

Jenny Sheehan – Nature's harsh lesson

It's 31 degrees outside. A big spike from yesterday when a south-easterly brought grey clouds with rain, to Kat's little corner on the farm.

A timber balcony wraps around her cottage that stands alone in the lower paddock she rents from Bobby Cunningham. Her washing hangs on a collapsible clothes horse against the northern wall, where the sun will shine all day. It's quite a frugal sight, seeing all the clothes she owns on display like that.

It's a good day for drying, she tells herself or did she say that out loud, because on cue, a cow moaned in the distance, and another replied in a higher octave. Back and forth they went as if they're Kat's guests, discussing the weather.

She sits on an old wooden chair, sipping black tea, listening to the silence. Except it's not really silent, that's just a word said by people who are used to having the sounds from cars, trucks and aeroplanes, fill their ears.

The high pitch whistle of the yellow robin cuts through the slapping of leaves, reminding Kat of an alarm she can't turn off. A crow dispenses an angry squawk and the beeping stops. A harem of wrens, congregate on brown grass, flitting around for insects. Here he comes, his royal blue highness, looking dapper, overseeing the working bee.

She knows she shouldn't feed the wallaby. It arrived outside her cottage last year with a torn ear and bung leg. It might not have stood a chance against the dingoes Kat could hear howling at night. She really does subscribe to 'let nature take its course' but because she hadn't, she was taught an even crueller lesson.

Kat named her Matilda and when her joey finally tumbled out of her pouch, she called him Joe.

Two weeks later Kat found Matilda staring into the long grass under the tree. 'Where's Joe, Matilda?' When Kat followed her line of sight, she saw the diamond python. The yellow, black and cream colours, stretched around the bulge. And out of its dislocated jaws, Joe's legs were still visible. Kat turned away, tears welling for Matilda.

'I'm sorry Matilda, this was MY fault.'

Right now, she would prefer the sound of machines to fill her ears, instead of this harsh lesson, living in the animal kingdom.