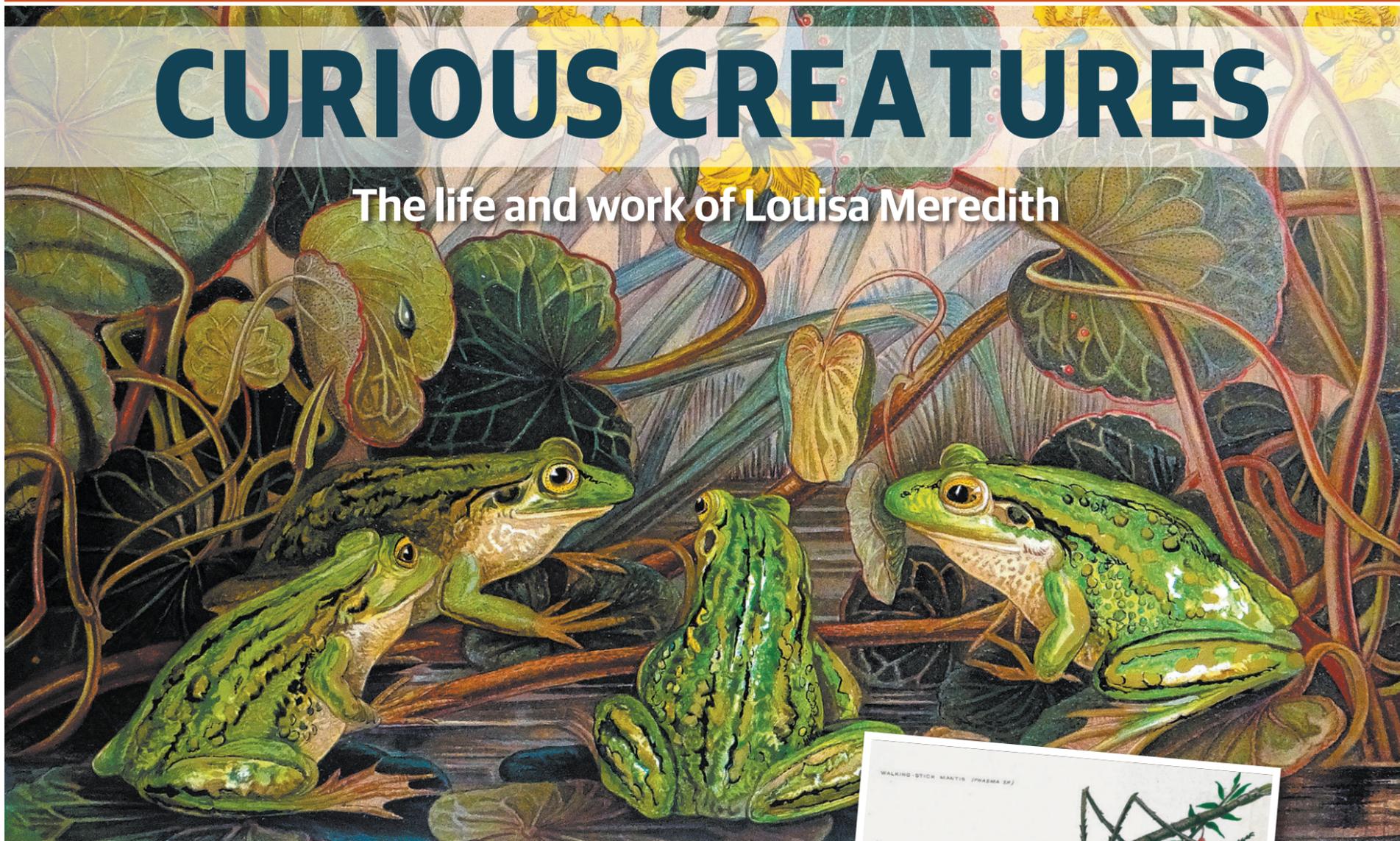


CURIOUS CREATURES

The life and work of Louisa Meredith



What would you do if you arrived in a place where everything – the landscape, the plants and animals – around you was different and strange? This is what colonists encountered when they arrived in Van Diemens Land in the early 1800s. Naturally curious, the author and illustrator Louisa Anne Meredith's solution was to write about her new life in Tasmania, and to draw the strange new plants and animals she encountered.



LEFT: Walking stick mantis (*Phasma* sp.) [Large Stick Insect *Ctenomorpha marginipennis*] on red epacris (*Epacris impressa*) [Common Heath]. Louisa Meredith, 1880. Picture: ROYAL SOCIETY OF TASMANIA

MAIN PICTURE: A Cool Debate - *Rana aurea*, [*Litoria raniformis*, Southern Bell Frog] Louisa Meredith, 1891. Picture: ROYAL SOCIETY OF TASMANIA



Picture: TASMANIAN ARCHIVE & HERITAGE OFFICE

Who was Louisa Meredith?

Meredith (1812-1895) was a talented writer, artist and naturalist who moved to the East Coast of Tasmania in 1840 after her marriage in England in 1839. She was one of the first women to write a description of life in Tasmania and also produced hundreds of beautiful detailed drawings, paintings and descriptions of Tasmanian wildlife and plants.

Louisa did all this, publishing books and writing articles as well as studying the plants, insects, seaweeds and fish of Tasmania's East Coast while running a home, bringing up children, sewing, establishing flower and vegetable gardens and performing in plays.

Why is she important?

Louisa Meredith's work gives us detailed descriptions of Tasmanian plants and animals, including some

that are now extinct or very rare. Her written accounts of life in Tasmania for settlers in the 19th century give us a vivid picture of what life was like at a time when things were changing rapidly. Although Meredith's books were aimed at a general market, her illustrations of the Tasmanian fauna and flora were always well researched and accurately drawn.

During the 19th century the study of Australian natural history acknowledged the work of the professional male scientists, but the contribution of women to the growth



Coprosma hirtella, Rough Coprosma; *Indigofera australis*, Australian Indigo; and *Acacia verticillata*, Prickly Moses. Louisa Meredith, 1891.

Picture: ROYAL SOCIETY OF TASMANIA

of this science in the colonies was not often recognised.

However, Meredith was an active member of the Royal Society of Tasmania, a rare privilege for a woman in the mid-to-late 1800s. She completed a number of natural history illustrations that were presented at Royal Society meetings. Her contribution to art and science was recognised by her contemporaries when in 1881 she was the first woman to be elected an Honorary Member of the Royal Society of Tasmania. She was joint founder of the first Tasmanian branch of the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals. As a passionate conservationist, she lobbied to have an Act of Parliament passed to protect Tasmania's wildlife.

Drawing her friends

In 1860 the *Mercury* reported, "Mrs Meredith appropriately calls these native flowers, berries, and insects, her 'friends'. Only one who had lived among them, and watched their changes and characteristics with the affectionate love of a friend, could have depicted all their delicate beauties with the tender

fidelity which is here seen in every leaf, berry, and flower of the plant, or wing of the insect."

Meredith continued to publish throughout her life, both in Tasmania and in England. In 1860 she published *Some of My Bush Friends in Tasmania*, a book which contained elaborate full-colour plates printed by the new chromolithography process, a method for producing multi-coloured prints.

In recognition of her "distinguished literary and artistic services", the Tasmanian Government granted her a pension in 1884 – the first such acknowledgement for an Australian writer. Meredith's wildflower drawings won medals in national and overseas exhibitions. The flowering plant *Ewartia Meredithiae* is named in her honour.

Where can I see some of her work?

Louisa Meredith's artwork can be seen in many places in Tasmania including the Royal Society of Tasmania Collection in the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery and the Allport Library and Museum in the State Library of Tasmania. Researchers can access her books at the Royal Society of Tasmania library collection in the Morris Miller Library at University of Tasmania. The State Library has more than 20 of Meredith's published works.



Some of Meredith's books. Picture: ROYAL SOCIETY OF TASMANIA

THINGS TO EXPLORE

- Where else did Louisa Meredith live, apart from Tasmania?
- Louisa drew the Southern Bell Frog. Where does this live?
- How many species of frog are there in Tasmania? Where are they found? If you can't see them, how can you identify them? Make a poster with illustrations of Tasmanian frogs and where they are found.

DRAWING CHALLENGE

Louisa Meredith sketched and painted many things close to where she lived. Take a pad and pencil, go outside your house and draw something you see within 100 metres of where you live. Sign and date your sketch and keep it. You will have made a record of what things were like in your area on that date.

READING CHALLENGE

Read Louisa's book *My Home in Tasmania During a Residence of Nine Years*: <http://gutenberg.net.au/ebooks16/1600411h.html>

