

D'harawal

DREAMING STORIES

Frances Bodkin

Gawaian Bodkin Andrews

illustrated by Lorraine Robertson

Boo'ambillyee

The Shark Dreaming Spirit



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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

A very long time ago in the Dreaming, there was much celebration amongst the Sea Spirits. Because of the misdeeds of The People who lived in This Land, the Sea Spirits were able to reclaim the lowlands. And where once The People danced upon The Land, the Sea Spirits were again, able to swim and frolic in the waves.

Now, not just The People, but all creatures have a place of healing, the Boomatjaril, to which they can go when they need to heal themselves. When the Seas once again covered This Land, the happiest of all was Boo'ambillyee, the Spirit of the Great Shark. You see, when This Land was lifted from the water by the Creator Spirit, the Boomatjaril was taken from the Shark People, and many sickened and died because they could not free themselves from the evil spirits that sucked away their very beings.

With the rising of the water, the Boo'ambillyee was able to seek out the Sacred Place of Healing once again. She made her way into the almost forgotten waters, swimming silently past the Boora'birra, and feeling the great power of the place, even though it was now covered by water. But something else was drawing her closer, a place more powerful to the Boo'ambillyee, than any other.

Although she was The Great Shark Spirit, she too, had not been able to heal herself, but as she drew closer to the Sacred Place, she could feel her old wounds getting better, she could feel the scars falling away, and she could feel the aches and pains easing. She sang a song that only her children could hear, guiding them to a place to where they had never been, but of which they all knew.

The Boo'ambillyee bared her many, sharp teeth in a smile. Now, once again, her children would be the most feared Warriors of the Sea. Now, once again, they would be able to carry out their duties of keeping the seas clean of the weak and the sick, and be able to come to their Sacred Place to be healed. But there was something strange about the place. There was the sense of a strange creature, a creature of other waters, and as she peered through the swirling waters, she saw a shadow, a long shadow, an unfamiliar shape. "Come forward, Creature" demanded the Boo'ambillyee.

Parra'doowee, the Great Eel Spirit had felt the disturbance caused by the presence of this powerful spirit, and had come to see what it was. Never before had he ventured this far,

even when the lands were free of the Sea Spirits. “Why come you here?” Asked the Parra’doowee. “You are a stranger to This Place.”

The Great Shark Spirit faced the Greet Eel Spirit, each seeing a creature so strange that they could scarcely believe their eyes. “I am no stranger to This Place.” Said the Boo’ambillyee. “This is where my people have come to heal themselves when evil spirits have made them ill. But when This Place was taken away from us, we were unable to come here, and many of my children died.”

Parra’doowee nodded. “I am sorry that happened, but could you not find another healing place?”

“Do you not know? In the Beginning, every creature was given a place where its children would be able to heal themselves. Don’t you have such a place?”

Parra’doowee nodded thoughtfully. “I am the guardian of the Dreaming Place of the Eel Peoples. My children came there to renew themselves, but since the rising of the waters, they have been afraid to make the journey, the river waters are no longer sweet.” He indicated the direction of the Dreaming Place. “I do not come this far usually, but I felt your presence, and came to investigate.”

Boo’ambillyee peered through the waters towards the deep hole where the Parra’doowee lived. “As I felt your presence.” She said. “My children need to come here to heal themselves. Your children need to go there to heal themselves. There is no dispute, we can live side by side, when your children are in my country, they must obey our laws, and when my children are in your country, they must obey your laws.”

Parra’doowee was satisfied. “That is fair.” He agreed. After Parra’doowee had taken his farewells Boo’ambillyee turned to those of her children who had been nearby when they heard her song, and she told them of her agreement with the Great Eel Spirit. She warned them that should they break these new laws she would, herself, eat the lawbreakers, even though they be her own children. The Shark children knew that Boo’ambillyee would, indeed do just that, and swam quickly off to tell all the other sea creatures.

Parra’doowee travelled far and wide across This Land, telling all his children that they were

now able to travel wherever they wished, but that they must obey the laws of People whose country they are travelling across.

Because they live in accord with the Laws of This Land, that is why, no matter where you travel, you will find eels living happily and peacefully, carrying out their duties of keeping our streams clean, just as the sharks keep our seas clean.

Some Information about Boo'ambillyee:

Grey nurse shark

Carcharias taurus Rafinesque, 1810

For many years, the Greynurse Shark was accused of being a 'maneater'. This is far from the truth.

Identification: The Greynurse is a distinctive fish which is usually grey-brown on top and a dusky white underneath. Both dorsal fins and the anal fin are of a similar size.

Juveniles have reddish or brownish spots on the posterior (back) half of the body and tail. These spots often fade as the shark ages, but are sometimes still visible on adults.

The Greynurse Shark grows to a length of 3.6 m. Males mature at 2.1 m and females at 2.2 m.

Distribution: The Greynurse Shark occurs in tropical and temperate waters in the Atlantic, Indian and western Pacific Oceans, although the species is known by different common names in different regions. It is recorded from all states of Australia except Tasmania.

Habitat: The Greynurse Shark lives in shallow coastal waters from the surf zone down to 60 m, although it has been recorded from water as deep as 190 m.

During the day, individuals are usually found in the vicinity of dropoffs, caves and ledges.

Feeding and Diet: Greynurse Sharks feed on fishes, which are pierced with the sharp teeth. The species has fang-like teeth which are visible when the shark's mouth is closed. The teeth of the Greynurse Shark are constantly being replaced. Older, damaged or blunt teeth on the exterior surfaces of the jaws are replaced by new teeth every eight to fifteen days.

Heterocercal tail: The Grey Nurse shark has a tail with a long upper lobe and a shorter lower lobe. This type of tail is described as heterocercal. When such a shark swims, the large upper lobe tends to push the snout of the shark down. This is balanced by the lift produced by the pectoral fins and the ventral surface of the snout.

Electroreception: Sharks have the same five senses as humans; taste, touch, sight, hearing and smell, but in addition have a sixth sense; electroreception. The underside of the Grey Nurse Shark's snout is dotted with pores. Each of these leads to an organ (ampula of Lorenzini) which can detect electricity.

Sharks can detect very weak electrical currents. This extra sense gives sharks the ability to detect and attack prey at close range without needing to see the prey item. This can be advantageous in murky water or if the shark is a bottom feeder which relies on finding prey buried in the sediment.

The electroreception capabilities of sharks also gives them the ability to navigate using the Earth's magnetic field. This is possible because an electrical conductor (the shark) moving through a magnetic field (the Earth's) generates an electrical field through the conductor. Sharks can navigate by responding to changes in this electrical field.

Large Oily Liver: Many bony fishes have a structure called a swim bladder which is used to control buoyancy. Sharks do not have swim bladders. Instead, they have different buoyancy regulating mechanisms that involve the liver and fins. The oily liver of the Grey Nurse Shark has been developed to a huge degree and occupies a large proportion of the body cavity. Shark oil is lighter than seawater and this gives the shark buoyancy.

The Greynurse Shark also swallows air at the surface, and holds it in the stomach. This provides buoyancy and enables the shark to hang almost motionless above the bottom.

In the early 1900s, shark liver oil was used to light the street lamps of Sydney.

Countershading: Greynurse Sharks are countershaded, the dorsal (upper) part is dark, mostly a grey to bronzy colour whereas the ventral (lower) part of the body is pale. This adaptation results in the fish being difficult to see from above because the dark colour of the dorsal surface of the fish blends into the dark colour of the water below. It helps to make the fish also less visible from below because the light colour of the underside of the fish is less noticeable against the light shining from above.

Life cycle: After fertilization, the developing young are enclosed in egg cases within each uterus of the female. They hatch from the egg cases at about 55 mm in length and then eat not only unfertilised eggs, but also their siblings. After about nine to twelve months two young are born, one from each uterus.

Greynurse Sharks are ovoviviparous. They produce eggs which hatch inside the female and have no placental connection.

Mating and reproduction: Internal fertilization occurs in all sharks. Sperm transfer occurs through the claspers of the male.

Conservation Status: Pogonoski et. al. (2002), list the conservation status of the species as endangered.

Danger to humans and first aid: It is generally a slow-moving species that is not considered dangerous to people, although it should never be provoked by divers.

<http://australianmuseum.net.au/greynurse-shark-carcharias-taurus-rafinesque-1810#sthash.o4kKldJ8.dpuf>

Some information about Parra:

Southern Shortfin Eel,

Anguilla australis Richardson, 1841

Alternative Name/s

Australian Shortfinned Eel, Freshwater Eel, River Eel, Silver Eel, Yellow Eel

Identification

The Southern Shortfin Eel is the only freshwater eel in southern Australian waters with a uniform body colouration.

Size range

It grows to about 90 cm in length.

Distribution

The species occurs widely throughout the Western Pacific region.

It lives in still, often turbid, freshwaters. Mature eels migrate to sea to spawn and young eels return to freshwater habitats.

<http://australianmuseum.net.au/southern-shortfin-eel-anguilla-australis#sthash.r52xS1k1.dpuf>