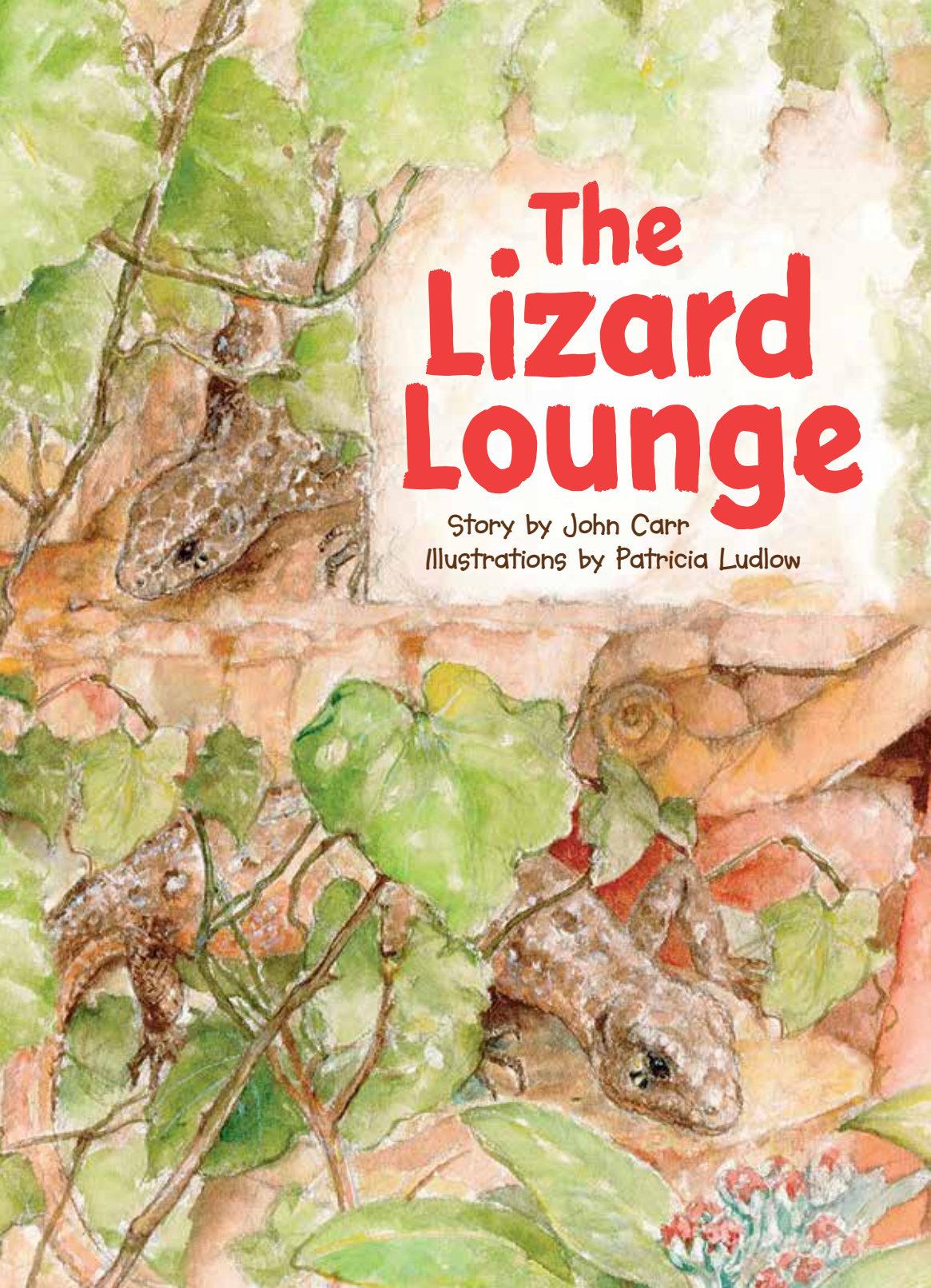


A watercolor illustration of two lizards in a garden. One lizard is perched on a tree branch in the upper left, and the other is on a stone wall in the lower right. The scene is filled with green leaves and a small red flower in the bottom right corner.

The Lizard Lounge

Story by John Carr
Illustrations by Patricia Ludlow

The Lizard Lounge

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The Lizard Lounge



Chapter 1

“A rabbit,” said Cooper.

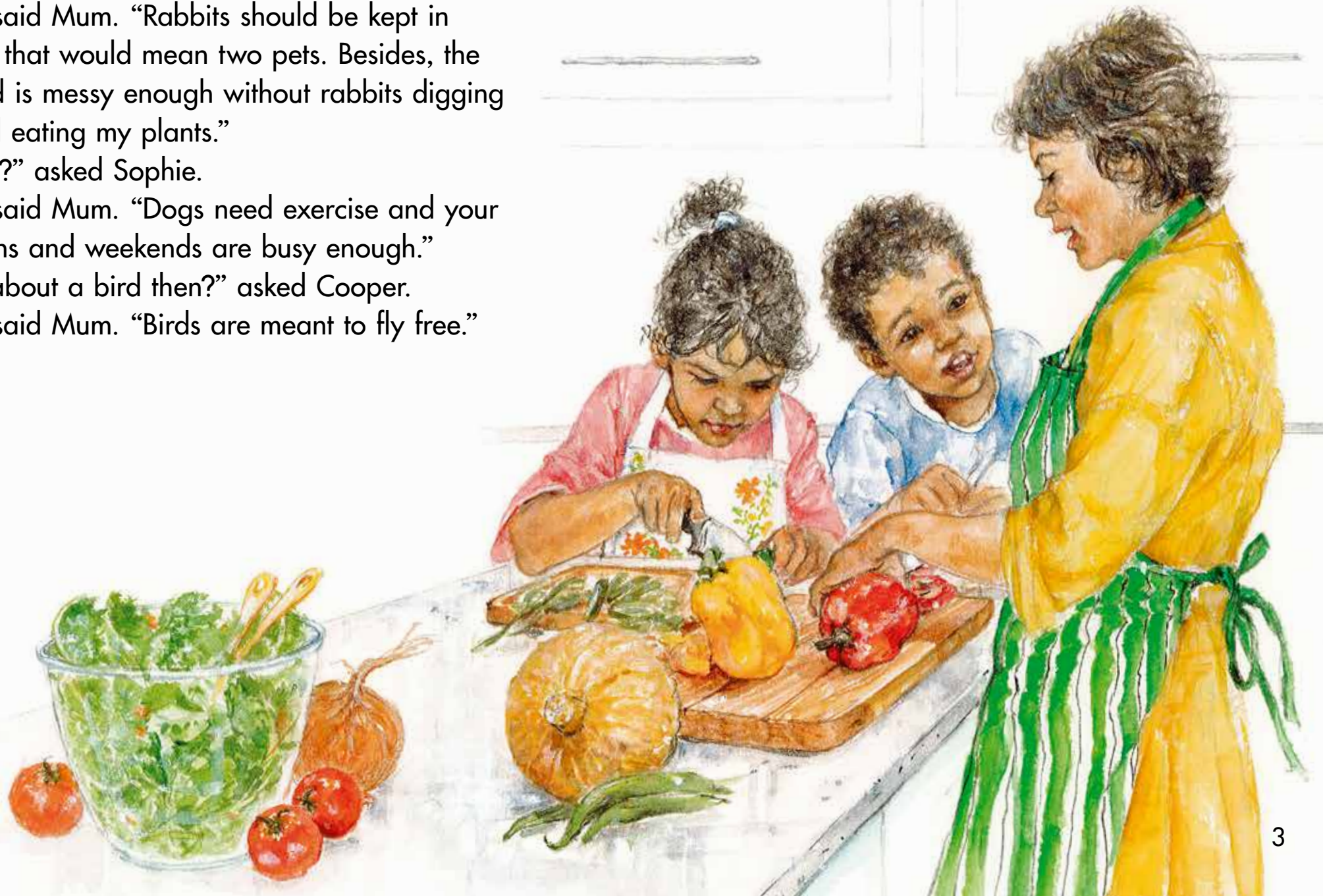
“No!” said Mum. “Rabbits should be kept in pairs, so that would mean two pets. Besides, the backyard is messy enough without rabbits digging it up and eating my plants.”

“A dog?” asked Sophie.

“No!” said Mum. “Dogs need exercise and your afternoons and weekends are busy enough.”

“How about a bird then?” asked Cooper.

“No!” said Mum. “Birds are meant to fly free.”



Sophie and Cooper knew Mum wouldn't let them have a pet, but they carried on anyway.

"A monkey?" said Sophie.

"You're being silly now," said Mum.

"What's your favourite animal?" asked Cooper.

"The cheetah," said Mum, who was starting to get silly herself. That was not a good sign.

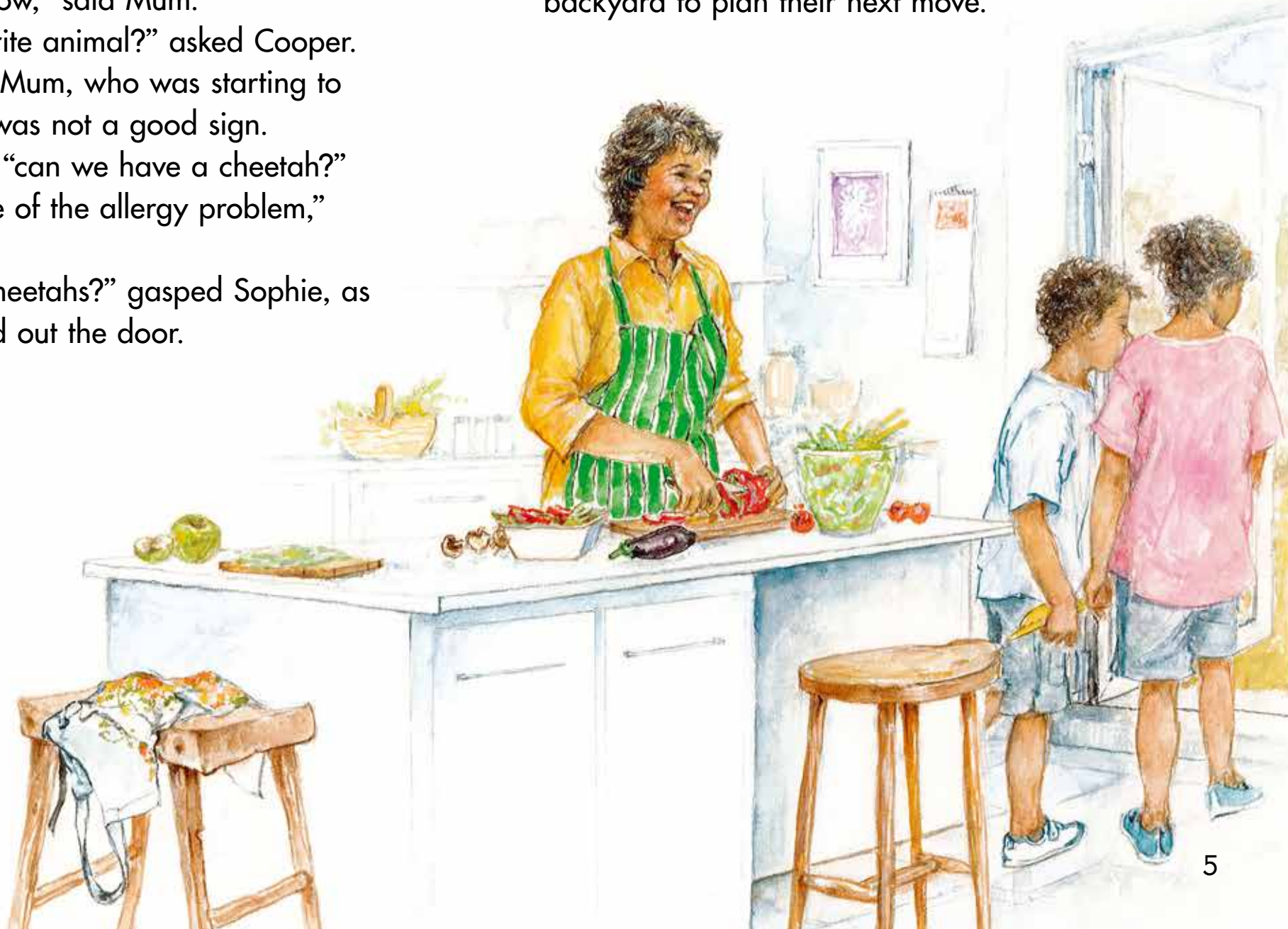
"OK," said Cooper, "can we have a cheetah?"

"You can't, because of the allergy problem," said Mum.

"You're allergic to cheetahs?" gasped Sophie, as the children wandered out the door.

"No," laughed Mum. "They are allergic to me because I bring them out in spots!"

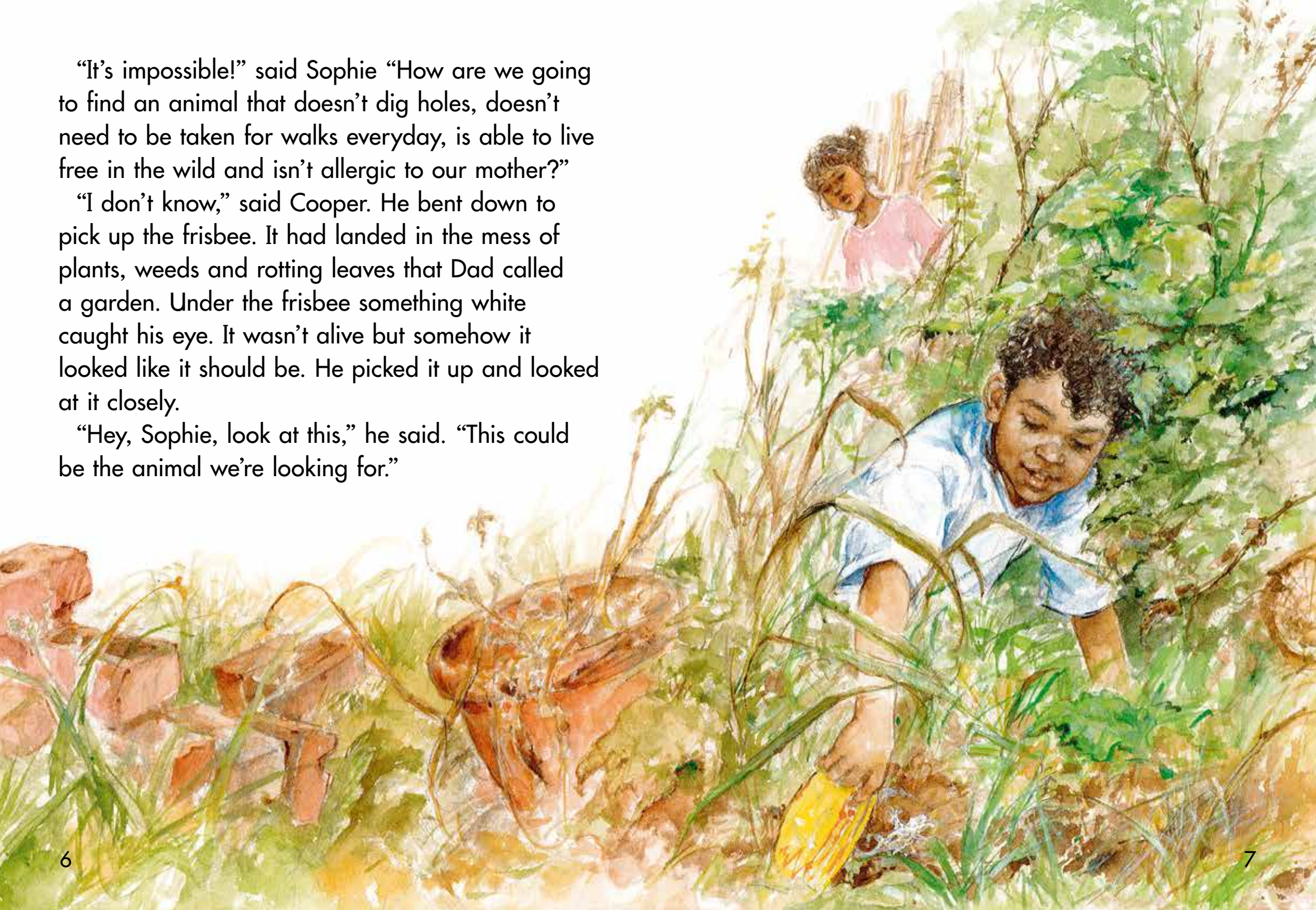
Cooper and Sophie gave up. They went into the backyard to plan their next move.



“It’s impossible!” said Sophie “How are we going to find an animal that doesn’t dig holes, doesn’t need to be taken for walks everyday, is able to live free in the wild and isn’t allergic to our mother?”

“I don’t know,” said Cooper. He bent down to pick up the frisbee. It had landed in the mess of plants, weeds and rotting leaves that Dad called a garden. Under the frisbee something white caught his eye. It wasn’t alive but somehow it looked like it should be. He picked it up and looked at it closely.

“Hey, Sophie, look at this,” he said. “This could be the animal we’re looking for.”



Chapter 2

“Lizards?” said Mum. “You want pet lizards?”

“Not pets, Mum,” said Cooper. “They are wild animals. They will live in our garden and look after themselves.”

“They are amazing animals. We’ve researched them,” said Sophie. “They’ve got great names like ‘gecko’ and ‘skink’. They don’t dig holes. They exercise themselves. They live in the wild and they are not allergic to humans. They can also grow new tails and some of them lick their own eyeballs!”

“And lizards like untidy gardens,” said Cooper. Suddenly Dad looked interested.

“That sounds like my kind of animal,” he said.

“It certainly is your kind of garden,” said Mum.



Cooper explained how lizards like places with lots of holes and crevices for shelter and protection.

“That pile of bricks and old roofing iron over there will be perfect,” said Cooper.

“For what?” asked Dad.

“For the lizard lounge we are going to build,” said Sophie. “It’s a place that is home to lots of insects and plants with berries and nectar that lizards and birds like to eat.”

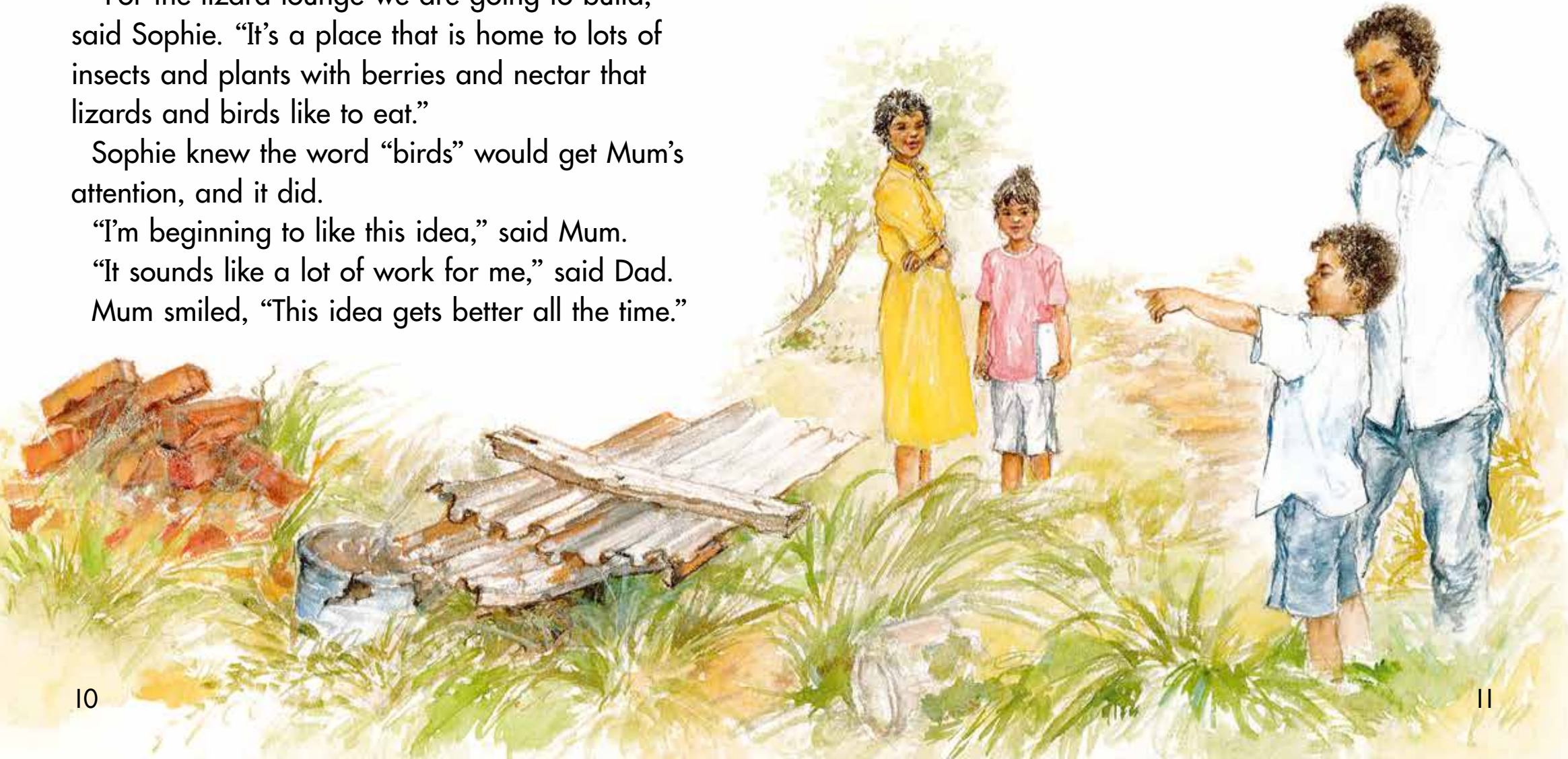
Sophie knew the word “birds” would get Mum’s attention, and it did.

“I’m beginning to like this idea,” said Mum.

“It sounds like a lot of work for me,” said Dad.

Mum smiled, “This idea gets better all the time.”

“Don’t worry, Dad,” said Cooper. “Once the planting and lifting is done, the lizard lounge, just like the lizards, will grow and look after itself. The lizards even help pollinate plants and spread seeds around.”



Dad still looked suspicious. “Where are you going to get these lizards from?” he asked.

“How much do they cost?”

“They are native animals, Dad,” said Sophie. “You can’t buy them, but we think there are some already living here, so if we make our garden more lizard-friendly, we will attract more!”

Cooper opened his hand and showed Mum and Dad what he had found under the frisbee.

“It was in the garden,” he said.

Mum and Dad were fascinated by the lizard-shaped material. “It looks like a ghost lizard,” said Mum.



“It’s the skin of a gecko,” said Cooper. “Geckos shed their whole skin all at once. It shows that there must be at least one lizard in our garden already. When we build the lizard lounge, more will come.”

“That skin could have been in the garden for years,” Dad said. “Before we put time and money into a lizard lounge, we need more proof. Here’s the deal. If you two can provide proof by Friday that there is a lizard in the garden, I’ll help you build the lounge.”

“And I’ll buy the plants,” said Mum. “Deal?”

“Deal!” said Cooper and Sophie together, although they weren’t sure how they were going to get the proof.



Chapter 3

Cooper spent two hours searching the garden with a camera strapped on his head.

“It’s hopeless,” he said. “They’ve got camouflage on their side and they can disappear into tiny cracks and crevices as soon as they are disturbed.”

Sophie had another idea. “Let’s search the internet instead. There must be a way of getting proof without taking photos.”

Searching for “finding small animals in your garden”, Sophie found the instructions for building a tracking tunnel. Everything they needed to build it could be found in the rubbish bin, the kitchen, Dad’s shed and Mum’s office.

When the tracking tunnel was finished, Cooper and Sophie set it up in the garden. They explained it to Dad.

“Lizards love sweet treats like berries and nectar,” said Cooper, “so we’ll use berries as bait.”

“To get to the berry bait, the lizard has to walk through the tunnel and across the food colouring sponge,” Sophie said. “To get out, the lizard has to walk on this printed paper and leave red footprints that we can use to identify them by.”

“Well done!” said Dad. “Now let’s wait and see what happens.”



Chapter 4

On Thursday, as the sun went down, Sophie and Cooper set the tracking tunnel up again.

Friday was their last chance to get proof. In the morning, they rushed outside to check. Mum and Dad were still in bed when the children came in looking serious, each holding a piece of paper behind their backs.

“What did you find?” asked Dad.

“Proof!” Cooper said, as he held up his paper with red footprints on it.

“And double proof!” beamed Sophie as she proudly held up a piece of paper with smaller footprints.

“We checked the footprints on the web,” said Sophie. “They belong to skinks.”

“Double proof is good enough for me,” said Dad. “It looks like we’ve got some work to do.”



Chapter 5

Because cold-blooded lizards need warmth, Sophie decided the lizard lounge should be put in a sunny corner of the backyard. Dad moved the bricks and roofing iron into piles leaving lots of small cracks, crannies and crevices for lizards to hide in. He also donated three old hubcaps from his shed to be used as drinking bowls.

The more work Dad did, the keener he got. Soon he had added some rotting logs and bits of unused firewood.

“That will attract insects and fungi into the garden,” he said. “That means more food for the lizards.”



Cooper and Mum bought plants from the local nursery. Mum knew they needed native plants and trees because the lizards were native animals. She also hoped they would attract native birds to the garden.

Tussock grasses, rengarenga lilies and tororaro would attract insects and provide protection for the lizards from cats and rats. Vines like rātā were planted to cover the logs and bricks.

“That’ll make it easier for the lizards to climb,” she told Cooper and Sophie. “Mānuka, rātā, kawakawa and flax can provide nectar and berries for the lizards all year round.”

While the lizard lounge was being worked on, the lizards kept out of sight. But they left plenty of signs that they were still around. Bits of shed skin were often found among the leaves and Dad became an expert at spotting lizard poo.



Chapter 6

When the lizard lounge was finished, everyone was proud of it. Cooper and Sophie decided to invite the neighbours and have an opening ceremony. Cooper made a sign. Sophie made a ribbon to cut. Mum made a blueberry pavlova. Dad made a speech. One of the lizards even made an appearance.

Just as Dad was about to start his speech, an adult skink crept out of a crack in a brick pile. It climbed a rātā vine onto some iron and began eating some squashed blueberries that had dropped off the pavlova. Everyone smiled and clapped.

“Look at that,” said Dad. “A beautiful animal like that deserves a wonderful lounge to live in. I’m sure we will all enjoy watching the lizards and their lounge grow for many years to come.”

As the clapping started, Cooper and Sophie cut the ribbon and declared the lounge open.

“Now,” said Dad. I suppose you are all wondering about lizard poos! Well let me tell you...”



Lizard Facts and Tips

Help protect precious lizards by sharing these facts and tips with all your friends, family, classmates and teachers.

- Lizards can thrive in suburban gardens and rural properties. They need places to hide when hunting, feeding and resting and shelter when it's hot or really cold.
- Use old concrete, bricks and stones. Stack them loosely so there are plenty of cracks and holes. Spiders, slaters and beetles will head inside, especially when it's cold. That's good news for the lizards that feed on them!
- Pile up a few logs and bits of wood and leave them to slowly rot, undisturbed. Let the fungi grow! It takes hold and helps recycle rotting wood by breaking it down. It makes good food for slugs, snails and other insects.
- Planting berry- or nectar-producing plant species will ensure garden lizards have plenty to eat all year round.
- When lizard spotting, look but don't touch! This is stressful to them and can cause them to lose their tail. This may reduce a lizard's chance of survival.
- Use binoculars to look for skinks on rocks and in berry-covered bushes. Sit quietly and see if you can spot them.

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about caring for wildlife**