



What do you do? Forest Ecologist

Kim has an assignment for World Environment Day, 5 June. She has to interview an interesting person in her community and find out about their work.

Kim has organised to meet with Arni.

Kim: What's your job at Forests NSW?

Arni: I am an ecologist. I study the way plants and animals live together.

Kim: What's the best part of your job?

Arni: I get to spend time in the forest looking for wildlife, so I end up working in some amazing places. I get to see native animals in their natural habitats. Once I watched a pair of wedge-tailed eagles play as they flew along the edge of a cliff at head height - a truly amazing sight.

Kim: What is the most dangerous creature you have found?

Arni: A feral pig - they create a huge amount of disturbance to soil and plants and are very aggressive and fast. They can charge at people - something you don't want to happen when working alone. I nearly trod on a tiger snake while surveying for frogs, which was pretty scary! Leeches are pretty common, but they are just yucky, not dangerous.

Kim: What's your favourite animal and why?

Arni: Echidnas. The way they waddle through the bush in a distracted way, all smelly and surrounded by flies as they search for food is quite funny. Did you know they can swim?

Kim: Do you see many snakes?

Arni: I see pythons sunning themselves. Most snakes prefer to stay away from people. Snakes smell with their tongues and sense movement through vibrations travelling through the ground, so by the time I arrive they have usually slithered off.

Kim: How many animals are in the forest?

Arni: Wow, that's an amazing question! Forests are biodiverse, meaning they contain a rich variety of plants, animals and micro-organisms. Forests contain millions of living things.

Kim: Is it true trees are cut down in State forests?

Arni: Yes, timber and other resources we use each day come from State forests. Timber harvesting is planned so that the variety of plant and animal life is conserved.

Before forests are harvested, surveys are carried out to find out what is living in the area. Surveys help us plan what areas of forest will be excluded from harvesting to protect unique forest features like wildlife and plants.

Kim: Why can't you just move animals when harvesting takes place?

Arni: Plants and animals make homes in places where they can best meet their need for survival. Moving them would threaten this. One of the things we do to conserve biodiversity is exclude harvesting from wildlife corridors, creek banks and the habitats of threatened species. We protect important food sources required by particular animals, sites where they can shelter, and ensure that they are able to find other animals of the same species to breed.

Kim: What are threatened species?

Arni: They are species facing possible extinction if measures are not taken to ensure their survival. Measures such as removal of feral predators and retaining and maintaining habitat help.

Kim: What threatened species live in the forests where you work?

Arni: The Strickland Mintbush is found in Strickland State forest and grows where the eucalypt forest and rainforest meet. It is threatened by invasion from weeds such as lantana which is being removed by forest workers and volunteers. We also work with the Department of Environment and Conservation to protect and manage this plant.

Kim: Who else do you work with?

Arni: I work with other ecologists, foresters and field staff that undertake harvesting operations, manage pests, weeds, picnic areas and build roads.

Kim: How would I see wildlife in the forest?

Arni: During the day look for the clues left behind like scratches, scats (poo), snake skins, bones, webs and burrows. You can see and hear a large number of birds by standing, and looking and listening. At night, nocturnal creatures like possums, quolls, gliders and frogs come out to feed. They often make loud and distinctive calls that give away their presence.

Act as an ecologist and spot the difference between these two forest scenes. Circle the wildlife and the clues left behind during the day and at night.

