

D'harawal

DREAMING STORIES

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Gaya'dari **How the Platypus Came to Be**



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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

Gaya'dari

How the Platypus Came to Be

Once, long ago there lived in the Wirrim'birra the Yuranyi clan, the clan of the black duck. Now the Yuranyi people were kindly people, who had many children, but who took in other orphaned or lost children to care for them.

At the time about which we speak one of those lost children was a boy of the Woo'rah, the Water Rat clan, a young lad who had become lost during one of the Great Ceremonies held in the Yandel'ora, and who had been left behind once the law making ceremonies were over.

The Yuran'yi sent a message to the Woo'rah to tell them that the lost child was with them, and they would look after him until the next ceremony, or until one of the Woo'rah could come and get him.

Woo'rah befriended some of the other children in the camp, and particularly one little girl, called Gaya'dari, who was very shy, and inclined to hide rather than join in the rough play.

Now, Woo'rah was a very good swimmer, and he spent much of the warm time of the year teaching Gaya'dari how to swim, and particularly how to hide underwater.

Gaya'dari enjoyed the company of the Woo'rah boy and they became firm friends, sitting together listening to the stories of the old ones, gathering berries together for the meals, and minding the younger children when the adults held their meetings. Everybody in the Yuran'yi clan commented on how well the two got on together, and how thoughtful they were.

Then, came the time for the next Great Meeting in the Yandel'ora. The Woo'rah sent a message to the Yuran'yi that they would collect the boy during the law making ceremony.

When the boy was told that his family were coming to collect him, he was both excited and upset.

He longed to see his family again, but he had become very fond of Gaya'dari, as she was of him. When he told Gaya'dari the news, she wept. "I shall miss you Woo'rah boy." She sobbed.

Woo'rah's heart almost split in two, he could not imagine life without little Gaya'dari, but he also wanted to see his family again, to imitate his uncles as they hunted, or as they danced, to listen to the stories of his aunts, or to hear his mother sing the songs of protection at night.

Came the time of the Great Ceremony and once again the Woo'rah boy was re-united with his family.

For the weeks of the law making discussions he and Gaya'dari continued their friendship, and played on the banks of the Great River, or chased the eels in the Menangul. But, all too soon the ceremony was over, and the Woo'rah boy thought that his heart would burst as he watched Gaya'dari's small figure dejectedly following her parents back into the Wirrim'birra.

"Come, my boy." Said his uncle, "Let us now go home." And sadly, the Woo'rah boy followed his uncle.

But he never forgot Gaya'dari, and every night, the Woo'rah boy would stare up at the stars, and think about his little friend of the Black Duck clan.

And Gaya'dari would creep away from the campfire at night, and stare up at the stars, thinking of her friend of the Woo'rah clan.

The years passed, and the Woo'rah boy grew into a fine young man, handsome, and sensible, polite to his elders, and kind to the younger members of the clan.

Gaya'dari grew into a beautiful young woman, but so shy that the young men of the other D'harawal feather clans did not even notice her.

Then, one day, a messenger arrived in the camp of the Woo'rah clan to tell them that it was time for another Great Meeting.

The men gathered up their hunting weapons, and the women collected their dilly bags, and began the trek to the lands of the Yandel'ora.

Although he was by now a warrior, the Woo'rah man, helped his mother and aunts with the young ones, as well as helping his uncles hunt for food to eat on the way.

Finally, they arrived at the Yandel'ora, and the Woo'rah man sought out and found the Yuran'yi clan. But Gaya'dari was not amongst them, he could not find her anywhere. However, he did find Gaya'dari's aunt sitting by a fire. "You may not remember me," he said. "I am the Woo'rah boy who stayed with you when I became lost during the meeting before last." The aunt looked up at him and smiled. "Gaya'dari's friend." She exclaimed. "How good it is to see you again. And you have grow so well." She indicated for the Woo'rah man to sit at the fire.

"Gaya'dari will be very happy when I tell you how handsome you have grown."

The Woo'rah's man heart leapt, and he found it hard to sit quietly. "And how is Gaya'dari?" He asked.

"She is on her way." Said the aunt. "She was hoping to see you here to catch up on old times, but, of course, she was not feeling well, which is why she did not come with us."

He could hardly conceal his excitement at the knowledge that he would once again see Gaya'dari, he got to his feet. "I must take my leave." He said politely, "And I thank you for your hospitality."

Gaya'dari's aunt smiled. "It is a pity that you are of the wrong skin." She said. "You would have made a wonderful husband for my niece."

The Woo'rah man's heart fell. "I have thought of that often." He replied as he walked away.

That night he could not sleep, thinking of Gaya'dari, and cursing the fact that they were of different skins.

He tossed and turned until the sky began to lighten, then he got up, and wrapping his cloak around him crept out of the camp, towards the lands of the Yuran'yi clan. He knew the path well, having travelled it in his mind every day he was apart from Gaya'dari, and he travelled quickly and silently into the Wirrim'birra, being careful to leave no tracks.

He heard Gaya'dari and some of her friends coming along the track long before he saw them, and moved off the track and hid amongst some ferns. He watched as Gaya'dari passed by, followed by her friends, then followed them, unseen and unheard.

Although he had thought that he was unseen, Gaya'dari had actually seen the Woo'rah man hiding in the bushes, she had a strong feeling that he was close by, and had been keeping a careful watch. She pretended that she was tired and had hurt her foot, and urged her friends to go on ahead, then slipped, unseen into a hollow tree. When the Woo'rah man came by she jumped out at him, and giggled as he started with fright.

They hugged each other with joy as tears streamed down both their faces, and they told each other how much they missed the other. Suddenly they heard Gaya'dari's friends approaching.

"Come with me." He said. "I cannot live without you."

"But if I go with you they will hunt us down." She whispered. "My life has been so miserable without you. I cannot live without you, either."

"We will find somewhere where they cannot find us." He said. "Do you remember how I taught you to swim without being seen?"

She nodded. "Yes, I do, I have continued to do it, pretending you are with me."

The Woo'rah man took her hand. "Then follow me."

Together they ran toward the river and jumped in, swimming underwater until they were well away from the Yandel'ora. Then they waded and swam up the river until it had become so narrow that they could no longer swim. Finally they found a small, green valley with some deep water holes, and a small waterfall.

"We will camp here." Said the Woo'rah man. "They will never find us here."

The Woo'rah man dived down into the waterhole beneath the waterfall and found a cave where they would be safe.

There they lived for many years, having several children, and although she longed to see her mother and aunts and her uncles again, Gaya'dari could never return.

You see, their children were half duck, half water rat. The pair had broken the marriage laws, for it was forbidden for feather skin to marry fur skin, and it was their children who bore the punishment.

But their families had never forgiven them. Eventually, one day whilst the Woo'rah man was out hunting he did not see some warriors of the Yuran'yi clan who were also out hunting.

They recognised him and threw their spears at him, one striking him in the side. He fell to the ground, knowing that he was going to die, but he needed to protect Gaya'dari.

As the Yuran'yi warriors stood over him, he signalled that he wanted to speak. "I stole your sister." He said. "I took her into the hills, and I forcefully made her my wife. All this time I have been holding her prisoner. She has no blame in this." And he died.

The warriors followed the Woo'rah man's tracks to the small valley where they found Gaya'dari and her children splashing around in the water.

As she saw them and recognised her brothers and uncles, Gaya'dari drew her children to her and held them protectively.

"Where is my husband?" She asked

The warriors stared with horror at the misbegotten children. "He is dead." Her uncle replied. "He told us that he took you by force, and held you prisoner here."

"Those children must die also," said her brother. "Their existence shames our clan."

Gaya'dari stared in horror at her brother. "No. They are my children." She cried, and taking their hands she jumped into the waterhole, fleeing into the cave beneath the waterfall.

For several days the warriors stayed at the waterhole, but when Gaya'dari did not resurface, they assumed that she had drowned and returned to the lands of the Yuran'yi clan.

Gaya'dari remained in the cave beneath the waterfall, and raised her children, who themselves had children.

That is how the platypus came to be, who is half duck, half Water Rat, and why it hides itself in shame and fear.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE ANIMALS IN THE STORY:

GAYA'DARI

Platypus, Duck-billed Platypus

Scientific Name: *Ornithorhynchus anatinus*

The Platypus is a unique Australian species. Along with echidnas, Platypuses are grouped in a separate order of mammals known as monotremes, which are distinguished from all other mammals because they lay eggs. When first discovered, the unusual look of a Platypus caused considerable confusion and doubt amongst European naturalists and scientists, many of whom believed that the animal was a fake.

Identification: The platypus is well adapted for semi-aquatic lifestyle. It's streamline body and a broad, flat tail are covered with dense waterproof fur, which provides excellent thermal insulation. The Platypus propels itself through the water by using its front, short, webbed limbs, and the partially-webbed hind feet act as rudders. Behind its distinctive bill are the grooves that house the ear openings and the eyes which close when the animal dives. The Platypus uses its tail for storage of fat reserves and the strong claws on its feet for burrowing and moving on land. In addition, males possess a horny spur on their ankles, which is connected to a venom gland in the upper leg, making the Platypus one of the few venomous mammals.

Size range: Southern populations are larger than northern ones, but also individuals from west-flowing rivers in New South Wales are larger than those found in the state's east-flowing streams. Males are larger than females and can be over 60 cm long (tip of the bill to tip of the tail). Typically, males are 400-630 mm long, and females are 370-550 mm long. The weight is 800-3000 g for males and 600-1700 g for females.

Distribution: Platypus is endemic to Australia and is dependent on rivers, streams and bodies of freshwater. It is present in eastern Queensland and New South Wales, eastern, central and southwestern Victoria and throughout Tasmania, once found in the Adelaide Hills and Mount Lofty Ranges of South Australia, it is extinct from that state, except for the introduced population on the western end of Kangaroo Island.

Habitat: Platypuses occur in freshwater systems from tropical rainforest lowlands and plateaus of far northern Queensland to cold, high altitudes of Tasmania and the Australian Alps. They feed in both slow-moving and rapid (riffle) parts of streams. When not foraging, the Platypus spends most of the time in its burrow in the bank of the river, creek or a pond. At times, the individuals use rocky crevices and stream debris as shelters, or they burrow under the roots of vegetation near the stream. Hence, the ideal habitat for the species includes a river or a stream with earth banks and native vegetation that provides shading of the stream and cover near the bank. The presence of logs, twigs, and roots, as well as cobbled or gravel water substrate result in increased microinvertebrate fauna (a main food source), and the Platypus also tends to be more abundant in areas with pool-riffle sequences.

Platypuses are active all year round, but mostly during twilight and in the night. During day, individuals shelter in a short burrow in bank. The activity patterns of these animals are determined by a number of factors including: locality, human activity, ambient temperatures, day length and food availability.

Feeding and Diet: The Platypus feeds mainly during the night on a wide variety of aquatic invertebrates. The average foraging periods last for 10-12 hours per day. It closes its eyes, ears and nostrils when foraging underwater and its primary sense organ is the bill, equipped with receptors sensitive to pressure, and with electroreceptors. The precise way in which the Platypus uses the bill to detect prey is still unknown, but the bill serves to find and sift small prey from the substrate, while larger prey is taken individually. The Platypus stays

underwater for between 30-140 seconds, collecting the invertebrates from the river bottom and storing them in its cheek-pouches. It then chews the food using its horny, grinding plates, while it floats and rests on the water surface.

Diet of the Platypus: Invertebrates, particularly the insect larvae, shrimps, swimming beetles, water bugs and tadpoles, and at times worms, freshwater pea mussels and snails. Occasionally the animals catch cicadas and moths from the water surface.

When swimming, the Platypus presents a low profile, with three small humps (the head, back and tail) visible above the water surface. The swimming action is smooth, and when the Platypus dives the back is arched as the animal plunges underwater, creating a spreading ring. These characteristics coupled with the absence of visible ears distinguish the Platypus from the dog-paddle style of the Water-rat.

Platypuses can swim through fast waters at the speed of around 1 metre per second, but when foraging the speed is closer to 0.4 metres per second. However, the Platypus is not well adapted for walking on land. The limbs are short, heavy and splayed away from the body, and a Platypus uses almost 30% more energy when moving on land, compared to a terrestrial mammal of similar size.

Communication: The Platypus is largely a solitary animal, but several individuals can share the same body of water. They produce a low-pitched growling sounds when disturbed or handled.

Life cycle: Young Platypuses do not seem to reproduce in their first year of life, instead, both sexes become reproductive in their second year. After mating, a female will lay 1-3 eggs (usually 2) following a 21-days gestation period. She then incubates the eggs for possibly 10 days, after which the lactation period lasts for 3-4 months before the young emerge from the burrow. Platypuses are long-lived animals both in captivity and in the wild, living up to approximately 20 years.

Mating and reproduction: Mating normally takes place between August to October, and lactating females were observed between September and March.

The knowledge of the breeding behaviour generally comes from observations of animals in captivity. In winter (when the water is still cold) males initiate mating interactions. Courtship includes aquatic activities such as: rolling sideways together, diving, touching and passing, and the male is also observed grasping a female's tail with its bill. The behaviour lasts from less than a minute to over half an hour and is usually repeated over several days.

After mating, a pregnant female builds a nest in a long complex burrow (possibly re-worked by several females in different seasons) in less than a week. She spends further 4-5 days collecting wet nesting material to prevent her eggs and hatchlings from drying out. During the egg incubation period, a female holds the eggs pressed by her tail to her belly, while curled up. She intermittently leaves the burrow, however, much of this aspect of the animal's life is still unknown. When the young hatch, the female starts secreting milk and the young Platypuses suckle from the two milk patches covered by fur on the female's abdomen. The female spends most of this time with her young in the burrow, and as the young grow, she increasingly leaves them to forage. Towards the end of the summer the young emerge from the burrow and their fate as young independent animals is still largely unknown.

Platypuses spend most of their time in water or their burrow, so it is difficult to determine their predators but there have been anecdotal reports of the species being predated on by crocodiles, goannas, carpet pythons, eagles and large native fish. In addition, it is likely that foxes, and possibly dogs or dingoes kill Platypuses that move on land or in shallow waters.

Platypuses have a number of ectoparasites in the wild, including their own tick species, *Ixodes ornithothynchi*. The tick is often found around the hind limbs, and in smaller numbers on the front legs and in the body fur. Severe skin ulcers caused by the amphibian fungal infection have been reported in Tasmanian Platypuses in particular. The fungus can be fatal to the animal if it invades other tissues, particularly the lungs.

Conservation Status: The Platypus is protected by legislation in all of the states that it occurs in. Individuals cannot be captured or killed, except for scientific research. The dependence of Platypuses on the established freshwater systems may lead to their decline in future.

- See more at: <http://australianmuseum.net.au/platypus#sthash.UG5jge8u.dpuf>

Woo'rah

Water-rat

Scientific name: *Hydromys chrysogaster*

The Water-rat is one of Australia's largest rodents and is usually found near permanent bodies of water. Well adapted to aquatic life with its webbed hind feet and waterproof coat, the Water-rat can be identified by its large size and long tail with a white tip. The main characteristics that help distinguish the Water-rat from other rodents include: Front teeth: One pair of distinctive chisel shaped incisors with hard yellow enamel on front surfaces. Head: Flattened head, long blunt nose, with abundant whiskers, small eyes. Ears: Notably small ears. Colouring: Variable. Near-black, grey to brown, with white to orange belly. Thick soft waterproof fur. Main feature: webbed hind-feet. Tail: Thick, white-tipped.

Size range: Body 231 mm - 370 mm, tail 242 mm - 345 mm, weight 340 g - 1275 g.

Distribution: The Water-rat is found in Queensland, New South Wales, Victoria, Tasmania, South Australia, Western Australia (south-west and north), Northern Territory.

Habitat: The Water-rat is one of Australia's only two amphibious mammals (the platypus is the other). They live in burrows alongside river and lake banks.

Feeding and Diet: The Water-rat feeds on a wide range of prey including large insects, crustaceans, mussels and fishes, and even frogs, lizards, small mammals and water birds. It forages by swimming underwater. Once it catches its prey, it usually carries it back to a regular feeding site.

Although native rodents are usually nocturnal, the Water-rat is most active around sunset and may even forage during the day.

The burrow is usually hidden among vegetation and built along the banks of rivers and lakes. The round entrance has a diameter of about 15 cm. In dense populations, males are territorial and defend their areas aggressively. In these circumstances, it is common to see Water-rats with damaged tails as a result of these fights.

Conservation Status: During the depression in the 1930s, a ban was placed on the import of furred skins (mostly American Muskrat). The Water-rat was seen as a perfect substitute and the price of a Water-rat pelt

increased from four shillings in 1931 to 10 shillings in 1941. The species was heavily hunted during this time until protective legislation was introduced. Populations seem to have made a recovery.

The main threats to the Water-rat today are habitat alteration as a result of flood mitigation and swamp drainage, and predation by introduced animals such as cats and foxes.

- See more at: <http://australianmuseum.net.au/water-rat#sthash.H7JfIYt5.dpuf>

Yuran'yi

Pacific Black Duck

Scientific name: *Anas superciliosa*

The Pacific Black Duck is one of the most versatile of the Australian ducks. It frequents all types of water, from isolated forest pools to tidal mudflats, and is found in all but the most arid regions of Australia.

Size range: 50 - 60 cm long

Distribution: Throughout Australia

Habitat: Freshwater, intertidal

Feeding and Diet: This duck is mainly vegetarian, feeding on seeds of aquatic plants. This diet is supplemented with small crustaceans, molluscs and aquatic insects. Food is obtained by 'dabbling', where the bird plunges its head and neck underwater and upends, raising its rear end vertically out of the water. Occasionally, food is sought on land in damp grassy areas.

The Pacific Black Duck is closely related to the Mallard, *A. platyrhynchos*, introduced into Australia from the Northern Hemisphere. The two species are very similar in habits and occupy the same niche in the two regions. The two species will interbreed in situations where Mallards have been released.

- See more at: <http://australianmuseum.net.au/pacific-black-duck#sthash.hSwzvKV0.dpuf>