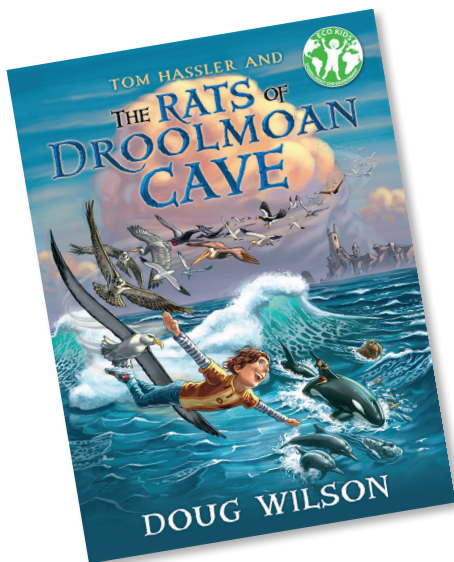


Tom Hassler and the Rats of Droolmoan Cave



About the Author



Doug Wilson is a medical scientist who has lived and worked in New Zealand, Australia, UK, Germany, Saudi Arabia and USA, and is now resident back in New Zealand. He has long been a storyteller to children, with wild leaps of imagination and high levels of irreverence, but until recently has never put the tales, new or old, on paper. In part, this was because he is dyslexic and has had to await the arrival of spell check to help push past the battle of word arrangements and spelling.

His background internationally has given him wide geographic and cultural experiences, and the scientific work, insights into the behaviours of the sea mammals and birds that are at the heart of the tales of Tom Hassler. The books are presented with exciting covers from the wonderful artist Donovan Bixley.

Selected Bibliography

Tom Hassler and the Rats of Droolmoan Cave
Erkel-Erkel Publishing, October 2013.

Tom Hassler and the Giant Razor-clawed Granioptrix of Ice Mountain, Erkel-Erkel Publishing, October 2013.

Tom Hassler and the Whale Killers,
Erkel-Erkel Publishing, to be published 2014.

Tom Hassler and Snake Haven
Erkel-Erkel Publishing, to be published 2014.

Assorted scientific and medical texts.

Thomas Hassler is an ordinary twelve-year-old kid. Life is boring, as usual. Until one day, when Tom's life changes forever. An urgent call from a grandmother he has never met leads him to an isolated castle and an incredible inheritance – the leadership of the Sea People.

At Castle Hassler, Tom meets not only his eccentric grandmother but a girl called Maria and, even more surprisingly, giant seals, walruses, orcas, albatrosses and sea eagles. He learns he can communicate with them using a common language, Seawish. And the creatures have got an urgent request.

After centuries of being imprisoned, the rats of Droolmoan Cave have escaped. It is up to Tom to defeat the rats and their horrible queen. And learn to fly!

There are battles, trickery and courage as Tom and Maria face the hordes of killers, with the help of the boldest grandmother of them all.

Classroom Activities



The Tom Hassler series is based on a unique character who is the emerging head of the Sea People, a community between humans and seabirds and sea mammals. In that role, Tom, who knew nothing of his heritage until he was a teenager, finds he can communicate with the sea creatures in a common language, and he learns to fly. He was an only child of a single mum and used a fantasy world to survive. But now ...

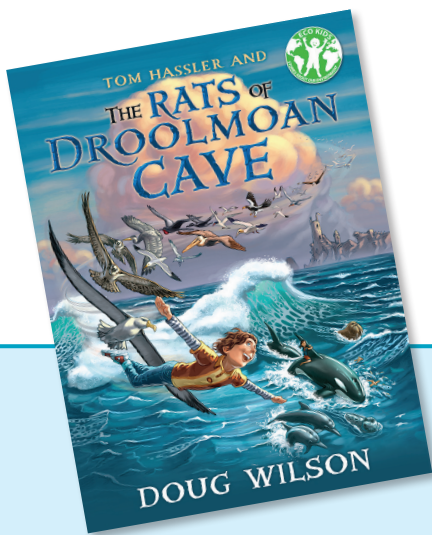
His aunt is a seagull. He meets seals and albatrosses, polar bears and orcas, bad people, threatened colonies, whale killers and more. Each story is a fast-paced adventure, where Tom is under threat and must save his friends and defeat the gangs of human and other predators. From battling the hordes of rats intent on destroying seabird colonies, to the disappearing world of polar bears, to hunters of whales, to oils spills, Tom faces demons and storms and killers. There are some imaginary creatures, such as the Granioptrix, and the Xakarax, the sleepy largest creature living beside undersea volcanoes. Through all these times, Tom has to steer his armies and negotiate with sea mammals and killer birds to save his friends and other Sea People groups.

1. Books written for reluctant readers, especially boys

The pace is fast, enemies terrible, battles furious, and outcomes unsure. Many children embark slowly on a voyage with Tom and are hooked early on. This is no comic hero. He is the responsible Sea Person leader, flying in storms with sea eagles, long flights with albatrosses, fighting beside orcas, and more. Most characters are based on living species, but there are a few other imaginative players to add fury and fight and humour to the tales. Larger print, imaginative typesetting and fantastic covers have created books for an easy read and a great appearance. Read alone or aloud, they are primed to excite. Acting parts is a must. Not for scaredy kids. We find many parents, who were themselves reluctant readers, have found these stories exciting and addictive.

2. Natural history and zoology

In each story there is a range of common creatures, from seagulls, petrels, albatrosses and sea eagles to polar bears, owls, bats, orcas, whales, seals, frigate birds and more. This provides a wealth of opportunities to explore



Classroom Activities



the life cycle and biology of this global zoology. How do they survive? What do they eat? How do they interact? Are orcas the great killers of all species? How long can some birds survive at sea without touching land? How can they drink? Do they carry diseases? And more. But entry to these biology lessons by way of a tearaway riveting tale is an obvious door to open.

3. Underlying ecological themes

These are softly presented as an underlying message. In *The Rats of Droolmoan Cave*, Tom is battling hordes of predators on offshore islands intent on killing off the seabird colonies. This is real life. New Zealand is at the forefront of striving to create predator-free islands, so seabird colonies can recover. In other stories there are the battles with whale killers and then dealing with oil spills. So broader themes than biology are opened, but as an incidental but yet core component of the stories.

4. Visual and artistic

The wide range of the stories and the core participants are fodder for children who want to let their imaginations soar and explore their own line of stories. Visually rich and geographically diverse, these are backdrops to a wealth of visual and artistic ventures.

Tom Hassler and the Rats of Droolmoan Cave

The three core objectives here are to:

- 1 persuade resistant and reluctant readers to read the stories
- 2 build knowledge of different sea species
- 3 introduce an ecological theme softly.

Comprehension and reading facilitation

Readers, reluctant or otherwise, are seduced into a fast-paced and dangerous world of real and imaginary characters. Each of the *Sea People* is based on the character of their species, and so they are talking points. At each step in these stories there are opportunities to open educational doors in many directions. For example:

- Single-child families, solo mothers
- Trouble with self-image for these children
- How do kids from single-child families manage boredom?
- Generational
- Children's fantasy worlds to deal with problems and issues
- The wide range of sea life and everything there is to learn about, such as how do albatrosses feed over long spells in the ocean?
- How do each of the species breed?
- Which are threatened and what is happening to change that?
- Are there pecking orders for seabirds?
- How far and for how long can an albatross fly?
- What have you learned about Ricky so far? What do you think of his behaviour?
- Identify the parts of the text that led you to

think that. How do these extracts show his character?

Reading

1. What was the name of Tom's next-door neighbour?
2. Mr Jameson's taxi seemed old. What tells you that?
3. The cover shows many different animals and birds. What can you recognise?
4. Who greeted Tom at the jetty of Castle Hassler?
5. Was Tom happy about having to learn to fly?
6. The orcas told Tom they spoke long before humans. Is this correct and how do they communicate?
7. How do rats and stoats damage the lives of seabirds?
8. What nickname did the sea eagle give to Tom when he saw him fly?
9. How did Goldo and Tom rescue the injured chick?
10. Madame Hortense: was she human or something else?

Answers:

1. Mrs Donald
2. Sputtering engine and lumpy seats
3. Dolphins, orcas, sea lion, different seabirds
4. Grandmother, two dogs, seagulls, Murgatroyd (Murgy), the giant seal
5. No, it scared the pants off him
6. It's true, millions of years before humans — they communicate by clicks and songs through the water

7. By smashing and eating the eggs and attacking the chicks

8. Ice Block

9. By using a sling and pulling her from the water

10. Something else, with ratty teeth and claws

Oral language

The stories are paced for reading aloud. They give different children the opportunity to take many different roles, each with very personalised language and accents and pace. They can take on different characters:

- Mr Spoolmentor
- Murgy, the giant seal
- Aunt Seawind
- Maria
- Tom
- Goldo the sea eagle
- Great-uncle Oceanspray
- Madame Hortense

Visual

The Donovan Bixley cover is dramatic.

- What can you see on the cover?
- Set out your own picture of a scene from the book.
- If this was a comic, how would you set out the story?
- Draw Droolmoan Cave.
- Draw Castle Hassler.
- Draw the rescue of the sea eagle chick.

Social Studies

The eco theme here is the impact of rodents on offshore islands on the seabird colonies. What is happening in New Zealand to change that?