

# Turtle tale tantalises PNG pupils

A TINY turtle has become the star of a children's book in Papua New Guinea in a bid to help conserve the curious species.

University of Canberra PhD student Carla Eiseberg is in Papua New Guinea, studying the harvest and nesting ecology of the pig-nosed turtle on the Kikori River.

Ms Eiseberg said she wanted to write the book to show the community how important these turtles were.

"The pig-nosed turtle is a very unique turtle. It is the sole survivor of its family and has a very restricted distribution," she said.

"People here know very little about conservation and wildlife management. Nowadays, it is very important for the next generation to learn about the environmental problems they are going to face in the future."

The pig-nosed turtle is found in and around a few rivers in the Northern Territory and in Papua New Guinea.

It is an important protein source for the Papuan communities, which wait each year for the nesting season to catch females nesting on the sand banks and their eggs.

But one of the turtles' most unusual features is the way they become males or females.

Nests holding eggs in cool, shaded areas produce males while exposed, hot nests produce females.

In the Northern Territory, eggs incubated at a constant temperature of 32 degrees produce both male and female hatchlings. But if this temperature drifts to even half a degree cooler, only males are produced. The



A child from Babaguna Village (Kikori River) on his canoe just after he received his book about the pig-nosed turtle.

opposite drift, half a degree warmer, produces only females.

Ms Eiseberg has been helping distribute some of the 5000 published books, which include puzzles and games for children while telling the story of Piggy the pig-nosed turtle and her fight for survival.

For many of the children, this is

their very first book. "Some parents told me they have to read the book for the kids every night," Ms Eiseberg said.

"We hope that it is going to be a special present and they will keep it in their memory for the rest of their life."

Ms Eiseberg is studying the patterns of sex determination in

the pig-nosed turtle in Papua New Guinea, trying to see whether they are the same as those in the Northern Territory.

She said when she first arrived in some villages, it was difficult to explain why she was there.

"It really looked silly for some landowners that someone could come from Australia or Brazil just



Canberra PhD candidate Carla Eiseberg at Kipi Village on the Kikori River with the school pig-nosed turtle pet, Fiona.



Piggy the pig-nosed turtle who features in a children's book about the importance of their ecology. (Artwork by Fernando A. Perini).

to study a turtle," she said. "They would like to know if there was money involved and how much people would get."

"It took a lot of talk and presentations, but now everybody understands what my project is about and its importance."

Ms Eiseberg plans to return to Australia after the end of the turtle's nesting season in April.

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**Q** WHY IS tennis scored the way it is? It has no rhyme, no mathematical system, so where did this way of scoring come from? Why start at 15, if you double to 30, why not double to 60 or add another 15, ie 45? – Susan Ricardo, Florey.

**A** LAWN tennis, as we play it today, is a modern, outdoor version of royal tennis which dates back to the 12th century. Royal Tennis was originally a French game called Jeu de Paume, the game of the palm, and was played indoors. It is widely believed that a clock face was originally used as a scoreboard. The game was worth 60 points divided into four equal parts – the quarter face of the clock 15, 30, 45, 60. Forty is only an abbreviation of the original 45.

Duce comes from the French word "a deux",

## Wonder why?

meaning the players had to win two consecutive points to win the game. Love means no score. There are several ideas as to where this term came from, however, the most commonly recognised is that love is a corruption of the French word "l'oeuf" meaning egg like the duck's egg in cricket.

The most recent change to the scoring system has been the introduction of the tie-breaker. James Van Alen created a tie-breaker system in

order to shorten matches. It was widely introduced to the game in the early 1970s. When it was first introduced it was invoked at 8-8 rather than 6-6 as it is now used.

The tie-break is sometimes not employed for the final set of a match, so that the deciding set must be played until one player or team has won two more games than the opponent. This is true in the major tennis championships, except the US Open where a tie-break is played even in the deciding set (fifth set for the men, third set for the women) at 6-6.

■ This answer is from the president of Tennis Australia, Geoff Pollard.

If you have a question about the world around us – or even about the worlds we may not see – email or write to Nyssa Skilton at The Canberra Times, PO Box 7155, Canberra Mail Centre, ACT 2610. Please provide your name and suburb.

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