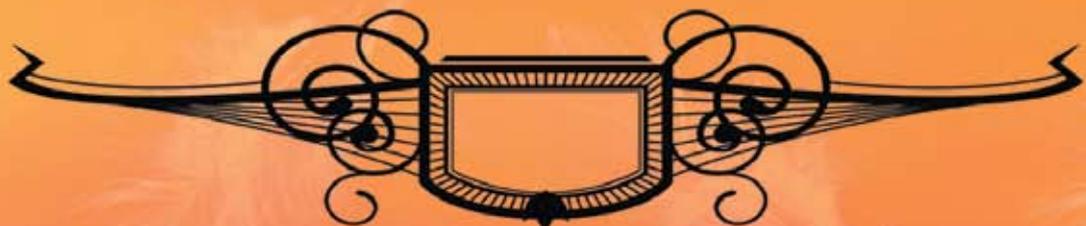


RARE CHICKEN RESCUE



TEACHERS NOTES

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Synopsis

After a long battle with depression, Queensland rare chicken breeder Mark Tully is now on a mission to protect the endangered chickens to which he owes his life.

He begins an epic 'chicken chase' fuelled by a determination to find 'lost' breeds of poultry before they are gone forever.

According to the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, over 1000 livestock breeds face extinction. In Australia, chicken species such as the Sumatran, the Phoenix, the Transylvanian Naked Neck, the Spanish, the Azeel and even the humble Leghorn are just some of the breeds under threat.

One of Australia's many 'poultry fanciers', Tully embarks on a 'chicken chase' that covers 10,000 kilometres and spans five Australian states as he tracks down rare heritage breeds and meets others who share his passion.

The journey takes Mark south from his rare poultry stud in Queensland through New South Wales, Victoria, South Australia and across Bass Strait to Tasmania, to the annual show of the Devonport Poultry Club.

While Mark spends his days rescuing poultry, he reveals that the unconditional love of his large collection of turkeys, chooks and other birds—and the serenity he finds in their company—has helped save his own life after a long battle with mental illness.



Poultry breeder Mark Tully with a Buff Cochon chicken
Photo by Andrew Railton© NFSA

Curriculum Links

This program will have interest and relevance for teachers and students at secondary and tertiary levels. Curriculum links include English, Media, Health Sciences, General Science, Biology, Health and Personal Development. It is also an invaluable resource for pastoral care, counsellors and any other professionals involved in the social and emotional welfare of students.

Before Watching

For each of these questions, just note what sort of impressions you have gained from the media and other sources. These are not questions for you to research, but just to give you some notes to reflect on once you have viewed the program.

- What sort of person do you think would be a 'poultry fancier'—collecting and showing hens (chooks) and roosters?
- What do you know about depression and the resources available to students?
- Do you think it matters if some poultry breeds cease to exist?

Terms used within this documentary

Soft feather

"Soft feather fowl come in Heavy, Light, and Bantam. Varieties include Plymouth Rock, Wyandotte, Sussex, Orpington, Faverolles, Brahma, Marans, and Barnevelder just to name a few."¹

Hard feather

"Hard feather breeds were bred for cockfighting centuries ago. They are now bred to show. They are known as Game fowl. They have a tighter feathering than the soft feather varieties."¹ Varieties include Old English Game, Malay Game, Indian Game, Yokohama and Phoenix.

Breeds

A 'breed' is a group of domestic animals, such as dogs, cats or poultry, which have specific characteristics such as looks and behaviour. With poultry, the ability to produce eggs and meat varies between breeds. To establish a breed, breeders select individual animals that have the desired qualities. The breeder mates the animals he considers to be the most likely to pass on the desired characteristics to their offspring. This is known as selective breeding.

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Breed standard

A written description of the characteristics that are desirable in the breed, and also those that are undesirable, is referred to as a breed standard. For example, Leghorn must have yellow legs.

Species

All breeds of chicken are the same species. An animal species is often considered as a group of animals capable of interbreeding and producing fertile young. Although there are refinements to that definition, it will serve us well for this situation. All chicken breeds could theoretically interbreed and produce fertile chicks.

The domesticated fowl is the species *Gallus gallus*, sometimes referred to as *G. gallus domesticus*. Humans keep chickens for eggs and food. Because they are such great sources of food, they are thought to be the most common bird in the world. It has been estimated that there are more than 24 billion domestic chickens in the world in 2003.²

Rare chicken breeds

When talking of rare chicken breeds, Mark says: "The sad thing is, many of them are disappearing at such fast rates. They're virtually being exterminated, discarded. Not because of what they are, but what they aren't."

- What was Mark referring to in the last sentence?
- What do you think made Mark feel more strongly about the need to preserve rare chicken breeds than the vast majority of people?
- In what way were Mark's parents involved in his relationship with the chickens?

A large number of chicken breeds are introduced to us in the film. They vary from dainty pretty breeds to some that many would consider weird.

- What names of breeds can you remember from your viewing of the film? What was it about those particular breeds which caused you to be able to recall the names? Do you also remember what they looked like?

If you have access to the internet, have a look at the breed websites:

The Poultry Club – Breeds of Poultry:
www.poultryclub.org/Breeds.htm

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Breeds of Poultry - Department of Animal Science, Oklahoma State University

www.ansi.okstate.edu/poultry

- If you were to go into poultry breeding, which breed or breeds would appeal most to you? Why?
- Are there any breeds you would not like to have? Why?
- What sort of qualities did the poultry fanciers and show judges look for in a bird? How does this differ from what you would look for if you were comparing various breeds of poultry?



A rare speckled Sussex chicken Photo by Jo Erskine © NFSA

Consider a collector who you know personally or have read about. (If you don't know anyone, then have a look at a The Collectors TV show website (abc.net.au/tv/collectors/) and select a topic.

- Compare Mark's method of collecting rare chickens to the collecting behaviour of your personal collector.

Mark was after two particular breeds of chicken. To him, these were the 'holy grail' of chicken breeds, the hardest to find and the ones he wanted most.

- If you are able to interview a collector, ask them if they have a 'holy grail'. What item for their collection would they most like to be able to find and own?

Mark says: "A real scary fact is that the United Nations recently said that 69% of all poultry breeds are on the verge of extinction. The true breeds are part of living history and should be part of our future".

- How do you feel about this issue? Do you feel the loss of rare chicken breeds matters? What is the importance of genetic diversity? Explain the reasons for your answers.
- Did your attitudes to the value of rare poultry breeds change as you watched this film? If so, in what way?

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A Great Chase

Collectors, such as Mark, have to go out and find the objects of their passion. It is often reported on the news when a collector has paid a very high price for a painting or piece of memorabilia of their favourite rock star.

- If you were going to go on a 'Great Something Chase' to collect everything you could of some object or creature, what would your 'something' be?
- Can you imagine how the obsessive searching for your 'something' could give a purpose to your life? Explain your answer, even if it is that you could not imagine yourself every going on a great chase.

Mark says: "The chooks rescued Mark and now Mark's rescuing the chooks".

- Do you feel that the difficulty of the quest to find the rare chicken breeds helped with 'rescuing Mark'? If so, why?

Mark compares himself to the 'storm chasers' as he heads off on his long trip chasing rare chicken breeds.

- What do storm chasers do?

Mark went to many farms and through a lot of farming country to search for his rare chickens. He says: "I seem to be a good poultry spotter". He doesn't just mean that he could see a lot of domestic chooks.

- What do you think Mark means by this comment?
- In terms of what you saw in the documentary, do you think he is correct in his self-assessment? Explain your reasons for your response.

The documentary gives many little anecdotes of Mark's adventures on the chicken chase.

- Which anecdote stood out most to you? In what way did this small story tell you about Mark as a person?

You have probably seen people who keep live chickens at home. You have probably seen film of battery hens in their cages.

- Describe the way the poultry fanciers represented in this film interact with their own chickens and compare that to the more common interactions.

Mark not only knows the look and breeds of chickens but also has a deep understanding of their behaviour. There are many examples of this in the film.

- Give some examples of specific poultry behaviour that Mark refers to within the film.

Devonport Poultry Club Annual Show

One of many poultry shows held regularly all over the world, the Devonport Poultry Club Annual Show is depicted in detail within this film. Imagine you are a poultry fancier. You know what breeds are possible. You know what sort of criteria the judges look for.

- Describe your hypothetical day at the show. Describe the chooks, the people, what you do and what happens. Do you win?

Ken Scott, the Poultry Judge at the poultry show says: "There's like one big family, poultry fanciers are...you trust one another and, no, it's quite good."

- Describe your impressions of the poultry fanciers. Try to go beyond superficial aspects of what the people look and speak like, into the sort of personality they have and the way they interact with each other and their birds.

When Mark collects his meal he takes it to a seat against the wall, but is soon called to the nearest table by the people eating there.

- In what way do you feel that the sense of being part of such a group of people may have contributed to Mark's ability to deal with his depression? Do you think that it may have been more than just 'the chooks'?

Mark does not exhibit any poultry at the show. He is not a competitor nor judge nor does he have any specific role with the Devonport club.

- From the way others spoke about Mark, what did you conclude was his status within the group? Give specific reasons for your response.



A Houdan chicken that features in the documentary
Photo by Jo Erskine © NFSA

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Devastation

The 'old bloke' who won Grand Champion Waterfowl at the show has his flock attacked by dogs.

- Write a fictional short story based on this event. Draw on the understanding you have gained of the importance of the fowls to their owners and the emotional attachment they have to them. Include the owner of the dogs in the story.

Depression

Mark says: "I suffer with a thing called depression and it's one that's called reactive depression and anxiety... At my worst I wanted to be dead, 'cause to me death meant—there was peace, there was harmony, and that was something I was yearning for beyond belief."

A great deal of information about depression is available from the Beyond Blue website:

"Depression is more than just a low mood - it's a serious illness. While we all feel sad, moody or low from time to time, some people experience these feelings intensely, for long periods of time and often without reason. People with depression find it hard to function every day and may be reluctant to participate in activities they once enjoyed.

Depression is one of the most common of all mental health problems. One in five people experience depression at some stage of their lives.

Different types of depression often have slightly different symptoms and may require different treatments. The five main types of depression are listed below.

Major depression - a depressed mood that lasts for at least two weeks. This may also be referred to as clinical depression or unipolar depression.

Psychotic depression - a depressed mood which includes symptoms of psychosis. Psychosis involves seeing or hearing things that are not there (hallucinations), feeling everyone is against you (paranoia) and having delusions.

Dysthymia - a less severe depressed mood that lasts for years.

Mixed depression and anxiety - a combination of symptoms of depression and anxiety.

Bipolar disorder - (formally [sic] known as manic depressive illness) - involves periods of feeling low (depressed) and high (manic)."³

- In terms of the descriptions given above, and what Mark says in the film, how would you describe Mark's depression?

Mark talks about the 'unconditional love' and 'unconditional compassion' of the poultry. He also talks about dancing with them.

- Describe how you understand Mark's comments on these issues and how you think that attitude may have impacted on him when he was in a depressed state.

Mark responds to the question about what he gets out of birds by saying: "Peace and tranquility... Or as some would say, serenity."

- In what ways do those words coming from Mark differ from their meaning if they had been spoken by someone who didn't suffer from depression?
- In what ways did your impression and understanding of Mark change from the start of the film to the end?

Depression isn't something that only happens to people in television documentaries. It is everywhere in every level of the community. Mark says: "And with help, being able to talk to someone, recognise and have it diagnosed as depression, you can beat what's trying to drag you down".

- If you were very depressed and life didn't really seem worth living, what would you do? Who would you turn to?
- What services are available in your school, local community and through Beyond Blue, as well as any other places you can locate, for people of your age to get help with depression?
- Can you think of any ways that might make depressed teenagers more likely to seek help?



Mark Tully with a rare Chinchilla Silkie Photo by Jo Erskine © NFSA

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Production values of the film

The production of this documentary is very creative. It has a look and style that goes well beyond just filming a guy racing around with chickens.

- In what way do you feel the animations, music and backgrounds to the live images add to the telling of the story? Quote specific examples from the film to demonstrate what you mean.

Endnotes

¹ Blue Hills Poultry Stud, www.rarechicks.com.au, accessed 14/4/08

² Christopher Perrins (ed), *Firefly Encyclopedia of Birds*, Firefly Books, Buffalo, NY, 2003

³ Beyond Blue - National Depression Initiative, www.beyondblue.org.au, accessed 14/4/08

References and Further Resources

American Poultry Association

www.amerpoultryassn.com

Beyond Blue – National Depression Initiative

www.beyondblue.org.au

Blue Hills Poultry Stud (Mark Tully's website)

www.rarechicks.com.au

Domestic Animal Diversity Information System

<http://dad.fao.org>

The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations

www.fao.org

Oklahoma State University, Breeds of Poultry - Department of Animal Science

www.ansi.okstate.edu/breeds/index-2.html/poultry

The Poultry Club - Breeds of Poultry

www.poultryclub.org/Breeds.htm

Storm Chasing in Australia [https://](https://www.australiasevereweather.com/links/chaser.htm)

www.australiasevereweather.com/links/chaser.htm

Traveller's Guide to Tasmanian Quarantine - What You Can Bring into Tasmania

www.dpiw.tas.gov.au/inter.nsf/WebPages/EGIL-56FW46



Some recently hatched chickens Photo by Andrew Railton © NFSA

Rare Chicken Rescue

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Writer/Director: **Randall Wood**

Producers: **Vickie Gest**

Executive Producer: **Mark Hamlyn (Film Australia), Trish Lake (Freshwater Productions)**

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Study guide written by Lynne Kelly. Photographs page 1 and 5 by Andrew Railton. All other photographs by Jo Erskine © NFSA.

For further information or to order this program, contact:

National Film and Sound Archive of Australia

Sales and Distribution

PO Box 397 Pyrmont NSW 2009

T +61 2 8202 0144 | F +61 2 8202 0101

E: sales@nfsa.gov.au | www.nfsa.gov.au

