

# D'harawal

## DREAMING STORIES

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*illustrated by Lorraine Robertson*

### **Mugga'go and Binnit**

### **The Ironbark and the Tawny Frogmouth**



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# 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*

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# Mugga'go and Binnit

## The Ironbark and the Tawny Frogmouth

A very long time ago, one of the Seven Warriors of Peace, Mugga'go, sat upon a rock on top of the Mountain of the Calling, now called Jellore, and looked out upon the lands around him.

Mugga'go was by this time no longer young, his hair was grey, and the knuckles of his hands were swollen and painful. He had three young warriors, all honourable young men, whom he had trained as acolytes, to perform his duties as Peacekeeper, but he could not decide which to choose.

Hence he was seated upon the mountain top, hoping that the Spirits would guide him as to the best warrior to choose.

Now Mugga'go was not sure whether he had fallen asleep or whether he had fallen into a trance, but whatever had happened he heard a voice calling his name, an urgent sound, almost like a cry for help. He started suddenly, and looked around, but could see no-one. He went to the edge of the rock overlooking the valley below, but all was still.

He listened carefully. But did not hear the voice again.

Disappointed that the Spirits had not given him the name of the warrior to choose, he made his slow descent down the mountain to his small camp where he placed a few tubers in the coals and waited for them to cook.

Suddenly he awoke. The voice had called his name again, and the tubers he had placed in the fire were burned to a crisp. He got to his feet and looked around, but again there was no one nearby. He called out the cry for that country. "Bulli-yo!"

But there was no answer.

Mugga'go looked around, the sky was darkening, for the sun had set, and he needed to gather some firewood.

It was too late to gather more tubers, but perhaps he would see some berries he could eat, otherwise he would have to go hungry until morning. But as he left the light of the dying fire he heard the voice again, from far away, like sound carried on the wind.

Again he cried out "Bulli'yo!", but there was no reply. He picked up his feathered cloak, and wrapped it around him for the night was getting chilly and set off to gather some berries and some firewood. He had no trouble gathering the firewood, for it was after the time of the south westerly winds, and there were plenty of fallen branches lying around, but finding food was more difficult.

The light was too dim to find any ripe berries, or to see the holes in the trunks of the trees made by the witchetty grubs. So he built up the fire, then wrapped his cloak more tightly around himself and laid down to sleep.

"Mugga'go". He awoke with a start. The voice was calling him again. He glanced at the fire, but it was still burning fiercely, it seemed that he had been asleep for only a few heartbeats.

All throughout the night, every time he fell asleep the voice would awaken him, until the sun rose, and the voice ceased.

Mugga'go was so weary from lack of sleep that he did not even have the energy to gather food, only enough to pull the feathered cloak over his head and sleep uninterrupted.

When the sun was high in the western sky, Mugga'go awakened and set about gathering tubers and berries and digging an occasional grub out of the trunk of the Boo'kerrikin. He then returned to his camp and set about relighting the fire.

But as soon as the sun set, the voice began calling him again. This time, Mugga'go decided that he would seek out the owner of the voice.

He took ten strides to the east, and waited for the voice to call his name again. When he heard his name it was fainter than before. He returned to the camp fire, and this time took ten strides to the north. Again, the voice called his name, but it was no stronger than before. He returned to the campfire, and took ten strides to the west. This time the voice seemed to

come from the south, so he went back to the camp fire and took ten strides to the south. The voice, when it called this time was much stronger.

He ate his meal, then carefully put out the fire, then, with the voice guiding him, began to walk in pale moonlight towards the south.

For many nights he travelled to the south, sleeping during the day, gathering food late in the afternoon, having a meal and then continuing his long journey.

But Mugga'go as he travelled, realised that as his eyes grew used to the dark, he began to see better in the night time than he could during the day. Even during times when the moon had not yet risen, he could use the bright starlight to travel by. And every night the voice grew stronger.

Finally, footsore and weary, Mugga'go reached a great wall of rock. He searched for a way to climb this sheer rock face, but could find none.

He beat his shield in frustration as the voice called him, then, suddenly he realised that the voice was echoing, not from the top of the cliff, but from a small crack in the base of the cliff, almost concealed by smaller rocks that had fallen from above.

Desperately he cleared away the fallen rocks to reveal a hole through which he could just barely fit his body. With immense difficulty he made his way along a narrow tunnel, until he reached a cave in which he could stand. The voice was quite loud in this small space, and he peered through the gloom.

At his feet was a river, dark and cold, and on the other side of the river was a small shelf, and trapped on this shelf, sitting very still, was a small creature.

“Are you the being that has been disturbing my sleep?” Asked Mugga'go.

The little creature raised its head. “Are you Mugga'go, the Peacekeeper who seeks the answer to a question?” It said.

“I am he.” Said Mugga'go. “And what is the answer to my question?”

The little creature shivered. “I have been trapped here, for a long time. I was travelling to your lands when a great storm came and I found myself here. I called, hoping you would hear.”

“I heard and I came.” replied Mugga’go.

“And for that I thank you, but I would ask you for one more thing. I cannot cross these waters without your help.” said the little creature.

Mugga’go looked with distaste at the cold, dark waters. He did not like the thought of entering the waters to swim across to the little creature, but he removed his feathered cloak and laid it carefully on the ground before taking a deep breath and plunging into the icy cold water. The water was not deep enough that he had to swim, but it covered his body up to his shoulders, and by the time he reached the shelf where the little creature was trapped, his teeth were chattering.

He placed the little creature on his shoulder and made his way back to the other bank where he laid for a few minutes, shivering with cold before being able to get up and place his feathered cloak around his shoulders.

He looked down at the little creature, also shivering with cold, and he tore off a piece of his cloak and placed it around the little creature’s shoulders. “What is your name?” He asked the little creature.

“I am known as Binnit.” It said.

“And how did you know my name?” Asked Mugga’go.

“Everybody knows the names of the Seven Keepers of Peace.” It said. “You were the closest so I called for you.”

Mugga’go assisted Binnit through the opening in the cliff, and crawled through himself, noting that the sun was still high in the sky. Binnit was huddled in deep shadow under a small ledge near the cliff base. “Why do you hide from the sun?” Asked Mugga’go.

Binnit pulled the feathered cloak over his head so that his eyes were shaded from the sun. “A long time ago a Wiri cursed me, and I became what you see today. Because of that curse, I can hunt only at night, and must stay in the shadows whilst the sun remains in the sky.”

“You see, I met a man who was handsome and kind to me, and who persuaded me to leave my husband and my family. I ran off with him, I was so happy to be with him, and so proud that he wanted me to be his wife. Then I had a child, a beautiful son, whom I loved dearly. But the child did not take my milk although he thrived and grew. He walked without first learning to crawl upon the ground. He talked as if he was an initiated man although he was only as high as my knees.” A tear ran down Binnit’s face. “Then one night I pretended to sleep and watched my husband and my son perform a ceremony that was forbidden to The People.”

“I knew then that I had brought evil into This Land. I tried to drive a spear into my husband, but my son prevented me, and held me whilst my husband placed the curse upon me.”

“I followed them, hoping that one day I would be given a chance to stop their evil ways, or to somehow make him change me back into that which I was before, but before I could do anything, you and your peacekeepers had enticed the Wiri into the fire.”

“I am sorry.” Said Mugga’go. “Had we known we may have been able to persuade the Wiri to revoke the curse before we destroyed them.”

“Not them, you only destroyed my husband.” Binnit replied. “My son still lives, and he seeks revenge upon the Peacekeepers for destroying his father.”

Mugga’go felt a chill that was not from the cold go through him. “I am old now, and like my brother peacekeepers, I cannot fight as I once was able, however, we have some brave young warriors who are being trained to undertake our duties when we are no longer able to fulfill them. We will enlist their aid and search for your son.”

Binnit looked up at the old warrior, and smiled sadly. “You do not understand.” She said.

“My son is one of your young warriors. I do not know what name he has chosen for himself, I know only what he plans to do.”

At this Mugga’go grew alarmed. He remembered what This Land was like before the Gorronge gathered together the Peacemaker and the Seven Peace Keepers. He

remembered the terrible night that they trapped the Wiri in the Flame of Peace. He did not want that to happen again.

Mugga'go extinguished the fire, then placed Binnit upon his shoulder and made the long trek back to the Lands of Yandel'ora.

This time Mugga'go travelled only by day whilst Binnit sat on his shoulder, sleeping so she could hunt for food for them both by night, and when they finally arrived in the Lands of Yandel'ora the old warrior sought out his companions and told them what had transpired.

The seven warriors of peace and the peacemaker then called together their young warriors to enable Binnit to indicate which one was her evil son. However, when the young men obeyed the summons from their elders one was missing. He had seen the little creature speaking to the peacemakers and recognised it as his accursed mother, and slipped away, unseen.

They have not yet found the Wiri's son, but until they do, Binnit can always be seen sitting on Mugga'go's shoulder, sound asleep, but ready to awaken at the approach of one who has evil in his heart.

Mugga'go with Binnit riding on his shoulder, searched This Land, seeking out the son of the Wiri, with Mugga'go searching by day, and Binnit searching by night.

## Information about the plants and birds in the story:

### Bin'nit

Tawny Frogmouth Owl

*Podargus strigoides*

The general plumage of the Tawny Frogmouth is silver-grey, slightly paler below, streaked and mottled with black and rufous, with a yellow eye and an olive-grey heavy bill. Some birds are russet-red. Frogmouth feathers are fringed to allow for silent flight.

The Tawny Frogmouth is found throughout Australia, including Tasmania and they inhabit all areas except the denser rainforests and treeless deserts. South-eastern birds are larger than birds from the north.

They are nocturnal birds (night birds) and during the day they perch on tree branches, often low down, camouflaged as part of the tree. With their nocturnal habit and owl-like appearance, Tawny Frogmouths are often confused with owls, but are actually more closely related to the nightjars. Their feet are weak however, and lack the curved talons of owls.

The Tawny Frogmouth eats nocturnal insects, worms, slugs and snails, small mammals, reptiles, frogs and birds which caught by pouncing to the ground from a tree or other elevated perch and some prey items, such as moths, are caught in flight.

Tawny Frogmouths have a regular breeding season. The nest is a loose platform of sticks, which is usually placed on a horizontal forked tree branch. The male sits on the eggs during the day, but both share sitting at night. Normally only one brood is raised in a season.

Their call is a soft, deep, continuous, 'ooo-ooo-ooo' sound.

<http://www.birdsinbackyards.net>

### Mugga'go

Red Ironbark

*Eucalyptus sideroxylon*

*Eucalyptus sideroxylon* is one of the best known of the Ironbarks as there is an isolated population in the western area of Australia's largest city, Sydney. There are two subspecies recognised; subsp. *sideroxylon* is the common form found over most of the range of the species except that it only has a very slight incursion into Victoria. Subsp. *tricarpa* is found along the south coast of New South Wales, the north-east coast of Victoria and in central Victoria. The latter differs from subsp. *sideroxylon* in having fewer flowers in its inflorescence, larger buds and fruit and broader juvenile foliage.

Red Ironbark is a useful timber tree and its very hard wood has been used for heavy construction and railway sleepers. It is a tree which may be from 10 to 30 metres in height with the hard, furrowed bark which is typical of Ironbarks. The bark is persistent and deep brown to black in colour. The foliage is dull, greyish-green in colour and is used for extraction of volatile oils.

Flowers are normally well displayed and are usually white. However, pink and red flowering forms are fairly common with both recognised varieties and are popular in cultivation.

*E.sideroxylon* is suitable for medium to larger gardens and is hardy in a wide range of soils and climates. The tree is frost tolerant.

Propagation is from seed which germinates readily. Because of the genetic variation that occurs with seedlings, the red and pink flowered forms cannot be guaranteed to come true to type. However, a reasonably high percentage of seedlings do produce coloured flowers.

<http://anpsa.org.au>