D’harawal
DREAMING STORIES

Frances Bodkin
Gawaian Bodkin Andrews
illustrated by Lorraine Robertson

The Goanna and the Black Snake
BAH’NAGA AND MUN’DAH

www.dharawalstories.com
The Goanna and the Black Snake
BAH’NAGA AND MUN’DAH

Frances Bodkin
Gawaian Bodkin Andrews
illustrated by Lorraine Robertson

www.dharawalstories.com
Foreword

Throughout the past two hundred years, society has come to regard the Koori Dreaming stories as something akin to the fairy stories they were told as children.

However, for thousands upon thousands of years, the stories in this book were used as a teaching tool to impart to the youngest members of the clans the laws which governed the cultural behaviour of clan members. The successive attempts to destroy the Koori culture and assimilate The People into the Euro-centric population were unsuccessful, and the Dreaming Stories were able to continue in their disguise as charming legends where animals became the heroes and the heroines.

Historians and anthropologists have studied the Koori culture since they first arrived on this continent, and have come to the conclusion that the D’harawal culture is dead. Of, course, this has been done without reference to the descendants of that culture, and without even asking the proper questions. The D’harawal culture is not dead, it is a strong, living, vital culture of the Sydney and South Coast regions that just had to go underground for a while to be able to survive. Now that the right questions have been asked, we have the key to unlock a vast wealth of knowledge of this part of the country in which we live.

It is difficult to explain to a society based on commerce fuelled by the profit motive, that D’harawal culture is not based on the ownership of tangible things like land and dwellings and possessions, but it does have a very strong sense of ownership of information. That information, particularly in story form, was not traded, but could be given, and given freely, but its ownership was respected, those stories were not told or passed on by those to whom they had been given, but the knowledge in them was used by the receiver whilst ever they walked in the Land of the D’harawals, This Land.

It is hoped that our present society is now mature enough to be able to accept the Koori Dreaming stories as they were, as they are, and as they were always destined to be; tools to teach the Children of The People about living with Earth, the Mother, in peace and harmony.

Each story contains several layers of knowledge, the first of which are the secrets. Which can only be passed on or discussed with persons of the same level of knowledge or higher than the story teller. These secrets are never told within a legend, but are remembered separately from the legend itself. These are very important components of any legend, and it is the knowledge of the secrets which determines the level of the person’s worthiness to ownership of that story.
The next layer of knowledge within the stories was the law, or laws, to be obeyed. The laws of the stories were told and often repeated after the telling of each story, after which the laws were discussed and their application in life demonstrated in a variety of ways.

The third layer of knowledge contained in each story was the lessons which could be learned from the story and the lessons were taught to all members of the group as well as visitors. These lessons introduced Peoples to the means to live in harmony with each other, and the land and its resources.

In this series of D’harawal Law Legends, there are many lessons to be learned. The D’harawals believed that children learned better and more quickly when they were encouraged to work through a problem, rather than be told the answer. By sharing the stories of our ancestors with you, it is hoped that not only will you recognise and learn the lessons and laws of the Peoples of This Land, but you will also come to understand and respect the culture of The People and our feelings and relationship with the land.

The stories do not in themselves act as an instruction manual - rather they point the way and encourage The People to think, to learn and to live. It is hoped that by sharing our stories, you too may be able to think, to learn and to live in This Land.

With understanding and respect for each other we can learn to more easily share This Land and live together in peace and harmony.

Frances Bodkin

Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study, research, criticism or review, as permitted under the Copyright Act, no part of this publication may be reproduced by any process whatsoever without the prior written permission of the authors.
A very long time ago there lived a man of the Goanna clan, called Bah’naga. Bah’naga was a very bad tempered man, who struck out repeatedly at those who annoyed him, and because he carried a poison bag, they usually died. The People became quite alarmed at the number of clan members who had died because they had done something to annoy Bah’naga, so they called a meeting to see what could be done to get the poison bag from the Goanna.

A man of the Magpie clan, Diruwan, was the first offer to try to get the poison bag. He waited patiently on a tree branch until Bah’naga strolled by, and swooped down and tried to grab the bag. Unfortunately, Bah’naga heard him and struck at him with the poison bag, and Diruwan fell to the ground, dead.

The next to try was Burran of the Kangaroo clan. He planned to challenge Bah’naga to a race and to snatch the bag when he became tired. But Bah’naga did not want to run the race, and when Burran challenged him a second time, the Goanna man lost his temper and struck at Burran the Kangaroo man, killing him.

Gugarra, the Kookaburra thought that he could get Bah’naga laughing by telling him funny stories, and whilst the Goanna was off guard, he would be able to steal the poison bag from him. That didn’t work, either, and Gugarra’s body fell beside that of Burran and Diruwan.

Managa, the Eagle thought that he could pick Bah’naga up and drop him from a great height, but the Goanna man saw Managa’s shadow approaching, and he too, fell dead beside the others.

Wombat thought that he could use his immense strength to knock Bah’naga down and take the poison bag from him, but Bah’naga simply stepped aside and struck poor Wombat with the poison bag.

The People met again. They were losing too many of their best warriors, and too many women were losing their beloved husbands.
It was the shy Mun’dah who came forward. Hardly anyone knew this woman of the Black Snake totem, and few had ever seen her. “If I can get the poison bag from Bah’naga,” she said, “I will ask for only one thing.”

The People looked at each other as Mun’dah moved silently forward. “I ask that you grant me a home where I can live in peace with my children.”

Now everybody realised how thoughtless they had been. Mun’dah made her home in hollow logs which were favoured by The People for burning during the great bunyas.

And, of course, some of the People doubted that this slender woman would be able to take the poison bag from Bah’naga, when cunning knowledgeholders and great strong warriors had failed. “Anything.” They said quickly. “You can have anything you want.”

But others, who were wiser, saw the look of determination in Mun’dah’s eyes. “Where is it you would want to live in peace and safety?” They asked politely.

“Several times I have sheltered in the Ganno’kan, the Bird’s Nest Fern.” She said. “I find it comfortable, and the fern does not mind me being there at all. My children and I can care for the fern, and feed it in return for the shelter it provides us. I ask only that I be allowed to live there in peace with my children.”

The People readily agreed, and Mun’dah set off to find Bah’naga.

The Goanna man was sitting by the camp fire when the Black Snake woman arrived. He greeted her with a scowl, but she sat quietly down on the opposite side of the fire.

She had brought with her many juicy grubs which she knew was the favourite food of Bah’naga, and began to prepare them. When they were ready, she placed them on a coolamon and laid it in front of Bah’naga. The Goanna man took one, found it was to his liking, and took another and another, until they were all gone.

He leaned back against a log and dozed whilst Mun’dah took some more grubs and berries from her dilly bag and prepared them. When they were ready, she once again gave them to Bah’naga, and he ate them with relish.
In all this time, hardly a word had passed between them, but this time Bah’naga spoke.

“I think I would enjoy having a wife who would gather and prepare my food for me.” He said. “Come closer, I would like to know you better.”

Mun’dah moved around the fire until she was next to Bah’naga. “It is a cold night,” she said, “Perhaps we could keep each other warm.”

Bah’naga smiled. Because of his bad temper he was a very lonely man, and a woman had never before said soft words to him.

As Bah’naga moved closer, the poison bag around his neck, swung in front of her. Swiftly, Mun’dah’s sharp teeth bit at the sinew string, and she swallowed the bag.

Bah’naga sprung up in a rage, but Mun’dah fled, silently and swiftly into the bush.

Although Mun’dah swallowed the poison bag, she never used it, except in defending herself or her young. Bah’naga, the Goanna is still bad tempered to this day, but his bite is no longer deadly.

But, the poison in the poison bag had robbed Mun’dah of her hearing, no longer would she be able to hear The People approaching her along the pathways where she used to like to sit in the sun. No longer would she be able to hunt using her ears to find the mice and frogs that she loved to eat.

Nor would she be able to hear the approach of her enemies who would harm her children. Mun’dah told The People of her disability, and she told them that, because she had no wish to harm them, should they see her sunning herself, or hunting for food, they were to stamp their feet three times on the ground, and she would move away from them. The People made the sign of their agreement and Mun’dah silently disappeared into the undergrowth.

So The People would remember Mun’dah’s courage, the Spirit Woman gave the black snake a red belly, to distinguish her from other snakes. And whenever Mun’dah, the Red Bellied Black Snake rests in the Bird’s Nest Fern, none may hunt her.
And, of course, the People learned that sometimes soft words will achieve what bravery and swiftness cannot.

And that is why, when you come across a red bellied black snake sunning itself on the pathway, or curled up, sound asleep on a rock, just stamp your feet three times, and Mun’dah will keep her promise and move away.

The Law of the Story of the Goanna and the Black Snake

Sometimes soft words and kindness will achieve that which bravery and strength cannot.

Can you think of times at school, or even at home, when this law would apply?
Even little things, like accidentally treading on your brother or sister’s foot. Isn’t it better to say “Oops, sorry, I didn’t mean it.” than to say “That was your fault, you shouldn’t have had your feet there?”

Can you think of any lessons you have learned from this story? When you see a red bellied black snake sunning itself on the pathway, just stamp your feet on the ground, and it will move away.

Goannas are very bad tempered, and it is best to leave them alone.

Ferns are where the red bellied black snakes like to make their home, so it is best to be very careful when moving through ferns, and keep to the track.

Red bellied black snakes will not bite you unless they feel threatened.
These lessons are all very sensible aren’t they? Did you know that most people who have been bitten by red bellied black snakes have been trying to kill the snake?

And when you are walking through ferns it is very difficult to hear your footsteps, so it is always wise to keep to the track so that you can see your way clearly.

And, of course, everybody knows how bad tempered goannas are, and how it is best to keep away from them, and not chase them. Although Goannas no longer have a poisonous bite - thanks to Mun’dah the red bellied black snake, they can still give you a very nasty bite which takes a long time to heal, and can be very painful.

Now, can you think of any more lessons you may have learned from this story?

I’ll bet that you didn’t realise how many words of the Aboriginal languages that you use already. Can you think of some?

Like the names of some animals, koala, wombat, kangaroo, numbat, wallaby, or the names of places, like Bondi, Milperra, Bunnerong, Coogee, Leumeah, Mittagong. What about the word Corroboree? What new words of the D’harawal language have you learned from this story?

Bah’naga - goanna
Diruwan - magpie
Burran - kangaroo
Gugarra - kookaburra
Mananga - eagle
Mun’dah - red bellied black snake
Ganno’kan - bird’s nest fern.

Do you think you could do a drawing of the animals in this story and print their D’harawal names on the piece of paper?
Some facts about snakes.

Snakes move around without legs by gripping the ground with the scales on their bellies and moving forward by contracting their stomach muscles.

Snakes are able to swallow prey that is much larger than their mouths because the two halves of their jaws are joined together by an elastic ligament which allows them to stretch their mouths and swallow their prey.

Snakes have a forked tongue which they constantly flick in and out of their mouths, this enables them to detect, and both taste and smell their prey. Snakes do not have any ears and detect tiny vibrations in the ground. That is why Mun’dah, in the story you have just read, asked The People to stamp on the ground before approaching her, and she will move away.

The red bellied black snake likes to live near water, and is active during the day in warm weather, but hibernates during cold weather. The female gives birth to an average of 12 young in late summer to early autumn, which are about 20cm long. An adult can grow to 2.7m long.

Red bellied black snakes like to eat frogs, lizards, other reptiles, small mammals and eels.

If you or a friend are ever bitten by a snake, do not waste time trying to catch the snake, instead apply a broad, constrictive bandage over the wound, binding towards the heart, and covering the whole limb if possible.

When the wound is bandaged, tie a stick to the limb so that it cannot move. If you can, telephone for an ambulance, but if you are too far away from a phone, or a stretcher, help your friend to walk, but don’t let him or her run. Keep your friend calm, and talk to him or her.
Some Facts about Goannas

This is our largest lizard and can grow to about 1.5m. in length. It likes to lay its eggs, (6-20) in termite mounds where the warmth of the mound will hatch the eggs, and the termites will keep the eggs safe until they hatch.

Goannas like to eat small birds and eggs, small mammals, reptiles, insects and dead things. Sometimes, though, Goannas hang around picnic areas and scavenge for scraps. It is best not to feed goannas or leave food scraps around because by doing this you do not help goannas to live properly in their natural environment. When frightened, a goanna will quickly climb the nearest tree, and if it feels threatened will rear up on its hind legs and lash out with its tail.

It is best to leave goannas alone if you happen to find one in the bush. Although it does not have venom, it can give you a nasty bite which could take a long time to heal. Besides that, they have very sharp claws that can inflict a deep scratch.
GLOSSARY

Bah’naga  Bah-nah-gah
goanna, Lace Monitor (*Varanus varius*)

Although averaging 1.5 metres in length, the Lace Monitor has been known to grow to 2 metres. Its colouring is typically dark blue with many scattered cream, yellow or white scales. Larger spots or blotches may also be formed by groups of scales. There is also the “Bells” form which is found along the Australia’s east coast and central regions, and its colour difference is marked with broad yellow and black cross-bands. All Lace Monitors have toes equipped with long, strong claws, which are used for climbing and digging. Their tails are extremely long and are usually almost twice the length of the monitor's head and body.

Habitat: The Lace Monitor is found along the East Coast of Australia inhabiting forests and coastal tablelands. The Lace Monitor is arboreal and will often seek shelter from the heat and cold in tree hollows or hollow logs.

Diet: The Lace Monitor feeds upon birds, insects, reptiles, small mammals and carrion. It also actively forages for nesting birds’ eggs.

Breeding: The Lace Monitor is usually a solitary species but will come together in spring and early summer during the breeding season. Most females breed every year and 4-6 weeks after mating will lay 6-12 eggs. The female will dig a hole in the side of a termite mound to lay her eggs. The termites then close up the hole, keeping the eggs safe and at a constant incubation temperature of 30 degrees Celsius. After 8-9 months the young will hatch and the female will actually return to dig them out.


Burran  Buh-rah-n

Eastern Grey Kangaroo, (*Macropus giganteus*)

The Eastern Grey Kangaroo’s fur is woolly and grey-brown in colour, and they have a small head with big ears. Their tail can grow up to 4 feet long which is very helpful for balancing and standing up straight. An Eastern Grey Kangaroo can live anywhere from 15-20 years of age in the wild. A big male can measure up to 2.8 meters from his nose to the tip of his tail, and can weigh up to 66kg. Females are much smaller only reaching approximately 32kg.

Habitat: Eastern Grey Kangaroos can be found living on the open grassland, open woodland and forested coastal areas of eastern Australia and Tasmania.

Diet: Eastern Grey Kangaroos are herbivores and predominately a grazing animal eating mainly shrubs and grass. They feed mostly at night and early in the morning. During the day, Eastern Grey Kangaroos lie under shaded trees or in scrapes they have dug. This is also where they sleep.
Breeding: Breeding occurs throughout the year but more births occur in the warmer summer months. A baby kangaroo is called a joey. A joey is born 33-38 days after his/her parents mate. The tiny embryonic kangaroo emerges from its mother’s body and slowly climbs up her abdomen and into her pouch. When the joey is first born it weighs under a gram and is as tiny as 15 millimetres. Once born the joey will stay in its Mum’s pouch for up to 8 months. At this age the joey will begin to start exploring and go for very short little hops around out of Mum’s pouch. The joey will still be able to fit into its mother’s pouch until it is around one year old, but will only try getting back in when he/she is cold or scared. When the joey finally does becomes too big for Mum’s pouch she will refuse to let him in. By this stage, Mum may already have another little joey suckling on her teat.


**Diruwan  Dee-roo-wan**

*Australian Magpie, Cracticus tibicen*

Description: The Australian Magpie is black and white, but the plumage pattern varies across its range. Its nape, upper tail and shoulder are white in males, grey in females. Across most of Australia, the remainder of the body is black. In the south-east, centre, extreme south-west and Tasmania, the back and rump are entirely white. The eye of adult birds is chestnut brown.

Similar species: The Pied Butcherbird, Cracticus nigrogularis, can be distinguished from the Australian Magpie by its black head and bib separated from the black back by a complete white collar, and white underparts. It is also a smaller species. The Australian Magpie is larger and has a heavier bill than the similarly coloured Magpie-lark, Grallina cyanoleuca.

Where does it live? Distribution: Australian Magpies are common and conspicuous birds. Groups of up to 24 birds live year round in territories that are actively defended by all group members. The group depends on this territory for its feeding, roosting and nesting requirements.

Habitat: Australian Magpies are found wherever there is a combination of trees and adjacent open areas, including parks and playing fields. They are absent only from the densest forests and arid deserts.

What does it do? Feeding: The Australian Magpie walks along the ground searching for insects and their larvae. Birds will also take handouts from humans and will often venture into open houses to beg for food.

Breeding: Although the Australian Magpie is generally quite tame, during the breeding season some individuals become aggressive towards any intruders, including humans, which venture too close to their nest sites. The nest is a platform of sticks and twigs (occasionally wire), with a small interior bowl lined with grass and hair. The nest is constructed in the outer branches of a tree, up to 15 m above the ground.

Living with us: Some Australian Magpies can be very aggressive during breeding season and attacks on humans and pets can occur.

http://www.birdsinbackyards.net/species/Cracticus-tibicen
Ganno'kan  Gan-noh-karn
Bird’s Nest Fern, *Asplenium australasicum*

Distribution: Widespread, Coast and Mountains

Niche: Occurring in the vicinity of water courses.

Description: An epiphytic, evergreen fern which grows to a height of 2m, spreading to 3m. Rhizome; short, thick, erect. Fronds; Bright green, glossy, thick, leathery, to 2m long, and 20cm wide, with sharply keeled undersurface, and arranged in a basal rosette. Sori; Forming oblique lines, parallel to veins on both sides of midrib.

Uses: Medicinal, Cooking aid
This plant has mythological value

Associations with other organisms: This plant has a close association with red bellied black snakes.
Associations with other plants: Gully Rainforest.

Comments: Killed by fire

Gugarra  Goh-goo-gah-rah
Laughing Kookaburra, *Dacelo novaeguineae*

Description: The Laughing Kookaburra is instantly recognisable in both plumage and voice. It is generally off-white below, faintly barred with dark brown, and brown on the back and wings. The tail is more rufous, broadly barred with black. There is a conspicuous dark brown eye-stripe through the face. It is one of the larger members of the kingfisher family.

Similar species: Identification may only be confused where the Laughing Kookaburra’s range overlaps that of the Blue-winged Kookaburra, Dacelo leachii, in eastern Queensland. The call of the Blue-winged Kookaburra is coarser than that of the Laughing Kookaburra, and ends somewhat abruptly. The Blue-winged Kookaburra lacks the brown eye-stripe, has a blue tail and a large amount of blue in the wing, and has a pale eye.

*Where does it live?* Distribution: Laughing Kookaburras are found throughout eastern Australia. They have been introduced to Tasmania, the extreme south-west of Western Australia, and New Zealand. Replaced by the Blue-winged Kookaburra in central northern and north-western Australia, with some overlap in Queensland, although this species is more coastal.

Habitat: The Laughing Kookaburra inhabits most areas where there are suitable trees.
What does it do? Feeding: Laughing Kookaburras feed mostly on insects, worms and crustaceans, although small snakes, mammals, frogs and birds may also be eaten. Prey is seized by pouncing from a suitable perch. Small prey is eaten whole, but larger prey is killed by bashing it against the ground or tree branch.

Breeding: Laughing Kookaburras are believed to pair for life. The nest is a bare chamber in a naturally occurring tree hollow or in a burrow excavated in an arboreal (tree-dwelling) termite mound. Both sexes share the incubation duties and both care for the young. Other Laughing Kookaburras, usually offspring of the previous one to two years, act as 'helpers' during the breeding season. Every bird in the group shares all parenting duties.

Living with us: Laughing Kookaburras often become quite tame around humans and will readily accept scraps of meat. This 'pre-processed' food is still beaten against a perch before swallowing.

http://www.birdsinbackyards.net/species/Dacelo-novaeguineae

Managa Mah-nah-gah

Wedge-tailed eagle, Aquila audax

Description: The Wedge-tailed Eagle has long wings (wingspan 2.3 m), a characteristic long, wedge-shaped tail, and legs that are feathered all the way to the base of the toes. The bill is pale pink to cream, the eye brown to dark brown, and the feet off-white. Young Wedge-tailed Eagles are mid brown in colour with reddish-brown heads and wings. They become progressively blacker for at least the first ten years of their lives; adults are mostly dark blackish-brown. The only difference in plumage between the sexes is that a female adult is generally slightly paler than her mate. Females (4.2 kg - 5.3 kg) are also larger and heavier than males (3.2 kg up to 4.0 kg). Wedge-tailed Eagles are Australia's largest raptors (birds of prey). The Tasmanian subspecies (Aquila audax fleayi) is listed federally as endangered.

Similar species: Australia's second largest eagle (and second-largest raptor or bird of prey), the White-bellied Sea-Eagle, Haliaeetus leucogaster, has shorter, more rounded wings and no feathers on its lower legs. The White-bellied Sea Eagle is 75 cm - 85 cm long and has a wingspan of 1.8 m - 2.2 m.

Where does it live? Distribution: The Wedge-tailed Eagle is found throughout mainland Australia, Tasmania and southern New Guinea.

Habitat: The Wedge-tailed Eagle is found from sea level to alpine regions in the mountains, but prefers wooded and forested land and open country, generally avoiding rainforest and coastal heaths. Eagles can be seen perched on trees or poles or soaring overhead to altitudes of up to 2000 m. Wedge-tailed Eagles build their nest in a prominent location with a good view of the surrounding countryside. It may be built in either a live or dead tree, but usually the tallest one in the territory. In some parts of Australia, where tall trees are absent, small trees, shrubs, cliff faces or even the ground may be used. The density of active nests depends on the abundance of prey and other resources. In most years, nests are usually 2.5 km - 4 km apart. If conditions
are particularly good, the distances apart may be less than 1 km because the birds require smaller areas to find sufficient food.

What does it do? Feeding: Wedge-tailed Eagles eat both live prey and carrion. Their diet reflects the available prey, but the most important live items are rabbits and hares. Rabbits usually comprise about 30-70% of the diet, but may comprise up to 92%. The introduction of the calicivirus has resulted in the decline of rabbits in many parts of Australia. It is not yet known how this will affect the Wedge-tailed Eagle. Other food items include lizards, birds (weighing over 100 g) and mammals (usually weighing over 500 g). Wedge-tailed Eagles will kill lambs, but these make up only a small percentage of their total prey.

Carrion is a major food source; roadkills and other carcasses are readily eaten. Many of the reports of predation on lambs result from birds scavenging already dead animals. Up to 20 birds may attend a carcass, although only two or three feed at any one time.

Wedge-tailed Eagles may hunt singly, in pairs or in larger groups. Working together, a group of eagles can attack and kill animals as large as adult kangaroos. This explains the scientific name of the Wedge-tailed Eagle which means 'bold eagle'. Under ideal conditions, an eagle can lift about 50% of its body weight. Often, eagles may cache food items on a branch near the nest area.

Breeding: Wedge-tailed Eagles are monogamous and apparently mate for life. If one bird of a pair is killed, the survivor will find a new mate. Established breeding pairs are territorial and live in the one area throughout the year, defending around their nest sites from other Wedge-tailed Eagles. (They are also known on occasion to attack intruding model airplanes, hang gliders, gliders, fixed-wing aircraft and helicopters.) Surrounding the territories are large home ranges in which the birds hunt for food but do not defend. There is usually overlap between the home ranges of two or more breeding pairs and of non-breeding birds.

The nest is a large structure of dead sticks, usually reused for years, often reaching considerable size. Nests 1.8 m across, 3 m deep and weighing about 400 kg are known. Nests have a shallow cup on the top, lined with fresh twigs and leaves. Sticks are added by a bird while it stands in the nest. If these sticks are dropped outside the nest, no effort is made to retrieve them. Piles of dropped sticks 1.8 m high have been recorded under the nest trees.

The timing of breeding may vary from location to location and from year to year according to the local availability of food. Both parents share in the duties of nest building, incubation and feeding of the young.

A clutch consists of white eggs measuring 73 mm x 59 mm with varying amounts of reddish brown spots and blotches. These are laid at intervals of two to four days. Incubation starts with the laying of the first egg. Because of the intervals between laying, the eggs do not hatch simultaneously. The first chick hatches larger than the second, which in turn is larger than the third. Survival rates of the chicks vary considerably depending on local conditions, including prey abundance and the amount of disturbance. A breeding pair usually rears only one young per clutch, although in a good year, two chicks may fledge in some nests. Because of the differences in size, the oldest and largest chick has the best chance of surviving. If food is scarce, it will kill and eat its smaller nest mates.
Chicks hatch covered with a white down. For the first five weeks or so, the adults must deliver food to their mouths. After this time they are able to recognise bits of food on the floor of the nest and can feed themselves. The young acquire their first feathers during the second week after hatching. If threatened by predators, the chicks lie flat in the nest, but will defend themselves if required. The adults, in contrast, make little defence of the young. The juveniles remain with the adults for about 11 weeks after leaving the nest. Young and non-breeding birds disperse, moving to wherever conditions are suitable. Juveniles are known to have moved over 850 km in a seven to eight month period.

Living with us: The Wedge-tailed Eagle is the most common of the world’s large eagles. It is nonetheless affected by several human activities. It has benefited by the opening of forests in eastern Australia and the increased availability of rabbits. Wedge-tailed Eagles however, are sensitive to forestry operations. In the more arid zones, extensive clearing has reduced the nesting resources. If a breeding pair is disturbed when they are preparing to lay eggs, they may abandon the nest. Wedge-tailed Eagles were persecuted for many years for supposedly killing lambs. Bounties were offered for dead eagles, and large numbers were poisoned or shot – 147 237 in Western Australia in 1928 -1968 and 162 430 in Queensland in 1951-1966. Indirect poisoning through Dingo baits and pesticides continues to be a major hazard. In Tasmania, the Wedge-tailed Eagle is threatened by habitat loss and deliberate persecution.

http://www.birdsinbackyards.net/species/Aquila-audax

Mun’dah  
*Muhn-dah*

Red-bellied black snake, *(Pseudechis porphyriacus)*

The venomous Red-Bellied Black Snake grows to lengths of up to two metres long, and has striking colouration. With stunning red edges to its belly scales and a shiny black back, this snake surely ranks amongst Australia’s most stunning venomous snakes. The Red-Bellied Black snake is most active during the day, although they may also be seen on hotter evenings.

Habitat: The Red-Bellied Black Snake can be found inhabiting most forest types near permanent watercourses or swamps in eastern and south-east Australia.

Diet: The Red-Bellied Black Snake’s diet consists of frogs, other reptiles and mammals. Usually seen around cool, wet areas the Red-Bellied Black Snake is particularly fond of frogs, making the Cane Toad a big problem. If they even bite a Cane Toad its all over. It’s hard to believe that this beautiful snake could suffer so badly as the result of the introduction of one alien species.

Breeding: Mating occurs in spring with combat between rival males occurring in this period. During combat, the snakes bodies are intertwined with their heads raised. They do this in attempt to place their head higher than that of their opponent. When pregnant, female Red-Bellied Black snakes are known to aggregate and bask in the sun together. January to March is when between five and forty young are born in membranous sacs from which they emerge from shortly after birth.
Status: Local populations were almost driven to extinction by the introduction of the Cane Toad. If a snake tries to consume a toad, they will fall victim to the toad’s poisonous gland secretions. It does however appear now that some of these snakes are finally learning to avoid the Cane Toad and their numbers are beginning to recover.


Wombat  Wohm-baht
Common Wombat, *(Vombatus ursinus)*

On the mainland Common Wombats grow to an average length of 1m and 27kg in weight, yet may reach up to 1.2m in length and up to 35kg. The Tasmanian Wombat is not as large or bulky, averaging a weight of 20kg and about 85cm in length. Their thick paws are designed for digging burrows. They also have a pouch which faces backwards to protect their young from flying dirt whilst the mother is digging the burrow.

Habitat: The Common Wombat is found throughout South-east Australia and also in Tasmania. They inhabit all sorts of areas including coastal forests, alpine woodlands and grasslands.

Diet: A wombat’s diet can consist of coarse native grasses, sedges, rushes, succulent plant roots and tubers and pasture grasses. Wombats are mostly nocturnal, usually coming out at night to graze when the temperature is lower. However in cold periods they may be seen out during the day either grazing or basking in the sun. They graze between 3 and 8 hours a night, during which time they may travel many kilometres and visit up to 4 burrows within their home range.

Breeding: When food is plentiful they breed throughout the year. Gestation lasts for one month, then a jelly-bean sized Joey is born which attaches to a teat in its mother’s pouch. The Joey will leave the pouch at 10 months but will stay with the mother for another eight to ten months. From the time the juvenile leaves the pouch it begins to substitute increasing amounts of plant material instead of milk. At between 12-15 months of age it stops suckling altogether. They commence breeding at two years and live for about 15 years in the wild or up to 20 years in captivity.