

D'harawal

DREAMING STORIES

Frances Bodkin

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Illustrated by Lorraine Robertson

Goora'rai'agon (Snapper Island)

**The Story of how the Sea Horses and
Sea Dragons 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

A very long time ago, after the Sea Spirits had reclaimed the lowlands, many bodies appeared on the shores of the Gwaigal. The Peoples of the highlands, and the survivors who had been helped to safety by the Parra'doowee, properly buried those they could retrieve from the sea. But they were concerned of those whose bodies could not be found.

You see, if a person is not properly buried the dead person cannot progress to the Spirit World, and it becomes angry and vengeful and wreaks havoc amongst the living, by causing great winds to blow, or storms with lightning that causes fires, or the People to become ill.

And after that time when the Boora Birra disappeared beneath the water, there were great storms, terrible storms, when the waves crashed against the rocky shores and turned them to sand, and when the cries of the dead could be heard above the howling of the wind.

The Cadi, the lowland ones who had survived, huddled in small groups, shivering with cold and with fear, as the children grew ill with hunger. The foods on the Bannarong were strange to them, and they could not fish because of the fierce winds and even fiercer seas, and even if they could fish, the waters were full of sharks. Huge sharks that came even into the shallow waters and stared at them hungrily, as they walked along the shores of the Bannarong, looking for food, or for the bodies of their relatives that may have been washed ashore in the storm.

The time came when no more bodies were washed ashore, but still the storms raged as the anger of the unburied spirits grew unabated. And the worst place of all to be was the place called Goora'rai'agon, there the screaming of the spirits of the dead was loudest, and there the winds howled amongst the mangroves like the cries of the devil merrigal.

The Cadi met with the People and together they sought the advice of the Kuratjee who lived alone in the place called Kuratjeen. Now this man, who was a most powerful sorcerer was greatly feared by all. He was extremely impatient, and, apart from Woo'rah, a water rat, he had no friends. He did not obey the normal protocols of The People, but he did obey the Laws, and his advice was often sought by the lawmakers when they met to make new laws.

Now this Kuratjee was getting very old, and because of his bad temper none would approach him to seek to learn from him. This worried the Kuratjee, for as all people grow old, they think often of their death, and of those who would bury them properly. The Kuratjee knew that he had no one who would mourn him when he died, and this made him angrier than ever, and when he saw The People approach him he drew his feathered cloak about him and retreated to his small rock shelter that overlooked the water.

Woo'rah, the Water Rat scuttled in after him and curled up in the folds of the warm cloak.

Amongst The People who approached the rock shelter was a woman, whose name was Dun'doon, the Firestick, so called because of her red hair. This woman whose husband and children had been killed by the rising waters, was a kindly person, and very wise, but now alone and troubled because the bodies of two of her children were missing, and she had been unable to lay their Spirits to rest.

As the others of the People and the Cadi sat down outside the Kuratjee's rock shelter, Dun'doon seated herself as far away as possible, enabling her to watch the Kuratjee as well as his visitors.

She studied the Kuratjee, and instead of seeing a fearsome creature seated in the shadows, she saw, instead a sad old man.

For none knew that as a young man, the Kuratjee had married a woman whom he had loved, it seemed, forever. But, during a raid by the Dharag, he had been wounded and she had been stolen from him, their only child, a boy of less than two years, had been savagely beaten by the Dharag clubs, and had died in the Kuratjee's arms. In a terrible revenge, the Kuratjee followed the trail of the Dharag, and had, one by one, hunted down the murderers of his son, and the kidnappers of his wife. He found his wife and brought her back, but her spirit had left her and she slowly died. He buried his two loved ones in a place that was now covered by the waters, a place that his small rock shelter overlooked.

Dun'doon saw the great sadness behind the anger in the man's eyes as he watched The People and listened to their pleas.

She saw the grief that had tormented the Kuratjee for so long, and she felt his bitterness as he listened to The People as they clamoured for a solution to their problem.

Soon, they were all talking at once, no longer pleading, but now demanding that he do something to stop the fierce storms, and the screaming winds. Dun'doon put her hands over her ears, but even that would not stop the clamour that drowned out even the howling winds.

Unable to stand it any longer, Dun'doon stood up and screamed.

Suddenly there was silence, the voices of The People ceased, and even the wind had stopped its howling, but she did not notice.

“You came here to ask the Kuratjee to help you:” she said. “But what have you done to help him?”

The People looked at her in astonishment. Dun’doon had never before spoken like this to anyone, and even Dun’doon herself was shocked at what she had done. Woo’rah, the Water Rat peeked out from under the Kuratjee’s feathered cloak and chattered up at its friend.

For the first time in many, long years the Kuratjee smiled, but put his hand up to his mouth so that none could see. Then, in a stern voice he said. “Go away. I will talk only with this many” and he held up one hand, “and this woman.” And only Kuratjee and Dun’doon noticed that the wind no longer howled.

When the five wise ones had been chosen the others departed, but not so far away that they could not see and hear what was going on.

“We are concerned that we have not been able to properly tend to our dead, and they are angry with us.” Said one of the wise ones.

“We ask you to help us to find the bodies of our people so that we can bury them properly, then this storm will stop and we will be able to once again seek food.” Said another.

The Kuratjee looked up at Dun’doon. “If I do this for you.” He said, “What will you do for me.”

The wise ones looked at each other. They had not thought to bring gifts. “We will do whatever you want.” Said one.

Another, who had seen the glances exchanged between Dun’doon and the Kuratjee, smiled. “We will give you this woman as your wife.” He said.

The Kuratjee angrily got to his feet so quickly that the Woo’rah tumbled over and over until it hit the ground with a thud. “You do not give anything which is not yours to give!”

The man who had spoken scuttled back so quickly that he fell into the water, and as he did so, his face changed, his eyes became large, his hands turned into fins, his legs became a fish’s tail, and his skin changed colour.

The Kuratjee had turned him into a Sea Dragon. “Now, since you were so anxious to care for your dead that you would give away something which does not belong to you, I curse you to

live forever in the sea to deliver the spirits of the drowned to the Goora'rai'agon." Then he turned to the others. "I did not stop the storm." He said. "The spirits heard the cry of this woman, and they listened."

"You will not find the bodies of your fathers and mothers and children, for once they drowned they turned into sea creatures, the Rai'agon, the sea horses, to enable them to travel to the Goora'rai'agon. It is that there you will conduct the proper ceremonies for the burial of those who have drowned." He said. "Now go, and leave me in peace. I ask for nothing in return for I have done nothing to merit a reward."

The four wise ones turned to go, but remembered Dun'doon and turned to her. But she was staring at the Kuratjee as he retrieved the Woo'rah and settled into his rock shelter. "I will stay." She said.

As the four much wiser ones walked slowly away, Dun'doon sat down outside the rock shelter and smiled. "Tell me, old man, of the grief that is chewing away your heart." She said.

The Kuratjee smiled through tears. "In time, Fire Woman, in time, but first let me teach you some of my magic."

Information about Seahorses and Sea Dragons:

Seahorses:

The Latin name for seahorse is Hippocampus which means "Horse Caterpillar"

Seahorses are fish. They live in water, breath through gills and have a swim bladder. However they do not have caudal fins and have a long snake-like tail. They also have a neck and a snout that points down.

Eyesight: Seahorses have excellent eyesight and their eyes are able to work independently on either side of their head. This means they can look forwards and backwards at the same time! This is particularly useful as they hunt for food by sight.

Snout: Seahorses have long thin snouts enabling them to probe into nooks and crannies for food. When they find food they suck it up through their snouts like a vacuum cleaner. Their snouts can expand if their prey is larger than the snout. They are not able to chew and have to disintegrate the food as they eat it.

Diet: Seahorses eat small crustacea such as Mysis Shrimp. An adult eats 30-50 times a day. Seahorse fry (baby seahorses) eat a staggering 3000 pieces of food per day.

Territory: Females have a territory of about 1.4 sq metres and males have a territory of about 0.5 sq metres. Their territories overlap.

Courtship: Seahorses pair for life. They meet first thing in the morning to reinforce their pair bonding with an elaborate courtship display. The female meets the male in his territory and as they approach each other, they change colour. The male circles around the female and the pair often spiral around an object. This display can last for up to an hour. Once over the female goes back to her territory.

Pregnancy: The male is the only creature where the male has a true reversed pregnancy. The female transfers her eggs to the male which he self fertilises in his pouch. The number of eggs can vary from 50-150 for smaller species to 1500 for larger species. They receive everything they need in the pouch from oxygen to food. Gestation time varies from 14 days to 4 weeks. Giving birth can be a long process with contractions lasting up to 12 hours.

Baby Seahorses: Baby seahorses are known as fry and when they are born they are totally on their own. They spend the first two to three weeks of their lives drifting along in the plankton layer of the ocean. Less than one in a thousand will survive long enough to become an adult due to predators.

Tail: Seahorses have a prehensile tail. This allows them to grip onto eel grass and other weeds and prevents them from being washed away by strong currents and waves.

Colour: Seahorses can change colour very quickly and match any surroundings in which it finds itself. They have even been known to turn bright red to match floating debris. Both males and females also change colour during their courtship display.

Body: Unlike most other fish, seahorses have an exo-skeleton. Their bodies are made up of hard, external, bony plates that are fused together with a fleshy covering. They do not have scales.

Movement: Seahorses are poor swimmers. They rely on their dorsal fin beating at 30-70 times per second to propel it along. Pectoral fins either side of the head help with stability and steering.

Appendages: Seahorses are able to grow fleshy appendages called cirri on their bodies. This gives them a weed like appearance and helps with camouflage.

Species: There are between 30 and 40 species of seahorses worldwide, and possibly as many sub-species. It is often difficult for scientists to identify seahorses because individuals of the same species can vary greatly in appearance. New species continue to be found.

Habitat: Seahorses live in shallow weedy areas especially eel grass beds. In winter they move into deeper waters to escape the rough weather.

Threats: Seahorses are under threat worldwide for three main reasons: The Traditional Chinese Medicine Trade takes in excess of up to 150 million seahorses a year from the wild and these are used for all types of medicine. The Curio Trade takes approximately one million seahorses from the wild. Along with shells and starfish; they are deliberately taken from the sea and left to die in the boiling sun. They are then sold as souvenirs, sad and sorrowful reminder of once beautiful creatures. The pet trade takes an estimated one million seahorses from the wild and It is thought that less than 1,000 survive more than six weeks, very often suffering a slow and possibly painful death.

• <http://www.theseahorsetrust.org/seahorse-facts.aspx>

Sea Dragons:

Common Name: Weedy Seadragon

Scientific Name: *Phyllopteryx taeniolatus*

Masters of mimicry, these extraordinary creatures have earned their reputation as the Marcel Marceau of the sea. Seadragons are decorated by seaweed like appendages that help them to blend in with their leafy environment.

As well as looking like seaweed, seadragons also move in a similar swaying motion as seaweed would if caught in a current. This nifty trick allows the Seadragon to sneak up on prey and also to appear virtually invisible to predators. This type of camouflage is called 'mimicry'.

The Weedy Seadragon complements its bizarre appearance with bright colouring, comprising of an orange-red background colour, bright blue stripes, and many white spots and yellow markings. Leafy Seadragons aren't quite as ostentatious with its fashion, with green to yellow-brown colouring and pale bands on its body.

Unlike their seahorse cousins, Seadragons do not have curly grasping tails but long straight tails.

Diet: The seadragons' long snouts are perfectly suited for sucking up plankton, larval fishes and small shrimp-like crustaceans, called mysids. Seadragons are not strong swimmers having only small fins on either side of their heads and a long shimmering dorsal fin to propel them through the water. So instead of chasing after their dinner they prefer to drift through the water camouflaged as a piece of seaweed until their prey swim by and then they quickly suck it out of the water.

Habitat: Both the Weedy and Leafy Seadragon exclusively call the south coast of Australia home. Leafy Seadragons can be found between Lancelin in Western Australia and Wilsons Promontory in Victoria while Weedy Seadragons are a little less fussy, being found all along the south coast as well as southern New South Wales and Tasmania. The people of Victoria feel so privileged to have such a remarkable creature living in their waters that they named the Weedy Seadragon their marine state emblem.

Seadragons like the safety and cover of shallow protected reefs, seaweed beds, seagrass meadows and structures colonised by seaweed such as pier pylons. They prefer shallow waters and are usually found frolicking at a depth of around 10 metres but have been known to venture as deep as 50 metres.

Breeding: Like all members of the Pipe Fish family, Seadragons reverse parenting roles. The female lays her eggs and the male looks after them, keeping them safely tucked away under his tail. They stay there for two months until they hatch. The clever Seadragons stagger the hatching process so that the baby seadragons don't have to compete for food. The juveniles then go through a pretty big growth spurt, attaining a size of around 70 millimetres in just three weeks!

You can tell a lot about Seadragons by their colouring. Their colour can change depending on age, diet, location, depth, or stress.

Size: Up to 45cm

Range: Southern Australian waters from Sydney south around to Western Australia

Threats: Habitat loss

Conservation Status: Near threatened

• <http://www.melbourneaquarium.com.au/explore/seahorse-pier/seadragons/>