

EXPLORING WAYS OF KNOWING,
PROTECTING & ACKNOWLEDGING

ABORIGINAL TOTEMS

ACROSS THE EUROBODALLA SHIRE
FAR SOUTH COAST, NSW



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Prepared for
The Eurobodalla Shire Council Aboriginal Advisory Committee

FINAL REPORT 2012

THIS PROJECT WAS JOINTLY FUNDED BY



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DISCLAIMER

Information contained in this report was understood by the authors to be correct at the time of writing. The authors apologise for any omissions or errors.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The Eurobodalla koori totems project was made possible with funding from the NSW Heritage Office. The Eurobodalla Aboriginal Advisory Committee has guided this project with the assistance of Eurobodalla Shire Council staff - Vikki Parsley, Steve Picton, Steve Halicki, Lane Tucker, Shannon Burt and Eurobodalla Shire Councillors Chris Kowal and Graham Scobie.

A special thankyou to Mike Crowley for his wonderful images of the Black Duck [including front cover], to Preston Cope and his team for providing advice on land tenure issues and to Paula Pollock for her work describing the black duck from a scientific perspective and advising on relevant legislation.

This project would not have been possible without the focus and dedication of the Aboriginal community, especially the project participants Georgina Parsons, Gloria Carberry, Arthur Andy, Tom Butler, Trisha Ellis, Leonard Nye, Randall Mumbler, Lynne Thomas, Warren Foster and Pam Flanders. Sadly we acknowledge the loss of Pam Flanders and Leonard Nye. We dedicate this report to Aunty Pam and Lenny; may their families enjoy the benefits of their input into this investigation.

It is acknowledged that although totem species and associated cultural values disregard Local Government boundaries, the scope of this project is based on the Eurobodalla Shire given it is the Eurobodalla Shire Council who are supporting the community in this project. It is also acknowledged that a great deal of cultural information about totems is restricted and that only the unrestricted information is contained within this report.

WARNING CONTAINS CULTURAL MATERIAL AND REFERENCE TO DECEASED ABORIGINAL PEOPLE

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The term 'totem' is used to describe the complex inter-relationship between people and the natural world, the two providing mutual benefits to each other through a spiritual, yet tangible inter-dependency. The cultural practise exists across Australia [see Elkin 1938], including in parts of New South Wales [see Rose, James and Watson 2003]. In this region, having a totem has been likened to having a friend. The Dhurga term for friend is 'moodji' and one's personal totem is known as one's 'moodjingarl'. Over the past century totemic affiliations across the NSW South East region have been identified by a number of researchers including Howitt in 1904, Rose, James and Watson in 2003 and Donaldson in 2006.

During the Eurobodalla Shire Aboriginal Heritage Study [2005 – 2008] members of the local Aboriginal community expressed a desire to increase public awareness about the cultural significance of certain species, in particular those relating to totems already familiar to the general public, for instance, the Black Swan's affiliation to the Moruya area and the Black Duck's affiliation to the region, in particular to Wallaga Lake. Do people really know why certain species have been singled out and what they symbolise? What other species are culturally important to koori people? There was also a desire to identify places connected to totem species that people were worried about in relation to environmental condition and plans for the future.

This project aims to answer some of these questions by collating information gathered about totems across the region over the past century, and through oral history and the community participating in fieldwork, to determine the extent to which the koori community value this cultural practise today, how the broader community can appreciate these cultural links and what aspirations exist amongst the koori community concerning the future protection and acknowledgement of any culturally relevant species and their habitat?

Much of the previously recorded information concerning totems across the region was validated, in particular the different types of totems; personal, family, tribal and totems received only when a certain level of ritual status has been attained. Each of these types of totems provides koori people with different obligations and connections, not only to the particular species, but also to their human kin and to elements of the natural world sustaining the species. Ways the broader community can gain an appreciation of these cultural links was also determined. The need to acknowledge the cultural practise through interpretive signage, booklets and short film clips was identified. The role that education plays in improving understandings between cultural groups was highlighted by most participants, as was the need to ensure breeding grounds were protected. Other community aspirations regarding totems revolve around the transmission of cultural knowledge within the Koori community, particularly through participating in family gatherings and camps at culturally relevant locations.

PART ONE: INTRODUCTION Eurobodalla totems project

The cultural context

From around 20,000 years ago within the Eurobodalla region¹, Aboriginal people were hunters, gatherers and fishers who sustainably managed the environment with fire and exploited the natural resources through cosmologically determined laws and customs passed on orally through the generations. Once the sea level rose and stabilised at its current level around 5,000 years ago, the marine environment became more important in Aboriginal culture. The traditional lifestyle created a rich archaeological heritage in the form of extensive shell middens, stone artefact scatters and many other site types. These are valued today as a repository of information about lifestyles that are no longer practised and for Aboriginal people they are tangible evidence of the activities of their ancestors².

Within the broader geographical area Aboriginal people of the south coast traveled throughout the coastal zone and west into the Monaro tablelands for a variety of reasons such as resource sharing (e.g. whale meat, fish flushes, bogong moths) and ceremonial purposes, including initiation and warfare. Patterns of movement along the coast and between the coast and the Monaro tablelands existed long before European arrival in the area³.

Underlying the Eurobodalla Shire an Aboriginal land tenure system has existed for many thousands of years⁴. Aboriginal people's links to the region, in the past as well as in the present, can be described according to a number of social groupings including tribal, sub-tribal, clan and linguistic. The *Yuin* [Djuwin] tribal area as recorded by Howitt in 1904 extends from the Shoalhaven River in the north to Cape Howe in the south and west into the Great Dividing Range. *Yuin* tribal subgroups with traditional links to the Eurobodalla include the *Walbanga* and *Djiringanj*⁵. Howitt recorded another division within the *Yuin* tribal area; the *Guyangal* [guya = south] and *Kurial* [kuru = north] coastal subtribes, together known as *Katungal* [Katung = sea]⁶. Additionally, Howitt recorded a number of clan divisions within the *Guyangal* sub tribal grouping.

Other Aboriginal clan group and / or place names recorded in the Eurobodalla in the early settlement period include *Currowan*, *Mooramorrang* [Murramarang], *Turras* [Durras], *Browley* [Broulee], *Canga* [Congo], *Kiyora* [Kiora], *Gundaree* [Gunday], *Duga* [Dooga], *Mullandurree* [Mullenderre], *Moorooya* [Moruya], *Terosse* [Tuross], *Bowdally* [Bodalla], *Wondeller* [Wandella], *Wokoonga* [Wagonga], *Noorama* [Narooma] and *Wallurga* [Wallaga]⁷. On a linguistic level, the Eurobodalla Shire is associated primarily with the *Dhurga* [Thoorga / Durga] language, with the *Djirringanj* language region extending into the study area in the south and the *Thurumba Mudthung* language region extending into the study area in the north⁸.

¹ See Mulvaney and Kamminga 1999.

² See Donaldson 2007

³ Goulding 2005: 23

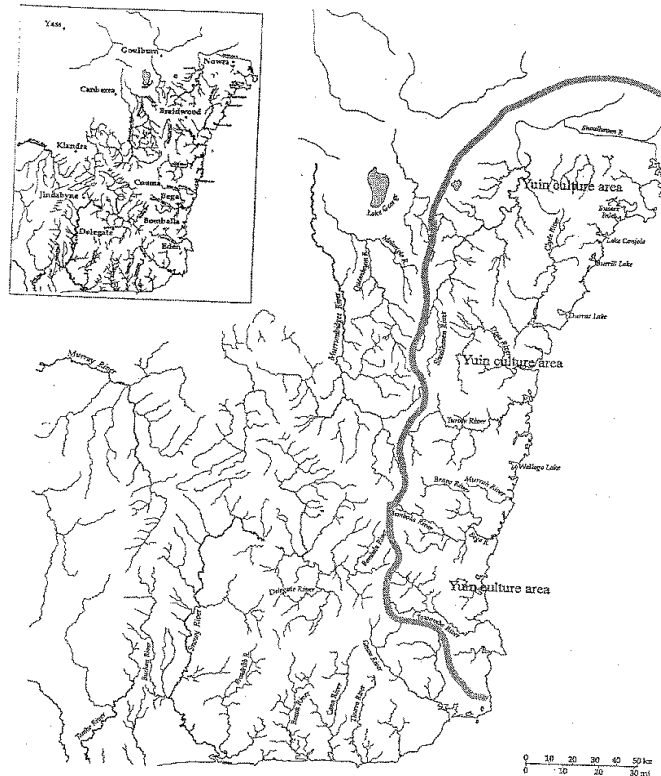
⁴ See Robinson 1844, Mathews 1902, Morris 1832, Oldrey 1842.

⁵ See Howitt 1904 [1996]; Egloff, Peterson and Wesson [2005].

⁶ Howitt 1904 [1996] 82.

⁷ S Wesson 2000: 131 – 147.

⁸ Egloff, Peterson and Wesson [2005]: 17, 20.



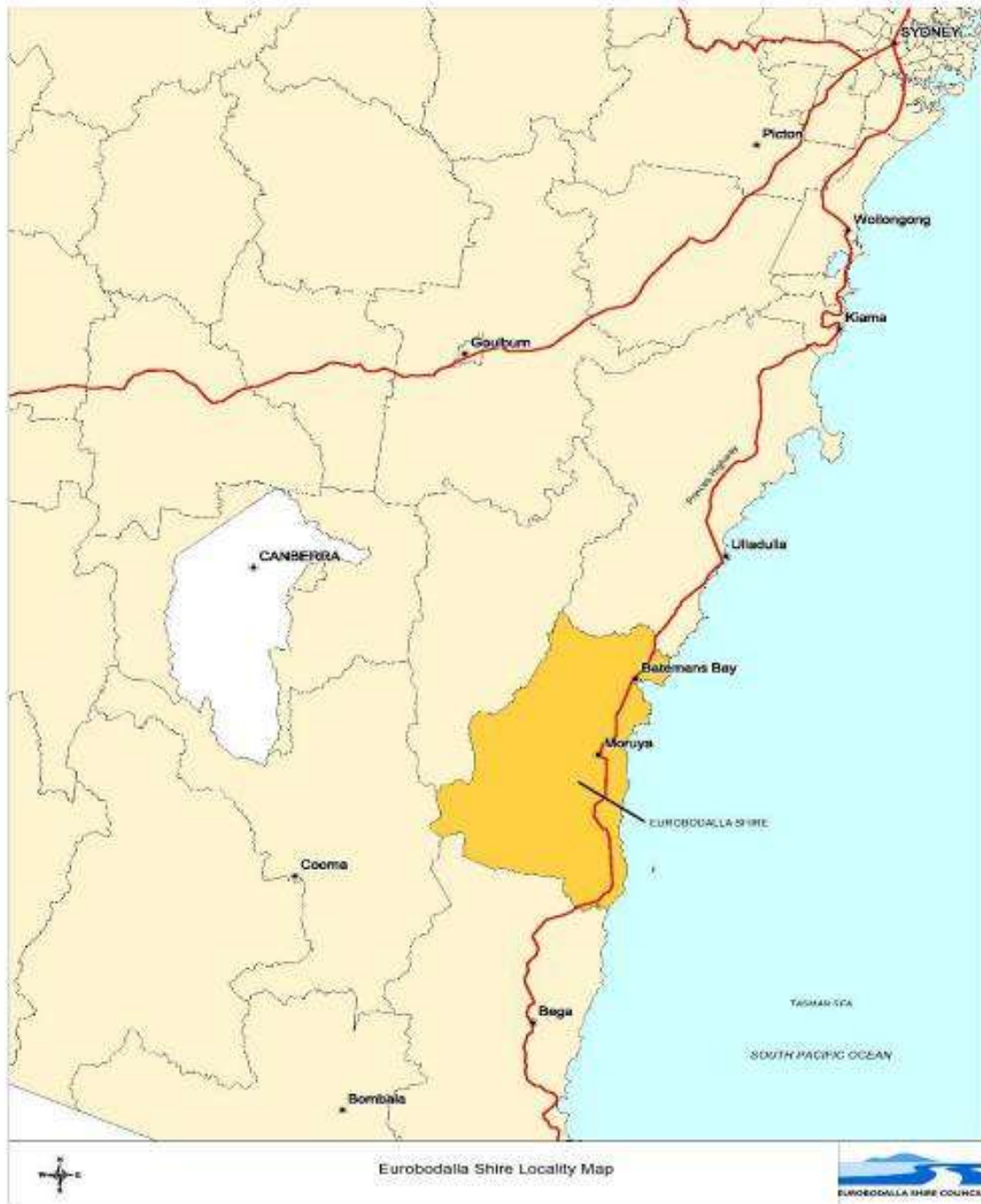
MAP ONE: Yuin cultural area as defined by river drainage lines between Towamba and Shoalhaven River systems [Wesson 2000].

Colonial history led to the demise of traditional Aboriginal life on the south coast through conflict, dispossession and the removal of children from their families. Aboriginal people and their cultural practises did survive colonisation and by the early 20th Century many Aboriginal people on the south coast were working for wages in local industries such as bean picking, saw milling and domestic duties. Often it is the memories of this era and the places associated with these times that remain in people's recollections and were identified during the Eurobodalla Aboriginal Heritage Study.

Today, Aboriginal people's cultural identity is defined by being part of modern Australian society as well as by maintaining links to the past. Alongside the archaeological evidence of past use and occupation, strong links to mythological story places are highly valued as are links to tangible historical camping places, work places and places where natural resources continue to be collected. The concept of totemism is interlinked with the traditional cosmological belief system and sustainable use of the natural environment and continues to be an integral component of Aboriginal people's cultural identity.

The study area

The Eurobodalla Local Government Area (LGA) encompasses the coastal strip between Durras and Wallaga Lake, westwards to the Clyde Mountain in the north and to Dampier Mountain and Belowra in the south [see Map one]. Whilst the Eurobodalla Shire covers 3,429sq km, the Eurobodalla Shire Council only has jurisdiction over about 25% of the total area; the other 75% is within conservation reserves, State Forest or other Crown land.



MAP TWO: Eurobodalla Local Government Area

At the time of the 2011 Census the Aboriginal population of the Eurobodalla Shire was 4.6% of the total population. This is considerably higher than the National average of 2.5% and probably reflects high population densities in pre-contact times, the historical existence of major missions and reserves such as the one at Wallaga Lake and the availability of manual work across the region, such as that associated with seasonal farming, fishing and saw milling.

The NSW Aboriginal Land Rights Act 1983 recognises that the State of NSW was traditionally owned and occupied by Aboriginal people and that land is an integral aspect of Aboriginal culture. It enables Local Aboriginal Land Councils to make land claims over vacant Crown land, not required for any public purpose. Currently 1123 hectares of land in the Shire is owned by local and/or regional Aboriginal Land Councils [Barry and Donaldson 2008: 20].

Under the NSW Aboriginal Land Rights Act 1983 there are currently six Local Aboriginal Land Councils [LALC] across the Eurobodalla Shire representing land interests of Aboriginal residents [which includes people with traditional as well as historical links to the area]. From north to south the LALCs are Batemans Bay, Mogo, Cobowra [Moruya], Bodalla, Wagonga [Narooma] and Merrimans [Wallaga Lake].

The project

Over the past century totemic affiliations across the NSW South East Coast region have been identified by a number of researchers including Howitt in 1904, Rose, James and Watson in 2003 and Donaldson in 2006. The term 'totem' is used to describe the complex inter-relationship between people and the natural world, the two providing mutual benefits to each other through a spiritual, yet tangible inter-dependency. Although the term 'totem' is not widely used by Yuin people, the cultural practise exists across Australia [see Elkin 1938], including in parts of New South Wales [see Rose, James and Watson 2003]. The Eurobodalla on the south coast of NSW is no exception.

During the Eurobodalla Shire Aboriginal Heritage Study [2005 – 2008] members of the koori community expressed a desire to explain to the public the cultural relevance of the totem species, particularly those that have been adopted into the realm of the general public, for instance, the Black Swan's affiliation to the Moruya area and the Black Duck's affiliation to the region, in particular to Wallaga Lake. Although these species have become familiar to local people, do people really know why certain species have been singled out and what they symbolise? What other species are culturally important to koori people? There was also a desire to identify places connected to totem species that people were worried about in relation to environmental condition and plans for the future.

The Eurobodalla Shire Council gained funding to support these community aspirations. In order to answer these questions, historically generated information about totems was collated, and through oral history and fieldwork, the extent to which the koori community continue to value this cultural practise was investigated. Community aspirations concerning the future protection and acknowledgement of culturally relevant species and their habitat was also identified. The current project thus aims to further our awareness of Aboriginal people's experiences with personal totems, family totems, tribal totems and to a limited extent ceremonial totems, as a way to improve the way totem species are regarded in day to day life and during the planning of development. In the process, it is acknowledged that a great deal of cultural information about totems is restricted and that only the unrestricted information is contained within this report.

Relevant legislation

In regard to general protection of waterways and wetlands the following planning controls apply:

Water Management Act 2000

Controls the extraction of water, how water can be used, the construction of works such as dams and weirs, and the carrying out of activities on or near water sources in NSW. The Act requires approvals to be obtained for the taking and use of water, and for the construction and use of works (such as pumps, drains and pipes) relating to water use.

Eurobodalla Local Environmental Plan 2012

An environmental conservation (E2) zoning has been applied to the Eurobodalla's wetlands, limiting activities and developments that can occur in these sensitive areas. Wetlands, coastal lakes and waterways are mapped on an environmental overlay within the Plan and present a range of considerations that landholders or developers must address in preparing development applications. These maps and associated clauses also, specify limited impact buffers along watercourses. Local Environmental Plans are made, and developments that have the potential to impact on local values and the natural environment, are assessed under the *Environment Planning and Assessment Act 1979*.

State Environment Planning Policy no. 14 Coastal Wetlands

State Environmental Planning Policy No14 - Coastal Wetlands was introduced in 1985 to protect coastal wetlands in the environmental and economic interested of the State. SEPP 14 places planning and development controls under the *Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979* over the mapped wetlands. The Policy required the preparation of an environmental impact statement, the consent of local council and the concurrence of the Director of Planning for development in affected wetlands. Development Applications are refused when the proposal involves the irrevocable destruction of large areas of wetland. In cases where development proceeds, concurrence is generally granted subject to a number of conditions specific to the site. Proposals are more likely to succeed if they include offsetting damage to wetlands by restoration or other mitigation measures. In this way this act has attempted to ensure that developments in wetlands have little impact on wetland values.

Threatened Species Conservation Act 1995

Freshwater wetlands, salt marsh, swamp oak and swamp sclerophyll and river flat eucalypt forests are all listed as endangered ecological communities under this Act and require special consideration. Key threatening processes that adversely affect the survival or evolutionary development of species, populations or ecological communities or that have the potential to cause those that are not currently threatened to become threatened are also listed. These might be things such as alteration to the natural flow regimes of rivers and streams and their floodplains and wetlands, clearing of native vegetation, high frequency fire resulting in the disruption of life cycle processes in plants and animals and loss of vegetation structure and composition, loss of hollow-bearing trees, and the removal of dead wood and dead trees. A number of species mentioned in

this report are listed as threatened or endangered, including the White Breasted Sea Eagle.

In regard to general protection of flora and fauna the following acts apply:

National Parks and Wildlife Act 1979

All native animals (fauna: mammals, birds, reptiles and amphibians) and many species of native plants (flora) are protected in NSW under the *National Parks and Wildlife Act 1979* and the *National Parks and Wildlife Regulation 2009*. There are criminal penalties for harming protected animals without a licence. Once a particular plant or animal is listed as a threatened species (vulnerable, endangered, etc) then their protection is covered under the provisions of the *Threatened Species Conservation Act 1995*.

Environment and Protection Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999

Commonwealth laws also control the harm and use of native species, and the *Environment and Protection Biodiversity Conservation Act* is the primary piece of legislation by which this is achieved. Some locally occurring species are considered threatened at a national level and these may include vulnerable communities, migratory or marine species and their habitats.

Native Vegetation Act 2003

Clearing of native vegetation and/or protected regrowth will only be approved if, overall, management actions improve or maintain environmental outcomes – protecting our land, rivers and wildlife. There are however, a series of routine agricultural management activities that do not require clearing assessment if carried out to the minimum extent required – these might include clearing along fence lines, personal firewood collection or harvesting timber for fence posts or on-farm structures.

These pieces of legislation set out the way in which impacts of a proposed development or activity should be assessed and encourages impacts to be avoided or mitigated, and, where impacts cannot be minimised or offset. Under these laws, many forms of development are still possible and can be carried out sometimes without requiring approval. It is recognised that many minor impacts culminate across catchments reducing biodiversity and effecting the land and water.

Methodology

The consultant was guided by concerns raised by members of the Aboriginal community about the general lack of respect for species of cultural value and the places where they predominantly reside, in particular species associated with the cultural practise of totemism. Given the cultural practise is of a spiritual, intangible nature, with links to the physical world, the approach to research was directed by the aspirations held by members of the Aboriginal community as the holders of the relevant cultural knowledge.

The approach was also guided by ideas and concerns raised by the Eurobodalla Aboriginal Advisory Committee. Their concerns included the need to respect the fact that a great deal of information associated with totems is culturally restricted and that informants are to retain copyright over the information they share with the project. Considering all of the above, it was decided to focus the project on one of the more public totems, Umbarra, the Pacific Black Duck, the totem for the Yuin tribal area. A project specific information agreement was developed by the consultant to ensure Aboriginal informants retain copyright over their cultural knowledge [see appendix one] and a biological description of the Pacific Black Duck was provided by Council [see appendix 2].

Background research was undertaken for this project in May 2011. Council's environmental planning team produced a map showing the areas where the Pacific Black Duck resides, ie most water ways. A community discussion paper and map were distributed across the region and discussed at numerous Eurobodalla Aboriginal Advisory Committee meetings. Sadly, some of the elders who initiated the project passed away before the project got started so initial community participation levels were low.

As time passed, a number of people expressed an interest in the project and a fieldwork schedule was developed. Early June 2012, interested Aboriginal knowledge holders participated in fieldwork and oral history recording associated with culturally unrestricted knowledge they hold. Georgina Parsons, Gloria Carberry, Arthur Andy, Tom Butler, Trisha Ellis, Leonard Nye, Randall Mumbler, Warren Foster and Pam Flanders all participated and guided the outcomes presented in this report. Fieldwork and or oral history recording covered the coastal stripe of the shire and took place over a five-day period.

Oral history interviews revolved around the following questions:

- Do you have a totem? Why are they important to you / your family?
- Are there any particular places across the Eurobodalla Shire that are culturally significant to you / your family / your tribal group in relation to totem species and their habitat [nesting sites / feeding places etc]?
- Do you go to a certain place to 'visit' or be with your totem? Are there places you would like to go but can not access these days?
- Are you worried about your totem in any way? Are there any places you are worried about in relation to the health / well being of your totem?

A draft report was prepared and presented to the community at a Eurobodalla Aboriginal Advisory Committee meeting in late June 2012. A comment period was determined and a final report considering submissions comments was prepared in August 2012.

PART TWO: BACKGROUND RESEARCH what anthropologists recorded in the past

A number of well-known anthropologists have investigated the cultural practise of totemism across the globe, including Lévi-Strauss, Radcliffe-Brown, Malinowski and Durkheim. Only a few researchers looked into totemism across eastern Australia, as summarised below.

Howitt 1904

Whilst Howitt records Mumbulla Mountain as a location to undertake initiation ceremonies, he documented Gulaga as an initiation site as well as a mythological creation site.

Long ago Daramulan lived on the earth with his mother Ngalalba. Originally the earth was bare and 'like the sky, as hard as a stone', and the land extended far out where the sea is now. There were no men or women, but only animals, birds and reptiles. He placed trees on the earth. After Kaboka, the thrush, had caused a great flood on the earth, which covered all of the east coast country, there were no people left, except some who crawled out of the water onto Mount Dromedary..... 'then Daramulan went up to the sky, where he lives and watches the actions of men. It was he who first made the Kuringal and the bull-roarer, the sound of which represents his voice. He told the Yuin what to do, and he gave them the laws which the old people have handed down from father to son to this time.....'. Howitt 1904:495

Howitt also documented traditional beliefs across the southeast region associated with totems, a topic later taken up by Rose et al 2003 [see below]. Relevant totemic species recorded by Howitt include the kangaroo, bush rat, eagle hawk, lace lizard, brown snake, black duck, echidna, bream (Burimi), waterhen (Ngariba), white-breasted cormorant (Berimbarmin), the pelican (Gurung-aba) and bandicoot [Howitt 1904:133, 262].

Mathews 1904

We are fortunate to have a number of detailed descriptions about Aboriginal cultural life in the early 1900s on the south coast, as documented by ethnologist Mathews. Although not specifically relating to totems, it highlights the intimate relationship Aboriginal people along the south coast have with the marine environment.

' ... when the natives observe a whale, murirra, near the coast, pursued by killers, manana, one of the old men goes and lights fires at some little distance apart along the shore, to attract the attention of the killer. He then walks along from one fire to another, pretending to be lame and helpless, leaning upon a stick in each hand. This is supposed to excite the compassion of the killers and induce them to chase the whale towards that part of the shore in order to give the poor old man some food. He occasionally calls out in a loud voice, "gaai gaai dyundya waggaranga yerrimaran – hurdyen", meaning "heigh – ho, that fish upon the shore throw ye to me" ... if the whale becomes helpless from the attack of the killers and is washed up on the shore by the waves, some other men, who have been hiding behind the scrub or rocks, make their appearance and run down and

attack the animal with their weapons. A messenger is also despatched to all their friends and fellow tribesmen in the neighbourhood, inviting them to come and participate in the feast. The natives cut through the blubber and eat the animal's flesh. After the intestines have been removed, any persons suffering from rheumatism or similar pains, go and sit within the whale's body and anoint themselves with the fat, believing that they get relief by doing so ... the killer eat only the tongue and lips of the whale.' (Mathews 1904:50–51).

Creamer 1984

National Park and Wildlife Service anthropologist Howard Creamer worked with a team of researchers to survey Aboriginal sacred and significant sites across NSW between 1973 and 1983. The research team identified 471 sites across NSW, 60% of which were associated with religious significance and 40% related to economic and technological pursuits [Creamer 1984: 6.5]. Creamer described the distinction between the two categories in the following way:

'The traditional world of Aboriginal people is characterised by a division into two inter-dependant domains – spiritual and economic. Spiritual for the beliefs and practises of Aboriginal religion, so closely bound to the land; economic for the subsistence strategies and technology of a hunter –gatherer people living from the land. This duality is reflected in the sacred and significant sites, which form the cultural landscape of Aborigines that has survived since first contact with Europeans. ...Many Aboriginal sites are the product of religious beliefs, others owe their existence to the everyday world of survival....shell middens, hearths, scarred trees.....Aboriginal religion in south east Australia, with its emphasis on the holistic unity of humans, animals and plants, and the land as expressed in the concepts of totemism, provides one such framework for beliefs covering the creation of the world, the passage of individuals through life and the mystery of death. Each of these universal themeshas for Aborigines a corresponding set of sites. Sites which because they are the product of a religious belief system, can truly be called 'sacred'.1984: 2.1

Within these overarching domains, the team sorted the sites into the following categories:

- Traditional [pre contact],
- Historical [post contact] and
- Contemporary [very recent].

Within these categories the following subcategories were also designated:

- Secret [knowledge of site restricted to a specific group within Aboriginal society e.g. initiated men or women],
- Sacred [associated with religious mythological beliefs eg Dreamtime creator and practises e.g. initiation ceremonies] and
- Significant [every days places of economic or historical importance eg missions, camping places, resource collection sites].

These typologies are useful in helping us to understand Aboriginal connections with the cultural landscape, today and in the past, across the Eurobodalla Shire and beyond. Creamer identified totemism is an aspect of Aboriginal religious belief, embodying the holistic view of humans and nature, the structural basis for the marriage system and the spiritual renewal of life sustaining

resources [Creamer 1983: 2.13]. Percy Mumbler and Jack Campbell confirmed their belief in the ownership of personal totems, which it was not possible to eat the same of or marry into.

Merrimans Island Aboriginal Place reporting 1975

In 1975 Merriman Island in the middle of Wallaga Lake was the first Aboriginal Place to be gazetted in NSW. Merriman Island is shaped like *Umbarra* the black duck, which is the totem of the Yuin people of the south coast of NSW. It is highly valued for its link to the origin of the Black Duck Totem. It is also associated with a story about King Merriman, a Yuin Elder who died in 1904. He lived on Merriman Island, while his people lived on the shores of the lake. Merriman was believed to have the ability to communicate with black ducks, his personal totem which forewarned him of forthcoming dangers, by flapping its wings, diving down into the water and splashing. Many legends now exist about Merriman and the Black Duck, for instance:

One day it told him of a group of warriors coming from the far south to do battle. King Merriman remained on the island while the other men took the women and children to a place of safety and then hid in the reeds. The first to sight the approaching warriors, the King warned his men who fought a fierce battle but lost. The opposing tribesmen then set out for the island.

King Merriman threw powerful spears, and a boomerang which severed the arms and heads of his opponents before returning to him, but it was not enough. He then turned himself into a whirlwind and flew off. He passed over the fierce Kiola tribe and their wise men correctly divined his presence and that it meant the defeat of the Wallaga people and the advance of another tribe. King Merriman journeyed on to the Shoalhaven tribe to warn them but the Kiola tribe defeated the invaders and the King, whose power was finished, stayed for a time at the Shoalhaven then travelled away.

For more information see Kelly R 1975 'Investigations of Aboriginal Sites in the Wallaga Lakes Area of NSW'. Report to NPWS.

Rose, James and Watson 2003

Rose, James and Watson found that totems can stand for or represent an aspect of the natural world as well as provide kinship links between the people or group whom identify with a particular totem, as well as kinship links to the natural world [Rose et al 2003: 3]. Accordingly, totem species become part of an Aboriginal person's extended family. When investigating Yuin people's kinship links with the natural world, anthropologists Rose, James and Watson [2003: 39-40] found that at Wallaga Lake:

"..... totemism is a dynamic system set within a broader context of respect and care. The two sacred mountains are central to this broader context; they are sites of origin, of connection, and of teaching. Here, mutual caring between human and non – human kin, and between land and living things is a dynamic reality..."

Rose et al identified three primary aspects to cultural forms of mutual caring [2003:40 – 50]. Firstly, totemic connections are expressed as a general worldview or cosmological framework in which 'Dreamtime' ancestral creator beings made totems. Secondly, the connections between humans, plants, animals, birds and fish are evident at a variety of personal and social grouping

levels including family, tribal and ceremonial. Thirdly, the relationship developed between a person or group and a totemic species allows for mutual protection and assistance through ongoing environmental interactions.

Rose et al identified that totems are passed through the generations by both men and women [2003: 40] and that there are a number of different forms or categories of totems including personal totems, gender totems, family or clan totems, tribal totems and totems relating to the specialised powers of 'clever people'. Some totems span each of these categories, for instance the Pacific Black Duck, *Umbarra*.

Umbarra was the late King Merriman's personal totem and as well as a tribal totem for all Yuin people. It has also become a symbol of the Wallaga Lake community and its resistance against further land loss. From this perspective we can see how the Black Duck has become an important element in the formation of an identity for contemporary Yuin people, who as a result of restrictive protectionist and assimilation policies of the past, may not have been informed of their personal or family totem¹⁰.

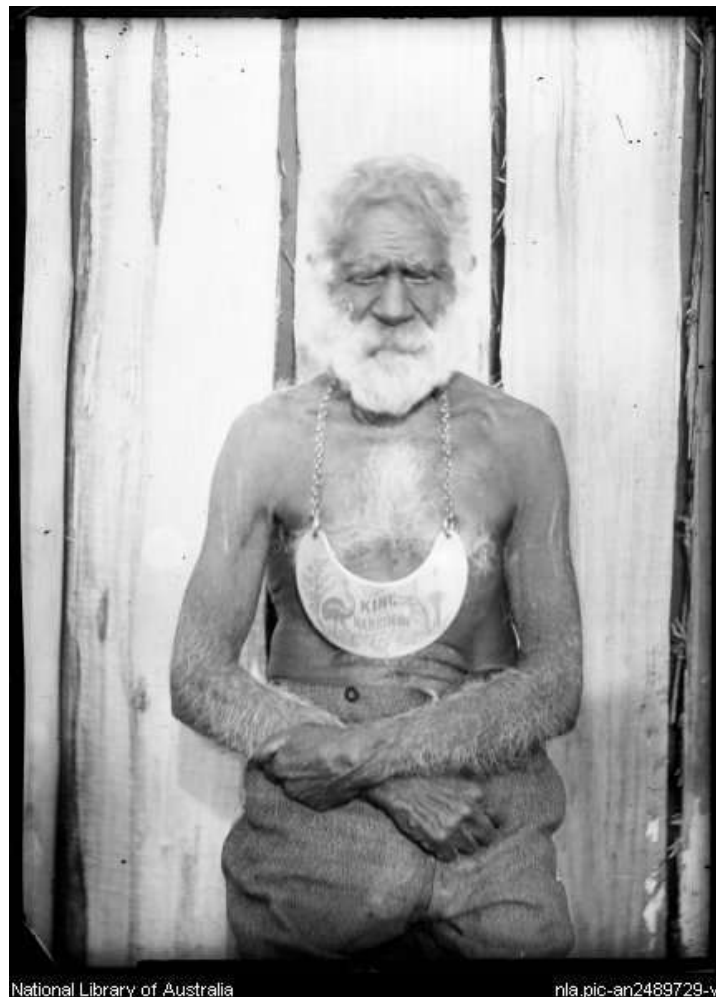


IMAGE ONE: 'King Merriman wearing his badge of office' c 1900 Corkhill Collection. ¹¹

⁹ Rose, James and Watson 2003: 3

¹⁰ Rose et al 2003: 43.

¹¹ nla.pic-an2489729/ PIC TT541 Corkhill, William Henry, 1846-1936. ca. 1900/ Part of [William Henry Corkhill Tilba Tilba photograph collection \[picture\]](https://nla.gov.au/nla.pic-an2489729) ca. 1890-1920

PART THREE: ABORIGINAL PERSPECTIVES the cultural significance of totems today.

This section is based on Aboriginal oral histories collected as part of this project, as well as during the Eurobodalla Aboriginal Heritage Study [Donaldson 2006]. The Australian Institute for Aboriginal and Islander Studies [AIATSIS] has compiled oral histories recorded over the years with elders from the NSW south coast. The collection is called 'South Coast Voices' and given it has been made available for research purposes, relevant excerpts have also been summarised below.

What is a totem?

Custodianship of the land and waterways is a position inherited by Yuin people from their ancestors. Custodial obligations have been refined over thousands of years and originate in the spiritual connections between Aboriginal people and the land, as exemplified by the Dreamtime. To many Aboriginal people, the entire landscape is imbued with a spirituality, which is intertwined with them as custodians of the land and water for which they have ongoing responsibilities.

Yuin custodianship can also be understood as the culturally engrained care and concern for the natural world. Custodial rights are expressed in a number of ways including through song, dance, painting, carving, story telling and totemic affiliations. Today, specific totemic connections between people and particular species continue to form part of local Aboriginal identity and provide a means for people to care for country, including the waters. Important cultural protocols revolve around one's responsibility to take care of totems. Koori knowledge holders often speak of protecting their totemic species by not eating or killing it, and taking care of the habitat that sustains it.

Totems continue to be valued by the Koori community today. Koori Having a personal totem has been likened to having a friend. The Dhurga term for friend is 'moodji' and one's totem is known as one's 'moojingarl'. The reciprocity between a person and his or her totem is a life long commitment; a moojingarl will frequently appear at unexpected times to indicate all is well, remind one when they are doing a good job, or warn of oncoming dangers. Warren Foster and others take notice of irregular behaviour of the Black Duck – a warning that trouble is coming [per comm. WF 2.11.2010]. On the other hand, one must protect the species and ensure a sustained future. Vivienne Mason will not eat duck, of any form, out of respect for her tribal totem [per comm. VM 1.6.2010]. This is a common practise, as described by Georgina Parsons:

' ... The Gonyung like little islands to lay their eggs on – they have a nest on a mound. Gonyung are very important, they are eatable, a food source, they are also good weather birds. Watch them in rough weather – they look for water inland. They were my son's totem, so he couldn't eat them, but we could. I gave that totem to him 'cause wherever he went there were lots of black swans. My totem is the sea eagle. These days the young people want their own totem. They don't have to come after their mother and father all the time; it just depends on who they are. My daughter is the black magpie. My great grannies might take the sea eagle as a totem, we'll see ... ' (Georgina Parsons, pers. comm. 9.2.2011).

The cyclical nature of Aboriginal spirituality and cultural practises, today as in the past, is evident in local belief systems, as described by Warren Foster:

'.....If our uncle or aunty actually had a dolphin or a whale as their totem, then we think of that person when we see that animal, they pop up out of the water to say 'hi'. See they are going back home when they pass away, they go back to that animal, their spirit goes back to their totem, it is like a family circle, it all comes back around. That is how we were taught that anyway and we need to keep our totems so that our kids and their generation can say the same thing as what we are saying. As I said it is like a circle. If people forget about their totem, the results speak for themselves, you see a lot of people who have got that they feel lost; they haven't got that connection to land and everything, their spirit is unfulfilled, something is missing....'.

Totems act to connect people to places, as described by Lynne Thomas:

'.....When we belong to a spiritual animal it connects us to that animal and to a place. It is embedded in our genealogy. We belong to each other.'

Totemic connections are expressed as a general worldview or cosmological framework in which 'Dreamtime' ancestral creator beings made totems [Rose et al]. A distinction is being made in this report between totem species which offer defined inter relationships between a species and individual people / groups and other species that feature in Dreamtime mythologies. The later is not usually classified as ones totem, although it remains culturally significant as a result of the associated mythological story and do not play the same role in people's lives as one's totem. Although totems and the associated laws are said to have originated in the Dreamtime era, only some totems have a Dreamtime story known today.

Warren Foster describes the origins of the Umbarra [Pacific Black Duck], its association with Merrimans Island within Wallaga Lake and its value as a broad tribal totem:

'.....that Island has black duck Dreaming, that is where they come from, in the creation. That is part of our story and totem. It is the home of the black duck, this is where he lives and comes from, he starts here and everyone, all Yuin all the people who identify as Yuin have the black duck as their totem. Gulaga where it all started for Yuin people, from Gulaga you can see that Merriman's Island is the shape of a duck. The man Merriman lived there and Umbarra was his totem, but the story didn't start with him, it started in the Dream time....' Warren Foster.

A Dreamtime story relating to the origins of totems was also documented during the Eurobodalla Aboriginal Heritage Study:

'....the creation of the diving birds starts with a group of Aboriginal people in the Ngarigo (Monaro) area. Their creator Biaami held Dumbi the owl in high regard and expected all people to protect the owl. Two young and foolish boys of this particular tribe saw an owl in a tree. They threw rocks and sticks at it 'til it fell out of the tree, then they plucked out its feathers and replaced them with twigs. Biaami was so outraged he caused a great flood to wash away these horrible people.

On the coast as the water level rose the local Yuin people tried to take refuge on Gulaga Mountain. The waters rose so swiftly that many people were taken and drowned. Others tried to save their kin but were drowned too. Dharramullin (what we call Biaami here)

seeing what was happening, thought he may have been too harsh on all people and relented some. He turned the brave rescuers into diving birds, cormorants, darters, shags, etc so that they could dive deeper and swim stronger to rescue their kin. Many were saved and remember their kinship to the diving birds....' Trisha Ellis

Tom Butler shares a mythological story about the organs of the Gunyung [Black Swan] and it's relevance to the Moruya area, again as a tribal totem:

'.....as the story goes, there were never any swans here at Beviaan Swamp, just eagles. The swan always wanted to know why the eagle didn't want the swan to come here; he thought he might have been hiding something. So when the eagle went out one day, two swans came to Waldrons Swamp to investigate. The eagle hawk caught them and pulled all the feathers out of them, the swans were white then and all the nice soft white feathers were fell away. Blood from the swan fell on the white waratahs and they turned red. The swans went to Wagga Wagga, which means place of many crows and dropped their feathers in a paddock. They were freezing and so when the black crows came along and said 'the eagle is our enemy too', and pulled their feathers out too. The swans took the crow's black feathers and pushed them into their bodies with their beaks. Today the swan around here has black feathers, a little bit of white and a red beak; from the blood shed from pushing his feathers back in. You can see black swan at Beviaan Swamp and Malabar, but not at Waldrons. Don't come here looking for black swans, there are sea eagles here though. It is not far between all three places, the weir is just over the hill from Waldrons and Beviaan Swamp, what we call Barlings Swamp, is not far again..... ' Tom Butler 2012.

Randall Mumbler describes the responsibility bestowed on Aboriginal people today as custodians of the land and all it holds:

'.....When the creator made life, he made it our job to maintain that life and our connections. Out of respect to our creator and to our families, we keep the stories going. The whale took the laws around; he took the Dreaming around to everyone....' Randall Mumbler.

Multiple connections made through totems

The good work done almost ten years ago by Rose, James and Watson [2003] reveals connections between humans, plants, animals, birds and fish are evident at a variety of personal and social grouping levels including family, tribal and ceremonial in the south east region of NSW. The current project has aimed to further the awareness of Aboriginal people's experiences with and understanding of personal totems, family totems and tribal totems. Ceremonial totems were discussed to a limited extent but not explored due to cultural sensitivities. The different types of totems are understood by Randall Mumbler in the following way:

'...There are personal, family, tribal, and ceremonial totems. The ceremonial totem gives you status if you've been through the law, the tribal totem connects you with everyone in your tribe, the family totem connects you with your family and the personal totem is your best mate.....' Randall Mumbler 2012.

Personal totems

Among the personal totemic species within the Yuin area, are the kookaburra, pigeon, and the mopoke. As noted above personal totems are considered to be one's friend or 'moodji'. Personal totems are not passed down as such, but are personally recognised during one's life [Trisha Ellis 4.2.2006 in Donaldson 2006]. Warren Foster explains the cultural value of having a personal totem and how it is determined:

'.....most Aboriginal people got a totem, but don't know they have 'em. If someone is aware and open and thinking about their life, they will realise they have a connection to a certain animal or bird, they see that thing all the time, then they will know 'ah that's my totem'. See the totem chooses you, we don't choose it, for personal totems that is, others get handed down the family line and you got not choice with that either. It is real, and they will know it once they become aware of their connection. It is a spiritual connection and through that spiritual connection, they become family. You need to show respect to that animal by not eating it, so that they will be your friend and warn you when things are happening. See it is like eating a member of your family, 'cause they are, they become part of your family.....' Warren Foster 2012.

'....my moodji is a possum; the possum always tells me what is going on. My mum always said that if you look after him, he will look after you. Mum's totem was also the possum. My kids will figure it all out. I have a little blue mug with a possum painted on it. I am the only one that uses it, well Rina can use it too. Shane Phillips, my nephew did that for me. He lives in Grafton. Rina's totem is the possum. Mum got it from her dad, Charlie, it was probably his totem too, he was a short man. Grandfather Carter was always on the move, he was a busy little man. He got murdered in Nowra. He was buried here at Wallaga. They taught me to not harm the possum; in fact I use to have a possum as a pet. It had lost its mother, and whatever I ate he had some too. I would have been a teenager. My dad brought it home for me. We let it back to the bush when it was older, near the tanks away from cats. It was a ringtail that I had as a pet, but the brush tail is my totem. They are all important to me. The possum is pretty safe around here, they come to the door looking for stuff at Umbarra. There were possums everywhere. I'd talk to them like grandfather talked to the black snake. He'd come right up to us. Possums are dumb animals and will happily feed off any human, not just me. They are lovely little animals. I love all animals. I have a special feeling for the little bushy tailed guy though.....Pam Flanders 21.6.2012.

'.....Dad's totem would be different again. Dad's father use to talk to black snakes, we think that was his totem. Dad didn't know about the importance of the black snake to his father, and one day he killed him. Two days later grandfather come to him and said 'when I go from here, you'll be putting me in a home'. That made Dad think about the snake and sure enough, we never saw him again until he was buried. Dad was spear happy in them days.' Pam Flanders 21.6.2012.

'.....My personal totem is the lyre bird [bellet bellet], I see it around, it comes in times on need, if stuffs happening at the 'mish', they will come and see me. I call it moojingarl, mooji means 'friend', gaal means 'my'. Some people have a budjarn [bird] as their totem, so they call it their budjarn, but it is still their mudj. I also have a ceremonial one that I don't talk about.....'. Warren Foster 2012.

'Every Koori has a Moodjingarl, it is your power, your spirit and it warns you of danger. My personal totem is the crow; my mother's personal totem was Willie Wag Tail; my grandmother's personal totem was the Magpie and my daughter's personal totem is the Peewee ...' [Trisha Ellis 4.2.2006].

'...My bujanggal, or spiritual bird is the Sea Eagle. I cannot eat the Sea Eagle, just like other people can't eat their totem.....' [Georgina Parsons 14.12.2005].

A personal totem stays with a person for their life, no matter where they go as Pam Flanders describes:

'.....the totem stays with you no matter where you go. If people move to another place, their totem is still important to them. You tell people what your totem is wherever you go....' Pam Flanders 21.6.2012

Family totems

Rose et al identifies how family totems are passed through the generations by both men and women [2003: 40]. Maria Walker of Wallaga Lake describes how many of the totems in this region are birds whose significance is passed on to succeeding generations. They are thus referred to as 'family birds'. Maria has inherited the Plover as her totem from her late father Alex Walker [Maria Walker 5.6.2006 in Donaldson 2006].

'..... the kookaburra that is another bird, when people die, it watches you. It protects the family that kookaburra. They are family birds, just like Mum told us.....' Gloria Carberry.

Randall Mumbler describes how family totems are to be respected like personal and tribal totems:

'.....the Black Snake is *guri*, and the Black Wallaby is *badarmala*, they are my totems. In general I would not eat any wallaby, out of respect to the Black Wallaby, they would be cousins. I wouldn't eat any sort of duck either out of respect for the Black Duck. You just stay away from all ducks out of respect for *Umbarra*. The old people used to eat the Black Swan around here, unless it was someone's totem, then that person would stay away from them when they were eating it. It was ok for others to eat it and they did, they probably still do. All totems have a Dreamtime story connected to them.' Randall Mumbler 2012.

Tom Butler explains how many different types of animals can become family totems.

'...Some families have the dolphin as their totem. Different family groups have different totems, not just birds, could have been a kangaroo or anything. These things don't need to be rare or what do you call it, endangered, but we need to work to keep it that way.....' Tom Butler 20.6.2012

The late Mary Duroux's family totem was the Tawny Frogmouth Owl. The Tawny Frogmouth totem connected Mary to the Haddigaddi family. According to Mary, nearly all animals are totem species. From this perspective 'all birds need protection; one can't just care for one and not the other. Aboriginal people would never have run out of food because their totems were protected because people did not eat their own totem....'. Mary also believed 'totemic species' habitats should be protected'. [Mary Duroux 6.2.2006].

Tribal totems

Eileen Morgan explains the significance of the black duck to Aboriginal people of the south coast to Terry Fox (recorded at Farmborough Heights on 5 July, 1993).

'.....People from the South Coast..., mainly, as far as I know around Wallaga, they never eat a black duck because that's their sacred bird. It's just been the symbol of tribal people, you know, about the black duck. And as each generation has been handed down, you just don't eat a black duck because that's your totem. They can eat many other animals and birds they see. I've never known an Aboriginal person to, especially around this area, to eat a black duck....' Eileen Morgan

'.....The black duck, when you go onto Gulaga Mountain, you look over to the lake near Wallaga, you can see the shape of the duck, that is where they got that duck from, from the shape of the island.....' Georgina Parsons 2012.

'.....King Merriman's totem was the Pacific Black Duck, Umbarra. Pam Flanders acknowledges that there are different totems for different families, and that the Wallaga Lake Community 'adopted' Umbarra as a localised community totem because Merrimans Island is close by ...' [Pam Flanders and Albert Solomon 11.4.2006].

The Black Duck can be a personal totem, for people such as Tanya Parsons, and a community totem for Wallaga Lake, it also considered a tribal totem for all Yuin people [Trisha Ellis 4.2.2006 / Tanya Parsons 5.6.2006].

'... Down at Wallaga, they got the Black Duck for that area, up here around Moruya we got the Black Swan, we call it Gunyung, it is our totem for this area, Moruya and all around, Mogo as well. It is not about where people live it is who they are related to; 'cause people are coming and going all the time. The Shire has taken on the swan as a full town totem; there is nothing wrong with that. They got the right bird anyways....'. Tom Butler 2012.

'...I know people at Wreck Bay who have the sea eagle as there totem, a bit like the Black Duck at Wallaga..... it is a tribal totem, but some people like me also have it as their personal totem.....' Georgina Parsons 2012.

Ceremonial totems

As noted above, ceremonial totems are bestowed upon an individual only after they have attained a certain ritual status. Much of the information associated with ceremonial totems is restricted to certain individuals and has not been provided for this project. Randall Mumbler has provided a brief and general description of the importance of ceremonial totems:

'... Fish are more likely to be ceremonial totems; it is not common to have a fish as a totem. It is more common to have a budjarn as your mudji. Different fish species are relevant to certain people in the tribe as their totem. I have certain species that I can't fish for or eat. These rules have been placed upon me through ceremony and so I stay away from them. There are certain fish that my brother and I never eat. That is also like a conservation thing....it keeps that species alive.' Randall Mumbler 2012.

Mutual protection and assistance

The relationship developed between a person or group and a totemic species allows for mutual protection and assistance through ongoing environmental interactions, as described below:

People care for their totems by looking after their nests and breeding areas, feeding and caring for them and avoiding to kill or eat them. Georgina was worried about the sea eagle nest at Bingi, usually a prominent feature which could not be located. Then later in the day :

'...There is that sea eagle at Bingi, there he's looking for me, I'll be buggered, so must still be living over there in the sand dunes. He must be telling us something, he must of realised I was worrying for him, so he is coming to tell me '..I'm ok, no need to worry any more...'. He is still going, so I don't need to worry about him any more, now you know what a spirit bird is. They know what is going on and they know what you are thinking.....'
Georgina Parsons 2012.

'.....People never ate the black duck around Wallaga, because it was our duck, the people took it as their mudji see, they never use to hunt them. Even one old man, Uncle Shepherd, he came from way out west, he use to live here. He used to hunt parrots, but never the duck. I had some parrot. You'll find pictures of the black duck everywhere because it is our totem around Wallaga Lake.....' Pam Flanders 21.6.2012.

'....most people know that it is bad for you if you eat your totem...'
Michelle Davis.

'.....When I fish I get a little fish and leave it lying on the rocks. That is something I just do to look after the Sea Eagle, when I have finished fishing, he comes along and has a little feed and probably says 'thanks old girl'. Where the sea eagles are, if people were diving they'd feed the birds and then there are middens around where they ate their catch, it is all connected.'
Georgina Parsons 19 6 2012

The late Mary Duroux once expressed concern for the future of the Gunya [Black Swan], the tribal totem for the Moruya area; because they mate with one another for life and lay their eggs in one place, if their nests were to be damaged they would have 'nowhere to lay their eggs and would die soon enough' [Mary Duroux 6.2.2006 in Donaldson 2006].

Interestingly, a number of project participants spoke about looking after all species, regardless of it being their totem. From their perspective, all native species are someone's totem, so all species need to be looked after, as described below.

'...Most animals have someone to look after them....'
Georgina Parsons

'... I don't have a totem, not me personally, but you could say all the birds are important to me. I watch them and look after them all. The birds, the eels, the fish.'
Leonard Nye 2012.

'... The sea eagle is around Wallaga Lake, it nests in the same tree for generations. They pass their homes down to their young. See this is not my totem, but I am interested in protecting it, because it will be someone's totem. I wouldn't eat a swan in front of someone who had a swan as their totem, I'd go away from them out of respect...'
Warren Foster 2012.

Conversely a totem acts to protect and assist people, as described below:

'.....no matter where I am on the coast a sea eagle appears, that is why I call him my totem. He is watching me, looking after me. You know what, sometimes they come up to my house. You know what your totem is cause you always see it, they find you. I got mine from my dad; he had the sea eagle too. If someone else has the same totem, then they are my family too. No matter where I am out of the blue it pops up. I use to see the sea eagle around Barlings Beach, there were two of them, they'd fly from the look out, right up to 'Little Paddock', and they had a nest there. Little Paddock has a lot of memories. That was thirty years ago, I am 72 now. The sea eagle, is not just in one place, see you might have a pair here and a pair further down the coast and another pair further up the coast. Their spirits must say 'oh there is the old girl down that way, we 'll go down and see how she is....' Georgina Parsons 2012.

Bill Campbell tells Brian Egloff in 1979 about the whale near Eden, which helped the fishermen (AIATSI SCVC):

' ... They used to have a whale there, they used to call him, they used to call him. When they sing out, he used to come in and whack himself, like that – his tail like that and wake the whalers up and away you'd see him go. And they used to follow him out and they'd get them (whales) too in them days. Look I seen them boats when they peak their oars, their oars would stand up like that. That's the way they'd peak their oars over the boat and she'd sit out in the trough to the water like that and all you could see was just the peaks of the paddles with the force of that whale going. She'd have a harpoon into him – he'd come right up alongside and they'd hit him with a harpoon ... ' (Bill Campbell, 1979 to Brian Egloff).

Totems can also act as a reminder of family members who have passed away, as described below:

'.....When my Dad died he said he'd come back as a big black shiny magpie, and that is what we got at home now, especially after he died. Big black shiny magpies, and we think of dad, it helps us...when we are missing him.' Michelle Davis 19 6 2012

'.... Nanny always said that old Digger said, 'when I die I am coming back as a magpie'. After he died, Mum was just a kid, they were all sitting around the veranda, and up came a magpie, he came and took some crumbs off then, and they were all happy. 'All right Digger' they said, 'we know its you'.....' Gloria Carberry 18 6 2012

Messenger birds provide a line of communication between the human and animal worlds. Unlike totems, messenger birds are for everyone, bringing both good and bad news, as described below:

Tom Butler describes cultural links to the Mopoke, the 'messenger bird':

'...the Mopoke, we call it the *dunoot*, it is our messenger bird. You hear him of a night time. He will tell you if there are people coming, it comes to give messages. The Mopoke, if you hear him calling from a long way away and he is slowing coming closer and closer, calling out coming towards your house, you know someone died from that direction. If he is singing out fast and happy, you know someone is coming from that direction. So it is not always bad news, is it a messenger. He is not a totem as such, we call him a messenger

bird. The willie wag tail is a bad message bird. Umbarra is a totem. See they all have different roles.....' Tom Butler 18 6 2012.

Georgina Parson talks about the willie wagtail, another type of messenger bird:

'.... The willie wag tail is our bad news caller, he comes to tell us that one of our people has died. That is for all Koori's, we all know that bird and know what it means. No one wants them hanging around. Billibi billibi we call it...'. Georgina Parsons 19 6 2012

Other birds act as a weather warning, as described below:

'.....The swans are good weather forecasters. Have you ever seen swan after swan flying north? They are heading away from the south westerly storms.' Tom Butler 18 6 2012.

Bert Penrith speaking to Luise Hercus at Wallaga Lake in 1963 about the cultural significance of the westerly and easterly winds:

'.....Well, you turn around and west guragama. Blacks here years ago had a terrible set on that guragama. That's the guragama, the bad wind that make them sick, that westerly wind, that's our west wind, guragama. That westerly wind very seldom comes. Yes, that's what they say, they say, *mingaa duduwa baabiyani yay* - every time that wind blows you get nasty [mingaa is mother, duduwa is the name of the wind bird probably also known as the whip bird, guragama is the westerly wind and marawudi is the easterly wind]...' Bert Penrith 1963 to Hercus.

Percy Davis tells the story of the small bird Meeyun who when he gets angry he whistles and makes the westerly wind Guragama blow. He also sings the song he wrote about it. Told to Janet Mathews at Bateman's Bay NSW in 1966.

'....: Oh this is what they call the guragama. That's a little bird.the Meeyun. It's the, when the you happen to pump a stone at him now they been he makes - he gets very angry, he makes the westerly wind blow. Oh, it sings songs. Often they was thinkin' about it, see, but I decided to catch that, the note that he whistles, you see. Ah well me grandfather - me - well me father died and I was up with me grandfather then. That - 'til I grew up a young man then. Then he learnt me this talking a bit of the language then.....' Percy Davis 1966 to Mathews

Reg McLeod speaks about the messenger bird, which forewarns of bad news. Told to Janet Mathews at Wreck Bay in 1967:

'.....We went over in Victoria, me and my mate, over in Victoria, the night she (Granny Tongia) died in Wallaga Lake, and - and this mail bird - we have a mail bird, a messenger bird - he came to us and just around the house about five or six times screaming. Making a screechy sort of noise and we knew straight away there must be something wrong home. I happened to be stopping with the uncle over there and I said to him, I said, 'There must be something wrong ...home.' 'Yes,' he said, '(that) bird's making a terrible noise, a savage noise singing at us.' So it came away then and flew straight back towards New South Wales to Delegate, heading home. The following morning the manager of the mission, he brought word to us that Granny Tongia had passed away down in Bega....' Reg McLeod 1967 to Mathews.

'....Once a stranger did the wrong thing in QLD, he took the wrong woman as his wife, she was from the wrong tribe. He came to hide out at Mum and Dad's here at Wallaga. They were good friends. His name was Lenny Silver; I was only a kid. Tally and Shorty came to find him and Lenny got a message from a little wag tail, telling him that the men were almost there. He left early the next morning heading to QLD via VIC! I later saw him in Kempsey, I had a dance with him and I said 'did you know Arthur Thomas and Joyce Carter? I was the little girl with them when you visited'. He gave me a hug. But I still remember the Willie Wag tail giving him a message.....' Pam Flanders 21.6.2012.

Passing on the cultural knowledge: teaching places

Overarching each of these facets of totemism is the need to teach each generation the value of respect and obligation in relation to totems. Accordingly, cultural teaching places are integral components to the cultural landscape in relation to totem species and their habitat.

'..... The stories come to us because we are connected spiritually to our totems, it is a spiritual thing and the stories come with it. The old people would tell us stories about their totems and different experiences they had with them over the years, we had to listen and learn and that is how we know these things today, listening to our elders over the camp fire. The totems belief is part of our culture. See a sea eagle is part of our fishing culture and I am a fisherperson.....' Georgina Parson 19 6 2012

'....These are the things we teach the kids sitting around the fire. Sometimes as a way to teach the kids we trick them, then they learn that way. We teach people at Bengello and North Congo. That story about the swan teaches kids a lesson 'do what you are told'. All the stories are for education of kids. They all make sense.' Tom Butler 18 6 2012.

'.....We don't have to sit around a campfire to teach our kids, at home even, when ever we are with our grannies, they ask questions and we tell them different stories. The Corner at Barlings Beach is a place we teach people and other places that are untouched bush for some privacy. You need to be able to concentrate on what you are being told. Hearing traffic is no good, it needs to be quite.....' Leonard Nye 18 6 2012..

'.....Mystery Bay has always been a teaching place. It provides food with the fish traps, there is abalone in the middens. It is a link to the sea [gadu] and gurrat [land], people left from here to do ceremonies on Montague Island. People still come here to teach their kids about this area, you got to bring people to different places so that they can learn the different stories for the different places. It is better to be out on country to experience the place, better than being in a room swapping stories. There are places we can no longer visit cause they are out in the ocean....' Randall Mumbler 21 6 2012.

Key Aboriginal cultural teaching places identified during this project include North Congo, 'the corner' at Barlings Beach, Bengello Beach, the historical Cricketing Ground area at Akolele and Mystery Bay. As noted by Warren Foster, 'memories last longer if you can feel, hear and see the story, it is better than learning from a book. My old fella took me to different areas to teach me.....'.

Educating the broader community about the cultural heritage value of totems was also discussed as part of this project:

'.....telling people about totems and other stories might help people to respect that animal, people are so ignorant, and sometimes they just need to be taught. It gives them an understanding of how we are connected to these animals and why they are important. When we see baby ducks, we feel happy and when we see our totems, they need to understand that. Each story has a moral, there are stories for little kids and as people get older they get more information. It would be for the local area, local stories about the local area.....' Randall Mumbler 21 6 2012.

'.....There things school kids need to know, not everything, but some things are really important for them to know. How will they understand otherwise, so a little book or a few little books would be good. Each book could tell a story. A cultural camp would be a good way to tell the kids how it all works, showing them is a better way of explaining things, then they remember what you've told them. That is how we have always done it. ' Georgina Parsons 19 6 2012

Places valued as totem habitat

Although this project did not involve exhaustive fieldwork, a number of locations specific to totem habitat were either visited or discussed during the course of oral history recording, as outlined below.

Wallaga Lake

Wallaga Lake, and in particular Merrimans Island, are intimately linked with the origins of the Umbarra [black duck]. Mythological values are heightened by strong historical attachments and the lakes high biodiversity and ecological status.

In particular the Crown land portion, part of Lot 7312 DP1131739, is seen as the primary breeding ground for the black duck in that area. The lot is part of Reserve No. 56146 Reserved from Sale or Lease generally as at the 11 May 1923 and part of Reserve No.1011268 for Future Public Requirements as at 3rd February 2006 [per comm. Preston Cope 27.6.2012]. It is located within Bega Valley Shire at the entrance to Niaria Creek, in the southwestern section of Wallaga Lake, directly opposite Fairhaven Point, which itself has high archaeological values.

Custodians are concerned about the impact motorboats have on the breeding site, as described by Randall Mumbler 'during holiday time it gets busy with boats and people. We worry about how people use the lake; it might impact on the ducks. You don't take the duck eggs either; you'd be killing one. I am not sure if that breeding area is in state forest, or national park or what. We worry about his nests, just like we worry about our kids when they get sick. All the stories have a moral; see if you look after the land, it will look after you.....'. Warren Foster added that 'the Black Duck is always nesting across the lake from Fairhaven. There are other birds here too, but this is the main place for the black duck. They breed over there on the bar, up Niaria Creek. It is always quite protected there and we want to keep it that way....'.

Custodians also raised concerns about the impact of vehicles on the Fairhaven Point Middens, as described by Warren Foster, '...This is where the old people use to camp, the point is covered with middens. All along the point you can see the old shells, you can't help but walk on it, a lot of it is protected under the bush and shrubs. You can see the bimbulla shells in the midden, they are still found here. We fenced this off years ago. ...the cars are still coming into the area damaging our site.'.

'Old cricketing ground', Akolele

'....The black swan, it has always been around here, they have their young near the cricketing ground, just there. Behind the swamp where the Turners lived. They have been there for ages, since we've been kids. My Mum cooked a cake with a swan's egg. My brother brought her an egg home and she cooked a couple of cakes with it. People don't actually eat swans, they just go about their business, we never even pelted them as kids. Someone had a swan once, and we told them not to do it again because of what they are. They probably have a spiritual connection. The swan is special for all our cousins, the Kelly's, the Parsons, the Thomas's, the Campbell's...' Pam Flanders 21 6 2012

'...there is a black duck breeding site near the old cricketing ground. That's where the old people use to get swans eggs; it was easy to get to from Wallaga Lake Mission. The low swampy section is where the ducks breed in the tea tree. The fresh water comes down from Gulaga. So it has a connection with Gulaga, it is an old camping ground; it has ceremonial connections to Mystery Bay and Murrinna Point and the black duck breeds there. This habitat needs to be protected. It is sort of protected cause there is no access. We need to be able to get in there, but the cars should stay out. It would be a good little cultural camping area, a place to tell people about the area, educational purposes, teaching them about totems, as well all the resources that area there.....' Warren Foster 21.6.2012.

'The Weir', Malabar Lagoon

'....Aboriginal culture and heritage is unreal, no matter how rough the ocean was, you could always get mussels and oysters out to the weir. We always see the white breasted sea eagle, a swan or two at times, the black shag, I have never seen so many black shags in the lagoon until now, imaging how many fish they are clearing out. This place in here, not too many people know about it but Aboriginal people know about it, mud crab galore. We can't get in here cause of Marine Parks, I am not against closing it off for netting, but we should have the right for hunting and gathering. Cultural fishing is going fishing the way we used to. ...' Tom Butler 20 6 2012

'.... sea eagles eat ocean fish. A lot of the fish that are here are connected to what is in the ocean. The water runs straight in through the weir. Sea eagles are around here 'cause the mullet will come to the top and he will grab what he likes.' Leonard Nye 20 6 2012.

Pedro Point and Swamp, Moruya

'There is a sea eagle at Pedro Point, he lingers around there, between the point and the swamp and along the coast. I see him in there often. He ranges over to a nest in ghost gully, on the north side of the Moruya River. We use to go looking for him from the Garlandtown area.....' Georgina Parsons 19 6 2012

Bingi Bingi Point

'....the sea eagle nest was in the big tree behind the sand dunes at Bingi Beach. It might be the same one that stops at Pedro. That is not too far away. It lived in a great big dead tree, so it could have fallen down. I am not too sure I haven't been here for a while. Once I was sitting up at the Bingi Centre, when I was caretaker, and a great big sea eagle would be there and I'd watch it. It is in NP now. If the tree fell down, if it was cut down for wood or if it fell down, I don't

know where it would go. See they always find the tallest tree for their nest, so they can look around. If Council or National Parks find out about a nest, an eagle nest, they should leave it.' Georgina Parsons 19 6 2012

Bevian 'Barlings' Swamp

'...the are always plenty of ducks at Barlings Swamp and black swans. There was a sea eagle nest here. The black swan was Dean's totem, my boy that passed away. No matter where he was there was a swan around. He was a little fella when he found out that connection.....' Georgina Parsons 22.6.2012.

'... The swans are at Barlings Swamp all year around. They are protected here, but then they go to Meroo Lake, which is very similar to this, well protected. See the swans from the south come here in the bad weather, they move about all the time. Plenty of eels and cherry trees, this area has everything we need and it is connected to our camp at Barlings. We call this Barlings Swamp. When we were living at the corner, all the pretty little fish would come through to the ocean, we'd collect buckets of all these pretty little fish coming through. This swamp is still linked to the beach, they have changed the course, but it all still flows when the water is high, it has it's own course that it runs. The swamp is a part of the beach. This place is important to us, and I want to bring my grannies down here and show them all the special things, the birds. We can't have any pollution coming into the swamp. I'd be glad to walk around it, drop some bread in and see all the little fish.' Leonard Nye 21.6.2012.

'...no matter what your totem everyone has to look after this swamp, well all the people from this area at least. We would like a little bird hide or ramp into the swamp so we can tell people these stories ...' Tom Butler 21.6.2012.

PART FOUR: Where to from here?

This investigation has found totems to be culturally significant to Aboriginal people across the region. The following recommendations offer key ways in which these important cultural connections can be valued and maintained including how land managers can increase their awareness of the intangible values presented to ensure the protection of species that may not otherwise be considered.

Supporting maintenance and transmission of cultural knowledge

Doing things the way they have always been done is currently termed 'maintenance of cultural practices', whilst teaching through showing and sharing stories is called the 'transmission of cultural knowledge'. Overarching all of the facets of totems is the need to teach each generation the value of respect and obligation in relation to totems. Accordingly, cultural teaching places are integral components to the cultural landscape in relation to totemic species and their habitat.

This cultural doing and sharing often takes place during extended family gatherings, be it a picnic or an extended summer camp. Enabling 'culture camping' at appropriate locations is one of the most important ways government agencies can, a) help to improve Aboriginal people's health and wellbeing, b) facilitate the transmission of cultural knowledge, and c) be involved in the revival of traditional technologies and subsequent retaining of existing knowledge. This may involve using traditional technologies such as fish trap maintenance, or observing the characteristics of one's totem species.

Often, multiple agencies are responsible for places across the land and waterways valued as cultural teaching places, and thus are beyond the jurisdiction of one agency. Accordingly, it is recommended that any agreement be done through interagency partnerships, (e.g. Forests NSW/Marine Parks Authority/ NPWS, Bega Valley and Eurobodalla Shire Councils).

Encourage cooperative management of totemic breeding sites

Given that only 0.52 per cent of NSW land is Aboriginal-owned¹², the scope for Aboriginal involvement in natural resource management on Aboriginal owned land is limited in NSW compared with the Northern Territory for instance. Subsequently, one of the primary challenges associated with maintaining Aboriginal people's cultural links to country in NSW, is finding ways to enable Aboriginal people to make full use of the opportunities that exist in natural and cultural heritage management across *all tenure types* across the region.

It is thus recommended that a regional interagency – community-working group be established to further progress Cultural Heritage and Natural Resource Management [CHNRM] opportunities for Aboriginal people across the region, incorporating the cultural heritage values associated with totem species. The development of a cooperative interagency working group would be a direct and sustainable way for multiple agencies to action their targets relating to Aboriginal cultural heritage and general involvement in NRM across their various jurisdictions / tenure types and for members of the Aboriginal community to gain culturally relevant, local employment that benefits the broader community and environment.

¹² Hunt, Altman and May 2009

Increase the general public's awareness of totems through education

Members of the Merrimans LALC have suggested that a CD be produced, explaining the cultural values associated with totems across the region.

All project participants supported the development of situ interpretive signage explaining the cultural values associated with totems across the region.

Members of the Mogo and Cobowra LALC have suggested the development of a booklet, explaining the cultural values associated with totems across the region.

Information exchange session

Understanding of totems amongst the broader community is low. Concurrently, understanding of the applicable laws and policies concerning totems amongst the Koori community is also low. One of the most effective ways to improve understandings between groups, is through face to face interaction. It is recommended that an information exchange session be arranged between Koori knowledge holders and Council's Environmental staff responsible for managing waterways, species etc, possibly also development application assessors and planning staff.

Unlike cultural awareness training which is usually a one way learning process, this session would provide an opportunity for koori knowledge holders to explain their cultural links to certain species as well as provide Council environmental staff with an opportunity to inform the koori community about how totemic species are currently being managed.

Hazard Reduction Burning: Wallaga Lake Koori community.

There is widespread concern amongst the members of the Wallaga Lake community about the fire hazard surrounding the village. 'It wasn't always this way', many claim, 'the bush was always cleaned up to keep away the snakes and fires'. There is a concurrent concern for the welfare of many culturally relevant species habituating in the bush lands surrounding the community, particularly if another uncontrolled fire were to pass through. It is recommended that the community be supported to reduce the risk of a dangerously hot fire, by undertaking a series of slow Hazard Reduction Burns in collaboration with the Rural Fire Service Tilba Brigade and NPWS.

Incorporating primary breeding grounds into ESC Aboriginal Heritage Inventory Culturally Sensitive Landscape model

A number of totem breeding grounds were identified during the course of this project. Further places may be identified during the comment period for the draft report, and on an ongoing basis. The Koori community values these places and as such they require consideration during Council's land use planning, if not already protected by existing processes. It is recommended that primary breeding grounds such as those associated with the coastal lagoon behind Wallaga Beach, Bevan Swamp, Pedro Swamp, Trunkettabella / Bombo, bushland associated with sea eagle nests and Malabar Lagoon be incorporated into Council's Aboriginal Heritage Inventory Culturally Sensitive Landscape to ensure they are considered during land use planning.

Recommendations for Bega Valley Shire Council

Two culturally relevant locations associated with totemic breeding sites outside of the Eurobodalla Shire were identified during this project, as outlined below.

Lot 7312 DP1131739

One of the primary breeding grounds for the Black Duck in the region is located at the entrance to Niaria Creek, in the south western section of Wallaga Lake. It is Crown land, part of Lot 7312 DP1131739, and is within Bega Valley Shire. It is recommended that the Bega Valley Shire, the Merrimans LALC, NPWS and the Department of Planning and Infrastructure work with the Gulaga Board of Management to establish cooperative management of the site. This could include having a koori ranger check the site from time to time and or having the land acquired/ transferred to the Gulaga Board of Management to form part of Gulaga National Park. Management of these lands should directly involve members of the Wallaga community.

The NSW Department of Transport Maritime should determine if motor boats are negatively impacting on this site.

Fairhaven Point

It is recommended that Wallaga Lake be included in the Bega Valley Shire LEP as an Aboriginal Heritage Conservation Area [as per recommendations from the Bega Aboriginal Heritage Study: Donaldson 2009]. The midden at the end of Fairhaven Point is in desperate need of protection and should be included as part of any listing or cultural heritage management plan. The end of Fairhaven Point could be acquired/ transferred to the Gulaga Board of Management to form part of Gulaga National Park. Management of these lands should directly involve members of the Wallaga community.

It is recommended that management of vehicular access to Fairhaven Point and the boat ramp be improved to avoid further damage to the archaeological site.

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Appendix one : Project Information Agreement

INFORMATION AGREEMENT EUROBODALLA SHIRE COUNCIL TOTEMS PROJECT

PURPOSE FOR WHICH THE INFORMATION WILL BE COLLECTED: In conjunction with the relevant Local Aboriginal Land Councils and community groups the Eurobodalla Shire Council will investigate the value of totem species to Aboriginal people across the Eurobodalla. Places valued as breeding grounds for totem species will also be recorded.

Information collected will be contained in a report used to inform local government planning processes, with a possible future use for an educational publication. In accordance with s.91 of the *National Parks and Wildlife Act 1979* any Aboriginal 'objects' located during this project will be reported to OEH for registration in the NSW Governments Aboriginal Heritage Information Management System [AHIMS].

PUBLIC / CONFIDENTIAL INFORMATION: Information will be treated in accordance with instructions received by individual informants. Information described as confidential will remain confidential. Information described as public, may become available to the public.

INDIGENOUS CULTURAL AND INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY RIGHTS: The Eurobodalla Shire Council acknowledges the cultural and intellectual property rights of Aboriginal people whose cultural knowledge is featured in this report.

COPYRIGHT: The Eurobodalla Shire Council and Aboriginal informants will jointly hold the copyright to any publicly available information collected for the purposes of this project. Accordingly, information collected for this project remains the property of the informants. Without written permission from individual informants information may not be used for purposes other than those agreed.

RETURN OF INFORMATION: All information collected for the purpose of this project will be returned to informants, including any photos.

ABORIGINAL INFORMANT

INFORMATION COLLECTOR:

Name:
Contact:

Name:
Contact:

INFORMANT INSTRUCTIONS

THE INFORMATION WILL BE RECORDED USING [circle]:

Audio camera video written

APPROVAL FOR FUTURE USES OF THE INFORMATION [circle]:

A publicly available report YES / NO
ESC planning processes [eg AHIMS, LEP, DCP] YES / NO
Provided to participating LALCS [Batemans Bay, Mogo, Cobowra, Bodalla, Wagonga and
Merrimans] YES / NO

RESTRICTIONS ON ACCESS TO THE INFORMATION [circle]:

Gender tribal family LALC OTHER

Any restrictions on the AHIMS in regards to access to site details?

SIGNATURES

Signature of information collector: Date:

Signature of Aboriginal informant: Date:

INFORMANT'S NEXT OF KIN?

Name:
Contact:

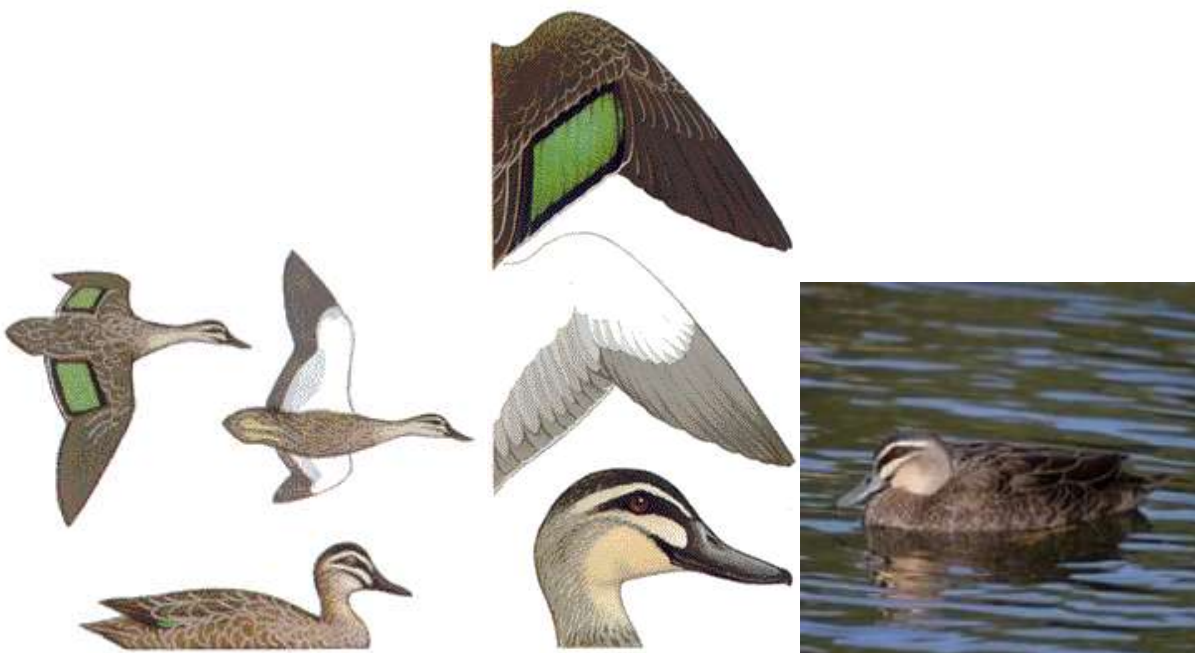
Appendix two: Scientific description of the Black Duck

Pacific Black Duck *Anas superciliosa*

Physical description

The Pacific Black Duck is a dark-brown bird with a pale face and throat. It has a distinctive black eye-stripe that stretches from the top of the bill through the eye. The dark brown line through the eye is bordered with cream above and below and a dark brown crown.

The upper wing colour is the same as the back, with a bright glossy green patch in the secondary flight feathers. In flight, the Black Duck is a dark bird with swift wing beats, a slender neck and conspicuous underwing.



Young Pacific Black Ducks are similar to the adults in plumage. The male and female have a similar appearance.

On the water, the Black Duck is a medium-sized duck with a slender head and neck which is carried erect. 47-60cm, legs and feet are yellow/green in colour.

Habitat

The Pacific Black Duck is one of the most versatile of the Australian ducks. It frequents all types of water, from deep, permanent, reed-dominated freshwater wetlands to rivers, creeks and brackish or saline wetlands. The Pacific Black Duck is found in all but the most arid regions of Australia. Outside Australia, its range extends throughout the Pacific region.



Pacific Black Ducks are usually seen in pairs or small flocks and readily mix with other ducks. In the wild, birds are often very wary of humans and seldom allow close approach. Birds in urban ponds become quite tame, however.

Feeding

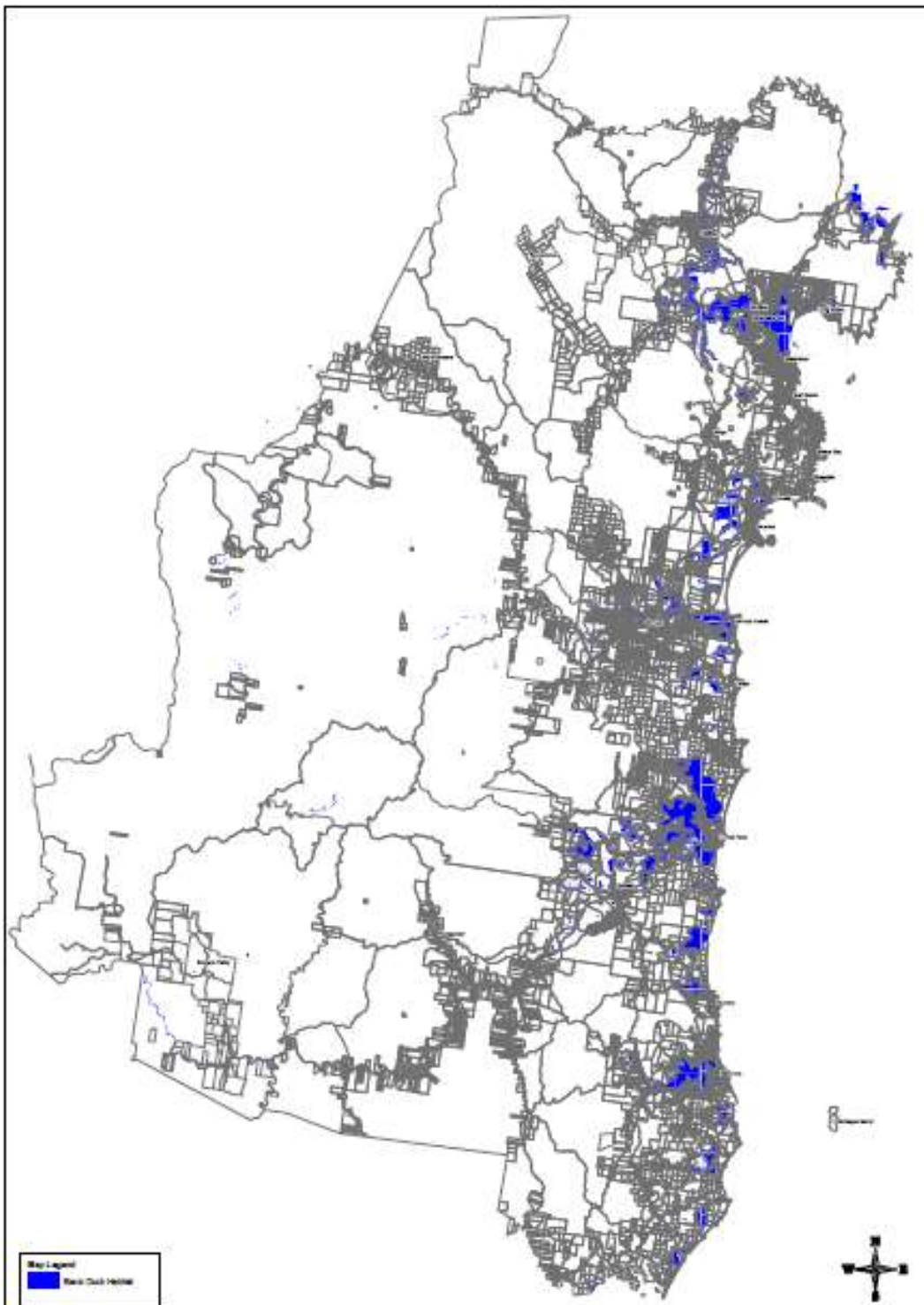
The Pacific Black Duck is mainly vegetarian, feeding on seeds of aquatic plants. This diet is supplemented with small crustaceans, molluscs and aquatic insects. Food is obtained by 'dabbling', where the bird plunges its head and neck underwater and upends, raising its rear end vertically out of the water.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

Breeding

Mating in Pacific Black Ducks coincides with availability of sufficient food and water, and often with the onset of heavy rains or when waterways are at their peaks. Courtship is accompanied by ritualised displays including preening, bobbing and wing-flapping. This behaviour is often initiated by the female, and, other than copulation, the male helps little in the breeding process. Often, two broods will be raised in a year and clutch size can be up to 16. The number of offspring produced may seem quite high, but only 20% of these will survive past two years of age.

Voice

The female makes a loud raucous quack.



Black Duck Habitat: Eurobodalla Shire, NSW.

Appendix three: Preliminary listing of Totem species in the Eurobodalla.

PRELIMINARY LISTING OF TOTEM SPECIES IN THE EUROBODALLA, NSW			
BIRDS			
COMMON NAME	SCIENTIFIC NAME	DHURGA NAME	REFERENCE / SOURCE OF INFORMATION
Pacific Black Duck	<i>Anas superciliosa</i>	Umbarra	Howitt 1904, Donaldson 2006, Cruse, Stewart and Norman 2005, Donaldson 2012
Pelican	<i>Pelecanus conspicillatus</i>	Gurung-aba	Howitt 1904: 133
Australian Raven [Crow]	<i>Corvus coronoides</i>	Waagura	Donaldson 2006, Renwick & the Wreck Bay Community 2000. Howitt 1904: 133
Eagle Hawk	-	Munyunga	Howitt 1904: 133
Willie Wagtail	<i>Rhipidura leucophrys</i>	-	Donaldson 2006 Hardwick, RJ 2001, Donaldson 2012
Australian Magpie	<i>Gymnorhina tibicen</i>	Diriwun	Donaldson 2006, Cruse, Stewart and Norman 2005
Eastern Whipbird	<i>Psophodes olivaceus</i>	Duduwa	Hercus 1963
Magpie Lark [Pee Wee].	<i>Grallina cyanoleuca</i>	-	Donaldson 2006, Slater and Slater 1995.
Lyre Bird	<i>Menura novaehollandiae</i>	Bellet Bellet	Donaldson 2012
Grey Magpie	-	Bilinga	Howitt 1904: 133
Black Swan	<i>Cygnus atratus</i>	Gunyung	Donaldson 2006 and 2012

COMMON NAME	SCIENTIFIC NAME	DHURGA NAME	REFERENCE / SOURCE OF INFORMATION
Laughing Kookaburra	<i>Dacelo novaeguineae</i>	Gugara	Donaldson 2006, Cruse, Stewart and Norman 2005
White-bellied Sea Eagle	<i>Haliaeetus leucogaster</i> -	-	Donaldson 2006 and 2012. Cruse, et al 2005
Southern Boobook [Mopoke]	<i>Ninox novaeseelandiae</i>	Googoog or Dunoot	Donaldson 2006, 2012.
A small owl	-	Jaruat	Howitt 1904: 133.
A small owl	-	Tiska	Howitt 1904: 133.
Tawny Frog Mouth	<i>Pogargus strigoides</i>	-	Donaldson 2006
Black Cockatoo [Yellow-tailed]	<i>Calyptorhynchus funereus</i>	Nyaagaan	Donaldson 2006, Cruse, Stewart and Norman 2005
White Breasted Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax sp.</i>	Berimbarmin	Howitt 1904: 133
Water hen	-	Ngariba	Howitt 1904: 133
FISH / MAMMALS			
Bream	-	Burimi	Howitt 1904: 133
Whale	-	-	Egloff 1979, Donaldson 2012
ANIMALS			
Eastern Grey Kangaroo	<i>Macropus giganteus</i>	Kaval-gar	Howitt 1904: 133
Bush Rat	<i>Rattus fuscipes</i>	Wungalli	Howitt 1904: 133

COMMON NAME	SCIENTIFIC NAME	DHURGA NAME	REFERENCE / SOURCE OF INFORMATION
Kangaroo Rat	<i>Marsupialia Potoroidae</i>	Guragur	Howitt 1904: 133
Dingo	<i>Canis lupus dingo</i>	Merigong	Howitt 1904: 133
Bandicoot	<i>Perameles nasuta</i>	Merrit-jigga	Howitt 1904: 133
Echidna	<i>Tachyglossus aculeatus</i>	Janan-gabatch	Howitt 1904: 133
Brush Tailed Possum	<i>Trichosurus vulpecula</i>	-	Donaldson 2012
Black Wallaby [Swamp Wallaby]	<i>Wallabia bicolor</i>	Badarmala	Donaldson 2012
REPTILES			
Lace monitor lizard	<i>Varanus vadus</i>	Burnagga	Howitt 1904: 133
Eastern Brown snake	<i>Pseudonaja textilis</i>	Murumbul	Howitt 1904: 133, Donaldson 2012
Black snake	<i>Pseudechis Porphyriacus</i>	Gumbera or guri	Howitt 1904: 133, Donaldson 2012