Matilda Allover Downunder

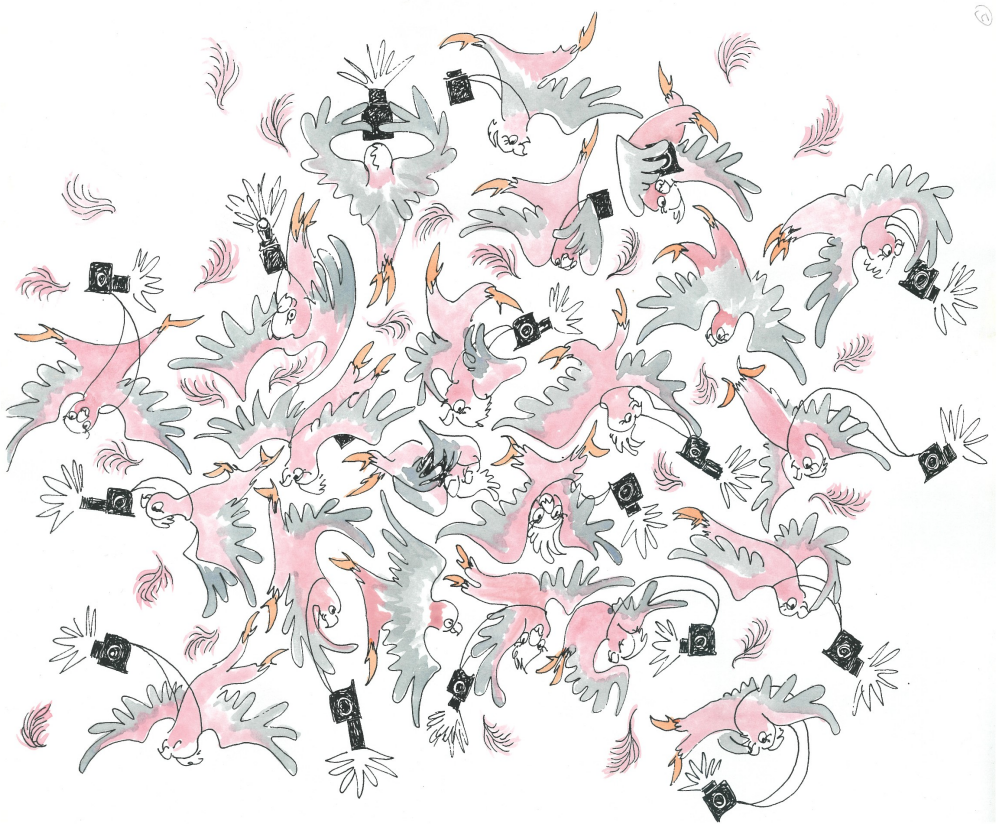
Matilda is a bird born with wings wrapped around a camera. Her camera can see into the past, present and future. It can record in fast and slow motion, and in geological time. It can also reveal dreams.

Read Matilda's life story. Respond with your own words and pictures.
Matilda shows the world as complex, huge and connected;
every living thing has a story and many stories connect to each other.

Published as an e-book with hyperlinks to art, scientific data and more, Matilda invites you to tell your own story of relationships that sustain you and your community of fellow living entities.

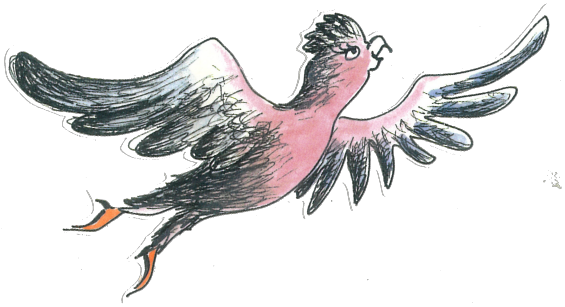
A pdf is provided to download and annotate.

Lisa Roberts 2025



Archaeopteryx lithographica are the first known birds. They lived during the late Jurassic period of prehistory. Their food was mainly insects.
This picture by Tasmanian artist Melissa Smith shows a rubbing she made from a fossil in the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery, Launceston.

Matilda is a Galah. Galahs belong to the amniote group, the common ancestors of reptiles, birds and mammals. Amniotes evolved during the Carboniferous period, from amphibious four-legged creatures, like frogs. Amniote eggs are fertilised internally.



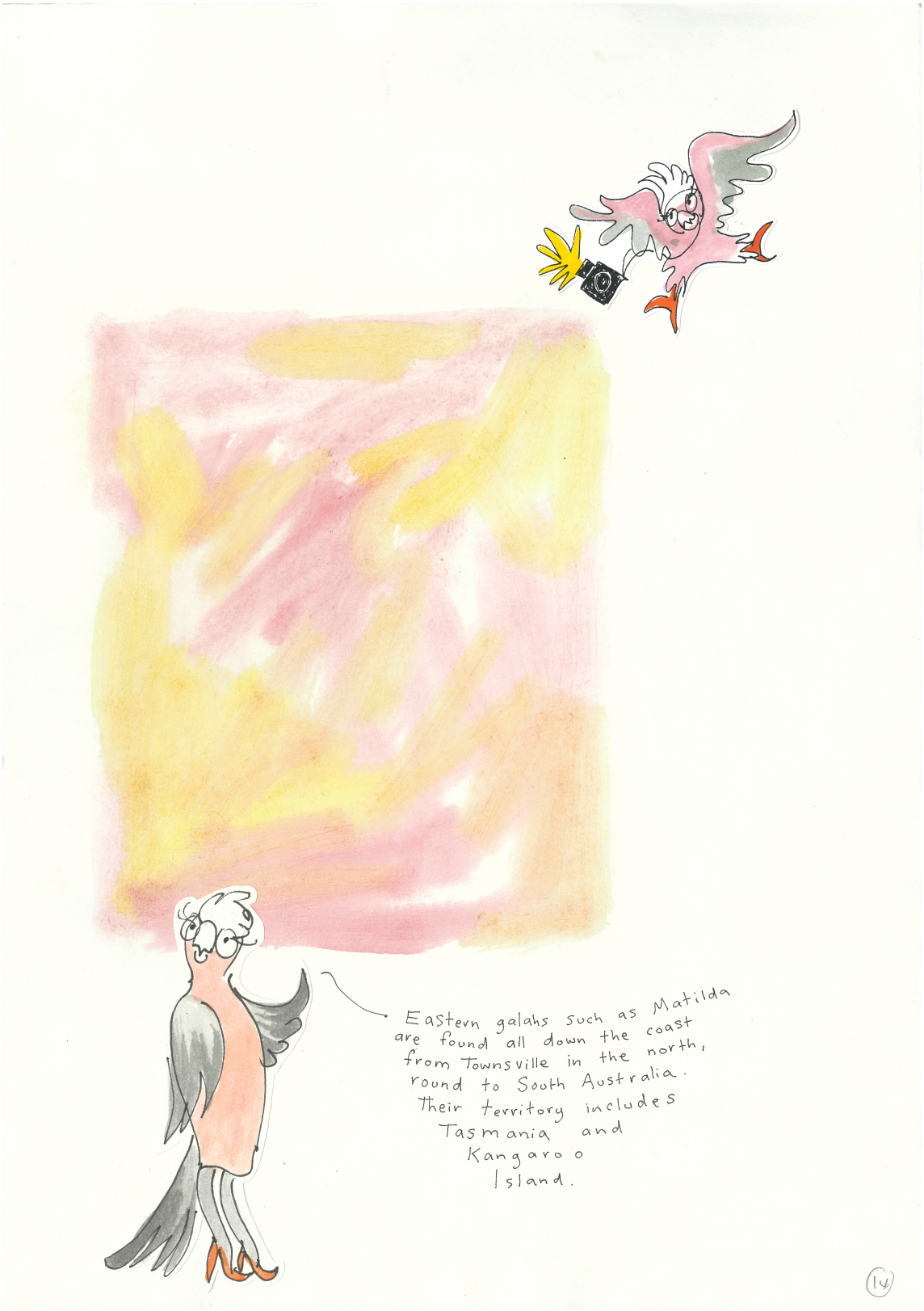
Matilda is an amniote descendant of Archaeopteryx lithographica, the first known bird.

This picture shows the back of a painting. It represents backstories of Matilda's story. Backstories appear through hyperlinks to letters, songs, dances, pictures, animations, video recordings, scientific data and more.

Letters and electronic messages arrive at Matilda's family home in Sydney - a hollow tree beside a river. Messages come from around the world to congratulate the Galah family on the birth of Matilda.

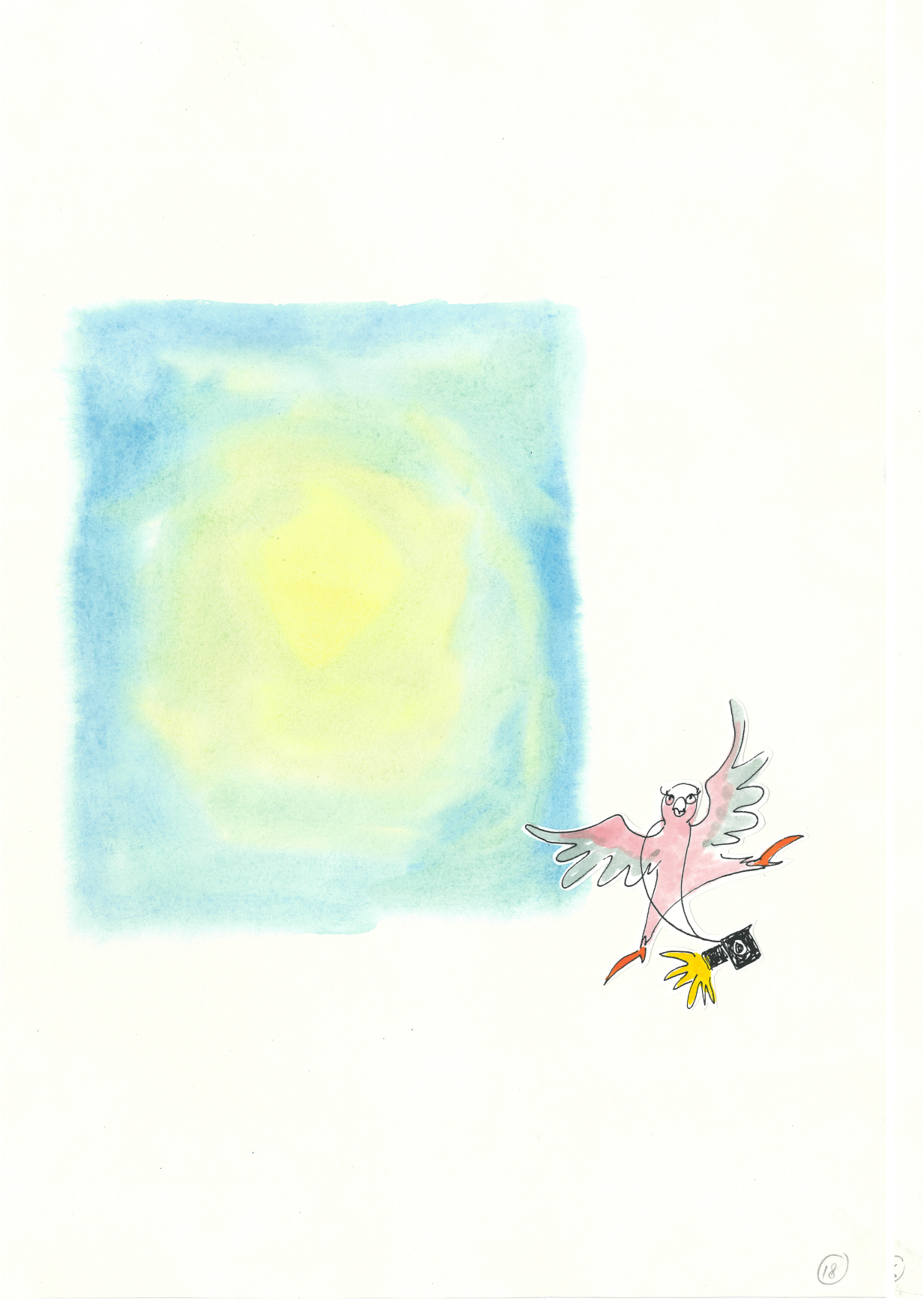
The whole Galah family is fluttering and singing with excitement. A new chick is about to be born. Prehistoric ancestors grin and hold their breath. One of these, the Great HG (Hasselblad Galah) waits with camera poised.

The Great HG is famous for taking photos from different points of view. His camera is a Hasselblad Eternal that can take pictures of the past, present and future.



This picture shows Matilda and her mother in a museum, looking at a photo by the Great HG, taken just before Matilda hatched.

This page is for you to draw and write what you know about your birth.



Matilda is born with her wings around a camera, a genetic gift from her ancestor, the Great HG. Her camera is just like his, except that it can record dreams, and has has attachments for recording fast and slow motion, and for animating moments in geological time.

Matilda takes her camera to explore the neighbourhood.

This page is for you to write, draw, and paste in pictures of things you find interesting in your neighbourhood. Note the picture at the bottom left, that Matilda saw through her camera.

Matilda was a keen photographer from the start. When she won the prize for best photo at her school, the Great HG was mighty impressed.

This page is for you to write and draw creatures you know and imagine.

Matilda is a very independent galah. Her playmate Rosie Capella is keen to meet and marry a nice galah. Matilda is more interested in a career. Matilda's mother wishes she was more conventional. Her father is never seen after the birth of Matilda. He is a business galah working from home behind a closed study door.

Rosie falls in love with Gustav Galah just as Matilda leaves home to seek a career as a photojournalist. The Great HG flies from his ancestral home in Tasmania with a letter containing a photo for Bob Wombat, editor of Allover Downunder magazine in Melbourne.

HG hopes his letter will inspire Bob to employ Matilda.

The photo HG encloses for Bob is one he took thousands of years ago, of an atoll appearing in the Great Barrier Reef. His letter explains that the atoll appears only once every thousand years or so, when sea levels drop according to ancient cycles of climate change – cycles of glacial and interglacial periods identified in both Indigenous and Western science.
HG tells Bob about Matilda and her special camera.
Bob assigns Matilda to cover the story.

Bob is impressed by Matilda's photo of Feral Cat who works for "The Underminer", the rival magazine of "Allover Downunder". Her photo tells the truth, that cats kill birds. As the only photographer who can get stories from any era, Matilda becomes Bob's star photo-journalist. She travels all over Australia and to Antarctica getting her stories and interviewing animals, fish, birds, krill, phytoplankton and more.
Her special interests are science and technology, and how humans use art to pass on knowledge.

Matilda keeps in touch with Rosie by phone and encourages her to pursue her own creative interests.

Bob asks Matilda to try to get a picture of the atoll. It is about to appear. The fact is, she can record the past, present and future, but Bob wants a picture from geological time taken in present time. This is a challenge. How to simultaneously show a moment in geological time and a moment of lived experience? What dreaming stories can guide her reporting? What scientific data can show the present moment within ancient patterns of natural change in sea level rise and fall?

Matilda's enemy Feral Cat gets wind of her assignment.

Matilda flies north. Feral Cat sets off hitch-hiking.

Feral Cat hitches rides to the Reef, meeting a range of Australian animals at the wheel - native species like emus, platypuses and echidnas, and invasive species like cane toads, fire ants and more.
Matilda and Rosie keep in touch by phone and post card.

Before Matilda flies to the Reef, she is bridesmaid and photographer at Rosie and Gustav's wedding.

Matilda takes a photo of their first child before it is born.

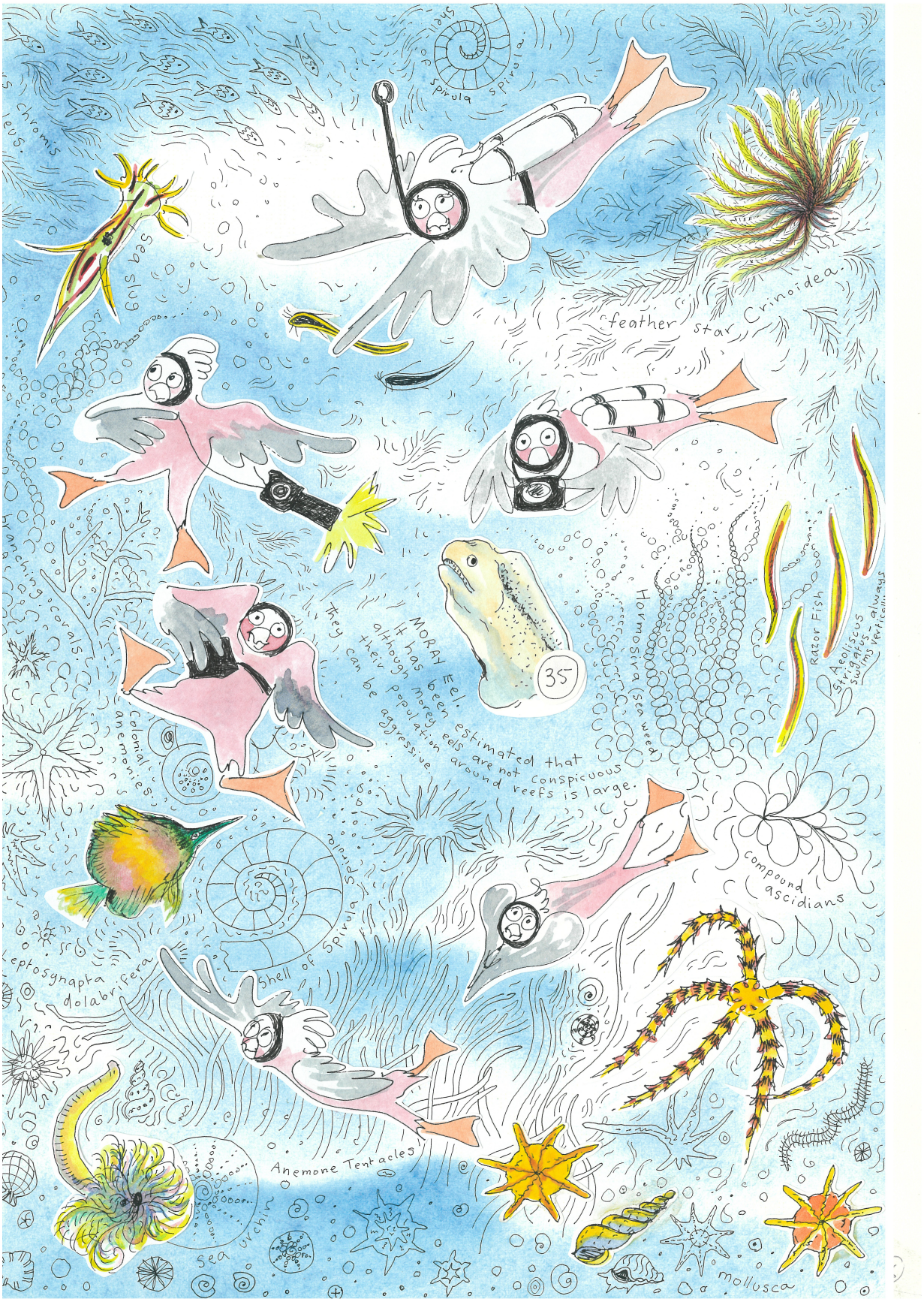
This picture shows Matilda's wedding gift to Rosie:

a book of photos of Rosie's life.

At the Reef, Matilda takes photos of colourful corals, clownfish, butterfly fish, trumpet fish, reef sharks, humpback whales and more. Feral Cat hangs out with all the nasties - Crown-of-thorn starfish, stonefish, sea snakes, tiger sharks, stingrays, box jellyfish and more.

Matilda is often in danger.

Detailed information about these things is provided through hyperlinks.



This page is for you to write and draw on.

What things are you most curious about?

What things do you most care about?

What things are you most afraid of?

Matilda takes many wild shots. She gets some prehistory and some future, but not the atoll. Rosie tells her to be patient and just enjoy the sunsets.

Then, one afternoon, as the sun is setting, Matilda is sitting on the prow of a little boat, and there before her eyes, the atoll begins to rise from the water. It is pink and gold and lilac. She gets some shots of it.

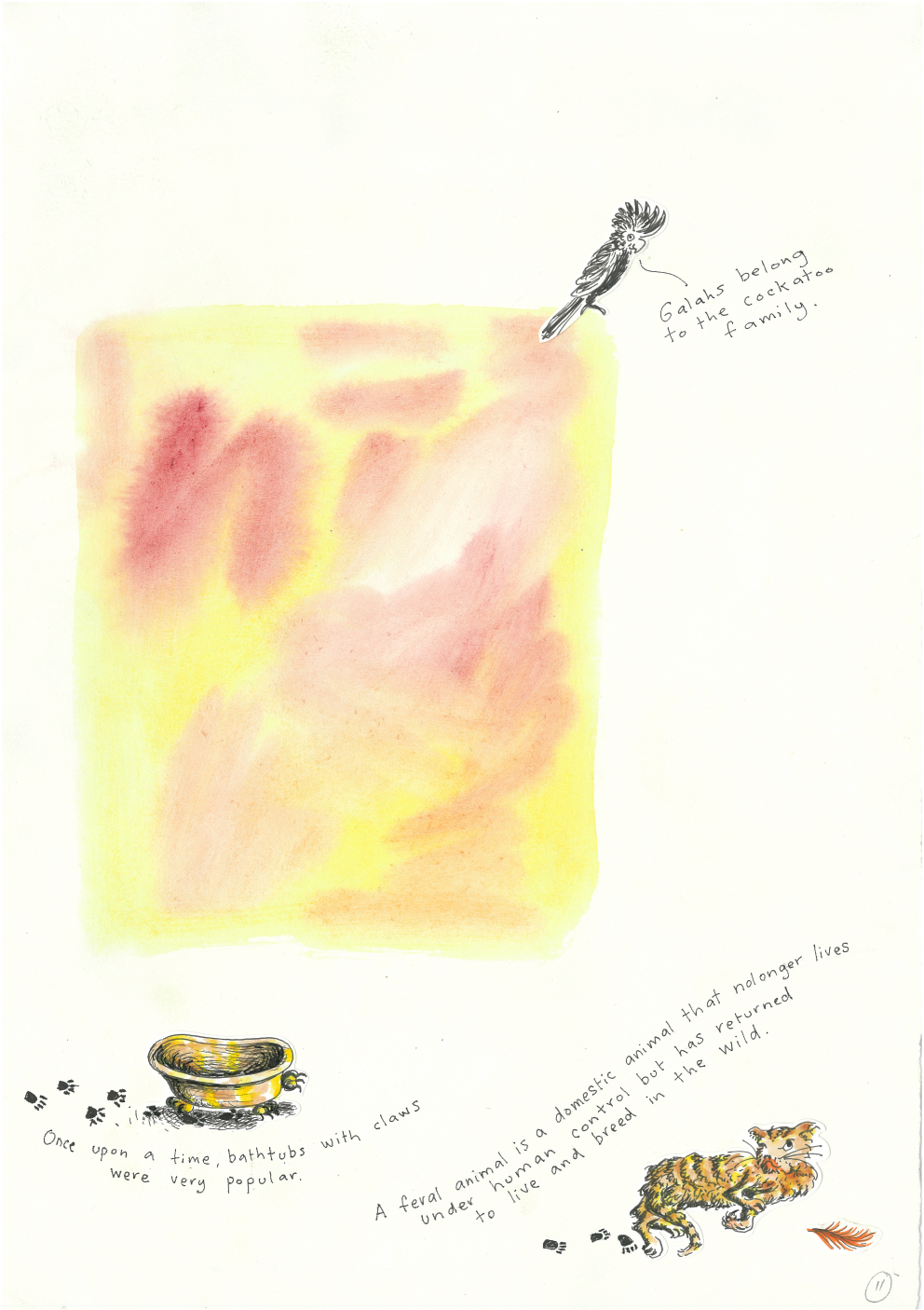
As darkness falls, Feral Cat creeps up along the beach.
The atoll disappears.
He has missed out.

Matilda enlists an eagle to take her camera files to a laboratory for quick processing and return to her hotel room in Cairnes.

Before she goes home, Matilda is given a reception at the Queensland Department of the Environment, Tourism, Science and Innovation.

Feral Cat is there, dark and furious.

He drinks too much and passes out.



The cover of Allover Downunder with the picture of the atoll is a sensation. Everyone crowds around the exhibit, including all the contributors to Matilda's story about it.

Safely held in Rosie's arms, her baby looks down at Feral Cat lurking.