Nestlé PURINA**

Body Condition System

TOO THIN

IDEAL

TOO HEAVY



Book Nook

Title: Elastic Island Adventures: Kingdom of Blong

Author: Karen McMillan

Illustrator: Michael Wilkin



Kiri, Jed, and twins Emma and Ethan, discover an 'elastic' island that sends them pinging across the ocean to a variety of destinations.

When they arrive at the Kingdom of Blong, they discover that Blong the Cat is the island's missing king. Blong is greeted with a great deal of fanfare, but it looks like fame might be the ruin of him.

Will Blong's relationship with Emma continue? And why do the bilbies, led by Baxter the Bilby, decide it is a good idea to live on a dangerous island ruled by cats? Will they end up on the dinner menu, or will they survive?



Interview with an Author

We sat down with Karen McMillan, author of the Elastic Island Adventure Series, to ask how her adorable cat Blong inspired the latest book in the series – *The Kingdom of Blong*!

Where did you adopt Blong from?

We adopted Blong from Vanuatu. During our holiday we noticed a starving cat living in the garden. We did our best to feed him up. He had such a sweet personality we fell in love with him.

How did you make the decision to adopt Blong?

We felt if we didn't adopt him he would probably starve to death as Vanuatu was coming into its rainy season, and the house wasn't going to be rented again for some time.

After talking to the people who owned the house, who were delighted we wanted to adopt him, I made all the arrangements from New Zealand

What was it about Blong that made you want to adopt him?

His sweet and loving personality! He was so affectionate, and even though he was starving, he clearly wanted our company and not just the food.

How did you choose Blong's name?

Blong is a local Vanuatu name that means 'of' or 'belong'. It seemed fitting and it honours his island heritage.

*How did Blong inspire your book, *The Kingdom of Blong*?*

Blong is the star of this book, so he is the main inspiration for the plotline. In this book, we discover that Blong the Cat is the island's missing king.

The fictional Blong is greeted with a great deal of fanfare, but it looks like fame might be the ruin of him. He adopted Emma as his human in book two, but now we aren't sure if his relationship with her will continue.

I looked to the real-life Blong for inspiration about all the things we might have in this kingdom of cats, with children paid to look after their every whim!



How has Milla, your husband's granddaughter, inspired you?

I wouldn't have written the Elastic Island Adventures books if it wasn't for Milla. I usually write for adults, but then aged 10, Milla kept asking when I'd write a children's book. So this project is really born out of my love for her and wanting to do a fun family project.

How would you describe Blong's personality?

The real-life Blong is sweet and affectionate. He is super cuddly, and he also loves people. He loves music and parties and being the centre of attention.

The fictional Blong is just like that, but he can talk and dance.

What is your favourite thing about Blong?

I think it's his devotion to us. In some ways, he's a little dog-like, as he follows us wherever we go. I wrote *Kingdom of Blong* with him sitting on my lap for much of the time, which was a wonderful way to write this book.



"It didn't take us long to fall in love with him and to want to give him a chance at a happy life with us in Auckland."

Besides Blong, what is your favourite animal?

I'd have to say Heathcliff, my husband's beloved dog. Heathcliff features in Elastic Island Adventures for the very first time in this book. Heathcliff is a wise philosopher in *Kingdom of Blong* and a lovely contrast to young Blong, who is sweet but very naïve and sometimes too trusting.

The fictional Heathcliff is very much like the real-life dog. He is loyal and caring, and wins over even people who don't like dogs.



Blong's Profile

Full name: Blong James Tommy McKenzie

Age: 16

Likes: Food, cuddles, music, people and parties.

Dislikes: He's a bit nervous of very young children but otherwise loves everyone.

Kind Conservation: Nest Helper

In our last issue of Kind Matters, we learned all about some of the awesome backyard birds you can find in New Zealand.

These birds are an important part of New Zealand's wildlife but unfortunately, they face a lot of challenges. One of these challenges involves the place where birds lay their eggs, and raise their young – their nests!

Birds use materials such as mud, leaves, sticks, and grass to build their nests.

These materials are so important for birds because they help keep eggs safe, supported, cosy, and warm!

When we clean up our yards of stray sticks and leaves, cut our grass, and remove these other natural materials, we're often removing prime nest building materials for these backyard birds.



Unfortunately, a material that has become too easily accessible for birds is plastic waste. Littering is leading to more and more nests that have been built with plastic, which can be dangerous for birds.

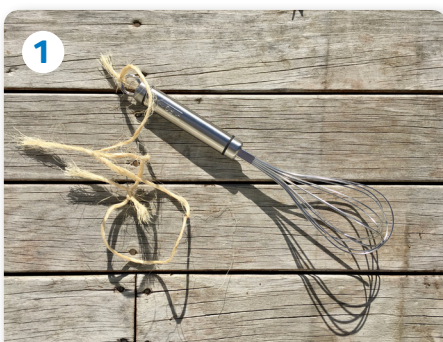
Not only can you help birds to avoid plastic waste by not littering and completing community clean ups, but you can also help birds save their energy searching far and wide for appropriate nesting materials, by completing the below Kind Conservation action!



Become a Nest Helper!

Materials needed:

- > Twine
- > Whisk
- > Twigs, dried grass, moss, dried leaves, straw, hay, bark, and any other natural materials you can find in your backyard. You can even collect your companions' hair after you've groomed them and add it to the whisk!



Tie a string to an old whisk



Stuff the whisk full of appropriate nest building materials.



Hang the whisk in a tree so birds can come and collect their favourite materials!

Note: Be sure that none of the materials you use have been sprayed with any chemicals. Remember, natural materials are safest for birds. Keep an eye on your whisk to see what materials the birds like best and refill it with those!

Craft: Felted Bird and Nest

Materials needed

- > Needle felting wool
- > Felting needle (felting needles are very sharp so take care when using!)
- > Scissors
- > Foam or cushion to felt on
- > Something straight like a pencil or chop stick to wrap the felting wool around



Instructions

1. Take a piece of felting wool, approximately 15cm long and wrap it tightly around a chop stick/pencil
2. Using the felting needle, felt the wool into a sphere shape. Repeat this step using less wool to make a smaller sphere for your bird's head.
3. Next, cut a piece of felting wool into a triangle shape.
4. Felt the wool into a wing shape.
5. Create another triangle, and felt into a tail shape.
6. When done, you should have the pictured shapes for your felted bird.
7. Felt the smaller sphere onto the bigger sphere to connect your bird's head and body.
8. Felt your bird's wings to the body. You can felt a small piece of wool into the front of the wing and side of the body to make it more secure and smooth.
9. Felt your bird's tail onto the body.
10. Felt a small piece of yellow wool into a triangle shape.
11. Felt the yellow wool onto your bird to create a beak. Next, roll two small piece of black felt into balls and felt onto your bird to create eyes.
12. Work a piece of brown felt into shape to make a start on your bird's nest.
13. Felt the wool until you have a tiny bird nest shape.
14. Roll three pieces of white wool into little spheres.
15. Felt the white wool into egg shapes and place in your bird's nest.
16. Once done, you can display your felted bird and nest in a safe place!



My Book Review

Book Details

Title: _____

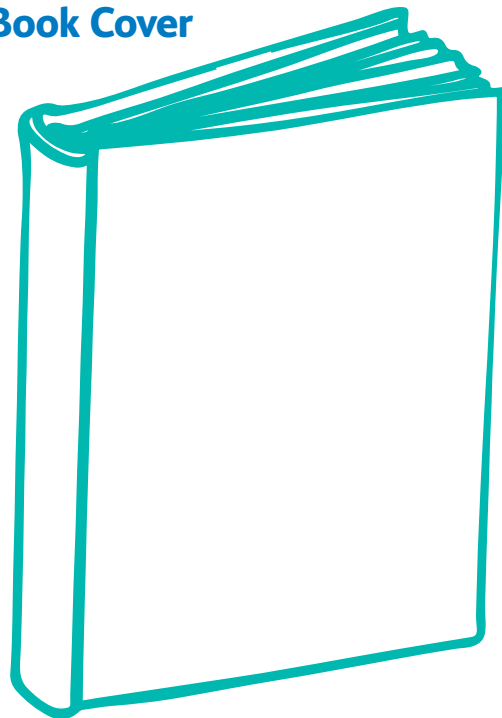
Author: _____

Illustrator: _____

Genre: _____

Characters

Book Cover



Did you like the book?



Your Review

What was this book about? What was your favourite part? Why? Would you recommend this book to a friend?

Draw your favourite scene from the book

Is there something you'd like to see in the next issue of Kind Matters?

We'd love to hear from you!

Email education@spca.nz with you ideas!

