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Last child in the bush? Children and wild nature in Australian cities, 1965-2000

Wednesday 8 May 2019 4:15–5:30pm

School of History Seminar Series

Speaker: Andrea Gaynor, University of Western Australia

McDonald Room, Menzies Library, ANU



In 1886 Frederick McCubbin painted *Lost*, an image that distilled a range of settler anxieties into the figure of a child lost in the Australian bush. Just over a century later, American author Richard Louv's *Last Child in the Woods* gave impetus in the Anglo world – including Australia – to a nature-based play movement that seeks to 'leave no child inside'.

In this paper I explore this ostensibly dramatic shift, with a focus on the latter half of the twentieth century as a time of booming suburban growth, dawning apprehension of environmental crisis, and emerging scientific evidence of the health benefits of contact with 'nature'. I also reflect on how the shifting entanglement of fear and hope within adults' ideas about the relationship between children and urban wild nature in Australia provides us with a salutary story for the present.



Andrea Gaynor is Associate Professor of History at the University of Western Australia. An environmental historian, her research seeks to use the contextualising and narrative power of history to help address real-world problems. At UWA she is Chair of the History Discipline Group and Director of the Centre for Western Australian History; she is also convenor of the Australian and New Zealand Environmental History Network and endeavours to influence policy as a member of The Beeliar Group: Professors for Environmental Responsibility.

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Please direct enquiries to: Alexander.Cook@anu.edu.au
Rhianne.Grieve@anu.edu.au