

# D'harawal

DREAMING STORIES

## Wiritjiribin THE FIRST LYREBIRD



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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*



# Wiritjiribin

THE FIRST LYREBIRD

A very long time ago, there was a long drought, and the forest began to die and food became scarce.



The People had never before suffered dry times, or times of scarcity, and they did not know what to do. They only knew that now that had to travel long distances to obtain enough food and water to sustain themselves, and were becoming very thin.

The old people were becoming weak and unable to travel far, and the young children were becoming sick.

Old Wiritjiribin, with her silvery white hair, and her ever ready chuckle, persuaded The People to make their way to the Place of Sanctuary, and there to tell the Miwa Gawaian, the white flower of the Spirit Woman, of their troubles. The People followed her, for they were not sure of the way to the Place of the Beginning. Some of the younger members of the clan had never been there, and were looking forward to going to the place Wiritjiribin spoke of so often in her stories.

But some of the older members of the clan were not happy at having to walk along the rough paths to the place that they should have visited more often, but had not.

Nevertheless, they followed the rest of the clan, reluctant to stay behind, just in case the Spirit Woman noticed their absence







However, they still had some distance to go when they noticed dark clouds had begun to form in the sky. The People pointed joyfully at the clouds, and when a few drops of rain spattered down on their faces began to laugh and dance. But the rain was not even enough to dampen the dry soil, and little dust clouds rose from the ground as they walked.

Pretty soon the Sky Spirits began to fight and throw their spears of fire at each other.

Unfortunately, some of those spears fell to the ground, and the dry litter on the forest floor quickly caught alight.

Soon the fire was raging through the tall trees, and The People became trapped. One of the men spotted a cave, high in the side of the valley, but Wiritjiribin shook her head and pointed to the cool, green gully ahead.



Because the cave was closer and easier to get to, and The People were afraid, having never seen such a fire before, they panicked, and choking on the thick smoke, made their way to the cave, leaving the weakened children and old ones behind.

In the blinding smoke, Wiritjiribin had bidden the children and the old ones to link hands and she led them to the cool green gully where she placed each child and an old one in a pot hole full of water, but when she sought a pot hole for herself and her grandson Gawaian, there was only a small hollow beneath the bank of the creek left.

She placed her beloved grandson in the hollow, then disappeared into the smoke.

As the fire raged overhead, the children and the old ones obeyed Wiritjiribin's instructions and remained in the water filled pot-holes, holding each other in fear.

But they trusted Wiritjiribin completely, and did not move from the potholes.

When the fire had passed, The People came out of the cave, blinking in the light after the darkness of the cave. It was then that they realised that the children and the old ones were not with them. Despite the hot ground and the smoke from the smouldering fallen trees, they ran down to the green gully, which had not been touched by the fire, and there they found the children and the old ones, safe.





Except for Wiritjiribin.

Everybody ran up and down the green gully, calling her name. Then, from a clump of ferns, nearby, they heard her chuckle, and caught a glimpse of her white hair. Joyfully, they ran to the tall ferns, calling her name, and they heard her voice calling back to them. “Wiritjiribin! Wiritjiribin!”

But when they reached the clump of ferns, she was nowhere to be seen.

Suddenly, with a cry, her beloved grandson Gawaian pointed to a rock overhanging the ferns. There, looking down at them with a quizzical look was a strange creature.

Its skin was brown and black, like Wiritjiribin’s skin when the shadows of the leaves fell upon her. Its eyes twinkled as did Wiritjiribin’s eyes when she played a trick on the children.

And it chuckled, with Wiritjiribin’s voice.

Then, as they stared, the creature began to dance. And it danced the way that Wiritjiribin danced around the fire at night. Suddenly, as it danced, Wiritjiribin’s shimmering, silver hair spread over its body, and once again it began to chuckle and call Wiritjiribin’s name.

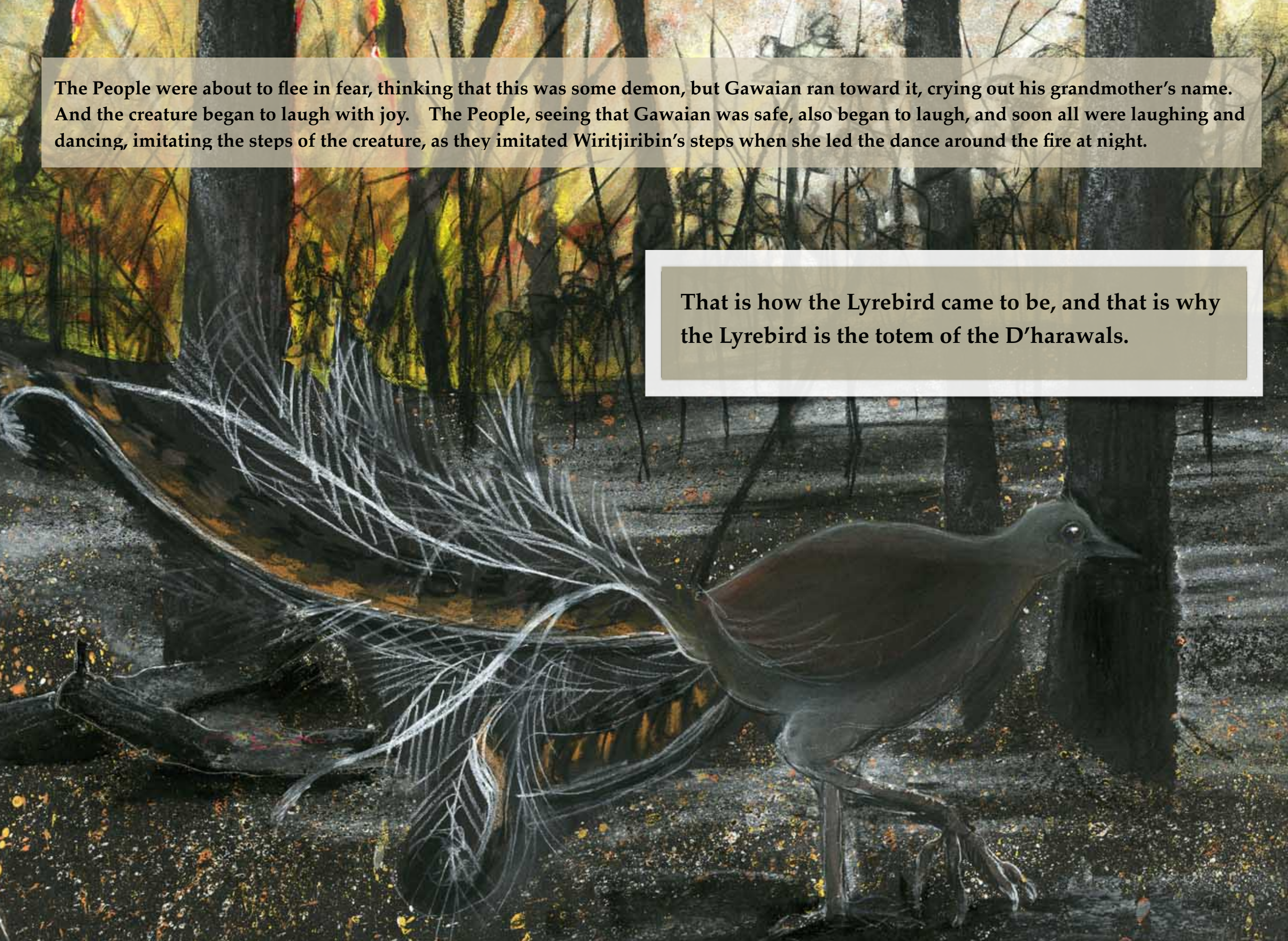
And around the shimmering white hair, was a necklace of gold and brown and black and white, just like the necklace of shells that Gawaian had made for her, and which she always wore.





The People were about to flee in fear, thinking that this was some demon, but Gawaian ran toward it, crying out his grandmother's name. And the creature began to laugh with joy. The People, seeing that Gawaian was safe, also began to laugh, and soon all were laughing and dancing, imitating the steps of the creature, as they imitated Wiritjiribin's steps when she led the dance around the fire at night.

That is how the Lyrebird came to be, and that is why the Lyrebird is the totem of the D'harawals.





# Wiritjiribin

## SUPERB LYREBIRD

*Menura novaehollandiae*

The Superb Lyrebird looks like a large brown pheasant with rufous wings and black bill, legs and feet. The adult male has an ornate tail which he fans out during a mating display. The tails of females and young males are long, but lack the spectacular plumage. Females are smaller than males.

One other lyrebird found in Australia is Albert's Lyrebird, *M. alberti*, which is restricted to an area around the Border Ranges, on the Queensland-New South Wales border. This bird is redder in colour and the male's tail is less elaborate.

The Superb Lyrebird is found in the south-eastern Australian mainland and southern Tasmania.

It is a ground-dwelling species in moist forests, feeding on insects, spiders, worms and, occasionally, seeds. It finds food by scratching with its feet through the leaf-litter. Birds tend to forage alone, but females and young males may be seen feeding together.

They roost in trees at night and rarely move away from a home-range of about 10 km in diameter. The male secures a territory, attracting potential mates by singing and dancing on one of several mounds within it, while throwing the tail forward over the body and shaking it in display. He will mate with several females but the female alone builds the nest, incubates the eggs and cares for the young.

The Superb Lyrebird's song consists of expert mimicry - both natural and mechanical sounds imitated and joined together in a rousing medley. Sounds can include anything heard in the bird's immediate surroundings, such as chainsaws, car engines, dog barks and local native birds as well as other calls: a loud alarm shriek and a series of whistles and cackling notes that are used as territorial calls.

<http://www.birdsinbackyards.net>