



Wildlife

Fiona Wood

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During a semester in the wilderness, sixteen-year-old Sib expects the tough outdoor education program and the horrors of dorm life, but friendship drama and an unexpected romance with popular Ben Capaldi? That will take some navigating.

New girl Lou has zero interest in fitting in, or joining in. Still reeling from a loss that occurred almost a year ago, she just wants to be left alone. But as she witnesses a betrayal unfolding around Sib and her best friend Holly, Lou can't help but be drawn back into the land of the living.

Fans of Melina Marchetta, Rainbow Rowell, and E. Lockhart will adore this endearing and poignant story of first love, true friendship, and going a little bit wild.

Wildlife Details

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From Reader Review Wildlife for online ebook

Lola says

3.5 stars.

It took me some time to realize that this story is narrated from two distinct point of views.

No wonder I was so confused at first. It's not as if the names of the narrators are mentioned at the beginning of chapters. But the moment you notice how the change is done, you never get confused again. Which is good.

So this is the story of Lou and Sib who spend a whole semester in the woods with their classmates. Lou's true love died in a car accident and she is still mentally and emotionally affected by his death.

Sib has it hard for Ben. But she's not his type. Or so she thinks. One day, however, at a party, they share a kiss. Could it be the beginning of something? That's what Sib hopes, but Holly—her best friend—'s betrayal may prove different.

It's a familiar story with a different setting. The wilderness definitely added a touch of originality to this story. I couldn't imagine spending nine weeks in the woods, but seeing the characters cope with their new lifestyle was quite entrancing.

It's a familiar story because betrayals between teen girls especially are very popular in teen literature. Your bf spread rumours on you. Your bf turned your back on you. Your bf betrayed your trust. This isn't something new, but it still is something important to discuss. When your best friend does something unforgivable, it makes you question yourself—who you want to be. Are you going to forgive them or carry on without them? This isn't an easy question.

Thank goodness for a *mild* love-triangle case instead of a heavy one. It's actually more about the action of loving someone who you have a connection with than the idea of developing a romance between three people. So it's not as if it made the romance any more complicated.

Wildlife is an important book. I also recommend Sleepaway Girls if you want something lighter and more joyful but with a similar setting.

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Amanda says

Wildlife is Fiona Wood's second book and is set in Victoria. Sibylla Quinn is sixteen years old and thanks to her Godmother, she's now the face of a global advertising campaign for perfume. This brings her more attention from her classmates, including Ben Capaldi. Lou is dealing with something that has had a huge impact on her life and she's switched schools right before her year is about to spend their last term in the bush.

When I started *Wildlife* and found out what Lou was grieving about, I decide to go back and re-read *Six*

Impossible Things, in case there was something I'd forgotten, and to reacquaint me with the characters. I really enjoyed the re-read and it set up *Wildlife* perfectly, so while you do not have to have read SIP, I highly suggest getting to know Lou and her friends before reading *Wildlife*.

I was really sad for Lou, and I kept getting progressively sadder each time she shared a special memory from her past. Her grief felt so realistic, I could understand why she was being anti-social, but I was glad when Sibylla's friend, Michael, befriended her. Michael has to be one of my favourite characters ever. I also liked the mentions of Dan and Estelle, who are in Paris on exchange.

I liked Sibylla from the moment she started narrating, she's funny, witty, and sarcastic. She's used to being the girl not invited to things, even when her bff, Holly, is included. Her friendship with Holly was baffling to Lou, and to me as well. Holly does not treat her very well at all, but Sibylla is so used to Holly and just puts up with her, I could totally understand why she was reluctant to end the friendship.

The biggest issues in this story are death and sex, and both are dealt with really well. Lou is seeing a counsellor who suggested she keep a journal and Lou's portion of the book is via her journal entries. I liked the differences between her and Sibylla when it came to sex. Lou talks about her time with Fred and how it was the first time for both of them and how Fred researched it first and how much love they had for each other. It was so sweet and a good example of how responsible teens can be about sex. Sibylla on the other hand hasn't had much experience with boys and isn't sure if she wants to have sex with Ben but even her experiences are handled responsibly and she does a great deal of thinking about it.

Ableist language use: I have a confession: Australian contemporary YA does not have to work very hard to get 5 stars from me, I truly love our authors and their clever, funny, amazing books and I always want to give them the highest rating and praise. But this book contains the use of ableist language and if this were not Aussie, I would probably be ranting. But it is Aussie and it pains me to criticise it. There's one use of the word spastic and three uses of the word retard/retarded. I took the time to think about why it was being used. Was it to convey the age of the characters or to make them sound authentic? I already believed they were teenagers because Fiona is a wonderful author and her characters are always so realistic and well thought out, so I feel there are other words that could have been used to convey their age without resorting to those words but I am well aware that most people will not even notice them while reading.

That was my only issue with this book, the rest of it is perfect. This is the second Aussie YA I've read that mentions a whole term of living in the bush, away from school/home and the concept reminded me of our week at camp each year in high school.

All of the secondary characters were well developed. We have a classic mean girl but she has issues at home, the hot guy, also with pressure and issues, the geeky intelligent guy who is the most wonderful boy ever (Michael) and a host of other characters. I particularly loved Sibylla's mother, a doctor at a free clinic, and her interactions with Sibylla and her misuse of the words fugs and lol made me laugh.

Wildlife is a wonderful story that deals with death and sex in a realistic and relevant way. The characters and setting made this a captivating story, especially as I have a soft spot for groups of kids becoming friends.

Estelle says

3.75? This is a tough one! Originally posted on Rather Be Reading Blog

I was tempted to read *Wildlife* because the reviews have been such a mixed bag. Here are some of my thoughts organized in a pros & cons list:

PROS

- The setting. I haven't read another book where students took a semester to live in the wilderness. It very much felt like a camp (but with grades), and I enjoyed hanging out in a new setting and taking part in all the nature-y and physical activities that were part of their every day routines. (I don't know if I ever would have survived a semester like this.)
- Lou is dealing with some very heavy grief. She's also brand new to this school, and is able to shrink in herself as she deals with a tragedy that totally shattered her world. I loved how realistically Fiona Wood handled this storyline. Lou has to come to terms with so much without a familiar shoulder to lean on. She's independent but hurting, and I liked how her story was broken down in diary entries as a way for her to work through these hefty emotions.
- I felt similarly about the sex in this book. Sib, who is dealing with some new treatment from her classmates because of a modeling gig she has, engages in a secret relationship with one of the most popular guys at school and she has so many questions about deciding to take the next step and what it means to her. This was some of the best inner dialogue I've seen about sex in a young adult book, and I wish there was more of it. What do you do when you think sex is a big deal and your partner doesn't?
Michael — Sib's true blue best friend who is sort of pushed to the side while she pursues other interests and also a new friend to Lou. He's quiet but super solid and I had a lot of love for him throughout the story.
- Short chapters! Again, something I rarely see in the books I'm reading but very welcome when I'm reading during lunch and only have a short amount of time to jump back into the story. It felt like I always had a stopping point. (Plus the chapter number art was beautiful.)

CONS

- The pacing was a little slow. *Wildlife* takes place over a semester and because all of the chapters were so introspective, there was very little action. I kept wondering what was going to break the book wide open, and it took awhile. (Even when it got there, it felt more like a tiny fire than a full on explosion.)
- I was reminded a lot of my reading of *Paper Airplanes* from a few weeks ago. Two girls become friends, one of them has a toxic best gal pal, and there seems to be only a little bit of time for a full-fledged friendship to develop. It was obvious Sib and Lou could help each other (especially because Sib's best friend is a piece of work) and I wanted the seed for their friendship to be planted sooner so maybe they could be farther along as I came up to the ending.

Final thoughts: *Wildlife* is written so beautifully, and I loved the supporting character that nature played in the story. The author did such a commendable job bringing to life two girls going through so much: one dealing with questions of her own limits (in relationships and friendship) and another working to make peace with the past. It was real and emotional but also hopeful. Definitely looking forward to reading more of Wood's work in the future.

Kelly says

Sib begins the wilderness term with her classmates, best friends still with Holly and on the brink of a relationship with Ben, who she kissed at a party. Sib's gotten a lot of attention lately, thanks to her face being plastered on a billboard. It was a modeling gig she did for a little cash, on the suggestion of her aunt. This stint with "fame" changed how her classmates -- and her best friend -- she and interact with her, even if it doesn't change her in the least.

Lou is the new girl, tossed into this wilderness term without any immersion with these peers prior. She's grieving, deeply grieving, and she's private about what she's going through. She's not ready to open up, and even when pushed to the brink, she won't.

Until she does with Michael.

And it's through her relationship and opening up with Michael that she begins to forge a relationship with Sib and helps Sib realize that people like Holly are energy saps. . . not best friend material. That people like Holly are the reason that Sib may become hurtful herself.

Wildlife is an excellent little book about friendships and peer relationships, as well as about sexuality. Wood USES THE WORDS to describe what goes on in sexual experiences, through the voices of Sib and Lou, and it never comes off clinical nor does it come off as being too technical for how a teen girl might think. Even though Sib may not be happy with the choices she makes, she empowers herself with the ability to make those choices. (view spoiler)

This is a story about coming into yourself and acting and reacting for yourself, rather than putting on a face or a performance for those around you.

I read the Australian edition, but I've been assured that, aside from some language that may be unfamiliar (and there was quite a bit), the story won't change in the US edition when it comes out this fall.

Tatiana says

A misleading cover. This is actually a novel about friendships.

A top tier Aussie YA.

Maggie says

Just my favorite book of the year thus far.

Trisha says

Fiona Wood, you are one brave YA author. Didn't anyone tell you it's not good form to kill off a beloved (secondary) character from a previous book? Didn't anyone warn you about not ending with a romantic kiss in the moonlight?

But you just ignored all the expectations, and put Lou (from Six Impossible Things) into the most awful of times. You send Dan and Estelle off page to France, and then you plunk Lou down in the middle of a toxic friendship. Not to mention the middle of a survival term (of school) in the wilderness (well, as wild as a private school off-site camp can be - hint: not very).

Oh, but you do all the wrong things so well.

Oh Lou. Her pain is palpable and never-ending. Her loss has changed her. And in trying to dig herself out of the spiralling darkness, Lou finds her self-imposed solitude sorely tried by the nasty Holly, who is undermining her best friend, Sibylla's confidence and self-esteem.

This is complicated and messy, and really really sad. Wood has been able to capture Lou's grief exquisitely, like sharp needles pricking endlessly. Sibylla's life is changing and in learning to keep true, she faces some harsh facts. Oh Sibylla.

And can I add one more? Oh Michael.

Oh yes. Oh Fred (sob).

Keep ignoring the tropes Ms Wood, I implore you.

Shelleyrae at Book'd Out says

Wildlife is Fiona Wood's companion novel to her popular young adult contemporary debut, *Six Impossible Things*.

Sibylla is used to people looking past her, around her, through her even, but that all changes the day her face appears on a 20-metre billboard and Ben Capaldi, the most popular boy in year 10, kisses her.

"So the Earth must be spinning of it's axis by now, plummeting headlong towards a new universe, oceans sloshing and spilling, icecaps sliding, trees uprooted. Because somehow I've stepped over the line to stand with the popular girls. Only I haven't. The line must have moved without me realising."

Coping with her shift in status is disorientating for Sibylla, despite her best friend's coaching, especially as year 10 have to spend the next nine weeks camping together at their Grammar school's outdoor education camp in the highlands of Victoria.

"Now all I have to do is blend in, zone out and start crossing off the days on my cell wall"

Lou (from *Six Impossible Things*), new to Crowthorne Grammar, couldn't care less about Sibylla, Ben or the whole social milieu. Still grieving the accidental death of her boyfriend, Fred, she aims only to endure the term bunking with five strange girls.

Contrasting Sibylla's tentative negotiation of love, sexuality and friendship with Lou's grief and hard earned self awareness, *Wildlife* is a thoughtful coming of age story.

It explores the dynamics of self image and self esteem, highlighting how vulnerable teens can be to the perceptions of others. Sibylla in particular struggles with her desire to fit in and be considered as worthy of Ben's interest. Woods captures Sib's conflicted thoughts and behaviour wonderfully and it is this insightful comment from Lou that articulates the lesson Sib needs to learn.

"Sometimes I think I see you, Sibylla, but then you get all blurry about what people think about you, how you should act, what everyone expects of you, who you are pleasing, or not... The only person you should be is yourself. You can't control perception. All you can control is how you treat someone else."

The complexities of teen relationships also comes under scrutiny in *Wildlife*. Holly's fickle friendship and

Michael's devotion highlights the extremes of loyalty. Again it is Lou's wisdom that helps Sibylla recognise the value of friendship.

"A friend brave enough to be truthful-very different from Holly's "honesty"."

The budding relationship between Sibylla and Ben is treated with refreshing candour. While Sib agonises over boyfriend/girlfriend etiquette and tries to reconcile lust with love, Ben maintains a casual attitude to the relationship which is realistic (and frighteningly familiar). I like that Wood chooses to recognise this common dynamic with equanimity and confronts desire and sex with candid honesty.

While Sibylla is experiencing a slew of firsts, Lou is mourning the memory of hers. Wood lays bare Lou's grief, anger and fears in poignant diary entries as Lou tries to reconcile her loss with the ordinary task of living. Though she tries to hold herself apart from everyone, sheer proximity eventually forces Lou to engage with her fellow students. Her strongest connection is with Michael, Sib's genius childhood friend, whose complete lack of artifice suits her, but she also becomes embroiled in the relationships between Sibylla, Holly, Michael and Ben despite herself. Unexpectedly, the muddled situation leads Lou to discover she can move forward with her life, without leaving Fred behind.

"You will always be a part of me, and how I see the world."

Wildlife is wonderful and easily one of the best contemporary young adult novels I have read. It's authentic, honest and teens will be able to relate to the characters and their circumstances.

Reynje says

"..my heart is its own fierce country where nobody else is welcome."

"Q: And who the hell do I think I am?"

A: I have no idea."

The long-awaited companion to Wood's much-loved debut, *Six Impossible Things*, does not disappoint. *Wildlife* is a beautiful and bittersweet novel of heartbreak and healing, friendship and betrayal; an achingly authentic portrayal of coming of age against a backdrop of the Victorian wilderness.

Where there was a certain light-hearted buoyancy that tempered the issues explored in *Six Impossible Things*, *Wildlife* has an emotional resonance and depth that befits both the maturation of the characters and the themes of the novel. This is a story that navigates the complexities of grief, sexuality and (not) fitting-in, written with a perceptive grasp of how the teen characters internalise and process these events.

The writing is a blend of lyrical and astute, laced with the raw longing and heady desire of heartbreak and burgeoning attraction. Related through the dual perspectives of Sibylla and Lou, Wood weaves a narrative of loss and love, gradually entwining the lives of the two girls as they learn to survive in the wild.

"Greatest pain in the world: the moment after waking. Remembering again as consciousness slaps my face in the morning's first sigh. Nips fresh the not-healed wound. Clubs its groundhog self into my brain, a new sharp bite, a new blunt instrument for every single day of the week. Grief has so many odd-value added features. You'd laugh."

Using the setting of an outdoor education program, Wood places her characters into a heightened

environment – here, life is distilled, concentrated down to its fundamental elements. In one sense, it's survival in the physical world, stripped of outside influences and support networks. In another, it creates an incubator that intensifies and tests allegiances. This concept of habitat and isolation from external factors serves to pressurise relationships, forcing them to either evolve or disintegrate.

“Sometimes I think I see you, Sibylla, but then you get all blurry about what people think about you... The only person you should be is yourself. You can't control perception. All you can control is how you treat someone else.”

Into this amplified reality, Wood mixes envy and manipulation, referencing the novel's Othello motif in the dynamic of Sibylla and Holly's friendship. The longevity of the relationship and the tenuous balance of power that both girls have grown accustomed to is challenged when the limelight suddenly falls on Sibylla. With this new attention, the roles they occupy within the school's social order are shifted, presenting opportunity, confusion, and a catalyst for the toxicity of their friendship to emerge. It's an insightful portrayal of the insidious creep of jealousy and cruelty, the way lines between friend and enemy can be obscured by years of shared history, and the complex nature of female friendships.

Within this framework, Wood also addresses perceptions of beauty and popularity, particularly as it relates to the hierarchy of high school. The concept of Sibylla's beauty and how it is viewed and acknowledged by the characters is handled particularly intelligently; Wood has smart, interesting things to say about self-image and change, and the frequent dichotomy between the way we see ourselves, and the way others see us.

Wildlife is frank in its depiction of sex and desire – in both the physical acts and feelings, and in attitudes towards sexuality. Anyone who thinks YA shies away from candidly portraying teen girls' responses to sex needs to read this book, because it's handled openly and positively, even while it acknowledges the negative messaging and misogyny that saturate mainstream media. Wildlife is refreshingly honest, addressing the imbalance while remaining true to the characters – who are complex, fallible, three-dimensional.

But most of all, I loved the achy ambiguity of the relationships, the palpable sense of yearning that accompanies reality when it doesn't quite match the characters' expectations. Wood has a keen grasp of how it feels to be in this emotional limbo, and it comes across raw and compelling in her writing. It's like being fifteen all over again – exposed, vulnerable, yet brave - tasting the world for the first time and being surprised that the sweetness can be laced with the bitter.

A novel about testing new realities, survival and nine-letter words, Wildlife is utterly gorgeous.

Paula Weston says

Yeah, yeah I know. I said I wasn't going to rate books any more, only review them. But when you love a book as much as I loved this one, I have to break my own rule...

I devoured *Six Impossible Things* only a month or so ago, and was itching to read *Wildlife*. It more than lived up to expectations, revealing new sides to Fiona Wood's talent as a storyteller.

Fiona's writing is honest, funny and, at times, heartbreaking. And always fresh and enjoyable.

There's a perfect balance here between two coming-of-age stories: Sibylla's lessons about friendship, love,

social status and self acceptance; and Lou's more heartbreaking one of loss and finding the courage to reconnect.

I'll confess I had a particularly soft spot for Lou and her ability to make wry (and wonderfully astute) observations, even in the midst of dealing with her grief. And I especially loved her memories of Fred.

The outdoor education camp setting is genius (survival skills and self reliance...these are not just things for the outdoors), and the Othello parallels are a nice touch.

I happily join the circle of love for this book.

Heather says

Fiona Wood, and her Australian YA counterparts, are an integral part of why I continue to read YA. Many YA characters are so perfectly constructed that they become unbelievable. While this can be amusing and even entertaining, I would hardly consider it relatable. Not so with Wildlife.

Don't be fooled by the cover, this isn't a cutesy love story. It's a story about navigating life's uncharted territories including disingenuous friends, misleading boys, and being true to who you are regardless of how popular or unpopular that might make you, all of which is fleshed out amidst outdoor camp setting.

I was impressed with so many aspects of Wildlife from the way characters were described, the issues they grappled with, and especially how the topic of sex was addressed, unflinchingly frank and honest.

A great read for anyone wishing for a witty, humorous, and humbling look at those final teen years.

ALPHAreader says

The Crowthorne Grammar outdoor education term is meant to impart life skills and self-reliance. Mobile phones are strictly forbidden (and reception sucks anyway) solo-hikes are a requirement and Milo is rationed – all in an effort to prepare the Year Ten's for their imminent arrival into adulthood.

But for Lou, adulthood has already come much too soon, after the accidental death of her boyfriend, Fred. Now she's dealing with the ache of never letting go and the shattered illusion that death is for the old. Her public school friends, Dan and Estelle, are putting their own pieces back together – and venturing on a different type of adventure, in the form of a French exchange program. But Lou, fearful of somehow abandoning Fred, instead chooses to attend her mum's old private school, Crowthorne Grammar. It's just a shame that her first term coincides with the dreaded outdoor education camp. Now Lou is packing up her grief into a waterproof backpack, breaking in her boots and carting her bruised heart to the middle of nowhere.

Sibylla is in the middle of a very different life lesson when the outdoor education term rudely interrupts. Despite her feminist mum's reservations, family friend and advertising producer, Bebe, managed to convince Sibylla ('Sib') to be the new face of an international perfume ad campaign. Sib recently had braces off and zits cleared, emerging beautifully butterflyed – but her transformation is accelerated ten-fold when a twenty-metre billboard of her appears the day before school camp. Now Sib's emergence from the cocoon is

advertised in an international campaign for all to see, and comment on. Sib's best friend since primary school is Holly, whose bark is as bad as her bite – she seems to be a walking conundrum, at once jealous of Sib's unbelievable good fortune, and thrilled that she can cash in on popularity-by-association for her own gains. Less enthused is Sib's older oldest friend since kindergarten, Michael. Michael is a genius and unimpressed by the social strata at school – he's focussed (and can sometimes get obsessed) with his piano-playing and running. To him, Sibylla will always be beautiful – billboard or no – and the resulting hubbub around her sudden popularity has him nervous.

What's really got Michael riled is Ben Capaldi – future class president, straight-A student, ladies-man, guys-guy and all-round Mr. Popular. Normally Sib wouldn't even be on Ben's radar . . . but since 'the billboard', things have gotten interesting – in the form of an unexpected party kiss. Now Sib is going to spend an entire term in the great outdoors with her crush, trying to figure out if their kiss was a one-off, or if there's possibility for more.

Along with four other girls, Lou and Sib are bunked together in Bennett House. Sib tries to steer clear of the new loner, and Lou is determined not to care about Crowthorne's petty popularity stakes . . . but when you're thrown together in the middle of nowhere, you quickly discover that the art of survival can sometimes mean depending on others, as much as yourself.

'Wildlife' is the new young adult novel from Australian author, Fiona Wood.

With some authors, it's as though they've twisted off the top of your head and taken a peek inside, and then acted as brain stenographer to jot down privacies and idiosyncrasies you thought were wholly unique to you. Fiona Wood is such an author, and 'Six Impossible Things' was one of those books I read and felt an instant kinship with. So when news of Wood's follow-up novel came through the YA grapevine, I marked its release date in my calendar and got excited . . . and when details of the blurb emerged, revealing that one alternating protagonist would be Lou (Estelle's friend from 'Six Impossible Things', and insta-crush for Dan's bestie, Fred) I was doubly-thrilled. There's nothing quite like reading a book and feeling that a fictional friendship has been established with the characters – the next best thing is knowing that you'll be able to catch up and touch base with them again (à la 'Saving Francesca' and 'The Piper's Son').

Of course, readers are not catching-up with Lou under the best of circumstances. When the book begins, Fred has been dead for months and Lou is still not coping . . . Dan and Estelle are making attempts to get on with their life by participating in the French exchange program, but Lou feels she should stay grounded in the country where Fred died, as a sort of allegiance to him. Fans of 'Six Impossible Things' will no doubt feel the crushing blow of once again meeting these characters they fell in love with, only to discover their world that we left semi-happily ever aftered, is now bleak and fractured. It's tough, I'll admit, but for Lou's story it's a hell of a place to start from.

Sib is dealing with very different issues. She's a forward-thinking young feminist who hates misogynistic rap lyrics and isn't terribly impressed by the girly cliques at her school. At seeming odds with Sib's moral fibre is the massive twenty-metre billboard of her face that's just been erected in the city – part of a perfume ad campaign that her mother's best friend, Bebe, talked her into doing (with the tempt of money being put towards Sib's end-of-school travel fund). Now Sib is on everybody's radar, for various reasons; girls look at her wondering why she's so special, boys feel the need to comment on her 'hotness' and her social standing is fluctuating (from non-existent, to suddenly being kissed by the most popular boy in her year level).

More barking. But maybe I've got traction with guys like this these strange days, and I decide to use it, instead of pretending to be a good sport and let them say any dumb thing they find amusing while I give what I hope is an ironic or non-committal smile.

'Being gross doesn't make you funny.'

'And being on a billboard doesn't make you pretty,' Vincent says.

I catch the briefest flash of triumphant in Holly's eye.

At first glance, Lou and Sibylla seem so different, that they're doomed to fail in the same book. How can Lou's grieving for her dead boyfriend possibly act as counterpoint to Sibylla's sudden popularity sky-rocket and lustful developments with Ben Capaldi? It sounds like it shouldn't work . . . but this is Fiona Wood, so it does. And the magnet that initially brings these two polar opposites together is Michael – Sib's oldest friend, and Lou's new confidante.

In a book with two stellar protagonists, Michael was actually my favourite character, hands down. He was just brilliant – a boy genius, tender soul and utterly unimpressed by popularity and the personality change that comes with clawing your way to the top of the 'cool' ladder. Michael may have Asperger syndrome, or else he simply suffers from always being the smartest person in the room (and it's probably been that way since kindergarten) – I loved that Wood and Sib don't hark on Michael's quirks that mark him as different, they just accept him. And it's his forthrightness and gentleman charm that has Lou seeking comfort in his friendship, and has him acting as a sort of bridge between her and Sib . . . and as much as Lou is gaining something from her new-found friendships, so too is Sib finding comfort in a new and old friend when romance becomes too much and frenemy, Holly, goes too far.

Sibylla's story acts to remind Lou (and readers) that there is life beyond grief, and the world keeps turning. Sib and Michael are there to pull Lou into a different orbit; one that's not defined by what's missing but rather, what's ahead. And I think if this had just been a book of Lou's grief, it would have been very tough to get through. Tasked to jot her feelings down in a journal, Lou writes so eloquently about her hurt, bewilderment and never-ending sadness. It's a vicious cycle that she communicates so well on the page, but poorly to the rest of the world;

Grief settles comfortably into any host; it is an ever-mutating, vigorous organism with an ever-renewing customer base. It generates a never-ending hunger, a never-ending ache, an unassuageable pain to new hearts, brains, guts every minute, every day, every year. It is the razor edge of a loose tooth shrieking to be pressed again and again into the soft pink sore gum. It's a one-way tunnel with no proof of another exit.

It's actually a blessing to have Sibylla's story alongside Lou's – with her we get the butterflies-in-stomach, rollercoaster-highs of first crush turning into something more. It's grief and giddiness, sweet and sour . . . two halves making an incredibly whole and fulfilling book.

Fiona Wood has done it again – I was happy to get lost in the wilderness of this story, and I'll be passing it on to friends and family (young and old – because there's no age-limit on relating to first experiences with love and death). A beautiful book with characters I didn't want to leave, but I feel lucky to have met (some of them for a second time).

Jenna says

My favourite kinds of stories are the ones you can relate to. The stories that leap from the page, wrap their arms around you and say, "It's ok, you're not alone." Wildlife is one of those books. I connected with so many aspects of this story – the grieving process, the struggle to fit in, the best friend who is really a bitch, the nervousness and excitement that goes along with first relationships, the loneliness that is being a teenager – there is so much in there.

Lou from Six Impossible Things is at the centre of this sad story, and her isolation and sadness are palpable

as she comes to grips with her grief in the middle of nowhere, at a school camp where she knows no one. The short, unfinished sentences that open her chapters in the beginning of *Wildlife* perfectly encapsulate the breathlessness of depression – the pain so deep, so overwhelming, that it numbs you and leaves you unable to speak or even function properly. It's utterly heartbreaking but importantly it's also incredibly cathartic, as you watch Lou slowly heal and find her way back to contentment, if not complete happiness.

Lou's intense grief and loneliness are perfectly balanced by the alternate chapters that focus on Sibylla's story. While she is dealing with her own problems, they're not as dark as Lou's, and in comparison her story is light and fun. She has a new, hot boyfriend who is pressuring her to move fast, her best friend is acting strange, and her oldest friend is strangest of all. It might sound like this kind of plot would contrast too starkly with Lou's chapters, but actually they're wonderfully integrated. A similar sense of isolation underpins both characters' experiences, and ultimately they both represent significant life events, for better or worse.

As with *Six Impossible Things*, the secondary characters are a highlight in *Wildlife*. There were a few that I loved, and a couple that I hated, which was just as it should be. I adored both main characters. Sometimes I just wanted to shake some sense into Sibylla, but I think that's because I identified with her so much and, you know, I've got hindsight and all. Lou I just wanted to hug and squish and make all the problems go away. My heart still hurts for her.

Wildlife is pretty much the perfect teen book. It is so incredibly realistic, while also being touching and inspiring. It is a fun, easy read, but it also explores very important and deep issues. It will make you feel happy and sad and worried and excited and so many things all at once. It will tear you apart into tiny pieces, before patching you up again, just as whole, but not quite the same.

Melanie says

See more reviews at [YA Midnight Reads](#)

'No matter how much you tell yourself nothing has changed, it has.'

An utterly beautiful novel, Fiona Wood threw me around in circles of emotions. Combining every possible element of a YA contemporary to create this seemingly impervious novel. The resplendent prose and imagery do not even begin to cover how magnificent this book was. For this was yet another successful read from a strong Aussie author, fleshing out reality to the barest bone of the pile.

Alternating in the POVs of two exclusive teen voices, in which the only similarity is that they are both lost in their unique ways, messages of loss and love break through the outdoor education camp. As well as grief and happiness. Sex, image and social hierarchy. While not falling into a cliché story, *Wildlife* is a book of wilderness and finding yourself after you lose yourself. This book made me go on tolls of emotions. While not awfully severe; I got frustrated, pissed off even. Crazy and lost. On the brink of sad tears, or even happy tears. What stood out to me most of this was that I was feeling exactly what Sibylla or Lou were going through. I related with them in the most wholly way anyone could possibly get. They were real and true to themselves, feeding me their words like I was their beloved diary.

Sibylla accomplished two things in the holidays that were out of the norm. She kissed Ben Capaldi- popular and everyone loved guy- and her picture appeared on the school billboard. Now, going for a school term in the wilderness at an outdoor education camp, Sib finds herself in a drama of new opportunities, romance and hidden secrets. And also maybe, learns that her closest friends may not be that close at all. It's a wild adventure of betrayal and reality. The way Sib tackled these situations eventually, as they smashed into her

face was highly authentic, exposed and spectacularly outspoken. By utilising the backdrop of this novel- the Australian outback- Sib is placed in a zone with no place to hide from, as her complications follow her twenty-four seven.

Then there's Lou. The two characters are similar in the essence that both Sibylla and Lou are confused, exposed. Their emotions are absolutely in contrast to what is hidden under their unwavering masks. What worried me here was because of these similarities in character, how would I manage to alternate between the POVs that were in first person? Answer: I could separate the two after reading just two sentences. Fiona Wood's intelligence of illustrating two broken teens in two thoroughly detectable tones that were authoritative to the core amazed me. While Sib was experiencing the hardships of assortments of relationships, Lou endeavoured through the recent loss of her love.

The simplistic backstory of a school outdoor camp borders possibilities to the sky. Entwined in here we have numerous strategically addressed harsh and topics that most authors shuffle stealthily away from. Classic high school occurrences are renewed and introduced, such as (like aforementioned) unrestrained desire, jealousy and the portrayal of social hierarchies that are determined by visual-image and to put candidly, sass.

Wildlife just took YA contemporaries to the next level with a broad spectrum of complexities, bittersweet romance that is fresh and wavering as well as a raw story about coming of age. Living in the wilderness could be a hidden doorway to new possibilities, new beginnings and about finding and loosing what's right. Fiona Wood's writing is something not to be overseen- it is analogical in a sense- and emotively enthralling.

In shorter words: Wildlife is a lovely novel that has take a place in my heart from the moment I finished it. If a book were to be hyped for it's gorgeousness, this would be so hyped that every living thing that could read would have read this.

I will now go and find myself as I have lost myself somewhere between the last few pages of Wildlife.

Wendy Darling says

I don't know about you, but I feel as though a vast majority of YA seems to portray teenagers as hypersmart, sophisticated creatures who are borderline perfect, or "carefully flawed" in exactly the right and tolerable way. As fun as that fiction can be, I always feel a certain amusement for characters like that, because how many of us actually were that spectacular at that age?

I think part of the appeal of contemporary Aussie YA for me is that it consistently offers teenagers who act like teenagers; whether they're snarly and vindictive or fumbly and sweet, a lot of them just seem very *real*. That's certainly the case with the students in *Wildlife*. Sybilla and Lou are spending one school term doing an outdoor education program, where they find that surviving the wilderness is easy in comparison to surviving deceptive friends, tricky, needy boys, and their own uncharted feelings.

Things I loved about this book: the funny, good-natured byplay between the characters; smart dialogue that zings; the way Lou's deep and private pain is slowly unpeeled until she's laid bare and vulnerable; the complex interplay between all the girls; and the way one first love is portrayed in a deeply earnest, embarrassing way. The author's writing feels fresh and unstudied, and I was startled into both laughter and tears on more than one occasion.

Perhaps the most unusual aspect of this book, however, is how sexually frank *Wildlife* manages to be without being laden down with angst and melodrama, nor breathless with rapture over its magical life-changing

properties. Consider these quotes, which I love because of how painfully and truthfully this girl's first sexual experience is portrayed.

...neither of us mentioned the four-letter word that comes before this three-letter activity in all my schemes and dreams.

(And later)

Afterwards I feel wobbly and slightly shocked, climbing up from under the rubble to check out the new world...Did we really just do that? I want to hide my face. I want to look into a mirror in private, to check if I'm still me.

Because there's been so much discussion (read: hand-wringing) recently about how much sex is too much sex, we've invited author Fiona Wood on the blog to share her thoughts on this issue: **do realistic sex scenes in YA fiction have value?**

I think you'll be interested in hearing what she has to say.

Fiona Wood on Girls, Sex, and Wildlife

This review also appears in The Midnight Garden. An advance copy was provided by the publisher.

Nomes says

I marked my fave passages -- here's just a few:

I have been anticipating this book for a long time (Six Impossible Things being one of my favourite books) but I did not anticipate how much this book would resound with me. I felt like Wood was peeking inside my soul, capturing feelings and thoughts, taking me right back to my teenage self. Taken those haphazard and chaotic feelings and brought them to life in such a poignant, heartfelt and smiley, achey way.

There is so much to love about Wildlife. I love the way Fiona Wood writes. She has taken her time with this. Words are carefully chosen, plots are weaved together, sentiments are nailed, dialogue is funny and sharp and pitch perfect.

I didn't realise Wildlife would incorporate two POVs. And I loved that about it. Lou's POV is shared through her diary entries, Sibylla's in present tense prose. I also loved the whole set-up. School camps were the best, and here we have a whole term school camp experience = winner for me.

A bit about Lou

I ached for Lou the most, wished she did not have to endure through the grief, and at the same time, I loved how she endured. She became so fierce and true to herself. Even in her grief, she is sharp and so likeable: After Fred died I divided my time between blind disbelief, blank chaos and therapy. (p7 Lou). Also, she brings to the book one of the best 'I love you' moments EVER. It nearly broke me, the swoon and all that was and all that was lost.

And Michael, how I loved him

Speaking of favourite characters, I loved Michael so much.

If I ever see Michael with a dreamy vague smile on his face and ask him what he's thinking about the answer is likely to be, prime numbers. (p 42 Sib on Michael) Michael really spoke to me. He was unique, just doing his own thing which was not like the crowd at all and teen years can be so hard for boys like him, but Wood really elevated him and he is such a stand-out and a new favourite literary character for me. I so like him, and I think he will resonate with many readers.

'Lou seems to have in common with Michael that thing of not caring at all about other people's approval. (p245 Sib) I wanted to go into the pages of this book and hang out with them, I wanted to go back to my teenage self and let Lou and Michael rub off on me and make me a better version of myself. 'The only person you should be is yourself. You can't control perception. All you can control is how you treat someone else.' (p 308. Lou to Sib. I love her.)

And, also, Sibylla...

I loved Sib as well, her narration and heartache was charming and honest and she is so beautifully captured. What am I even doing here? Me, an inner city girl. Ninety per cent of my life happens on one highly resourced page of the street directory. (p92 sib LOL)

I'm too tired and too sad to write home just yet. I miss them, even Charlotte. Who'd thunk? I don't think I fully appreciated how relaxing it is having someone I can be really mean to. It's going to be so hard being nice all the time. (p 51 sib -- I know that feeling :))

I am really sick of the people who need to tell me I'm unattractive. Somehow they feel duty-bound to put me down because I've been in that stupid advertisement. Surely my neon self-esteem/appearance sign is still visibly flickering on 'below average'. Nothing has changed here. (p289 Sib. Capturing how we have all felt, despite her confidence and shining personality).

Here I could mention all the themes and goodness and beauty of this book, there is so much depth and richness to explore. However, in thinking about my review, I really want to say, despite the ache and grief and exploring sex and friendship and classic coming of age stuff, just how much FUN the whole book is

Favourite things about Wildlife that I loved:

pranks

ghosts (Maisy and the charcoal man),

hikes

camping

elevensies

clinkers

'we intend to deliver the joy of grammar to wanderers in the alpine region.' p212 apostrophes of possession graffiti. That whole scene = love so much

redskins

sex and STDs and Lou's mum -- many LOLs

Looking for Alibrandi shout-out <3

snippets of awesome hanging out teen dialogue: 'What flavour would you say blue snakes are?' He asked (p 238 michael to Lou)

Also, finding out more about Dan and the gang from Six Impossible Things:

I look forward to sitting with him when he gets back and I am released. We will sit and not have to talk. Or we may talk. If we do, it won't be to reassure someone who doesn't feel as bad as we feel that everything is okay. (p147 Lou, thinking about Dan)

While I was reading Wildlife I loved it. I loved the fresh and funny feel. Loved watching the character's interact. Loved the little anecdotes weaved into the narrative. After I finished Wildlife, I loved it even more.

Once I saw the big picture I was in awe of how Wood did all that. How she crafted a story that was so much more than a linear storyline. Full of deep running themes (see Reynje's review for more theme discussion).

Wildlife is a beautifully written story that will stand the test of time and multiple rereads. A book for every teenager, and everyone who once was a teenager. A new absolute favourite for me.

Beth says

Wildlife is an attempt at How To Make Sybilla Real: The Novel. Which means that her every teenage reaction is a scripted teenage reaction - one that feels universal and *likely*, but not real. Not like Sib is a living, breathing human being whose decisions are extensions of that uniqueness. Even this, from the very beginning of the novel:

As though I haven't heard every feminist rant under the sun and am not a proud feminist ranter myself, when warranted, and when I can be bothered.

I loved that. How perfectly apathetically adolescent. And yet there's nothing in the story which follows that supports Sib's statement there, and in fact I could build the argument that Sib's behavior contradicts it. And while it's really great to have a contradictory protagonist, there needs to be more self-awareness in the writing that said character is actually contradictory (instead of just passive) in order to pull that off.

There's so much about Sybilla's story that *could* be great, too: her sympathy toward Holly, how far she let Holly go, how she dealt with Ben. There are flashes - when Sib realizes that two of her friends have become friends without her, when she's upset at herself for a reaction she was too slow and startled to correct. But she just stayed a collection of very good opinions and never became a person holding those opinions. She feels like an author mouthpiece in that regard.

I also wonder how this will stand up in a few years, with lines like "I put down *Othello* for a bout of Angry Birds." That strikes me as instantly dating.

And there's an odd fixation with skin, too: Sybilla used to have acne until she went on Accutane, Lou and Fred both have - and there's a bunch of weird responses I can't quite figure out. They don't read as a rejection of the importance of appearance but almost as "She's a great person anyway," which is not something I'm comfortable with.

Interestingly, this is half Lou's story, too. And to give the author credit, she does a good job at creating two distinct voices. But Lou's story is so typical that it feels flat. It proceeds exactly as you would expect and ends exactly as you would expect, and I didn't find it nearly as thoughtful as Sybilla's story, which does have the trappings of originality, even if it never leaps off the page.

Reading this back, I can tell I'm picky: I want characters to be unique *and* universal, and to feel real and relatable, too. And yet even within Australian contemporary YA, I've found all that, so isn't my pickiness justified?

Catie says

4 1/2 stars

So, so good. It is so rare to find a YA book so raw and so...fluffy at the same time. I love that this is a story about friendship. Lou's sections were so pared down and stricken that I felt on the verge of tears a number of times. Sybilla's ugly friendship with Holly is disgustingly twisted and made me feel both uneasy for it to end and nauseous at its continuing presence, like I was being forced to love and coddle a rapidly growing malignant tumor.

My only sticking point is that I (with my leanings toward the dark and twisty) do wonder about Holly and Ben. They can't possibly be as one-sidedly disaffected/evil as they appear. I want to know their sides of the story. It's easy to sympathize with awkward, well-meaning pushover Sybilla and grieving, intelligent champion Lou. It would be harder to sympathize with (possible) sociopath Ben and manipulative mean girl Holly. I guess that I like more prickly, challenging characters.

On that note, I am off to read some Courtney Summers.

Celine says

Review originally posted in: <http://forget8me8not.blogspot.com.au/...>

Cover:

So cute! I love how the title of the book is written like the clouds, the blue sky and the two pairs of shoes in the bottom of the cover. It's simplistic but adorable!

Story:

Life? It's simple: be true to yourself. The tricky part is finding out exactly who you are...

While I haven't read Fiona Wood's *Six Impossible Things*, I adored *Wildlife*, the companion to *Six Impossible Things*. In *Wildlife*, we meet Sibylla, a girl who before going to the outdoor education program, managed to do two 'incredible' things; getting her face plastered on a huge billboard and kissing the most popular guy in her school!

Wildlife ventures around the themes of friendship, love and grief. Fiona Wood's writing is witty, beautiful and tackles the life of teenagers excellently. The setting is perfect to explore the characters and I love how Fiona Wood can capture the emotions of her characters so well. The book is written from dual POVs of Sibylla and Lou. Since I haven't read *Six Impossible Things*, I had no idea who Lou is or what she is like in the book but in this book, Lou becomes friends with Sibylla and their friendship is sweet and beautiful. Also, I can't help but smile when I noticed that Fiona Wood made a reference to Melina Marchetta's *Looking for Alibrandi*!

Characters:

I think this is the strongest element of the book, the way Fiona Wood explores the characters, revealing the layers of their emotions and feelings one by one. In the beginning of the book, we know that Lou is grieving. As a way to handle her griefs, she writes journal entries and reading her journal entries broke my heart. They are honest, filled with grief but also show a process of Lou healing her heart. In some of her journal entries, she also talks about her friends (and if I'm not mistaken, they are the main characters in *Six Impossible Things*) I really liked Lou's character and how she blends in with Sibylla and her friends later on. Sibylla is also an enjoyable character to read about, from the awkward moments she had with the boy she likes, her witty-bantering with Michael, her friend, and her cute conversations with Lou. Sibylla's friend, Holly, isn't a particularly likeable character to me but I do like her friendship with Sibylla. Michael, on the other hand, is

such a cute nerdy boy! I love his new-found friendship with Lou and his long friendship with Sibylla. Ben is an alright character, he can be annoying at times but his moments with Lou are quite adorable.

Overall:

Do you ever think of the wildlife as a place to heal your wounds, to find out who you are and to form relationships and friendships with people? Wildlife is a great novel which ventures around these themes with realistic characters who you can't help but adore and love. If you love contemporary books with beautiful and realistic story of friendship and love, then you definitely don't want to miss out reading Wildlife!

Thank you Pan Macmillan Australia for the review copy!

Kayla (The Thousand Lives) says

Reviewing Wildlife is actually going to be really hard for me, because my feelings are kind of all over the place. On one hand, there were parts that I LOVED, but the further I got along in the book, the less I enjoyed it. If I were to judge by the first third, I'd give it four stars. The second third I give three stars, and the last third I give two stars. Ultimately, I'm going to give it a two star rating, because there's so much *more* that could have been done to really make the book shine, but with certain aspects I just can't love it like I wanted to.

But first: the positives. I felt Lou's grief so much that my heart was just aching for her every time it was her turn for narration. Her thoughts were disconnected, flowing and swirling and trying to make sense of everything that happened, but not so much that it became annoying. And then there's Michael, who was personally my favorite part of the story. I really wish the book was about him, to be honest. He was intelligent, funny, and a great friend, if a bit odd in some of his habits. So as far as secondary characters - A+!

Sadly, the negatives outweigh the perfection of Lou and Michael. I'll bullet point them, as I think that'll be easiest for me in this case.

Holly and Sib's "friendship." I spent four years in a toxic friendship like those two girls have, so it may have been a personal issue here. I just wanted to scream at Sib, "GET OUT GET OUT GET OUT." I could see how much damage it was doing to her and she just needed to grow a spine and say no for once.

Sib's abandonment of Michael once she started dating. I can't stand people who ditch their long time friends for a romance. It just irks me to no end. So again, another personal issue (I'm seeing a trend here).

The emphasis on sex. I've ranted over and over and over about how I believe sex is like the last thing teens should be worrying about. There's so much more to life other than deciding when to lose your virginity! When it's meant to happen, it'll happen. Planning it to the last detail just takes away the magic of it. And really - I signed up for a "kids find themselves and learn life lessons in the wilderness" book, not a "let's get frisky in the bushes and screw up every important relationship as a result" book.

The length. I liked the writing style, and the big pondering of your place in the universe and having overly pretentious conversations thing - it's a weakness of mine. But it finally devolved into random, misplaced scenes that just dragged on too long and didn't add anything to the story. It seems like there's a lot that could have been cut out to make the book more concise and powerful.

I just couldn't connect in the end. I felt Lou's pain so much, but when it was never really explored (I know nothing at all about the boy she lost), I couldn't stay invested. I hardly cared about Sib's issues, and I just wanted to clobber her by the last few chapters. Ultimately, I didn't really see a point after all that - the ending

left me feeling just meh.

So now that I read what I said, I think this book was a case of we just didn't work out for personal reasons. There's a lot of potential for others to really enjoy this one though! So while I've given it a lower rating, I'd suggest trying it out for yourself before taking my word for it. This review was originally posted on The Thousand Lives
