

D'harawal

DREAMING STORIES

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illustrated by Lorraine Robertson

Budbri learns to Dance

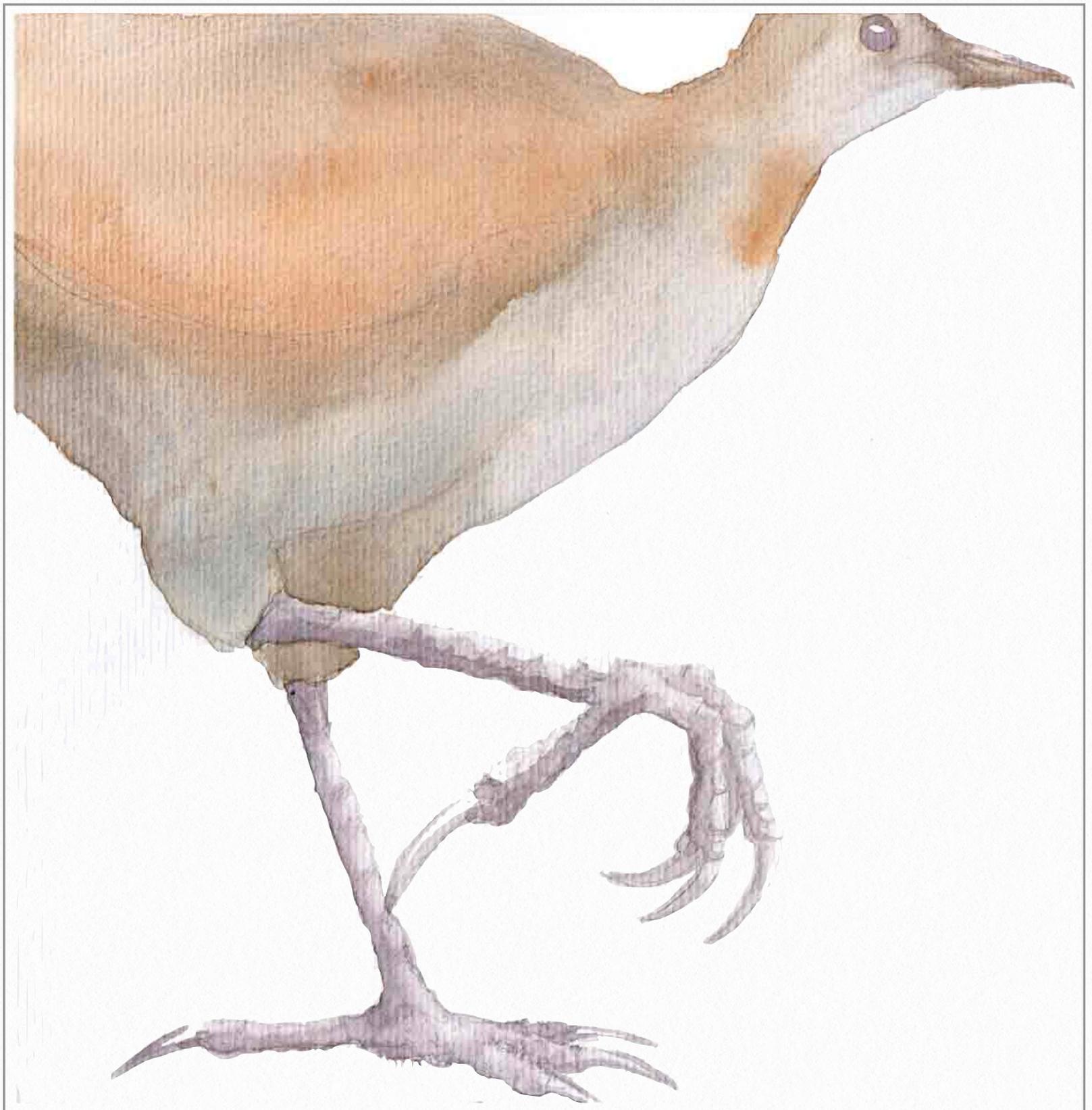


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Foreword

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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A very long time ago, when all The Peoples held big meetings, the men would sit around and watch the women as they danced the dance of The Beginning.

The men enjoyed watching the women dance, and would have liked to join them, but, of course, the men had no part in The Dance of the Beginning, and therefore could not dance with the women.

But one day, one of the clan, whose name was Budbri was sitting on a rock enjoying the warmth of the spring sunshine, when he looked down into the gully below and saw several lyrebirds.

He watched, fascinated, as they flitted back and forth across the gully, chattering away to each other and to the other birds who were gathering around as if to watch some great event.

Now, Budbri was very happy, because he loved a woman who was of the Lyrebird totem, and he was sure that this was a good sign, so he decided to sit and wait to see what the Lyrebirds had to tell him.

Pretty soon the Lyrebirds stopped their game, and the largest of the group began to scrape together the dried leaves and twigs into a small, flat-topped mound. Budbri was most puzzled at this, then thought that perhaps he was building a nest.

The other Lyrebirds approached with curiosity, and one began to dismantle the mound until the larger bird chased the intruder away. Another began to build a mound nearby, until it, too was also chased away.

It was not long before the mound appeared to have been completed to the lyrebird's satisfaction, and Budbri waited impatiently, to see what would happen next.

And he did not have to wait long.

The lyrebird climbed on top of the mound, and began to make a rhythmic noise, clucking and clicking, then shrilling musically. This the Lyrebird repeated several times, and Budbri could feel his toes twitching, and his feet wanting to move in time with the song's beat.

But there was a stirring of leaves of the bushes on the side of the gully, and then, with dainty steps, there stepped into the clearing a female lyrebird. Slowly she approached the mound, scratching amongst the rotting bark of the gully floor, pretending not to notice the male lyrebird performing on top of the mound, but at the same time keeping a watchful eye on him.

Suddenly the female looked up, and with pretended surprise, appeared to notice the male lyrebird for the first time. She clucked at him once, then set about searching for food again.

The male shook himself, then began to preen his feathers, delicately, before tidying the mound and re-arranging a few leaves that had strayed from their proper position. And, with a series of clucks, twitters, trills and screeches, the male lyrebird began to dance.

Budbri watched as the Lyrebird spread its tail. No longer was this creature a drab brown and black, suddenly, it was shimmering white, like a waterfall in the sunlight, with bright gold, and white and bronze, feather flashing and glinting in time to its song.

But it was the dance that caught Budbri's attention, the most. It was an intricate series of steps performed in time to the calls. And as the female approached the dancing male, Budbri got to his feet and began to imitate the steps.

Budbri danced his way back to the camp, and there he told The People of what he had seen. He showed them the dance that the Lyrebird had taught him, but when they exclaimed their disbelief he led them back to the gully.

The Lyrebird were nowhere to be seen, but there, on the gully floor was the mound, and around the mound were the tracks of the birds. And in the distance, the clan could hear the music of another lyrebird as it performed its dance.

Now Budbri loved a woman of the Lyrbird totem, and wanted her as his wife. But try as he might, he could not attract her attention. She always seemed to be busy when he was around, picking berries, digging for roots, grinding wattleseeds, or even just attending to her little brothers and sisters. He realised that she was acting exactly the same as the female lyrebird in the gully.

That night, accompanied by the calls of the men imitating the lyrebird's song, and the clapping together of the boomerangs, Budbri once again danced the steps that the Lyrebird had taught him.

And this time, while the women watched, it was the men who followed Budbri around the fire, dancing.

And the one who watched only Budbri with shining eyes, was the Lyrebird woman. At last he had her attention, and he felt his chest swell with happiness. His feet became lighter, he leapt higher than any of the other men, and his feet hit the ground exactly in time with the clicks of the clap sticks.

And that is how the men learned to dance.
And how Budbri and the beautiful Wiritjiribin fell in love.

Some information about Wiritjiribin's dance:

Lyrebirds

What do they look like?: There are two species in the family of lyrebirds - the superb lyrebird and the Albert's lyrebird. However, it is the superb lyrebird which gives the family its name. Its spectacular tail of fanned feathers, when spread out in display, looks like a lyre (a musical instrument of ancient Greece).

The male superb lyrebird is 80-100 cm long, including his 55-cm-long tail. He is dark brown on the upper part of his body and lighter brown below, with red-brown markings on his throat. His tail feathers are dark brown above and silver-grey below.

Females of the species are smaller than the males, with similar colouring but without the lyre-shaped tail. The females' tail feathers are broadly webbed with reddish markings. Young male superb lyrebirds do not grow their lyre tails until they are three or four years old. Until this time, they usually group together and are known as 'plain-tails'.

The Albert's lyrebird is similar in appearance to the superb lyrebird, but is smaller and darker, with a rich chestnut colour. The male does not have the outer lyre-shaped tail feathers of the superb lyrebird.

What do they sound like? Lyrebirds are capable of imitating almost any sound. Mixed in with their own calls, clicks and song, you will usually hear them mimicking loud clear sounds made by other birds and mammals - including humans. They have been heard to mimic the sounds of chainsaws, horns, alarms and even trains. They sing throughout the year, and scientists think that the mimicry helps them to vocally set out their territory and defend it from other lyrebirds.

Where do they live? The superb lyrebird lives in forests east of the Great Dividing Range. However, the range of the Albert's lyrebird is restricted to a small area of sub-tropical rainforest near the Queensland/New South Wales border. Due to its specialised habitat, the Albert's lyrebird is an endangered species and the clearing of rainforest would probably lead to the bird's extinction.

What do they eat? Lyrebirds feed mainly on ground-dwelling insects, spiders, frogs, and other small invertebrates that they find by scratching among the leaf litter. They have powerful legs with long toes and claws, which are ideal for raking over dead leaves and soil.

Courtship and breeding: The superb lyrebird has an elaborate courtship ritual, centred around a display mound. Built by the male bird, this display mound is made of scratched earth and measures up to 90 cm wide by 15 cm high. Each lyrebird territory may include 10 to 15 display mounds, which the displaying male may visit in turn. When courting, the male bird stands on a mound, spreading its tail over its head (see picture, right) and singing a loud, clear song for as long as 20 minutes.

A male Albert's lyrebird builds a display panel of trampled vegetation. Its song and displays are comparable to those of the superb lyrebird, although its song is less varied.

The display period is from May to August, with breeding occurring mainly in June and July. Females are attracted to the mound by the male's display and song. Male birds will mate with several females, and although they appear to know where the nests are, they take no part in building them or incubating and feeding the young.

The female builds a dome-shaped nest of sticks, which can be on the ground, on rocks, within tree stumps, or in tree ferns and caves. The nest is lined with ferns, feathers, moss and rootlets. Usually, only one egg is laid, which hatches in around six weeks. The young lyrebird remains in the nest for six to ten weeks.

Keeping out of danger: Lyrebirds are shy birds. When threatened, they escape by running and dodging rapidly through the undergrowth while emitting high-pitched shrieks of alarm. With their short, round, weakly-muscled wings they rarely fly. However, their wings allow them to jump onto tree branches or rocks - and then glide back down to the forest floor.

Living with lyrebirds: Some people living on the edge of the bush are lucky enough to have lyrebirds visit their gardens. Finding out about their way of life, and listening to their fantastic mimicry, can make living with lyrebirds a rewarding experience. Sometimes however, these birds rake up garden beds, knocking over seedlings and leaving leaf litter everywhere.

To prevent this from happening, you can put up wire fences around the plants to protect them, make a temporary barrier with potted plants, or lay chicken wire over the garden beds. Lyrebirds will be encouraged by open compost heaps, so keep your compost covered or use a compost bin.

<http://www.environment.nsw.gov.au/animals/lyrebirds.htm>