

MARGARET CLARK

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Aussie Angels

on its last legs!

LEAP FROG

hands. 'Let's go and check it out on the internet.'

So they all went into Mike's room. Of course, Mike had forgotten that Mark had switched off the computer incorrectly, so they had to wait until it reprogrammed. He logged on to 'frogs Victoria' while Boris sat the frog carefully on the desk and willed it to sit there.

'This is an excellent site,' said Meg. 'www.frogs.org.au/frogs/ I didn't know that Victoria had thirty-three species of frogs. Look. Most of them are brown and warty. Cute names. Froglets. I wonder if Adam and Mark will find any in our area?'

'Here's ours,' said Mike. He looked at the frog. 'You're a Growling Grass Frog.'

'That's disappointing,' said Meg as she stared at the screen. 'A widespread but only locally common frog. It's not a new species or anything.'

'Well, we knew that because we've seen them before, only smaller,' Boris pointed out. 'But it says they're on the decline.'

'I think all frogs are on the decline,' said Mum from the doorway. 'And who's this big fellow?'

The frog's throat pulsed as it stared at her.

'It was just saved from being Elsie's afternoon snack,' said Boris. 'We were going to take it to the caravan park. But maybe we should put it in the river, because it says here that the adults are usually found close to the water or very wet areas in the woodlands, shrublands and open areas. Do you reckon there's enough water in the swampy part of the caravan park?'

'I'd put this *Litoria raniformis* in the river, if I were you,' said Mum.

Meg stared at Mum in admiration. 'You're really clever with Latin names. How did you remember that?'

'Oh, I guess I'm just a genius.'

'It's on the screen,' said Mike. 'That's how she knew it.'

'Sprung bad, Mrs Green.' Boris grinned. 'I'll put it in a box. We were about to take Carol and Alice to the beach, so we can go up the

river a bit where the water isn't salty, and let the frog go there.'

'I'd like to hear it growl,' said Meg wistfully.

'It says that males usually call while floating in open water,' Mike said as he pointed to the screen. 'The call is a growl of about one second duration-crawark-crawark-crok-crok. Hear it now for yourself.'

He clicked on "hear it now", and sure enough, the sound of a croaking frog filled the room.

The frog on the desk swelled up even more.

'Crawark-crawark-crok-crok' it said.

'It must be a male.' Mum looked at the frog as its throat swelled again.

'Unless it's a female answering the call,' said Meg doubtfully.

'Well, whichever it is, it will be back in the river as soon as we get to the beach,' said Boris. 'We don't need a frog-mating ritual between a real frog and a virtual frog, do we? This could get complicated.'

'Let's go!' Mark logged off and shut down

the computer. 'Who knows? It might swim upstream and be floating on its back going crawark-crawark-crok-crok when Adam and Mark cruise past in the punt. Maybe I should put an X on its head to identify it.'

'If it was floating you'd need to put an X on its tummy,' Meg giggled.

'X marks the spot!' Of course Mike was only joking. Maybe professional researchers tagged frogs by putting metal bands on their legs, but a cross made with a waterproof marker wasn't the right thing to do. The chemicals could be harmful to the frog.

Meg found a clean box and they popped the frog into it. Then they grabbed a backpack, just in case they needed first aid equipment or a mobile, and hurried out to get Carol. Alice yapped happily at their heels.

'Pity the breeze is blowing onshore,' said Mike. 'We could've gone for a surf. But there are practically no waves at the moment. And it's a bit too cold for a swim, even though it's sunny.'