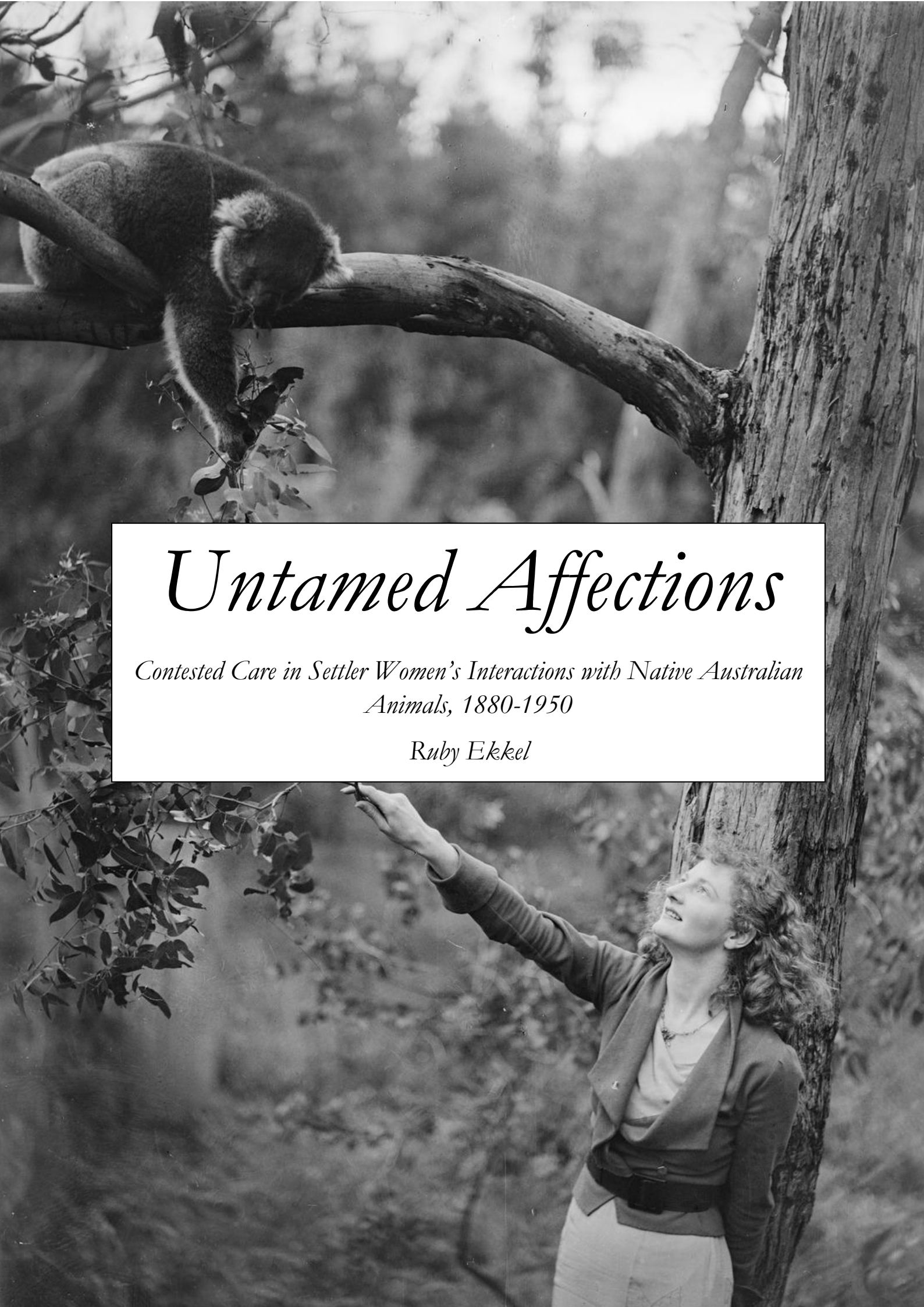


A black and white photograph of a woman in a forest. She is standing on the right side of the frame, leaning against a tree trunk and reaching her right arm up towards a koala. The koala is perched on a thick, horizontal tree branch on the left side of the frame. The woman has curly hair and is wearing a dark jacket over a light-colored top and a skirt. The background is a dense forest with many trees and foliage.

Untamed Affections

*Contested Care in Settler Women's Interactions with Native Australian
Animals, 1880-1950*

Ruby Ekel

Untamed Affections

*Contested Care in Settler Women's Interactions with Native Australian
Animals, 1880-1950*

Ruby Eckel

February 2026

89 008 words

Declaration

I declare that this thesis, submitted in fulfilment of the requirements of the award of Doctor of Philosophy, in the School of History at The Australian National University, is wholly my own original work unless otherwise referenced or acknowledged and has not been submitted for qualifications at any other academic institution.

This research was supported by an Australian Government Research Training Program Scholarship. I have also been a grateful recipient of the Research School of Social Sciences Director's Award for Higher Degree Research and the Vice-Chancellor's Higher Degree Research Travel Grant at the Australian National University.

I would also like to acknowledge the Ngunnawal and Ngambri peoples on whose traditional lands most of this thesis was researched and written.



16 February 2026

Note on Prior Publication

Portions of this thesis have appeared in similar form in previously published journal articles. Chapter Five was published in part, in my sole-authored article, ‘Real Men Don’t Kill Koalas: Gender and Conservationism in the Queensland Koala Open Season of 1927’, *Australian Historical Studies* 56, no. 2 (2025): 274-92.

Chapter Six was published, in part, in my sole-authored article, ‘The Meaning of a Bushwalk with the Melbourne Women’s Walking Club, 1922-45’, *Australian Historical Studies* 56, no. 3 (2025): 415-35.

Chapter Four incorporates limited material from my sole-authored article, “‘Making Friends with Lyre-Birds’: Alice Manfield and Settler Belonging in Mount Buffalo National Park’, *Settler Colonial Studies* 15, no. 2 (2025): 238-59.

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Abstract

This thesis charts settler women's interactions with native Australian animals from the 1880s to the 1950s, across a diverse range of domains and spaces: from petkeeping to organised conservationism and from suburban gardens to national parks. Between the late nineteenth and mid-twentieth centuries, colonial disdain for 'freakish' and largely unprofitable animals like koalas and echidnas gave way to widespread affection, mythologisation, and conservationist concern. Some scholars have recognised the environmental and political significance of this transition, but women's interventions and voices are mostly absent in the historiography. *Untamed Affections* examines the neglected roles of settler women in shaping dramatically shifting relationships with the environment. By addressing seven modes of interspecies encounter, the thesis enriches and challenges historiographies that sideline women's interventions and that have only recently begun to consider animals as historical subjects in their own right.

My research draws on an expansive range of archives across Australia, with a focus on Queensland, New South Wales, Victoria, and Tasmania. These sources include several women's personal archives, nature writers' publications and ephemera, newspaper coverage of environmental controversies, photographic collections, bushwalking journals, and the records of conservationist and animal welfare societies. Considered together for the first time, these sources reveal that many settler women cultivated a contested ethic of care, one that cast native animals as emotionally and morally significant individuals meriting human attention and patriotic affection. They did so in their socially endorsed roles as educators and writers for children, and as politically engaged 'new women' who embraced opportunities for more intimate and sustained encounters with nature, experiences that inspired conservationist commitments. Though concern remained uneven across species, some women tried to bring even the most maligned of animals into the circle of care, like thylacines and Tasmanian devils. At the heart of many of these varied and contested encounters was a tension between closeness and distance, and between control and relinquishment.

These emergent forms of care for native animals were complex and often contradictory. Care coexisted with commodification, captivity, and exclusion; public and private records show that apparent affection did not preclude violence or possession. Yet women's advocacy for animals' inclusion within the sphere of moral, domestic, or religious concern had both material and symbolic consequences. They fostered opposition to the fur and feather trades, spurred the creation and protection of national parks, and promoted some species as friendly national icons. Crucially, these reframed icons could be rhetorically enlisted to affirm settler claims to land and legitimacy. Fostering caring attachments to native animals deepened settlers' sense of connection to colonised landscapes and served to erase the long histories of Aboriginal people's profoundly different relationships to animals, as well as the more recent histories of colonial violence and dispossession.

Untamed Affections disrupts the periodisation of Australian environmental action into disparate waves, reframes animal protectionism, children's literature, and petkeeping as important gendered strands of conservationist history, and points to the oft-overlooked role of religion in shaping women's and men's environmental attitudes. Sitting at the intersection of environmental history, animal history, gender history, and settler colonial studies, the thesis demonstrates the insights that can be generated by a gendered approach to understanding humans' evolving relationships with the non-human world.

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Abbreviations

ANA	Australian Natives Association
ANM	Australian Newsprint Mills
BMA	Band of Mercy Advocate
BMHJNSW	Band of Mercy and Humane Journal of New South Wales
DAS	Department of Agriculture and Stock
MATWC	Melbourne Amateur Touring and Walking Club (Later the Melbourne Walking Club)
MWWC	Melbourne Women's Walking Club
QSA	Queensland State Archives
RSPCA	Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals
SLNSW	State Library of New South Wales
SLV	State Library of Victoria
SPCA	Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals
TFFCC	Tasmanian Fauna and Flora Conservation Committee
WLPSA	Wild Life Preservation Society of Australia
WSPCA	Woman's Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals

The bill protects a lot of animals absolutely of no use whatever. Of what use is the wombat or the hedge-hog? Of what good to the country are a thousand or even a million kangaroos?

Broughton Barnabas O'Connor, NSW, Legislative Assembly
1 September 1903, p. 1986

Introduction

Most mornings, Alice Manfield could be found hiding in a tree trunk perched on the edge of a cliff, trying to lure out local lyrebirds with the bird calls she had spent her childhood learning to imitate. Two adult lyrebirds were nesting there with their baby, who was still young enough to keep his silky, purple-grey down. The avian family was on ‘friendly terms’ with the inquisitive interloper who visited their cliff-edge home each day for months, dressed in sensible climbing shoes and her characteristic handmade pantsuit – a bold choice for a young woman in the 1910s.¹ Once accustomed to Manfield’s quiet presence and regular owl impersonations, mother and baby had become relatively willing subjects for the camera. It took more ingenuity, including removing the baby from its nest and disguising herself in the tree, to snap a picture of the wary father. Manfield, a mountain guide, naturalist, and nature photographer, would go on to publish the first known photographs of the notoriously shy male lyrebird, attracting respect and envy from male naturalists who had failed to ‘bag’ the same.² The photographs’ publication had a particular resonance because lyrebirds were already endangered, their feathers coveted for women’s hats in Australia and abroad.³

This vignette of a clandestine mountaineer and her attempts to befriend and photographically capture a family of lyrebirds offers a glimpse into the myriad ways in which settler Australian women engaged with native animals around the beginning of the twentieth century. It is a picture of a person whose life revolved around studying, protecting, and sharing her appreciation for her natural environment, and especially the animals who lived in it, and whose work helped provide a path, sometimes literally, for other women to have similar experiences. It also offers a mediated glimpse of the reclusive lyrebird, both the ‘curious but still cautious’ individual captured here by Manfield’s camera (Figure 2), and the entire species which was, by this point in time, being simultaneously embraced as a national symbol for the newly minted Australian state, and pre-emptively mourned by ornithologists fearing extinction in the face of ‘the march of settlement’.⁴

¹ Alice Manfield, *The Lyre-Birds of Mount Buffalo: photographs and notes by “Guide Alice”* (Melbourne: Robertson & Mullens, 1924), 4-18.

² Edith E. Hoy, ‘Historiette of the Manfields Who Began their Mt. Buffalo Saga When the Buckland was at its Heyday in the early 50’s’ (Harrietteville, Victoria: Harrietteville Historical Society, 1965).

³ Despite official restrictions on the trade in lyrebird feathers, London auction records from 1908 reported 180 lyre bird tails imported from Australia. Robin Doughty, *Feather Fashions and Bird Preservation: A study in nature protection* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975), 30.

⁴ Manfield, *The Lyre-Birds of Mount Buffalo*, 16; A.E. Kitson, ‘Notes on the Victoria lyre-bird (*Menura victoriae*)’, *The Emu* 5, no. 2 (October 1905): 55-67.

Environmental historians have highlighted the ways in which early colonial misgivings about ‘freakish’ and often frustratingly unprofitable Australian animals gave way to widespread affection, nationalistic attachments, and concern for their survival.⁵ Though Tim Bonyhady has rightly challenged absolute narratives of earlier colonists’ indifference or aversion to the natural environment, there was a profound shift in the ways that native animals were valued in the later-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. This change is reflected in cultural, political, environmental, and legal legacies that continue to structure human-animal relationships in Australia.⁶ Contemporary concerns about endangered animals, decimated by colonial practices of land-clearing and species introduction and threatened by human-induced climate change, give urgency and impetus to reconsiderations of human-animal relationships in this country, and raise questions about the construction of the categories and assumptions which have come to structure settler-Australian thinking about non-human animals. However, the roles of settler women, like Alice Manfield, are largely absent or obscured in these accounts.

Settler Australian women’s lives were entangled with native animals with whom they shared homes, workplaces, and leisure spaces. Women cooked and ate animals, played with them, crushed them under foot, wore their fur, kept them as pets, killed them, were injured or killed by them, and cared for them. They wrote about animals, taught children about them and through them, and studied their anatomy, behaviour, and distribution. And especially at and after the turn of the twentieth century, they formed, joined, and acted through societies to protect animals’ populations and their habitats. In turn, native animals’ lives were inextricably tied to the labour, protection, representation, care, and consumption of settler women. It is unsurprising, then, that settler women played crucial and often distinctively gendered roles in shaping human/non-human relations in Australia.

⁵ Adrian Franklin, *Animal Nation: The True Story of Animals and Australia* (Sydney: University of NSW Press, 2005); Libby Robin, *How a Continent Created a Nation* (Sydney: University of New South Wales Press, 2007); Libby Robin, ‘Nationalising nature: Wattle Days in Australia’, *Journal of Australian Studies* 26, 73 (2002): 13-26; Tom Griffiths, *Hunters and Collectors: The Antiquarian Imagination in Australia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); Thomas Dunlap, *Nature and the English Diaspora: Environment and History in the United States, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), especially ch.7. For more recent interventions, see Russell McGregor’s work on Alec Chisholm’s brand of nature-based nationalism. Russell McGregor, *Idling in Green Places* (Melbourne: Australian Scholarly Publishing, 2019); Russell McGregor, ‘Mateship with Nature: Nationalism and Conservation in the Writings of Alec Chisholm’, *Environment and History* 27, no. 3 August 2021): 399-420.

⁶ Notably, in making his argument against generalised settler disdain for the environment, he dedicates a chapter to the perspectives of a woman, the author and artist Louisa Meredith. Tim Bonyhady, *The Colonial Earth* (Carlton, Victoria: Miegunyah Press, 2000), 128-57.

This thesis investigates settler Australian women's interactions with native animals between 1880 and 1950, drawing primarily upon conservationist, animal protectionist, and bushwalking society records, and the personal papers and writings of a suite of key women whose lives traversed a range of tangible and intangible interactions with native fauna. I have sought to identify the varying experiences and representations women contributed to changing settler relationships to native animals, whether as writers, educators, campaigners or bushwalkers, and the extent to which these should be considered a distinctively gendered approach.

An account of changing environmental attitudes and animal interactions that seeks out women's views and interventions, looks different from male-dominated narratives in a number of ways. Such an account draws greater attention to the figure of the 'amateur' and to the range of methods by which different kinds of people could claim expertise, to the intellectual and emotional raising of children, to intimate relationships with animals, to the role of religion in shaping environmental attitudes, and to animals' intrusions into domestic and familial spaces. In part a gendered retelling of the conservationist movement in Australia, this is also a history concerned with the animal protection movement, alongside related female-dominated campaigns including temperance and turn-of-the-twentieth-century feminism. More generally, attention to women in Australian environmental history complicates dominant accounts of colonisation that tend to stress the 'clear and conquer' mentality and its legacies of waste and environmental devastation, drawing in histories of accommodation and adaptation that were also crucial to the story of settling in a confronting new continent.

Historiographies of the human and non-human

This thesis arises from and sits in conversation with a number of intersecting historiographies of gender, colonialism, and the environment, the most pivotal of which is Australian environmental histories of settler engagements with the land. Working within an environmental history tradition which insists on the significance of Australian landscapes, waterways, climate patterns, plants, and animals, I build on scholarship that views the Australian environment as a shaping force in colonial and national experiences and identities. Libby Robin and Tom Griffiths have spearheaded these conceptual developments, showing how settler Australians adjusted to, and sometimes embraced, a challenging natural environment in colonial, wartime,

and nation-building contexts.⁷ Crucially, rather than viewing the Australian story as an addendum to international environmental histories, Griffiths stresses the analytical possibilities of considering the distinctiveness of the Australian environment and climate, the power of thinking in terms of deep time invited by the long history of Indigenous occupation, and the specificities of the settler revolution that transformed social and ecological life.⁸

Robin and Griffiths, alongside other historians, have argued that landscapes such as the mythologised bush or desert, and striking native animals and plants like the kangaroo or the gum tree, were recruited to the struggle for a distinct national identity.⁹ The processes they describe align with the ‘naturalistic nationalism’ identified by American historian Eric Kauffman, and this concept has informed my thinking about the role of animals in relation to women in this period.¹⁰ Notable works in this historiography include Robin’s *How a Continent Created a Nation*, Griffiths’ *Hunters and Collectors*, and the two historians’ co-edited volume, *Ecology and Empire: Environmental History of Settler Societies*.¹¹

A growing amount of scholarship focuses especially on the positions of Australia’s distinctive native animals in these narratives of national identity-formation. In his influential book *Animal Nation*, sociologist Adrian Franklin critically analyses discourses surrounding native and non-native animals in Australia, arguing that a form of ‘eco-nationalism’ has worked in tandem with xenophobia and racism in the country’s culture and politics.¹² These social and cultural dimensions of the emotionally loaded rhetoric around ‘invasive species’ have been further expounded by scholars including Kylie Mirmohamadi, Lesley Head, and Simon Farley, whose work makes clear that categories like ‘native animals’ always operate in close relation to other

⁷ Tom Griffiths, ‘The Transformative Craft of Environmental History: Perspectives on Australian Scholarship,’ *RCC Perspectives*, no. 2 (2017): 115-24.

⁸ Griffiths, ‘The Transformative Craft of Environmental History’.

⁹ Ashley Hay, *Gum: The story of eucalypts & their champions* (Sydney: NewSouth, 2021), especially 70-136; Beth Hatton and Linda Thompson, ‘Kangaroo’, in *Symbols of Australia*, ed. Melissa Harper and Richard White (Sydney: NewSouth, 2021), 38-52.

¹⁰ Eric Kaufmann, ‘“Naturalizing the Nation”: The Rise of Naturalistic Nationalism in the United States and Canada’, *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 40, no. 4 (1998): 666-95.

¹¹ Robin, *How a Continent Created a Nation*; Tom Griffiths and Libby Robin, *Ecology and Empire: Environmental History of Settler Societies* (University of Washington Press, 1997); Griffiths, *Hunters and Collectors*. See also Thomas R. Dunlap, ‘Australian Nature, European Culture: Anglo Settlers in Australia’, *Environmental History Review* 17, no. 1 (1993): 25-48.

¹² Franklin, *Animal Nation*; Ann Moyal, *Koala: a historical biography* (Collingwood, Victoria: CSIRO Publishing, 2008); Nancy Cushing and Kevin Markwell, ‘Platypus Diplomacy: Animal Gifts in International Relations’, *Journal of Australian Studies* 33, no. 3 (1 September 2009): 255–71; Nancy Cushing, ‘The Interspecies Entanglements of Eating Kangaroo, 1788–1850’, *History Australia* 13, no. 2 (2 April 2016): 286–99; Andrea Gaynor, Susan Broomhall, and Andrew Flack, ‘Frogs and Feeling Communities: A Study in History of Emotions and Environmental History’, *Environment and History* 28, no. 1 (1 February 2022): 83–104.

mutable categories.¹³ Histories of charismatic species like the platypus and koala have drawn out the cultural and symbolic power of the ‘little Aussies’, which transformed, during the period at hand, from ‘freaks of nature’ to beloved icons which fostered emotional attachments to the land.¹⁴ Studies of a wide range of forms of interaction with native animals, notably Nancy Cushing’s work on live transport, animal diplomacy, and pet-keeping, demonstrate the diverse way native animal encounters have shaped broader political and environmental histories.¹⁵ Cushing and Jodi Frawley’s edited collection on animal populations in Australian history, moreover, makes clear that individual animals from the same species have generated starkly different responses from different humans at different times, depending on shifting perceptions of abundance or rarity, and on the demands of the particular cultural and political moment.¹⁶

Some historians and ecologists have looked to the histories and cultures of native animals as sources of insight for the future – not only in the possible lessons offered by humans’ varied engagements with them, but in animals’ own capacities to survive and adapt in a ‘boom and bust’ continent, in which seasonal rhythms differ from European norms, and where climate change is making the weather, including droughts and floods, even more unpredictable.¹⁷ Acknowledging settlers’ past and present failures to adapt to the ‘deep rhythms’ of the Australian environment, as well as the urgent need for adaptability and resilience in a warming world, these scholars encourage readers to take a literal ‘bird’s eye view’ or to consider the

¹³ Simon Farley, ‘Mateship with Brumbies: Horses, Defiance and Indigeneity in the Australian Alps’, *Journal of Australian Studies* 47: 2 (2023): 256-72; Simon Farley, “‘Alien Hordes’: A cultural history of non-native birds in Australia”, (PhD thesis, University of Melbourne, 2024); Kylie Mirmohamadi, “‘Wog Plants Go Home’: Race, Ethnicity and Horticulture in Australia”, *Studies in Australian Garden History* 1 (2002): 91-108; Kylie Mirmohamadi, ‘Talking About Native Plants’, *Colloquy* 12 (2006): 91-102; Lesley Head and Pat Muir, *Backyard: nature and culture in suburban Australia* (Wollongong: University of Wollongong Press, 2007); Libby Robin, ‘Cane toads as sport: Conservation practice and animal ethics at odds’, in *Animals Count*, ed. Nancy Cushing and Jodi Frawley (Abingdon, New York: Routledge, 2018), 15-25; Jodi Frawley and Ian McCalman, ed., *Rethinking Invasion Ecologies from the Environmental Humanities* (New York: Routledge, 2014). See this introduction’s discussion of the contested category of ‘native animal’.

¹⁴ Jack Ashby, *Platypus Matters* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2022); Danielle Clode, *Koala: a life in trees* (Collingwood, Victoria: Black Inc., 2022); Moyal, *Koala*; Ann Moyal, *Platypus* (Allen & Unwin, 2001).

¹⁵ Cushing and Markwell, ‘Platypus Diplomacy’; Nancy Cushing, “‘Few Commodities Are More Hazardous’: Australian Live Animal Export, 1788-1880,” *Environment and History* 24, no. 4 (November 1, 2018): 445-69; Clode, *Koala*. See also Rohan Howitt, ‘Oil from Penguins: Mentalities of Extraction in the Southern Ocean World, 1889-1919’, *International Review of Environmental History* 9, no. 2 (February 21, 2024): 51-75; Cushing and Markwell, “‘The Bird Was a Valuable One’”; Alistair Paton, *Of Marsupials and Men* (Carlton, Victoria: Black Inc., 2022). For perspectives on animals that were rarely included in affectionate attitudes towards native animals, see Peter Hobbins, *Venomous Encounters: Snakes, Vivisection and Scientific Medicine in Colonial Australia* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2017); Peter Hobbins, ‘Venom and vivisection in the colonial antipodes, 1788-1914’ (PhD thesis, University of Sydney, 2013).

¹⁶ Cushing and Frawley, *Animals Count*.

¹⁷ Libby Robin and Mike Smith, ‘Introduction: boom and bust’, in Libby Robin, Robert Heinsohn and Leo Joseph (eds.), *Boom & Bust* (Collingwood, Victoria: CSIRO Publishing, 2009), 2-5.

multiple meanings of a flurry of brine shrimp hatchings in the wake of serious drought – liveliness appearing unexpected alongside shortage and death.¹⁸

Gender in environmental history

The roles of women and concepts of gender and sexuality are often obscured or absent altogether in these accounts of changing relationships with native animals and the broader environment.¹⁹ This dearth of gendered perspectives has been identified in a range of national contexts; it seems that the ‘sex secret’ of environmental history is remarkably consistent across geographies and polities.²⁰ It is also a resilient secret, given that, two decades after Carolyn Merchant’s 1990 ‘Gender and Environmental History’ article, Susan Schrepfer and Douglas Cazauz Sackman could accurately reflect that the ‘intersection between gender and environmental history has not been particularly busy.’²¹ Another decade later, in 2021, Australian environmental historians Ruth Morgan and Margaret Cook wrote that ‘[w]e are far from the first, and expect we will not be the last, to wonder at the paucity of women, gender and sexuality in (Anglophone) environmental history.’²² Such a paucity might reflect a presumption that ecological interventions by women in the past have been too minor, too subtle, or too feminine to merit serious historical analysis. Histories of women’s environmental care, in particular, have been overlooked, perhaps unsurprisingly given that care ‘remains

¹⁸ Emily O’Gorman, ‘Weathering the Anthropocene at the End of the River: Thinking with Brine Shrimp in the Coorong, South Australia’, in J. M. Hamilton, S. Reid, P. van Gelder, & A. Neimanis (eds.), *Feminist, queer, anticolonial propositions for hacking the Anthropocene: archive* (Open Humanities Press, 2021): 161-64.

Robin, Heinsohn and Joseph’s *Boom and Bust* offers multiple examples of this kind of thinking, bringing ornithological and historical perspectives together. See in particular Steve Morton, ‘Rain and grass: lessons in how to be a zebra finch’, 45-74; Julian Reid, ‘Australian pelican: flexible responses to uncertainty’, 95-120; Libby Robin, ‘Emu: national symbols and ecological limits’, 241-266.

¹⁹ Ruth A. Morgan and Margaret Cook, ‘Gender, Environment and History: New Methods and Approaches in Environmental History’, *International Review of Environmental History* 7, no. 1 (10 June 2021): 5–19; Katie Holmes and Ruth Morgan, ‘Placing Gender: Gender and Environmental History’, *Environment and History* Volume 27, Number 2, May 2021, pp. 187-191.

²⁰ Important publications in this vein include Carolyn Merchant, ‘Gender and Environmental History’, *The Journal of American History* 76 (1990): 1117–21; Melissa Leach and Cathy Green, ‘Gender and Environmental History: From Representation of Women and Nature to Gender Analysis of Ecology and Politics’, *Environment and History* 3, no. 3 (October 1997): 343-370; Ramachandra Guha, *The Unquiet Woods: Ecological Change and Peasant Resistance in the Himalaya* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989); Virginia J. Scharff, ‘Man and Nature! Sex Secrets of Environmental History,’ in *Seeing Nature through Gender*, ed. Virginia J. Scharff (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2003); Nancy C. Unger, ‘Women and Gender: Useful Categories of Analysis in Environmental History’, in *The Oxford Handbook of Environmental History*, ed. Andrew C. Isenberg (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 600-43; Susan Broomhall, ‘Editorial’, *Australian Historical Studies* 56, no. 2 (2025): 187–94; ‘Gender’, in *A Companion to American Environmental History*, ed. Douglas Cazauz Sackman (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 116–45; Sandra Swart, ‘Birds of a Feather: How Rethinking Animals Helps Us Rethink Ourselves’, in *Gender and Animals in History*, ed. Sandra Swart, *Yearbook of Women’s History* 42 (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2024), 9-27.

²¹ Schrepfer and Cazauz Sackman, ‘Gender’, 1.

²² Ruth A. Morgan and Margaret Cook, ‘Gender, Environment and History: New Methods and Approaches in Environmental History’, *International Review of Environmental History* 7, no. 1 (10 June 2021): 5.

associated with the unexciting, blended with the dullness of the everyday, with an uneventful temporality.’²³

That picture has shifted in recent years, however, as historians’ interventions in fields including domestic labour, women’s gardening, mountaineering, and environmental knowledge-making challenge a hegemony that privileges ‘forest fires’ over ‘cooking fires’.²⁴ A recently published special issue, *Gender Histories of Resource Management in Settler Colonial Australia*, has added a wealth of new perspectives on the relations of gender and environment in settler colonial contexts, especially with regard to the valuation of plants, animals, waterways, and landscapes as resources for human consumption.²⁵ An active scholarly blog series on new historical perspectives on women and the environment also signals the field’s vitality.²⁶ These new interventions make clear that taking gender seriously in environmental history is not only about adding more women to this historical record, or reaffirming metaphorical equivalences that have often been drawn between women and nature.²⁷ It also means analysing the ways that environmental knowledge, experiences and behaviours are deeply gendered in historically contingent ways. As Virginia Scharff observed, ‘Gender, the bundle of habits and expectations and behaviours that organises people and things according to ideas about the consequences of sexed bodies, is a crucial, deep, and far-reaching medium through which we encounter nature’.²⁸

²³ Bellacasa, *Matters of Care*, 118.

²⁴ Katie Holmes and Ruth Morgan, ‘Placing Gender: Gender and Environmental History’, *Environment and History* 27, no. 2 (1 May 2021): 187–91; Karen Twigg, ‘The Green Years: The Role of Abundant Water in Shaping Postwar Constructions of Rural Femininity’, *Environment and History* 27, no. 2 (1 May 2021): 277–301; Karen Twigg, ‘“Dust, Dryness and Departure”: Constructions of Masculinity and Femininity during the WWII Drought’, *History Australia* 18, no. 4 (2 October 2021): 694–713; Katie Holmes, ‘The “Mallee-Made Man”: Making Masculinity in the Mallee Lands of South Eastern Australia, 1890-1940’, *Environment and History* 27, no. 2 (1 May 2021): 251–75; Ruth A. Morgan, ‘Health, Hearth and Empire: Climate, Race and Reproduction in British India and Western Australia’, *Environment and History* 27, no. 2 (1 May 2021): 229–50.

²⁵ Susan Broomhall (ed.), ‘Gender Histories of Resource Management in Settler Colonial Australia’, *Australian Historical Studies* 56, no. 2 (2025). Three articles from this special issue have especially informed this thesis: Ruth A. Morgan, ‘“Propagandists for the Soil”: Gender, Erosion and the Murray Valley in the Mid-Twentieth Century’, *Australian Historical Studies* 56, no. 2 (2025): 293–312; Katie Holmes and Karen Twigg, ‘Saving Hattah Lakes: Changing Masculinities and the Campaigns for a National Park, 1900-1960’, *Australian Historical Studies* 56, no. 2 (2025): 313–33; Lorinda Cramer, ‘“All the Men at the Pump”: Water, Wool, and Squatter Anne Drysdale’s Diaries, 1840–1851’, *Australian Historical Studies* 56, no. 2 (2025): 213–30.

²⁶ Ruby Ekkel, ‘In her nature: new historical perspectives on women and the environment’, *VIDA* (blog), Australian Women’s History Network, 19 June, 2025, <https://www.auswhn.com.au/blog/in-her-nature/>.

²⁷ In 2001, American environmental historian Richard White warned against ‘an endless rediscovery that humans have made nature female’. Richard White, ‘Environmental History: Watching a Field Mature’, *Pacific Historical Review* 70 (February 2001): 109.

²⁸ Virginia Scharff, ‘Introduction’, in *Seeing Nature Through Gender*, ed. Virginia Scharff (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2003), xiii.

We have seen a longer and more productive tradition of attention to gender and environment in an American context, and these works have been important in informing this topic and giving me confidence in the potential insights of this kind of investigation. Philosopher and historian Carolyn Merchant has written influentially about the relationship often assumed to exist between women and the environment or women and ‘nature’, and a feminine ethic of care.²⁹ She has also produced histories of women’s distinctive experiences of the imagined and physical American frontier environment, and of the prominent but often controversial role of women in Progressive conservation organisations in the late 1800s and early 1900s.³⁰ As Merchant and others have demonstrated, North American women were crucial and early supporters of conservationist causes including bird preservation and national park formation, but their presence in some key organisations, and their reported focus on aesthetic value instead of utilitarian value, was seen to take away from the conservationist cause’s seriousness, rationality, or masculinity.³¹ Other North American scholars who have contributed to this field include Vera Norwood, Annette Kolodny, Nancy Unger, and Josephine Donovan.³²

One of the major insights of North American scholars of gender and environment is the significance and specificity of women’s environmental relationships in settler colonialism.³³ As Adele Perry observes, gender is where ‘the abiding bonds between dispossession and colonisation become most clear’ in the settler colonial context.³⁴ Responding to Scott Morgenson’s call in 2012 for greater attention to gender and sexuality in settler colonial studies, Jody Jensen and Rebecca Weaver-Hightower argue that settler women performed a vastly different, but not necessarily less impactful, range of legitimising acts of settlement compared

²⁹ Carolyn Merchant, *The Death of Nature: women, ecology, and the scientific revolution* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1980); Amanda M. Nichols, ‘After the Death of Nature: Carolyn Merchant and the Future of Human--Nature Relations’, *Journal for the Study of Religion, Nature & Culture* 15, no. 1 (January 2021): 130-33.

³⁰ Carolyn Merchant, ‘Women of the Progressive Conservation Movement: 1900-1916’, *Environmental Review: ER* 8, no. 1 (1984): 57-85; Carolyn Merchant, ‘George Bird Grinnell’s Audubon Society: Bridging the Gender Divide in Conservation’, *Environmental History* 15, no. 1 (January 2010): 3-30.

³¹ Merchant, ‘George Bird Grinnell’s Audubon Society’; Nancy Unger, *Beyond Nature’s Housekeepers: American Women in Environmental History* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2012).

³² Vera Norwood, *Made From This Earth: American Women and Nature* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993); Annette Kolodny, *The Land Before Her: Fantasy and Experience and History in American Life and Letters* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1984); Unger, *Beyond Nature’s Housekeepers*; Nancy Unger, ‘Women and Gender: Useful Categories of Analysis in Environmental History’, in *Oxford Handbook of Environmental History*, ed. Andrew Isenberg (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 600-643.

³³ Important examples include Adele Perry, *On the Edge of Empire: Gender, Race and the Making of British Columbia, 1849-71* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001); Cynthia Culver Prescott, *Gender and Generation on the Far Western Frontier* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2007).

³⁴ Perry, *On the Edge of Empire*, 19.

to men, helping to demonstrate ‘for themselves and others their ownership of colonizable space’.³⁵ These legitimising acts could include writing and art-making about colonised environments and their relationship to the ‘old country’, as well as popular forms of botany and natural history. Especially in second and later generations of white settlers, these acts could also overlap with the practices and ideas of white women’s emancipation.³⁶ Such perspectives are important in an Australian context, too, though the specific environmental and political conditions were different and necessitate close and careful examination. In forging and expressing tangible and intangible bonds with nature and by making places for themselves in the Australian landscape, settler Australian women took part in, and sometimes contended with, geographies of ostracism and inclusion which were fundamental to the continuation and development of settler colonialism in their country.³⁷

A number of Australian historians have demonstrated that some of the most socially acceptable modes of engaging with the Australian environment, and making meaning about it, were those relating to plants.³⁸ Settler women’s botany and gardening – more so than other interventions – have been closely considered by historians, who have emphasised both their contributions to science and their complex parts in the first century of colonialism in Australia.³⁹ Georgiana Molloy (1805-1843) and Louisa Atkinson (1834-1872) are probably the best-known female botanists from this period: both aided distant male scientists by collecting and sending hundreds of specimens of indigenous flora previously undocumented by Western botany and both wrote

³⁵ Jody Jensen and Rebecca Weaver-Hightower, ‘Botany and the Woman Colonizer in Catharine Parr Traill’s *Backwoods of Canada* and Anna Brownell Jameson’s *Winter Studies and Summer Rambles in Canada*’, *Settler Colonial Studies* 11, no. 2 (2021): 242-58.

³⁶ As Cynthia Culver Prescott argues with reference to American settlers, the second and later generations were allowed more freedom in gender roles than the first – women could find roles for themselves beyond ‘the house and hearth’. Prescott, *Gender and Generation*, 3

³⁷ Australian work on women’s particular roles in settler colonialism includes Ann Standish, *Australia through Women’s Eyes* (Melbourne: Australian Scholarly Publishing, 2008); Patricia Grimshaw and Ann Standish, ‘Making Tasmania Home: Louisa Meredith’s “Colonizing Prose”’, *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies* 28, no. 1/2 (2007): 1-17.

³⁸ Explaining the great popularity amongst women of flower drawing in mid-century Australian colonies, Caroline Jordan writes that ‘[g]ardening, botanising and drawing shared a program of moral and religious propaganda around the themes of ‘woman’, ‘nature’ and ‘innocence’, meanings reinforced by the fact that female amateurs frequently pursued them all at once [...] The combination of morality with science would present a particularly strong appeal for many women artists in the colonies where women grasped a real chance to contribute to scientific discovery.’ Caroline Jordan, *Picturesque Pursuits* (Carlton, Victoria: Melbourne University Publishing, 2005), 17-18.

³⁹ Important studies of women botanists in Australia include Judy Skene, ‘The Power of Naming: Women Botanical Collectors and the Contested Space of 19th Century Botany’, *Studies in Western Australian History* 17 (1997): 1-12; Sara Maroske, ‘“A taste for botanic science”: Ferdinand Mueller’s female collectors and the history of Australian botany’, *Muelleria* 32 (2014): 72-91; Sara Maroske and Alison Vaughan, ‘Ferdinand Mueller’s Female Plant Collectors: A Biographical Register’, *Muelleria* 32 (2014): 92-172; Bernice Barry, *A Lady’s Pen: The Botanical Letters of Georgiana Molloy* (Perth: UWA Publishing, 2023); Nicole Hodgson, ‘Ghost Plants: The Possibilities of Botanical Ecobiography’, *Life Writing* 22, no. 1 (2025): 26-36.

with eloquence about their findings, in letters, newspaper articles, and books.⁴⁰ Some women, most famously Louisa Meredith, Mary Allport, and sisters Helena Scott and Harriett Scott found acclaim as natural history illustrators, drawing plants (and less often insects and animals) with an eye to scientific detail as well as aesthetic beauty.⁴¹ Their illustrations, as Caroline Jordan argues, encouraged settlers to ‘come to terms with an unfamiliar country’ and to ‘bring the country into legible order’.⁴²

Jordan is among a number of scholars who argue for women botanists’ important role in naming and claiming the continent for settler Europeans. Their work in denominating, drawing, and popularising native plants connected to more violent dispossession and mass murder of ongoing settlement across the continent that would, by 1901, be named Australia.⁴³ They fostered a sense of homeliness and comfort in a land that often seemed foreign and inferior to settlers.⁴⁴ Though many women abhorred the environmental destruction wrought by male colonialists, and some sympathised with Aboriginal people’s plight, they rarely questioned Europeans’ fundamental claim to the land.⁴⁵ Rather, female naturalists and illustrators helped to, in the words of Tom Griffiths, ‘take hold of the land emotionally and spiritually’.⁴⁶

⁴⁰ For an account of the life and work of Louisa Atkinson, including her relations with Aboriginal people, see Patricia Clarke, *Pioneer writer: the life of Louisa Atkinson, novelist, journalist, naturalist* (Sydney; Boston: Allen & Unwin, 1990). Molloy’s life, marked by personal tragedy along with notable scientific pursuits, has inspired several biographies, including a forthcoming publication, *From the Miniature from the Momentous*, by Jessica White. See Alexandra Hasluck, *Portrait with Background: A Life of Georgiana Molloy* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1955); William J. Lines, *An All Consuming Passion: Origins, Modernity, and the Australian Life of Georgiana Molloy* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1994); Bernice Barry, *Georgiana Molloy: The Mind that Shines* (Sydney: Pan Macmillan, 2016 [first published 2015]).

⁴¹ Jordan, *Picturesque Pursuits*, 158.

⁴² Jordan, *Picturesque Pursuits*, 158.

⁴³ Jane Carey, *Taking to the Field* (Clayton, Victoria: Monash University Publishing, 2023), especially 12–46. In 1841, Molloy’s husband John headed a massacre of Wardandi Nyungar people after the spearing of a neighbour, George Layman. Jessica White, “‘Paper Talk’: Testimony and Forgetting in South-West Western Australia”, *Journal of the Association for the Study of Australian Literature* 17, no. 1 (2017): 1–13. See also Len Collard, *A Nyungar Interpretation of Ellensbrook and Wonerup Homesteads* (Perth: Heritage Council of Western Australia, 1994).

⁴⁴ Other important botanical collectors of this kind included Harriette Sophia Biddulph (and several of her female relatives), Flora Campbell, and Diana Bunbury. Maroske and Vaughan, ‘Ferdinand Mueller’s Female Plant Collectors’, 104, 107, 106.

⁴⁵ For Atkinson’s complex relationship to Aboriginal people and the environment, see Elizabeth Lawson, ‘Louisa Atkinson: The Distant Sound of Native Voices’, Occasional Paper No. 15, English Department University College, Australian Defence Force Academy, Canberra (1989); Elizabeth Lawson, ‘Louisa Atkinson: Writings on Aboriginal Land Ownership’, *Margin*, 21 (1989), 15–20; Grace Moore, ‘Then came the high unpromising forests, and miles of loneliness’: Louisa Atkinson’s recasting of the Australian landscape’, in *Worlding the South*, eds. Sarah Comyn and Porscha Fermanis (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2021), 196–214.

⁴⁶ Griffiths, *Hunters and Collectors*, 5.

A related body of scholarship has examined women's gardening as a commonplace and crucial settler mode of reshaping the landscape and creating a sense of place within it.⁴⁷ Many women strove to tame or evict the autochthonous plants that flourished in climates where imported roses languished, while some learned to appreciate and promote Australian plants. Katie Holmes sees in these complex interactions evidence of women gardeners' 'double vision', consisting of a 'reaching backwards to a remembered place and past, and forward to an imagined place and future'.⁴⁸ Gardening was thus another way that settlers 'transformed alien spaces into images of their own making'.⁴⁹ These transformations never did run smooth, however, and Andrea Gaynor has stressed that gardens were also sites of engagement with an agential and unruly more-than-human world, which moulded rather than only reflected the evolution of environmental attitudes.⁵⁰ In all, botanically minded women have collectively been recognised as some of the first amongst settler Australians to recast the natural landscape as beautiful and worth protecting, and as a place where European settlers might feel themselves to belong.

Engagements with native animals, by contrast, have so far remained peripheral at this promising intersection of gender and environmental history in Australia – though moths, butterflies, and birds often feature in colonial women's natural history artworks.⁵¹ This thesis therefore is inspired by the existing scholarship on colonial women and plants, particularly in

⁴⁷ For analyses of women gardeners' particular roles in environmental and national meaning-making, see Katie Holmes, *Between the Leaves: Stories of Australian Women, Writing and Gardens* (Crawley, Western Australia: UWA Publishing, 2011); Holly Forsyth, *Remembered gardens: eight women and their visions of an Australian landscape* (Carlton, Victoria: Miengunyah Press, 2006); Margaret Somerville, *Wildflowering: The life and places of Kathleen McArthur* (St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 2004). More general works on the significance of gardening in settler Australian history and identity include Katie Holmes, Susan K. Martin and Kylie Mirmohamadi (eds.), *Green Pens: A Collection of Garden Writing* (Miengunyah Press, Carlton, 2004); Georgiana Whitehead (ed.), *Planting the Nation* (Melbourne: Australian Garden History Society, 2001); Andrea Gaynor, *Harvest of the Suburbs: An Environmental History of Growing Food in Australian Cities* (Crawley, Western Australia: University of Western Australia Press, 2006); Katie Holmes, Susan K. Martin and Kylie Mirmohamadi, *Reading the Garden: The Settlement of Australia* (Carlton, Victoria: Melbourne University Publishing, 2008).

⁴⁸ Katie Holmes, "'Planting hopes with potatoes": Gardens, memory and place making', in *Memory, Monuments and Museums: The Past in the Present*, ed. Marilyn Lake (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2006): 170.

⁴⁹ Katie Holmes, 'Gardens', *Journal of Australian Studies* 23, no. 61 (1999): 152.

⁵⁰ In a point more fully elaborated in Chapter One of this thesis, Andrea Gaynor has challenged a historiographical tendency to depict gardens as only a human and cultural space for the creation and negotiation of national, racial, classed and gendered identities; rather, she argues, gardens 'have always been co-productions of human and non-human', shaped by the material make-up of diverse environments and diverse non-humans. Andrea Gaynor, 'Grappling with 'Nature' in Australian Home Gardens 1890-1960', *Environment and History* 24 (2018): 23-38.

⁵¹ An important example is found in Harriet and Helena Scott's celebrated illustrations of moths in Alexander Walker Scott's *Australian Lepidoptera* series, published between 1890 and 1899. See Vanessa Finney, *Transformations: Harriet and Helena Scott, colonial Sydney's finest natural history painters* (Sydney: NewSouth, 2018).

considering the complex dynamics of meanings imposed on an agential natural world which did not always cooperate. Here I turn my primary focus, however, to a slightly later stage of settler colonialism, and to the animal kingdom.

Women protecting animals

Women's relationships with the more-than-human world have also been elaborated in the historiography of animal protectionism, a literature that is particularly well-established in the British context. Scholars including Harriet Ritvo and Diana Donald have stressed that women in the later nineteenth and early twentieth century in England played a major role in the emergence of an animal protectionist movement.⁵² Women were disproportionately represented in vegetarian and antivivisectionist societies and, when permitted, were influential in the organisation which would become known as the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (RSPCA).⁵³ The popular association between women and animal advocacy could both galvanize and frustrate efforts towards more stringent animal protection measures. Animal protectionist leaders such as Frances Power Cobbe, Anna Kingsford, and Louise Lindaf-Hageby, adopted and moulded dominant concepts of womanhood and feminism to argue for animals' protection, bringing some success alongside mockery and vitriol.⁵⁴

Accounts of this period are insightful for the connections drawn between the early women's movement and animal protectionism, and for their exploration of societally pervasive debates about gendered cruelty, animals' place in moral and social systems, and relative values of feminised sentimentality and masculinised rationality. They also suggest the possibilities of similar investigations in other contexts, considering the added complications of a settler-colonial context in which distinctions between native and non-native were highly fraught. Animal protection ideas and organisations were transported to Australia in the nineteenth and

⁵² Harriet Ritvo, *The Animal Estate: The English and Other Creatures in the Victorian Age* (Harvard University Press, 1987); Diana Donald, *Women against Cruelty: Protection of Animals in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2020).

⁵³ Donald, *Women against Cruelty*, 179-222.

⁵⁴ Sally Mitchell, *Frances Power Cobbe: Victorian Feminist, Journalist, Reformer* (University of Virginia Press, 2004); Susan Hamilton, "'A Crisis in Woman's History': Frances Power Cobbe's Duties of Women and the Practice of Everyday Feminism", *Women's History Review* 11, no. 4 (1 December 2002): 577-93; Ruby Ekkel, 'Vegetarians, Vivisection and Violationism: Gender and the Non-Human Animal in Anna Kingsford's Life and Writing', *Lilith: A Feminist History Journal* 28 (20 December 2022): 73-96. For a discussion of the pathologisation of women's care for animals in the past and present, see Lori Gruen and Fiona Probyn-Rapsey (eds.), *Animaladies: Gender, Animals, and Madness*, (New York, NY: Bloomsbury Academic, 2018); Carol J. Adams, *The Sexual Politics of Meat (20th Anniversary Edition): A Feminist-Vegetarian Critical Theory*, (New York ; London: Continuum, 2010).

early-twentieth centuries, finding a ready audience amongst many settler women concerned with eradicating cruelty to the vulnerable. Yet relatively little scholarship has explored the ways the movement manifested in, and adapted to, Australian cultural and environmental realities.⁵⁵ Still less attention has been paid to intersections of Australian animal protectionism and native animal conservation.⁵⁶

Argument

It almost goes without saying that settler women's interactions with native animals were as many and varied as the non-human forms with which they shared the Australian continent. For some women, native animals were pests, domestic intrusions, or an uninteresting sideshow; they were dangerous and unwelcome deviations from a European norm that still felt like home. Nevertheless, it appears that settler women, broadly speaking, were integral in changing attitudes towards native animals in ways that have not been fully appreciated.

This thesis argues that, in their diverse environmental engagements, many settler women cultivated a contested ethic of care that cast native animals as emotionally and morally significant individuals meriting attention, protection and patriotic affection. They often did so in their roles as mothers, educators and writers for children, and in the greater opportunities for thoughtful engagements with nature, in leisure and in politics, embraced by the 'new women' of the early twentieth century. This ethic of care was never straightforwardly benign; it could entail exclusion, control, and violence. Women's advocacy for animals' inclusion within the sphere of moral, domestic, or religious concern had significant consequences: fostering opposition to fur and feather trades, spurring the creation of national parks, and enlisting some species as friendly national icons who could be rhetorically enlisted to affirm settler claims to

⁵⁵ Stefan Petrow has led work in this area, noting the gendered difficulties faced by the women who dominated the establishment of SPCA branches in Launceston and Hobart. 'Civilising Mission: Animal Protection in Hobart 1878-1914', *Britain and the World* 5 (2012): 69-95; Stefan Petrow, "'Developing the Highest Moral Instincts': Protecting Animals in Launceston 1879-1906', *History Australia* 12, no. 3 (2015): 160-82. Karen Pack's recent biographical portrait of Frances Levvy explores the gendered opposition she received to her animal protectionist education and policing in Sydney. Karen Pack, *Queer Omissions: Unmarried Women and Social Justice Activism in the Church* (Routledge, 2025), ch. 1 and 2. For institutional histories of the state RSPCA branches see Barbara Pertz, *For All Creatures: A History of RSPCA Victoria* (Burwood: RSPCA Victoria, 2006); Jennifer MacCulloch, 'Animals in Sydney c. 1880-1930', *Sydney Gazette: Organ of the Sydney History Group* 6 (1984): 31-41; Wallace B. Budd, *Hear The Other Side: A History of the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals in South Australia 1875-1988* (Hawthorndene: Investigator Press, 1988).

⁵⁶ Jennifer MacCulloch's PhD thesis is an important exception, tracing the connections between Sydney's animal protectionist and conservationist movements and emphasising the roles of women. While I differ from her interpretations in some respects, and address a different scale, MacCulloch's thesis is an important foundation for the current study. Jennifer MacCulloch, 'Creatures of Culture: The Animal Protection and Preservation Movements in Sydney, 1880-1930' (PhD thesis, University of Sydney, 1993).

land and legitimacy. Native animals who were pets, friends, protected wards in national parks, or characters in a children's book could act conveniently as what Affrica Taylor has called 'endorsing indigenes', offering an emotionally satisfying relationship with the land and consolidating a sense of settler belonging.⁵⁷ In this way they erased Indigenous people's ongoing, unsettling presence, and their own ways of caring for and understanding native animals.

At intimate and public scales, settler women engaged with native animals in ways which went beyond the need for food, clothing or safety. They worked often in close coalition with male naturalists and conservationists, who were typically better-known and better-resourced. At other times, they battled against men. For women like Alice Manfield and Mary Grant Roberts, this love for native animals shaped the course of their lives. For others, a commitment to native animal care could be triggered by a brief local controversy or an individual animal who wandered into a home or garden. Their care was often grounded in an enduring appreciation of a bush space and its inhabitants, familiar since childhood, and it was almost always encouraged in young women by female mentors like teachers and mothers. In all this, women contributed powerfully to the creation of a sense of 'settler indigeneity' which was crucial to the solidification and continuation of British settler colonialism, even and especially as Australia settled uneasily into being its very own, very white, nation.

Care and emotion environmental history

In employing the language of 'care', I mean to convey its complex meanings as drawn out in recent years by scholars including Joan Tronto, María Puig de la Bellacasa, and Thom Van Dooren.⁵⁸ These scholars have reinterpreted the concept far beyond a simplistic notion of 'warm pleasant affection or a moralistic feel-good attitude', and highlighted both the political

⁵⁷ Affrica Taylor, 'Settler Children, Kangaroos and the Cultural Politics of Australian National Belonging', *Global Studies of Childhood* 4, no. 3 (2014): 169-82.

⁵⁸ María Puig de la Bellacasa, *Matters of Care: Speculative Ethics in More Than Human Worlds* (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 2017), 2. Other influential work theorising more-than-human care includes: Thom van Dooren, *Flight Ways: Life and Loss at the Edge of Extinction* (Columbia University Press, 2014) and Deborah Bird Rose, *Wild dog dreaming: love and extinction* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2011). Formative to these varied lines of care-based scholarship was the work of psychologist Carol Gilligan, who in 1982 posited an alternative moral orientation based on care and relationships more-so than on universal laws of justice – one that had been overlooked because it better represented women's perspectives (though she noted that an ethics of care would transcend gender in a truly democratic society). Carol Gilligan, *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982).

significance of care and its multidimensional nature.⁵⁹ Care can be a form of practical labour (today often referred to as ‘care work’) or an emotional and intellectual engagement with others. One can care for, care about, or care with.⁶⁰ An ethic of care is a relational dynamic involving a ‘reaching out to something other than the self’, that usually involves looking from ‘the standpoint of the one needing care or attention’.⁶¹ As scholars in recent years have argued, the ‘something other than the self’ need not be a human.⁶²

Indeed, Joan Tronto’s expansive definition of care, developed with Berenice Fisher, embraces ‘everything that we do to maintain, continue and repair “our world” so that we can live in it as well as possible.’⁶³ This ‘world’ includes bodies, selves, and environments in a ‘complex, life-sustaining web.’⁶⁴ Thus, though Tronto’s own work is focused on human politics – arguing that care should be centred as ‘the substantive work of democratic life’ – she and Fisher’s expansive and influential framing lends itself to more-than-human lenses.⁶⁵ Care has in recent years emerged as an important theme in environmental humanities more broadly, albeit with a quieter impact, so far, in environmental history.⁶⁶

An important argument developed by these scholars is that care is always ambiguous, and neither intrinsically good nor fair. It can manifest in coercive or exclusionary ways. ‘To care can feel good; it can also feel awful,’ Bellacasa notes. ‘It can do good; it can oppress.’ The fact that humans and all living creatures require care for survival, she goes on, means that care is ‘all the more susceptible to convey control.’⁶⁷ Care for, or about, animals has not always translated to better outcomes for those animals as individuals or species, and one of the central tensions animating these practices and ideas was the conflict between control and non-

⁵⁹ Bellacasa, *Matters of Care*, 2.

⁶⁰ Berenice Fisher and Joan Tronto, ‘Toward a Feminist Theory of Caring’, in *Circles of Care*, ed. Emily K. Abel and Margaret Nelson (Albany: SUNY Press, 1990), 40; Joan Tronto, *Caring Democracy: Markets, Equality and Justice* (New York: NYU Press, 2013), 35. Sara Ahmed points out that care can also denote an anxious position of ‘carefulness’. She notes that, because both care and anxiety are associated with the feminine, a ‘feminine relation to objects could be described as a mode of carefulness, which actually restricts the mobility of the feminine body within domestic space, as well as public space’. Sarah Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, second edition (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014), 97.

⁶¹ Joan Tronto, *Moral Boundaries: A political argument for an ethic of care* (New York and London: Routledge, 1993), 19.

⁶² Bellacasa, *Matters of Care*.

⁶³ Tronto, *Moral Boundaries*, 103.

⁶⁴ Tronto, *Moral Boundaries*, 103.

⁶⁵ Joan Tronto, ‘There is an alternative: *homines curans* and the limits of neoliberalism’, *International Journal of Care and Caring* 1, no. 1 (March 2017): 38.

⁶⁶ See for example Thom van Dooren, ‘Care’, *Environmental Humanities* 5, no. 1 (2014): 291–94; Stine Krøijer and Cecilie Rubow, ‘Introduction: Enchanted Ecologies and Ethics of Care’, *Environmental Humanities* 14, no. 2 (2022): 375–84; Bellacasa, *Matters of Care*; Hannan Lewsley et al., ‘Storying the river: toward a Feminist Ethics of Care’, *Environmental Humanities* 17, no. 2 (2025): 525–35.

⁶⁷ Bellacasa, *Matters of Care*, 1.

intervention, proximity and distance, possession and preservation.⁶⁸ As the case studies in this thesis make clear, the desire to protect and ‘care for’ native animals often coexisted with urges to possess, capture, classify, or commercialise them.

Care has long been, and continues to be, understood as feminine.⁶⁹ Its association with women and the feminised labour of what Bellacasa calls the ‘domestic unimpressive ways in which we get through the day’ has been an important factor in care’s muted scholarly presence.⁷⁰ In light of this, I am cautious not to suppose a naturalness or homogeneity to women’s interactions with native animals – whether caring or otherwise – concurring with Susan Broomhall that ‘the aim of feminist history approaches to environmental history is not to claim women (or indeed men) are an essentialised, monolithic or homogeneous category who have or had a universal or special relationship to nature and the environment.’⁷¹ Rather, it is important to seek ‘varied feminist approaches’ to produce more nuanced environmental histories that recognise ‘the diversity of human experiences, de-naturalise and historicise, any assumed relationships between gender and environment, and also integrate nonhuman perspectives and experiences into historical narratives.’⁷²

Because the language of ‘care’ mixes the psychological and the physical, this thesis is informed by, and speaks to, approaches that foreground the emotions in environmental history. Emotions are deeply entangled in human interactions with environments, and especially with animals, but it is only more recently that scholars including Andrea Gaynor, Andrew Flack, Emily O’Gorman, and Dolly Jørgensen have advocated a thorough and explicit engagement with the history of emotions.⁷³ They stress the diversity of emotions around animals, their political

⁶⁸ Thom van Dooren ‘A Day with Crows – Rarity, Nativity and the Violent-Care of Conservation’, *Animal Studies Journal* 4, no. 2 (2015): 2-24; Libby Robin, ‘Culling and Care: Ferals, Invasives and Conservation Icons in Australia’, *Australian Zoologist* 29, no. 1 (2017): 103-13.

⁶⁹ Sara Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004), 97; Carol Gilligan, *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women’s Development* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982). For Tronto’s arguments complicating the gendering of care, see Tronto, *Moral Boundaries*, especially 112-16.

⁷⁰ Bellacasa, *Matters of Care*, 117.

⁷¹ Broomhall, ‘Editorial’, 189.

⁷² Broomhall, ‘Editorial’, 189. For critical discussion of the problems of essentialism in gendered environmental history and ecofeminist scholarship, see Bina Agarwal, ‘The Gender and Environment Debate: Lessons from India’, *Feminist Studies* 18, no. 1 (Spring 1992), 119-58; Chandra Talpade Mohanty, ‘Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses’, *Boundary 2* 12, no. 3 (Spring-Autumn 1984): 333-58.

⁷³ Gaynor, Broomhall, and Flack, ‘Frogs and Feeling Communities’. Andrew Flack and Dolly Jørgensen summarised recent approaches to emotions and the environment, and outline future terrains, in their chapter ‘Feelings for Nature: Emotions in Environmental History’. Andrew Flack and Dolly Jørgensen, ‘Feelings for Nature: Emotions in Environmental History’, in *The Routledge History of Emotions in the Modern World*, eds. Katie Barclay and Peter N. Stearns (Abingdon and New York: Routledge: 2023), 235-251. In 2019 Dolly Jørgensen published the first book to explicitly centre emotions in order to examine environmental histories of conservationist action. Dolly Jørgensen, *Recovering Lost Species in the Modern Age: Histories of Longing and*

power, and their changeability over time. Shame, rage, reverence, love, grief, pride, and exasperation reverberate through the archives under consideration here. Throughout the following chapters there are some emotions that we might recognise as akin to ‘ecological grief’ or ‘solastalgia’, alongside other readily recognisable emotions like fondness for pets and anger at cruelty.⁷⁴ Other emotions may be less legible to twenty-first century readers: protectionists, for example, stressed ‘mercy’ as both a set of actions and an emotional attitude that could and should be inculcated in children.

Gender is a shaping factor in emotional regimes surrounding animals. Labels for women’s emotions, like ‘hysteria’, ‘sentiment’ or ‘sentimentality’ can bear significant consequences for how their interpretations are responded to by historical contemporaries and historians.⁷⁵ Gender also mattered in people’s understanding of emotional relationships *with* animals. As the fourth chapter makes clear, women often justified their expertise about native animals in terms of their sustained emotional connections to them. Such assertions had high-stakes implications, including that animals possessed sufficient powers of thought and emotion to form meaningful bonds with humans, and that humans, therefore, were under substantial moral obligations to these fellow thinkers and feelers. The latter point was integral to the writings of women animal protectionists around the turn of the twentieth century, who emphasised animals’ capacity for pain and fear, as well as for noble emotions like motherly love and devotion. These appeals to animal emotions were echoed in conservationist arguments against cruel trapping methods for koalas and other native mammals. The particularities of women’s discourses about animal emotions, which often differed from men’s in style and purpose, merit closer attention.

Belonging (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2019). For other recent accounts of human-animal emotional interactions, see Thomas Webb, Chris Pearson, Penny Summerfield and Mark Riley, ‘More-Than-Human Emotional Communities: British Soldiers and Mules in Second World War Burma’, *Cultural and Social History* 17, no. 2 (2020): 245–62; Chris Pearson, ‘“Four-Legged Pollus”: French Army Dogs, Emotional Practices and the Creation of Militarised Human-Dog Bonds’, *Journal of Social History* 53, no. 3 (2017): 731–60. I say ‘explicit’ because considerable earlier work on animal history, especially in the British scholarship on animal welfare, and antivivisection has acknowledged and explored intersecting dynamics of gender and emotions. See for example Hilda Kean, ‘The ‘Smooth Cool Men of Science’: The Feminist and Socialist Response to Vivisection’, *History Workshop Journal* 40, no. 1 (autumn 1995): 16–38, Coral Lansbury, *The Old Brown Dog: women, workers, and vivisection in Edwardian England* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985).

⁷⁴ The familiar vocabulary should not, however, lead us to assume that the historical experiences and meanings of ‘loving pets’ or ‘hating cruelty’ were the same.

⁷⁵ Brian Luke has highlighted the ways in which women’s resistance to animal exploitation, often dubbed ‘hysteria’ or ‘sentiment’, is frequently interpreted as a ‘biosexual phenomenon to be ignored or subdued’ rather than a substantive moral or political challenge. Brian Luke, ‘Taming ourselves or going feral? Toward a nonpatriarchal metaethic of animal liberation’, in *Animals and Women: Feminist Theoretical Explorations*, ed. Carol J. Adams and Josephine Donovan (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1995), 239.

Sources and approaches

A study of this kind, encompassing a wide range of humans and animals, necessitates a creative and expansive approach to archival sources. These include diaries, newspaper and magazine accounts, society periodicals, maps, government records, natural history displays, fiction and non-fiction books, advertisements, field notebooks, committee minutes, photographic collections, memoirs, guidebooks, oral history recordings and transcripts, material objects, and scientific papers. Because this research is concerned with the experiences of individual women and animals on the one hand, and broader trends, shifts and sensibilities on the other, I deliberately draw on a mixture of organisational records – namely conservation, scientific, animal welfare, and bushwalking societies – and, where available, personal papers belonging to particular women. The personal archives of Alice Manfield at the State Library of Victoria, Marie Byles at the State Library of New South Wales, and Mary Grant Roberts and Jessie Luckman at the Tasmanian Archives were especially significant.

As with so many Australian histories, this research has also been richly supported by access to digitised historical newspapers, available through the National Library's *Trove* website.⁷⁶ *Trove*'s abundant and searchable resources help to generate new and richer histories that surface voices otherwise difficult to find.⁷⁷ In using them, however, I bear in mind James Keating's word of caution about the 'distorting effect' of a database that privileges 'the pressman's gaze' and still absents many dedicated women's publications.⁷⁸ Contemporary newspapers can serve as a barometer for broader, male-dominated perspectives towards the animal causes that were often trivialised, feminised, or ignored, notwithstanding their deep importance to animal advocates. Though they play a contextual role in most chapters, newspapers are centrally important to the fifth chapter, helping to piece together (and pull apart) public responses to a koala open season that threw the tensions and passions of care for native animals into sharp relief.

⁷⁶ National Library of Australia, 'Trove', accessed 31 December 2025, <https://trove.nla.gov.au/>. For a range of Australian historians' reflections on the significant impact of Trove – and its possibilities and limitations – see 'History in Practice: Trove Special Section', eds. Michelle Arrow, Leigh Boucher & Kate Fullagar, *History Australia* 18, no. 4 (2021).

⁷⁷ Catherine Bishop, 'The serendipity of connectivity: piecing together women's lives in the digital archive', *Women's History Review* 26, no. 5 (2017): 766–67.

⁷⁸ James Keating, 'Say Her Name: Madge Donohoe and the Promise and Problems of Using Trove to Write Australian Suffrage Histories', *History Australia* 18, no. 4 (2021): 849. See also Bishop, 'The serendipity of connectivity'.

To give one example of how the thesis stitches together diverse sources, my research into women's bushwalking practices brings together findings from the Melbourne Women's Walking Club records at the State Library of Victoria, which include memoirs, journals, newspaper clippings, correspondence, circulars, annual bushwalking programmes and photographic albums, with source material drawn from the personal papers of Alice Manfield, Marie Byles, and Jessie Luckman. These three women's relatively well-documented lives were dominated by their efforts to protect the natural environment in which they lived and the non-human inhabitants with which they shared it. Their cross-pollinating commitments to conservation, feminism and natural history, as well as their sometimes-polymathic achievements and copious, thoughtful writing give rich insight into the range of public, influential ways women could and did engage with animals, especially when well-resourced and blessed with fewer than typical social and familial restraints.

My sources, and consequently the bulk of my case studies, are primarily drawn from archives and libraries in Queensland, New South Wales, the Australian Capital Territory, Victoria, and Tasmania. This choice of geographical focus reflects the places where conservation, animal protection, and bushwalking activity was most concentrated during the period in question. It also encompasses a wide range of climatic and biotic contexts – from tropical rainforests to the sub-Antarctic – and includes both cities and rural areas. Though I have an eye towards broader national trends, I am alert to the distinctiveness of women and animals' experiences in a vast and extraordinarily biologically diverse continent, in spaces bearing idiosyncratic histories of colonialism and gender relations.⁷⁹ Historical accounts of human-animal relations, as Sandra Swart notes in agreement with Garry Marvin, should be written 'in the plural', rather than in

⁷⁹ Scholars who have worked on the distinctive environmental histories of the north, west, and centre of Australia, which feature less prominently in this thesis, include Andrea Gaynor, Ruth Morgan, Deborah Bird Rose, and Ann McGrath. See for example Gaynor, *Harvest of the Suburbs*; Andrea Gaynor and Ian McLean, 'Landscape Histories: Mapping Environmental and Ecological Change Through the Landscape Art of the Swan River Region of Western Australia', *Environment and History* 14, no. 2 (2008): 187-204; Ruth A. Morgan, *Running Out?: Water in Western Australia* (Crawley, Western Australia: UWA Publishing, 2015); Deborah Bird Rose, *Nourishing Terrains: Australian Aboriginal Views of Landscape and Wilderness* (Australian Heritage Commission, 1996); Ann McGrath, *Born in the Cattle* (Allen & Unwin, 1987). Specifically gendered environmental histories of these regions are less common, with the exception of a number of studies of Georgiana Molloy (see footnotes 39 and 43). The thesis is attentive to how these spaces featured in the environmental imaginaries of women based in eastern cities: Georgina Sweet was reported to preserve her respectable femininity by *not* venturing into remote parts of northern Australia to collect specimens (Chapter Four), while Ella McFadyen wrote a children's book about the imagined experiences of her pet thorny devils, wrenched from their desert homeland (Chapter Two).

an effort to ‘subsume them in overarching rubrics’, and I interpret my spatially diverse sources with this principle in mind, looking for specificity and plurality.⁸⁰

My research also took me to Britain, where collections at the Zoological Society of London Archives and the natural history museums of Oxford and Cambridge offered insights into the transnational colonial networks of science, moral reform, and animal trade in which Australian animals and their advocates were enmeshed. Few of the women in this thesis were highly internationally mobile, yet their work and ideas – and sometimes the animals they exported – circulated widely, shaping conversations about Australia, its ‘freakish’ animals, and its people, within and beyond a changing British Empire. Mary Grant Roberts, for example, spent most of her life in Tasmania, but was proud to be recognised by the Zoological Society of London, with whom she traded thylacines and other native animals, and she corresponded with zoologists and animal welfare advocates across the world.⁸¹

Animal-sensitive histories in more-than-human worlds

Animal lives, agencies, and experiences are heavily mediated by human perspectives and priorities, even when we take a wide and creative approach to sources. The seabird flying over Monica Meares’ head as she hiked along a Wilson’s Promontory beach in 1936, for example, probably did not intend to be a symbol of the ‘slow and sad procession of what has been’ nor of the triviality of ‘all men’s striving’.⁸² But how can historians strike at a truer interpretation? Scholars in the emerging field of animal history and from across the broader ‘animal turn’ have warned of countless chances for ‘wrong turns, misinterpretation, and clumsy ventriloquism’, though they insist on the urgency and possibilities of taking animal pasts seriously.⁸³ Some have argued the project is essentially impossible.⁸⁴ A thoughtful humility about what we can

⁸⁰ For the importance of careful attention to the placed-ness of animal histories, see Sandra S. Swart, ‘Review of Brantz, Dorothee, Ed., *Beastly Natures: Animals, Humans, and the Study of History*’, H-Environment, H-Review, November 2011, <https://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=31301>.

⁸¹ See Chapter One and Chapter Four.

⁸² Monica Meares, ‘Wonderful Wilson’s Promontory’, *Wayfaring*, no. 2 (1937): 24.

⁸³ Jennifer Bonnell and Sean Kheraj, ‘Introduction: Traces of the Animal Past’, in *Traces of the Animal Past: Methodological Challenges in Animal History*, eds. Jennifer Bonnell and Sean Kheraj (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 2022), 3; Harriet Ritvo, ‘Among Animals’, *Environment and History* 20, no. 4 (November 2014): 491-98.

⁸⁴ Erica Fudge, ‘A Left-Handed Blow: Writing the History of Animals’, in *Representing Animals*, ed. Nigel Rothfels, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002), 6. Susan J. Pearson and Mary Weismantel, ‘Does “the Animal” Exist? Toward a Theory of Social Life with Animals’, in *Beastly Natures: Animals, Humans, and the Study of History*, ed. Dorothee Brantz (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2010), 17–37. For a partial refutation of this approach, see Etienne Benson, ‘Animal Writes: Historiography, Disciplinarity, and the Animal Trace’, in *Making Animal Meaning*, eds. Linda Kalof and Georgina Montgomery (Michigan: Michigan State University Press, 2011), 3-16.

claim about animal experiences (without giving up the endeavour altogether or negating animals' agencies) is part of the answer. So too are creative approaches to reading traditional sources that seek out 'animal traces', and an openness to other sources including scientific literature to supplement our knowledge.⁸⁵ I am interested for this reason in non-textual sources like wildlife photography, where animal subjects may have the capacity to bypass or transcend the intentions of their human authors.⁸⁶ The opaqueness of animal interiority 'does not mean that we should not listen', as Peter Hobbins has written in his history of vivisection in Australia: 'the presence, intentions and actions of individual animals have meaning and consequence'.⁸⁷

With this in mind, I draw ecumenically from the insights and lexicon of the diverse fields of the animal turn, including critical animal studies and multispecies ethnography, but I have found Sandra Swart's concept of 'animal-sensitive history' most helpful in shaping my approach towards these sources. Humble and self-reflexive, animal-sensitive history looks for and accepts evidence of animal 'sentience, agency, individuality and personhood' but is cognisant of the constraints on the ways they can exercise or express these elements.⁸⁸ It couples an empathetic approach to human and non-human beings with an insistence on empirical accuracy, generating 'a complicated story, with no easy answers', that attends to the ways that animal lives and cultures change over time.⁸⁹ Swart differentiates this approach from grand claims of writing history 'from the animal perspective', warning that such attempts tend to reveal more about the human historian and their culture, than about animals themselves.⁹⁰

This word of caution aligns with Fiona Probyn-Rapsey and Lynette Russell's critique of a historiographical tendency in Australian environmental history, which frames trafficked animals like sheep and cows as 'co-colonisers' or 'shock-troops of empire', because of their damaging impact on the environment.⁹¹ I would add that framing native animals as committed

⁸⁵ Sandra Swart, 'Kicking over the Traces? Freeing the Animal from the Archive', in *Traces of the Animal Past: Methodological Challenges in Animal History*, ed. Jennifer Bonnell and Sean Kheraj (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 2022): 29.

⁸⁶ Benson, 'Animal Writes', 3, 6.

⁸⁷ Hobbins, 'Venom and vivisection', 37.

⁸⁸ Sandra Swart, *The Lion's Historian: Africa's Animal Past* (Auckland Park, South Africa: Jacana Media, 2023), 42, 30.

⁸⁹ Swart, *Lion's Historian*, 10.

⁹⁰ Swart, *Lion's Historian*, 30.

⁹¹ Fiona Probyn-Rapsey and Lynette Russell, 'Tools, Troops or Escapees? Cattle Trafficking in the Early Years of the Colony of New South Wales, Australia', *Environment and History* (published online ahead of print 17 October 2024): 1–22, <https://doi.org/10.3828/whpeh.63861480327329>. Harrison Croft has elaborated on this 'non-human non-complicity' with reference to sheep in colonial New South Wales. Harrison Croft, 'Unloading the sheep at the Port Phillip District: invasion, agency and non-human non-complicity, 1835-1853', *History Australia* (published online before print 7 October 2025): 1-17, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14490854.2025.2561065>.

anti-colonialists can also be problematic. We might rather consider them as, ‘rejecting the conditions of their experience’, as understood through a kangaroo’s individual sensory and intellectual *umwelt*.⁹² Animals variously adapted to and resisted the seismic changes engendered by human invasions, but they did so on their own terms and for their own purposes, within constraints out of their control.

Because the thesis concerns itself with human-animal interactions and attitudes, the animals featured most prominently are those that generated emotional engagement, discussion, physical encounters, and study – largely land-dwelling animals that were big enough for human perception. To some extent, therefore, the thesis reproduces an overemphasis on certain charismatic animals due to their preponderance in the archives – lyrebirds and kangaroos recur more than others, for example. It also attends, however, to the more inconspicuous, obscured, and undesirable of native animals. In this I am informed by more-than-human and multispecies approaches, led in the history discipline by Andrea Gaynor and Emily O’Gorman, that foreground relationality and co-constitution in animal and plant worlds, and aim to make visible (or audible) multiple voices.⁹³ These approaches do not take for granted fixed notions of homogenous and disparate ‘species’, and encourage a critical reading of sources that often present animals as individuals divorced (literally or conceptually) from wider ecological neighbourhoods.⁹⁴ To take one example, koalas feature liberally in the archives and in the following pages, appearing as objects of affection and controversy, national symbolism, and as pets and literary characters. Looking through a multispecies lens, we can see that as an ‘umbrella species’ – requiring large swathes of healthy eucalyptus forests to meet dietary needs – koala populations can indicate the health and biodiversity – or destruction – of wider assemblages, even if not all of those plants, reptiles, birds, and mammals drew the same attention.⁹⁵ Grounded in animal-sensitive and multispecies approaches, *Untamed Affections*

⁹² Susan Nance provides a model for this careful animal analysis in her book on frequently unruly circus elephants, which ‘refuses any notion that elephants understood, endorsed, or resisted the world of show business as a human cultural or business practice. Rather than speaking of elephants rejecting the circus or capitalism per se, it speaks of them as rejecting the conditions of their experience.’ Susan Nance, *Entertaining Elephants: Animal Agency and the Business of the American Circus* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2013), 10.

⁹³ Emily O’Gorman and Andrea Gaynor, ‘More-Than-Human Histories’, *Environmental History* 25, no. 4 (2020): 711-35; Emily O’Gorman, *Wetlands in a Dry Land: More-Than-Human Histories of Australia’s Murray-Darling Basin* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2021).

⁹⁴ Thom van Dooren, Eben Kirksey and Ursula Münster, ‘Multispecies Studies: Cultivating Arts of Attentiveness’, *Environmental Humanities* 8, no. 1 (2016): 1–23.

⁹⁵ Umbrella species are typically large animals whose necessarily wide geographical range encompasses the areal requirements of other co-occurring animals. Conservationists often target umbrella species, with the rationale that their protection leads to the protection of many others who share the same spaces, though there is some debate over the effectiveness of this approach. David B. Lindenmayer and Martin J. Westgate, ‘Are Flagship, Umbrella and Keystone Species Useful Surrogates to Understand the Consequences of Landscape

treats settler women's interactions with native animals as contingent and situated, embedded in lively relational networks seen and unseen, and, finally, vitally important if not always immediately apparent to the human historian's eye.

What is a native Australian animal?

Writing about animals in Australia means using terms burdened by anxious histories and demarcated by blurred boundaries.⁹⁶ We cannot avoid using the terms altogether, but we can begin by acknowledging their complexities. For practical and theoretical reasons, I have adopted a capacious and flexible understanding of both 'native' and 'Australian', noting that the term 'native' has long been politically and racially charged in settler Australia, including in conversations not ostensibly about people. As Head has explained 'boundary making around [non-humans] is intimately connected to boundaries around the human'.⁹⁷ In the first place, the word has often served to other and demean Indigenous people. Somewhat paradoxically, it has also served to reinforce settlers' presence and validity in Australia, as in the name of the influential mutual society, the Australian Natives Association (ANA). This group, founded in 1871, catered to Australian-born white men, the 'natives', as distinct from white men who had migrated from Europe.⁹⁸ Notably, as Libby Robin has shown, the ANA aligned itself closely with native species as symbols for their worth and belonging, especially the yellow wattle.⁹⁹

Ecologists and conservationists generally take 'native species' to mean one that exists 'within its natural range', often with a clarification that it should have begun life in that range 'entirely independent of human activity'.¹⁰⁰ Such definitions raise questions about shifting

Change?', *Current Landscape Ecology Reports* 5, no. 3 (2020): 76, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40823-020-00052-x>.

⁹⁶ Libby Robin, for example, articulates the 'long and anxious history' of the term 'feral' in Australia. Once a relatively neutral term denoting de-domestication, the 'loaded' word has taken on highly negative connotations with flexible applications: 'feral' cats that threaten native animals, or 'feral' kangaroos that interrupt humans' agricultural interests or transgress into urban lives. Robin, 'Culling and Care', 105-6.

⁹⁷ Head, 'Decentring 1788', 169.

⁹⁸ The ANA dwindled in influence after a peak between the 1890s and 1930s, and the last branch closed in 2007. In 2018, a group of people in Canberra launched the 'Australian Natives Association', claiming to represent the first organisation's heritage. A white supremacist organisation far smaller than its predecessor, it claims to be 'dedicated to advancing the legitimate ethnic interests of founding-stock Australians.' Again, we see 'nativeness' deployed in the service of racist ideas and white belonging. 'Australian Fraternity', A. N. A. <https://ausnatives.org/>, accessed 30 December 2025.

⁹⁹ Robin, *How a continent created a nation*, 13-4.

¹⁰⁰ 'Convention on Biological Diversity', Glossary of Terms, 2014 <http://www.cbd.int/invasive/terms.shtml> (accessed 18 November 2025); D. Webb, 'What are the criteria for presuming native status?', *Watsonia* 15 (1985): 232.

environmental baselines: how to decide when ‘natural’ animal relations began? What about when evolving climactic and geographical conditions changed which ranges suited species best?¹⁰¹ The fact that settler Australians conventionally date the nativeness of animals back to colonisation, so that dingos count as native despite being introduced about 5000 years ago, reflects a wider belief – thoroughly challenged by recent scholarship – that nature was essentially unmodified by human activity before the arrival of Europeans.¹⁰² It is also important to note that Indigenous people, compared to settler Australians, have often delineated less sharply between ‘native’ and ‘non-native’ species than settler Australians.¹⁰³

The ambiguity of animal nativeness and its temporalities – does one ever *become* native? – emerges in hotly contested contemporary debates over brumbies, camels, and dingos.¹⁰⁴ Many local people in the Snowy Mountains area, to take one example, see the region’s herds of free-living horses as an integral and beloved part of the physical and cultural landscape.¹⁰⁵ These brumbies, introduced by British settlers by the mid-1800s, seem to constitute a distinctive settler Australian heritage, captured in and promoted by iconic literature like Banjo Paterson’s poem ‘The Man from Snowy River’ and Elyne Mitchell’s novel *The Silver Brumby*.¹⁰⁶ Environmentalists, on the other hand, are more likely to call for brumbies to be culled, as their growing populations cause significant soil erosion, damage waterways and trample native plants.¹⁰⁷ Some critics have argued that affection for the wild horse – as opposed to a moral

¹⁰¹ For the first articulation of ‘shifting baseline syndrome’, see D. Pauly, ‘Anecdotes and the Shifting Baseline Syndrome of Fisheries’, *Trends in Ecology & Evolution* 10, no. 10 (1995): 430, [https://doi.org/10.1016/s0169-5347\(00\)89171-5](https://doi.org/10.1016/s0169-5347(00)89171-5).

¹⁰² Ken Thompson, *Where do Camels Belong: The Story and Science of Invasive Species* (London: Profile Books, 2014), 42. For the dubiousness of 1788 as the ‘temporal threshold’ of nativeness, see Lesley Head, ‘Decentring 1788: Beyond Biotic Nativeness’, *Geographical Research* 50, no. 2 (2012): 166–78. The most significant works arguing for Aboriginal people’s precolonial management of the environment are Bill Gammage, *The Biggest Estate on Earth: how Aborigines made Australia* (Crows Nest, NSW: Allen & Unwin, 2011); Bruce Pascoe, *Dark Emu: Aboriginal Australia and the Birth of Agriculture* (Broome, Western Australia: Magabala Books, 2018).

¹⁰³ See David S. Trigger, ‘Indigeneity, Ferality, and What ‘Belongs’ in the Australian Bush: Aboriginal Responses to ‘Introduced’ Animals and Plants in a Settler-Descendant Society’, *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 14, no. 3 (2008): 629–30. For the absorption of introduced dogs into Tasmanian Aboriginal culture, see James Boyce, ‘Canine revolution: the social and environmental impact of the introduction of the dog to Tasmania’, *Environmental History* 11 (January 2006): 102–29.

¹⁰⁴ Simon Farley, ‘Mateship with Brumbies: Horses, Defiance and Indigeneity in the Australian Alps’, *Journal of Australian Studies* 47, no. 2 (2023): 256–72; Thompson, *Where do Camels Belong*.

¹⁰⁵ Farley, ‘Mateship with Brumbies’.

¹⁰⁶ A. B. Paterson [Banjo Paterson], *The Man from Snowy River and other verses* (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1895); Elyne Mitchell, *The Silver Brumby* (London: Hutchinson, 1958).

¹⁰⁷ The environmentalist argument has prevailed politically in the last two years, with legislation protecting brumbies repealed and a new ‘management’ program introduced to reduce their numbers to 3000 by June 2027. Adriane Reardon, ‘Kosciuszko National Park brumby numbers nearing target, environment minister says’, *ABC News*, 3 March 2025, <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2025-03-03/nsw-environment-minister-wild-horse-numbers/104498518>.

apathy about large populations of wild camels – is part of a romanticisation of Australian ‘stockman’ and ‘pioneer’ tropes that tends to erase or euphemise frontier violence against Aboriginal people.¹⁰⁸ Though they deal with constructed and shifting boundaries and anxieties, these modern debates can have life-or-death consequences for the animals involved. Being classified as ‘non-native’ or, even worse, ‘invasive’, typically translates to being, in Donna Haraway’s parlance, ‘killable’.¹⁰⁹

So much for the ambiguous and consequential category of native species: but what makes a native species *Australian*? The period under investigation includes two decades between 1880 and 1901, when the Commonwealth of Australia did not yet exist as a formal legal entity, but rather as a collection of British colonies spread across a vast and ecologically diverse continent and scattering of islands. This is not to say that notions of Australianness and nativeness were not relevant in these years; rather, the instability of these categories made them areas of intense and politically charged negotiation in the decades leading up to Federation.¹¹⁰

As Rohan Howitt has pointed out, the geographical limits of ‘Australia’ have always been unclear, especially with regard to the oceans to the continent’s south.¹¹¹ The elephant seals, penguins, and whales that excited hunters in the nineteenth century and later catalysed conservationists’ concerns, were sometimes ‘native’ to Australia and sometimes ‘native’ to New Zealand, depending on Macquarie Island’s changing legal status.¹¹² On the opposite side of the continent, closer to Jakarta than Perth, the Christmas Island shrew has changed jurisdictional hands several times since British naturalists began visiting in the 1880s. The British soon inadvertently introduced the black rats and associated diseases that imperilled endemic mammalian populations.¹¹³ Weighing only five grams but capable of producing a

¹⁰⁸ Karen Welberry, ‘Wild Horses and Wild Mountains in the Australian Cultural Imaginary’, *PAN: Philosophy Activism Nature* 3 (2005): 23; Farley, ‘Mateship with Brumbies’, 264.

¹⁰⁹ Donna Haraway, *When Species Meet* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007), 80. I am informed by Farley’s deployment of this concept in relation to introduced species of birds. Farley, ‘Alien Hordes’, 195–203.

¹¹⁰ Robin, *How a continent created a nation*, 13–4.

¹¹¹ Rohan Howitt, *The Southern Frontier: Australia, Antarctica and Empire in the Southern Ocean World* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2025), 7, 10–11.

¹¹² Roger Kellaway, ‘“Sorry for the Seals and Sea Birds”: Tasmania, New Zealand and the Management of Macquarie Island 1890–1894’, *Tasmanian Historical Studies* 11 (2006): 41–59; Howitt, ‘Oil from Penguins’.

¹¹³ Alistair Bates, ‘Christmas Island shrew declared extinct after decades without a sighting’, *ABC News*, 2 November 2025, <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2025-11-02/christmas-island-shrew-declared-extinct/105949448>.

disproportionately piercing shriek, the shrew was declared officially extinct in 2025.¹¹⁴ ‘Few knew it lived, fewer still that it was Australian’, noted a conservationist group’s obituary.¹¹⁵

‘Animal’ too, is a loaded word. It is so often deployed to denote a comforting sense of humans’ phenomenological distance from other species, but the humanities’ animal turn has pushed scholars to recognise that the category includes *Homo sapiens* as well, rendering terms like ‘human-animal studies’ tautological in spite of their usefulness. This is, of course, not a new idea, and in fact this thesis traces a move amongst some conservationists towards a recognition of humans’ shared ‘animal’ status and shared environmental threats. What complicates any historiographical effort to treat humans as just another species of animal, is the long and racist history of conflating Indigenous and other non-white groups of people with wildlife, in ways that justified those people’s exploitation, dispossession, and murder.¹¹⁶ This conflation was common and powerful throughout much of Australian history after 1788, as the following chapters help to demonstrate, and its legacies remain.¹¹⁷

Chapter Outline

Initial plans to divide this thesis into two sections – real and represented interactions with animals – were decided against when the archival evidence made clear that even the most seemingly direct and tangible kinds of interactions with the natural world are mediated by webs of representations, beliefs and past experiences. To take Alice Manfield as an example, it is clear that her activities as a mountaineering guide, bushwalker and birdwatcher cannot easily be separated from her photography, tourism promotion, and nature writing. Accordingly, the thesis is divided into chapters by different forms of human/non-human interaction, without defining sharp categories of real and unreal. In this, I follow Etienne Benson’s injunction to

¹¹⁴ J.C.Z. Woinarski & A. A. *Crociodura trichura*. *The IUCN Red List of Threatened Species* 2025: e.T136379A254622730. <https://dx.doi.org/10.2305/IUCN.UK.2025-2.RLTS.T136379A254622730.en>, accessed on 19 November 2025.

¹¹⁵ Rhett Ayers Butler, ‘In memory of the Christmas Island shrew’, *Mongabay*, 24 October 2025, <https://news.mongabay.com/2025/10/in-memory-of-the-christmas-island-shrew/>.

¹¹⁶ For an influential discussion of decolonial approaches to animal studies, that do not ‘further displace and disappear Indigenous bodies and epistemologies’, see Billy-Ray Belcourt, ‘Animal Bodies, Colonial Subjects: (Re)Locating Animality in Decolonial Thought’, *Societies* 5, no. 1 (2015): 1. See also Bénédicte Boisseron, *Afro-Dog: Blackness and the Animal Question* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2018).

¹¹⁷ It is not just that the porousness of the boundary between animal/human is a problem when the boundary leaks’, write Fiona Probyn-Rapsey and Lynette Russell, ‘but that the boundary is always leaking [...] its legacy is manifest in words like ‘chattel’, ‘black cattle’, and the animalising rhetoric that underwrites them.’ Fiona Probyn-Rapsey and Lynette Russell, ‘Tools, Troops or Escapees? Cattle Trafficking in the Early Years of the Colony of New South Wales, Australia’, *Environment and History* (published online ahead of print 17 October 2024): <https://doi.org/10.3828/whpeh.63861480327329>, 21.

reject a ‘strict, hierarchical division between the real and the discursive, things and representations, animals and attitudes towards animals’, as a partial solution to the quandaries of pursuing a meaningful animal history.¹¹⁸ The interconnectedness and coproduction of these experiences, attitudes and behaviours is a theme throughout.

An exhaustive study of all kinds of interactions between native animals and women would not be possible, so I have prioritised those people, animals, and relationships which allow me to speak to the diversity and significance of women’s interactions with native animals, to draw some previously unexamined stories to the fore alongside some more familiar names, and, finally, to illustrate the complex and gendered meanings of care in this period.

The thesis opens by examining the relationship of the female-dominated animal protection movement to the lived and imagined realities of native animals. While the development of a conservation movement shaped by gender is one important throughline in the thesis, there were not one, but two major social movements concerned with the wellbeing of Australian animals in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and they overlapped: the conservation movement and the animal protection movement. I draw primarily on the lives and writings of educator Frances Levvy (1831–1924) and zoo owner Mary Grant Roberts (1841–1921), to chart the diverse ways settler women extended protectionist ideas about cruelty and kindness towards individual creatures to populations of threatened native species. I show how protectionists like Levvy and Roberts fostered an influential and expansive ethic of care – which at least in theory included quokkas and kangaroos as much as cats and horses, in a cast of knowable and lovable individuals with personalities and, possibly, souls.

While the two women differed in location, methods and means – Roberts was a wealthy philanthropist hosting RSPCA fundraisers at her zoo, whereas Levvy relied on NSW government support for her teaching – they shared a commitment to children’s education for the betterment and ‘civilisation’ of white Australia, and a common vision of a divinely ordained natural world, in which all animals were morally worthy members of God’s creation and thus were deserving of Christians’ care. I conclude by examining the dynamics of women’s animal protection in two native animal contexts. On the one hand, the highly gendered campaign against the trade in egrets’ feathers brought conservationist and welfare voices almost into unison. On the other hand, debates about thylacines in captivity highlighted the contradictoriness, violence and controversy which claims of animal care and protection could

¹¹⁸ Benson, ‘Animal Writes’, 4.

encompass. Levvy and Roberts' impactful philanthropic work also speaks to the interconnections of animal welfare and conservation work with temperance, feminism, and turn-of-the-twentieth-century Protestantism. Care for animals was one of several realms in which white women could draw on extant gender norms to stake their claim to expertise and credibility, and shape settler Australian society.

Pets were an important moral and practical concern to animal protectionists, provoking emotional attachments and a sense of moral responsibility, and so, in the second chapter, I consider women's interactions with native animals in and around the home. The historical evidence for the keeping of native species as pets is surprisingly ubiquitous, though the practice remains under-researched.¹¹⁹ As this chapter will make clear, possums, koalas, kangaroos, wallabies, native birds, and wombats were common pets during this period, and their position in homes and gardens, and within the family, was often facilitated and negotiated by women. Brought literally and conceptually into the domestic sphere, these wild animals could be sources of solace, fun, companionship, inspiration, exasperation, or grief. On the other hand, some native animals were seen mostly or only as threats to domestic safety. Native animals, perhaps more-so than dogs and cats, blurred the boundaries between these morally loaded categories of pest, danger, and beloved companion, sometimes causing conflicts between husbands and wives, and between children and parents. Embodied domestic relationships with individual animals around the home informed many women's art, writing, and activism. I trace some of these stories, including Ada Jane Fletcher's (1870–1956) interactions with the birds in her garden and Florence Oswin Roberts' care for Edward, only legally-kept pet koala. I argue that the quotidian, intimate processes of negotiating the presence of native animals in the home raised confronting and catalytic questions about cruelty, emotion, domesticity, animal agency, and conservation. Conceptually and literally, women's native animal pets impacted settlers' environmental relationships well beyond the boundaries of the home.

The third chapter explores women's nature writing in early twentieth-century Australia, with a focus on representations of native animals. Although nature writing was a popular genre among women, their work has received less scholarly attention than male authors like Alec Chis olm, Charles Barrett, and Donald Macdonald, whose work often emphasised masculine, nationalistic, and sometimes martial ideals; this chapter instead foregrounds the often-overlooked contributions of writers like Amy Mack. In very successful publications like

¹¹⁹ A significant exception is Cushing and Markwell, 'The Bird Was a Valuable One'.

Bushland Stories and *Scribbling Sue*, she gave lovable personalities and voices to native animals, especially birds, and encouraged adults and children to find wonder, joy and belonging in an inviting, imaginatively tamed Australian bush setting. Mack critiques aspects of settler colonialism, especially environmental destruction and violence done by ‘men with guns’ – a common trope – but it’s a vision that largely excludes Aboriginal people, with animals standing in as the sole sympathetic spokespeople for the suffering wrought by white people, especially white men. I put this close analysis of Mack’s writing in conversation with other authors who presented animals and indigeneity in analogous or differing ways, including Ada Jane Fletcher, Ethel Pedley, May Gibbs, and Dorothy Wall.

The fourth chapter explores how women collected, shared, and validated information about native animals in amateur and professional contexts, producing knowledge in the form of photographs, books, academic articles, stories, speeches, and artworks. By analysing the contrasting careers of Alice Manfield (1878-1960), a self-trained naturalist and mountain guide on Mount Buffalo, Georgina Sweet (1875-1946), an early woman zoologist at the University of Melbourne, and Mary Grant Roberts (1841-1921), a Tasmanian zookeeper and philanthropist, I unpick the complex methods by which women navigated gendered knowledge norms and found ways to acquire and communicate information about native animals. Of course, these methods were many and varied, but I argue that women tended to draw on notions of emotional, long-term relationships with individual living animals, in order to justify their claims to knowing about Australian fauna. To know about animals, many felt, a researcher should know animals personally, ideally for a long time. Such relationship-based knowledge claims were not exclusive to female naturalists, and they formed part of broader changes in zoological and biological practice, but when applied to or by women this rhetoric was often gendered, drawing explicitly or implicitly on women’s presumed capacity for emotional intimacy and care. Manfield and Roberts’ careers highlight this trend, while Sweet’s more conventional scientific career and methods (though not conventional for a woman) provide a counterpoint, illustrating the new avenues to science and credibility opening to some women in the early twentieth century.

Having established women’s overlapping involvements in the conservation and animal welfare movements in earlier chapters, Chapter Five examines a controversy which brought questions of gender, motherhood, sentiment, cruelty, and conservationism to the fore: the 1927 Queensland koala open season, when at least 600 000 koalas were shot, poisoned, or trapped. I argue that, in a broad-based and emotional public backlash against the open season, concepts

of authentically Australian forms of masculinity and femininity were mobilised in attempts to end the destruction; koala killing was framed as a debasement of an idealised ‘bushman’ identity and koala fur wearing as a betrayal of an idealised category of inherently caring womanhood. The interests of mothers and children were foregrounded in a campaign concerned with preserving the popular ‘native bear’ for the enjoyment of future generations. Because women across the world were the main market for koala products, the many women who campaigned against the open season faced accusations that their gender was ultimately responsible for the slaughter.

Building on Melissa Harper’s study of bushwalking’s popularity in the early 1900s, with its connections to conservationism and a nature-based nationalism, the sixth chapter explores the experiences of women bushwalkers between the early 1920s and the end of the Second World War. Drawing mostly on Melbourne Women’s Walking Club records and members’ reflections, I ask what bushwalking meant to women, as a physical encounter with nature and animals, and as a form of community. Like other bushwalkers, MWWC members drew solace and excitement from spending time in natural spaces, and held genuine affection for the places and wildlife they encountered and commonly fought to protect. The chapter argues that for women, bushwalking – the deliberate act of immersing themselves in the ‘untouched’ habitats of wild animals – also represented a temporary and thrilling escape from confined domestic spaces, an avenue for close relationships with likeminded women, and an opportunity to experiment with new and feminist ways of dressing and behaving. As the first women’s bushwalking club in Australia, and the object of little scholarship thus far, the MWWC is the focus. But I also sketch the broader bushwalking culture of which the club was part, and highlight women from other parts of Australia who made strides (so to speak) in the worlds of bushwalking, feminism, and politics. Chapter Six provides a different point of view spatially: rather than confining native animals, literally in zoos, gardens, or homes, or metaphorically as diminutive characters in children’s literature, bushwalkers deliberately sought to immerse themselves in what they saw as ‘untouched’ habitats of wild animals, trying to encounter them on their own ground.

I maintain this different scale of caring relationship to native animals in the final chapter, which examines the significant role of women in organised conservationism, particularly in the promotion and protection of national parks between the 1930s and the 1950s. The chapter takes as its throughline the campaign of bushwalker and musician Jessie Luckman to preserve Mount Field National Park, with reference to the comparable activism of Thistle Harris, botanist and

longtime president of the Wild Life Preservation Society of Australia, and Marie Byles, another leading bushwalker and New South Wales' first practising female lawyer. These women's long and influential lives, documented in official publications and a number of oral histories recorded before their deaths, witnessed major changes in conservationist attitudes and practices. As a young woman, Luckman was an avid bushwalker with the Hobart Walking Club, and these experiences of intimate encounters with landscapes, animals and plants informed her later activism. Most significantly, she led the 1943 campaign to prevent the excision of parts of Mount Field National Park for sawmilling. Though that campaign failed, it led to the formation of the committee that would later fight for Lake Pedder (1972) and the Franklin River (1980). Both Luckman and Harris were present at the Lake Pedder dam campaign, which environmental historians variously frame as either the end of an older environmentalism or the beginning of a new one, so the chapter also suggests that figures like Luckman, Harris, and Byles bridge two periods of environmental action that have often been sharply delineated in existing historiography. I propose a notion of 'long-distance care' to grapple with mid-century conservationist efforts to protect native animals from a distance, driven by a non-interventionist belief that direct contact with humans caused more harm than good. Underpinning these insights is the understanding, informed by Tracey Banivanua Mar, that national parks could concurrently protect native species, exclude Indigenous people and perspectives, and reinforce settler claims to territory in the language of environmental protection.

Of the many women whose lives and work are interspersed between the seven chapters, the most significant to my analysis are Ada Jane Fletcher, Florence Oswin Roberts, Frances Levvy, Mary Grant Roberts, Amy Mack, Alice Manfield, Georgina Sweet, Marie Byles, Thistle Harris, Jessie Luckman, and, collectively, the members of the early Melbourne Women's Walking Club. Sometimes they feature in a dedicated chapter, but more often they recur throughout them, in a structure that reflects humans' multiple, overlapping and co-constitutive engagements with the more-than-human world. A zoologist could be an animal welfarist, and a bushwalker a nature writer. Studies of these principal figures are all supported by some combination of visual and textual archives, women's own publications, and contemporary media coverage. I am also interested those women whose interventions are more sparsely recorded, such as the climbing nuns inspired by Alec Chisolm to start a bird-watching society at their convent, or the angry writer to the editor who called on the Country Women's

Association to join her in fighting the ‘extermination’ of Queensland’s ‘quaint and charming’ koalas. She signed off only as ‘Bushwoman’.¹²⁰

There was no single or deterministic profile for the kind of settler women who cared for native animals or sought to change attitudes about them. Author Dorothy Wall depended on meagre profits from her *Blinky Bill* series for economic survival, while the wealthy Mary Grant Roberts made her zoo a locus for her philanthropy.¹²¹ Even so, settler women who actively and publicly shaped relationships to native fauna tended to derive from middle-class or upper-class backgrounds that allowed sufficient time and resources for activism, education, recreation, or professional writing. These women’s relationships with native animals were not only contoured by gender and their positionality as white settlers, then, but also by class.

That many of the thesis’ principal women were feminists, or at least aligned with feminist causes, is not coincidental. As a woman, changing perceptions of native animals often required pushing into new spaces, like Marie Byles, the first woman lawyer in New South Wales, whose feminism combined with her conservationist work. Moreover, some feminists, particularly at the beginning of the twentieth century, saw the abuse of animals as connected to men’s abuse of women and children.¹²² Care for animals was thus intertwined with feminist concerns about ameliorating human society and curbing what seemed to be the dangerous excesses of male behaviour.

Nor is it a coincidence that a number of these central women were childless, including Frances Levvy, Georgina Sweet, and Amy Mack. Appeals to women’s literal or figurative roles as mothers were an important means of claiming moral and intellectual authority in relation to vulnerable animals. Actually raising children, however, could curtail women’s scope for action in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, as many women bushwalkers discovered.¹²³

¹²⁰ Russell McGregor, *Idling in Green Places* (North Melbourne: Australian Scholarly Publishing, 2019), 60-61; ‘Bushwoman’, ‘Readers’ Protest’, *Brisbane Courier*, 22 July 1927, 9. The Country Women’s Association did, in fact, play a major role in fighting the open season, which is explored in Chapter Five.

¹²¹ Wall wrote to her publisher in 1937, amongst numerous similar letters: ‘I am without anything as you know, & living as I am compelled to do at present, has not only made me ill, but I am not capable of looking for work, as I feel so awfully depressed’. Dorothy Badgery (Wall) to Arthur Cousins, 24 January 1937, Angus & Robertson Correspondence, Collection 3, Series 2, Dorothy Badgery (Wall), vols. 122–123, State Library of New South Wales, Sydney. See Chapters 1 and 4 for Mary Grant Roberts’ philanthropy.

¹²² Pack, *Queer Omissions*, 60-63. Further discussion of these interconnections can be found in Chapter One.

¹²³ See for example E.M.A., *Wayfaring* 2 (1936/37): 11.

‘I don’t think I’d have had time to have children really’, said Jessie Luckman in 1994, reflecting on her achievements in bushwalking, conservationism, and classical music.¹²⁴

As noted earlier, it has been more challenging to trace the life stories of individual animals, and more difficult still to generalise from them. Many animals, like a mother kangaroo daring to drink a shooter’s water, or a kookaburra killing snakes in exchange for a human family’s rewards, move briefly and anonymously through the archives and these chapters.¹²⁵ A smaller number of individuals, like Edward, an oft-photographed pet on Phillip Island, or ‘Truganini’, the celebrated Tasmanian devil at Beaumaris Zoo, generated relatively extensive archival records, thanks mostly to their highly unusual lives in close contact with human guardians or captors.¹²⁶ I have drawn critically on these slightly better-documented stories, noting with Swart that ‘the carceral is never the normal’, and also, following Erica Fudge, refusing the idea that an animal who spends considerable time amongst humans becomes ‘unnatural’.¹²⁷

By examining the varied environmental experiences, contributions and disruptions of settler women, we are better placed to confront pressing questions about settler attitudes and practices which can simultaneously obscure Indigenous people’s existence and knowledge, glorify some native species as national icons, and condemn many others to extinction. In an era when many indigenous species of non-human animals and plants remain under a serious and apparently peculiarly Australian threat of extinction, it is crucial to understand changing attitudes of settler Australians towards the wildlife they confronted and came to know and care about in the decades before and after national Federation. Considering the historical role of women in the development of these powerful attitudes, and thinking through the lens of care, has the potential to enrich our understanding of the relationships between Australian cultural and gendered norms and our threatened natural environment. It complicates ideas about supposedly masculine confrontations with the colonial frontier, and brings awareness to settler women’s

¹²⁴ Jessie Luckman, interview by Roger Penny, May 31, 1994, oral history sound recording, National Library of Australia, Canberra, 99 of transcript.

¹²⁵ See Chapter One; Chapter Two.

¹²⁶ See Chapter Two; Chapter Four.

¹²⁷ Swart, *Lion’s Historian*, 282; Erica Fudge, *Pets* (Stocksfield: Acumen, 2008), 8-9. As Swart puts it in a different publication, ‘[t]he ‘unnatural’ is a powerful – if shifting and culturally specific – concept with critical repercussions for what is seen or unseen, tolerated or taboo, accepted or abhorred.’ Swart, ‘Birds of a Feather: How Rethinking Animals Helps Us Rethink Ourselves’, 12.

positions in the creation and sustenance of powerful settler myths of belonging, buttressed by affinities with the land and ‘our very own’ native animals.¹²⁸

¹²⁸ ‘Our Native Heritage’, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 4 December 1926, 16.

Chapter One: All creatures great and small?

Native animals in women's work for animal protection

In February of 1891, a frog was saved from the jaws of death. Ten-year-old Julia Redden, of Kellyville, New South Wales, seized the frail amphibian from the clutches of the family cat. Whether or not the frog survived its shock and injuries is unknown, but Redden felt satisfied she had fulfilled her pledge to be kind to animals.¹ Many observers may not have felt that the survival of an individual frog mattered in the larger scheme of animal-human relations, partly because settler Australians have long had an ambivalent relationship to frogs, and partly because it was only one of millions of native frogs menaced by cats since feline introductions in the early nineteenth century.² If one took seriously the Bible's assertion of divine concern for even a single sparrow's death, however, a single frog's death probably mattered to God, and if it mattered to God it mattered to Frances Levvy.³ An indefatigable social reformer and animal welfare advocate, Levvy was responsible for establishing the Bands of Mercy movement in New South Wales, which taught children like Redden to be merciful to animals. As longtime secretary of the Women's Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, she was a leader amongst many settler Australian women committed to a perceived feminine mission to educate children and the broader public about the evils of abusing any animal.

Julia Redden's small-scale ecological intervention (though hardly small from the frog's point of view) offers a glimpse into the women-dominated animal protectionist movement which gained momentum across Australia around the turn of the twentieth century. In schools, societies, churches, town halls, homes, gardens, and zoos, women played important roles, often as educators, in the movement to protect animals from cruelty. This girl-frog encounter also points to the seldom acknowledged fact that animal protectionism, which formally emerged in

¹ M. T. Pryce, 'Kellyville "Star of Peace" Band of Mercy', *Band of Mercy Advocate N.S.W. (BMA)* IV, no. 4 (26 February 1891): 5.

² Andrea Gaynor, Susan Broomhall, and Andrew Flack, 'Frogs and Feeling Communities: A Study in History of Emotions and Environmental History', *Environment and History* 28, no. 1 (February 2022): 88; K. Koch et al., 'A Voyage to Terra Australis: Human-Mediated Dispersal of Cats', *BMC Evolutionary Biology* 15, no. 262 (December 4, 2015): <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12862-015-0542-7>.

³ Matthew 10:29, King James Version. The verse, which attests that even a sparrow could not fall without God's permission and notice, was a favourite amongst animal protectionists. See for example 'Humane Poets', *Band of Mercy and Humane Journal of New South Wales (BMHJNSW)* XXX, no. 7 (25 July 1914): 4; 'A short address to Bands', *BMA* 1, no. 1 (14 November 1888): 4.

early nineteenth-century England, encompassed both native and non-native species in Australia.

The animal protection movement, which promoted kindness to animals and sought to prevent and punish their maltreatment, has often been sidelined in scholarly accounts of the ‘spectacular’ transformation in settler attitudes towards Australian native animals.⁴ In an incomplete and uneven process between the late nineteenth century and the 1930s, colonial disdain for, and exploitation of, ‘freakish’ native species largely gave way to widespread affection, patriotic mythologisation, and concern for their survival.⁵ Scholars looking to understand this transition have focused on the conservationist movement, which linked concerns about dwindling populations of native wildlife to questions of national identity.⁶ There are important reasons for this emphasis, but, as Peter Hobbins points out, there were in fact, not one but *two* movements deeply concerned with the treatment of Australian animals during this period.⁷ In fact, the animal protection movement preceded and then coexisted with conservationism, often coalescing and sometimes clashing, and had comparable, if not greater, cultural reach.⁸ Leaving the animal protection movement out of environmental and cultural histories of native animals, therefore, risks omitting many of the people most engaged in thinking about human-animal relations in Australia around the beginning of the twentieth century. These include many women whose Christian faith shaped their attitudes to the non-human world, and many who were tasked with influencing children.

⁴ Adrian Franklin, *Animal Nation* (Sydney: University of New South Wales Press, 1996), 15.

⁵ Franklin, *Animal Nation*.

⁶ Scholarship on the entanglements of Australian nationalism and nature conservation continues to expand. Important accounts include Libby Robin, *How a Continent Created a Nation* (Sydney: University of New South Wales Press, 2007), and more recently, Russell McGregor, ‘Mateship with Nature: Nationalism and Conservation in the Writings of Alec Chisholm’, *Environment and History* 27, no. 3 (August 2021): 399–420.

⁷ Peter Hobbins, *Venomous Encounters: Snakes, Vivisection and Scientific Medicine in Colonial Australia* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2017), 112.

⁸ The distinction between ‘preservationism’ (associated with aesthetic and spiritual values of untouched nature) and ‘conservationism’ (associated more so with efficient management of natural resources) has been drawn less sharply and consequentially in Australia than in the United States. This difference applies both to turn-of-the-twentieth-century environmental discourse and to later environmental historiography, which in Australia tends to draw on broader terms like an ‘environment movement’ or an ‘ecological consciousness’. See for example Drew Hutton and Libby Connors, *A History of the Australian Environment Movement* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999); Libby Robin, *Defending the Little Desert: The Rise of Ecological Consciousness in Australia* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Publishing, 1998). As an overarching term for work to preserve species and natural spaces in the first half of the twentieth century, I use ‘conservationism’. For American debates on the distinction, see Roderick Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind* (New Haven: Yale University press, 1967); John Meyer, ‘Gifford Pinchot, John Muir, and the Boundaries of Politics in American Thought’, *Polity* 30, no. 2 (Winter 1997): 267–84; Stephen Fox, *The American Conservation Movement: John Muir and His Legacy* (Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 1981); Samuel P. Hays, *Conservation and the Gospel of Efficiency: The Progressive Conservation Movement, 1890–1920* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1999).

This chapter charts the diverse ways settler women extended protectionist ideas about cruelty and kindness towards individual creatures to populations of threatened native animals. Drawing on the illustrative cases of educator Frances Levvy (1831–1924), and, secondarily, the zoo owner and philanthropist Mary Grant Roberts (1841–1921), the following pages chart how some women brought ideas about cruelty and kindness towards individual animals to bear on larger questions of species survival. I argue that animal protectionists like Levvy and Roberts fostered an influential ethic of care for native animals, as part of a cast of knowable and lovable individuals with personalities and, possibly, souls. Though the two women differed in location, methods and means – Roberts was a wealthy philanthropist hosting fundraisers at her Hobart zoo, while Levvy relied on government support for her teaching across New South Wales public schools – they shared a common vision of a divinely ordained natural world, in which all animals were morally worthy members of God’s creation, who needed and deserved human protection and kindness.⁹ This message, delivered to tens of thousands of children by Levvy in New South Wales and Roberts in Tasmania, contributed to and resonated with settler Australians’ developing awareness of the dire state of many native species, which had been devastated by hunting, habitat destruction, introduced species, and disease.

I begin by teasing out some of the key interventions and tensions of Australian women’s animal protectionism near the beginning of the twentieth century, noting the ways gender and religion featured in women’s efforts to shape children’s moral relationships to a wide range of creatures. The chapter then examines the intersections of animal protectionism and conservationism in two contexts pertaining to native animals. Both scenarios inspired an emotionally loaded interplay – variously harmonious or tense – of care and conservation concerns. The emotive campaign against the trade in white egrets’ feathers brought conservationist and welfare voices almost into unison. Disgust at the mass-killing of adult and young egrets, particularly in the name of women’s fashion, resonated with and strengthened anxieties about species endangerment and a growing nationalist protectiveness over ‘our’ own birds. Secondly, we see that debates about thylacines in captivity highlighted the contradictoriness, violence and controversy which claims of animal care could encompass. Roberts’ zoo was simultaneously an effective site for the promotion of kindness to animals, and a key node in what was often a deadly network of native animal trade and trapping, one which almost certainly accelerated the

⁹ I have found no evidence that the women ever met, though their common associational commitments make it likely that they knew of one another.

decline of thylacines and other animals. Here too, conservationist and welfare concerns intermingled, but they could pull in conflicting directions.

‘Eminently a woman’s work’: women and children in the animal welfare movement

Though a rich body of scholarship has developed around organised animal protectionism in Britain and the United States, which unpicks the gendered, raced, and classed dimensions of the movement, historians have been relatively quiet on the character of the Australian animal protection movement.¹⁰ In his history of transnational animal protection after 1970, Gonzalo Villanueva observed that historians had largely ‘ignored the form and meaning of the Australian [animal] movement’.¹¹ Important exceptions are Stefan Petrow’s studies of nineteenth-century cultures of animal protection in Hobart and Launceston, Hobbins’ work on snakes and vivisection, and a number of thoughtful commemorative histories of the RSPCA.¹² Studies of individual animal protectionists are even scarcer; Karen Pack’s account of Frances Levvy in her 2025 book *Queer Omissions*, about unmarried Protestant women between the late nineteenth and mid-twentieth centuries, represents a significant and rare contribution.¹³ Pack makes a compelling case for Levvy as a serious intellectual force contributing to religious and civic debate, whose significant impacts have been overlooked by historians of religion – I would add that the same could be said for environmental historians.¹⁴ Mary Grant Roberts has received no such biographical treatment, though she is included in the large and growing body of work on the Tasmanian tiger and its iconic extinction.¹⁵

¹⁰ Important scholarship includes Harriet Ritvo, *The Animal Estate: The English and Other Creatures in the Victorian Age* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1987); Diana Donald, *Women against Cruelty: Protection of Animals in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2020); Hilda Kean, *Animals Rights* (London: Reaktion, 1998).

¹¹ Gonzalo Villanueva, *Transnational History of the Australian Animal Movement* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 3.

¹² Hobbins, *Venomous Encounters*; Wallace B. Budd, *Hear The Other Side: A History of the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals in South Australia 1875–1988* (Hawthorndene: Investigator Press, 1988); Barbara Pertzel, *For All Creatures: A History of the RSPCA Victoria* (Burwood: RSPCA Victoria, 2006). Stefan Petrow, ‘Civilizing Mission: Animal Protection in Hobart 1878–1914’, *Britain and the World* 5, no. 1 (March 1, 2012): 69–95; Stefan Petrow, “Developing the Highest Moral Instincts”, *Protecting Animals in Launceston 1879–1906*, *History Australia* 12, no. 3 (January 1, 2015): 160–82.

¹³ Karen Pack, *Queer Omissions: Unmarried Women and Social Justice Activism in the Church* (London: Routledge: 2025), chs. 1, 2, and 3.

¹⁴ Pack, *Queer Omissions*, especially 68–88.

¹⁵ See for example Robert Paddle, *The last Tasmanian tiger: the history and extinction of the thylacine* (Oakleigh: Cambridge University Press, 2000); David Owen and David Pemberton, *Tasmanian Tiger: The tragic story of the thylacine* (New South Wales: Allen & Unwin, 2023), 47–8, 163–5; Gareth Linnard, *Thylacine: The History, Ecology and Loss of the Tasmanian Tiger* (Clayton, Melbourne: CSIRO, 2023); Eric Guiler, *Thylacine, the tragedy of the Tasmanian tiger* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1985). See also David Owen and David Pemberton, *Tasmanian Devil: A Unique and Threatened Animal* (London: Natural History Museum, 2005), 84–93, 96. In their summative account of Australian zoo history, Catherine de Courcy and

In particular, animal protectionism is rarely considered alongside the conservationist and later environmentalist movement. Hutton and Connors' near-comprehensive *History of the Australian Environment Movement*, for example, dedicates less than a page to animal protection.¹⁶ Drawing on the case study of Louisa Meredith's multifaceted interventions, the authors note the prevalence of women as animal protectionists, as well as the movement's connections to broader concerns about moral and physical pollution in urban spaces.¹⁷ Jennifer MacCulloch's 1995 thesis on conservationism and protectionism in Sydney between 1880 and 1930 remains the only example of sustained analysis of the movements' intersections. She argues that efforts to preserve endangered species and to promote kindness to animals became intertwined, despite distinct origins and priorities.¹⁸

The emergence of animal protectionism in Australia had many causes, but in large part it was a heartfelt response to the increasingly visible suffering of animals, especially in cities. An English animal welfare publication reported that the people of Sydney and its surrounds were 'the most habitually cruel in their treatment of dumb animals (horses, dogs, sheep and cattle in particular) and the most callously indifferent in regard to their sufferings' in the world.¹⁹ Frances Levvy was outraged at these anonymous representations, and published several protests.²⁰ She suggested Antwerp, Jerusalem, and Berlin as better claimants for the status of cruellest city.²¹ Levvy was acutely aware, however, of significant and visible cruelty to animals in her city, and a lack of enforceable legal protections for them. At the founding of the Woman's Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (WSPCA) in 1886, existing legislation offered a narrow view of cruelty that only pertained to stock and domestic animals; limited protections were extended to birds and all quadrupeds in 1899.²² Even as legal consideration expanded, it was clear to advocates that not enough was being done, and that

Michelle Murphy acknowledge the existence of private zoos, including in Tasmania, but assert that they were 'of no great relevance', due to their ephemerality and diversity of development. Catherine de Courcy and Michelle Murphy, 'Zoological gardens of Australia', in *Zoo and Aquarium History*, ed. Vernon Kisting (Routledge: 2022), 301, 347. The most extensive account of Roberts' Zoo before and after her death is Eric Guiler, 'The Beaumaris Zoo in Hobart', *Papers and Proceedings of the Tasmanian Historical Research Association*, 33, no. 4 (1986): 121-71.

¹⁶ Drew Hutton and Libby Connors, *A History of the Australian Environment Movement* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 81.

¹⁷ Hutton and Connors, *A History*, 1.

¹⁸ Jennifer MacCulloch, 'Creatures of Culture: The Protection and Preservation Movement in Sydney 1880-1930' (PhD thesis, University of Sydney, 1993).

¹⁹ Frances Levvy, 'Misrepresentation', *BMHJNSW* XXVI, no. 12, (26 January 1911): 9; Frances Levvy, 'How Others See Us', *BMHJNSW* XXVI, no. 4 (26 April 1911): 4.

²⁰ Levvy, 'Misrepresentation'; Levvy, 'How Others See Us'.

²¹ 'At Antwerp', *BMHJNSW* XXVI, no. 6 (28 June 1911): 10.

²² Act No. 40, 1850, 'An Act for the more effectual prevention of Cruelty to Animals', 1 October 1850; Act No. 11. 1899, 'An Act to amend the law respecting Cruelty to Animals', 20 November 1899.

education as well as sterner enforcement were necessary.²³ By the end of the nineteenth century, every Australian colony had at least one society dedicated to preventing cruelty to animals.²⁴

As in Britain, women were predominant in the Australian movement to promote kindness to animals and prevent cruelty. There was broad middle-class support for white women's philanthropy in this arena; one reporter approvingly labelled Levvy's activism for vulnerable animals 'eminently a woman's work'.²⁵ However, as Stefan Petrow has made clear, intervention into men's lives and livelihoods was often the sticking point at which support for Australian women's animal welfare work ceased.²⁶ Louisa Meredith (1812-1895), perhaps the female protectionist-conservationist par excellence of her period, encountered this problem when leading the establishment of societies for the prevention of cruelty to animals (later the RSPCA) in Tasmania. Alongside animal welfarist Mary Gellibrand and a number of other influential women, she helped to found and run society branches in Launceston and Hobart.²⁷

Gellibrand and Meredith felt that there were 'evidences everywhere' of their efficacy in behaviour towards animals, but support dropped away when they appeared to be intervening too much in men's affairs.²⁸ The women were stymied by paradoxical claims that their female-dominated committee was composed of 'sentimental old women' *and* that they were too hard-headed and disquietingly unfeminine about their approach. When SPCA members criticised cruel practices in hare coursing, they were accused of being overly emotional women who, '[h]owever estimable in their own sphere', did not understand the exigencies of the male working world.²⁹ The *Launceston Examiner* expressed grave concerns:

However estimable in their own sphere, ladies who practically compose the executive are seldom qualified to be judges of what animals usually under the control of the sterner sex can do or endure; but still less are they fitted to sit in conclave to canvass the actions of their fellow-citizens as furnished by secret reports, anonymous or otherwise, which are as likely to emanate from fussiness or malevolence as from humanity [...] It is calculated to foster a system of meddlesome inquisitiveness and espionage through all classes that must undermine the very foundations of society.³⁰

²³ MacCulloch, *Creatures of Culture*, 42-45.

²⁴ MacCulloch, *Creatures of Culture*, 42.

²⁵ 'The Animals' Friend', *Daily Telegraph* (Sydney), 30 January 1906, 3.

²⁶ Petrow, 'Developing the Highest Moral Instincts'; Petrow, 'Civilizing Mission.'

²⁷ Petrow, 'Developing the Highest Moral Instincts'; Petrow, 'Civilizing Mission.'

²⁸ Sixth Annual Report of the Tasmanian Society for Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (Hobart, 1884), 7, quoted in Petrow, 'Civilising Mission', 83.

²⁹ Hare coursing entails inducing greyhounds or other dogs to chase and kill brown hares across open areas of land. It is often accompanied by betting.

³⁰ *Launceston Examiner*, 21 February 1882, 2.

Levvy and her Women's Branch of the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (WSPCA) received a notably similar rebuke when two of the society's inspectors were caught up in controversy in 1896.³¹ The President of Sydney's Animal Protection Society, with whom the WSPCA had a close but tense relationship, complained of Levvy to the editor of the *Sydney Morning Herald*. It seemed to him that the Bands of Mercy had become:

too tame a work for its originator who therefore neglected her womanly work for the masculine work of the APS... There is a wide difference between teaching children and punishing rough hearted men for their cruel acts, one by nature belonging to woman and the other by duty to man.³²

Now that the (male) inspectors under her charge had been implicated in 'a loose system of issuing charges' and one had been convicted of blackmail, he felt all the surer in his conviction that women were not suited to the harder-edged aspects of animal protection.³³

Nineteenth-century women who wanted to improve the conditions of animals' lives, therefore, needed ways and means that did not clash (or at least seemed to clash less) with powerful men's norms and privileges. 'The *care* of animals and the relief of suffering,' Diana Donald argues, 'were more attainable and (according to Victorian notions) more appropriate objectives for women than the punishment of cruelty through criminal prosecutions'.³⁴ Levvy's WSPCA inspectors continued their policing work, but since the public was more comfortable with the idea of women as care-centred moral guides for children, it was in the field of children's moral education that animal protectionists like Levvy and Roberts found greatest traction.

One opportunity for Tasmanian children to learn mercy and care for animals was an excursion to Mary Grant Roberts' Beaumaris Zoo. The zoo began in 1895 as a private collection of foreign and local birds. Supported by her husband's wealth earned in the wool trade and supplemented by entry fees and trades with international zoos, the zoo blossomed over the following twenty years into a major tourist and scientific institution, well-known for its Australian and Tasmanian animals. These included Tasmanian devils, platypuses, wallabies, quolls, wombats, lyrebirds (the first to be exported to the island), and thylacines.³⁵ Roberts had

³¹ Pack, *Queer Omissions*, 32. Due to conflicts over naming rights and affiliations, this society was later known as Women's Society, Prevention of Cruelty to Animals.

³² Letter from John Horbury-Hunt, President of the Animal Protection Society, to the Editor of the *Sydney Morning Herald*, 11 June 1896, located in Horbury-Hunt's scrapbooks, third volume, 98-99, quoted in MacCulloch, *Creatures of Culture*, 83-84.

³³ 'A False Pretences Defrauder', *Age* (Melbourne), 4 June 1896, 5.

³⁴ Donald, *Women Against Cruelty*, 4-5.

³⁵ 'Beaumaris Zoo', *Mercury* (Hobart), 20 April 1915; E. A. Bell, *A historic centenary* (Hobart: Mercury Press, 1965), 108.

a hands-on relationship with these animals well into her old age, claiming to be on ‘the best of terms’ with all except a Burmese peacock.³⁶ The zoo’s visitors’ book is crowded with thanks from teachers who appreciated the personal tours Roberts gave schoolchildren, which comprised lessons on kindness to animals as well as about the importance of preserving Australian fauna. The unusual zookeeper was passionate about her work’s educational function, and its capacity to promote both moral and societal uplift, and (relatedly) the preservation of the natural environment.

Children should be taught to reverence life as “every animal is an expression of the mind of God,” and not only to love the beauties of nature, but to feel their responsibility in the preservation of it.³⁷

She advocated for nature study to be taught compulsorily in Tasmanian state schools, but in practice her zoo was, for many people, the only place where they learned about native animals.³⁸

Another way that Australian children could be taught ‘right feelings’ about animals, both native and non-native, was as part of a Band of Mercy.³⁹ In the mid-1880s, Frances Levvy and her sister Emma began the first Australian Band of Mercy, following the British lead established by Catherine Smithies in 1875 (Figure 1). Bands of Mercy were groups of children, often attached to a school or church, who pledged never to be cruel to animals, and who met regularly for education and mutual encouragement.⁴⁰ Thanks to Frances Levvy’s tremendous efforts and financial support from the New South Wales Department of Public Instruction, by 1899 the ten children in the first Band had blossomed to about 26 000 children, in 446 bands.⁴¹ The Bands of Mercy were modelled after the temperance movement’s Bands of Hope, and their literature and customs – hymn singing, recitations and pledges – bore close resemblance.⁴² Indeed, in

³⁶ Bell, *A historic centenary*, 107.

³⁷ Mary G. Roberts, ‘Our Animal Friends’, *Mercury* (Hobart), 11 May 1915, 8.

³⁸ ‘Our Animal Friends’

³⁹ ‘In the Throng’, *Daily Telegraph*, 22 November 1906, 13.

⁴⁰ Though the Bands were aimed at children, Levvy realised that many adults were also reading her publications and attending meetings, so she wrote with them in mind, too. See for example Frances Levvy, ‘Ourselves’, *BMHJNSW* (15 March 1897): 28; Frances Levvy, ‘Gleanings from the Ages: For Our Senior Readers’, *BMHJNSW* (20 February 1904): 23.

⁴¹ MacCulloch, ‘Creatures of Culture’, 122.

⁴² For more on the Bands of Hope tradition, see Annemarie McAllister, ‘Picturing the Demon Drink: How Children were Shown Temperance Principles in the Band of Hope’, *Visual Resources* 28, no. 4 (2012): 309-23; Lilian Lewis Shiman, ‘The Band of Hope Movement: Respectable Recreation for Working-Class Children’, *Victorian Studies* 17, no. 1 (1973): 49-74.

some towns, children could join a Band of Hope *and* Mercy, in which they would jointly pledge to abstain from alcohol and commit to kindness to animals.⁴³

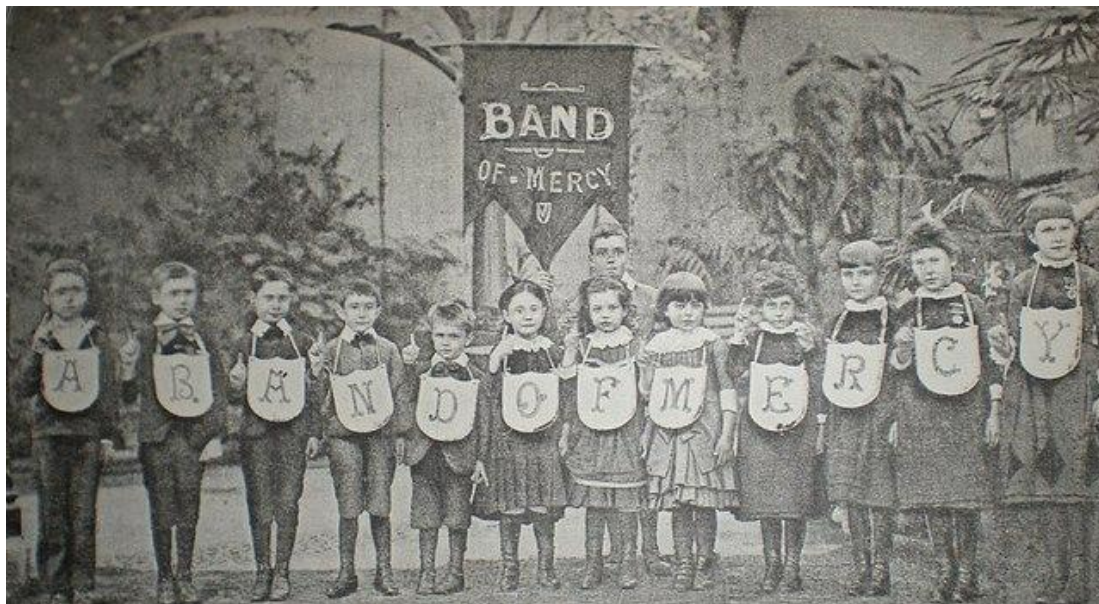


Figure 3 One of the first Bands of Mercy, c. 1880. Photograph in Florence Suckling, *Humane Educator and Reciter*, ed. Florence Suckling (London: Simpkin, Marshall, Hamilton, Kent & Co, 1891), 385.

As this alliance suggests, the temperance and animal welfare causes shared an underpinning belief that it was easier to prevent vice in childhood than to cure it in adults, and a commitment to fostering those emotions conducive to morally upstanding behaviour while repressing the ‘cruel element’ and wayward impulses of youth.⁴⁴ As *The Band of Mercy Advocate* put it in 1890, ‘the hearts of the young have to be pruned in their evil propensities, and true generosity, tenderness, and compassionate feelings have to be ingrafted.’⁴⁵

At stake in this humane mission to instil ‘right feelings’ in children (and quash bad ones) was not only the welfare of animals, it was thought, but also the promise of a moral and prosperous Australian nation.⁴⁶ Since at least the eighteenth century, it was commonly believed in Britain that a child’s cruelty towards animals was a harbinger of adult depravity. It was a dangerous sign of future inhumanity, especially towards vulnerable people, and of an inability to

⁴³ See for example *The Cumberland Mercury* (Parramatta), 22 February 1888, 2.

⁴⁴ ‘S.P.C.A.’, *Examiner* (Launceston), 24 October 1904, 4. For more on efforts to shape the emotional life of young people in Britain, see Stephanie Olsen, *Juvenile Nation: Youth, Emotions and the Making of the Modern British Citizen, 1880-1914* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014).

⁴⁵ *BMA III* (25 June 1890), 119.

⁴⁶ ‘In the Throng’, 13.

contribute effectively to society and the state.⁴⁷ Fears that a boy who picked the wings off a fly or tortured a cat was destined for criminality were a major impetus behind calls for animal protection well before the concept of animal ‘rights’ had gained currency, and they remained potent in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. So too did the concomitant idea that opportunities for active kindness to animals, such as in the care of pets, offered a training ground for the sensitivity, duty, and compassion required for moral adult citizenship. The stakes were high: ‘Check your children then in this fatal course before they fall into the abyss,’ counselled an animal protection periodical in 1891.⁴⁸

The popular association between humane animal treatment and general moral progress resonated with settler Australian anxieties about the residual ‘taint’ of convictism, and the capacity of the continent’s geographic and climactic features to cause white people’s physical and moral degeneration.⁴⁹ Like the connected movements for temperance and feminism, animal protectionism offered a corrective to the perceived moral permissiveness of the male-dominated and convict-dominated early history of colonised Australia, contoured by the real and imagined realities of a brutal frontier.⁵⁰ Australian parents were entreated to check their children’s cruelty to animals, including to small insects, lest they should stumble into a life of crime, unhappiness, and hardness of heart. ‘The slope that leads to crime is smooth and easy’, counselled an animal advocate in 1891, ‘and it is because of beginning with cruelty that so many find their way at last to the prison.’⁵¹ Unlike some commentators who thought of children’s ‘savagery’ and capricious cruelty as inherent qualities in need of rooting out before their full decline into criminality, Levvy believed children were ‘not depraved by nature’, but rather lacking in ‘training in habits of kindness and humanity’.⁵² Her Bands of Mercy offered a means of providing this training.

Boys were the biggest worry. Animal protectionists worried that animal-harming boys, left unchecked, would grow up to be violent to working animals like horses and donkeys, and to their wives and children. Animal-harming men, it was feared, were likely to be hurting their dependents too. When a man was fined for beating his bullock with a stick and whip until he

⁴⁷ Harriet Ritvo, *Animal Estate*, 131.

⁴⁸ ‘A word to parents’, *Band of Mercy Advocate* IV, no. 5 (24 March 1891): 3.

⁴⁹ Penny Russell, *Savage or Civilised?: Manners in Colonial Australia* (Sydney: NewSouth Publishing, 2011), 5–6. See also Petrow, ‘Civilizing Mission’; Petrow, ‘Developing the Highest Moral Instincts’.

⁵⁰ Marilyn Lake, ‘Frontier Feminism and the Marauding White Man’, *Journal of Australian Studies* 20, no. 49 (1996): 12–20.

⁵¹ ‘A Friend of Children: Little Things Produce Great Effects’, *Australian Town and Country Journal* (Sydney), 31 January 1891, 27, also reprinted under the title ‘A Word to Parents’ in *BMA* IV, no. 524 March 1891): 3.

⁵² ‘INHERENT SAVAGERY’, *Sunday Sun*, 9 February 1908, 9; Pack, *Queer Omissions*, 28.

broke the animal's neck, Levvy responded 'we must wonder how this teamster treats his wife and children.'⁵³ Women were cognisant of the starkly different models of masculine Australian behaviour that children encountered in their lives; teaching boys to be kind and merciful to vulnerable animals was one of the ways that that settler feminists tried, as Marilyn Lake has observed, 'to protect Australian boys from the models of manhood around them.'⁵⁴ Lisa Surridge and MacCulloch have read these kinds of statements as evidence that female authors who wrote about abused animals were displacing men's marital violence onto animals, to allow an indirect critique of the taboo issue of domestic violence.⁵⁵ Recent studies have also made clear that threatened and real animal abuse is frequently a feature of domestic violence situations, not only a precursor or symbol.⁵⁶

Levy's emphasis on working-class boys, and the possibility of their future violence against humans as well as other animals, might seem to confirm a common historiographical critique. That critique holds that animal protectionist groups were concerned first and foremost, not with protecting animals, but with policing undesirable behaviour of the lower classes, especially lower-class men.⁵⁷ There are good reasons for such an emphasis on social and cultural drivers: animal protection societies were dominated by middle-class women relying on aristocratic patrons for money and respectability, and it was often more politically expedient to focus on cruelties enacted by labouring men than on the pursuits of the rich and powerful.⁵⁸ But this interpretation – which in its extreme form has entailed a denial that animals mattered *at all* to animal protectionists – can overlook the series of sustained and emotionally fraught battles that played out between protectionists and upper-class interests, including in the fields of vivisection, hunting, and feather-wearing.⁵⁹ 'So far from sitting back in a mood of self-

⁵³ *BMHJNSW* XXVI, no. 9 (29 November 1911), 2.

⁵⁴ Lake, 'Frontier feminism', 15. A member of the Womanhood Suffrage Citizen Committee, Levvy was a supporter of turn-of-the-twentieth-century suffragist feminism, though she felt that women's continued participation in fur and feather trades called into doubt their readiness for full citizenship. Pack, *Queer Omissions*, 35.

⁵⁵ Lisa Surridge, 'Dogs'/Bodies, Women's Bodies: Wives as Pets in Mid-Nineteenth-Century Narratives of Domestic Violence', *Victorian Review* 20, no. 1 (1994): 1-34; MacCulloch, *Creatures of Culture*, 88.

⁵⁶ See for example Anne M. Volant et al., 'The Relationship Between Domestic Violence and Animal Abuse: An Australian Study', *Journal of Interpersonal Violence* 23, no. 9 (2008): 1277-95. Carol Adams has reflected on the interconnections of the abuse of women, children, and animals in Carol J. Adams, 'Bringing Peace Home: A Feminist Philosophical Perspective on the Abuse of Women, Children, and Pet Animals', *Hypatia* 9, no. 2 (1994): 63-84.

⁵⁷ Donald, *Women Against Cruelty*, 4.

⁵⁸ Donald, *Women Against Cruelty*, 3-4.

⁵⁹ Extreme renderings of this view included Rob Boddice's argument that 'the concept of animal rights is only marginally concerned with animals' and Keith Tester's idea that the 'moral mission' of the RSPCA could not have had animals at its heart. Keith Tester, *Animals and Society: The Humanity of Animal Rights* (London and

congratulation over the taming of the lower orders,’ Diana Donald contends in an English context, ‘reformers became more and more conscious of the intractability of cruel behaviour at every level of society’.⁶⁰ Many women were troubled by the incongruence of received ideas about middle- or upper-class white civility with practices that appeared to constitute the ‘savage brutality’ that British people claimed to have left behind.⁶¹

For her part, Levvy was often at her most energetic when criticising people who purported to be wealthy and respectable. She paired criticisms of lower-class omnibus drivers who overworked their horses with appeals to their passengers, whose frequent requests to stop and start caused unnecessary strain on horses’ muscles.⁶² Nobody was immune: Levvy even laid aside her deep respect for British royalty when she condemned King Edward VII’s coronation robe, reported to consist of 108 000 slaughtered ermines.⁶³ Though in later life she mingled with the elites of New South Wales society, Levvy herself was no stranger to poverty: her father died when she was young, leaving the family with significant debts and shaky means of supporting themselves.⁶⁴ In 1897 she defended the importance of public schooling, insisting that children should be educated without regard to their parents’ rank or finances, but rather ‘according to the amount of intelligence with which the Creator has endowed them’.⁶⁵ She suggested that New South Wales public schools might in fact be better at ‘training gentlemen’

New York: Routledge, 1991), 48; Rob Boddice, *A History of Attitudes and Behaviours Towards Animals in Eighteenth- and Nineteenth-Century Britain* (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen Press, 2008), 165.

⁶⁰ Donald, *Women Against Cruelty*, 4. For further discussion of the homogenising historiographical assumption that animal welfarists must primarily be serving ulterior, sometimes subconscious, motives, see Chien-hui Li, *Mobilizing Traditions in the First Wave of the British Animal Defence Movement* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), 5; Ekkel, ‘Vegetarians, vivisection and violationism’, *Lilith: A Feminist History Journal* no. 28 (2022): 73-96; Brian Harrison, ‘Campaigners against cruelty’, *Times Literary Supplement*, 29 January 1982; Brian Luke, ‘Taming ourselves or going feral? Toward a nonpatriarchal metaethic of animal liberation’, in *Animals and Women: Feminist Theoretical Explorations*, ed. Carol J. Adams and Josephine Donovan (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1995), 290-319.

⁶¹ See for example ‘Savagery’, *BMHJNSW* XXVI, no. 10 (27 October 1911): 8; Frances Levvy, ‘Civilised’, *BMHJNSW* XXXVI, no. 7 (30 April 1920): 4.

⁶² Pack, *Queer Omissions*, 37. Frances Levvy, ‘Kindness to Horses: Action by the WSPCA: Pathetic Appeal to Passengers’, *Australian Star*, 25 March 1897, 7.

⁶³ Frances Levvy, ed., ‘General News’, *BMHJNSW* (21 July 1902): 76.

⁶⁴ A newspaper report about her father’s death explained that ‘his constitution was completely shattered – it is perhaps no great scandal to say – owing to the use of ardent spirits’, and presented him as an example of ‘anti-temperance men, who are bringing themselves to a premature grave, and about to convert their wives into widows and their children into orphans, by the dreadful *mania for drink* which pervades this fine country.’ This alcoholism, as well as a later instance when she was run over by a drunk driver, may have shaped Levvy’s personal commitment to temperance. ‘Domestic Intelligence’, *Sydney Times*, 21 October 1837, 3; Frances Levvy, ‘To the Editor Woman’s Voice’, *Woman’s Voice* 1, no. 9 (1 December 1894): 117.

⁶⁵ Frances Levvy, ‘Our Boys and Girls’, *BMHJNSW*, 14 (September 1897): 102.

than Britain's elite Eton College, because Bands of Mercy flourished in the former system, whereas Etonians continued to hunt hares for sport.⁶⁶

As a counter to the image of the 'cruel boy', Band of Mercy stories and poems exalt the 'gentle boy'. The 'gentle boy' expressed his bravery by protecting animals and humans rather than through violence, and would grow into a sage and temperate Australian citizen who used his vote in defence of the weak. Presumptively white, the gentle boy's enlightened masculinity would exemplify and advance the proud 'civilisation' of settler-colonial Australia.⁶⁷ Speaking to boys at Erskineville Superior Public School, Levvy asked students to pledge that, 'when they attained their manhood vote, they would endeavour to obtain a law forbidding all sports that involved suffering on any creature.'⁶⁸

Despite their best efforts to influence boys, the Bands of Mercy found their greatest uptake amongst girls. This ratio of interest seems to have been common across Australian and English animal protection groups, and it caused concern amongst those who felt that teaching girls to be merciful was a comparable waste of time. A humanitarian society in Queensland abandoned their essay competitions for school-aged children because most of the thousand annual participants were girls, who, it was felt, were 'rarely guilty of cruelty'.⁶⁹ This belief probably stemmed from the fact that girls were less likely to take part in outdoor activities which harmed animals, like hunting and egg-collecting, and less likely to enter animal-adjacent occupations in later life, such as cab driving or livestock transport. Moreover, girls were encouraged from a young age to view the qualities of kindness and mercy as requisites of their later 'lovely womanhood' and eventual motherhood.⁷⁰ This vision of girls as both naturally gentler and more likely to have gentleness inculcated throughout their upbringing was well-established in the animal protection movement.⁷¹ British author Priscilla Wakefield wrote in 1811 that:

Women are more tender-hearted than men; which may partly be attributed to a wise provision of nature, to qualify them for the maternal office. But they are also indebted to education: cruelty is discouraged in girls, as unamiable, and discordant with their natural character; so that an affectation of great sensibility has, of late years, been very fashionable.⁷²

⁶⁶ Pack, *Queer Omissions*, 62.

⁶⁷ 'The Gentle Boy', *Band of Mercy Advocate* 1, no. 2 (14 February 1888): 6.

⁶⁸ 'The Gentle Boy'.

⁶⁹ Fifty-fourth Annual Report, *Queensland Society for the Prevention of Cruelty* (1936-1937): 11.

⁷⁰ See for example Frances Levvy, 'Women's Society, Prevention of Cruelty to Animals', *BMHJNSW* 30, no. 7 (25 July 1914): 2; Levvy, 'Civilised'.

⁷¹ Donald, *Women against Cruelty*, 17.

⁷² Priscilla Wakefield, *Instinct Displayed, in a Collection of Well-Authenticated Facts, Exemplifying the Extraordinary Sagacity of Various Species of the Animal Creation* (London: Darton, Harvey and Darton, 1811), 288-89.

In light of these enduring ideas, it was relatively easy to make the case that girls should be gentle to animals. Care for children and care for animals were closely associated. Speaking separately to the girls at Erskineville Superior, Levvy encouraged them to remember their ‘great power to render their homes happy’, especially by helping to care for infants: ‘it is not possible to be really kind to animals and neglectful of the little ones in their homes.’ Her audience was apparently receptive to this message, promising to be ‘gentle and womanly.’⁷³

In short, though Levvy believed that children should develop different virtues according to their gender – maternal tenderness for girls and noble bravery for boys – all those virtues could be fostered by caring for animals, ‘whether of domestic or wild nature’.⁷⁴ What was more, both sets of virtues were vulnerable to the blunting power of exposure to animal abuse. Levvy argued in a letter denouncing the cruelty of hare coursing: ‘We are endeavouring to train our brave boys to be just, manly men, and our girls to be tender, womanly women, and the scenes at a coursing match are as unfit for them as those at a slaughter-house, and are as demoralising’.⁷⁵ She was not alone in recognising the discrepancy between the moral lessons taught to children about nature and animals, and the realities those same children experienced in their extracurricular lives. Opponents of open seasons on marsupials asked how parents could explain the indiscriminate killing to children who were learning about kindness to animals and nature appreciation at school, while anti-plumage advocates castigated women who punished their children for treating kittens unkindly and then wore a dead heron’s feathers on their hat – in church, no less.⁷⁶

All creatures great and small: A Christian ethic of care

What message about native animals did Bands of Mercy members receive? Fundamentally, Levvy promoted an expansive moral vision of animal creation deeply shaped by her Christian faith, and which, at least theoretically, embraced kangaroos and frogs as much as dogs and horses. Since the Christian God had created ‘All creatures great and small’, as the popular hymn declared, every animal, in Levvy’s eyes, had inherent moral worth and purpose. Devout from a young age, she believed that, while animals were inferior to humans, they deserved human care and protection. ‘Surely we could remember with gratitude the numberless benefits

⁷³ *Band of Mercy and Humane Journal of New South Wales* XXX, no. 7 (25 July 1914): 2.

⁷⁴ *Band of Mercy Advocate* IV, no. 9 (26 February 1891): 15.

⁷⁵ Frances Levvy, ‘COURSING AND CRUELTY’, *Daily Telegraph* (Sydney), 5. Levvy’s aversion to violence in children’s lives was general; she also argued against corporal punishment. ‘The Animals’ Friend’.

⁷⁶ ‘The Gentle Assassin’, *Western Mail*, 3 September 1910, 39; ‘In a London Church’, *BMHJNSW* no. 8 (28 August 1914): 11.

and comforts we owe to these our fellow-creatures all fashioned by the same Creator,' she wrote in 1920, 'all sustained by His care and treat them with the respect and kindness that their natures require'.⁷⁷ Even those animals whose benefits to humans were less clear, were encompassed in the moral embrace of Levvy and her supporters. Even the earwig, whose divinely ordained role in God's creation, English animal welfarist and supporter of the New South Wales Bands Florence Suckling admitted, was unclear, possessed maternal instincts humans might learn from.⁷⁸ A committed Anglican, Levvy was nevertheless open to other traditions which embraced animal life in a similar way, writing to defend the spiritualist Annie Besant's concept of a 'universal kinship' with all living things, in which all shared 'an equal claim for justice, the stronger protecting the weaker'.⁷⁹

This poem went unattributed in her *Band of Mercy* edited journal. If it is not Levvy's own, it certainly reflects her view of Christian children's (and adults') responsibilities to God's diverse animal gifts.

The creatures dumb, whose soft eyes plead
With us to shield their lives from wrong;
He only lends them for our need,
To Him they one and all belong;
Oh, help me Father, that I may,
Protect Thy creatures tame and wild
So that they mutely bless the day –
That brought them near a Christian child.⁸⁰

Thanks to her wide-ranging care framework, Levvy's *Band of Mercy* periodicals could feature an elegy for a dead kangaroo rat, a condemnation of the trade in possum fur, or a riddle about kangaroos, alongside paeons to the cats, dogs, caged birds and horses of better-established animal protectionist tradition.⁸¹ Though native animals never predominated in the publications' pages, Levvy's insistence on God's concern for all animals, 'tame or wild', was clear (see Figure 2).⁸²

The melding of categories of native and non-native species was also visible in reports of young members' activities. The journals offer unusually detailed accounts of how young people

⁷⁷ Frances Levvy, 'A Bird's Work', *BMHJNSW* XXXVI, no. 5 (28 February 1920): 5.

⁷⁸ 'Kindness and Cruelty', in *Humane Educator and Reciter*, ed. Florence Suckling (London: Simpkin, Marshall, Hamilton, Kent & Co, 1891), 498.

⁷⁹ Frances Levvy, 'One Universal Kinship', *Daily Telegraph*, 14 July 1908, 4.

⁸⁰ 'Our Duty', *BMHJNSW* XXXII, no. 2 (28 February 1916): 4.

⁸¹ 'A Riddle', *BMA* 1, no. 6 (14 April 1888): 6.

⁸² 'Our Duty'.

proudly applied protectionist principles, in interactions which traversed usual adult categories of native and non-native, pet and non-pet. It is thanks to these periodicals, *Band of Mercy Advocate* and *Band of Mercy and Humane Journal of New South Wales*, that we know that elsewhere in Kellyville, in the same month Julia Redden saved a frog, Minnie James stopped a magpie from pecking a duckling to death, and Ethel Sherwood saved a bee. Not to be outdone in humanitarianism by her sister, Elsie Redden also saved a kitten about to be drowned by a young boy. She explained that the common practice was cruel, and requested he join her as a member of the local ‘Star of Peace’ Band of Mercy.⁸³

Sometimes, Christian care for animals extended to a commitment to vegetarianism, especially in non-conformist groups like Seventh-Day Adventists, Quakers and Methodists.⁸⁴ In 1889, W. P. Bretnall told an audience of Melbourne vegetarians that the correct translation of God’s sixth commandment was ‘Thou shalt not kill’, rather than ‘Thou shalt not murder’, thus encompassing the taking of animal as well as human life.⁸⁵ Bretnall went on to say that vegetarianism’s success lay ‘in the hands of the ladies’ due to their roles as domestic cooks, but a number of vegetarian women took on advocacy roles outside the kitchen. These included the first vice-president of the Australian Vegetarian Society, Fanny E. Samuel, and the poet and activist Florence Hayward.⁸⁶ Samuel and Hayward joined a number of leading feminists and temperance advocates who drew links between meat-eating, drunkenness, and ‘blood-thirsty’ violence, which seemed to harm women and degrade a supposedly civilised society.⁸⁷

The more mainstream belief amongst women animal protectionists, however, held that animals were placed on Earth for human use, and that they therefore deserved kindness and an absence of cruelty while they lived.⁸⁸ Suckling explained to members that though death, pain, and sorrow were necessary parts of life for humans and animals, cruelty consisted in the giving of *unnecessary* pain, whether due to ‘want of heart’ or ‘want of thought’.⁸⁹ Thus it was cruelty, rather than control, use, or killing, that constituted the problem. In making this point,

⁸³ Pryce, ‘Kellyville “Star of Peace” Band of Mercy’, 5.

⁸⁴ ‘Food & Drink Reform’, *Progress*, 1 October 1889, 7. Spiritualists and theosophists, including a young Alfred Deakin, also made up large numbers of the small vegetarian community in Australia; their outlooks related to traditional Christianity to varying degrees. They undercut the organising principle that animals were available for human use and control, and often saw vegetarianism as an avenue towards utopian social change.

⁸⁵ ‘Food & Drink Reform’, 7.

⁸⁶ Edgar Crook, *Abstainers!: A Vegetarian and Vegan History of Australia* (Canberra: Edgar Crook, 2018), 80, 186; ‘Vegetarian Society of Australia’, *Progress*, 2 December 1889, 6.

⁸⁷ Crook, *Abstainers!*, 85-9.

⁸⁸ On the other hand, many Christians did not see animal suffering as a theological concern at all. Protectionists often complained at ministers’ general silence on the issue in the pulpit. See for example S.T.C., ‘Kindness to Animals’, *Daily Telegraph*, 29 November 1924, 10.

⁸⁹ Suckling, ‘Kindness and Cruelty’, in *Humane Educator and Reciter*, 497.

protectionists sought to separate themselves from accusations of sentimental hypocrisy. In a protest against pigeon shooting, Levvy insisted that the WSPCA ‘ha[d] no absurd sentiment in our humane teachings [...] for there can be no more cruelty in having “pigeon pie” than in “chicken pie.”’⁹⁰ The issue rather lay in the fact that, as male Bands of Mercy testified, ‘to terrify or kill any creature as an amusement is the act of a cruel man, and cowardly’.⁹¹ Instead, members pledged to ‘spare all needless pain’ when killing an animal was necessary.⁹²

Individualising animals

Under this schema, native animals were framed as feeling individuals with some right to moral consideration. They might even have souls and concomitant eternal lives, though even amongst sympathisers this was a vexed question. In a letter to the *Stock and Station Journal* in 1907, for instance, Levvy expressed her heartache about abused animals, and her hope in ‘a future of compensation for these outraged creatures; they have as much right to it as we have.’⁹³ A newspaper columnist heartily agreed with the premise: in a racist comparison common to many white and middle-class animal protectionists, they averred that surely ‘a good English horse’ had more claim to eternal life than ‘a howling Chinese mob’.⁹⁴ The journalist worried about the wider implications of such an idea, however, invoking native animals to demonstrate the absurdity of extending a heavenly future to *all* animals.

When Miss Levvy thinks that the animal world deserves a time of “compensation” after death, we say in our hearts amen, but as soon as ever we apply reason to it, we stand amazed at what we see. [...] If you allow the higher animals a soul, the horses and the dogs, what comes of the cows, and the sheep, and the dingoes? What comes of the kangaroos and the wallabies, of the platypus and the ant? What comes of the oyster and the shark?⁹⁵

The implied hierarchy of species suggests the difficulty many settler Australians experienced in imagining dingos or platypuses (alongside insects, cattle and ocean dwellers) as soulful individuals meriting moral concern.⁹⁶ Another respondent to Levvy’s letter wondered whether,

⁹⁰ Frances Levvy, ‘Cruelty to Animals’, *Evening News* (Sydney), 4 September 1905, 3. Elsewhere she expressed a more sympathetic view of vegetarianism, noting that she knew a family in Sydney who had become vegetarian, and noting that ‘[i]t has been stated by many medical writers that the less animal food we eat, the healthier will be the human frame, the purer will be the mind, and the clearer the intellect.’ Frances Levvy, *The Band of Mercy and Humane Journal of New South Wales* XXVI, no. 1 (24 February 1911): 3.

⁹¹ Levvy, ‘Cruelty to Animals’.

⁹² Frances Levvy, ‘The Bands of Mercy of N.S.W.’, *Australian Town and Country Journal* (Sydney), 25 December 1886, 13.

⁹³ ‘The Future of Animals’, *Stock and Station Journal* (NSW), 16 April 1907, 3.

⁹⁴ ‘Future of Animals’.

⁹⁵ ‘Future of Animals’.

⁹⁶ As affinity with native animals increased in the following decades, settlers were more comfortable with affording them spiritual personhood: the writer and naturalist Ambrose Pratt reported his friend’s observation

if animals did have souls and afterlives, divine punishment might wait for people who mistreated them. There is a sense of overwhelm in the writer's conclusion that 'the subject is too big for a common human brain.'⁹⁷

Even if their souls remained in doubt, animal protectionists were confident that animals had distinctive personalities and a capacity for moral behaviour. They promoted a vision of righteous animals who could experience suffering or joy and form companionate relationships with their own family members and with humans who cared for them. As Harriet Ritvo has detailed, English animal protectionists assigned and celebrated admirable qualities to certain European species throughout the nineteenth century, their admiration chiefly based on animals' apparent enthusiasm for serving human interests.⁹⁸ Horses, for example, worked nobly and proudly in difficult conditions, and dogs were loyal and loving even to their abusers. Extolled in popular literature, art, and even court cases, these laudable personality traits made animal maltreatment seem all the more abhorrent.⁹⁹

Well-established tropes of 'canine sagacity and equine loyalty' translated to Australian cities and towns, but the continent's starkly different native fauna also called for a new set of characterisations.¹⁰⁰ In concert with many nature writers, children's authors and popular zoologists, Australian animal protectionists nevertheless crafted positive personas for many native animals. Kookaburras, for example, were waggish with a good sense of humour – 'real larrikin[s]' of the avian world according to one visitor to Beaumaris.¹⁰¹ Willie wagtails were boisterous and friendly, and platypuses shy and retiring.¹⁰² Perhaps most enduringly, koalas were cast as innocent, childlike, and not very bright. This image of sweet simple-mindedness was not inevitable: some early European accounts noted their look of serene 'wisdom'.¹⁰³

that the lyrebird was 'much more completely a person than most of the humans I meet', and that the species' soulful aura compared to that of opera singer Nellie Melba or ballerina Anna Pavlova. Ambrose Pratt, *Lore of the Lyrebird* (Melbourne: Robertson and Mullens, 1933): 54.

⁹⁷ 'Compensation for Animals', *Stock and Station Journal* (NSW), 30 April 1907, 5.

⁹⁸ Ritvo, *Animal Estate*, 25.

⁹⁹ Ritvo, *Animal Estate*, 25.

¹⁰⁰ MacCulloch, *Creatures of Culture*, 131.

¹⁰¹ 'Preserving our Native Animals and Birds: Phenomenal Success of the Beaumaris Zoo', *Mercury* (Hobart), 5 July 1924, 43. By this point Roberts had died and her zoo moved to a more central location in Hobart.

¹⁰² Ethel Pedley, *Dot and the Kangaroo* (London: Thomas Burleigh, 1900 [first published 1899]), 68, 30.

¹⁰³ Danielle Clode has recently challenged the anthropocentric and placental-centric metrics used to judge koalas' intelligence. 'When it's smart to be slow', in *Koala: A Life in Trees* (Collingwood: Black Inc, 2022), 138-53.

Children were encouraged to learn from the variously righteous Australian animals they met around them. Queanbeyan's fourteen-year-old Lauristina Carver, who won first prize for a Band of Mercy essay competition in 1888, told readers that '[t]he opossum furnishes us with striking proof of tenderness and regard for their young in the manner in which they carry them about in their pouches'. Carver believed that if humans acted like possums and other animals, 'unkindness to one another would not exist'.¹⁰⁴ Kangaroos, too, offered a useful model of maternal love. In an event reported in a *Band of Mercy* publication, a mother kangaroo risked approaching the balcony of a well-known kangaroo shooter, to fetch water for her sick joey. By overcoming her obvious fear, the kangaroo had demonstrated a universally applicable 'daring for the sake of her young'.¹⁰⁵ This supremacy of maternal love over self-preservation offered both a moral exemplar and further evidence for the immorality of harming such good creatures. At the very least, the experience affected the station owner: he pledged never again to shoot kangaroos.¹⁰⁶ In another account, a mother seal offered an example of maternal love by swimming for eighty miles in pursuit of a sailor who had taken her pup as a pet.¹⁰⁷ Nine years later, author Ethel Pedley popularised the figure of the loving mother kangaroo in the successful children's book *Dot and the Kangaroo*.¹⁰⁸ In an early indication of the interplay between protectionist and conservationist aims, Pedley dedicated the book to 'the children of Australia, in the hope of enlisting their sympathies for the many beautiful, amiable and frolicsome creatures of their fair land; whose extinction through ruthless destruction is being surely accomplished.'¹⁰⁹

Difficult cases

Dangerous carnivores were more difficult to integrate into a moral schema of 'amiable and frolicsome' creatures deserving of care and protection, though some women did their best. As Ritvo has argued, an anthropocentric metric of moral worth based on subservience to human

¹⁰⁴ Lauristina Carver, quoted in *BMA* IV no. 1 (14 March 1888): 8-9.

¹⁰⁵ *BMA* IV, no. 4 (26 February 1890): 10.

¹⁰⁶ *BMA* IV, no. 4 (26 February 1890): 10.

¹⁰⁷ 'Motherhood', *BMHJNSW* XXXVIII, no. 7 (31 May 1923): 4.

¹⁰⁸ Ethel Pedley, *Dot and the Kangaroo* (London: Thomas Burleigh, 1900 [first published 1899]).

¹⁰⁹ Pedley, *Dot and the Kangaroo*, front matter. Pedley's book critiques settler Australians' treatment of native animals across several domains, while offering a care-based path to redemption. See Chapters Three and Four for further discussion.

aims left most wild and apparently untameable animals sidelined as inoffensive. Or worse, if they actively harmed humans, they were denounced as nefarious renegades.¹¹⁰ Animal protectionists dealt with this issue by either ignoring predators altogether or asserting that, in fact, all animals could be brought to appropriate human morals standards in the right conditions. *Band of Mercy* journals alleged that wild animals like seals and dingos could be tamed ‘and made pets of by kindness’, even those ‘which in their natural state are vicious and fierce’.¹¹¹

Roberts endeavoured to prove this point in her hands-on interactions with Tasmanian tigers, whom she proudly displayed at her zoo. These animals, also known as thylacines, Tasmanian wolves, or zebra wolves, seemed apt examples of Ritvo’s ‘rebels who refused to accept the divinely ordained dominance of humankind’, and they suffered accordingly as individuals and as a species.¹¹² Tigerish and wolfish in appearance, with a gaping jaw presumed responsible for many sheep deaths, thylacines generated considerable hatred and fear amongst European settlers.¹¹³ This unfavourable reputation had profound conservationist implications; many people were sanguine about the idea of the species’ endangerment, hastened by bounty schemes incentivising their deaths.¹¹⁴ ‘Fancy actually ‘protecting’ a villainous and repugnant animal of this type’, wrote one commentator in 1937, ‘It would be a good thing if the species did become extinct, even at the risk of upsetting the balance of nature.’¹¹⁵

The species was condemned as not only villainous, but stupid, their resistance to captivity and confinement treated as an indictment on their intelligence.¹¹⁶ ‘Too Stupid to Tame’ ran one headline, describing a thylacine recently arrived at London Zoo. After noting the ‘unapproachable’ animal’s recalcitrance even in the face of food offerings and kindness, the *Daily Mail* observed ‘[t]he Tasmanian wolf is one of the most stupid animals; its lack of intelligence is the cause of its untameableness. It never loses its ferocity.’¹¹⁷

¹¹⁰ Ritvo, *Animal Estate*, 25.

¹¹¹ *BMA* II (6 April 1889): 2; *BMA* III (25 September 1890): 173.

¹¹² Ritvo, *Animal Estate*, 25.

¹¹³ In fact, thylacines are more closely related to quolls and Tasmanian devils. See Menna Jones et al., ‘Australia’s surviving marsupial carnivores: threats and conservation’, in *Carnivores of Australia: Past, Present and Future*, edited by Alistair Glen and Christopher Dickman (Collingwood, Victoria: CSIRO Publishing, 2014) 177-199.

¹¹⁴ Guiler, *Thylacine*, 23-29. See also Chapter Four for further discussion of perceptions of Australian mammals’ intelligence or stupidity.

¹¹⁵ ‘The Tasmanian “Tiger”’, *Examiner* (Launceston), 3 March 1937, 1.

¹¹⁶ See also Chapter Four.

¹¹⁷ ‘Too Stupid to Tame’, *Mercury*, 23 April 1909, 4, quoting *Daily Mail* (London), 18 March 1909.

Such judgements were tied to ideas about Australian animals' evolutionary backwardness. Even a comparatively celebratory article featuring the species at Beaumaris Zoo in 1924 called the thylacine a 'living fossil'.

You only have to look at him to see that: His legs are relatively short, and a body somewhat elongated, head narrow, with little brain capacity, a bad finish around the hindquarters; in fact an unproportioned experiment of nature quite unfitted to take its place in competition with the more highly-developed forms of animal life in the world today.¹¹⁸

The idea of thylacines' lack of intelligence could have real ramifications for an animal's treatment. A later zookeeper at Beaumaris Zoo recalled her distress when watching a surgeon amputate a thylacine's leg without the anaesthetic he used for comparable European carnivores. That marsupial, at least, felt the pain keenly: when the limb was removed, he bit right through the surgeon's metal tray.¹¹⁹

Roberts responded by advocating for the tameability of Tasmanian tigers and other Australian marsupials. Zoo visitors were consistently impressed by the way she entered the thylacine enclosure without fear, countering assumptions about the species' aggression.¹²⁰ The way she had tamed even thylacines, the Governor of Tasmania reflected in 1911, was a 'great object lesson in the care of animals'.¹²¹ As the fourth chapter explores in more detail, Roberts made a similar case for Tasmanian devils, and was relatively successful in changing the reputation and treatment of a maligned species which had long inspired comments such as: 'Kindness seems as much wasted on it as on a bursting shrapnel shell'.¹²² But moral rehabilitation was too little and came too late for thylacines, and the last known individual died at Beaumaris Zoo in 1936.

Care and conservation in the egret feather trade

As Roberts' advocacy suggests, animal protectionists' messages about God's vulnerable and lovable creatures often dovetailed with early twentieth-century conservationist messages about the need to protect threatened species in Australia. Notions of motherly possums or kind kangaroos made their indiscriminate killing harder to defend, and offered emotionally potent

¹¹⁸ Preserving our Native Animals and Birds: Phenomenal Success of the Beaumaris Zoo'.

¹¹⁹ Roslyn Sargent, Jean and Kevin Mitchells, 'The Alison Reid Story', VHS, 28m 17s, 1996, NS5349/1/1, Tasmanian Archive and Heritage Office, Hobart. Reid did not specify a date but these events must have occurred between the zoo's relocation in 1923 and the zoo's closure in 1937.

¹²⁰ 'Beaumaris Zoo. The Governor on Treatment of Animals', *Mercury* (Hobart), 6 March 1911, 2.

¹²¹ 'Beaumaris Zoo. The Governor on Treatment of Animals'.

¹²² 'Devils at the London "Zoo"', *Geelong Advertiser*, 15 January 1912, 5.

fodder for conservationist campaigns against the fur trade, which gathered steam throughout the 1920s and 30s.¹²³ The emotionally charged rhetoric of the 1927 campaign against the open season on Queensland koalas, as we will explore in the fifth chapter, echoed protectionist arguments about God's 'innocent' and 'tame' animals, whose ungallant 'murder' surely hardened the hearts of boys and men.¹²⁴ Though many of these advocates were driven by conservationist fears of extinction, they also cared deeply about the cruelty of harming 'the most innocently appealing of God's creatures'.¹²⁵ Certainly, they used this moral framing to powerful emotional effect.

In the feather trade controversy, we can see most clearly the deep and gendered relationship between women's animal welfare work and the changing fates of native animals. Throughout much of the nineteenth century and the early part of the twentieth, feathers were in fashion, worn jauntily on women's hats, parasols, gowns, fans and other garments.¹²⁶ More ostentatious than mere feathers (and more scandalous to bird-lovers) were the whole taxidermied birds styled to look as if they had just landed on a hat; sometimes they were presented in artificial nests.¹²⁷ To their proponents these ornaments could suggest style, coquettishness, exoticism, or wealth. To opponents they seemed the epitome of cruelty and waste, necessitating the death and suffering of millions of birds in Australia and elsewhere. 'The cruelty of women's fashions' united conservationists and welfarists like no other issue.¹²⁸

Women's consumption of feathers was cast as especially egregious because it undermined a belief in women as the naturally caring protectors of animals. Though plume-hunters were almost exclusively men, women were their major consumers, so much of the debate over the industry was framed as a battle between female vanity and the 'greater call of humaneness'.¹²⁹ By supporting the cruel and exploitative practices of the feather trade, women seemed to betray

¹²³ Historians have paid relatively little attention to the fur trade and its opposition in Australia, though Elizabeth Downes has established its economic and social significance in Victoria. Elizabeth Downes, "'A Very Good Livelihood': The Native Animal Fur Trade in Victoria", *History Australia* 15, no. 1 (2018): 89–112. See also MacCulloch, 'Creatures of Culture', and Chapter Five.

¹²⁴ See Chapter Five.

¹²⁵ 'Brisbane Lady', 'Save the Native Bear', *Brisbane Courier*, 23 July 1927, 20.

¹²⁶ Robin W. Doughty, *Feathered Fashions and Bird Preservation: a study in nature protection* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975), 14–16.

¹²⁷ Near the end of the nineteenth century, some hats featured entire owls' heads complete with wide eyes peering over the brim. Doughty, *Feathered Fashions*, 16.

¹²⁸ Roberts, 'The cruelty of women's fashions', 7.

¹²⁹ 'Banned Plumage: Women's Borrowed Feathers', *Sunday Times* (Perth), 11 November 1923, 11.

the gentleness and sensitivity to violence often attributed to their gender.¹³⁰ Their much-vaunted capacity for sentiment could be cast by critics of the bird trade as warped and ineffectual. Opponents argued that women whose sensibilities were too delicate to actually slaughter an animal were content to wear the products of someone else's killing, like the woman who wanted to preserve a butterfly but, since she could not bear to kill it, enclosed it in a box until it suffocated. 'Beat out your life, little captive in your cardboard oubliette; it would cost my lady a shudder to put a pin through you,' opined the reporter.¹³¹ The leading naturalist and conservationist David Stead was particularly scathing about the 'womanly pity' which seemed to desert women when it came to their sartorial choices.¹³²

Perrine Moncrieff, the first female president of the Royal Australasian Ornithological Union, took a less condemnatory tone in her presidential address in 1933.¹³³ Speaking on the topic of 'Birds in relation to women', Moncrieff acknowledged the mass-killing of birds in the name of women's fashion, but cast it as one interaction amongst many possible bird encounters embraced by women, including poetry, music, and ornithology.¹³⁴ She encouraged the appreciation of and engagement with living birds, rather than dead ones. Like many other anti-plumage campaigners, Moncrieff alluded to the use of bird skins and feathers by many Indigenous groups, but insisted that these judicious practices, which did not threaten entire populations, were not blameworthy. Rather, it was 'amongst civilized races' that the shamefully unacceptable slaughter of birds for decorative purposes occurred. She concluded: 'In her pursuit of pleasure, woman has been lured away from the simple things of this world which can be enjoyed by rich and poor alike. Let us hope that in future her relation to birds will become every closer.'¹³⁵ Moncrieff's choice of an artificial feather suggested a cruelty-free alternative, though as opposition to the plumage trade grew, manufacturers were accused of selling real feathers labelled as fakes.

¹³⁰ 'Cruel Slaughter of Wild Birds: Feathers Flaunted on Women's Hats', *Saturday Journal* (Adelaide), 1 September 1923, 2; 'Do Women Really Hate Cruelty?', *The Mercury* (Hobart), 21 August 1937, 14.

¹³¹ 'Gentle Assassin'.

¹³² 'Murdered Mother Heron: Women and Feathers', *Sydney Stock and Station Journal*, 13 August 1920, 2. In the absence of other sources, it would be possible to chart the fluctuations of Australian feathered fashions solely by tracking the varying intensity of Stead's invectives against women.

¹³³ For an analysis of Moncrieff's significance to nature conservation across Australia and New Zealand (her country of birth), see Robin Hodge, 'Seizing the Day: Perrine Moncrieff and Nature Conservation in New Zealand', *Environment and History* 9, no. 4 (November 2003): 407-17.

¹³⁴ Perrine Moncrieff, 'Birds in Relation to Women', *Emu* 33 (1933-4): 204-18.

¹³⁵ Moncrieff, 'The relation of birds to women', 204-18.

The feather trade criss-crossed the globe, but the use of local Australian birds was particularly unacceptable to opponents. A reporter in Perth was disgusted to see a woman wearing a stuffed black-fronted dotterel, a dainty wading bird which in life would have frequented the shallow waters of nearby lakes, rivers, storm drains and marshes. Its familiarity in living form made its use as dead ornamentation all the more damnable.¹³⁶ ‘No one who had kept the bird as a garden pet, who had watched the little grey-stockinged feet patter up and down in search of some familiar garden pest, who had felt the little satin smooth head nestle into her hand at feeding-time’, fumed the reporter, ‘could look upon the wearer of such a trophy without experiencing a feeling of revulsion for her callousness.’¹³⁷ Politicians gradually responded to concerns about Australian birds, and, as Levvy reported in 1911 under the heading ‘AT LAST’, the Commonwealth prohibited the deportation of these birds and their eggs, skins, or feathers:

Emu, Tern, Gull, Egret, Heron, Bittern, Lorrikeet, Cockatoo, Parrot, Dollar or Roller Bird, Kingfisher, Cuckoo, Bee-eater, Lyre Bird, Pitta, Robin, Ground Thrush, Chat, Wren, Strike Tits, Thickheads, Shrike, Sun Birds, Bower Birds, Rifle Birds, Grebe, Albatross, Finch, Oriole, Shining Starling.¹³⁸

As opponents often lamented, however, official restriction did not seem to stem the flow of feathers.¹³⁹ Other strategies were required.

One of Roberts’ responses was to found a Tasmanian branch of the Anti-Plumage League, membership of which required women to take the following pledge:

To help in preventing the extermination of the birds of the world, by appealing to women to refrain from wearing the plumage of birds [...] and the signatories pledge themselves to assist in carrying out this object wherever they may be.¹⁴⁰

Prospective league members could connect more directly to the living subjects of their activism at Roberts’ zoo, where she kept two white egrets. In an advertisement for Beaumaris Zoo, she stressed these birds’ multilayered appeal: ‘apart from their aesthetic value [egrets] are classed amongst the “beneficials,” and silently appeal to all beholders to save their kind from further destruction at the altar of fashion.’¹⁴¹ Where emotional appeals failed, Roberts tried more

¹³⁶ Black-fronted dotterels are also found in New Zealand.

¹³⁷ ‘The Gentle Assassin’.

¹³⁸ ‘AT LAST’, *BMHJNSW* XXVI, no. 4 (26 April 1911): 3.

¹³⁹ See for example ‘Wild Lies’, *Daily Examiner* (Grafton), 12 August 1920, 1.

¹⁴⁰ Roberts, ‘The Cruelty of Women’s Fashions’, *Mercury* (Hobart), 27 February 1913, 7.

¹⁴¹ “‘Beaumaris Zoo’: Mrs H. L. Roberts’ Private Zoological Collection at Battery Point’, pamphlet, undated, Box NS823/14, Item NS823/4, Correspondence, Photographs, Papers of the Roberts Family (NS823), Tasmanian Archives, Hobart.

forcible means. Frustrated that legal restrictions on the importation and sale of certain feathers were brazenly flouted in major cities, she took advantage of a trip to Melbourne to make representations to the Minister for Trade and Customs, which led to several shop raids and seizures. She regretted that the Act protecting native birds was not being enforced in Tasmania.¹⁴²

Roberts appealed to women to abstain from wearing feathers gained by cruel means, but she also criticised the men who hurt birds more directly. A man ‘with no manly spirit’, she recounted, had shot dead two crested penguins beloved by their local community. ‘When will our young people learn to reverence life,’ Roberts concluded, ‘and realise that all these creatures are objects of Divine care, and should be also of human pity and sympathy.’¹⁴³ She approvingly repeated the comments of the Chief Justice of New South Wales, who said about the destruction of Australian wildlife that he ‘did not know in which of its aspects it was most odious, the wanton destruction of beautiful things or the cruelty for which it was responsible.’¹⁴⁴

Levy responded to women’s feather-wearing with some of her sharpest poetry and prose. Her writings on the subject are heavy with anger at the Christian, ‘civilised’ women who asked for God’s mercy on Sundays but, she felt, offered no mercy to the ‘mother bird, slaughtered on her nest of young ones that her plume of feathers might minister to this woman’s vanity.’¹⁴⁵ The association of feathers with wealthy women was particularly abhorrent to Levy. About a recent fashion for mounting the breast feathers of hummingbirds on women’s shoes, which were sold at £400 a pair, she questioned:

Can we wonder that the great mass of men and women who are literally grinding out their lives in the struggle for the necessities of life, are almost maddened by the knowledge of such wanton waste of money – putting aside the hideous cruelty.¹⁴⁶

Egrets featured most often and most emotively in Levy’s arguments, reflecting their worldwide prominence as icons within the anti-plumage movement.¹⁴⁷ This group of species

¹⁴² Roberts, ‘The Cruelty of Women’s Fashions’.

¹⁴³ Roberts, ‘The Cruelty of Women’s Fashions’.

¹⁴⁴ ‘Our Animal Friends’.

¹⁴⁵ Frances Levy, ‘In Church’, *The Band of Mercy and Humane Journal of New South Wales* XXXVIII, no. 9 (28 July 1923): 4.

¹⁴⁶ ‘Savagery’, *BMHJNSW* XXVI, no. 10 (27 October 1911): 8.

¹⁴⁷ Anti-plumage advocates even complained that too much focus had been placed on the cruelty of egret feather harvesting, such that consumers decided not to buy egret feathers but assumed there was ‘no harm in using other feathers for personal adornment.’ Willoughby Dewar, ‘The Plumage Trade and the Destruction of Birds’, *Journal of the Royal Society of Arts* 69, no. 3569 (15 April 1921): 339.

share long white plumes that were popular as elegant hat ornaments.¹⁴⁸ The plumes are at their wispy finest at the time egrets are mating and nesting, so hunters killed and skinned mothers, leaving newborn egrets to die and thereby decimating populations across the globe.¹⁴⁹ As MacCulloch has argued, mothers had an exalted status in what she terms ‘mercy literature’, and so the idea of killing mother birds, especially for the purposes of women who might be mothers themselves, held particular horror.¹⁵⁰ ‘Every egret that nods on a woman’s head means the death of a mother-bird’, wrote Levvy, ‘and the starvation of her nestlings’.¹⁵¹ Poems warned that the same angels sent by God to count dead sparrows, according to the Book of Matthew, would surely count dead egrets at the same time, holding their killers responsible.¹⁵²

Elaine Stratford notes Levvy’s tendency to appeal to male arbitration in her condemnation, suggesting for example that men should hiss at women who donned cruel fashions, and expressing hope that women in feathered dresses would not be asked to dance at balls.¹⁵³ Still, Levvy was more than capable of conducting her own arbitration. In grotesque descriptions and illustrations of birds’ deaths, she tried to restore what Carol Adams has called the ‘absent referent’ – the once-living animal whose existence and killing are erased in the production of a cooked and renamed piece of meat, or, in the case of egrets, a spray of tufty white feathers which seemed to levitate attractively over women’s heads.¹⁵⁴ Opponents also cast suspicion on the way traders rechristened egret feathers, as ‘osprey’ or ‘aigrette’. The name change was ‘presumably on the ground’, speculated one, ‘that it doesn’t sound half so improper in French’.¹⁵⁵

¹⁴⁸ The terms ‘herons’ and ‘egrets’ were often used interchangeably at the beginning of the twentieth century. Thus it is clear that Amy Mack’s story, ‘The White Herons’, which we examined in Chapter Three, refers to the same controversy over egret hunting. Today, ‘egrets’ are all classed under the heron family (Ardeidae): all egrets are herons but not all herons are egrets. Recognised egret species in Australia include the Great Egret, Cattle Egret, Plumed Egret, Intermediate Egret, and Little Egret. Thank you to Russell McGregor for clarification. For more see Neil McKilligan, *Herons, Egrets and Bitterns: Their Biology and Conservation in Australia* (Collingwood, Victoria: CSIRO Publishing, 2005).

¹⁴⁹ Libby Robin, *Flight of the Emu* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press), 92-94.

¹⁵⁰ MacCulloch, ‘Creatures of Culture’, 154.

¹⁵¹ Frances Levvy, ‘The Protection of Birds’, *Daily Telegraph* (Sydney), 3 November 1908, 5.

¹⁵² Annie McQueen, ‘In the Egret’s Nest’, *BMHJNSW* XXVI, no. 6 (28 June 1911): 3.

¹⁵³ Elaine Stratford, *Home, Nature and the Feminine Ideal: Geographies of the Interior and of Empire* (New York; London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2019), 138.

¹⁵⁴ Carol J. Adams, *Sexual Politics of Meat: A Feminist-Vegetarian Critical Theory* (New York: Continuum, 1990), 20-22, 142.

¹⁵⁵ Dewar, ‘The Plumage Trade and the Destruction of Birds’, 339.

In 1911, a full-page spread in the *Band of Mercy and Humane Journal of New South Wales* attempted to counter this distancing effect. It depicted a glamorous, evidently wealthy woman standing incongruously amongst the reeds of a swamp, with a nest of dead baby egrets and a shotgun by her feet (Figure 2). With the mother egret's limp neck in his other hand, a roughshod hunter hands the woman the plumes she requires to complete her grand turban. Evoking women's roles as loving mothers, Levvy dedicated the reprinted picture to the 'Wearers of the Murdered Mothers'.¹⁵⁶



Figure 1 Levvy sought to convey the connection between fashionable women's consumption of egret feathers and the reality of their deaths. The Band of Mercy and Humane Journal of New South Wales XXVI, no. 6 (28 June 1911), centrefold.

This image of a slain mother egret, with her babies left to starve slowly on the nest, crystallised the entwined anxieties of protectionists and conservationists in the context of the feather trade. In 1907, ornithologist Arthur Mattingley published a series of photographs exposing the extent of destruction inflicted by plume-hunters in a wetland in southern New South Wales. His photographs of floating white corpses and hungry, motherless babies galvanised public

¹⁵⁶ *BMHJNSW* XXVI., no. 6 (28 June 1911), centrefold.

sentiment against the feather trade in Australia and abroad.¹⁵⁷ ‘What a monument of human callousness!’ wrote Mattingley, deeply moved. ‘There were 50 birds ruthlessly destroyed, besides their young (about 200) left to die of starvation!’¹⁵⁸ For this ‘practical conservationist’, the cruelty of the situation could not be separated from its wastefulness and danger to species continuance. In a letter called ‘The Cruelty of Women’s Fashions’ Roberts wrote approvingly about Mattingley’s awareness raising, and offered her own lurid accounts of birds left alive with their wings severed.¹⁵⁹ The analogous and cross-fertilising activism of Levvy, Roberts, Stead, and Mattingley highlights the link between protectionists’ appeals to individual animal suffering and broader efforts to temper the all-out destruction of Australian native species.

Complex care

Then, as now, the precise demands of ‘kindness to animals’ could be unclear, leading to contested and conflicting applications. As Thom van Dooren has elucidated, practices undertaken in the name of caring and conservationist aims often entail forms of violence and control. They can be contradictory and exclusionary.¹⁶⁰ The ‘universal kinship’ with all animals which Levvy promoted, for example, sometimes faltered in the face of unpopular animals like rodents and venomous snakes, particularly those who threatened children or more favoured animals. She highlighted the family dog’s loyalty in the face of a snake in Henry Lawson’s famous story ‘The Drover’s Wife’, and in another instance praised a robin’s bravery and intelligence in ‘pecking [...] viciously’ at a rat which threatened her nestlings.¹⁶¹ On the other hand, Roberts’ membership of the Cat Society seems incongruent with her concern for native Tasmanian mammalian species, many of whom were threatened by cats.¹⁶² Where the moral complexities of women’s animal care became most obvious, however, was at the zoo.

Zoos have long been crucibles for conflicting public sentiment regarding animal cruelty and conservation.¹⁶³ Historically the preserve of rulers and aristocrats looking to display wealth and

¹⁵⁷ See Robin, *Flight of the Emu*, 92-95.

¹⁵⁸ A. H. E. Mattingley, ‘Plundered for Their Plumes’, *Emu* 7, no. 2 (1907): 71-73.

¹⁵⁹ ‘Cruelty of women’s fashions’, 7.

¹⁶⁰ Thom Van Dooren, ‘A Day with Crows – Rarity, Nativity and the violent-Care of Conservation’, *Animal Studies Journal* 4, no. 2 (2015): 1-28.

¹⁶¹ Frances Levvy, ‘One Universal Kinship’, *Daily Telegraph* (Sydney), 14 July 1908, 4. See for example a quotation from Henry Lawson’s ‘The Drover’s Wife’, *BMHJNSW* XXVI., no. 2 (25 March 1911): 8-9 and ‘Bird Chat’, *BMHJNSW* XXVII. No. 1 (25 January 1912): 4-5.

¹⁶² B. T. Lazenby et al., ‘Raiders of the Last Ark: The Impacts of Feral Cats on Small Mammals in Tasmanian Forest Ecosystems’, *Ecological Applications* 31, no. 6 (2021): e02362, <https://doi.org/10.1002/eap.2362>.

¹⁶³ See for example Helen Cowie, ‘“Down python’s throats we thrust live goats”: snakes, zoos and animal welfare in nineteenth-century Britain’, *British Journal for the History of Science* 57, no. 3 (September 2024):

imperial dominion, they offer humans intimate interactions with creatures who are usually distant and anonymous.¹⁶⁴ There is the tantalising possibility of emotional familiarity with the exotic, and sometimes a close encounter with danger within the bounds of safety. Looking out from the barred and barren cages common to early twentieth-century zoos, these animals also raised troubling questions about the ethics of their captivity: could they be healthy and happy in small enclosures far from their normal ecological communities?¹⁶⁵ Or, in the case of native Australian animals, ought they not be allowed to roam free?¹⁶⁶ ‘I admit the attractiveness of the Zoo but it’s a heart-rending show to the thinking man or woman,’ wrote a concerned Brisbane citizen in 1912.¹⁶⁷ By the time Roberts was establishing Beaumaris as a powerhouse of the global zoological trade, then, some settler Australians were already debating the morality of zoos and ‘the imprisonment of any of God’s creatures’.¹⁶⁸

Some of Roberts’ own allies were critics of the existence of zoos. Frances Levvy, though she sometimes visited zoos, disapproved of the practice in principle, because of the captive animals’ suffering and presumed desire for liberty. Quoting approvingly from the *New York Mail*, she told readers of her journal that animals ‘suffer and sorrow in confinement’ and that ‘sensitive Humans are beginning to sorrow with them’.¹⁶⁹ The article appeals to the plight not only of ‘the lions, tigers, [and] leopards’ but also ‘other free people in their cages’, referring to the ongoing practice of exhibiting ‘exotic’ Indigenous people in zoos and at exhibitions.¹⁷⁰ Levvy was joined by other local SPCAs concerned about the interstate and international trade in animals which zookeeping entailed.¹⁷¹

369-88; Andrew Flack, “‘In Sight, Insane’: Animal Agency, Captivity and the Frozen Wilderness in the Late-Twentieth Century”, *Environment and History* 22, no. 4 (November 2016): 629-52.

¹⁶⁴ R. J. Hoage, Anne Roskell, and Jane Mansour, ‘Menageries and Zoos to 1900’, in *New Worlds, New Animals: From Menagerie to Zoological Park in the Nineteenth Century*, ed. R. J. Hoage and William A. Deiss (Baltimore and London: John Hopkins University Press, 1996), 8-18. For an account of the tradition of ‘exotic’ animals circulating in England and the British Empire, see Caroline Grigson, *Menagerie: The History of Exotic Animals in England 1100-1837* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).

¹⁶⁵ Edith A. Waterworth, ‘Tasmanian Tiger for Zoo: Protest on Grounds of Uselessness and Cruelty’, *Mercury* (Hobart), 11 March 1937, 10; ‘The Zoo Proposal’, *Brisbane Courier*, 13 November 1912, 4.

¹⁶⁶ ‘Is a Zoo Cruel?’, *Herald* (Melbourne), 14 January 1925, 6. This writer suggested: ‘Why not turn the [Melbourne] Zoo into a national park, where the animals, being natives, could live a more or less natural and happy life and be spared all the misery for transportation?’

¹⁶⁷ ‘The Zoo Proposal’.

¹⁶⁸ ‘A Site for the Zoo’, *Brisbane Courier*, 8 August 1911, 12; ‘The City Park Zoo’, *Examiner* (Launceston), 17 July 1913.

¹⁶⁹ ‘Are Zoos Doomed?’, *BMHJNSW* XXX, no. 12 (30 December 1914): 6.

¹⁷⁰ ‘Are Zoos Doomed?’.

¹⁷¹ ‘Captive Animals: Is Imprisonment at Zoo Cruel?’, *Telegraph* (Brisbane), 2 August 1921.

Other critics condemned zoos on conservationist grounds, especially in relation to the process of trade and capture they necessitated. A delegate at the 1922 Congress of the Royal Australasian Ornithological Union complained:

The frightful mortality and brutality to Australian birds then sending them overseas should be stopped. Zoological societies should not be given control [...] Zoological societies had formed a combine to exploit Australian fauna. That was most disgraceful [...] Other countries were ready to offer high prices for the Tasmanian devil and Tasmanian tiger. Such offers were an invitation to murder.¹⁷²

As the first to emphasise endangered Tasmanian and Australian fauna in her collection, Roberts was part of a vanguard of zoos presenting themselves as bastions of conservation for threatened species, but conservationists had serious doubts. The Wild Life Preservation Society of Australia, with whom Roberts was proud to correspond, opposed zoos since its founding in 1909 because of ‘the constant fillip given by Zoo trading to the destruction of Fauna.’¹⁷³ David Stead and, later, his long-term partner and fellow conservationist Thistle Harris, repeatedly accused zoo owners of the ‘recurring sin’ of financially profiting from Australian animals rather than operating out of concern for their wellbeing or conservation. It is interesting to note that though his focus was on protection of Australian animals at a species level, Stead felt that cruelty alone ‘should be sufficient enough’ for most people to take issue with zoos.¹⁷⁴

Moreso than the zoo displays themselves, Roberts’ participation in the zoological trade of native fauna seemed to clash with her connected commitments to animal wellbeing and species preservation. Though she was discerning about who was allowed to buy and transport her animals, refusing sales to circus groups, for example, Roberts inevitably caused death and suffering to thylacines, Tasmanian devils and many other animals by commissioning their trapping and sale, often sending them on weeks-long journeys to London Zoo, the main recipient of her exports.¹⁷⁵ Trapping could be a traumatic and sometimes deadly process, and it

¹⁷² ‘Aus. Fauna’, *World* (Hobart), 18 October 1922, 8. The Director of the Zoological Gardens in South Australia took exception to these remarks, insisting that in thirty years in his role he had only exchanged, never sold, any birds. ‘Exports of Birds’, *Farmers’ Advocate*, 16 November 1922.

¹⁷³ David Stead, letter to the Commissioner of Police, NSW, 5 July 1953, David Stead and Thistle Harris Papers, ML MSS 5715 (25), State Library of New South Wales, Sydney.

¹⁷⁴ Stead, letter to the Commissioner of Police.

¹⁷⁵ Guiler, ‘The Beaumaris Zoo in Hobart’, 126.

is reasonable to assume, as Eric Guiler advises, that the thylacines found in zoological, trapping, and trading records are ‘but the survivors of a much larger band who failed to survive the initial trauma of capture.’¹⁷⁶

At one point, a Tasmanian devil whose capture Roberts had commissioned arrived at Beaumaris dead in its crate, its mutilated body an archive of at least three different attempts at evading capture before the last.¹⁷⁷ Roberts described her distress and contacted the SPCA, but never acknowledged her own role in commissioning the captures and the trade. It may be that Roberts’ sterling reputation as a caring, maternal, philanthropic animal lover, and her close economic and social relationship to Tasmania’s animal welfare and conservationist groups, helped in avoiding controversy over these practices, which in other contexts were condemned as both cruel and dangerous to conservationist aims.

Roberts appeared aware of these possible critiques and sought to distance herself from less morally scrupulous traders and zookeepers. It was likely she who underlined every reference to her animals’ apparent wellbeing in the Beaumaris visitor’s book. Another clue to a preoccupation with perceptions of care or cruelty comes in the form of a Beaumaris postcard. It features a photograph of two of Roberts’ thylacines, originally taken in their unsightly wire enclosure (Figure 3). The animals’ silhouettes have been carefully cut out and pasted on a different photograph of woody undergrowth. If the subtle collage is Roberts’ own handiwork, it suggests her awareness that the public increasingly wanted to envision endangered animals thriving in their natural habitat.

¹⁷⁶ Guiler, *Thylacine*, 66.

¹⁷⁷ Mary G. Roberts, ‘The Keeping and Breeding of Tasmanian Devils (*Sarcophilus harrisi*)’, *Proceedings of the Zoological Society of London* (1915): 581.



End-of-life care: Tasmanian tigers at Beaumaris

Figure 3 The Beaumaris thylacines in this photograph have been cut out and stuck onto a background suggestive of their natural habitat. Postcard of Beaumaris Zoo, c. 1908-1921. Photographs, Papers of the Roberts Family, NS823, Tasmanian Archives, Hobart.

crystallised around the display of thylacines, who became more and more valuable zoo attractions as their numbers dwindled in the wild. In captivity, thylacines did not mate and tended to live shorter lives, so the conservation value of their presence in zoos was doubtful. Even successful attempts were highly traumatic. A leading Tasmanian welfarist, Edith Waterworth, remembered observing a thylacine that had been recently captured for display:

I have seen one brought in from the bush, and I never want to see another. The frozen despair which its face and its whole body expressed would wring the heart of any person not entirely without imagination. Its frenzy was over, it had refused to eat, but the sight of it will live in my memory until the end of my life. I find it impossible to understand how any man or woman can be associated with such a deed.¹⁷⁸

Waterworth's appeals to readers' imaginative and emotional faculties highlight how women's work for animal welfare could push for different outcomes. Whereas Roberts' advocacy for the moral claims of Tasmanian devils and tigers centred around their captivity in her zoo, Waterworth used similar ideas and language to excoriate the very practices of capture, transportation and confinement which made up much of Roberts' life work. Care could entail domestication and display, or protection against those very things.

The only remaining captive thylacine in the world died on a cold night in 1936, only two months after her species had received protected status. When the Zoo proposed to procure a

¹⁷⁸ Edith A. Waterworth, 'Tasmanian Tiger for Zoo: Protest on Grounds of Uselessness and Cruelty', *Mercury* (Hobart), 11 March 1937, 10.

replacement, opposition to the idea focused on welfare. Waterworth denounced the idea of confining yet another ‘frenzied, frantic creature’:

After the frenzy has died down, it will pace up and down, its whole body expressing the devastating misery it feels, and in the course of time it will die. What possible good can its purchase do anybody?

In a damning refutation of Roberts’ ideas and reputation, she argued that ‘the idea that people learn natural history from zoos is so out-of-date that an intelligent person would be ashamed to put it forward.’¹⁷⁹

Waterworth got her wish, in a sense, because no other thylacine could be captured, then or since. Perhaps more than any other Australian animal, Tasmanian tigers had suffered for being excluded from the sphere of moral consideration, both in terms of individual welfare and collective survival. They had few human allies, with exceptions including a handful of scientists, Waterworth, and Roberts, the latter of whom was nevertheless responsible for many of their deaths. Even as fears of the species’ total extinction grew in 1937, when sheep killings by thylacines must have been close to nil, many Tasmanians were unperturbed by their possible fate.¹⁸⁰ The possibility that the species quietly survives in the remote wilds of Tasmania has never been fully extinguished, though a recent meta-analysis suggests that some individuals lived on until the 1970s.¹⁸¹ At that point, it seems that Australia’s most iconic extinction was complete.

Conclusions

Mary Grant Roberts died in 1921, having actively tended to her zoo animals until weeks before her passing. Her daughter Ida gave the zoo to the Hobart Council, and the zoo was moved to a more central location on the Queen’s Domain.¹⁸² An article about Roberts’ death was entitled ‘Knew the Devil Well’ in reference to her influential research into Tasmanian devils, the

¹⁷⁹ Waterworth, ‘Tasmanian Tiger for Zoo’.

¹⁸⁰ See for example ‘The Tasmanian “Tiger”’, *Examiner* (Launceston). For a fuller examination of the conflicting views of thylacines around the turn of the twentieth century, see David Owen and David Pemberton, *Tasmanian Tiger: The tragic story of the thylacine* (Crows Nest, NSW: Allen & Unwin, 2023), 137-72.

¹⁸¹ Barry W. Brook et al., ‘Resolving When (and Where) the Thylacine Went Extinct’, *Science of The Total Environment* 877 (June 2023): 162878, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.scitotenv.2023>.

¹⁸² ‘Beaumaris Zoo’, *Daily Telegraph* (Launceston), 3 February 1923, 7.

thylacine's stocky, scavenging cousins.¹⁸³ The pun reminds us that the zookeeper not only claimed to love and care about Tasmanian animals – she claimed to *understand* them, perhaps uniquely. We will revisit Roberts and her captive carnivores, therefore, in the fourth chapter, which examines how she and other settler women asserted their knowledge about native animals in the early twentieth century, navigating gendered norms and embodied more-than-human relationships to stake a claim to expertise.

Frances Levvy died in 1924, aged 93, not long after bidding her young readers 'farewell till we all meet in the Higher Life' in the last edition of her journal.¹⁸⁴ She had been sick for some time, and in contemplating her own death had become even more confident about sharing a heavenly afterlife with the animals she loved. About a horse who refused to leave a dead soldier's side on the battlefield, she wrote: 'Shall such love perish because it dwelt in the body of a sub-human creature? Love unto death and beyond.'¹⁸⁵ Though Levvy felt the world was 'slowly improving' in its treatment of animals, she despaired at the thought of ongoing hunting, coursing, and feather-wearing, feeling the violence harder to stomach in the wake of the bloody First World War.¹⁸⁶ Native animals had featured more and more regularly in Levvy's later and last publications. She complained about the cruelty of the trade in possum and kangaroo furs, cheered on the development of the Gould League for the protection of Australian birds, and quoted from David Stead's research on Australian sea animals, titling her article 'The Miracles of Life'.¹⁸⁷

Attention to the contributions of welfare advocates like Levvy and Roberts shows that the gendered priorities and practices of the animal protection movement had a greater bearing on settler relationships with native animals than previously acknowledged. It is true that Australian protectionists spent most of their time and money advocating for a limited group of introduced animals who tended to live in close proximity to humans and who served human interests, including horses, cows, donkeys, cats, dogs, some birds, and some animals pursued by hunters. But historians interested in environmental and more-than-human relations should not overlook the interventions of a movement which constituted many Australians' main source of instruction about animals and appropriate relationships to them – largely forgotten today,

¹⁸³ 'Knew the Devil Well', *Sun* (Sydney), 28 November 1921, 2.

¹⁸⁴ Frances Levvy, 'Farewell', *BMHJNSW* XXXVIII, no. 10 (31 August 1923): 2.

¹⁸⁵ Frances Levvy, 'Unto death and beyond' *BMHJNSW* XXXVIII, no. 10 (31 August 1923): 3.

¹⁸⁶ Levvy, 'Civilised'.

¹⁸⁷ Frances Levvy, 'Miracles of Life', *BMHJNSW* XXXVIII, no. 10 (31 August 1923): 2; Levvy, 'Unto Death and Beyond'.

Levvy was once a household name in Sydney.¹⁸⁸ Though women's protectionist arguments may have appealed more often to the docile dog and noble horse (Roberts is an exception in this regard), they nevertheless made a persuasive and emotive case for the inherent value and moral claims of any animal, free-living or domesticated, native or introduced, earwig or kangaroo.

When we look at native animals through this neglected lens of women's animal protection, a number of insights emerge. Levvy, Roberts and their ilk advocated a wide-ranging ethic of multispecies care, informed by their devout Protestantism, which, at least in theory, embraced native animals from frogs to possums, and thus influenced relationships with them, especially amongst children. These women energetically encouraged empathy for wild and domesticated animals, who were portrayed as moral individuals, and they insisted that upstanding settler Australian citizens – whether 'manly men' or 'tender, womanly women' – ought to treat them kindly.¹⁸⁹

The fight to save egrets from women's vanity and men's brutality indicates the extent to which protectionist arguments for individual animals could aid and coalesce with the work of conservationists at a species level. On the other hand, the case of Tasmanian tigers at Beaumaris complicates any idea of an all-encompassing, straightforwardly benevolent care for native animals. The language and practice of care, often expressed as 'mercy' or 'kindness', could be mobilised to alternative or even opposite ends, in ways which could exclude or harm certain animals. Especially in human-regulated spaces like zoos, care skirted close to control, existing alongside violence and the commercialisation of animal selves.

Levvy's greatest strength lay in her writing. In accessible and often beautiful prose, she captured complex religious and moral ideas about animals, children, and the depredations of cruelty in all forms, helping to reshape readers' concepts of native and non-native animals alike. To reframe relationships with 'amiable' and 'tame' animals textually, however, was one thing. It could be quite another to negotiate these interactions in daily life. How did settler women encounter and think about the wombats, wallabies, birds, and other creatures that shared their hours and their spaces? The second chapter addresses this question, examining settler women's interactions with native animals in and around the home.

¹⁸⁸ 'The Animals' Friend'.

¹⁸⁹ Levvy, 'Coursing and Cruelty'.

The emotional and intellectual landscape of women's animal protectionism remains highly relevant in this domain: pets were a major concern of the animal welfare movement. Intriguingly, in fact, MacCulloch interprets the Animal Protection Society's increasing concern with pets as a symptom and cause of the movement's 'feminisation' and decline in the early twentieth century, though she does not make explicit why domestic animals were a necessarily inferior or inconsequential choice of focus.¹⁹⁰ Blurring the border of wildness and tameness, native animal pets (and not-quite-pets) shaped settler women's understandings of Australian wildlife and influenced environmental attitudes well beyond domestic interiors.

¹⁹⁰ MacCulloch, 'Creatures of Culture', 45.

Chapter Two: Cohabitations

Animal companionship in women's homes and gardens

There must be an end to this sort of thing. I've put up with 'possums in the veranda, tame kangaroo-rats in the kitchen, and pet magpies and parrots all over the house; but I draw the line at *leeches*. You understand?

Narrator's father, *An Australian Childhood*, by Ellen Campbell, 1892¹

Human homes teem with non-human life. In our coming and going, our cooking and cleaning up, we share space and resources with multitudes of microbes, insects, mammals, reptiles and birds – more than a thousand different species according to a recent count – and these interactions, whether or not they are noticed or intended, shape our lives and thinking.² Ellen Campbell's home in rural New South Wales was no exception, though she played a more active role than most in bringing new creatures into the domestic sphere. She exasperated family members by bringing possums, koalas, kangaroo rats, birds, and insects into the house and raising them as pets. She rejoiced in their playfulness and affection, observed their behaviours, fed and named them, and mourned their frequent deaths.

As an older woman, Campbell reflected on these pet-related heartaches and joys in a memoir. Published in 1892, *An Australian Childhood* offers an antipodean and colonial bent on the popular and female-dominated genre of sentimental pet stories.³ These texts, usually aimed at children, reflected and augmented the growing emotional significance of companionate and domestic relationships with some animals in the English-speaking world. They spoke to the role of the pet as a repository of ideas and emotions about morality, children's development, gender, domesticity, nature, and empire.⁴ While sharing in the sentimental register and tropes

¹ Ellen Campbell, *An Australian Childhood* (London and Glasgow: Blackie & Son, 1892). In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Australian possums were known as opossums or 'possums.

² Biodiversity researchers identified 1041 different animal species in their 300m² home in Brisbane. Andrew M. Rogers et al., 'The House of a Thousand Species: The Untapped Potential of Comprehensive Biodiversity Censuses of Urban Properties', *Ecology* 105, no. 2 (2024): e4225, <https://doi.org/10.1002/ecy.4225>.

³ A number of scholars have identified women's pet literature as a genre which aimed to shape the moral and affective expressions of children, and therefore of society at large. Examples include Monica Flegel, *Pets and Domesticity in Victorian Literature and Culture: Animality, Queer Relations, and the Victorian Family* (London: Routledge, 2015), especially ch. 4; Elizabeth A. Boyle, 'Antebellum Womanhood and Taming Her "Wild Way": Pet Keeping, Mourning, and Social Indoctrination in Grace Greenwood's History of My Pets', *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature* 37, no. 1 (2018): 111-29; Katherine C. Grier, *Pets in America: A History* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2006).

⁴ Katherine C. Grier, *Pets in America: A History* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2006).

of comparable pet stories in Britain and the United States, Campbell's narrative sheds particular light on the place of Australian native animals in the home, animals whose transient and often contested roles in homes and gardens challenged the boundaries between native and non-native, wild and free, indoor and outdoor, and threat and pet.

Campbell was not unusual in keeping native animals as pets in this period, nor in writing about the attitudes and emotions inspired by these relationships. This chapter details the culture and practices of negotiating with native animals in and around the home, in intimate and quotidian processes often arbitrated by women and girls. In backyards and backrooms, settler Australians have long cared for native animals as pets. Possums, kangaroos, wallabies, lizards, native birds, koalas and wombats crawled and hopped through humans' domestic lives in the nineteenth and first half of the twentieth century, as Nancy Cushing and Kevin Markwell uncovered in their pathbreaking article.⁵ There is little official evidence of such pet-keeping behaviour, especially when it occurred informally, but evidence of the importance of these animals in the daily lives of families is surprisingly common in diaries, memoirs, newspaper articles and photographs.⁶ Brought literally and conceptually into the domestic sphere, 'adopted' native animals could become sources of solace, conflict, fun, companionship, inspiration, exasperation, research and grief.

Cushing and Markwell see this practice as an anomaly, 'quite separate' to broader trends of exploitation and disdain in settler Australians' relationship to the environment.⁷ I contend, however, that embodied domestic relationships with individual animals informed many women's art, writing and activism, and raised consequential questions about cruelty, animal agency and conservation. They opened different ways of thinking about and relating to native animals – and to indigeneity more generally – which could have profound impacts beyond the home's interior. Though a human's companionate relationship with an individual thylacine or cockatoo did not automatically translate to wider concern for the conservation or welfare of Australian animals, there did emerge a meaningful relationship between care for individual pets and care for native animals at a wider scale.

⁵ Nancy Cushing and Kevin Markwell, "'The Bird was a Valuable One': Keeping Australian Native Animals, 1803–1939", *Society & Animals* 25 (2017): 592–609.

⁶ Robert Paddle, *The Last Tasmanian Tiger: The History and Extinction of the Thylacine* (Port Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 70.

⁷ Paddle, *The Last Tasmanian Tiger*, 70.

Interactions with native animals as pets mattered because they helped to make kangaroos and koalas morally and emotionally legible to many settlers, in line with the animal protection movement described in the previous chapter. They also generated and informed debates about the correct methods of species conservation and ethical treatment – sometimes resulting in real policy change. Finally, these domestic encounters with native animals mattered because the home was a crucial site for the enactment and negotiation of colonial power – and one often mediated by women.⁸ Historians such as Patricia Grimshaw, Ann Standish, and Penny Russell have articulated how the so-called ‘private sphere’ of settler women’s homes shaped and furthered the Australian settler colonial project, including in its ‘civilising’ and (in the broader sense) home-making efforts.⁹ Seen in this light, women’s attempts to ‘tame’ and care for native animals at home were an important mode by which settler women created and negotiated a sense of belonging in colonised spaces, making Australia intelligible and loveable through the familiar cultural practices, imagery, and vocabulary of pet-keeping (figure 1).

The chapter begins by outlining the settler culture of keeping native animals in homes and gardens in the late nineteenth and earlier-twentieth century, noting that women were often responsible for navigating these caring relationships. Secondly, it explores the personal and public ramifications of these intimate practices, which drew native animals into the field of moral and emotional consideration, provoked questions about their proper treatment, and inspired authors such as Jane Ada Fletcher (1870-1956).¹⁰ Moving away from the house into the garden, I demonstrate how some Australian animals tested and blurred conventional boundaries between tame and wild, fostering a range of new kinds of pet and pet-like relationship that were less premised on human control or a forcible removal of animals from their habitat. There is an emphasis on pets, but the chapter also considers those creatures who transgressed domestic borders as pests or dangers. I conclude with a case study of Phillip Island’s Florence Oswin Roberts (1875-1957) and her famous pet koala, Edward. Their

⁸ Significant scholars in this turn towards the gendered space of the home as a site of colonialism include Antoinette Burton, Ann Stoler, and Penny Russell. Antoinette Burton, *Dwelling in the Archive: Women Writing House, Home, and History in Late Colonial India* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003); Ann Stoler, ‘Tense and Tender Ties: The Politics of Comparison in North American History and (Post)Colonial Studies’, *Journal of American History* 88, no. 3 (2001): 829-65; Penny Russell, “‘Unhomely Moments’: Civilising Domestic Worlds in Colonial Australia”, *The History of the Family* 14, no. 4 (2009): 327-39.

⁹ Russell, “‘Unhomely Moments’: Civilising Domestic Worlds”; Patricia Grimshaw and Ann Standish, ‘Making Tasmania Home: Louisa Meredith’s Colonizing Prose’, *Frontiers: A Journal of Women’s Studies* 28, no. 1/2 (2007): 1-17. These scholars are part of a growing body of scholarship on colonialism and white women’s home-making – whether literal and conceptual – in Australia. See also Victoria Haskins and Margaret Jacobs, ‘Introduction’, *Domestic Frontiers: The Home and Colonization*, special issue of *Frontiers: A Journal of Women’s Studies* 28, no. 12 (2007): ix–xvi.

¹⁰ Jane Ada often went by ‘Ada Jane’, instead.

relationship, which captured public attention and tangibly shaped conservationist policy, points to the enduring appeal and cultural power of the native animal pet, even as the practice came under suspicion and prohibition in the middle of the twentieth century.



Figure 1 Birds were some of the first Australian native animals to be incorporated by settlers into the tradition and imagery of pet-keeping. Samuel Calvert, 'Australian Pets', 1876, National Library of Australia, Canberra.

Thinking about pets

It is worth holding any definition of 'pets' lightly. This approach allows for the consideration of animals who pace, hop or slither at the unclear boundaries of hearts and homes, and for an awareness of how 'pets' as ideas or breathing realities can trouble the divisions humans like to draw: between ourselves and animal others, between the animals we care about and those we do not, between those who belong and those who must be rejected. With that said, I draw here on the thinking of Jane Hamlett and Julie-Marie Strange, in understanding pets as:

...animals that humans derive pleasure and companionship from and which were usually kept in the home (or on the boundaries of home), and are viewed (by at least one person) as a member of the household (i.e. they are named, and perhaps given their own sleeping quarters).¹¹

¹¹ Jane Hamlett and Julie-Marie Strange, *Pet Revolution: Animals and the Making of Modern British Life* (London: Reaktion Books, 2023), 174.

Hamlett and Strange rightly stress the social, historical and cultural specificity of definitions of pets, noting that past interpretations incorporated a broad range of animals, including free-living and farmed.¹² Some scholars prefer the term ‘companion species’, popularised by Donna Haraway in her groundbreaking *Manifesto*, to highlight the mutuality of influence in human-animal relationships and avoid implications of hierarchy and subordination attached to ‘pet’.¹³ I predominantly use the older word ‘pet’, however, partly to align with how most settlers viewed and spoke about their creaturely home relationships, and partly to bring the word’s powerful cultural connotations of ownership and sentimental subjugation into view.¹⁴ Significantly, the word could also be a term of endearment applied most commonly to children and women communicating mingled affection and condescension.¹⁵ Animal protectionists often sought to exploit this overlap between ‘pet’ humans and pet animals, though some chafed against an attitude that cast adult women as objects of affection alongside children and pets. Leading English antivivisectionist and feminist Frances Power Cobbe argued in 1881: ‘Nothing is easier than to coax [men] to pet us like children, nothing more difficult than to persuade them to treat us like responsible human beings’.¹⁶

The contingency and specificity of terms like ‘pet’ and its corollaries ‘wild’ and ‘tame’ become clearer when we consider other, older traditions of animal companionship. Though they did not always recognise it, European colonisers encountered well-established and diverse Aboriginal cultures of animal care. Companionate relationships with dingos were clearest to the newcomers: in 1788 a British marine captain recorded his impression that dingos were the Indigenous people’s only domestic animals, observing that they were ‘equally shy of us and attached to the natives’.¹⁷ Like wolves, dingos were some of the first animals to enter semi-domestic relationships with humans, acting as companions at home at camp and on the hunt, as bedfellows, watchdogs and hunting allies.¹⁸ Whereas earlier scholarship assumed that

¹² Hamlett and Strange, *Pet Revolution*, 174.

¹³ Donna Haraway, *The Companion Species Manifesto: Dogs, People, and Significant Otherness* (Bristol: Prickly Paradigm Press, 2003).

¹⁴ Cushing and Markwell, “‘The Bird was a Valuable One’”, 594.

¹⁵ For the merging of the categories of the child and pet animal in the Victorian family, see Monica Flegel, *Conceptualizing Cruelty to Children in Nineteenth-Century England: Literature, Representation, and the NSPCC* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009), ch. 2 and Flegel, *Pets and Domesticity*, ch. 4.

¹⁶ Frances Power Cobbe, *The Duties of Women: A Course of Lectures* (Boston: Geo. H. Ellis; London: Williams & Norgate, 1881), 10.

¹⁷ Watkin Tench, *A narrative of the expedition to Botany Bay; with an account of New South Wales, its productions, inhabitants, &c. To which is subjoined, a list of the civil and military establishments at Port Jackson* (Dublin: For Messrs. H. Chamberlaine, W. Wilson, L. White, P. Byrne, A. Gruebier, J. Jones, and B. Dornin, 1789), 83.

¹⁸ See R.G. Gunn, R.L. Whear, and L.C. Douglas, ‘A Second Recent Canine Burial from the Arnhem Land Plateau’, *Australian Archaeology*, no. 74 (2012): 103–5. Betty Meehan, Rhys Jones & Annie Vincent, ‘Gulu-

Aboriginal people's relationships with dingos and other canids must be understood in terms of mutual exploitation – greater hunting success for humans and protection and better nutrition for dogs, later research indicated that dingos did not contribute significantly to Aboriginal hunting.¹⁹ The bonds went beyond utilitarian factors, and Justine Philip and Don Garden argue that records of Aboriginal-dingo relations suggests 'an ecocentric tradition of cohabitation' which were unlike Western forms of domestication.²⁰ 'Ancestors and contemporaries,' explained Deborah Bird Rose in *Dingo Makes Us Human*, 'dingos are thought still to be very close to humans: they are what we would be if we were not what we are.'²¹

Photographic and narrative records also indicate close and ongoing Aboriginal relationships with a far wider range of animals including Northern brushtail possums, cockatoos, kangaroos, wallabies, lizards, parrots, magpies, cassowaries, emus, and thylacines.²² Young animals were especially popular, kept until they were old enough to be released into their normal habitats, or, in some cases, eaten. In 1922, the doctor and explorer Herbert Basedow captured photographs of a Ponga Ponga woman from Western Arnhem Land with her pet Northern brushtail possum (*djebuyh* in the Kunwinjku language) balanced on her head. The practice was apparently common amongst young Ponga-Ponga women, who carried the marsupials around during their daily activities. Basedow also recorded traditions of keeping tamed cockatoos, and reported some birds who spoke fragments of local Aboriginal languages.²³

kula: dogs in Anbarra Society, Arnhem Land', *Aboriginal History* 23 (1999): 83-106; M. J. Meggitt, 'The association between Australian Aborigines and dingos', in A. Leeds and A. R. Vayda (eds), *Man, culture and animals* (Washington: American Association for the Advancement of Science, 1965). It is noteworthy that, in defending her theoretical focus on pets, Erica Fudge raises dingos as an example of the kind of wild and self-sufficient creatures which might appear more meet for serious enquiry than domesticated animals removed from their natural states. However, dingos have co-existed with Indigenous people in semi-domesticated relationships for thousands of years. Fudge, *Pets*, 8.

¹⁹ C Manwell and C.M.A. Baker, 'Domestication of the dog: hunter, food, bed-warmer, or emotional object', *Journal of Animal Breeding and Genetics* 101, no. 1-5 (January-December 1984): 241-56.

²⁰ Justine Philip and Don Garden, 'Walking the Thylacine: Records of Indigenous Companion Animals in Australian Narrative and Photographic History', *Society & Animals* 24, no. 1 (2016): 34-62, 57.

²¹ Deborah Bird Rose, *Dingo Makes us Human: Life and land in an Aboriginal Australian culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992): 47.

²² Philip and Garden, 'Walking the Thylacine'.

²³ Philip and Garden, 'Walking the Thylacine', 38.

Imported pet traditions

But early settlers were mostly ignorant of the Aboriginal relationships with animals, and it was a European emotional tradition of engaging with domestic animals which they brought to, and adapted, in Australia's startlingly different ecologies.²⁴ In a brief historical account prompted by renewed calls for the domestication of native animals in the 1990s, veterinarian and historian John Auty traced how colonisers formed pet-like relationships with coastal native animals almost as soon as they arrived, perhaps helping to navigate the homesickness and shock of moving to a new continent, leaving treasured human and non-human relationships behind them.²⁵ The continent's many varieties of colourful parrot fit relatively neatly into existing European patterns of caging beautiful or songful birds – so they were popular in the first houses and gardens in what became Sydney. Rosellas, for example, took their name from the 'Rose Hill' agricultural settlement in Parramatta, one of the first in New South Wales, where the blue and red birds gathered and were often fed by English arrivals.²⁶

These earliest of native animal pets must have provided a comforting sense of homeliness and familiarity for settlers arriving in a frighteningly new and distant environment, while also representing the newness of this land and its occupants.²⁷ This duality calls to mind Katie Holmes' articulation of the 'double vision' epitomised by early settler women's gardening: which looked back towards a cherished past while cultivating a vision for the future in a new world.²⁸ More unfamiliar than rosellas were the kangaroos, some of whom were shipped back to England for purchase as exotic pets as early as the 1790s, prompting a 'kangaroo mania'.²⁹ Wombats also made a name for themselves as pets, including 'Tops' the wombat who in the

²⁴ A marine captain recorded in 1788 that 'The only domestic animal they (the Aboriginal people) have is a dog, which in their language is called dingo, and a good deal resembles the dog of England. These animals are equally shy of us and attached to the natives.' Tench, *A narrative of the expedition to Botany Bay*, 83. Though they did not fully understand Aboriginal relations to native animals, settlers did call on their labour and expertise in procuring native animal pets. Ellen Campbell visited the 'blackfellows camp across the creek', against her parents' rules, to ask for help acquiring her pet possums. Campbell, *Australian Childhood*, 49-55.

²⁵ John Auty, 'To cage or not to cage? A historical look at Australians' association with wildlife as pets', *Issues* 34 (1996): 19-24.

²⁶ Auty, 'To cage or not to cage', 21. 'Rose Hill-er' became 'Rosella'.

²⁷ Most early colonists were unable to bring pets with them from Europe, though exceptions were possible for the elite. Governor Arthur Phillip arrived in Australia on the First Fleet with his greyhounds. Cushing and Markwell, "'The Bird was a Valuable One'", 596.

²⁸ Katie Holmes, "'Planting hopes with potatoes": Gardens, memory and place making', in *Memory, Monuments and Museums: The Past in the Present*, ed. Marilyn Lake (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2006): 170.

²⁹ Christopher Plumb, "'In fact, one cannot see it without laughing": The Spectacle of the Kangaroo in London, 1770-1830', *Museum History Journal* 3, no. 1 (2010): 7-32.

1860s became the beloved muse and companion of Dante Gabriel Rossetti and the wider pre-Raphaelite movement.³⁰

A commercial trade in native animals was blossoming by the end of the nineteenth century.³¹ The sometimes-controversial industry consisted of an informal and overlapping network of collectors who captured live animals (often alongside the work of shooting them for furs), traders who shipped live animals across national and international borders, and pet shop owners and street hawkers who sold them.³² An Adelaide pet shop owner, Mr J. Foglia, claimed to have traded in thylacines, wallabies, kangaroos, Tasmanian devils, koalas, and hundreds of thousands of birds. By 1914, he was complaining that newly stringent animal protection laws in South Australia were making it difficult to stay afloat.³³ He was also disappointed that Australians appeared to ‘care little or nothing about pets’ in comparison to the British, and were less willing to spend time and money on them.

Many acquisitions of native animal pets were opportunistic and casual, however, and Foglia’s impression of an Australian indifference to pets can be partly explained by the reality that many companionate interspecies relationships did not begin in a pet shop. Indeed, a reptile enthusiast writing for *The Australian Home Beautiful* felt it was wasteful to buy native animals when so many were available for the taking in the wild. A blue tongue or stump-tailed lizard might be bought from a Melbourne pet shop for a shilling, he granted, but why bother when ‘[l]izards are plentiful and on a bush outing one is likely to meet with both the “bluey” and the single-back with its short, rounded tail’?³⁴ Many people took home animals they encountered in their day-to-day routines or while traveling, often gifting them to loved ones: the introduced population of koalas on French Island allegedly in the 1890s began, when a man brought a few koala joeys from the mainland as a present for his girlfriend.³⁵ Cushing and Markwell note that ‘casually acquired animals’ were often treated with little consideration and could easily slip back out of pet status.³⁶ But some pet owners bestowed significant love and labour on their

³⁰ Angus Trumble, ‘“O Uommibatto”: How the Pre-Raphaelites became obsessed with the Wombat’, *The Public Domain Review*, 11 January 2019, <https://publicdomainreview.org/essay/o-uommibatto-how-the-pre-raphaelites-became-obsessed-with-the-wombat/>.

³¹ Cushing and Markwell, “‘The Bird was a Valuable One’”, 601.

³² Settler collectors often drew on Aboriginal expertise. Cushing and Markwell, “‘The Bird was a Valuable One’”, 601.

³³ ‘A Novel Trade’, *Mail* (Adelaide), 14 March 1914.

³⁴ ‘Terrarium: Keeping Cold-Blooded Pets’, *The Australian home beautiful: a journal for the home builder* 14 (no. 7) (1 July 1936): 20.

³⁵ Elizabeth Warkentin, ‘This Island is Inhabited by More Koalas than Humans’, *Smithsonian Magazine*, 11 July 2024, <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/travel/this-island-is-inhabited-by-more-koalas-than-humans-180984680/>.

³⁶ Cushing and Markwell, “‘The Bird was a Valuable One’”, 600.

native animal pets, like Campbell who fiercely defended her animal wards, and Alice Jones, in rural New South Wales, who nursed her pet kangaroo back to health when after he was mauled by a kangaroo dog in 1931, bathing his neck every several hours.³⁷

Women, girls, and pets

Conceptually and in practice, women and children were closely associated with pet-keeping. Historians of pet-keeping have shown how children and pets often played overlapping roles in middle-class families, wherein what Susan Pearson calls a ‘regime of kindness’ assigned both groups ‘a mutual role as objects of sentimental investment’.³⁸ This was a connection exploited and promoted by animal protectionists, who often featured portraits of a small child with a dog or cat, with a caption like ‘Two Orphans’ or ‘Two Darlings’.³⁹ Beyond this symbolic association, children were often enthusiastic procurers and keepers of pets themselves. Children’s pages in Australian newspapers across the country were dominated by letters about young readers’ pets, although editors necessarily solicit that specific theme. Their accounts often featured a melange of native and non-native species brought deliberately or accidentally into human family lives. One child wrote to the naturalist Ella McFadyen’s children’s page about their kitten, Bidgee, and white cockatoo, Chick, who were ‘the best of friends’.⁴⁰ A girl named Irene wrote to the ‘Young Folks’ page of the *Weekly Times* about another pet cockatoo, who screeched when she or her brother were running late for school, and formed part of a pet menagerie that also included four lambs, a calf, a pony, and a cat.⁴¹

Pet-keeping was generally perceived as wholesome pastime which might develop desirable characteristics, such as nurture for vulnerable others, hard work, and nature appreciation. For girls more specifically, looking after an animal offered a means of practising motherly love and responsibility without risking the wellbeing of actual human babies.⁴² Animals taken in from

³⁷ Campbell, *Australian Childhood*; Alice Jones, ‘A Pet Kangaroo’, *Farmer and Settler* (Sydney), 28 February 1931, 11.

³⁸ Susan Pearson, *The Rights of the Defenseless: Protecting Animals in Gilded Age America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press), 22. See also Monica Flegel, “‘How does you collar suit me?’: The Human Animal in the RSPCA’s ‘Animal World’ and ‘Band of Mercy’”, *Victorian Literature and Culture* 40, no. 1 (2012): 247-62.

³⁹ See for a discussion of this trope, and broader conflations of vulnerable children with vulnerable pets, see Monica Flegel, “‘How does you collar suit me?’: The Human Animal in the RSPCA’s ‘Animal World’ and ‘Band of Mercy’”, *Victorian Literature and Culture* 40, no. 1 (2012): 253-56.

⁴⁰ ‘Westerner’ to ‘Cinderella’ [Ella McFadyen], *Sydney Mail*, 22 June 1938, 46.

⁴¹ ‘My Favourite Pet’, *Weekly Times* (Melbourne), 26 September 1914, 49.

⁴² Elizabeth A. Boyle, ‘Antebellum Womanhood’.

the wild, sometimes on the unproven assumption that they had been abandoned by its mother, were seen as orphans in need of adoption, in a discourse shared with humanitarian reformers.⁴³ Many girls and women spoke about their pets in explicitly maternal terms. In the days after receiving two baby possums from an Aboriginal man named Jackie, Campbell felt she ‘lost more rest over them the first few nights than did ever a young mother over her first-born baby.’⁴⁴ Campbell’s experience and later recollections align with Katherine Grier’s argument that as ‘the untutored voices of sympathy and conscience in the children’s literature promoting kindness, little girls rehearsed [through pet-keeping] the role they would play as mothers.’⁴⁵

However, protectionists and preservationists alike realised the risks of giving children free rein to care for animals. As mothers, housekeepers, teachers and children’s writers, women were often the main moral and pragmatic mediators in children’s relationships with their pets, negotiating between youthful enthusiasm and the needs of animals who often suffered from neglect or a superfluity of affection. Frances Levvy told parents and nurses not to leave children as ‘the sole caretakers of any creature that can suffer by their neglect; neglect not from cruelty but from natural heedlessness.’⁴⁶ Mothers, in particular, were enjoined to prevent children from hurting their pets through ignorance, neglect, or cruelty. This was especially important because, as the first chapter detailed, the actions of a ‘cruel boy’ picking wings from a fly or pestering the family cat seemed to portend future criminality.⁴⁷

Too often, wrote journalist and artist Emily Pelloe in 1929, did mothers allow young children to treat a kitten as a cute but unfeeling toy. When the kitten reacted with its claws, exasperated by ‘tail-pulling, hair-dragging, muscle-straining torture’, the mother would reprimand and kick it while comforting the scratched child. This reaction would ‘engender a wrong relationship of ideas in the minds of children where animals are concerned’, she advised.⁴⁸ Rather, mothers ought to take the earliest opportunity to teach their children that animals were feeling, thinking creatures like them who deserved careful treatment.

⁴³ See for example ‘The Orphan Duckling’, *Band of Mercy Advocate* 4, no. 9 (31 July 1891): 6-7.

⁴⁴ Campbell, *Australian Childhood*, 58.

⁴⁵ Katherine C. Grier, *Pets in America: A History* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 147.

⁴⁶ Frances Levvy, ‘The Growth of Cruelty’, *Band of Mercy and Humane Journal of New South Wales* (16 October 1899) 112.

⁴⁷ ‘A Word to Parents’, *Band of Mercy Advocate* 4, no. 5 (24 March 1891): 3.

⁴⁸ ‘Ixia’ [Emily Harriet Pelloe], ‘Women’s Interests’, *West Australian* (Perth, Western Australia), December 13, 1929.

For Pelloe, the implications of this kind of motherly intervention in children's pet care were potentially global:

Lessons of toleration and thought for the welfare of others may be learned in childhood from animal care that will favourably affect later the outlook on life generally. A right attitude will unconsciously be developed towards world peace, possible only by the kindly consideration for the feelings of the people of various countries. No true lover of animals can approve of warfare.⁴⁹

Pelloe evidently believed that the ways women managed pets inside the home had significant import outside of it. She was not idiosyncratic in this perspective and, though her article referred to familiar European pets, the argument for pet-keeping's significance also resonated, perhaps even more-so, in relation to native animals.

Pet-keeping's implications beyond the home

It is true that keeping native animal as a pet did not always lead to respect for other individuals of that species, nor for the wellbeing and preservation of native animals generally. An individual animal, elevated through chance or purchase to the status of pet, typically enjoyed privileges and an economic valuation far higher than others of its species.⁵⁰ This finding aligns with the argument of Erica Fudge, who contends that people love pets as individuals, in a moral category largely distinct from other species members.⁵¹ This meant that many lovers of a particular pet could peaceably contemplate killing other individuals of that species, like the example of a man who loved his pet possum but relished memories of shooting other possums in his youth.⁵² In the late nineteenth century some people shot mother koalas for the purpose of 'adopting' the baby koala on her back. A.G. Hamilton found the sight of his intended pet clinging to its dead parent 'quite affecting', but did not seem remorseful about this method of pet acquisition.⁵³ His only regret was that the adopted koala 'was in no way an interesting pet', refusing in an 'exasperatingly stolid way' to learn his own name or that of his master.⁵⁴

On a broader scale, the indiscriminate killing of native animals for their fur or meat, and the destruction of their habitat, continued apace during the same period that native animal ownership was flourishing. 'Thylacines, possums and kangaroos were treasured companions

⁴⁹ 'Ixia', 'Women's Interests'.

⁵⁰ Cushing and Markwell, 'The Bird was a Valuable One', 605. Of course, as this chapter goes on to discuss, being kept as a pet certainly did not always lead to better outcomes for individual native animals, even with the best of human intentions.

⁵¹ Erica Fudge, *Animal* (London: Reaktion Books, 2002), 32.

⁵² Cushing and Markwell, 'The Bird was a Valuable One', 605.

⁵³ A. G. Hamilton, 'Some of my Pets', *Sydney Quarterly Magazine* (December 1890): 303.

⁵⁴ Hamilton, *Some of my Pets*, 303.

to some', write Cushing and Markwell, 'at the same time as bounties were placed on their scalps by those seeking to protect livestock and crops from their predation or competition'.⁵⁵ Sometimes beloved pets actually were acquired in the process of killing their parents, like the kangaroo joey pulled from his mother's pouch after she had been shot by a hunter in South Australia in the early 1890s.⁵⁶ For Cushing and Markwell, such incongruences indicate that experiences of caring for native animals as pets were disconnected from any more general regard for the welfare or preservation of native species. Rather, the anomalous practice was significant as a nearly unique 'strand of empathy' for a select group of native animals, in a time otherwise dominated by routine disparagement and killing.⁵⁷

In what follows, I argue for a wider conception of pet-keeping's impacts and significance in the history of changing settler relations with native animals. It is true that many people seemed to act with moral and intellectual inconsistency when it came to their pets and non-pets, though, as Katherine Grier notes, there is little that is remarkable about human contrariness in their behaviour towards animals. Similar irregularities might be criticised (and sometimes were) in people who loved certain introduced species and ate others.⁵⁸ A focus on women's experiences and writing helps us to see, however, considerable evidence that companionate encounters with a kangaroo or cockatoo could and did have ripple effects far beyond private walls and garden fences. Settler women's close associations with literal homes and families, and with metaphorical notions of domesticity and home-making in a new nation, gave their domestic interactions with animals great but under-recognised significance in negotiating settler belonging and influencing relationships with the natural environment.⁵⁹

Many settler Australians felt that the emotional and practical realities of caring for native animals contributed to conservationist values and practices, especially amongst children. Ornithologists enthused that where boys had once impressed their friends by killing birds with slingshots, in the 1920s they were showing off by demonstrating their ability to tame birds and feed them – an activity which had raised their 'bird-consciousness'.⁶⁰ Ella McFadyen, a longtime member of the Wild Life Preservation Society, endorsed keeping native animals as

⁵⁵ Cushing and Markwell, "'The Bird was a Valuable One'", 606.

⁵⁶ 'Our Kangaroo', *Adelaide Observer*, 30 May 1903, 41.

⁵⁷ The practice was also notable for keeping alive early-colonial interest in the natural history of Australian fauna, which seemed to reemerge strongly in the mid twentieth century. Cushing and Markwell, "'The Bird was a Valuable One'", 606-07.

⁵⁸ See for an example further explored in Chapter Five, Thomas Foley, 'Open Season Defended', *Brisbane Courier*, 21 July 1927, 9.

⁵⁹ Holmes, 'Planting hopes with potatoes', 179.

⁶⁰ Russell McGregor, *Enchanted by Birds* (Brunswick, Victoria: Scribe, 2024), 187.

pets, and encouraged her readers to tell her about them, but advocated caution in thinking about which animals might be suitable for domestication, and where.⁶¹ Her personal love and fascination for her two pet thorny devils, Wendy and Marco, shaped much of her time, writing and thinking. The lizards were the muse for her children's book, *Little dragons of the Never Never*.⁶² On a wider scale, when a species faced a particularly grave threat of extinction or cruelty, conservationists made appeals to its lovability as a pet or, more grandly, its status as 'The Pet of Australia'.⁶³ The implication was that if an animal that could potentially be a pet, even if most of its species existed in the wild, it surely merited greater moral attention and respect for its life.

In light of the emotional and cultural 'revolution' in nineteenth-century pet-keeping in the Anglo world, in which domestic animals took on higher sentimental value and were expected to be treated with a reasonable degree of kindness, a move towards the category of 'pet' was profound.⁶⁴ It could signify emotional investment, a recognition of individuality and personality (typically indicated by a name), the capacity for a reciprocal emotional relationship, and some expectation of moral treatment. At a practical level it could entail regular interactions with another being which were not premised on killing or labour, close physical contact, and a growing acquaintance with their habits and preferences. All these things contributed to a process of 'moralisation', which, as Elizabeth Morton and Eva Tsahiridu define it, 'brings within the moral sphere an activity or object that was considered outside it, thus making behaviours related to such activity or object subject to moral evaluation, praise and blame'.⁶⁵ An individual animal can be 'moralised', but the process can happen at the level of the species, too, as Morton and Tsahiridu demonstrate in the case of the thylacine.⁶⁶ There are various ways an animal can be 'moralised', but claiming and naming it as a pet is a powerful one.

The attachment of moral value to domesticated animals drew on Victorian ideas about the naturally subservient role of animals in God's universe. In this schema, if an animal acquiesced to be tamed for human use, including for intimacy and companionship, it proved itself worthy

⁶¹ See for example 'Cinderella's Answers', *Sydney Mail*, 17 August 1938, 4; 'Cinderella's Answers', *Sydney Mail*, 1 September 1937, 48.

⁶² Ella McFadyen, *Little dragons of the Never Never* (Sydney: Australasian Publishing, 1949).

⁶³ Amy Thornett, 'The betrayed Koala' [extract], 24 July 1927; 'Individual Protests.', AGS/J463, GC, DAS, Queensland State Archives; 'The Pet of Australia', *Sun News-Pictorial* (Melbourne), 29 July 1925, 10.

⁶⁴ See for an account of this transformation Hamlett and Strange, *Pet Revolution*.

⁶⁵ Elizabeth Morton and Eva Tsahiridu, 'Moral Framing and the Thylacine: A Historical Example of Shifting Frames' *Accounting History* 28, no. 4 (2023): 550–76, <https://doi.org/10.1177/10323732231162368>.

⁶⁶ Morton and Tsahiridu, 'Moral Framing and the Thylacine'.

of moral approbation and consideration.⁶⁷ Ritvo explains that those reprobate creatures who, by reputation or in reality, not only rebuffed domestication but were actively dangerous to humans, could be seen as ‘rebels who refused to accept the divinely ordained dominance of humankind.’⁶⁸ Carnivores who sometimes killed humans were singled out for condemnation. This anthropocentric metric of tameability left dangerous or carnivorous native animals species out in the cold.

Some women responded to this problem by defending maligned animals’ tameability, sometimes claiming a special womanly ability to connect with them where others had failed. The first chapter highlighted the efforts of zookeeper Mary Grant Roberts tried to rehabilitate Tasmanian devils’ execrable reputation by arguing that, despite bleak diagnoses of their incurable ferocity, the marsupials could become ‘pets’ if treated with love.⁶⁹ Ella McFadyen championed another pejoratively named species, the thorny devil, in similar terms. She argued that the alternative name of ‘Horned Dragon’ was better suited to these ‘gentle and harmless little creatures’ who, under the right conditions, made ‘intelligent and affectionate little pets’.⁷⁰ In these cases, to assert even an animal’s *potential* to be a pet could increase respect and concern for its species.

McFadyen may have made a compelling case for ‘affectionate’ lizards, but their legless relatives were more difficult to incorporate within European pet sensibilities. Australian snakes were almost universally hated by settlers. To many early colonists, venomous snakes like the taipan, brown snake, and mulga snake – represented the hostility of a foreign landscape in need of conquering and taming.⁷¹ Even as the nineteenth and early twentieth century progressed and antivenoms made snakebites less of a death sentence, snakes were typically excluded from growing concerns about animal welfare.⁷² There was a particular horror reserved for the notion of the quietly slithering reptile who violated the safety of settler women’s domestic life, a notion famously captured, and amplified, in Henry Lawson’s 1892 short story *The Drover’s*

⁶⁷ Harriet Ritvo, *The Animal Estate: The English and Other Creatures in the Victorian Age* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1987), 25.

⁶⁸ Ritvo, *The Animal Estate*, 25.

⁶⁹ “‘Beaumaris Zoo’: Mrs H. L. Roberts’ Private Zoological Collection at Battery Point’, pamphlet, undated, Box NS823/14, Item NS823/4, Papers of the Roberts Family (NS823), Tasmanian Archives, Hobart.

⁷⁰ Ella McFadyen, ‘Horned Dragons: Information supplied to the Correspondence School’, Ella McFadyen papers, ca. 1906-1977, MLMSS 3229 1 (4), State Library of New South Wales, Sydney.

⁷¹ Dallas Rogers, ‘Hostile Nature and the Settler-Colonial City: Dangerous Native Animals, Indigenous Land, and Venomous Property (2024) Plenary Lecture’, *Urban Geography* 46, no. 4 (2025): 713-33.

⁷² Peter Hobbins details the ways in which Australian snakes ‘sat outside of wider concerns for animal welfare’: the very first Australian law against animal cruelty, enacted in 1837 in Van Diemen’s Land by Governor John Franklin at the same time as a bounty scheme to rid the island of snakes. Peter Hobbins, ‘Venom and vivisection in the colonial antipodes, 1788-1914’ (PhD thesis, University of Sydney, 2013), 238.

Wife.⁷³ These ideas were reflected in the rhetoric of newspaper reports on snake bites in women's homes and gardens, sometimes bearing biblical overtones. Mrs Marsland of Balmattum was 'working among the lilies in the garden of her home [when] a snake glided from among the plants' to bite her. ('AS IN EDEN' the headline quipped).⁷⁴ There is a similar sense of the nefarious in a 1928 report of a woman bitten by a brown snake in her garden while trying to plant flowers; the culprit had hidden in the hole intended for the innocuous bulb.⁷⁵

Snakes were occasionally kept and sold as pets, but these relationships were treated with scepticism. In 1935, a Mrs George Brookes was reported to keep a pet snake named Percy caged in her Sydney backyard. Brookes allowed the seven-foot reptile to catch his own birds from her aviary, in a slow process of enticement, strangulation and crushing. The reporter concluded of this 'controversial' arrangement that 'most people will consider it cruel to the live victims that go to satiate their appetite.'⁷⁶ Birds were not always beloved, but they ranked far higher in most settler Australians' hearts and minds than snakes.

Clearly, the moralisation of some native animals through domestication was contested and incomplete. In 1912, George Simmonds of Springvale brought his neighbour to court for killing his and his wife's beloved pet cockatoo. The case hinged on the veracity of Simmonds' claim that the cockatoo was a 'great talker'; if this was true, the bird was a proper pet worthy of legal consideration, possessing qualities absent from wild cockatoos and indicative of long-term emotional investment and training by humans. This conflict also exemplified the amusement many people found in the idea of heartfelt emotional attachment to a pet which was, after all, just 'an ordinary Australian cockatoo'.⁷⁷ The reporter noted laughter in the courtroom, especially when the defence lawyer joked that Mrs Simmonds should 'put a crest on [her] husband and he will replace the bird.'⁷⁸ Thirty years later, on the other hand, a man was fined for shooting a neighbour's pet kookaburra because he had believed the kookaburra had killed his pet goldfish. In a sign of changing values and laws, the cost of the fine was increased because he had shot, not only a pet, but a protected native animal.⁷⁹

⁷³ Henry Lawson, 'The Drover's Wife', *Bulletin* 12, no. 649 (23 July 1892): 21-22.

⁷⁴ 'AS IN EDEN: Woman Encounters a Serpent in the Garden', *Sun News-Pictorial* (Melbourne), 4 September 1924, 17.

⁷⁵ 'Woman Bitten', *Newcastle Morning Herald and Miners' Advocate*, 23 September 1929, 7.

⁷⁶ 'LIVE BIRDS', *Truth* (Sydney), 17 March 1935, 12.

⁷⁷ 'Poor Cocky', *South Bourke and Mornington Journal*, 29 February 1912, 3.

⁷⁸ 'Poor Cocky'.

⁷⁹ 'SHOT PET KOOKABURRA', *Advocate* (Tasmania), 13 August 1942, 3.

The battle over who or what counted as a pet and therefore deserved consideration was often fought out along gendered lines. Many men and boys cared for native Australian pets, like George Simmonds distraught over his cockatoo, but in women's fictional and non-fictional writing on the topic, male characters often appeared as foils to feminine affection for native animals. They offered responses ranging from pragmatic indifference to animals which might just as easily be shot for fur or stirred into a soup, to antagonistic cruelty towards female relatives' darlings. 'And you did not try to save them for me, you cruel boy', wept Ellen Campbell to her indifferent brother when her pet possums died, 'when you knew how I loved them, and how they loved me.'⁸⁰ Campbell's father, on the other hand, was merely fondly exasperated by his daughter's habit of smuggling animals into the house, only putting his foot down when her hospitality extended to leeches.⁸¹ When men did write about their native animal pets, they tended towards a more jocular, adventure-story style in which killing and care sit brazenly side by side. A. G. Hamilton wrote matter-of-factly about the native animals he killed, kept, or tormented (sometimes all three), in a style which could not be more different to the genre of sentimental pet literature to which Campbell belonged.⁸² It may be this masculine genre of writing about animals which gives an impression that keeping native animals did not translate to any more general affection for animal populations.

Ethical debates

While the keeping of native animals as pets helped to draw a contested range of species into the circle of moral care, it was also influential in the debates it sparked about captivity and cruelty. The late-twentieth-century geographer Yi-Fu Tuan influentially argued that the domestication of animals is equivalent to domination, and that affection towards pets gives a soothing 'human face' to what is essentially a power dynamic of complete human control.⁸³ 'Domination, domestication, and love are deeply entangled', as Anna Tsing puts it, and some pet owners and observers found such entanglements troubling, especially when it came to native animals.⁸⁴ Edith Waterworth, we have already seen, was distressed at the sight of a

⁸⁰ Campbell, *Australian Childhood*, 73-4.

⁸¹ Campbell, *Australian Childhood*, 38.

⁸² Hamilton, 'Some of my Pets', 302-11.

⁸³ Yi-Fu Tuan, *Dominance and Affection: The Making of Pets* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1984): 99; 1-2.

⁸⁴ Anna Tsing, 'Unruly Edges: Mushrooms as Companion Species: For Donna Haraway', *Environmental Humanities* 1, no. 1 (2012): 141.

captured thylacine who Mary Grant Roberts perceived as amongst her ‘pets’.⁸⁵ More common than pet thylacines were pet birds, and these provoked the most angst and debate.⁸⁶ Many native parrots were caged on verandas or inside houses, and some had their wings clipped to avoid the possibility of escape; both practices were controversial. The symbolically loaded figure of the miserable caged bird, condemned to ‘cheer thy gaoler’s heart’ with birdsong or beauty, inspired empathetic responses in poetry and prose, including amongst young settler Australians caught between affection for pet birds and guilt about confining them.⁸⁷ It seemed a particular pity to cage or clip a native bird while its fellows flew free, as one Tasmanian ‘Birdlover’ wrote to the *Advocate* 1922:

Magpies are destroyed in great numbers by rabbit traps as they look for grubs in the newly-turned earth, and yet here and there one sees a magpie beating its wings in caged captivity, while those of its kind are singing and flying within its sight. I would like to see a notice at every P.O. warning the public against these cruel and unlawful practices. The keeping of them in yard or garden with clipped wing should also be prohibited, as they never increase except in untrammelled [sic] freedom.⁸⁸

These qualms about violence, confinement, and control rarely led to an outright dismissal of pet-keeping, either of native or introduced species, but they did foster conversations about the right and wrong ways to care for animals.

One site where these concerns were negotiated was the literature of ornithologist, photographer, and nature writer Ada Jane Fletcher. She was one of a number of women writers who frequently returned to theme of pet-keeping and animal companionship, and who attended to the distress caused by ‘adoptions’ from the wild.⁸⁹ They adopted the narrational perspective of bewildered rehomed animals, to whom humans seemed terrifying ‘enemies’, and likening the experiences of human mothers who lost their children to the experience of animals whose babies were removed to become pets. One of Ada Jane Fletcher’s stories, based on true events, begins with a poignant description of a mother wombat whose dozing joey is captured and

⁸⁵ Edith A. Waterworth, ‘Tasmanian Tiger for Zoo: Protest on Grounds of Uselessness and Cruelty’, *Mercury* (Hobart), 11 March 1937, 10.

⁸⁶ Emily Gallagher, ‘The Childhood Imagination in Australia, 1890-1940’ (PhD thesis, Australian National University, 2023), 96-99.

⁸⁷ Agnes Mowle, ‘A Caged Bird’, *Sydney Mail and New South Wales Advertiser*, 15 May 1897, 1044; Gallagher, ‘The Childhood Imagination in Australia’ 96-99.

⁸⁸ ‘Plea for the Magpie’, *Advocate* (Burnie, Tasmania), 17 May 1922, 3.

⁸⁹ Examples include Campbell, *Australian Childhood*; Amy Mack, *Waterside Stories* (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1910), especially 82-95; Lydia Elliot, *Little Teddy Bear* (London and Glasgow: Collins, 1939). Women’s nature writing will be explored in greater detail in Chapter Three.

caged by two men.⁹⁰ Fletcher describes the joey's pain and bewilderment as he is transported away.

Terrified, bruised, and sore with his strugglings, the captive crouched in a corner of the box and trembled with fear at the strangeness of it all.

New fears entered the tiny heart when the box was lifted up and a strange jolting commenced which continued for a long time as the cart followed the winding tough road that led from the bush run to the settlements, where were the homes of men.⁹¹

In this account, the young wombat's journey to the 'homes of men' constituted a traumatic removal from his *real* home in the burrow built by his mother. Fletcher's tender retelling aligns with twenty-first-century understandings of wombat behaviour: wombats depend on their mothers for between eighteen months and two years after birth, one of the lengthiest periods for a marsupial, so even brief separations can be traumatic.⁹² Mothers can suffer too, as Fletcher imagined:

Away back on the plains behind the ranges an old Badger [the mother] was out of her burrow, smelling, searching, and calling for the baby which had so suddenly disappeared. All that night she tried to find it, and many times rushed back to her hole to see if the little toddler were there, or paused in her tracking over the tussocks, as if waiting for the slower steps of the baby to keep pace with her.⁹³

One of the men, Jim, gave the wombat to his children. Gender inflected the apportionment of responsibility, as he told his daughter, 'the poor little thing will be missing its mother, Nancy, and you'll have to take care of it.'⁹⁴

Despite this inauspicious beginning, the newly christened 'Teddy' soon made himself at home, became the delight of the children. When he began burrowing through the vegetable gardens and interfering with the laundry, however, Jim decided he was 'a pet no longer, it is a nuisance', demonstrating the mutability of the category depending on human whims. But the wombat in this story showed its agency by returning to the family multiple times despite the father leaving him further and further distances from the house. When he crossed the river to make it back to the family a final time, dirty and exhausted, 'no one could have the heart to turn him away, and so with the friends to whom he was so truly attached he passed the rest of his life.'⁹⁵ Teddy

⁹⁰ J. A. Fletcher, *Nature and Adventure in Australasia for Boys and Girls* (London: Macmillan, 1916), 77-92.

⁹¹ Fletcher, *Nature and Adventure*, 81.

⁹² Julie Old, 'Yes, it's a terrible idea to pick up or interfere with wild animals – especially baby wombats. Here's why', *The Conversation*, 13 March 2025, <https://theconversation.com/yes-its-a-terrible-idea-to-pick-up-or-interfere-with-wild-animals-especially-baby-wombats-heres-why-252164>.

⁹³ Fletcher, "'Teddy', the Wombat', 81.

⁹⁴ Fletcher, "'Teddy', the Wombat', 83.

⁹⁵ Fletcher, "'Teddy', the Wombat', 92.

actively and defiantly engaged with the process of his domestication, despite the fact that his wombat identity – namely his burrowing tendencies – seemed incompatible with harmonious domestic relations. His repeated refusals to be relocated, which Fletcher describes with fondness, calls to mind Donna Haraway’s influential argument that domestication can go in both directions: pets shape human behaviour as humans shape that of pets in a ‘joint dance’.⁹⁶

Feminist philosopher Val Plumwood, whose work consistently challenges sharp dichotomies of nature and culture, wrote a eulogy for her long-time wombat companion, Birubi, which echoes Fletcher’s account of an intransigent animal who changed human behaviour as much as humans changed his.⁹⁷ Like the characters in Fletcher’s stories, Plumwood framed her relationship with the orphaned ‘Birubi’ in maternal terms, reflecting that ‘it was the centrality of the mother-child relationship to both our species and what was shared in its framework of ethics and expectations that made possible intimate contact with a creature so very different.’⁹⁸ Crucially, she also felt that Birubi, ‘like other wombats and unlike dogs, was a resilient and determined animal who could not be shaped to human will’, and that he entered a relationship with her very much on his own terms. While Haraway would argue that dogs, too, have distinguishable agencies that shape human relationships, Plumwood’s reflection on her own ‘wild familiar’ speaks to how the particularities of Australian native animals stretched the boundaries of European pet norms that were premised on human control, raising questions about the right ways to relate to them.⁹⁹

Indeed, Fletcher’s stories are representative of the many women who loved their native animal pets but struggled with the ethical and practical problems involved in this set of caring practices. Those who sought to keep wombats, kangaroos, or cockatoos in their homes were often confronted with the animals’ distress and found it difficult to keep them alive, content, or compliant. Though they inflected women’s writings, such misgivings rarely led to a total rejection of native animal companionship. In the following section of the chapter, we expand our gaze beyond the home to the garden, a liminal space where many women found alternative ways of relating to ‘pet’ native animals: relationships less reliant on human control and more open to – even appreciative of – animal autonomy or ‘wildness’.

⁹⁶ Haraway, *Companion Species Manifesto*, 62.

⁹⁷ Val Plumwood, ‘A wombat wake: In memoriam Birubi’, in *The Eye of the Crocodile*, ed. Lorraine Shannon, (Canberra: ANU Press, 2012), 49-54.

⁹⁸ Plumwood, ‘A wombat wake’, 51.

⁹⁹ Haraway, *Companion Species Manifesto*.

Agency and companionship in women's gardens

Spanning the space between public and private, and between domesticity and wildness, gardens opened possibilities for complex reciprocal relationships with native animals, which were less predicated on one-way domination or control.¹⁰⁰ The garden was also the site of many women's most frequent interactions with native animals and the broader environment. As Katie Holmes has demonstrated, gardening offered a socially acceptable way – akin to pet-keeping – for settler women to intervene in landscapes and ecosystems, create a more profound sense of belonging and home, assert their expertise and skill, and contribute to the changing ways in which white settlers related to the land in the twentieth century. Gardening offered not only health-promoting leisure, but 'a space where their identity might be framed, their authority exercised and their knowledge and skill given public display'.¹⁰¹ Australia's thousands of female gardeners, then, fostered new understandings of womanhood and Australianness as they plucked, pruned and planned.

Many women experienced Australian gardening as a battle to bend a hostile and hot land to their wills. As Margaret Tuckett wrote in her bestselling guide *A Year in My Garden*, published in 1905, the sight of flowers 'drooping under the rays of the fierce sun, scorched with the hot breath of the north wind' was a call to arms. 'Gardening', she told readers 'is now and ever shall be, a constant warfare against the forces of Nature'.¹⁰² The struggles and successes of many women in raising European flowerbeds and hedges in inhospitable soils, especially in the hot north of the continent, could be framed as part of efforts to tame a resistant colonised land, and to import memories and traditions from the European past.¹⁰³

However, gardens are also living and lively sites of negotiation, whose material and animal realities gave rise to diverse and evolving understandings of nature.¹⁰⁴ We might think about gardening, then, not as a unidirectional imposition of human ideas on a non-human landscape, but rather, in Andrea Gaynor's words, 'a network of relationships between and among humans

¹⁰⁰ Andrea Gaynor, 'Grappling with "Nature" in Australian Home Gardens 1890-1960', *Environment and History* 24 (2018): 26.

¹⁰¹ Holmes, *Between the Leaves*, 4-5.

¹⁰² Mrs Arthur Tuckett [Margaret Tuckett], *A Year in My Garden* (Melbourne: Melville & Mullen, 1905), 27; 4.

¹⁰³ See Georgiana Whitehead (ed.), *Planting the Nation* (Melbourne: Australian Garden History Society, 2001); Katie Holmes, Susan K. Martin and Kylie Mirmohamadi, *Reading the Garden: The Settlement of Australia* (Carlton, Vic: Melbourne University Publishing, 2008); James John Beattie, 'Making Home, Making Identity: Asian Garden Making in New Zealand, 1850s-1930s', *Studies in the History of Gardens & Designed Landscapes* 31, no. 2 (2011): 139-159; Holmes, *Between the Leaves*, 93; Holmes, 'Planting hope with potatoes'.

¹⁰⁴ Gaynor, 'Grappling with "Nature"', 23-38.

and nature, involving various forms of response and control, connection and autonomy.’¹⁰⁵ Embodied interactions with dynamic plants, animals, fungi and soil shaped gardeners’ views of nature, challenging modernist, western perceptions of a sharp divide between humans and a conquerable, controllable natural world. Such interactions could help to foster a more mutualistic ethic of animal companionship that allowed for and celebrated animal agency.

One way to foster this kind of companionship was to entice birds with the provision of food and water. Though feeding Australian birds is today generally discouraged, turn-of-the-century conservationists and ornithologists celebrated the relationships forged between birds and people through feeding. They saw in them sustained proof of mutual non-aggression.¹⁰⁶ Offering seeds or filling a bird bath to attract a regular round of avian visitors seemed a more humane method of engaging with native birds, especially compared to keeping them in cages or clipping their wings. Moreover, advocates argued that such encounters offered valuable evidence of birds’ intelligence and emotional capacity.¹⁰⁷ Compared to bird cages, which form part of what Sandra Swart calls an ‘ephemeral archive of resistance’, denoting the ways that animals tried to resist captivity and control, bird baths and tables constitute an archive of a different kind, suggesting interspecies invitations both refused and adopted.¹⁰⁸

Dolly Jørgensen has noted that as the American conservationist movement gathered force in the early twentieth century, the building and maintaining of a birdhouse was thought to promote a caring and conservationist spirit in children.¹⁰⁹ In 1942 ornithologist Frank Robinson promoted building a bird table as a ‘social exercise’. Its purpose, he felt, ‘is not to train birds, but to train human beings.’¹¹⁰ His phrasing brings to mind Donna Haraway’s concept of domestication as a two-way process.¹¹¹ Likewise, since the organisation’s beginnings in 1909, the Gould League of Bird Lovers encouraged children to feed birds, trusting the practice would

¹⁰⁵ Gaynor, ‘Grappling with “Nature”’, 24.

¹⁰⁶ Though there are concerns about spreading disease, enhancing the habitats of introduced animals, nutritional shortcomings, and the risk of making wild animals dependent on anthropogenic foods and behaviours, Darryl Jones argues bird specialists should accept that bird-feeding in Australia is ‘here to stay’ and that it offers an important method for many people to connect with nature and gain more environmental awareness. Darryl Jones, ‘An Appetite for Connection: Why We Need to Understand the Effect and Value of Feeding Wild Birds’, *Emu* 111, no. 2 (June 2011): i.

¹⁰⁷ McGregor, *Enchanted by Birds*, 214.

¹⁰⁸ Sandra Swart, ‘Kicking over the Traces? Freeing the Animal from the Archive’, in *Traces of the Animal Past: Methodological Challenges in Animal History*, eds. Jennifer Bonnell and Sean Kheraj (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 2022): 30, 31 [ebook].

¹⁰⁹ Dolly Jørgensen, ‘Backyard Birds and Human-Made Bat Houses: Domiciles of the Wild in Nineteenth-and Twentieth-Century Cities’, in *Animal History in the Modern City: Exploring Liminality*, eds. Clemens Wischermann, Aline Steinbrecher, and Philip Howell (London, New York: 2019), 227.

¹¹⁰ Frank Robinson, ‘In favour of a bird table’, *Wild Life* 4, no. 10 (1942): 370-72.

¹¹¹ Haraway, *Companion Species*.

forge meaningful bird-human bonds and promote conservationist attitudes in young people. League publications provided recipes for enticing bird puddings and sugar syrups, and advised all schools to install a bird-feeding table for their pupils' edification and fun.¹¹² Whether installed in schools or in private gardens such structures encouraged animals to make 'domiciles of the wild', neither fully domesticated nor fully wild.¹¹³

Of course, not all animals were welcome to make their homes in women's gardens. Alongside the aforementioned snakes, many of the insects, marsupials, reptiles and birds, attracted by the food and shelter of garden spaces, were counted among the 'evils' with which gardeners and their seedlings had to contend.¹¹⁴ These creatures' efforts to create 'domiciles' in human-shaped spaces clashed with human wishes, and prompted the language of warfare.¹¹⁵ Slugs and snails were the 'arch enemy', inspiring innovative traps and lime treatments to beat back the 'nocturnal marauders'.¹¹⁶ Burrowing marsupials could also provoke anger and resistance: *The Garden and Home Maker of Australia* advised Sydney readers on how to trap bandicoots, who stood charged with digging up entire plots of lettuce and repeatedly thwarting efforts to plant tennis court lawns.¹¹⁷

In this context, relationships with birds who killed unwanted animals or warned of their approach took on special emotional valence. Debilitated by injury in her old age, Fletcher appreciated the birds who gave warning calls when they spotted approaching snakes. She suggests a kind of reciprocal care, wherein the birds, too, look out for her safety.

Every Eden, human or avian, has its serpent and even my small plot of land is no exception, the dryness of the eastern slope of Mount Cash compelling the snakes to seek a drink where water is available in the lily ponds and poultry dishes, so I must mention that nearly every snake killed in this avian Eden has been the result of a bird's vigilance. Whenever my sister or I hear the warning call of a Wren, Dusky, Tas. Tit, Yellow-wing or Joe Sicky in the summer months we know a snake is somewhere near. Several times I would have trodden on the unwelcome intruder near the back door but for a warning from a sharp-eyed bird sitting on a fuchsia bush near.

Kookaburras' tendency to snakes made them especially popular pets or quasi-pets, and their serpent-destroying reputation helped the species receive some of the first legal protections for autochthonous species, though some people argued their threat to household chickens was more pressing.¹¹⁸ One family on the South Coast of New South Wales, who had 'learned the

¹¹² McGregor, *Enchanted by Birds*, 186-87.

¹¹³ Jørgensen, 'Backyard Birds'.

¹¹⁴ 'Protecting Seeds, Seedlings and Plants', *The Garden and the Home* 1, no. 7 (1 September 1923): 30.

¹¹⁵ Jørgensen, 'Backyard Birds'.

¹¹⁶ 'With Springtime Comes Jack Slug', *Garden and Home Maker of Australia* 1, no. 2 (1 September 1925): 65.

¹¹⁷ 'The Bandicoot', *The Garden and Home Maker of Australia* 1, no. 2 (1 September 1925): 65.

¹¹⁸ Hobbins, 'Venom and vivisection', 286.

joy of cultivating the friendship of the birds', developed a reciprocal relationship with local kookaburras, in which the birds would warn the humans of snakes by 'dart[ing] about in an excited manner', and be rewarded with a meal when the offending reptiles killed with a stick and left hanging on the fence.¹¹⁹

Gardening in Australia traditionally involved a gruelling process of raising European plants in Australian climes, beating back native plants and animals to preserve the hedgerows and rosebushes of English tradition. By the early twentieth century, however, driven by a mix of early conservationist concern and growing appreciation for native species, some women deliberately maintained portions of 'wild' bush as part of, or adjacent to, their gardens, in attempts to attract and provide for native wildlife. Writer Amy Mack loved the modest 'wilderness' outside her home, a former garden which had been left alone by humans and eventually 'reclaimed' by the bush, encouraging the return of native animals.¹²⁰ She treasured ongoing relationships with bandicoots, frogs, possums and a beloved variety of 'tame and friendly' birds who joined her on her veranda to sing. Mack painted European plants and styles of gardening as counter to the interests of timid animals, who, 'now that there is no more digging and planting to disturb them they live as happily as if they were a hundred miles away from men and houses, instead of in the midst of a popular suburb.'¹²¹ Women found great pleasure in the new 'wild' visitors that native plants and hands-off gardening seemed to invite. A disabled woman who spent most of her days confined to a seat in her garden, wrote in 1914 that, inspired by Mack, she 'had some bush shrubs placed [...] and it is truly good to see wild birds of many sorts come for a drink and occasional bath, and then fly away, refreshed.'¹²²

The horticulturalist and florist Edith Wilkinson also found pleasure in a relationship forged in her little 'wilderness' where she lived on the slopes of Victoria's Mount Dandenong, near Melbourne. An elderly woman, she kept mostly to her cottage and European-style garden, but also maintained and 'jealously preserved from human trespass', a strip of native sclerophyll forest as a sanctuary for the animals of Sherbrooke Forest.¹²³ 'The deep fern gully which traverses her land exists to-day in the same state as when Australia was discovered', wrote an admiring naturalist, 'and it is probably that for countless ages it has been inhabited by the

¹¹⁹ 'Farmhouse Friends', *Sydney Mail*, 28 September 1938, 47.

¹²⁰ Amy Eleanor Mack, *The Wilderness* (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1922), 5.

¹²¹ Mack, *Wilderness*, 5. The third chapter examines Amy Mack's 'wilderness' and its influence on her nature writing in greater detail.

¹²² 'Correspondents' Views', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 5 August 1914, 5.

¹²³ Ambrose Pratt, *The Lore of the Lyrebird* (Melbourne: Robertson & Mullen, 1938 [first published 1933]), 18.

forebears of the many Lyrebirds which now dwell in its shadowy recesses.’¹²⁴ Though had she heard lyrebirds’ famous vocalisations for many years as she worked in her garden, Wilkinson only saw one for the first time in February, 1930, a male searching for grubs amongst her foxgloves and laburnums. James, as she named him, would become her daily visitor for more than a decade.¹²⁵

Wilkinson’s garden encounters with James, who came and went as he chose, took on emotional and spiritual dimensions. Despite being a ‘very sensible woman [who] refused to give rein to her imagination’ when it came to animals, Wilkinson was gradually convinced of the genuineness of James’ affection for her – that it was of a ‘purely spiritual character’. He refused all offers of food, and when Wilkinson became gravely sick and unable to get out of bed, he built a mound of garden debris outside her bedroom window on which he could stand and sing to her ‘as she had never heard him sing before’.¹²⁶ Observers flocked to visit, relying on Edith’s ability to cajole the bird, ‘exactly as a mother might’, into performing his songs and staying still long enough to be photographed or recorded.¹²⁷ Apparently James impressed visitors, on Edith’s encouragement, by mimicking not only the birdlife of Sherbrooke Forest, including the Eastern whip-bird, grey shrike-thrush and golden whistler, but also Edith’s daily greeting of ‘Hullo Boy!’, barking dogs, and the yells of nearby woodchoppers.¹²⁸

Ella McFadyen regretted she did not have space or money to create her own nature sanctuary in Sydney, but imagined what it might look like in a poem for her young readers.¹²⁹ The poem conveys the need for animals’ protection against the male threat of guns, baits, and snares.

I wish that I were very rich
And owned a lot of land –
A river and two forests,
Stretching wide on either hand;
And there would be no gun nor bait,
Nor any cruel snare
To hurt a friendly possum
Or a harmless native bear.
But when the moon made silver lanes
Between the tall, dark trees,
I’d walk and watch my wild bush guests
Make frolic at their ease. [...]

¹²⁴ Pratt, *Lore of the Lyrebird*, 18.

¹²⁵ Pratt, *Lore of the Lyrebird*, 19.

¹²⁶ Pratt, *Lore of the Lyrebird*, 26.

¹²⁷ Pratt, *Lore of the Lyrebird*, 31.

¹²⁸ Pratt, *Lore of the Lyrebird*, 24, 28.

¹²⁹ ‘Cinderella’ [Ella McFadyen], ‘Fairy Wood’, *Sydney Mail*, 3 June 1931, 48.

Characteristically for the conservation-minded McFadyen, the poem goes on to say that ‘kindly’ children and fairies might help in guarding this ‘Fairy Wood’.¹³⁰

In gardens and privately maintained ‘wild’ nature sanctuaries, women like Wilkinson and Mack engaged with – and to some extent created – a category of animals for whom they felt affection and responsibility, but who were not necessarily confined in human homes or fully beholden to human control. These relationships, and the way they were spoken about, fostered care for native animals, while simultaneously negotiating questions about the right way to relate to them. Meaningful in their own right to the women involved, these interspecies attachments also attracted wider, sympathetic audiences. These audiences were gained sometimes through the representations of nature writers like Mack and Fletcher, and sometimes through the mediation of other journalists. Stories of native animals communing with the women who loved them evidently resonated with many.

Perhaps the clearest demonstration of both the power and complexity of early-twentieth-century native animal pet-keeping can be found in the story of Florence Oswin Roberts and Edward the Koala, whose relationship enthralled children, soldiers, naturalists, and politicians alike. This story of an abandoned joey and her adoptive ‘mother’ captures many of this chapter’s themes and tensions, including extent to which a relationship with an individual member of a species *could* lead to protections at a species level; the ethical problems of loving an animal that needed its own habitat; the thought-provoking liminality of women’s gardens and nature sanctuaries; the role of pet native animals in science and natural history; and the casting of women in a maternal role over native animals. It also points to the enduring relevance of the native animal pet as a concept, even as practices and laws changed by the middle of the twentieth century.

A political animal: Edward the Koala and Florence ‘Zing’ Oswin Roberts

Beloved and affectionately anthropomorphised but frustratingly ill-suited to captivity, koalas offer a good example of the power and complexity of native animal pet-keeping. The cuddly animal was celebrated as ‘an affectionate and amusing pet’ and was popular with both children and adults.¹³¹ The koala’s highly specialised digestive system, however, meant that removal

¹³⁰ ‘Cinderella’ [Ella McFadyen], ‘Fairy Wood’.

¹³¹ *The Australasian*, 13 August 1927, 67.

from their natural habitat typically led to illnesses, comas, and death.¹³² So, whereas a kangaroo might resist captivity by jumping over a fence, or a horse flatten its ears and disobey its rider, koalas foiled traditional human pet-keeping attempts by dying.¹³³ Their deaths could be highly affecting. Ambrose Pratt (the same naturalist who publicised Edith and James' friendship) was inspired to research koalas when he accidentally killed a beloved pet koala as a boy. 'Probably at that moment there were thousands of boys and girls scattered through Australia owning baby koalas and ignorantly poisoning their beloved pets as I poisoned mine', he reflected. 'The pity of it!'¹³⁴

Florence Oswin Roberts was well aware of the difficulties of koala-keeping when she discovered an unwell koala joey in the grounds of her Phillip Island guesthouse, off the southeast coast of Victoria. She collected leaves from twelve different gum trees for her patient's consideration; the sickly joey discarded eleven before settling for the twelfth. Her new pet was restored to chubby good health within weeks, and was soon beloved by Florence's family and guests. At a dinner party in her honour, she was christened Edward Lewis Oswin Roberts, Esquire (her sex was discovered too late). The 'Lewis' in her name was a nod to the Mr Fred Lewis, Chief Inspector of the Department of Fisheries and Game, who granted Florence a unique permit to keep a koala as a pet. The permit required a special bill to be passed through the Victorian State Parliament; already Edward had friends in high places.¹³⁵

The relationship which ensued absorbed much of Oswin Roberts' time and effort. Upon waking in her cot each morning, Edward clambered into Florence's bed to cuddle under her chin. Breakfast was gum leaves and a few drops of milk, after which the koala would cling to Florence's person as she went about her daily responsibilities. Her favourite position was atop Florence's head, from which she could survey the action.¹³⁶ Observers interpreted their relationship through the gendered lens of Florence's maternity. 'During his waking hours she must not merely be his mother, but his absolute slave', wrote Pratt in his 1937 book, *Call of*

¹³² For an analysis of koalas' highly specialised dietary niche, see Benjamin D. Moore and William J. Foley, 'A review of feeding and diet selection in koalas', *Australian Journal of Zoology* 48, no. 3 (July 2000): 317-33.

¹³³ Sandra Swart, 'Kicking over the Traces? Freeing the Animal from the Archive', in *Traces of the Animal Past: Methodological Challenges in Animal History*, eds. Jennifer Bonnell and Sean Kheraj (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 2022): 30; 31 [ebook]. For a theorisation of kangaroo resistance, see Sophie Chao, 'Bouncing Back? Kangaroo-Human Resistance in Contemporary Australia', *Environment and Planning: Nature and Space* 6, no. 1 (2023): 331-54.

¹³⁴ Ambrose Pratt, *Call of the Koala* (Robertson & Mullens, Melbourne, 1937), 36-37.

¹³⁵ Christine Grayden (ed.), *Women in Conservation* (Cowes: Phillip Island Conservation Society, 2018), 40.

¹³⁶ Pratt, *Call of the Koala*, 31.

the Koala. ‘Always (while awake) he must be folded in her arms or clinging somewhere about her person.’¹³⁷

Pratt was not alone in being captivated by Edward and her ‘mother’. Like many typically wild animals who enter into sustained and apparently affectionate contact with humans, the pet koala inspired strong emotional responses from both children and adults, and contemplation about the blurry lines between humans and other animals. We might compare Edward to Jenny, an orangutang kept at London Zoo from 1837-1839, who was the first non-human ape Charles Darwin encountered. Enchanted with an animal who wore clothes, drank tea, and seemed to comprehend her keepers’ words, Darwin visited Jenny multiple times and filled notebooks with evidence of what he felt were human-like behaviours and feelings. Some of these observations later appeared in his influential publications *The descent of man* (1871) and *Expression of the emotions* (1872).¹³⁸

Similarly, though with less epochal ramifications, close encounters with Edward inspired scientists’ thinking and rethinking about animal nature. Ongoing relationships with animals who could be summoned or made to lie still or sing by their owners allowed extended examination of living animals, leading to new discoveries about their behaviours and needs. Edward’s great selectiveness in which manna gum leaves to eat proved that baby koalas discriminated between varieties of leaves, and Pratt felt that Edward had ‘taught us positively’ that koalas ate bark as well as leaves, though this phenomenon still seems to be in doubt amongst biologists.¹³⁹ Edward’s tendency to develop and perform tricks – stretching her body at a right angle from Oswin Roberts’ stick and twirling around it with ‘astonishing swiftness’ and apparent glee – also challenged scientific and public perceptions of koalas as sweet but unintelligent.¹⁴⁰

¹³⁷ Pratt, *Call of the Koala*, 31.

¹³⁸ John van Wyhe and Peter C. Kjærgaard, “‘Going the Whole Orang’: Darwin, Wallace and the Natural History of Orangutans”, *Studies in History and Philosophy of Science Part C: Studies in History and Philosophy of Biological and Biomedical Sciences* 51 (June 2015): 53–63, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.shpsc.2015.02.006>. Zoo animals occupy an interesting place in schemas of animal life – in many ways their place in relation to human society is akin traditional European conceptions of the pet: captive, fed, often named, and developing relationships with particular humans overtime, often beloved of children, with some adapting better to ‘kept’ life than others. On the other hand, they are conceived as still ‘wild’, and lack a connection to the domestic space.

¹³⁹ Pratt, *Call of the Koala*, 33; Elle Hunt, ‘Bark-eating koalas shake expert consensus on dietary behaviour’, *Guardian*, 23 November 2015, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/nov/23/bark-eating-koalas-shake-consensus-on-dietary-behaviour>.

¹⁴⁰ For a reassessment of debates about koalas’ intelligence, see Danielle Clode, *Koala: A Life in Trees* (Collingwood: Black Inc, 2022), 138-53.



Figure 2 Edward delighted visitors with human-like behaviours such as sipping from a teacup and sitting in a highchair. Touching photographs depicting the pet koala's domesticity and affection for Oswin Roberts were sold to raise money for the war effort. This photograph featured in Lydia Elliot, *Little Teddy Bear* (London and Glasgow: Collins, 1939), 53.

These highly mediated relationships raise the vexed question of whether a captive animal, well-accustomed to humans and their care, offered insights relevant to the rest of the species. Pratt certainly thought so. 'Edward, in Mrs Roberts' hands, is something incomparably more important than a toy, a pet, or a wonderful natural exhibit', he enthused. He felt that the famous pet koala 'offers us a living key to age-old mysteries, a key that has opened the door to a number of Nature's most jealously guarded secrets, and may still reveal to science many more.'¹⁴¹ Edward also featured in Charles Barrett's *Koala* and Lydia Elliott's *Little Teddy Bear*.¹⁴² Elliot invented a touching account of Edward and his mother's life before she was found sick on

¹⁴¹ Pratt, *Call of the Koala*, 33.

¹⁴² Charles Barrett, *Koala: The Story of the Native Bear* (Melbourne: Robertson & Mullens, 1937); Elliot, *Little Teddy Bear*.

Oswin Roberts' property. 'There's nothing for it but the long journey to that lovely garden by the sea where the kind lady lives, and where some of the trees are always fit to eat', concluded the beleaguered mother.¹⁴³

In November 1938, Edward made a valuable friend in the Victorian Premier. According to *The Age*, Albert Dunstan 'surrendered completely to the charm and captivating manner of the friendly little creature, and declared that the Government would do everything humanly possible to prevent him and his kind from becoming extinct.'¹⁴⁴ True, Dunstan had already expressed interest in the issue, and by the late 1930s it was already a political faux pas to appear anti-koala. But the premier seemed genuine in his commitment, fully approving a proposed Rhyll reserve for koalas and suggesting a second reserve be created on the island. Dunstan's wife Jessie was also inspired by Florence and Edward, promising to turn a 'waste-area' on her property in Bendigo into a eucalyptus reserve for koalas. 'If there ever was an animal that deserved canonisation', declared a local newspaper, 'it is Edward, the koala. During the visit of the Premier this month, Edward pleaded so strongly, if mutely, for his [sic] race, that the head of the Government pledged his political reputation to secure peace, plenty and protection for all the bears in the State.'¹⁴⁵

Edward was recruited to the war effort, too. Though the secretary of the Koala Club of Australia had hoped the iconic species' peacefulness would engender peacefulness in Australians, the outbreak of World War Two pressed koalas like Edward into less pacifist roles.¹⁴⁶ Australian soldiers often embraced native animals like koalas as mascots, which reminded them of home (in an expansive sense) and fostered a sense of group identity.¹⁴⁷ Louisa Lort Smith, directress and founder of the Animal Welfare League Hospital in Melbourne, was distressed to read that soldiers had taken a koala with them on deployment. 'There is but one fate, death, for the koala taken aboard', she wrote. 'I would suggest that the taking aboard of mascots in the form of animals and birds be strictly forbidden.'¹⁴⁸ Edward and Florence attended public fundraisers with her pet in tow, and sold endearing photographs of her to raise money for the war effort.¹⁴⁹ Admirers could take home a photograph of diminutive Edward in a child's highchair sipping a

¹⁴³ Lydia Elliott, *Little Teddy Bear* (London and Glasgow: Collins, 1939), 50.

¹⁴⁴ 'KOALA STOCK FARMS: Premier Gives Approval', *Age* (Melbourne), 14 November 1938, 12.

¹⁴⁵ 'KOALA STOCK FARMS'.

¹⁴⁶ Frank L Edwards, 'Foreword' in Lydia Elliott, *Little Teddy Bear*, 6.

¹⁴⁷ See Nigel Allsop, *ANZAC Mascots: All Creatures Great and Small of World War I* (Newport, New South Wales: Big Sky Publishing, 2023).

¹⁴⁸ L. E. Lort Smith, 'Koala Mascot', *Argus* (Melbourne), 24 February 1940.

¹⁴⁹ Lort Smith, 'Koala Mascot'.

cup of tea, or atop Florence's head. Whenever they travelled around the island and to the mainland, Florence brought a branch of eucalyptus with her, for Edward to nibble. Newspapers pictured Edward perched on her steering wheel.¹⁵⁰ The war touched koalas in less predictable ways, too.



Figure 3 Florence Oswin Roberts (middle) treated burnt koalas in purpose-made hammocks, assisted by locals and, during World War Two, refugees from Indonesia. Photograph care of Anne Oswin, c. 1942.

In 1942, around 9000 Dutch women and children were evacuated to Australia from the Netherlands East Indies, following the Japanese invasion of Java. Roughly 100 of the refugees came to Phillip Island, including some who stayed temporarily at Broadwater Guest House.¹⁵¹ In the same year, a major bushfire left many local koalas injured and clinging to life. Creating

¹⁵⁰ 'Teddy Goes Motoring', *Sunday Mail* (Brisbane), 30 May 1937, 2.

¹⁵¹ Edna Thompson, 'Phillip Island – The Homefront in WWII', edited by Christine Grayden, Phillip Island & District Historical Society Cowes, collection of video interviews, accessed 29 January 2024, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_XS1jEUuCU4&ab_channel=PhillipIsland%26DistrictHistoricalSocietyCowes.

what was possibly the first dedicated koala hospital in Australia, Oswin Roberts placed the most badly burned individuals in small hessian hammocks in purpose-built sheds on her property (Figure 3). Her niece, Edna Thompson, recalled how the refugee women had ‘bucked in’ to provide uninterrupted care to the burned or blinded koalas. Assisted by a local doctor who provided cutting-edge antiseptic treatments for the animals’ burns, the improvised nursing team succeeded in saving most of their marsupial patients.¹⁵²

Edward rose to local fame during a period of increasing koala popularity. Decimated by fur hunters in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, koalas had become national and international objects of love and concern by the 1930s. For some these changing ideas about koalas were linked to growing humanitarian concern for Aboriginal people, identifying a common historical enemy in the white settler. By 1940, the Inspector of Games and Fisheries in South Australia was hopeful that the moral tide had turned for koalas:

From a golden age, the koala entered an age of decline and fall; it has suffered, as the aborigines has suffered, from the coming of the white man to Australia. There is hope for both now that our eyes have been opened and our sympathy fanned by a spark into flame. Humanity demands fair treatment for the blacks; the whole world is our judge. The world, too, is concerned for the future of Koala, because, through toys and pictures, he is known and loved in nearly every country.¹⁵³

With their humanlike faces and lack of defence mechanisms, koalas could be powerfully cast as the epitome of everything sweet, harmless, and Australian. In his book largely drawing on the Edward’s case study, Pratt echoed broader public sentiment when he declared: ‘No more gentle, harmless, trustful, quaintly comical, wistfully curious, wise-looking, pathetic and lovable little creature ever existed’. In an indication of the affectionate anthropomorphism that surrounded the koala, he noted that no animal bore a face ‘so subtly suggestive of some of the more endearing psychological qualities we are wont to regard as pertaining only to the human race’.¹⁵⁴

Edward’s manner of living had been extraordinary for a koala, but her manner of dying was not: she died from chlamydia in June of 1944. The disease was already rampant in Phillip Island’s koala population in the 1930s, causing blindness, infertility and suffering. An obituary

¹⁵² Thompson, ‘Phillip Island’.

¹⁵³ Wm. J. Clark (Inspector of Fisheries and Game, South Australia), ‘Koala’, *Border Watch* (Mount Gambier, South Australia), 3 October 1940, 2.

¹⁵⁴ Ambrose Pratt, *Call of the Koala*, 13.

called Edward ‘the only house-pet koala in Australia, and probably the best-known of any Australian animal.’¹⁵⁵

Changing views towards pet-keeping

Oswin Robert’s relationship with ‘the tamest of all Teddy Bears’, made a demonstrable mark on conservationist attitudes and activities on Phillip Island.¹⁵⁶ By the time Edward made her appearance in Oswin Roberts’ home, however, keeping native animals as pets was frowned upon in conservationist circles, and in many cases was explicitly illegal. Beginning in the late nineteenth century, a series of legislative developments at colonial and national levels curtailed the ways ordinary citizens were allowed to interact with native animals, in a process best charted by Brett Stubbs in the New South Wales context.¹⁵⁷ Initially motivated primarily by concern for preserving ‘game’ species for hunters, over time the legislation came to reflect an awareness of native animals’ aesthetic and ecological ‘uses’, as well as fears of extinction and growing nationalistic and sentimental appreciation for endangered native fauna. Conservationists began to argue strongly against the capture and trade of Australian animals for use as pets, pointing to the ecological effects of removing so many animals from their natural environments. In particular the trade in live birds entailed the capture and unintentional death of huge numbers of animals.¹⁵⁸ Curbs on keeping native animals were also a side-effect of laws introduced in attempts to control the international trade in their furs and feathers, which was pushing some species towards local or complete extinctions. During closed seasons (periods when hunting was banned), it could be an offence to merely have a live possum, wallaby or black swan in one’s home.¹⁵⁹ There is evidence of people being charged under such legislation as early as 1891.¹⁶⁰

Protections were uneven across jurisdictional and species lines. Koalas – charismatic, threatened on mainland Australia, and unlikely to survive the most affectionate of human companionship – received protections early, though as the fifth chapter, legal protections for the species were precarious. Fred Lewis, Edward’s namesake, reported in 1938 that his

¹⁵⁵ ‘Edward, pet koala, dead’, *Herald* (Melbourne), 13 June 1944, 3.

¹⁵⁶ Barrett, *Koala*, 30.

¹⁵⁷ Brett Stubbs, ‘From “Useless Brutes” to National Treasures: A Century of Evolving Attitudes towards Native Fauna in New South Wales, 1860s to 1960s’, *Environment and History* 7, no. 1 (February 2001): 23-56.

¹⁵⁸ David Stead, ‘A brief history of the Wild Life Preservation Society of Australia, 1909 to 1949’, *Australian Wild Life* 2, no. 2 (1949): 55-60.

¹⁵⁹ Cushing and Markwell, “‘The Bird was a Valuable One’”, 604-5.

¹⁶⁰ Cushing and Markwell, “‘The Bird was a Valuable One’”, 604.

department had seized twelve koalas from Melbourne homes within six months, most of whom had died shortly afterwards. Offenders faced a £5 fine, though in the afterglow of meeting Edward and other koalas on his visit to Phillip Island, Premier Dunstan declared it ought to be £50.¹⁶¹ On the other hand, wombats retained a reputation as agricultural pests, and were left off the protected lists, so they remained legal and often long-suffering pets well into the twentieth century. A reporter for a Melbourne newspaper noted in 1949 that, since wombat joeys were ‘not protected under the Game Act, they are the only infant marsupials that may be kept as such’, going on to tell the story of brothers who tried and failed to keep a wombat joey alive with an improvised feeding bottle.¹⁶²

Convincing a public that loved koalas *not* to express that care by bringing them into their own homes was not an easy task. Naturalists continued to acknowledge the appeal of pet-keeping, including for children, but worked in warnings about cruelty and the risks of taking too many animals from the environment. Charles Barrett wrote that ‘Edward the Koala is a delightful little chap that any small girl, or boy, would love to have as a pet’ but stressed that the stay at Broadwater was only temporary and that Edward would eventually return to her family with stories of ‘the queer animal, man, a good-natured giant who for a century their enemy has become the champion of all native bears’.¹⁶³ Lydia Elliott likewise explained the rules against koala-keeping in 1940, noting that despite Oswin Roberts’ rare success, ‘it is impossible to keep a koala happy and healthy unless he has the right kind of gum leaves’ and that ‘they are so delicate and sensitive, they must be cared for by some one who understands them, if they are to be happy.’ Though Elliott entitled her book *Little Teddy Bear*, she emphasised to her young readers that koalas were sensitive beings who, unlike toys, ‘must on no account be startled or handled roughly, or be cuddled when they do not want to be petted.’¹⁶⁴

The ‘pet’ concept was powerful whether or not it was applied literally. As the threats of endangerment and extinction became clearer, and national attachments to native flora and fauna grew, animals like the koala could be compellingly presented by advocates as loveable ‘tame-wild pets’ with a claim on Australian affections, even if actually keeping them in homes was

¹⁶¹ ‘Oriolus’, ‘Koala Stock Farms: Premier Gives Approval: Visit to Reserve’, *Age* (Melbourne), 14 November 1938, 12.

¹⁶² ‘BABY WOMBAT AS PET’, *Weekly Times* (Melbourne), 27 April 1949, 24.

¹⁶³ Barrett, *Koala*, 30.

¹⁶⁴ Elliott, *Little Teddy Bear*, 54, 35, 24-5.

discouraged.¹⁶⁵ Pratt put this case compellingly in defending the need to for koala protections in sanctuaries and zoos.

That all mainland koalas must perish eventually if left to their own devices is startlingly obvious. It cannot be denied that every koala living in Australia today in the so-called “wild” is a helpless prisoner. It is protected by law and by public sentiment and it has a continent for its roaming ground; but its movements are limited and rigidly controlled by the available food supply [...] The term “free” applied to any koala is an ironical expression. Every “free” bear in Australia is essentially a captive bear – a captive to the cruel conditions of an unnatural new environment created by man.¹⁶⁶

In the ‘cruel’ new world that settler humans had created, native animals seemed no longer able to fend for themselves, even if they were nominally ‘wild’ and unsuited to domestic cohabitation. The common understanding that Australian native animals were under-evolved and therefore more vulnerable to the pressures of introduced species and other changes wrought by colonisation, lent credence to this view. Thus, though the keeping of native animals in private homes was discouraged, the *idea* of the pet native animal kept its significance.

Conclusions

Today, keeping native animals in private Australian homes, especially mammals, remains illegal or discouraged. Signs in some national parks warn explicitly that ‘native animals are not pets’, a warning against acclimating kangaroos and birds to human feeding. Even less interventionist ways of building companionship with native animals are also discouraged, like feeding local birds. The RAOU’s successor organisation, Birdlife, advises against providing food for birds, though it offers a guide to safe practice on the assumption that people will do it anyway.¹⁶⁷ These restrictions suggest a different relationship with wilderness than that promulgated by bird lovers at the turn of the twentieth century: better to preserve wildness through distance from humans, who might ruin it, than to embrace wildness directly.¹⁶⁸ On the other hand, the enduring idea of a pet native animal, infantilised and vulnerable, is clear in

¹⁶⁵ Barrett, *Koala*, 30.

¹⁶⁶ Pratt, *Call of the Koala*, 110.

¹⁶⁷ ‘A guide to feeding wild birds in Australia’, *Birdlife Australia*, accessed 3 July 2024, https://birdlife.org.au/a-guide-to-feeding-wild-birds-in-australia/?srsltid=AfmBOoqTEkxJSf0C8R3xojztEW_BgTHIwYARpQkA8SNu1yqOqNFazWH3.

¹⁶⁸ On the other hand, some biologists suggest that allowing more Australians to keep animals like quolls and swamp wallabies as pets might boost their chances of species survival, tapping into a longer tradition of care for native animals fostered by pet relationships. Michael Archer, ‘Keeping Australian native animals as pets is a good idea’, *UNSW Newsroom*, 19 March 2015, <https://www.unsw.edu.au/newsroom/news/2015/03/keeping-australian-native-animals-as-pets-is-a-good-idea>.

conservation campaigns that encourage people to ‘adopt’ – from a distance – a platypus or little penguin.¹⁶⁹

This chapter has argued that the intimacies of pet and pet-like relationships with native animals had a deeper cultural and political reach than has been previously acknowledged. In a few cases, like that of Edward and Florence Oswin Roberts, these impacts could be direct and obvious: new nature reserves were established, political commitments made, books written, money raised. But the consequences were also more subtle, emerging in children’s stories about bereft wombats or in moral dilemmas about ‘caring’ for a bird that preferred its freedom.

Bringing animals into the literal and moral zones of home and family helped some settler Australians to see them as individuals with claims to affection and proper treatment, though this viewpoint clashed with more utilitarian perspectives. Moreover, a recognition of the suffering which pet-keeping could entail sparked private and public debate about the appropriate way to care for vulnerable animals which were, whether in private homes or threatened natural spaces, increasingly recognised to be reliant on human care and consideration.

In women’s gardens and improvised nature sanctuaries, different ways of experiencing friendship and closeness with tamed native animals were explored and celebrated. They could be transient experiences and often involved negotiation between the wishes of humans and the wishes of animals, including certain Australian animals that were difficult to contain within the traditional pet relationship distilled in the loyal dog or the caged bird. Frequently experienced as a personal delight or frustration, these negotiations also had broader consequences, including fostering an ethic of care which did not necessitate forcible removal or complete human intervention or control. Relationships with semi-tamed creatures allowed for the autonomy and agency of animals and for the preservation of their ecological niche, and were increasingly promoted as the gold standard of friendly interaction with native animals. It was hoped they might foster a conservationist spirit.

The layered consequences of petkeeping unfolded in conjunction with other cultural changes, which the range of scientific, natural history, journalistic, and literary sources featured in this chapter make clear. To take Jane Ada Fletcher as an example, her interactions with native

¹⁶⁹ See amongst many examples: ‘Adopt a Platypus – A gift that protects nature’, World Wildlife Fund Australia, accessed January 2 2026, <https://wwf.org.au/adopt/adopt-a-platypus>; ‘E-adopt a Koala’, Koala Conservation Australia, accessed January 2 2026, <https://adopt.koalaconservationaustralia.org.au/>.

animals were not only as a pet-keeper but also as a respected ornithologist, nature photographer, writer.¹⁷⁰ Though her career had taken her on exciting ornithological expeditions in places far from Tasmania, Fletcher's thoughts returned to birds closer to home as she lay faced a fatal illness in 1955.¹⁷¹ 'Birds of my Garden' was her final piece of writing.¹⁷² Even when drafted from a hospital bed, the author's prose remained lyrical and tender, evoking a picture of native Australian animals as beautiful and beneficial. This kind of writing, much of it aimed at children and written by women, became a major shaper of beliefs about native animals the beginning of the twentieth century. In the following chapter, therefore, I explore in greater depth the encounters of native animals and female nature writers at the beginning of the twentieth century.

¹⁷⁰ 'Obituary: Jane Ada Fletcher', *Emu* 56 (1956): 49. A 1929 *Australian Women's Mirror* article acknowledged her as one of the leading ornithologists in Tasmania. 'Women in the World', *Australian Women's Mirror* 5, no. 12 (12 February 1929): 20.

¹⁷¹ Leonard Wall, 'Fletcher, Jane Ada (1870–1956)', Australian Dictionary of Biography, National Centre of Biography, Australian National University, <https://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/fletcher-jane-ada-10202/text18029>, published first in hardcopy 1996.

¹⁷² Jane Ada Fletcher, 'Birds of my garden', typescript with hand-written notes, 1955, NS656/1/1, Tasmanian Archives, Hobart. It is annotated 'written in the Royal Hospital, Hobart 1955. Her last paper', and was given to Mrs D. Richardson, 'in memory of J.A. Fletcher, who went 'home' on 15/4/56'.

Chapter Three: Writing the wild

Vulnerable wilderness and colonial spokes-animals in Amy Mack's nature writing

In the relative hush of a city evening, something rustled near Amy Mack's verandah. A posse of long-nosed bandicoots was making its way through the sword-grass, foraging for insects with their strong front claws and sensitive snouts.¹ Or, perhaps, they were Southern Brown bandicoots, their slightly fatter, slightly browner relatives – it was difficult to make out the difference in the dark.² As they fossicked, the rabbit-sized marsupials left conical holes in the soil to be tripped over by humans in the morning, though the members of this particular household did not mind. The bandicoots were regular nocturnal visitors to this 'little wild patch in the heart of the houses' in the growing city of Sydney in the opening decades of the twentieth century.³

Long-nosed bandicoots, known as *burruga* in the Dharug language of the Gadigal people, adapted comparatively smoothly to the environmental upheavals of European colonisation and city-building. Like Australian brush-turkeys and ringtail possums, their habitat and dietary flexibility meant they could cope and even thrive in parts of Sydney where they shared space and resources with introduced foxes, rats, and cats.⁴ In agricultural areas bandicoots were often trapped or shot for their habit of 'scratching in cultivated land', but these 'fearless little animals', wrote naturalist and anthropologist Frederic Wood Jones in 1923, nevertheless evinced a 'cheerful assumption of good fellowship with man' as they wandered calmly into urban homes and gardens.⁵ The species' adaptability in procuring food was so well-known that,

¹ Amy Eleanor Mack, *The Wilderness* (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1922), 20. The text was first published in three parts in *The Sydney Morning Herald*: 'The Wilderness I', 3 June 1922, 7; 'The Wilderness II', 10 June 1922, 7; 'The Wilderness III', 17 June 1922, 7. Today, bandicoots are typically described by biologists as solitary animals, but Mack mentions seeing groups of up to twelve at a time in her garden. This disparity might be due to exaggeration or mistake, or to the significantly declining numbers of bandicoots in the Sydney area since the 1920s. Peter Menkhorst, *Field guide to the mammals of Australia* (Melbourne; New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 77-78.

² Mack distinguishes between two kinds of bandicoot that visited her garden and nearby 'wilderness': 'fat bandicoots' (Southern Brown Bandicoots) and long-nosed bandicoots. Mack, *Wilderness*, 20.

³ Mack, *Wilderness*, 20.

⁴ Martín Boer-Cueva et al., 'Life in the big smoke: terrestrial vertebrate assemblages and their drivers along an urbanisation gradient in Sydney, Australia', *Wildlife Research* 52, no. 2 (2025): 1, 10-11.

⁵ Jones also celebrated bandicoots' incessant work ethic, advising that '[i]t would be far more appropriate to recommend the sluggard to study the Bandicoot than to urge him to attempt to emulate the ant.' Frederic Wood

to protest the poor quality of land offered to discharged Australian soldiers in the Soldier Settlement Scheme, a local politician complained in 1918 that the proffered allotments ‘would not feed a bandicoot’.⁶

Flexible as they were, however, Sydney’s bandicoots depended on a dwindling mosaic of denser undergrowth and open patches to meet their various needs for food, sleep, and nesting. They also required passages of hospitable vegetation to allow them to move between these natural spaces – what conservation ecologists now call wildlife corridors.⁷ As Australia’s most populous city suburbanised rapidly along new train and tram lines, many remnant tracts of bush were cleared for housing developments, leaving native animal habitats fragmented and isolated.⁸ Even the most adaptable of native mammals were struggling.

Amidst this ecological fragility, the strip of bushland next to Amy Mack’s home at 4 Burgoyne Street, Gordon, was a gift to the burrowing omnivores.⁹ The nature-loving author and journalist did not begrudge the holes left behind, nor the bulbs the bandicoots sometimes excavated from her garden. In fact, as she told regular readers in the *Sydney Morning Herald* in 1922, Mack loved to hear a bandicoot’s ‘queer little cough’ at night, its wildness clashing deliciously with the decidedly modern jazz ‘thumping’ from her neighbour’s pianola.¹⁰ Mack’s many books and newspaper columns, published over the first three decades of the twentieth century, reflected a lifelong delight in nature, as well as a keen and localised awareness of native fauna’s vulnerability in the face of urbanisation, industrialisation, and what she grimly called ‘civilisation’.¹¹ Her approach seemed to resonate with the reading public: though little remembered today, during her lifetime she was one of the most popular nature writers in Australia.¹²

Jones, *The Mammals of South Australia Part II*. (Adelaide: Government Printer, 1923-1925), quoted in Charles Barrett, *An Australian Animal Book* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1943), 53.

⁶ ‘Poor Land for Soldiers’, *Bundaberg Mail* (Queensland), 27 September 1918, 4.

⁷ C. R. Dickman and C. P. Doncaster, ‘The Ecology of Small Mammals in Urban Habitats. II. Demography and Dispersal’, *Journal of Animal Ecology* 58, no. 1 (1989): 119–27, <https://doi.org/10.2307/4989>.

⁸ More homes were built in Sydney during the 1920s than in any previous decade. Peter Spearitt, ‘An Urban History of Sydney 1920-1950’, (PhD Thesis, Australian National University, 1976), 31.

⁹ Certificate of valuation for Amy Mack’s estate, 27 December 1939, NRS-13660-18-4065-Series 4_248828, New South Wales State Archives, Sydney.

¹⁰ Amy Mack, ‘The Wilderness III.’, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 17 June 1922, 7.

¹¹ Amy Mack, *Bush Days* (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1911), 1, 54.

¹² With reference to nature writers Donald Macdonald and Charles Barrett, Tom Griffiths writes that their ‘romanticism has made them marginal to the history of science, and their practical, descriptive orientation has placed them outside the study of literature and culture.’ Tom Griffiths, *Hunters and Collectors: The Antiquarian Imagination in Australia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 122.

This chapter examines the writing of Amy Mack as a case study in how settler Australian women used the popular genre of nature writing to cultivate care for native animals in the early twentieth century. It argues that Mack was a significant voice advocating a mode of care grounded in attentiveness to, and emotional engagement with, a valuable and threatened natural world. In this caring framework, which shared some of the thematic and emotional registers of the animal protection movement, native animals were presented as vocal and loveable creatures to be befriended by those who cared to listen, and as the representatives of Australian indigeneity.

After establishing Mack as part of a broader literary culture of women nature writers who were crucial to shaping environmental attitudes amongst adults and children, the chapter then traces how Mack invited her readers into an enchanting natural world. Her beloved ‘wilderness’ was not vast or untouched, nor completely tamed and homely.¹³ Rather, it existed in precious remnants of bush in amongst human dwellings, threatened by the near-unstoppable forces of modernity. Though her stories circulated nationally, I demonstrate that Mack’s vision of nature was grounded in her local environmental context (neighbourly bandicoots included) around the north shore of Sydney at a time of rapid suburban growth and attendant deforestation. Her narratives are better understood as a cogent and personal response to changing settler-environmental relationships and an expression of complex ideas about animal care, rather than only, as has been argued, a straightforward flattening or pacifying of the bush imaginary.¹⁴

The second part of the chapter considers the particular kinds of caring relationship to animals which Mack promoted, and the picture of settler colonial belonging which they evoked. Counter to what she saw as trends of men’s cruelty and destructiveness on the one hand, and women’s apathy or vain materialism on the other, the author called for a quietly attentive and friendly approach to the more-than-human world. The voices she granted to animals and other non-human agents in her fiction could only be heard and enjoyed by those paid attention. Mack

¹³ The changing meanings of the term ‘wilderness’ has been the subject of a large body of scholarship, particularly since William Cronon’s famous critique, in ‘The Trouble with Wilderness’. William Cronon, ‘The Trouble with Wilderness: Or, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature’, *Environmental History* 1, no. 1 (January 1996): 7-28. Cronon pointed out that humans had constructed valued ‘wilderness’ spaces, yet imagined them, fondly, to be completely free from human intrusion or artifice. Other scholars of settler colonialism have drawn out the implications of these conceptions of empty and untouched wilderness for Indigenous people, who are written out of the past and present. See for an Australian case, Tracey Banivanua Mar, ‘Carving Wilderness: Queensland’s National Parks and the Unsettling of Emptied Lands, 1890–1910’, in *Making Settler Colonial Space: Perspectives on Race, Place and Identity*, eds. Tracey Banivanua Mar and Penelope Edmonds (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 73-94. The meanings and obfuscations of the term ‘wilderness’, especially in and after the mid-twentieth century, are further explored in Chapter Seven.

¹⁴ Jennifer MacCulloch, ‘Creatures of Culture: The Animal Protection and Preservation Movements in Sydney 1880–1930’ (PhD thesis, University of Sydney, 1993), 343-44.

presented these interactions as a pathway to effective education, proper patriotism, and national belonging. Mack's animal characters are often very critical of white people, but without challenging their right to be there, pointing instead to the potential for a more enlightened settler-colonial relationship to the land. The fictional voices of these 'endorsing indigenes' spoke over and helped to silence the voices of Aboriginal people.¹⁵

Women writing nature

Nature writing became one of the most influential avenues for shaping public attitudes about native animals during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Strongly influenced by the Romantic movement which originated in Britain around the end of the eighteenth century, early nature writers foregrounded embodied and emotional relationships with the environment, which were often set against more utilitarian approaches that figured nature as a resource or problem.¹⁶ As a result, some of the earliest articulations of anxiety about human-driven environmental decline and of deep emotional investment in some wild animals, can be found in the work of nature writers.¹⁷ Though the most famous nineteenth-century writers from this genre were men, including William Wordsworth, John Muir, and Henry David Thoreau, nature writing was far from an exclusively masculine domain.¹⁸ Indeed, for a long time, nature study and collecting were some of very few respectable outdoor activities for middle-class and elite European and North American women, many of whom took up their pen in attempts to depict and advocate for the landscapes they loved.¹⁹

Not infrequently, these women nature writers found large and enthusiastic audiences. As Virginia Scharff points out, millions more Americans were familiar with the work of writer and naturalist Gene Stratton-Porter (1863-1924), than with the works of John Muir, though the latter are now canonical in environmental history.²⁰ Susan Fenimore Cooper (1813-1894) was

¹⁵ Affrica Taylor, 'Settler Children, Kangaroos and the Cultural Politics of Australian National Belonging', *Global Studies of Childhood* 4, no. 3 (September 1, 2014): 172.

¹⁶ Lawrence Buell, *The environmental imagination: Thoreau, nature writing, and the formation of American culture* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1995), especially 56; 185-88. Other major influences on the emergence of nature writing as a distinct genre included natural history, Transcendentalism, and travel and exploration literature. Inga Simpson, *Australian Nature Writing: A Literature of Landscape*, (PhD thesis, The University of Queensland, 2017), 23.

¹⁷ Simpson, *Australian Nature Writing: A Literature of Landscape*.

¹⁸ Griffiths, *Hunters and Collectors*, 140-41.

¹⁹ Griffiths, *Hunters and Collectors*, 140.

²⁰ Virginia J. Scharff, *Seeing Nature Through Gender* (Lawrence, Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 2003), xx. See also Amy Green, "'She Touched Fifty Million Lives': Gene Stratton-Porter and Nature Conservation",

another early American female nature writer whose contributions were influential and well-respected in her own time but has since been largely forgotten. Her 1850 book *Rural Hours*, about farming life in New York, has since been recognised as an influence on and rival to Thoreau's *Walden*.²¹ A focus on female nature writers and their distinctive approaches, therefore, promises to bring to light some of the biggest influences on public environmental opinion, often complicating or correcting male-dominated narratives.²²

Turning our attention to Australia, Tom Griffiths has identified a predominantly male culture of nature writing around the turn of the twentieth century, which tied love of Australian nature to martial and patriotic values.²³ Donald Macdonald (1859-1932) and his protégé Charles Barrett (1879-1959) both promoted a view of the Australian bush as beautiful, vital, and character-building. They pushed later for less violent ways of engaging with nature, such as photography and scouting, in place of hunting and egg-collecting.²⁴ Importantly, these alternatives still promised to shore up participants' manly vigour; the authors shared popular fears about white Australian men's degeneracy in a period of rapid urbanisation.²⁵ The manly qualities of strength and courage, which they proposed in frankly nationalist terms, could and should be developed through bracing outdoor recreation and the resultant 'patriotism born of Nature's grandeur', and eventually proven on the field of war.²⁶ In this literary vision, women – along with the domesticity they were taken to represent – often figured as an absence or a hindrance. As Griffiths puts it:

Boys, nature, race and war were powerfully bound together in the preaching of the nature writers. 'Boys', [Macdonald and Barrett] emphasised, was an ageless term, expressive of a sort of freedom and emotional responsibility which they hankered after for life. 'The open air' was contrasted, sometimes, not just with the city, but with the feminine shackles of home.²⁷

in Virginia Scharff, *Seeing Nature Through Gender* (Lawrence, Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 2003), 221-41.

²¹ Rochelle L. Johnson and Daniel Patterson, eds. *Susan Fenimore Cooper: New Essays on Rural Hours and Other Works* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2001).

²² Scharff, *Seeing Nature Through Gender*, xx.

²³ Griffiths, *Hunters and Collectors*, 121-49. For more on the divergences of Australian nature writing from the American tradition, see Simpson, especially 50-55.

²⁴ Griffiths, *Hunters and Collectors*, 130-32.

²⁵ These fears were heightened by enduring concerns about the taint of convictism and the possibly stunting effects of tropical climates on white bodies. Graeme Davison, 'The City-Bred Child and Urban Reform in Melbourne 1900-1940', in Peter Williams (ed.), *Social Process and the City* (Sydney: George Allen & Unwin, 1983): 143-74.

²⁶ Donald Macdonald, *Gum Boughs and Wattle Bloom, Gathered on Australian Hills and Plains* (London: Cassell & Company, 1887).

²⁷ Griffiths, *Hunters and Collectors*, 141.

This distancing from the feminine echoed – without fully embracing – the jocular misogyny of the Bohemian literary circles of 1890s Sydney – associated with authors Henry Lawson and Banjo Paterson and the *Bulletin* newspaper, and thus helped to consolidate a masculinist Australian culture invested emotionally in the imagined bush.²⁸ Another popular nature writer of the early twentieth century, Alec Chisholm (1890–1977), was less bombastic in linking nationalism or war to a masculine vision of nature study and nature writing.²⁹ He proudly asserted a link between nature appreciation and nationalism, but hoped for the cultivation of a ‘mellow nationhood’ that bonded Australians closely to their land’s own beauties while permitting them to respect the lands of others.³⁰ Nevertheless, Chisholm’s most celebrated volume, *Mateship with Birds* (1922), with its evocation of a distinctly male-coded form of Australian friendship, maintains the masculine tenor of much of Barrett and Macdonald’s work.³¹

In this literary and cultural terrain, some settler Australian women found considerable success within a tradition that, despite the masculinist bush ethos celebrated by Barrett and Macdonald, also offered one of few acceptably feminine public avenues for shaping environmental attitudes.³² They contributed in important ways to the literary reframing of the Australian bush as a beautiful and meaningful place – if often an unforgiving one – where settler colonists could spiritually belong, taking patriotic pride in the landscape and its distinctive fauna and flora.³³ In fact, two of the most influential mid-nineteenth-century nature writers in Australia were Louisa Atkinson (1834–1872) and Louisa Meredith (1812–1895). Atkinson’s natural history

²⁸ Griffiths, *Hunters and Collectors*, 141. This bush-based, mythologised identity was most influentially articulated by Russel Ward, *The Australian legend* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1958). Richard White notes that Amy’s sister Louise Mack was one of very few women authors to enter these Bohemian circles, though she was generally not taken seriously by her male peers. Richard White, *Inventing Australia* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1981), 101.

²⁹ Russell McGregor, ‘Mateship with Nature: Nationalism and Conservation in the Writings of Alec Chisholm’, *Environment and History* 27, no. 3 (August 2021): 299–420. For an in-depth account of Chisholm’s influence over Australian attitudes towards nature, see Russell McGregor, *Idling in Green Places* (Melbourne: Australian Scholarly Publishing, 2019).

³⁰ McGregor, ‘Mateship with Nature’, 405.

³¹ Alec Chisholm, *Mateship with Birds* (Melbourne: Whitcombe & Tombs, 1922).

³² Griffiths, *Hunters and Collectors*, 140. Jane Carey notes that one of the attractions of nature writing for a highly knowledgeable woman like Louisa Meredith, was that it offered a way to ‘exhibit scientific interests while not overtly claiming scientific authority.’ Jane Carey, *Taking to the Field* (Melbourne: Monash University Publishing), 23.

³³ While this chapter focuses primarily on prose writers, it bears acknowledgement that Dorothea Mackellar’s poem, ‘My Country’ became, and remains, a cultural touchstone for settlers’ appreciation of Australian nature. Mackellar’s poetry exemplified the ways that settlers at the turn of the twentieth century reframed the ‘sunburnt’ and ‘ragged’ Australian landscape as distinctively beautiful, and a worthy basis for patriotic affection. Dorothea Mackellar, ‘My Country’, *The Closed Door, and Other Verses* (Melbourne: Australasian Authors’ Agency, 1911), 9–11. For more on Mackellar’s life and legacies, see Deborah Fitzgerald, *Her Sunburnt Country: The Extraordinary Literary Life of Dorothea Mackellar* (Sydney and Melbourne: Simon & Schuster, 2023).

series, 'A Voice from the Country', was the first long-running column written by a woman in an Australian newspaper, while Meredith, according to Tim Bonyhady, achieved more for environmental protection in Australia *and the world* than 'any other colonial author or artist'.³⁴ Meredith wrote in a way that balanced expectations of 'appropriate' femininity with a colonising agenda in mid-nineteenth-century Tasmania, helping European settlers to feel at home even as violence against Aboriginal people continued apace.³⁵ She personally justified this violence, and in 1890 called Tasmanian Aboriginal people 'the very lowest creatures in human form.'³⁶ This capacity for emotionally powerful 'colonizing prose', as Patricia Grimshaw and Ann Standish describe it, is a recurring theme in women's nature writing and one we return to later in this chapter.³⁷

Many women followed Atkinson and Meredith's nature-writing suit into the twentieth century, writing about species and spaces in newspapers, magazines, and books both fictional and non-fictional. As Alec Chisholm finalised his 1964 anthology of the best Australian nature writing since European colonisation, he admitted that 'some degree of surprise (and pleasure) was felt at the discovery that women had become quite richly represented in various sections!' In fact, women's presence in this nature writing collection was much greater, he noted, 'than is the case in most anthologies of prose.'³⁸ Apart from the aforementioned Atkinson, Meredith, and Mack, Chisholm's ecumenical collection, entitled *Land of Wonder*, features Mary E. Fullerton, Mrs Aeneas Gunn, Elyne Mitchell, Georgiana Molloy, Edith Coleman, Kylie Tennant, Hilda

³⁴ Tim Bonyhady, *Colonial Earth* (Carlton: Miegunyah Press, 2000), 157. For a full account of Louisa Atkinson's development and contributions as a writer, including her condescending but sympathetic approach to Aboriginal people, see Patricia Clarke, *Pioneer Writer. The Life of Louisa Atkinson: Novelist, Journalist, Naturalist* (North Sydney, N.S.W.: Allen & Unwin, 1990).

³⁵ Patricia Grimshaw and Ann Standish, 'Making Tasmania Home: Louisa Meredith's "Colonizing Prose"', *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies* 28, no. 1/2 (2007): 5. Meredith's book *My Home in Tasmania*, published 1852, best captures this domesticating vision. On the so-called 'Black Wars' in Tasmania, with which Meredith was familiar, see Lyndall Ryan, *The Aboriginal Tasmanians* (Brisbane: University of Queensland Press, 1981); Henry Reynolds, *The Other Side of the Frontier: Aboriginal Resistance to the European Invasion of Australia* (Melbourne: Penguin, 1990) and Henry Reynolds, *Fate of the Free People* (Melbourne: Penguin, 1995).

³⁶ Quoted in Vivienne Rae-Ellis, *Louisa Anne Meredith: A Tigress in Exile* (Hobart: Blubber Head Press, 1979), 208.

³⁷ Grimshaw and Standish, 'Making Tasmania Home'.

³⁸ Chisholm, *Land of Wonder* (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1964), xi-xii. A longer – but still not exhaustive – list of women nature writers who might feasibly have been credited in the 1964 anthology includes Ethel Pedley, Dorothy Wall, May Gibbs, Ella McFadyen, Jocelyn Henderson, Judith Wright, Jean Galbraith, and Thistle Harris. We might also add some of the wives of noted male nature writers who often were talented naturalists or authors in their own right, and whose career aspirations were frustrated by their husbands' gendered expectations. Helen Barrett was a conchologist who vitally assisted Charles in his work, and Jessie Macdonald (nee Seward) felt frustrated in her journalistic aspirations by a husband who expected a 'supportive, self-sacrificing wife' to assist his own career. Griffiths, *Hunters and Collectors*, 140.

Geissmann, Dorothy Cottrell, Eleanor Dark, Christina Mawdesley, Miles Franklin, Gladys H. Froggatt, Anne von Bertouch, Maie Casey, Joyce Allan, and Kathleen Johnston.³⁹

As certain omissions from this anthology suggest, many popular female authors who wrote influentially about Australian nature have been classified as children's writers and illustrators, as opposed to nature writers. Most Australian children's authors at the beginning of the twentieth century were women, and many of their most successful and enduring publications were set in the bush and were often fiercely conservationist.⁴⁰ Famous examples include May Gibbs' *Snugglepoot and Cuddlepoot* books, Ethel Pedley's *Dot and the Kangaroo*, and Dorothy Wall's *Blinky Bill* series.⁴¹ Partly, women's preponderance in this genre was a product of gender norms which cast white women as authorities on emotional and moral matters and appropriate teachers for children, but looked askance at their attempts at more 'serious' genres and topics. Ethel Turner, beloved author of *Seven Little Australians*, continued to write for young people against her own wishes, and Elyne Mitchell found success with *The Silver Brumby* but was derided for riding 'too high a horse' when she contributed to debates on postwar development and soil erosion.⁴² According to Ruth Morgan:

Women writers like Mitchell, such assessments reveal, were expected to retain their femininity in their contributions to public discussion, while steering clear of issues of national importance. To do otherwise, risked dismissal as women and thus as intrinsically emotional rather than sufficiently rational beings.⁴³

Because literary scholars have seldom taken children's literature seriously, at least until recent decades, writers like Turner encountered the double burden of the relegation of women to children's literature and the relegation of children's literature to the 'sandpit' of 'Kiddylit'.⁴⁴ Though this situation had meant that the work of women like Amy Mack attract less scholarship and prestige, we can also see women's predominance in children's literature in a different light. In what Marilyn Lake identified as a gendered battle for control of the national culture around

³⁹ Chisholm, *Land of Wonder*, xvii-xxii.

⁴⁰ Kerry White, 'The Real Australian Girl?: Some Post-Federation Writers for Girls', in *The Time to Write: Australian Women Writers 1890-1930*, ed. Kay Ferres (Ringwood, Vic.: Penguin, 1993), 73.

⁴¹ Ethel Pedley, *Dot and the Kangaroo* (London: Thomas Burleigh, 1900 [first published 1899]); Dorothy Wall, *Blinky Bill, a Quaint Little Australian* (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1933); May Gibbs, *The story of Snugglepoot and Cuddlepoot* (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1918).

⁴² Ruth Morgan, "'Propagandists for the Soil': Gender, Erosion and the Murray Valley in the Mid-Twentieth Century", *Australian Historical Studies* 56, no. 2 (2025): 295.

⁴³ Morgan, 'Propagandists for the Soil', 305.

⁴⁴ One historian who has led the way in recognising the scholarly value of children's literature, Brenda Niall, recalled the editors of a *Penguin New Literary History of Australia* asking her to expeditiously write a chapter on Ethel Turner before publication, because they had 'forgot[ten] Kiddylit'. 'In this garden of Australian literature', Niall reflected, 'there was a sandpit for children's writers.' Brenda Niall, *Friends and Rivals: four great Australian writers, Barbara Baynton, Ethel Turner, Nettie Palmer, Henry Handel Richardson* (Melbourne: Text Publishing, 2020), 3.

the end of the nineteenth century, Australian settler women won out in the battlefield of children's literature.⁴⁵ This could be a highly influential role, especially regarding attitudes to the natural environment, as women writers were well aware.

In this cultural and literary milieu, Amy Mack stands out as a culturally influential but critically overlooked nature writer, whose popular writings offer a valuable lens onto women's personal and creative engagements with native fauna. Her body of work further elucidates the contested connections between conservationism and animal protectionism introduced in the previous chapters, and sheds light on two other important strands in women's environmental relations around the beginning of the twentieth century, namely the nature writing genre and the nature study movement. As a children's author (among other things) who presented anthropomorphised native animals in a welcoming bush landscape, and who tied love of native species to patriotism while mostly erasing Indigenous people, Mack illuminates some broader trends in women's nature writing. As we will see, her voice is also a distinctive and locally situated one. A sustained analysis complicates narratives that cast women writers as merely over-sentimentalising animals and domesticating the bush.

The nature of Amy Mack

Mack's absence from the present-day Australian canon belies the extent of her influence within and beyond the genres of nature writing and children's literature.⁴⁶ One of thirteen children of a Wesleyan minister and his wife, Mack began her professional life as a journalist with the *Sydney Morning Herald* in 1907, drawing on an education provided by her mother and Sydney Girls' High School. In 1908 she married Launcelot Harrison, who went on to become a prominent zoologist and academic. The couple, who had no children, shared a passion for conservation and nature study and travelled together on zoological expeditions.⁴⁷ They settled

⁴⁵ Marilyn Lake, 'Frontier Feminism and the Marauding White Man', *Journal of Australian Studies* 20, no. 49 (1996): 12–20.

⁴⁶ 'Australian children's literature' is an unstable and disputed category. Here I follow Rebekah Ward's lead in applying a loose definition of 'fictional books originally intended for children (ranging from birth to early adolescence) written by someone who was born in or moved to Australia'. Cognisant of Mack and others' deliberate educational focus, however, I note the fluid boundary between fictional and non-fictional writing for children. Rebekah Ward, 'Angus & Robertson and Australian Children's Publishing: from Expensive Hobby to Profitable Business, 1897-1933', *Publishing History* 86 (2022): 32.

⁴⁷ Nancy Phelan, 'Mack, Amy Eleanor (1876–1939)', *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, National Centre of Biography, Australian National University, <https://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/mack-amy-eleanor-7769/text12815>, published first in hardcopy 1986. Perhaps inspired by his wife's example, Harrison published a single children's book in 1925. Launcelot Harrison, *Tails -- and tarradiddles: an Australian book of birds and beasts* (Sydney: Eagle Press, 1925).

in the affluent suburb of Gordon in 1919, when Harrison became a professor of zoology at the University of Sydney.⁴⁸ Active across several causes, Mack was a council member of the Wild Life Preservation Society of Australia, founded in 1909, and she served as honorary secretary of the National Council of Women of New South Wales between 1920 and 1923.⁴⁹

But it was as a writer that she made her greatest mark. Mack quickly reached a wide audience as the editor of the ‘Women’s Page’ of the *Sydney Morning Herald* between 1907 and 1914, producing many of the essays later published in her popular collections *A Bush Calendar* (1910) and *Bush Days* (1911). These publications’ evocative descriptions of Sydney’s hidden and disappearing natural spaces conveyed her familiarity with the seasonal rhythms of faunal and floral lives in Sydney, and seemed to resonate with adult readers. Her greatest commercial success, however, came through her writing for young people.

Sydney-based publishing house Angus & Robertson would go on to produce some of the most iconic books for Australian children, but their first ventures in the area, including two novels by Louise Mack in 1898, had been commercially disappointing.⁵⁰ By 1908 George Robertson, a founding partner of the firm, remained of the opinion that ‘However great the dearth of books for girls it seems impossible to make them pay in Australia’. He recapitulated longstanding advice that aspiring Australian children’s authors should ‘send your work to London’.⁵¹ Nevertheless, Angus & Robertson made a new foray in 1910, publishing three short story collections by Louise Mack’s younger sister, Amy: *Waterside Stories*, *Bird Land Stories*, and *Bushland Stories*.⁵² The collections’ modest production value reflected an ongoing wariness about investing in children’s literature, but in this case, the publishers’ worries were unfounded.

Mack’s creative and educational stories found an immediate and enthusiastic market, particularly in schools where nature study was becoming increasingly popular and sometimes compulsory.⁵³ Later in 1910, an emboldened Angus & Robertson brought out a more

⁴⁸ G. P. Walsh, ‘Harrison, Launcelot (1880–1928)’, *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, National Centre of Biography, Australian National University, <https://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/harrison-launcelot-6586/text11335>, published first in hardcopy 1983, accessed online 13 February 2025.

⁴⁹ Joan Webb, *Conserving Australia’s Wild Life: The History of the Wildlife Preservation Society of Australia, Inc.* (Sydney: Wildlife Preservation Society of Australia, 2002), 19; Phelan, ‘Amy Eleanor Mack’.

⁵⁰ Ward, ‘Angus & Robertson’, 38.

⁵¹ Letter from George Robertson to Miss Farrell, 1908, quoted in Jennifer Alison, *Doing Something for Australia: George Robertson and the early years of Angus and Robertson, publishers: 1888-1900* (Melbourne: Bibliographical Society of Australia and New Zealand, 2009), 146. In 1906 Angus & Robertson published the first Australian edition of Ethel Pedley’s *Dot and the Kangaroo*, which had already proven its popularity with local audiences.

⁵² Amy E. Mack, *Waterside Stories* (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1910), Amy E Mack, *Bird Land Stories* (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1910), Amy E Mack, *Bushland Stories* (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1910a).

⁵³ Ward, ‘Angus & Robertson’, 39.

expensive, illustrated compilation of the three books, also called *Bushland Stories*.⁵⁴ The new version was ‘a triumph’, praised by reviewers for its new and quintessentially Australian character. *The Sydney Stock and Station Journal* recommended this ‘delightful bundle of fairy stories, written specially for Australian boys and girls by one who has her head and heart close to Nature.’⁵⁵ It was reprinted eleven times before 1940.⁵⁶ Mack published another bestseller in 1914, *Scribbling Sue*, and together the two books sold roughly eight thousand copies by 1930.⁵⁷ Rebekah Ward argues that Amy Mack ‘renewed Angus & Robertson’s faith in local children’s literature’, as evidenced by their twenty-two new publications in this genre between 1910 and 1923.⁵⁸ Mack’s success also aided the emergence of probably the most iconic Australian children’s author and illustrator, May Gibbs, who illustrated *Scribbling Sue*.⁵⁹

Mack’s simple yet evocative prose resonated with a wide audience. Educators and parents appreciated the combined ‘moral lessons’ and educational value contained in her books, so they were widely assigned in the nature study classes that had recently become compulsory in New South Wales.⁶⁰ She was herself an enthusiastic supporter of the ‘nature study idea’, writing in 1911:

Rich as our country is in its wonderful animals and plants, our teachers have for generations persistently ignored the part the wild things play in national life. But in the past few years, happily, a change has come [...]⁶¹

As for young readers themselves, whose responses can be more difficult to gauge in traditional archives, Emily Gallagher’s innovative study of Australian children’s stories and artworks

⁵⁴ Amy E Mack, *Bushland Stories* (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1910b). This second and longer iteration became popular, and is generally the version being referred to by scholars. For clarity, for the remainder of this chapter, when I cite *Bushland Stories*, I will be referencing the second iteration, specifically the following edition: Amy E Mack, *Bushland Stories* (Sydney: Cornstalk Publishing, 1925 [first published 1910]) or, in Figure 3 of this chapter, the 1914 edition with illustrations by Joyce Dennys.

⁵⁵ ‘A Book for the Children’, *Sydney Stock and Station Journal*, 9 December 1910, 15.

⁵⁶ Ward, ‘Angus & Robertson’, 39. ‘The Australian book of stories for young Australians has at last been written,’ declared an admiring reviewer for *The World’s News* (Sydney). ‘Have You Read?’, *The World’s News* (Sydney), 26 November 1910, 30. See other examples, all positive: ‘Amy Mack’s New “Bushland Stories,”’ *Sunraysia Daily* (Mildura), 4 March 1922, 6; ‘Bushland Stories’, *National Advocate* (Bathurst), 30 November 1910; ‘Bushland Stories’, *Daily Telegraph* (Sydney), 12 November 1910, 6.

⁵⁷ Ward draws this figure from an Angus & Robertson catalogue contained in *Pick and the Duffers* (1930). Ward, ‘Angus & Robertson’, 40.

⁵⁸ Ward, ‘Angus & Robertson’, 40.

⁵⁹ Amy Mack, *Scribbling Sue and other stories* (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1914), illustrated by May Gibbs.

⁶⁰ In one of the only dedicated historical accounts of nature study outside of the United States, Dorothy Kass has identified Mack as a highly influential figure in the nature study movement. Dorothy Kass, *Educational Reform and Environmental Concern: A History of School Nature Study in Australia* (London: Routledge, 2017), 145-56 [ebook].

⁶¹ Amy Mack, “‘Song of the Wild’”, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 21 June 1911, 5.

suggest genuine and creative enthusiasm for Mack's imaginative world.⁶² Gallagher credits Mack as one of the 'architects' behind the 'fantasy of birdland' that captivated so many Australian children in the early twentieth century. Influenced by Mack's anthropomorphic bird stories, especially 'The Birds' Concert', schoolchildren composed their own stories about 'the Bird Olympic Games', 'birdland birthday parties', and birdland courtroom trials.⁶³ Perhaps due to her own gender and record as the editor of a Women's Page, Mack was seen as an author for girls more so than for boys; a 1909 reviewer intriguingly asserted that Mack's *Bush Calendar* was 'the kind of book that ought to be on every girl's bookshelf, and every thoughtful and intelligent boy's also'.⁶⁴ By and large, it appears, the claim made on the dust cover of *The Gumleaf that Flew*, that 'any normal child would love this book', was bold but not far off the mark.⁶⁵

A 'wonderland' in trouble

What image of Australian nature did Mack share with this broad audience? She wrote at a time when multiple portrayals of the bush jostled for attention and validity, including those of women writers like the successful novelist Barbara Baynton, who portrayed the bush as a place of gothic horror for women and children, or Banjo Paterson, who depicted romanticised and rollicking bush adventures amongst men.⁶⁶ The Australian bush conveyed in Mack's writing was a shrinking 'wonderland' populated by lovable and vulnerable creatures, who she felt should be protected and celebrated as national icons, though never held captive or domesticated literally.⁶⁷ Nature in Mack's books and articles was mostly beautiful, inviting, pleasingly wild but not generally menacing to humans, and, importantly, threatened. Her wilderness did not endanger humans. On the contrary, it was endangered by human cruelty and apathy, and by the destructiveness of excavators, auctioneers and woodchoppers – the heralds of modern civilisation. Mack's oeuvre is deeply rooted in the spaces in and around Sydney where she spent most of her life. Many of the particularities of the 'tamed' natural world she portrayed in her fiction and journalism can be understood through the lens of her time and place.

⁶² Emily Gallagher, 'The Childhood Imagination in Australia, 1890-1940' (PhD thesis, Australian National University, 2023), 82-85.

⁶³ Gallagher, 'The Childhood Imagination', 84-85.

⁶⁴ 'Amy Mack's Nature Calendar', *Farmer and Settler* (Sydney), 26 November 1909, 15.

⁶⁵ Amy Mack, *The Gum Leaf that Flew* (Waterloo: Eagle Press, 1929), dust cover.

⁶⁶ Barbara Baynton, *Bush Studies* (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1972 [first published 1902]); A. B. Paterson, *The collected verse of A.B. Paterson* (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1923).

⁶⁷ Mack, *The Wilderness*, ii (image caption).

Mack's writing was informed by the small pockets of bushland remaining within or just outside of Sydney, and the animals who depended on them. Her nature writing is often set, not in dangerous deserts and tropical forests, but in strips of trees and undergrowth within a stone's throw of a tram stop or a suburban verandah. *The Wilderness*, published in 1911, offers vibrant vignettes of Mack's experiences in an overgrown block adjoining her home, which had grown into a tangle of native and non-native species. Bisected by a creek, Mack's wilderness was too wet to attract a 'ruthless builder', and so remained a haven and breeding ground for countless animals and insects, which she described affectionately for her readers.⁶⁸ In *Bush Days*, Mack tells of another 'beauty haunt' which lay 'within sight and sound of the city clock', but refused to give its location. Her explanation: 'for if I did you would all rush off to the boat which carries one there – yes it is as close as that to the beaten track – and my place of peace would soon become as unrestful and disturbed as all the other places.'⁶⁹ Rather than representing a distant and forebodingly boundless exterior, the wilderness Mack presented was near at hand, a beautiful and semi-magical 'quiet haven' away from the discomfort and demoralisation of city life. What was also crucial to the emotional appeal of this portrait was the risk of the wilderness's coming disappearance.⁷⁰

Threatening Mack's treasured natural sanctuaries – in her writing and in reality – was the rapidly increasing sprawl of Australia's most populous city. According to George Forbes' laudatory *History of Sydney*, Sydney had quadrupled in population since its 1888 centenary, surpassing a million by 1924.⁷¹ Poor economic conditions on the land, growing industrialisation, and high rates of immigration from Britain led these changes that made Sydney home to a fifth of Australia's population.⁷² Forbes, like many other Sydneysiders in the early twentieth century, was proud to live in 'the Mother State of the Australian Commonwealth' and the 'third white city of the British Empire' (soon, he hoped, to surpass Glasgow). He saw the growth as evidence of 'an industrious and self-reliant people'.⁷³ But the spread of development, facilitated by a new electric tram network which peaked in extent in 1925, entailed the clearing of large tracts of bushland, scattering or killing their animal

⁶⁸ Mack, *The Wilderness*, 5.

⁶⁹ Mack, *Bush Days*, 1.

⁷⁰ Mack, *Bush Days*, 1.

⁷¹ George Forbes, *History of Sydney: from the foundation of the city in 1788 up to the present time, 1926 / compiled from authentic sources* (Sydney: William Brooks & Co, 1926), front matter.

⁷² This statistic is from 1931. Lucy Hughes Turnbull, *Sydney: Biography of a City* (Milsons Point, NSW: Random House, 1999), 137-8.

⁷³ Forbes, *History of Sydney*, front matter.

occupants.⁷⁴ Mack's elegiac descriptions of vanishing 'wilderness' resonated with many in Sydney – and other Australian cities – who mourned the destruction as it unfolded in front of them. Many would have related to the author's stories about her mother, who reminisced about bushland walks and sights which had now turned to suburbs.⁷⁵

As the city encroached ever more on bushland beloved by nature lovers, civilisation itself seemed to be at fault. Mack cast the agents of 'progress' – woodchoppers, auctioneers, surveyors, and builders – as frightening figures in a relentless attack on vulnerable and beautiful spaces and creatures. She employed the language of war or colonisation to describe a favoured haunt which had so far been preserved from destruction:

I know a place where the hands of Time have almost stopped. All round and about progress marches with axe and hammer, and civilisation sweeps beauty out of sight; but the invading army has missed my quiet corner, and left it undisturbed.⁷⁶

There is often an air of hopelessness in these descriptions, a sense that the only feasible task remaining was to appreciate these spaces for what they were, so that they might live on in memory. Such language expressed – and probably triggered in many readers – feelings of loss and shame akin to what scholars today call ecological grief or solastalgia.⁷⁷ 'Those of us who love the trees and flowers and birds, watch with sad eyes the passing of the bush,' wrote Mack in 1911. 'Sometimes we raise our voice in protest, or lift helpless hands against the onward rush. But it is in vain.'⁷⁸ She aimed instead to capture a picture of these precious spaces before they were lost.

As this despairing rhetoric suggests, for Mack 'civilisation' was a deeply ambivalent and context-dependent term. This was true for many advocates of native animals, both in the protectionist movement and conservationist movement. On the one hand, civilisation was mobilised as a self-evidently desirable state of being for white Australians, which should entail moral, sensible, and sustainable treatment of vulnerable wildlife. In this view, unsustainable

⁷⁴ Bahman Lahoorpoor and David Levinson, 'In Search of Lost Trams: Comparing 1925 and 2020 Transit Isochrones in Sydney', *Findings* (March 2022): <https://doi.org/10.32866/001c.33040>. See also Garry Wotherspoon, 'Trams', *The Dictionary of Sydney*, 2008, <https://dictionaryofsydney.org/entry/trams>.

⁷⁵ Mack, *Bush Days*, vi.

⁷⁶ Mack, *Bush Days*, 1.

⁷⁷ Ashelee Cunsolo and Neville R. Ellis, 'Ecological Grief as a Mental health Response to Climate Change-related loss', *Nature* 8, no. 4 (1 April 2018): 275-281 and Glenn Albrecht et al., 'Solastalgia: The Distress Caused by Environmental Change', *Australasian Psychiatry* 15, no. sup1 (2007): S95-98, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10398560701701288>; Lesley Head, *Hope and Grief in the Anthropocene: Re-conceptualising Human-Nature Relations* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2016).

⁷⁸ Mack, *Bush Days*, vii.

destruction of natural spaces and cruelty towards animals seemed to belie upstanding citizens' claims to civilisation, and superiority over other races.⁷⁹ On the other hand, civilisation could be a harbinger of unstoppable destruction of natural spaces and the animals who depended on them, in the name of modernisation and industrialisation, and progress. Assumed even by their defenders to be evolutionarily backwards – fragile museum artefacts more-so than viable species – native Australian animals seemed pitifully vulnerable to the onslaught.⁸⁰ 'Are we civilised?' wondered Frances Levvy in 1920, pondering the breadth of animal cruelty that endured across the Western world. Levvy concluded the answer was no; Mack's response was that 'we' might be too civilised for our own good.⁸¹



Figure 1 Amy Mack at her writing desk in Sydney. Photographed by J. S. P. Ramsay, [191-?], National Library of Australia, Canberra.

⁷⁹ See for example Frances Levvy, 'Civilised', *BMHJNSW* XXXVI, no. 5 (28 February 1920), 3-4.

⁸⁰ See for example, 'Science Notes', *The Australasian*, Melbourne, 23 December 1922, 54; J. R. W. Taylor, 'From Stone Age to Gunyah', *Brisbane Courier*, 7 May 1927, 22. In what was a common comparison in the 1920s, the latter article links the existence of 'primitive' character of platypuses and echidnas with the perceived vulnerability and backwardness of Aboriginal people, who also appeared to white Australians to be sadly defenceless in the face of 'civilisation'. See also 'The Disappearing Aborigine', *Daily Telegraph* (Sydney), 19 August 1911, 12.

⁸¹ Frances Levvy, 'Civilised', *BMHJNSW* XXXVI, no. 5 (28 February 1920), 3-4.

Domestication and freedom

Women writers like Mack and Gibbs have been credited with – or accused of – the imaginative domestication and pacification of Australian nature, drawing on elements of European children’s writing and fantasy traditions to transform a place of imagined danger into a charming environment appropriate for white women and children. There, animals were friends, not threats. Jennifer MacCulloch, who links Mack to Ethel Pedley and Gibbs as the chief purveyors of what she calls ‘bush baby literature’, says Mack and her charming animal characters turned the bush – misleadingly – into ‘an endless Australian backyard’: safe, comfortingly familiar, and fun.⁸² However, any account of Mack that centres on pacifying and taming must also account for the reality that she loved ‘the wilderness’, and was extremely critical of forces which sought to control, capture, flatten, or maim the bush spaces she cared for so deeply.

More specifically, MacCulloch argues that such authors’ presentation of an ethereal melange of introduced and native species indicates insufficient or disingenuous affection for the ‘real’ Australian bush. Commenting on Mack’s *Wilderness* alongside the works of popular authors Annie Rentoul, Ida Rentoul Outhwaite, and Ethel Pedley, she identifies a ‘need to modify the Australian wilderness in some way so that it can be seen as beautiful.’ The enchantment, taming, and beautification of the landscape seemed to rely on the incorporation of European elements. MacCulloch interprets the ‘cool lushness’, ‘magical glens, glades and gullies which were filled with streams and waterfalls, carpeted with moss and ferns, and muted sunlight’ found in Mack’s books as a Europeanisation of the Australian bush, in line with European fairytales.⁸³ But rather than a fictionalisation or Europeanisation, these literary settings might be read as turning away from certain Australian spaces – like seemingly barren deserts or impenetrable bush – to others, like the cool and lush forests found in many parts of southeastern Australia.

Mack recognised the impact of introduced birds who competed with native species for food and habitat, but also advocated for the newcomers’ redeeming features, such as beautiful birdsong or a tendency to eat caterpillars (a habit appreciated by farmers). About the red-whiskered bulbul, established in Melbourne and Sydney in the 1910s, she wrote, ‘One forgives the intrusion of this alien and his mischievous habits when listening to his cheerful song.’⁸⁴

⁸² MacCulloch, ‘Creatures of Culture’, 339.

⁸³ MacCulloch, ‘Creatures of Culture’, 343-44.

⁸⁴ Amy Eleanor Mack, ‘The Birds of Kuring-gai’, *Sydney Mail*, 8 October 1930, 17.

Sydney's native trees ought to be preserved, she felt, for the good of this friendly 'alien' as well as for the local butcher birds, Eastern yellow robins and orioles.⁸⁵ This rhetorical mildness contrasted with the rhetoric of many fellow naturalists, conservationists, and some farmers who called for Australians to 'shoot, poison, and destroy this bulbul at sight', in order to defend both native bird populations and agricultural viability.⁸⁶

This advocacy of a benign melding of native and non-native species seemed to form part of a broader worldview. In one of her very few publications that directly addressed Aboriginal people (and 'directly' is putting it strongly), she praised the creators of Tregoyd Garden in Sydney. She admired how, in a time before it was 'fashionable to be Australian', they had planted a 'clever intermingling of old and new world'.

There has been no idea of Australia for the Australians only; no thought of excluding the old world favourites which belong to our race. Nor, on the other hand, has there been any attempt to super-impose an old-world tradition on to the new world conditions. Here in this lovely garden overlooking the blue harbour we find things subtly fashioned to carry out Nature's scheme. The decorative quality of the native flowers is developed and displayed by the right surroundings [...] By their love of all growing things these two gardeners [Sir William and Lady Cullen] have developed an ideal Australian garden – wherein aborigines and foreigners live together in harmony as good Australians.⁸⁷

In political and racial rhetoric which would have been familiar to her 1920s readership, Mack links the garden's aesthetically pleasing blend of European and Australian species to a possible and, to her mind, desirable future of a harmonious blend of Indigenous and non-Indigenous humans. In an article about a different garden, Mack concluded by wondering, 'if a little tender care and consideration can produce such a happy balance amongst the trees ['aliens' and 'native trees'], could not a great deal more be done in the human garden by just such loving consideration for everybody's needs?'⁸⁸ Of course, this botanical metaphor simplifies and euphemises the dispossession and decimation of Aboriginal people through European colonisation. Still set as part broader settler colonial discourse, it is an interesting alternative to the xenophobia evoked and stoked by other early twentieth-century naturalists, who attacked the 'alien hordes' of animals and plants, in a nationalism-building process identified by Adrian Franklin and Simon Farley.⁸⁹

⁸⁵ Mack, 'The Birds of Kuring-gai', 17.

⁸⁶ R. Peacocke, 'Noxious Birds', *Daily Telegraph*, 31 March 1925, 6.

⁸⁷ Amy Eleanor Mack, 'The Australian Garden at "Tregoyd"', *The Home: an Australian Quarterly* 1, no. 4 (1 December 1920): 33.

⁸⁸ 'A Mountain Garden', *Sydney Morning Herald* (New South Wales), 8 November 1924.

⁸⁹ Adrian Franklin, *Animal Nation*; Farley, 'Alien Hordes'.

MacCulloch also argues that the writers of bush baby literature, including Mack, obscured the harsher realities of the natural world and thereby ‘pacified the bush by populating it with idealised animals’.⁹⁰ Violence, painful struggle, and carnivory could unsettle a vision of a harmonious creaturely community, where the only dark threat was posed by humans. Pedley, certainly, created an animal society whose internal conflicts do not rise above grouching and gossip. ‘See how easily one can live in the bush without hurting anyone,’ the titular Kangaroo tells her human friend in *Dot and the Kangaroo*.⁹¹ The same cannot be said for Mack, however. She shared Pedley’s impulse to enchant and endear, but did not shy away from presenting animal killing with mingled realism and sympathy. Sometimes, she evoked the horror of ‘nasty falcons’ or ‘thieving ravens’ from the perspective of prey species, and at others she defended animals like the butcher bird – ‘since I must call him so’ – from their bloodthirsty name and reputation.⁹² In concluding a children’s story about an anemone who saves her smaller fish friends by eating larger carnivorous ones, Mack invited young readers to consider the ethical complexities of a Darwinian view of nature (figure 2):

But you must not think that it was mere revenge that made the Anemone eat the Red Fish, for, unless she had big fish to eat sometimes, she could not live; nor, indeed, was it really cruelty that made the Red Fish eat the little fish, for they had also to feed on something, just as men eat sheep and cattle. And that is what wise men call “the survival of the fittest” for it is one of the laws of Nature that the strongest shall always devour the weakest. Still, it is very hard for the little fish, isn’t it?⁹³

Without dismissing children’s probable sadness at the little fish’s plight, Mack encouraged them to care about and empathise a wide range of animals, including those whose behaviours in the wild seemed less than endearing.

⁹⁰ MacCulloch, ‘Creatures of Culture’, 349, 346.

⁹¹ Pedley, *Dot and the Kangaroo*, 18. The Kangaroo makes an exception of dingos.

⁹² Mack, *Bird Land Stories*, 148; Mack, *Wilderness*, 14.

⁹³ Amy Mack, ‘The Tale of Tibbie’ in *Waterside Stories* (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1910), 81.



Figure 2 Even within an endearing vision of the animal world, Mack grappled with the moral complexities of animal carnivory. Illustration by Joyce Dennys, in Amy Mack, Bushland Stories (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1914), 26.

Another problem with the idea of Mack as primarily an agent of literary domestication, is her clear rejection of native animal domestication and control in a literal sense. As the previous chapter made clear, native animals were frequently kept as pets in the early twentieth century, including by some conservationists, but Mack opposed practices of animal captivity. Her evocative story, 'Little Black Duck', is illustrative. In it, an Australian duck born and raised in a foreign zoo is content with his lot, believing the institution's iron gates to be the end of the world. When the duck meets a group of newly arrived brolgas, reeling from having their wings cut and their freedom curtailed, he learns of the distant plains and rivers that 'stretched for miles and miles' and 'of the trees that grew along the rivers' banks'. After much hesitation and

fear, the Little Black Duck joins a flock of his ‘brothers’ flying overhead, and eventually makes it to ‘his own country’ of Australia:

And there he spent many happy days, swimming amongst the waving reeds, and flying across the open plains. Often he thought of his friends in the Zoo, and sometimes he thought he would go back just to tell them that he had learned that they were right, and that there were many more beautiful places in the world than the little island and pond; but when he remembered that all the birds there had their wings clipped, and that if he went back his would be cut too, he realised how much happier are the free wild birds than those that live in parks and gardens. And so he stayed where he was, and lived happily for many, many years.⁹⁴

What becomes clear is that women’s representations of likeable, emotionally appealing anthropomorphised animals could and frequently did coexist with affirmations of their inherently wild nature and right to live freely in their natural habitat. Even the Little Black Duck, who has only ever known captivity, feels the pull of a ‘queer feeling [in] his heart’ when he hears a freer life in Australia is possible.⁹⁵ Mack was not alone: Ada Jane Fletcher’s stories about pet-keeping and care, which we encountered in the second chapter, capture similar tensions between freedom and domesticity, as does Dorothy Cottrell’s popular 1936 novel, *Wilderness Orphan*.⁹⁶ This book follows a young kangaroo who, Bambi-like, loses his mother to a hunter. ‘Chut’ is adopted as a pet by a kind man before becoming a boxing kangaroo, under the control of a cruel circus master. As an ‘orphan’, Chut elicits sympathy for Chut and abhorrence for his abusers; as a *wilderness* orphan, he requires freedom as well as care, and so, after escaping the circus, he must leave his human friends and re-enter the bush.⁹⁷

Voices in the wilderness

The defining feature of Mack’s nature writing, both for the purposes of this chapter and for her many admiring readers, was the way she gave voices and personalities to Australian animals – as well as plants, rocks, and meteorological phenomena. A gloomy green grub speaks to the Wind about his wish to be as pretty as the flowers, in one story.⁹⁸ In another, a honey-flower begs a Jacky Winter for help from the insects choking her.⁹⁹ Reviewers responded very

⁹⁴ Mack, *Bird Land Stories*, 145.

⁹⁵ Mack, *Bird Land Stories*, 142.

⁹⁶ J. A. Fletcher, *Nature and Adventure in Australasia for Boys and Girls* (London: Macmillan, 1916), 10-22, 77-92.

⁹⁷ Dorothy Cottrell, *Wilderness orphan: the life and adventures of Chut the Kangaroo* (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1936).

⁹⁸ Amy Mack, *The Fantail’s House and Other Australian Nature Stories* (Sydney: Cornstalk Publishing Company, 1928), 18-22.

⁹⁹ Amy Mack, *Why the Spinebill’s Beak is Long and other Stories of Australia’s Bushland* (Sydney: Cornstalk Publishing, 1929), 5-14.

positively to this technique. The fantasy elements of talking animals and the occasional fairy seemed to augment the books' appeal to children and educational value, rather than detract from it. A reviewer for *The Bulletin* praised the way Mack 'makes Nature articulate and with a touch of faerie gives a series of simply-told stories that must catch and hold the interest of the youngster'.¹⁰⁰ Another reviewer felt that, '[a]s an introduction to nature study, the Mack fairy stories are in a class by themselves, for they give the denizens of the bush personality, and that puts the child student on a footing of friendship and understanding for a start.'¹⁰¹ There were limits, however. As H. M. Saxby notes, Mack's concern for conveying accurate natural history facts meant she was 'careful to subdue her storytelling gifts so that the reader never loses touch with nature.' A stream might be personified enough to inform a friendly lyrebird that he wishes to flow uphill, for example, but he is not actually able to do so until flooding occurs – 'the stream could not be given full human powers'.¹⁰²

Even within these limitations, Mack's anthropomorphic treatment let non-human agents express preferences, histories, relationships, and, very often, grievances. 'The Birds' Protest', first published in 1908, reveals the power of this approach, corralling a boisterous cast of Australian avian characters to discuss the urgent matter of their treatment by 'mankind'. Their accusations are manifold. The Emu begins, complaining that the 'idle honour' of appearing on Australia's coat of arms means little when his eggs were stolen – male emus incubate the eggs laid by females – and sent overseas as curios, risking the extinction of his species.¹⁰³ The small birds, like the little tits, Tomtits, wagtails and Jacky Winters, complain about boys who steal their eggs, break their nests, attack them with slingshots and popguns and, in short, 'Never give us a moment's peace!'¹⁰⁴ The lyrebird and Wild Turkey argue that the legislation protecting them was meaningless, since men shot them for sport and commerce anyway. They stressed the indignity of seeing their elegant feathers mounted on mantelpieces and hats.¹⁰⁵

Another running theme was the ingratitude of humans for birds' contributions to their lives. 'Every year I eat thousands of grasshoppers, and so save his grass for him', opined the Magpie in 'The Birds' Protest', 'and yet, because I take a few grains of wheat for a change of diet, he calls me a nuisance, and when he isn't shooting me, he catches me and cuts my wings, and

¹⁰⁰ *The Bulletin* (Sydney) 43, no. 2 (2 February 1922), 25.

¹⁰¹ 'Amy Mack's New "Bushland Stories"', *Sunraysia Daily* (Mildura), 4 March 1922, 6.

¹⁰² Mack, *Waterside Stories*, 30-43; Saxby, *A History of Australian Children's Literature*, 102-03.

¹⁰³ Amy Mack, 'The Birds' Protest', *Sydney Mail*, 19 February, 1904, 494.

¹⁰⁴ Mack, 'The Birds' Protest'.

¹⁰⁵ The Wild Turkey is now known as the Australian brushturkey.

keeps me in his backyard, and teaches me to say silly things.’¹⁰⁶ Importantly, some of the birds reject the prospect of any conciliatory outreach to humans. In the jaded Magpie’s reproach to his friends, Mack seems to offer the counterpoint to her own gentle approach to nature conservation and animal protection: ‘You can be kind as you like to [man], but we are not so sentimental. Any birds that agree with you had better stay here and submit patiently to being ill-treated, but I and my friends are not going to be so stupid.’¹⁰⁷ He flies away to deliberately punish humans by eating their fruit and grain, accompanied by leather-heads, satin birds, white cockatoos and some parrots. Some animals, even in sympathetic early-twentieth-century imaginings, refused to endorse white settlers’ presence.

When writing from the perspective of the native animals, it mattered little what kind of humans perpetrated abuse. So, in the writing of Mack and her contemporaries, humans of all races could be seen as equal – equally bad. In Pedley’s *Dot and the Kangaroo*, the main character is appalled at the sight of a group of Aboriginal hunters, calling them ‘dreadful, horrid creatures’, to which her kangaroo guide observes that ‘All Humans are the same underneath; they all kill kangaroos.’¹⁰⁸ This message, evoking a Christian idea of human equality based in shared sin, would have troubled many settler Australians in a period when the racial eugenics movement was flourishing, and the authors of Australian Federation were developing a Constitution that would exclude Aboriginal people from a new, proudly white nation.¹⁰⁹ The kangaroo goes even further in unsettling racial norms by qualifying that, whereas Aboriginal people hunted for necessary food, the white newcomers ‘delight[ed] in taking our lives, and torturing us just as an amusement’.¹¹⁰ Viewed in this way, human distinctions of class and race lost much of their pertinence, collapsing or inverting in the face of a broader moral judgement issued from the animal world.

Distinctions of gender, though, did seem to matter. Whereas in ‘The Birds’ Protest’, the meaning of ‘man’ slips between human generality and male specificity, a more clearly gendered critique emerges in ‘The White Herons’.¹¹¹ The highly emotive story features a mother heron and her nest of newborn chicks. She teaches them about life in their swamp home, explaining the value of the many frogs, insects and fish that make up the small family’s diet,

¹⁰⁶ Mack, ‘The Birds’ Protest’.

¹⁰⁷ Mack, ‘The Birds’ Protest’.

¹⁰⁸ Pedley, *Dot and the Kangaroo*, 50.

¹⁰⁹ Taylor, ‘Settler Children, Kangaroos’, 177.

¹¹⁰ In this distinction, Pedley echoes the animal protection movement’s delineation between necessary and unnecessary harm to animals.

¹¹¹ Mack, *Bushland Stories*, 85-97.

and warning of the dangers of ‘cruel, nasty falcons’ and ‘wicked, thieving ravens’. In the new heron culture created by colonial intrusion, however, here was one threat far worse than the rest:

He is a deadlier foe than even the falcons and ravens; his name is man. He does not fly as we do, but walks upon the ground, and so we build our homes as far up in the trees as we can, so that he will not be able to reach us, for he shows no mercy [...] Perhaps mother Nature has her own way of making him suffer for his cruelty; we can do nothing but try to avoid him.

The mother heron explains to her horrified children that this violence stemmed from humans’ desire to procure, sell, and wear her elegant white feathers. Though the hunter does not require the feathers for survival, ‘he gives them to his wife, and she wears them on her head and thinks she is beautiful.’¹¹² Like many of her allies in the anti-plumage movement, Mack stressed that birds’ plumage was best appreciated in living form. She described the mother’s ‘pure white feathers gleaming’ and ‘floating gently in the soft breeze’.¹¹³ The following day, however, the foretold ‘cruel’ men arrive. They gruesomely kill the mother before stripping her tail feathers and leaving her bloodied body bobbing on the water amongst thousands of others. The story ends with a piteous image of remaining infants who are left to starve or drown. Meanwhile, ‘away in the city the man was proudly showing the white plumes which he had robbed from the mother’s back.’¹¹⁴

In content and style, this story aligns closely with the animal protection movement and conveys Mack’s twinned commitments to conservation and animal cruelty. With its harrowing description of an idealised mother and devoted children menaced by masculine violence and feminine vanity, ‘The White Herons’ could easily have been found in Frances Levvy’s *Bands of Mercy and Humane Journal*. Its main difference lies in Mack’s elaboration on the biological and ecological context of heron, which showed off her background in natural history. MacCulloch calls the story ‘sentimental’ and ‘hysterical’, arguing that it is barely coherent ‘outside of the context of the anti-plumage campaign.’¹¹⁵ It is important to note, however, that the ornithologist and conservationist Arthur Mattingley wrote in similarly emotional and moral terms when presenting his famous photographs of dead mother herons and their starving babies.¹¹⁶ MacCulloch’s broader critique is that Mack was ‘mistaken’ in conflating kindness to

¹¹² Mack, *Bushland Stories*, 90.

¹¹³ Mack, *Bushland Stories*, 85.

¹¹⁴ Mack, *Bushland Stories*, 97.

¹¹⁵ MacCulloch, ‘Creatures of Culture’, 355.

¹¹⁶ A. H. E. Mattingley, ‘Plundered for Their Plumes’, *Emu* 7, no. 2 (1907): 71-73. See also Libby Robin, *The Flight of the Emu* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2001), 92-94.

animals with conservationism.¹¹⁷ Though she acknowledges the rhetorical and emotional power of cruelty as an idea that aided conservationists, especially in campaigns to protect populations of birds and koalas, MacCulloch felt its use had ‘clouded the question of preservation and debased its political significance.’¹¹⁸ This reading is worth considering more closely, especially since it mirrors another claim by MacCulloch, that animal protectionists, including Levvy, became involved in conservationism because they ‘[m]istakenly’ understood it to be an extension of animal protection.¹¹⁹

While it is true that some scientific conservationists sought to distance their movement from affective relationships with individual animals, this separation was far from settled when Mack was publishing. In vernacular usage, and particularly in women’s writing for children, conservation often encompassed or implied a commitment to kindness at an intimate level, alongside concerns about habitat preservation and hunting restrictions. The division was especially blurred for children, whose personal scope for shaping the fate of native animal populations was usually limited to their immediate environmental surroundings. If indeed Mack erred in presenting kindness as a form of conservation, then so too did many children’s writers of the period, including Ethel Pedley, May Gibbs, and Dorothy Wall, who routinely entwined messages of mercy towards animals with imperatives to protect species and environments. ‘I think you can influence children through books,’ Gibbs told her sister, ‘you can teach them to be thoughtful and kind to animals and to love the bush.’¹²⁰ Rather than being peripheral to conservationist discourse, misinterpreting what they did not understand, these women were participating in its constitution and extending its reach.

Whereas ‘The White Herons’ focused mainly on male cruelty, a more caustic short story sheds light on Mack’s disdain for certain kinds of womanhood. First published in the *Sydney Morning Herald* in 1908, ‘Nature and the Materialist’ depicts a smartly dressed, rude woman who does not understand what the narrator ‘gets out’ of ‘caring about flowers and birds and creepy things’.¹²¹ The materialistic woman’s disconnection from nature is expressed in bodily form, notably in ‘clear colourless eyes’, an ‘over-plump figure’, and ‘not-too-well-shaped ears, with their little diamond rings’. Mack often presented time spent in the bush as a healing and character-building experience, but in this case, she gives up the Materialist for lost:

¹¹⁷ MacCulloch, ‘Creatures of Culture’, 185.

¹¹⁸ MacCulloch, ‘Creatures of Culture’, 338.

¹¹⁹ MacCulloch, ‘Creatures of Culture’, 185.

¹²⁰ Bronwen Handyside, ‘A Tribute to May Gibbs (1876-1969)’, *Lip*, nos. 2 and 3 (1977): 37.

¹²¹ ‘NATURE AND THE MATERIALIST’, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 11 November 1908, 5.

‘For how could one ever hope to explain to that placid, well-fed person the joy of the bush [...] The racing wind only blew her hair out of place, and made her irritable; it had no power to blow all dark thoughts and phantoms from the corners of her mind. But then, of course, her mind had no corners. It was round and sleek like her body. Walled in by a narrow little circle of things to eat and drink and wear and buy, how could it ever reach out to the vast illimitable spaces? How could she ever understand what you “get out of the nature fad?”’

The woman in this story and the feather-wearing wife in ‘The White Herons’ are united by moral obliviousness, material greed, and misguided vanity. They are both depicted as wealthy, festooned with the expensive jewellery and feathered hats, yet they are literally or mentally distanced in a way which makes them blind, Mack felt, to the joys of lively nature and their own enmeshment in it. The feather-wearing woman does not see the distant suffering caused by her consumption, while the Materialist fails to grasp that her tasty strawberries are a product of the ‘flowers and birds and creepy things’ which she denigrates.¹²² They could not hear, and did not care to hear, the voices of the dying heron chicks, nor absorb the simple sensory delights of an outdoor picnic. Mack’s frequently expressed frustration with people who could not absorb Australia’s local natural beauties indicates that the kind of care Mack advocated was not only about kindness or protectiveness towards nature. It was also an ethic of attentiveness, a call to notice where others did not.

Careful attention

Noisy people passing by may think it is a mere empty patch of trees; but we who have sat silently on our verandah through the long still summer evenings and listened to the whisperings and stirrings, know that there is a distinct world of living things waking and moving down there in the shadows.¹²³

We have seen how animals and other non-humans were given voices in much of Mack’s fiction. The corollary was a responsibility on the part of humans to *notice* these voices, so the author entreated her readers young and old to pay closer attention to their natural environment. Riding on the Sydney to Adelaide express in springtime, Mack pitied the seasoned international travellers who thought the journey ‘dreary’; they did not notice the ethereal birdlife in the skies and fields, nor the carpets of flowers flashing by outside the train windows. ‘If the thought of snow-capped Alps, tropical forests, Italian lakes, and mighty cañons, has blinded you to the

¹²² The snobbish character who turns her nose up at nature study and cannot perceive local beauties is a regular trope in Mack’s writing, and may have been partly inspired by frustration with her sister, Louise. A novelist and cosmopolitan war correspondent, Louise often mocked her Amy’s penchant for flowers and animals, and used her as inspiration for an unflattering and stodgy character. See also Mack’s critique of the overly intellectual ‘book-bore’ who criticises one’s reading choices, in Amy Mack ‘The Cheerful Correspondent’, *The Bookfellow* 1 (no. 9) (28 February 1907): 11.

¹²³ Mack, *Wilderness*, 20.

beauty of all else,’ she concluded, ‘then you may find the journey “absolutely uninteresting”; but if you set out with love of your land in your heart, and eyes that can see clearly, then you will find that there are more joys than the globe-trotter sees on the road to Adelaide.’¹²⁴ Everywhere in her fiction are these kinds of characters, who fail to notice and appreciate the mass of non-human life bubbling, growling, or ‘talking’ around them.

In place of what she saw as a deadening heedlessness to the beauties of nature, Mack called Australians to the kind of care that paid attention – a caring about, not only a caring for.¹²⁵ This attentiveness to the environment was multisensory: ‘To-day as I walked along the sandy track on the top of the ridge,’ wrote Mack about a walk in July, ‘every sense responded to the fascination of the season, and my eyes and ears and nose were all keenly awake to the delights around me.’ Even in the relative dormancy of a Sydney winter, she noticed the ‘nutty fragrance of the sweet-scented wattle’, spotted a feather-lined tomtit’s nest amongst a ‘thick tangle of flowering needle-bush and banksia’, and picked up the ‘melancholy note’ of a bronze cuckoo hoping to usurp the nest with her own egg.¹²⁶ With all senses alert, Mack was easily and willingly distracted from her plan of seeking out a lyrebird’s nest by the ‘sweet interruptions’ of the plants and animals around her.¹²⁷

There was a special place reserved in this ethic of attentive care, however, for listening. Listening to nature, especially to the voices of the ‘really shy, strange, wild creatures’ required quietness and unobtrusiveness, as Mack demonstrated in her description of a wintertime walk:

I stretched myself full length on the rock, humming the line ‘What is so rare as a day in June?’ The answer came back very quickly from a butcher-bird, which sent his song up from the valley below; his ringing notes were immediately answered by his mate from the other side of the gully, and I lay and listened with delight to the sweet duet. It was a duet with an occasional chorus, in which thrushes, yellow bobs, spinebills, and chickups all joined at intervals. Even the little rock-warblers joined their chirrup to the choir, as they hopped about the rocks, coming quite close to me as I lay silently listening.¹²⁸

Paying attention – a careful looking and listening – lent itself to an appreciation of biological diversity. ‘Most people will tell you that a frog croaks, and leave it at that,’ Mack opined in

¹²⁴ Mack, *Bush Days*, 37-8. Unlike her well-travelled sister Louise, Amy lived in Australia for most of her life, except when she and Launcelot moved to London between 1914 and 1919. During the war she served as a publicity officer for the ministries of Munitions and Food in London. Phelan, ‘Amy Eleanor Mack’.

¹²⁵ For more on the distinctions between ‘caring for’, ‘caring about’ and ‘caring with’, see Andrea Gaynor, ‘Regenerative Histories for Troubled Times’, (edited oration first delivered 2 July 2025) *History Australia*, 22, no. 4 (2025): 527; Berenice Fisher and Joan Tronto, ‘Toward a Feminist Theory of Caring’, in *Circles of Care*, ed. Emily K. Abel and Margaret Nelson (SUNY Press, 1990), 40; Joan Tronto, *Caring Democracy: Markets, Equality and Justice* (New York: NYU Press, 2013), 35.

¹²⁶ Mack, *Bush Calendar*, 102-03.

¹²⁷ Mack, *Bush Calendar*, 105.

¹²⁸ Mack, *Bush Calendar*, 98.

The Wilderness, but they missed the astonishing diversity of frog calls, that rivalled those of birds. There was the gravelly ‘Craw-craw, craw-craw’ of green tree-frogs, the ‘Craw-awk, crawk, crok, crok’ of golden tree-frogs, and the ‘Toc, toc, toc’ or ‘Kuk-kuk-kuk-kuk’ of the *Limnodynastes* species.¹²⁹ ‘Once you have realized the difference you will wonder however you were so stupid as to think them all the same,’ Mack wrote.¹³⁰ Distinguishing between the subtle signs of animal life could be a source of pleasure, and of insight: when she heard the frogs’ chorus swell overnight, she knew to visit in the morning to check for eggs, where further diversity was evident in the variously coloured eggspawn.¹³¹ Her ability to notice ‘what is afoot’ in the animal world allowed her to unobtrusively participate in animals’ social lives, as she intimated in this description of a gathering of frogs near her home.

Often the gathering numbers hundreds, and they sit about the edge of the pond, in the grass, and on the stones, chanting loudly. And at each deep note a great balloon swells out in front of the throat, a balloon almost as big as the frog itself, going up and down, as each deep note goes out and the breath comes back for the next boom. I know of nothing in the whole bush quite so ludicrous as a frogs’ party, and I must confess that the knowledge that so few people have attended one adds to its interest. There is a rare satisfaction in being on intimate terms with the really shy, strange, wild creatures.¹³²

Though she admits some pride in the exclusivity of her relationship with these frogs, Mack invites readers to similar experiences: ‘If you would share my pleasure all you need do is to keep a little wild patch of bush near your home. For wherever there is sanctuary the shy bush things will come and make their homes beside you.’¹³³

Mack juxtaposed the quiet, reverential attentiveness of the naturalist with the obnoxious noise of ‘civilisation’ as it intruded on her cherished natural spaces. In a plaintive newspaper column later published in *Bush Days*, she lamented the destruction of a favourite gully, likely the same area described so lovingly in *The Wilderness*. Noisiness heralds the coming obliteration: after the ‘auctioneer’s raucous tones’ sold off the land to developers, wreckers arrived to chop down the gully’s trees. Mack was appalled that axe-bearing ‘executioners’ walked not with appropriately ‘saddened steps and bowed heads’, but ‘talking and laughing as gaily as if they were going to a picnic.’ The workers’ discordant chatter is soon joined by the noise of their axes against the she-oaks, red gums, and turpentines. The displaced birds try to express their distress, like the fan-tailed cuckoo who ‘wailed in misery for the fate that has

¹²⁹ Mack, *The Wilderness*, 23-4.

¹³⁰ Mack, *The Wilderness*, 24.

¹³¹ Mack, *The Wilderness*, 24.

¹³² Mack, *The Wilderness*, 25-26.

¹³³ Mack, *The Wilderness*, 26.

befallen him', but, as Mack put it, '[t]he wreckers have heeded none of them, and the work of destruction has continued.'¹³⁴ In the absence of careful listening, this piece implies, comes obliviousness and destruction. The failure to listen to birdsong, she implied, could lead to the outright destruction of the natural spaces that birds inhabited.

In promoting leisure time in the bush as an antidote to the city's demoralising bustle and noise, Mack anticipated and influenced the organised bushwalking movement, whose heyday was the 1920s and 30s. Members of the first walking groups, including the Melbourne Women's Walking Club which we will encounter in the sixth chapter, expressed their joy in leaving behind the sounds of modern life, especially of public transport, and hearing them replaced by bubbling creeks, frogs, or birdsong.¹³⁵ They echoed Mack's prose, which so often contrasted the 'clanging haste' of a new electric tram to the quiet of the bush, or, as we have seen, a bandicoot's cough to her neighbour's modern jazz.¹³⁶ Mack also shared with later bushwalkers a commitment to leaving the bush as untouched as possible after a walk. About the journey home from a coral reef, she wrote: 'We carried no specimen bag; we had left our treasures where we found them,' she wrote after a visit to a coral reef. Nature's beauties were left untouched but, 'in our hearts we carried the magic memory of a golden day.'¹³⁷ As historian of bushwalking Melissa Harper has argued, these affinities were no coincidence: many of these early walkers were part of the first generation to grow up taking nature study classes at school and reading the works of authors like Mack, Gibbs, and Pedley, whose messages helped shape a view of the Australian bush as 'gentle, therapeutic and bountiful.'¹³⁸

¹³⁴ Mack, *Bush Days*, 26.

¹³⁵ See for example E. M. A., 'Rain', *Wayfaring* (Melbourne Women's Walking Club Journal), no. 7 (May 1939): 11; 'Cobberas – Mt. Pilot: Christmas 1939', *Wayfaring*, no. 9 (May 1940): 14.

¹³⁶ Mack, 'The City Park', *Bush Days*, 54.

¹³⁷ Mack, 'On the Reef', *Bush Days*, 112.

¹³⁸ Melissa Harper, *The Ways of the Bushwalker: On foot in Australia* (Sydney: NewSouth, 2020 [first published 2007]) 156. Mack, *Bush Days*, 112.

Though she enjoyed dedicated hikes away from the city – advising readers on the best time for a ‘bush walk’ well before Myles Dunphy claimed to have coined the term – Mack also encouraged readers to find aural and spiritual respite within city limits.¹³⁹ About a city park, she wrote:

It lies midway between two crowded eastern suburbs, within a few minutes’ run of the city’s heart. On either boundary electric trams rush past with clanging haste. Motor-cars race along the asphalt paths, motor-bicycles snort from gate to gate; civilisation, with its feverish unrest, surrounds and invades it, and yet, in spite of it all, it holds a peace and special sanctuary, undreamed of by the noisy, bustling crowd, that casts a careless eye on its beauty, or hastens through unheeding.¹⁴⁰

Again, we see Mack’s preoccupation with attentiveness or a lack thereof. To her mind, ‘careless’ or ‘unheeding’ Sydneysiders missed the natural beauties all around them, whether on a bushwalk or in their own neighbourhood.

Love of nature, love of nation

Mack hoped that the ethic of attentive, listening, loving care which she promoted would lead naturally to a greater knowledge of nature and what she saw as a healthy form of patriotism. She wanted settler Australians to notice and take pride in native flora and fauna – which implicitly or explicitly belonged to them – and express their love of nation by protecting the continent’s natural spaces and unique species. ‘We should preserve the wild things because they are ours’, she wrote in 1910. ‘They are an inseparable part of our native land – the spirit of the soil from which we come.’¹⁴¹

She was not unusual in promoting this kind of floral and faunal nationalism. Nationalism was, as Russell McGregor puts it, ‘a major taproot nourishing nature conservation’ in Australia and in similar settler societies, and many early twentieth-century naturalists, scientists, and nature writers endeavoured to ally the defence of nature to love of the Australian nation state.¹⁴² Conservationists expressed their appreciation and concern for flora and fauna in effusively patriotic terms. In 1926 The Wild Life Preservation Society of Australia declared that they represented ‘The Soul of Australia... [and] a unity of thought and action finding expression in

¹³⁹ Mack, *Bush Calendar*, 48, 94, 95. For an account of Dunphy’s contested status as the ‘Father of Bushwalking’, see Harper, *The Ways of the Bushwalker*, 189-92.

¹⁴⁰ Mack, ‘The City Park’, *Bush Days*, 54.

¹⁴¹ Amy Mack, ‘Some Reasons for protecting our Wild Life’, *Education Gazette*, 30 July 1910, 254.

¹⁴² McGregor, ‘Mateship with Nature’, 400.

the preservation of the glorious heritage we possess in our bushland flora and fauna.’¹⁴³ The coterminous emergence of the Gould League of Bird Lovers reflected a growing belief that Australian children must learn more about their environment in order to foster patriotic affection and protective attitudes. Many of Mack’s young readers would also have been members of their local Gould League, receiving complementary messages about kindness to birds and taking pride in the beautiful animals and landscapes that belonged to them as Australians.¹⁴⁴

Sometimes, this nature-based nationalism was explicitly connected to better-established forms of military and imperial patriotism, heightened during Australia’s participation in World War One.¹⁴⁵ Mack’s nature-based patriotism, on the other hand, mostly eschewed military metaphor, focusing instead on the distinctiveness of Australian flora and fauna as a basis for national pride. Instead of taking pride primarily in buildings, trams, and other institutions shared by countries around the world, she pressed the uniqueness of Australian flora and fauna, speaking in reverential terms of ownership.¹⁴⁶ She therefore encouraged children to identify with and appreciate native plants and animals. Reviewers agreed that the author’s intimate prose encouraged a love of nation, especially when contrasted against the ambivalence many still felt about unusual or unevolved creatures. ‘The writer is possessed with a fondness (unfortunately rare) for all that goes to make Australia’, wrote one. ‘To her the plants are not scentless, or the birds voiceless, and the reader finds constant pleas for more patriotism and a better realization of the bush beauties.’¹⁴⁷ The fact that Mack’s Australian nature stories were published by an Australian publisher with an Australian illustrator was cause for even more national pride, especially at the beginning of the twentieth century. A Sydney reviewer, recommended *Scribbling Sue* and *Bushland Stories* as Christmas presents, noting that ‘[a]n Australian Christmas sentiment is a consummation devoutly to be desired, and in these publications we have the means of realising that ideal in our hands.’¹⁴⁸

¹⁴³ Wild Life Preservation Society of Australia Annual Report, 1926, quoted in MacCulloch, ‘Creatures of Culture’, 316-17. See also ‘The Soul of Australia’, *Nambour Chronicle and North Coast Advertiser*, 19 February 1937, 11.

¹⁴⁴ Gallagher, ‘The Childhood Imagination’, 67.

¹⁴⁵ Griffiths, *Hunters and Collectors*, 136-38.

¹⁴⁶ Amy Mack, ‘Some Reasons for protecting our Wild Life’, *Education Gazette*, 30 July 1910, 254.

¹⁴⁷ ‘AUSTRALIAN FAIRIES’, *Observer* (Adelaide), 3 December 1910.

¹⁴⁸ ‘Books for the Young Folk’, *Sunday Times*, 20 December 1914, 4.

If caring for Australian flora and fauna was the truest expression of love for one's country, then the destruction of 'our native land' must be patriotism's antithesis. In an article published in the *Education Gazette*, Mack elaborated on her appeals to patriotism:

How can we love our native land while we mercilessly destroy that which is part of it? Can we call ourselves patriotic whilst we chop down the forests, tear up the flowers, slaughter the beasts, and poison the birds which make our country the wonderland that it is?¹⁴⁹

Mack's description, in this article, of native animals as the vulnerable 'original inhabitants' of the land is revealing for its omission. If animals were the precious and unique indigenes of Australia, deserving of patriotic love, attentiveness and protection of enlightened settler colonists, what and where were Aboriginal people? What role did they play in Mack's imaginative landscape, into which she invited so many settler Australians? The final section of this chapter will explore how Mack's vocal animal indigenes simultaneously expressed nationalism and contributed to the erasure of Aboriginal presence.

Animal indigenes, Aboriginal silences

For the most part, Mack's calls for attention and care for those affected by the ongoing destructiveness of colonisation in Australia did not extend to Indigenous people. She did not acknowledge their own ancient, disrupted relationships with native animals, who were threaded into their ceremonies and songlines.¹⁵⁰ As Gallagher observes, 'while Mack's stories directly confronted the violence being unleashed against nature by 'mankind', she had nothing to say on the violence being inflicted against Indigenous peoples.'¹⁵¹ Though, as we have seen, she sometimes seemed to refer to Aboriginal people through botanical metaphor or colonial allegory, they are absent from Mack's oeuvre as actual characters or voices. What is more, descriptions of treasured pockets of bushland as 'untouched by the hand of man' until white men arrive to chop it down give an impression of a pre-colonisation arcadia inhabited only by morally praiseworthy animals. It is these representatives, rather than people, who speak on behalf of Australia and Australian indigeneity. Their speech is often a complaint, but their sharp rejection of many settler Australian behaviours, whether it was women wearing feathers, men

¹⁴⁹ Mack, 'Some Reasons for protecting our Wild Life', 254.

¹⁵⁰ Philip Clarke, 'Birds as Totemic Beings and Creators in the Lower Murray, South Australia', *Journal of Ethnobiology*, 36, no. 2 (2016), pp. 277-93; Sonia Tidemann and Tim Whiteside, 'Aboriginal Stories: The Riches and Colour of Australian Birds', in Sonia Tidemann and Andrew Gosler (eds.), *Ethno-ornithology: Birds, Indigenous Peoples, Culture and Society* (London: Earthscan, 2010), 153-80; Johanna M. Blows, *Eagle and Crow: An Exploration of an Australian Aboriginal Myth* (New York: Garland Publishers, 1995); Diane Bell, *Ngarrindjeri Wurruwarrin: A World that Is, Was, and Will Be* (North Melbourne: Spinifex, 1998), 310-15.

¹⁵¹ Gallagher, *Playtime*, 74.

axing forests, or boys robbing birds' nests, never led to a fundamental rejection of settler colonial presence. Rather, most of Mack's stories pointed to the possibility of a better settler colonial future where humans and native animals could peacefully coexist.

Affrica Taylor argues that settler colonial disavowal of Aboriginal people's sovereignty spurred the adoption of native animals as alternative 'endorsing indigenes.'¹⁵² It was difficult to imagine that dispossessed Aboriginal people, fictional or otherwise, might authorise or naturalise settler colonial belonging in Australia. On the contrary, their very existence troubled the moral coherence and legitimacy of a colonising process that was premised on the absence of the kind of occupation or sovereignty recognised by British law.¹⁵³ In contrast, native animals seemed less ethically and legally problematic representatives of affirming indigeneity. No one argued that colonisation was wrong on account of native animals' prior occupation. Certainly the native animals themselves did not, since they lacked a language that was comprehensible to settler Australians. As literary scholars have argued about May Gibbs and Mem Fox (author of iconic 1983 children's book *Possum Magic*), when native animals stand in for a broadly construed 'Australia', Aboriginal people are often alienated from the land, their Indigeneity symbolically weakened.¹⁵⁴

Using animals rather than people as symbols of indigeneity, writers like Mack and Pedley could project voices and opinions that critiqued but did not fundamentally threaten colonialism. These romanticised 'endorsing indigenes' often sternly rebuked settler Australian behaviour, especially men's actions that damaged forests or harmed native animals, but their guidance almost always offered a path to moral redemption and belonging. As Taylor describes it in her analysis of Pedley's *Dot and the Kangaroo*, non-human animals 'appear to offer white settlers and their offspring a seemingly uncomplicated mode of identification with Australian nature, and via this identification, a clear route towards becoming naturalised or 'native' Australians.'¹⁵⁵ By following the example of her 'kangaroo-as-indigenous-muse' and recognising her past mistakes, Dot is judged by a council of native animals to be an 'improved

¹⁵² Taylor, 'Settler children, kangaroos', 172.

¹⁵³ Taylor, 'Settler children, kangaroos', 172.

¹⁵⁴ Clare Bradford, 'Exporting Australia: National Identity and Australian Picture Books', *Children's Literature Association Quarterly*, 20, no. 3 (Fall 1995): 113; Erica Hateley, 'Visions and Values: The Children's Book Council of Australia's Prizing of Picture Books in the Twenty-First Century', in Bettina Kümmerling-Meibauer and Anja Muller (eds.), *Canon Constitution and Canon Change in Children's Literature* (New York: Routledge, 2016), 211.

¹⁵⁵ Affrica Taylor, 'Settler Children, Kangaroos and the Cultural Politics of Australian National Belonging', *Global Studies of Childhood* 4, no. 3 (2014): 173.

human' who is at last 'at home in the bush.'¹⁵⁶ Her story offers a template for other settler Australians, beginning with her father who repents of his hunting habits when he sees his daughter safely returned. The kangaroo in this story also benefits from sharing her time and wisdom with humans, joyfully reuniting with her lost joey as soon as she returns Dot home, in a fantasy of settler-Indigenous mutuality.¹⁵⁷

Pedley was not the only female author to utilise the kangaroo as a kindly native mentor; one of Mack's favoured animal indigenes was the kangaroo. Literally and conceptually flexible, kangaroos were popular with many writers, especially for children, as representatives for various Australian causes or qualities (Figure 3). Hatton and Thompson have noted the 'floating significance' of an animal that has been employed as a symbol of 'warmth, boundless energy and forward-looking optimism', maternal dedication and care, or the threatened Australian environment.¹⁵⁸

In a story from Mack's *Waterside Stories* collection, zoo animals gather in secret to plan their escape. In a premise similar to 'The Birds' Protest', all the animals are unhappy and resentful, but the kangaroo expresses his especial outrage at his situation:

No doubt it is bad enough to be shut up in a foreign land, but how would you like to be a prisoner in your own country? My fathers owned this land before any white Humans came, and we used to live so happily out on the wide western plains, or in the bush where the great gum trees grow. And yet here I am, a captive in my own country. Oh it is a terrible thing, that people who call themselves Australian, should treat an Australian animal in such a way!¹⁵⁹

The aggrieved party in the colonising process in this case is the kangaroo, whose ancestors had 'owned' the land taken from them by colonising humans. The analogy with Aboriginal people's experience seems too obvious here to have been unintended, and yet Mack's other writings do not suggest any wider radical critique of Indigenous people's dispossession. Certainly, her deployment of kangaroo characters did not adhere to a consistent political pattern.

In Mack's story 'The Lion and the Kangaroo', for instance, the titular marsupial plays a young and swaggering Australia who rejects a visit from his elder 'kinsman', The British Lion.¹⁶⁰ The old and kindly Lion expects a warm welcome in 'the Kangaroo's land' but is rudely rejected by his overconfident relative, who no longer thinks the relationship necessary.¹⁶¹ The Kangaroo

¹⁵⁶ Taylor, 'Settler Children, Kangaroos', 179.

¹⁵⁷ Pedley, *Dot and the Kangaroo*, 113.

¹⁵⁸ Beth Hatton and Linda Thompson, 'Kangaroo', in Melissa Harper and Richard White (eds.), *Symbols of Australia* (Sydney: NewSouth Publishing, 2021), 48.

¹⁵⁹ Mack, *Waterside Stories*, 82.

¹⁶⁰ Mack, *Bushland Stories*, 146-60.

¹⁶¹ Mack, *Bushland Stories*, 146-47.

learns his lesson when The Dragon arrives from across the seas, and is fought back by The Lion. The nimble young animal and the brave old one join forces to defeat the invader. Chastened, the Kangaroo admits his mistake:

I have been rude and unfair to you. But I was stupid, and vain, and thought you wanted to steal my country, and I imagined I was strong enough to do without you. Now I know that I do not wish to live without your friendship and help, for I love you and need you.¹⁶²

Whereas in 'Jimmy at the Zoo', the kangaroo has been harmed by white colonisation, in this story there is no sense of The Kangaroo as a colonised figure, no sense that The Lion had at one time *been* the invading enemy aiming to 'steal' his 'lovely land' in the same way as the fearsome Dragon attempts in this story.¹⁶³ Instead, 'The Lion and the Kangaroo' celebrates and reaffirms British colonialism, recasting it as a mutual and consensual process of relationship-making, which kept Australia safe from fiercer beasts, like The Dragon, The Bear, and The Eagle (probably China, Russia, and Germany). Unsubtly rebuking Australians who felt ready to stand alone without British imperial support, Mack's marsupial allegory likely struck a chord when it was published in 1910, even if some of the geopolitical messages went over young readers' heads. The Kangaroo serves to reconcile national and imperial belonging, amid rising anxieties about Australian security in a dramatically changing political context, particularly following Japan's defeat of Russia in 1905 and the Anglo-German naval arms race of 1909.¹⁶⁴

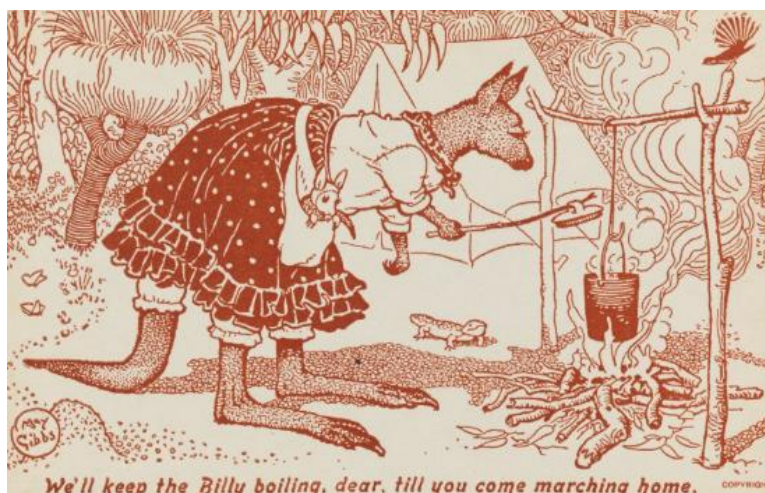


Figure 3 Kangaroos were common and versatile representatives of Australia, especially during wartime. In this 1916 postcard by May Gibbs, an aproned, maternal kangaroo represents a faithful Australian home front during World War One. Chromolithograph print, State Library of New South Wales, Sydney.

¹⁶² Mack, *Bushland Stories*, 159-60.

¹⁶³ Mack, *Bushland Stories*, 149.

¹⁶⁴ See Paul Souter, *Lion and the Kangaroo: the initiation of Australia, 1901-1919* (Sydney: Collins, 1976).

Even within these two examples, the precise role of the kangaroo is ambiguous. At times, he appears to represent the first custodians and owners of the land; at others, he seems to embody White Australia, or the nation, or the land itself. Such symbolic instability is common to this literature, and speaks to unstable understandings of racial, imperial, and national belonging at the turn of the twentieth century. What is clear is that the voices of kangaroos were prioritised over those of Indigenous people; they were the spokes-animals of indigeneity and Australianness.

Conclusions

When Amy Mack died in 1939, she left behind an oeuvre of beloved books and journalism which, despite their great reach and influence during her lifetime, quickly faded into obscurity. After her death, Angus & Robertson publishers wrote to enquiring relatives that the copyright value of her collected works was ‘definitely nil’.¹⁶⁵ The vision Mack had promoted of beautiful, welcoming, and threatened bush spaces, filled with endearing animal characters with voices worth listening to, was more enduring. Grounded in the embodied and emotional experience of witnessing bush spaces shrink and disappear in a growing Sydney, Mack’s work emphasises the associated vulnerability and preciousness of natural sanctuaries and their inhabitants, as they were hemmed in by the ambivalent forces of ‘civilisation’. She did value wilderness, but hers was a gently ennobling and threatened kind wilderness, appropriate for women and children, rather than the harsh man-making hinterland of earlier chroniclers of the bush.

Mack’s lyrical work resonated with many other urban Australians who worried about environmental changes, and who were eager for a more authentically Australian literature. By giving animals literal or metaphorical voices, she evoked their sufferings and encouraged humans to ‘listen to’ and appreciate these voices, and to live communally and tolerantly with them, absent of cruelty. Thus, she promoted a care ethic for animals which encompassed attentiveness as well as kindness towards individuals and concern for their longer-term species survival.

Though her literary animal indigenes were often harshly critical of humans, they tended to affirm settler colonial presence on the land and push for a Mack-approved form of patriotism, replacing and erasing the voices of Aboriginal people at a time of broader colonial disavowal

¹⁶⁵ W. G. Cousins to Messrs Creagh & Creagh, 30 November 1939, Angus & Robertson Collection, Series 2 Collection, MLMSS 3269, State Library of New South Wales, Sydney.

and silencing. Mack and similar writers featured in this chapter promoted an enlightened form of settler colonial relationship to the land, premised on positive emotional relationships with animals, constraints on destructiveness and cruelty, and a comfortable replacement of dispossessed Indigenous people with animals who were easier to control, and easier to speak for.

Mack and her supporters assumed a close relationship between an attitude of love and attentiveness towards nature, on one hand, and deep and accurate knowledge of nature on the other. As one enthusiastic reviewer put it, ‘Amy Mack is in love with Nature, and through love comes knowledge.’¹⁶⁶ This is a striking statement at a time when the small Australian scientific community was emerging, natural history norms were shifting, and the validity of sentimental approaches to animals was up for debate. Indeed, Mack’s much-applauded literary contributions to the field of nature study – to children’s education, not only to their emotional and political lives – raise questions about epistemological relationships to native animals. Was the reviewer right that Mack needed to love the animals around her to understand them? And how much was her position as a woman implicated in this kind of emotion-based plaudit? The following chapter considers more closely the ways in which women could claim expertise about native animals in the early-to-mid twentieth century.

¹⁶⁶ ‘A Book for the Children’, *Sydney Stock and Station Journal*, 9 December 1910, 15.

Chapter Four: Knowing Animals

Intimate expertise in science and natural history

That's the way Humans amuse themselves. They write books about things they don't understand, and keep the game going by each new book saying the others are wrong. It's a silly game, and very insulting to the creatures they write about. Humans at the other end of the world, who never took the trouble to come here to see me, wrote books about me. Those who did come were more impudent than those who stayed away. Their idea of learning all about a creature was to dig up its home, and frighten it out of its wits, and kill it; and after a few moons of that sort of foolery they claimed to know all about us. Us! whose ancestors knew the world millions of years before the ignorant Humans came on the earth at all!

The Platypus, in Ethel Pedley, *Dot and the Kangaroo*, 1899¹

Acquiring knowledge about animals in the nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries could be a violent affair. It was common practice for naturalists to kill the animals they were studying, after which animal bodies, repackaged as specimens, were shipped to institutions and experts in Europe for examination and display. Monotremes like the platypus, whose behaviour and anatomy outrageously defied Western systems of classification, paid an especially high price for the scientific curiosity they excited.² The story that the first platypus sent to England was believed to be a hoax is a familiar one, and partly true: in 1799 the naturalist George Shaw became the first to scientifically describe the animal, and he admitted that its unusual combination of features 'naturally excites the idea of some deceptive preparation by artificial means'.³

Less often recounted is the way that in the following century and a half, platypuses were routinely displaced, shot, skinned, bottled, drowned, barrelled, and dissected in attempts to solve mysteries like their egg-laying tendencies, venomous spurs, and ambiguous taxonomic position.⁴ Harry Burrell, world-leading researcher of platypuses in the 1920s, unearthed and killed countless platypuses in his investigations, in one case testing their capacity for surviving

¹ Ethel Pedley, *Dot and the Kangaroo*, (London: Thomas Burleigh, 1900 [first published 1899]), 30.

² Monotremes are an order of mammals that lay eggs. They are found only in Australia and New Guinea.

³ Harriet Ritvo, *The Platypus and the Mermaid and other Figments of the Classifying Imagination* (Cambridge Mass: Harvard University Press, 1997), 4; George Shaw, 'The Duck-Billed Platypus, *Platypus anatinus*', *The Naturalist's Miscellany* 10, no. CXVIII (1799): plates 385-86.

⁴ Jacob W. Gruber, 'Does the Platypus Lay Eggs? The History of an Event in Science', *Archives of Natural History* 18, no. 1 (1991): 51-123. For the history of platypus investigations in the broader context of relations with Australian mammals, see Jack Ashby, *Platypus Matters* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2022).

oxygen deprivation by measuring how long it took twin nestlings (platypus infants) to drown when sealed in a bottle of river water. For one of them, the answer was three and a half hours.⁵ As Jack Ashby notes, Burrell's proud descriptions of his many discoveries are interspersed with these uncomfortable reminders of the actual platypuses sacrificed to the work.⁶ Despite being couched in terms of conservation and scientific progress, the removal of animals and eggs from their habitats contributed to species endangerment, especially for animals like platypuses, who were also in commercial demand for their soft and fashionable pelts.⁷

It is little wonder that author Ethel Pedley chose to adopt the voice of a disgruntled platypus to critique these 'inquisitive, pushing, and dangerous' methods of investigating native animals in 1899.⁸ Her much-loved children's book, *Dot and the Kangaroo*, was dedicated to Australian children in hopes of 'enlisting their sympathies for the many beautiful, amiable, and frolicsome creatures of their fair land; whose extinction, through ruthless destruction, is being surely accomplished'.⁹ The book, as discussed in the previous chapter, is sharply critical of many of the ways white settlers interacted with native animals.

In explaining his wariness about helping the human protagonist, Dot, to locate her family, the Platypus condemns the folly and needless brutality of men who claim to understand him, framing their exploits as a meaningless game of asserted and negated knowledge claims, the victims of which were platypuses themselves. He mocks the way human interpreters 'squabbled together – one saying I was a Beaver; another, that I was a Duck', and suggests a futile outcome: 'everyone wrote a book, full of lies, all out of his head'.¹⁰ Moreover, the Platypus stresses the impertinence of naturalists and scientists claiming to comprehend animals who held a prior knowledge of the world reaching back millions of years before human existence. Whether Pedley intended it or not, this critique also evokes the long history of

⁵ Harry Burrell, *Platypus: its discovery, zoological position, form and characteristics, habits, life history, etc.* (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1927), 137.

⁶ Jack Ashby, *Platypus Matters* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2022), 31.

⁷ 'The platypus skin,' explained a reporter in 1903, 'when the long, coarse hairs have been pulled out, is as soft and silky as the finest velvet, and when it has been dyed a rich brown it makes beautiful necklets and muffs.' 'The Australian Fur Trade', *Brisbane Courier*, 3 October 1903, 13. The article notes that despite strict government protections including heavy penalties, the sought-after and expensive skins were continually being sold.

⁸ Pedley, *Dot and the Kangaroo*, 31.

⁹ Pedley, *Dot and the Kangaroo*, front matter.

¹⁰ Pedley, *Dot and the Kangaroo*, 30.

Indigenous people's knowledge of native animals, which white scientists ignored except when it benefited them.¹¹

Pedley's platypus appraisal, consumed by thousands of children and adults, raises questions about the ways settler Australian men and women came to know about native animals, and how that knowledge could be shared, accepted, or undermined. Writers like Pedley might criticise men for cruel scientific and natural history methods, but other women were increasingly involved in the sourcing of zoological knowledge, despite barriers to their participation in science. Some were able to participate in traditional academic spaces, while many others found alternative routes.

What were the possible, acceptable, or tactical methods by which women could learn about animals, and share that understanding with others? This chapter explores how women collected and conveyed knowledge about native animals in amateur and professional contexts. Analysing the contrasting careers of Mary Grant Roberts (1841-1921), the Tasmanian zookeeper we met in the opening chapter, Alice Manfield (1878-1960), a self-trained naturalist and mountain guide on Mount Buffalo, and Georgina Sweet (1875-1946), a university-educated zoologist at the University of Melbourne, I unpick the modes by which women positioned themselves as intellectual authorities on native animals.

Naturally, these methods were many, varied, and overlapping, but I argue that women tended to draw on notions of emotional, long-term relationships with individual living animals, in order to justify their claims to knowing animals. To *know about* animals, many felt, a researcher should *know* animals personally, ideally for a long time. Such relationship-based knowledge claims were not exclusive to female naturalists, and they formed part of broader changes in zoological and biological practice, but when applied to or by women this rhetoric was heavily gendered, drawing explicitly or implicitly on women's presumed capacity for emotional intimacy, care-taking, and closeness to nature.¹² Women naturalists, who often (but not always) lacked conventional experience in science, and the same audience afforded to their male

¹¹ Leading nineteenth-century non-Indigenous naturalists openly admitted that their expeditions relied almost completely on the knowledge and efforts of Indigenous guides. As we will see, the same naturalists often described Indigenous people as backward and unintelligent. Ross L Jones and Simon Farley, 'Indigenous Knowledge', in *Dhoombak Goobgoowana: A History of Indigenous Australia and the University of Melbourne - Volume 1: Truth*, eds. Ross L Jones, James Waghorne, and Marcia Langton (Carlton: Melbourne University Publishing, 2024), 312.

¹² For the perception of nurture and care as fundamentally feminine virtues, see Carolyn Merchant, *Earthcare: Women and the Environment* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 109-36.

counterparts, tended to assert their zoological expertise in terms of a long-term familiarity or emotional friendship with the animals they studied. Australian women in the First World War and interwar periods experimented with new ways of asserting their knowledge, authority, and originality, often combining older and newer bases for their credibility.¹³ Sometimes this meant leaning on essentialist beliefs about women's inherently caring, maternal or emotional qualities, even though those beliefs might hamstring them in other ways.

A number of senses of the word 'knowing' are thus at play: knowledge as familiarity ('my pet lyrebird comes when I call his name') intersects with knowledge as the holding of information ('platypuses are mammals which lay eggs'). Women's claims to authority because of long-time familiarity and friendship suggest some kind of mutual understanding between knowers, leading to a conceptualisation of 'knowing animals' who were capable of their own forms of emotion and learning. 'Knowing' can also constitute a form of power which was integral to ongoing processes of settler colonialism. As numerous historians of imperialism have argued, the classificatory and exploratory work of scientists and natural historians was foundational to colonial ventures across the world.¹⁴ Women were not exempt from these processes, even when they brought different methods and sensibilities.¹⁵ Indeed, the epistemologies of care, friendship, or maternity explored in this chapter could deepen a sense of settler belonging in colonised spaces, while erasing Indigenous people's traditions of understanding and caring for native animals.

The chapter begins by sketching the interactions of Mary Grant Roberts with the animals at her Tasmanian zoo between 1895 and her death in 1921. Roberts was the first to breed Tasmanian devils at Beaumaris Zoo near Hobart, earning scientific interest and credibility, and her emotional descriptions of the hand-reared devils speak to complex methods of knowledge production and circulation. Alice Manfield will be introduced second, a beloved mountain guide and photographer who claimed to 'make friends' with a lyrebird family on Mount

¹³ Angela Woollacott, 'From Moral to Professional Authority: Secularism, Social Work, and Middle-Class Women's Self-Construction in World War I Britain', *Journal of Women's History* 10, no. 2 (1998): 102.

¹⁴ Richard Grove, *Green Imperialism: Colonial Expansion, Tropical Island Edens and the Origins of Environmentalism* (Cambridge, Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 1996); Richard Drayton, *Nature's Government: Science, Imperial Britain, and the 'Improvement' of the World* (New Haven, Connecticut, 2000).

¹⁵ See for example Jody Jensen and Rebecca Weaver-Hightower, 'Botany and the Woman Colonizer in Catharine Parr Traill's *Backwoods of Canada* and Anna Brownell Jameson's *Winter Studies and Summer Rambles in Canada*', *Settler Colonial Studies* 11, no. 2 (April 3, 2021): 242–58; Tanja Hammel, *Shaping Natural History and Settler Society: Mary Elizabeth Barber and the Nineteenth-Century Cape* (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan and Springer Nature, 2019); Patricia Grimshaw and Ann Standish, 'Making Tasmania Home: Louisa Meredith's "Colonizing Prose"', *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies* 28, no. 1/2 (2007): 1–17.

Buffalo. Finally, the chapter turns to consider the contrasting career of Georgina Sweet, one of the first Australian women to earn a science degree and pursue a career in biology, zoology, and parasitology. Sweet's life, career, and reputation were also shaped by her gender, but her conventionally scientific methods and spaces provide a counterpoint to Roberts and Manfield and point to the diversity of epistemic methods drawn upon by women in changing social milieux.

Knowing Tasmanian devils

In the early twentieth century, the Tasmanian devil was an object of revulsion. The wide-jawed, black-and-white marsupial was cast as an evil and implacably vicious brute who threatened settler Tasmanians and their sheep. Graham Renshaw's hyperbolic natural history about the 'bloodthirsty' species is characteristic, featuring sharply moral language more akin to theological denunciation than zoological description. Published in 1907, it begins:

Stupid and savage, quarrelsome, merciless, and bloodthirsty; these adjectives sum up the moral – or immoral – attributes of the subject of this Essay. Few animals indeed are hopelessly untameable, relentlessly vindictive, unceasingly ferocious; almost every species which the liberal policy of Zoological Societies has enabled the naturalist to study in captivity are capable of first enduring and afterwards appreciating, contact with civilized man [...] Therefore a singular interest attaches to the truculent subject of this Essay, a beast whose hand (or jaw) is against every man's, and every man's against his – a fourfooted Ishmael – the ursine dasyure or Tasmanian devil.¹⁶

Even the devil had its advocate, however, and from 1908, that was Mary Grant Roberts. In the first chapter we encountered Roberts as a devoutly Anglican zookeeper who combined animal protectionism with conservationist concern for native fauna. Intersecting with these engagements was Roberts' internationally respected work in zoological science, especially regarding Tasmanian devils. Countering portrayals of the species' irredeemable sanguinity, Roberts depicted a creature capable of affection, enjoyment, intelligence, and even tameness, qualities that other naturalists had overlooked because devils only displayed them when treated with care.¹⁷ Roberts staked her claims to superior expertise on her long-term, affectionate relationship with captive animals in her zoo, including some she had managed to breed and raise herself. Her assertions of a special familiarity with Tasmanian devils aligned with and contributed to her broader reputation as an idealised mother, and a particular friend to animals. This framing was remarkably successful, attracting public sympathy and scientific interest for

¹⁶ Graham Renshaw, *Final Natural History Essays* (London: Sherratt and Hughes, 1907): 211.

¹⁷ Mary G. Roberts, 'The Keeping and Breeding of Tasmanian Devils (*Sarcophilus harrisi*)', *Proceedings of the Zoological Society of London* (1915): 575-81.

Tasmanian devils and earning Roberts national and international recognition for her scientific contributions.

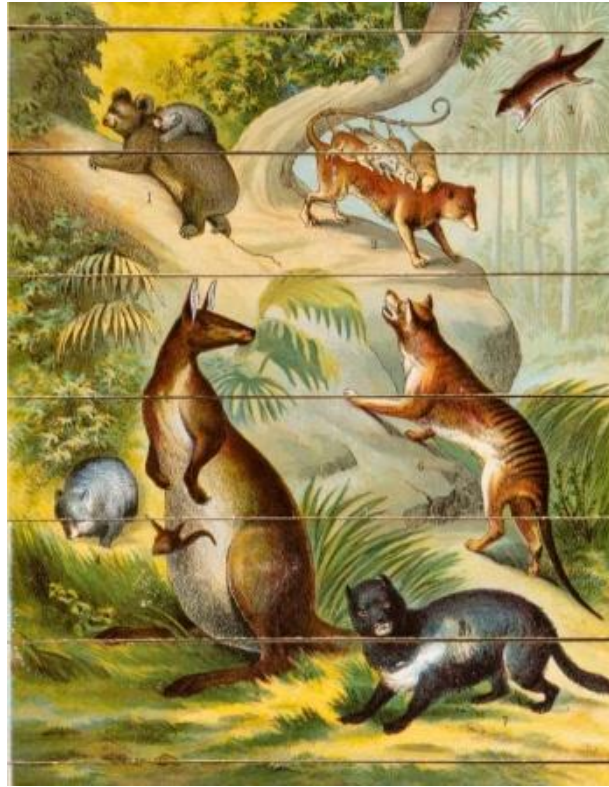


Figure 1: American children's puzzle depicting the Tasmanian devil (bottom right) and other Australian fauna. The devil's depiction is not anatomically correct and was likely painted by someone unfamiliar with the species. Nevertheless, the image reflects popular perceptions, portraying the animal as red-eyed and ferocious. 'Puzzle slips' children's toy made by McLoughlin Brothers, 1889, Object No. 99/4/71, Powerhouse Museum, Sydney.

A devilish reputation

In 1808, George Harris gave the first Western scientific description of the animal the Palawa people of Tasmania/Lutruwita had long called *purinina*. He called the species *Sarcophilus harrisii*, meaning 'flesh eater described by Harris' and noted that though the marsupials had been common when Europeans first arrived in Tasmania, they had since been 'driven from their haunts' by white settlement.¹⁸ Their equally unprepossessing common name – Tasmanian devil – seems to have derived from the otherworldly howls that frightened convicts at night. Harris' research methodology was not likely to incite sympathy for the declining species however: to discover their nature he kept two devils chained together in an empty barrel for

¹⁸ G. P. Harris, 'XI. Description of Two New Species of Didelphis from Van Diemen's Land', *Transactions of the Linnean Society of London* 9, no. 1 (1808): 177.

two months. The trapped devils fought and barked nearly incessantly, leading Harris to conclude that the nocturnal animals were ‘untameably savage’ in captivity.¹⁹

Thus began a long series of similar moral pronouncements. Almost without exception, nineteenth and early twentieth-century accounts of Tasmanian devils followed Harris’ lead in insisting that they were evil and – relatedly – impossible to tame. An especially garish article assured readers in 1871 that even if raised from infancy, this ‘impartial monster’ would never change its character nor accept its confinement, and would likely die ‘in some mad struggle with the bars of his cage’.²⁰ A local joke held that the only way to tame a Tasmanian devil was to shoot it to death.²¹ The animals’ striking set of teeth and jaws, tendency to fight one another, uncanny shrieks and growls, and ability to consume their prey in entirety (bones and all) contributed to this fearsome image, which was also conveyed pictorially through paintings, books, and toys (figure 1).²²

Observers relished the opportunities for wordplay afforded by an animal whose name and habits seemed to evoke the diabolical.²³ Even the writer and artist Louisa Meredith, typically a champion for Tasmania’s indigenous fauna, felt that whoever gave the animal its common name had ‘given the devil his due’. ‘If anyone desires to see a blacker, uglier, more savage, and more untameable beast than our ‘Devil’, he must be difficult to please’, she went on.²⁴ These widely read comments suggest the significance of beliefs about animal morality and personality from a species conservation perspective. Meredith knew Tasmanian devils were increasingly endangered, but her view of the species translated to indifference or even

¹⁹ Harris, ‘Description of Two New Species’.

²⁰ ‘The Tasmanian Devil’, *South Australian Chronicle and Weekly Mail*, 7 October 1871, 4.

²¹ Arthur Morrison, *Strand Magazine*, 1893.

²² Other early names for Tasmanian devils included ‘Beelzebub’s pup’, *Sarcophilus satanicus* (satanic flesh-lover) and *Diabolus ursinus* (Diabolical bear).

²³ See for example ‘Room for the Devil!’, *Pictorial Australian*, 1 June 1891, 87. For a later example, see a 1917 report on Melbourne Zoo’s Tasmanian devils, which the authors compared to a ‘choir consisting of imps in the infernal regions’. A. A. W. Wilkie & Amy Osborne, *Almost Human: Reminiscences from the Melbourne Zoo* (Melbourne: Whitcombe & Tombs, 1918), 56-59.

²⁴ Louisa Meredith, *Tasmanian Friends and Foes: Feathered, Furred, and Finned* (Hobart: J. Walch & Sons, 1880), 63-65. Having survived the extinction drivers which had wiped out devils on the Australian mainland (likely climate change exacerbated by pressure from humans and dingos), devils struggled to survive the onslaught of British colonisation in Tasmania which began in the early nineteenth century. Anna Brüniche-Olsen et al., ‘Ancient DNA Tracks the Mainland Extinction and Island Survival of the Tasmanian Devil’, *Journal of Biogeography* 45, no. 5 (2018): 963-76. There is little evidence that Aboriginal people ate devils, though a male skeleton was discovered in Victoria, roughly 7000 years old and wearing a necklace made from the teeth of at least forty-seven different Tasmanian devils, indicating they may have once had ceremonial significance and been hunted for body parts. Owen & Pemberton, *Tasmanian Devil*, 41-2.

enthusiasm at the possibility of extinction, which was a very real one at the turn of the twentieth century.

Roberts claimed that her interest in this much-maligned species was sparked in 1910, when the director of the Zoological Park in Sydney, Albert Sherbourne Le Souëf, asked her to attain some Tasmanian devils for the Zoological Society of London. Until then, she claimed, she had only known about the animals as stuffed museum specimens or the villains of childhood ghost tales.²⁵ This origin story situates Roberts at the heart of national and international zoological circles and links her to a powerful scientific family, but it was at least partly false, because Roberts was reportedly keeping Tasmanian devils at Beaumaris Zoo at least two years earlier.²⁶

It seems, therefore, that it was in 1908, not 1910, that Roberts received a Tasmanian devil already carrying a pouchful of very young joeys. This situation allowed the eager zookeeper to observe the infants' development almost from conception, a rare opportunity in a period when scientific understandings of marsupial reproduction remained shaky and hotly contested.²⁷ She described the mother's gentleness in endearing terms: 'The little ones hung from her pouch (heads hidden in it) and she lay still and motionless as if afraid of hurting them by moving, and allowed me to stroke her head with my hand.'²⁸ Once the four infants were old enough to leave the pouch full-time, though, Roberts decided to have the mother put down. The animal's leg had been badly injured in the trapping process, probably by a trapper named James Harrison, with whom Roberts often collaborated.

Another family member was lost when one of the infant devils escaped and was killed by fox terriers, but the three remaining devils settled in at Beaumaris and became 'an unfailing source of interest and amusement.'²⁹ Despite their dangerous reputation (or perhaps because of it) the devils were popular with visitors, particularly children. An article published in 1908 noted that a family of Tasmanian devils – accompanied by Hobart's vice-regal orchestra – was part of a fundraising afternoon at the zoo.³⁰ Roberts featured them prominently in her advertisement for

²⁵ Roberts, 'The Keeping and Breeding of Tasmanian Devils', 575.

²⁶ 'At Beaumaris. Among the Tigers and Devils', *Daily Post* (Hobart), 12 October 1908, 3. It is difficult to dismiss this as a simple oversight, since Roberts kept meticulous diaries. If she deliberately shifted the dates to credit Le Souëf, it would have been in keeping with her evident political astuteness and eagerness to secure her place in international scientific circles.

²⁷ See for example Gruber, 'Does the Platypus Lay Eggs?'.

²⁸ Framing zoo animals in anthropomorphically gendered terms was common. For further discussion see Andrew Flack and Sarah Joy Maddeaux, "'Ask of the Beasts and They Shall Teach Thee': Animal Representations in Bristol Zoo Guidebooks," *Society & Animals* 26, no. 1 (2018): 54–72.

²⁹ Roberts, 'Keeping and Breeding', 576.

³⁰ 'Beaumaris Zoo', *Mercury*, 26 November 1908, 6.

the zoo, probably printed in the early 1910s (figure 2).³¹ The species were eventually so strongly associated with Beaumaris that when an indignant supporter wrote to *The Mercury* to protest the zoo's name change in 1922, they adopted the perspective of a Tasmanian devil.³²



Figure 2 This photograph from an undated pamphlet advertising Roberts' zoo was captioned 'These curious animals are pets at "Beaumaris."' Roberts explained that the species 'has been given a "bad name" and a bad character as well, and has always been subjected to much ill usage.' Papers of the Roberts Family, NS823/1/19 Tasmanian Archives, Hobart.

In line with early-twentieth-century zoo practice, there was little attempt to keep the devils in their 'natural habitat', though Roberts felt her animals were kept in better conditions than those at other zoos.³³ Others agreed: a Sydney visitor described the devils as 'cosily housed' under 'pleasant conditions'.³⁴ From what it is possible to reconstruct, this cosy housing consisted of a wire cage, which was big enough to contain an artificial den and a pear tree which the devil joeys delighted in climbing. The cages were not completely secure: a Tasmanian devil escaped at least once, though Roberts presented the incident as proof of the species' temperance,

³¹ "'Beaumaris Zoo": Mrs H. L. Roberts' Private Zoological Collection at Battery Point', pamphlet, undated, Box NS823/14, Item NS823/4, Correspondence, Photographs, associated Papers of the Roberts Family (NS823), Tasmanian Archives, Hobart.

³² The correspondent complained that after years of caring for Tasmanian devils and recording their life histories in scientific publications, Roberts had succeeded in making Beaumaris 'well-known in the realm of science'. For this reason, the zoo's name should not be changed to the 'ultra-modern' Hobart Zoo. 'What the Devils Say', *Mercury*, 25 November 1922, 11.

³³ Keeping animals in cages was common practice for zoos in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Attitudes were changing already, however, and by the 1920s, the new Hobart Zoo and Sydney's Taronga Zoo would be experimenting with 'naturalness' in their designs for animal enclosures.

³⁴ F. Montagu Rothesy, 'Birds and Animals on Exhibition at Beaumaris', *Mercury*, 29 January 1909, 2.

because the fugitive had reserved its attacks to chickens and ducks and left the wallabies unharmed.³⁵

Raising hell

Two of the remaining devil offspring were selected by Roberts for attempted breeding, in a process recorded by Roberts in her article for the Zoological Society of London.³⁶ Though she did not comment on it, the decision to mate siblings despite the risks of incestuous breeding was probably due to the difficulty and cost of acquiring increasingly endangered devils. Though less rare and less valuable than thylacines, they were just as difficult to procure, especially in uninjured form. Unfussy eaters, devils could be relatively easily trapped with raw meat as bait over a camouflaged pit, but they were capable of subsequently escaping with their extraordinarily strong jaws. Roberts named the two devils ‘Billy’ and ‘Truganini’, no doubt expecting her audience to pick up the political and racial resonances, which we will return to: William Lanne (also known as King Billy) and Truganini were remembered as the last Tasmanian Aboriginal man and woman.

In April of 1913, Billy started aggressively defending Truganini and preventing her from leaving the den.³⁷ Following ten to twelve days of being held hostage by the ‘relentless tyrant’, Truganini was allowed to emerge. In an observation corroborated by later research, Roberts recorded a switch in power relations after mating, as the female began to be hostile and controlling towards the male.³⁸ She admitted to ignoring the advice of her correspondent William Hornaday, director of the New York Zoological Park, by keeping Billy in the same enclosure as his mate and their pouch-bound joeys, because it distressed her to see the parents unhappily separated. It seems that the territorial father ate his unweaned babies, ending Roberts’ first experiment with captive breeding.³⁹

The following year, the devils mated again, and the male was afterwards kept strictly separate. A nervous wait followed, and on 3 August a jubilant Roberts could record: ‘Little ones partly

³⁵ ‘Beaumaris Zoo’, *Mercury* (Hobart), 31 October 1910, 7; Roberts, ‘Keeping and Breeding’, 578.

³⁶ Roberts, ‘Keeping and Breeding’.

³⁷ I use Roberts’ chosen names in the following despite their problematic colonial connotations, noting Sandra Swart’s observation that, despite the unequal power dynamics of humans naming animals, ‘not naming implies estrangement from other animals and an excuse for bad treatment’ and that ‘[k]nowing the name is usually at least a start in knowing the animal’ and helps to challenge the ‘supposed vast chasm between “them” and “us”’. Sandra Swart, *Lion’s Historian: Africa’s Animal Past* (Jacana Media, 2023), 40.

³⁸ Eric Guiler, ‘The Tasmanian devil in captivity’, *International Zoo Yearbook* 11, no. 1 (1971): 32.

³⁹ Roberts, ‘Keeping and Breeding’, 577.

hanging out of pouch.’ By 30 August three healthy joeys were clinging to their mother’s fur as she ran about the enclosure, alarming Roberts with a seemingly reckless approach to parenting. She noted that the point when joeys began to leave the pouch seemed to coincide with the completion of a temporary nest constructed by the mother.⁴⁰

Roberts kept a close eye on the young animals as they grew, taking scientific notes and playing with them like ‘pets’.⁴¹ She expressed her fondness in 1915:

At the present time I have six running together, my own three and three that I bought when in their mother’s pouch. All are tame, frolicsome, and lively. I can go in and have a bit of fun with them, and when I am outside their enclosure they frequently climb the wire-netting to the height of nearly six feet, and get their little black faces close to mine with evident delight.⁴²

The racial undertones in much of Roberts’ prose about Tasmanian devils are not incidental. Like many settler Australians, including a majority of naturalists, she linked the character and fate of native animals to those of Indigenous people.⁴³ Such conflations, though all were dehumanising, could be used to starkly different political and affective ends. Accounts which insisted on Tasmanian devils’ intractable ferocity, for example, ran in tandem with claims about the impossibility of ‘taming’ Aboriginal people who remained apparently ungrateful for the unrefusable gifts of British civilisation. Consider the resonances in this statement about ‘the Central Australian aborigine’ by William Augustus Horn, the benefactor of the 1894 Horn Expedition to Central Australia:

He has no gratitude except that of the anticipatory order, and is as treacherous as Judas [...] After an experience of many years I say without hesitation that he is absolutely untameable. You may clothe and care for him for years, when suddenly the demon of unrest takes possession; he throws off all his clothing and plunges into the trackless depths of his native bush, at once reverting to his old and hideous customs [...]⁴⁴

⁴⁰ Roberts, ‘Keeping and Breeding’, 579.

⁴¹ “‘Beaumaris Zoo’: Mrs H. L. Roberts’ Private Zoological Collection at Battery Point’, pamphlet, undated, Box NS823/14, Item NS823/4, Correspondence, Papers of the Roberts Family (NS823), Tasmanian Archives, Hobart, 1. A photograph of the devils is captioned ‘These curious animals are pets at “Beaumaris”’.

⁴² Roberts, ‘Keeping and Breeding’, 580-81.

⁴³ Conflations of Aboriginal people with animals were commonplace and typically uncontroversial, including in children’s literature. In 1902, the artist Eirene Mort wrote an illustrated *Australian Alphabet*, which assigned each letter an Australian animal (C is for cockatoo, D is for dingo, and so on). The letter A was for ‘Aborigine’. Eirene Mort, *Eirene Mort’s Australian alphabet: from the collection of the Australian National Gallery* (Canberra: Australian National Gallery, 1986).

⁴⁴ W. A. Horn, ix-x. The joke that Tasmanian devils could only be tamed by being shot was also made about Aboriginal people. Alan Atkinson, *The Europeans in Australia Volume Three: Nation* (Sydney: UNSW Press, 2014), 241-2. For an earlier assertion of the impossibility of civilising Aboriginal people, see Barron Field, *On the aborigines of New Holland and Van Diemen’s Land*, in Barron Field (ed.), *Geographical Memoirs on New South Wales* (London: John Murray, 1825), 224. He assured readers that ‘the most persevering attempts have always been made, and are still making, to induce them to settle, and avail themselves of the arts of life; but they cannot be fixed, nor is it possible by any kindness or cherishing to attach them’.

These descriptions of incurable savagery reduced any sense of settler responsibility or empathy for Indigenous people's plight, and cast their approaching disappearance – like that of problematic species like the devil and thylacine – as inevitable, and not especially sad.⁴⁵

On the other hand, Roberts' racialised presentation of devils drew explicitly on a competing, condescending characterisation of Indigenous people as vulnerable and docile, innocents in need of settler Australians' protection and affection.⁴⁶ Christian white women who intervened in Indigenous people's lives around the turn of the twentieth were more likely to adopt this view.⁴⁷ Rather than irredeemable 'savages', they were 'little black playmates' who required condescension and kindness.⁴⁸ Aboriginal people were treated in this framing as children or – sometimes literally – as pets.⁴⁹ In Tasmania these ideas had a particular resonance because the Indigenous population of the island was, at the time, thought to be completely extinct. The Palawa people had been decimated by the forces of colonisation, war, and disease, in a genocidal process falsely thought to conclude with Truganini's death in 1876.⁵⁰ Roberts' choice of names – Truganini and Billy – thus serves as a potent, if flippant, symbol of extinction – more precisely, extinction at the hands of white settlers.

The monikers are made more unsettling in light of Jack Ashby's recent research, which unveils the way Tasmanian colonial trade in the remains of Aboriginal people, including the repeatedly desecrated body of William Lanne, intersected closely with the trade in native animal bodies,

⁴⁵ As Anette Bremer notes about Field, if failures of civilisation could be blamed on Aboriginal people's incurable instinct towards 'savagery', then the British colonial project avoided the taint of moral responsibility, 'unruffled by its contact with this intractable other'. Anette Bremer, 'Domestic disclosures: Letters and the representation of cross-cultural relations in early colonial New South Wales', *Frontiers: A Journal of Women's Studies* 28, 1 & 2 (2007): 82.

⁴⁶ This infantilising approach, which emphasised 'the docility, tractability and goodwill' of Aboriginal people, had a longer heritage amongst some colonists. See for example Penny Russell's account of Robert Dawson's encounters with the Worrimay people on his Port Stephens property in the 1830s, which were characterised by a 'grain of respect almost smothered under lashings of paternalism.' *Savage or Civilised?: Manners in Colonial Australia* (Sydney: NewSouth Publishing, 2011), 63; 57.

⁴⁷ There is a large body of scholarship on colonial white women's distinctive roles in engaging with and shaping ideas about Indigenous people. Margaret Jacobs, *White Mother to a Dark Race: Settler Colonialism, Maternalism, and the Removal of Indigenous Children in the American West and Australia, 1880-1940* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2009); Fiona Paisley, *Loving protection?: Australian feminism and Aboriginal Women's rights 1919-1939* (Carlton: Melbourne University Press, 2000); Joanna Cruickshank and Patricia Grimshaw, *White Women, Aboriginal Missions and Australia Settler Governments: Maternal Contradictions* (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2019).

⁴⁸ Roberts, 'Keeping and Breeding', 581.

⁴⁹ Penny Russell, "'Unhomely moments': Civilising domestic worlds in colonial Australia', *The History of the Family* 14, no. 4 (2009): 327-39. See also Ellen Campbell's recollections of adopting an Aboriginal child as a 'pet'. Ellen Campbell, *An Australian Childhood* (London: Blackie & Son, 1892), ch. IX.

⁵⁰ For the life of Truganini, see Cassandra Pybus, *Truganini: journey through the apocalypse* (Crows Nest, NSW: Allen & Unwin, 2020). The most comprehensive account of the experience of Aboriginal people in Tasmania remains Lyndall Ryan, *The Aboriginal Tasmanians* (St. Lucia, QLD: University of Queensland Press, 1981).

including thylacines. I have not found evidence that Roberts took part in trading human remains, but she was part of the same museological and scientific networks at the centre of Ashby's discoveries.⁵¹ As in so many other cases around the turn of the twentieth century, the study of animals and the study of Aboriginal people were mutually reinforcing phenomena.

Better the devil you know

Roberts' promotion of her 'frolicsome' devils flew in the face of mainstream accounts of the species, painting a picture of sweet, tameable, and safe animals, who were capable of play, emotional intimacy, and pleasure. Stories of baby devils enjoying a bath, or a mother gently protecting her joeys, endeared the animal to readers far more than the usual stories of gnashing teeth and nightmarish screaming.⁵² The zookeeper took pleasure in defying expectations of her visitors, who 'express[ed] surprise when they see them so lively, sprightly and excited, running out to my call'.⁵³

Crucially, Roberts argued that the basis for her special understanding of these animals, and her unparalleled success in breeding and keeping them, lay in her emotional familiarity with the particular Tasmanian devils at her zoo, and a relationship with them of care and mutual affection. There is evident pride in her description of how a nursing mother was content to be picked up and stroked, or of the way baby devils would run to her when she approached their cage.⁵⁴ Her devils, she explained, were 'frolicsome' and 'tame', because they were treated with kindness. The article's conclusion implied an admonishment of other naturalists and scientists who had misrepresented the species:

Others who *do not know or understand them*, may think of them as they like, *but I, who love them*, and have had considerable experience in keeping most of our marsupials, from the Thylacine down to the Opossum Mouse, will always regard them as first favourites, my little black playmates.⁵⁵

⁵¹ Jack Ashby, 'How Collections and Reputation Were Built out of Tasmanian Violence: Thylacines (Thylacinus Cynocephalus) and Aboriginal Remains from Morton Allport (1830–1878)', *Archives of Natural History* 50, no. 2 (2023): 244–64.

⁵² Roberts, 'Keeping and Breeding', 580.

⁵³ Roberts, 'Keeping and Breeding', 576.

⁵⁴ Roberts, 'Keeping and Breeding', 575.

⁵⁵ Roberts, 'Keeping and Breeding', 581 (my emphasis).

Assertions of knowing an individual animal, in the sense not only of zoological mastery but of familiarity and shared intimacy, imply a mutual understanding with another knower: the animal. Roberts' implication that Tasmanian devils and tigers were capable of an emotional and intellectual relationship between humans and 'pets' was especially significant because it countered longstanding claims about Australian animals' stupidity. Colonising naturalists had often assumed that Australian marsupials were less evolved and less intelligent than their placental counterparts which dominated Europe, and interpreted their behaviour accordingly.⁵⁶ Renshaw, for example, attributed devils' propensity to gnaw off their own legs when caught in a trap, not to desperation or strength, but to an inability to feel pain.⁵⁷

Assumptions about marsupials' lack of intelligence could extend to a belief that they were insensitive to physical suffering.⁵⁸ In this light, devils' seeming refusal to accept a state of captivity was interpreted as mental inadaptability or derangement, such as in this lurid depiction of a caged devil: 'After years of experience he repeats the same acts of profitless and exhausting frenzy. Without apparent motive he rushes at the wall, beating the air like a rabid lunatic'.⁵⁹ In sharp contrast, Roberts' presentation of Tasmanian devils as potential friends who could feel delight, affection, terror, or pain, and who could *know and be known* by the right kind of human companion, pointed to a need for humane treatment and conservation.

Roberts' claims to a special familiarity with Tasmanian devils aligned with and contributed to her broader reputation as a maternal figure to her animals, with a remarkable capacity to care for and understand them (Figure 3). Many congratulated her on the apparent wellbeing of the animals, often comparing them to other zoos in Australia where the same could not be said, and implicitly or explicitly referencing her gender.⁶⁰ In 1904, for example, Roberts hosted a fete to raise money for a new Maternity Hospital for mothers in Hobart. Arthur Budden, who was visiting from Hunters Hill in New South Wales, attended the event, and paused upon his departure to reflect in the visitor's book. He commended Roberts on her achievements:

⁵⁶ Jack Ashby, 'The political platypus and colonial koala – decolonising the way we talk about Australian animals', *Journal of Natural Science Collections* 9 (2021): 35-45.

⁵⁷ Renshaw, 'Tasmanian Devil', 211-12.

⁵⁸ Robert Paddle, *The Last Tasmanian Tiger* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 206.

⁵⁹ 'Tasmanian Devil', *South Australian Chronicle and Weekly Mail*, 4. One interesting variant on this theory held that that Tasmanian devils were stupid and sluggish during the day, but during the night took on a 'cunning and cleverness inseparably connected in the human mind with the original owners of the despised name of devil.' Osborne and Wilkie, *Almost Human*, 59.

⁶⁰ See for example Richard Smith, 15 April 1908, Beaumaris Visitor's Book, NS823, Tasmanian Archives, Hobart.

Mrs Roberts is a great example to the women of the present generation. Has reared a fine family and in addition has reared an innumerable number of Birds & feathered Fowl and is now rearing a Maternity Home where the rearing will never cease.⁶¹

Budden's framing evokes the maternalist feminism of the era, which stressed white women's alleged inherently womanly qualities, like being maternal, moral, caring, and religious, as justification for their greater participation in public life.⁶² Roberts' accomplishments in her family life (she had five children), zookeeping, and charity were seen as linked, falling under the same umbrella of her qualities as mother and woman. She was seen as a 'foster mother' to 'unique and all but miraculous animals.'⁶³



Figure 3 Mary Grant Roberts feeding the wallabies at Beaumaris Zoo. Papers of the Roberts Family, NS823, Tasmanian Archives, Hobart.

⁶¹ Arthur Budden, c.1904, Beaumaris Visitor's Book, Papers of the Roberts Family, NS823, Tasmanian Archives, Hobart.

⁶² Seth Koven and Sonya Michel, eds. *Mothers of a New World: Maternalist Politics and the Origins of Welfare States* (New York: Routledge, 1993); Marian Quartly & Judith Smart, *Respectable Radicals: A History of the National Council of Women of Australia, 1896-2006* (Melbourne: Monash University Publishing, 2015); James Keating, '“Woman as Wife, mother, and Home-Maker”: Equal Rights International and Australian Feminists' Interwar Advocacy for Mothers' Economic Rights', *Signs* 47, no. 4 (2022): 957-85.

⁶³ Lily Butler, Beaumaris Visitor's Book, 25 March 1921.

Considering Roberts' emotional and professional investments in challenging negative descriptions of Tasmanian devils, some level of embellishment might be suspected. Her account, however, does correspond with contemporary reports on the noticeably tractable Tasmanian devils available for visitors to observe during a tour of Beaumaris. *The Sun* headlined their 1912 feature with what seemed the two most paradoxical aspects of the zoo: 'Woman Zoologist. Lovable Devils.'⁶⁴ At the first R.S.P.C.A meeting to be held in Tasmania after the First World War, Governor Francis Newdegate commented on the 'docility' of the Tasmanian devils and Tasmanian tigers at Beaumaris Zoo, attributing it to the kindness which they had experienced. He expressed wonder at watching a Tasmanian devil place its nose in her outstretched hands.⁶⁵ Roberts' favourable characterisation of Tasmanian devils also aligns with more recent research, which shows the animals to be generally timid and rarely threatening to humans unless provoked.⁶⁶ Greg Irons, who is currently the director of the Bonorong Wildlife Sanctuary in Tasmania, describes his experiences of caring for orphaned devils in remarkably similar terms to Roberts. Like her, he compares their personalities to affectionate puppies and recounts the way grown devils have remembered and showed affection to him throughout their lives, jumping up on his lap when approached.⁶⁷ 'You don't really know them till you hand-raise them', Irons told me, 'when they completely and utterly trust you and see you as their mum'.⁶⁸

It makes sense that earlier naturalists, like Harris, who primarily met with devils distressed by recent trapping, injury, and confinement, gained an impression of uncontrollable hostility. Roberts' prolonged interactions with individuals who were not constantly fearful, defensive, or in pain, led to a more expansive view of their temperaments. This contrast indicates that Roberts' style of gendered intimacy-based expertise was not only a helpful packaging for women seeking to be heard and believed in male-dominated intellectual spaces, but a methodology in itself, which deeply shaped the *kind* of knowledge produced.

After Roberts' death in 1921, she was acknowledged as an 'ardent and well-known zoologist' and 'probably the greatest authority on the character and habits of the Tasmanian devil and the

⁶⁴ 'Woman Zoologist. Lovable Devils.', *The Sun* (Sydney), 11 August 1912. It is not clear whether the author was drawing a causal link between the two phenomena, though many of the zoo's visitors seemed to do so.

⁶⁵ 'S.P.C.A.', *Mercury* (Hobart), 18 June 1919, 8.

⁶⁶ Karin Cox, 'Going to the Devil: Australia's Largest Marsupial Carnivore Proves More Timid than Terrifying', *Wildlife Australia* 55, no. 3 (September 2018): 29-34.

⁶⁷ Roberts, 'Keeping and Breeding', 580.

⁶⁸ Greg Irons, personal communication, 27 March 2024. Irons added that these boisterous puppies appear to be 'on drugs'.

Tasmanian tiger’ – a remarkable accolade for a woman who had never received formal scientific or zoological training.⁶⁹ As David Owen and David Pemberton have shown, Roberts’ work with Tasmanian devils permeated scientific circles, which were small but growing in Australia, helping to raise awareness about a previously unbeloved and rarely studied animal.⁷⁰ She drew the attention and assistance of Tasmanian scientists including the University of Tasmania’s first Professor of Biology, Theodore Thomson Flynn, who assisted Roberts during her attempts at breeding the devils, drew on her zoological collection in his own work, and went on to become a leading expert in marsupial reproductive biology.⁷¹ His son Errol, later an infamous Hollywood actor, assisted in the research and was probably one of many schoolchildren who visited devils at Beaumaris. Errol gave the name ‘Tasmanian devil’ to the first chapter of his salacious autobiography *My Wicked, Wicked Ways*, attempting a sexy spin on the marsupial’s reputation for wild wrongdoing.⁷² Roberts would not have approved.

In her final years, during which she continued to work, the tenacious zookeeper could draw satisfaction from the change in how devils were described, largely thanks to her work. Grisly depictions of wanton violence retained (and retain) their currency, but accusations were typically tempered by reference to Roberts’ contrasting findings. A 1920 feature in a Hobart newspaper took pride in ‘our very own’ Tasmanian devil, noting that ‘elsewhere he has achieved, possibly largely on account of his unprepossessing title, a wholly exaggerated reputation as a savage’. The reporter quoted from John Gould’s frightening account of the devil’s bone-cracking jaws and unconquerable ferocity, but followed with a counterpoint from Roberts, who had raised them to be ‘great pets’.⁷³

⁶⁹ ‘Knew the Devil Well’, *Sun* (Sydney), 28 November 1921, 2.

⁷⁰ Her relationship to the Tasmanian and international scholarly community is an especially interesting one when we consider developing norms of modern science which tended to entail the refusal of empathy for individual animals, as a prerequisite for professionalism and objectivity. Flack & Gaynor, ‘Frogs and Feeling Communities’, 88.

⁷¹ David Owen and David Pemberton, *Tasmanian Tiger: The tragic story of the thylacine* (Crows Nest, NSW: Allen & Unwin, 2023), 93.

⁷² Errol Flynn, *My Wicked, Wicked Ways* (London: Heinemann, 1959). This would not be the species’ only brush with television fame: the studio which made Errol’s career, Warner Bros, internationalised the Tasmanian devil’s reputation in 1954 with the creation of the volatile Looney Tunes character, Taz. Pemberton and Owen, *Tasmanian Devil*, 148-58.

⁷³ ‘Our Tasmanian Devil’, *World* (Hobart), 19 January 1920, 3.

Knowing Lyrebirds

Beaumaris Zoo represented one kind of space – peri-urban and relatively controlled – where settler Australians could go to interact with native animals. In the early twentieth century, however, many settler Australians were seeking out opportunities to engage with the more-than-human world in wilder spaces. In this second case study, we trace the interactions of mountain guide and nature photographer Alice Manfield with a family of lyrebirds living on Mount Buffalo, in southeastern Victoria, and the ways she mediated knowledge about them.⁷⁴ A strikingly modern woman in many respects, with her independent and outdoor lifestyle, embrace of an emergent conservationist ethos more concerned with photographing birds than stuffing them for the mantelpiece, and her handmade trousers, Manfield's knowledge-making about the natural environment was also invested in romanticised visions of a colonial past that elided the history of the Mogullumbidj people, the original owners of Mount Buffalo. The hospitable and knowledgeable 'Fair Maid of Mount Buffalo' made settler visitors feel at home on colonised land.

Manfield grew up with her family in the Mount Buffalo area, and was a popular mountain guide by the mid-1910s, taking visitors and packhorses up the mountain for three-to-four-day trips, and teaching them about the area and its animal and plant life. She seemed to appreciate the nickname 'Guide Alice', using it on the cover of her book and to sign off an angry letter to the newspaper condemning vandalism on Mount Buffalo.⁷⁵ In her own reflections, Alice recalled tourists' excitement at tasks such as boiling the billy, laying meals out on the grass, and making their own beds from heather and snowgrass. To close out each night on the mountain, guests would gather around a campfire to share stories, songs, and hot toddies.⁷⁶ Although campfire dinners and snowy hikes were unusual in most Buffalo tourists' daily lives, these experiences evoked the myth of an authentic Australianness believed to have been forged and perpetuated

⁷⁴ In popular memory, Alice Manfield is still recalled on tours of Mount Buffalo, in the name of a lookout she loved as a child, in a recently published children's book, and as a nostalgic symbol in campaigns to protect the Mount Buffalo National Park. But perhaps because of the double impediment of belonging to the category of nature writers, who Tom Griffiths has argued have been overlooked thanks to their amateur and public-facing status, and of being a woman in male-dominated fields, she is largely absent from scholarly histories of Australian women, science, ornithology or animal relations more generally. Tom Griffiths, "'The Natural History of Melbourne': The Culture of Nature Writing in Victoria, 1880-1945", *Australian Historical Studies* 23, no. 93 (October 1989): 340.

⁷⁵ Alice Manfield, 'Destruction at Mount Buffalo', *Argus*, 24 August 1914, 14.

⁷⁶ Alice Manfield "'Pioneering Days" of Mount Buffalo', *Age*, 18 July 1936, 9.

in dangerous bush settings.⁷⁷ Connecting to this romantic ideal, with its associated stories and images of hardy bushmen, was a culturally powerful way to foster settler belonging, especially for the majority of settler Australians who lived in cities by the turn of the twentieth century; indeed, some of the concept's biggest literary proponents were writers and poets based in Sydney.⁷⁸



Figure 4: Alice Manfield's tours attracted a wide range of guests, who she liked to photograph perched in precarious positions. 'Clergyman and five nuns sitting on rock drinking tea, teapot between them, Mt. Buffalo, Vic.', ca. 1890/1930, Alice Manfield Collection, H2003.96/28, State Library of Victoria, Melbourne.

Aside from the thrill of intrepid outdoor life, tourists also appreciated the depth of Manfield's knowledge. Tourists were all the more impressed because it appears that Manfield spent only eighteen months in formal school education, at the nearby township in Porepunkah. In place of

⁷⁷ This trope, most famously presented in Russel Ward, *The Australian Legend* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1958), valorised a highly masculine and hardy 'bushman', who was often independent from matrimonial and familial commitments. There is a significant body of scholarship investigating women's complex roles and negotiations within this masculinist nationalist mythology. See for example: Marilyn Lake, 'Frontier Feminism and the Marauding White Man', *Journal of Australian Studies* 20, no. 49 (1996): 12–20; Karen Twigg, "'Dust, Dryness and Departure': Constructions of Masculinity and Femininity during the WWII Drought", *History Australia* 18, no. 4 (2021): 694–713; Kay Schaffer, *Women and the Bush* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), especially 22–3.

⁷⁸ Graeme Davison, 'Sydney and the bush: An urban context for the Australian legend', *Australian Historical Studies* 18, no. 71 (1978): 191–209.

‘copy-book platitudes’, one reporter enthused, she had ‘reaped her scholastic education from nature study in her native forest.’⁷⁹ Recipients of this Mount Buffalo tutelage included botanist Ferdinand Von Mueller and General John Monash, the latter of whom praised her abilities. When the composer Percy Grainger visited, he wrote a piece of music inspired by the stream outside Buffalo House.⁸⁰

Also contributing to her fame as a guide was Manfield’s clothing. In a time when women walkers were still hampered by long skirts and when would-be bathers in Lake Catani were compelled to wear ‘neck-to-knee’ swimming costumes, Guide Alice stood out in an outfit of her own design (Figure 4). Her signature look consisted of a handmade pantsuit and sturdy shoes allowing for easy climbing, bloomers up to the knees and a jacket buttoned to the neckline and cinched at the waist, topped off by a warm beanie and walking pole.⁸¹ In the late 1920s and 1930s, as the bushwalking craze gathered momentum and Australian women increasingly embraced new activities, spaces, and modes of expression, the wearing of pants and even shorts during outdoor leisure activities became far more common.⁸² But during Manfield’s most active guiding period, she would usually have been the only woman on the mountain wearing her transgressive style of dress.

The outfit clearly held a practical purpose for a woman whose work demanded physical dexterity and endurance— she was forced at least once to drag female guests to safety when their skirts were caught in the snow and rocks – but Manfield also seemed to take a self-conscious pride in her wardrobe. One of her staged photographs juxtaposes sturdy-looking lace-up boots against a much smaller pair of delicate, embroidered high-heels. She captioned it ‘City Shoes & Mountain Boots’.⁸³ A 1993 National Parks retrospective claimed that contemporary women’s groups were appalled by Alice’s unconventional clothes, but there is

⁷⁹ ‘On the Alps: The Girl Guide’, *Herald* (Melbourne), 17 October 1911, 3.

⁸⁰ Manfield, ‘Pioneering Days’, 9.

⁸¹ Harper, *Ways of the Bushwalker*, 20.

⁸² Later, as the bushwalking craze gathered momentum in the 1930s, the wearing of pants and even shorts by women participating in outdoor leisure became more common, though some religious leaders were concerned. The Archbishop of Brisbane warned, not incorrectly, that practical clothing on the hiking track might lead to an expansion of women’s literal and metaphorical spheres of action: ‘Men getting into women’s clothing is quite bad enough but the reverse is worse’, he wrote. ‘I know that young girls dressed in men’s garments would go to places where they would never venture in their proper attire.’ ‘Sunday Hiking Movement: Views of Church Leaders’, *Telegraph* (Brisbane), 13 July 1932.

⁸³ ‘City Shoes & Mountain Boots’, Alice Manfield Collection, State Library of Victoria, Melbourne.

little evidence of this hostility.⁸⁴ It is probably closer to the truth to say, like Harper, that the outfit ‘caused a stir’, even adding to the excitement of a trip with the celebrated and quirky Guide Alice.⁸⁵



Figure 5 ‘Guide Alice on Mt. Buffalo’, wearing her signature pantsuit, c. 1910. Alice Manfield Collection, H2003.95, State Library of Victoria, Melbourne.

If the pantsuit raised any doubts about appropriate levels of femininity, her admirers were quick to assuage them. The same reporter who complimented her unusual education called Alice ‘a fine type of young Australian womanhood, sunkissed, lithe and strong’, calling to mind the patriotic trope of the athletic and independent ‘Australian girl’.⁸⁶ Enthusiastic tour members

⁸⁴ L. Roberts, ‘A Maid of the Mountains’, *Park Watch* no. 174 (1993): 12–3. The account echoes the romantic depictions of Manfield in the early twentieth century.

⁸⁵ Harper, *Ways of the Bushwalker*, 20.

⁸⁶ ‘On the Alps’. For an analysis of this trope, which was often contrasted to an image of a weaker English girl, see Angela Woollacott, *To Try Her Fortune in London* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 57–9. See also Gillian Sykes, ‘The New Woman in the New World: Evelyn Dickinson and a New Type of Australian Heroine’, *Australian Studies* 16.1 (2001): 1–21 (3) and Tanya Dalziel, *Settler Romances and the Australian Girl* (Perth: UWA Publishing, 2004).

paired compliments about Alice's knowledge and skills with compliments concerning her womanhood. Writing in a Mount Buffalo visitor's book, dozens of grateful people recorded their admiration for Alice's warmth, physical beauty, hospitality and cooking skills, alongside her remarkable knowledge and photographic ability. She was a 'fair maiden' and a 'fair angel'. A number of contributors to the visitor's book were spurred to poetry. One poem concluded:

The fauna flock round her from mountain and plain,
To them she's most kindly, discrete [sic] and humane.
E'en the lyre birds are lured from their tangle and tile
Through her kindness to bask in this fair maiden's smile.
Yea, these shiest of creatures, with silvery tongue,
Grace Alice's album, safeguarding their young.
And they join with the warblers that sing in the dale
Their love songs to Alice of Buffalo Vale.⁸⁷

These 'shiest of creatures', the lyrebirds, had been plentiful when the Manfields had first established themselves on Mount Buffalo. Unfamiliar with the species, Alice's mother Jane had assumed the brown, ground-dwelling birds gathered around her home must be turkeys.⁸⁸ Given that lyrebirds were reported to surreptitiously feed alongside settlers' chickens, her visitors were likely seeking out food. Other birds responded to the new human incursion with more aggression: wedge-tailed eagles stymied settlement plans for the mountains with their 'curious and decided objection to the red flags of surveyors'.⁸⁹

In common with other lyrebird-inhabited areas of Australia, white settlement in the Buffalo mountains led to a rapid reduction in their population, due to hunting, a trade in their feathers, introduced species, and the clearing of the wet, scrubby forest which constituted their habitat. Alice remembered being enchanted by lyrebird song as a young girl, when she first snuck out of home to climb Mount Buffalo, but by the time she was old enough to be taking her own tours of the mountain, a lyrebird sighting was a rarity, and cause for excitement.⁹⁰

⁸⁷ Newmarket, W.S., 'A tourist's trip to Mount Buffalo' [Visitor's book entry], ca. 1912-1927, MS 14125, Press clippings and Visitors' book from the Manfield Guest House: 1912-1927, State Library of Victoria, Melbourne.

⁸⁸ A. E. Kitson, 'Notes on the Victoria Lyre-Bird (*Menura Victoriana*)', *Emu* 5, no. 2 (October 1905): 57-67.

⁸⁹ D. Le Souëf, 'Bird Life on the Buffalo Mountains in March', *Emu* 7, no. 1 (1 July 1907): 40-41.

⁹⁰ Kitson, 'Notes on the Victoria Lyre-Bird'.

Alice first discovered a lyrebird's nest, which she dubbed the 'Lyre-birds' nursery', tucked into a crevice on the edge of a 500-metre cliff wall and overlooking the famous Mount Buffalo Gorge.⁹¹ Lyrebird nests are generally made up of a podium of sticks supporting a large, dome-shaped protective chamber for the egg.⁹² Manfield's discovery fits this description, with its 'rounded mass of sticks and leaves' and an interior snugly lined with moss. She was initially sceptical about how the birds could have dragged the alpine shrubbery to the location and shaped it into position, but concluded that 'no other explanation was possible'.⁹³ The nest was already cradling a speckled, purplish-grey egg, about the size of a chicken's.⁹⁴ Thrilled, and knowing the mother bird must be close by, Manfield hid in a hollow tree trunk with her camera. The mother lyrebird did shortly appear, settling onto the nest, sweeping her tail behind her back, and arranging some sticks to cover her from view. It all happened too fast for the clandestine mountaineer to react.⁹⁵

Disappointed but undeterred, Manfield returned to the same spot day after day, trying a new technique of habituating the male and female birds to her presence. She sat in full view of the nest for hours on end, mimicking the mournful sounds of the Southern Boobook owl all the while. One day, the female slowly approached and appeared to greet her by attempting the same Boobook call. 'To my great joy', Manfield wrote later, 'I found I had secured her friendship'.⁹⁶ When the egg hatched about a month later (placing it at about twenty days' old when Manfield first came across it), she was taken with the baby bird's 'quaint appearance', with his large feet on a tiny body covered in soft down.⁹⁷ Now that the mother was freer to move from the nest, Manfield felt that their friendship deepened – the female bird would respond as soon as she heard Manfield arrive, leaping back and forth between rocks and attempting to imitate the visitor's voice. Food offerings were firmly rejected by the mother bird, who took the meat and bread in her beak and threw it away.

⁹¹ Manfield, *Lyre-birds*, 7-9.

⁹² Alex C. Maissey et al., 'Environmental Influences on Variation in Nest-Characteristics in a Long-Term Study Population of the Superb Lyrebird, *Menura Novaehollandiae*', *Emu* 116, no. 4 (24 May 2016): 445-51.

⁹³ Alice Manfield, 'Making Friends with Lyre-Birds', *The school magazine of literature for our boys and girls* 6, no. 9, part 3 (2 October 1921): 130.

⁹⁴ Manfield, 'Making Friends', 130.

⁹⁵ Manfield, 'Making Friends', 131.

⁹⁶ Manfield, 'Making Friends', 131.

⁹⁷ Manfield, *Lyre-birds*, 13.

After many attempts, and a number of successful photographs of the female, Manfield had still not succeeded in her goal of capturing the male on camera. He was less shy around her now, but still wary, and frustrated photographic efforts, like those of so many others, by staying in near-continual motion. The first photograph of the male was finally procured when she removed the four-week-old chick from its nest. The mother shrieked indignation and brought the father running to his small family's aid, allowing Manfield, who had quickly hidden herself again, to snap a hurried picture. She assured readers that on such occasions, '[p]eace was easily restored' thanks to the friendship established 'by patience and quietness' between the parents and herself.⁹⁸ But when the adult lyrebirds removed the chick from the nest 'before their darling was fully feathered', Manfield acknowledged her intrusions may have been the cause of their premature move.



Figure 6 Likely Alice Manfield's first photograph of the male lyrebird, c. 1910. Alice Manfield Collection, State Library of Victoria, Melbourne.

In 1924, Manfield published a short book with Robertson and Mullen Publishers called *The Lyre-Birds of Mount Buffalo*, showcasing her groundbreaking photographs and detailing her observations of and interactions with the avian family she knew so well. The book was well

⁹⁸ Manfield, *Lyrebirds*, 11, 15.

received by reviewers who commended Manfield's 'infinite patience and strategy' and acknowledged the uniqueness of her achievements. *The Lyre-Birds of Mount Buffalo* was suggested as a suitable gift for 'nature lovers', especially as a reminder of Australia for loved ones overseas.⁹⁹ *The Argus* credited the author for gradually gaining the trust of her photographic subjects in order to capture images 'such as many nature photographers have coveted, but few obtained.' The review assumes Manfield's general fame as a mountain guide and implies she should now also be recognised for her gifts as a naturalist.¹⁰⁰

Manfield's accomplishments went unmentioned in the leading Australasian ornithological journal and organ of the Royal Australasian Ornithological Union (RAOU), *The Emu*. The omission is surprising given that the problems of photographing and understanding lyrebirds was a well-canvassed topic in its pages.¹⁰¹ Reclusive and unusual, lyrebirds frustrated scientists' efforts to classify and comprehend them well into the twentieth century. Prominent ornithologist J A Leach claimed in 1929 that the lyrebird, 'Australia's mystery bird', had caused more scientific controversy than any other.¹⁰² Despite or perhaps because of the difficulty of capturing it on camera, the species was at the forefront of ornithological efforts to photograph, film, or record Australian avian life.¹⁰³ Nature enthusiast and later president of the RAOU, Ray Littlejohns, complained that it was difficult to secure funding for these costly technological forays, except when it came to lyrebird-related expeditions. That exception, he felt, was thanks to the appeal of the bird's 'extremely romantic life'.¹⁰⁴ Ornithological photography was valued not only as a means of popularising the study of birds, or of promoting birds' protection as in the case of Arthur Mattingley's famous photographs of starving egrets, but as a method of scientific enquiry. RAOU president and nature photographer Norman Chaffer reflected in his 1956 address that photography had played a crucial role for the organisation in the preceding decades by generating interest and gleaning 'many new facts of scientific value'.¹⁰⁵

⁹⁹ 'The Lyre Birds of Mount Buffalo', *Huon Times* (Franklin, Tasmania), November 14, 1924, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article136039110>.

¹⁰⁰ 'New Books', *Argus*, 23 August 1924.

¹⁰¹ See for example Michael Sharland, 'Photographing the Lyrebird', *Emu* 30, no. 2 (October 1, 1930): 88-96; L. C. Cook, 'Lyre-Birds and the Camera', *Emu* 14, no. 1 (July 1914): 66-68; 'Mr. Littlejohns' Lyre-Bird Film,' *Emu* 27, no. 3 (January 1, 1928): 220-21.

¹⁰² J. A. Leach, 'The Lyrebird – Australia's Wonder-Bird', *Emu* 28, no. 3 (January 1929): 199.

¹⁰³ Libby Robin, 'Living with Lyrebirds', *Kunapipi* 29, no. 2 (2007): 129-30.

¹⁰⁴ R. T. Littlejohns, 'In Quest of Unusual Bird Photographs', *Emu* 32, no. 4 (1 April 1933): 259-62.

¹⁰⁵ Norman Chaffer, 'The Development and Progress of Bird Photography in Australia', *Emu* 56, no. 1 (1 February 1956): 62-68.

It was an RAOU member, however, the prominent nature writer and ornithologist Charles Barrett, who wrote the foreword for Manfield's book. The romanticised description gives a sense of how she was perceived by fellow naturalists and ornithologists, the vast majority of whom were men. 'There are forest maids in fiction – beautiful romantic and impossible', he began. 'In Australia there are Bush Girls whose lives have been coloured by romance', he continued, and went on to describe Manfield's 'strange, romantic life' as a child of pioneers, who grew up without playmates and instead made 'friends with the hills'. Barrett admits his envy as a fellow naturalist: 'Many of us, who hunt with a camera, have tried, year after year in nesting time, to add the male Lyre-bird to our "bag" - and we have always failed.'¹⁰⁶ He attributed Manfield's accomplishment to her capacity to win the trust and friendship of her subjects, and to 'know their ways so well'.¹⁰⁷ Her close, long-term knowledge of and friendship with the natural environment was treated as the basis of her expertise.

In 1925, after publishing *Lyrebirds of Mount Buffalo*, Manfield put a notice in the newspaper for any other nature photographers who would like to be guided to the cliffside location where she had observed the birds. She was humble about her achievements but noted that she had been told she was 'the only person who ever procured a photograph of the male bird in its natural state.'¹⁰⁸ Given the popularity and rarity of the lyrebird, it is likely a number of naturalists would have taken up this offer, perhaps including Barrett. Apparently, Manfield never accepted compensation for any of her touring services, and no fee is requested in this article.¹⁰⁹ If this is true, perhaps her offer to introduce other enthusiasts to the lyrebirds expressed a wish to establish herself as an authority on Mount Buffalo wildlife, one who could graciously grant access to her scientific subjects and friends. In another instance, Manfield denied this access, refusing the Tasmanian government's offer to buy two lyrebird eggs for fifty pounds (roughly 5000 Australian dollars today).¹¹⁰ The decision suggests a reluctance to interfere any further with the offspring of birds she felt had come to trust her, as well as a more general opposition to the increasingly controversial practice of egg-collecting, or oology, in natural history.

¹⁰⁶ Charles Barrett, foreword to *Lyre-birds of Mount Buffalo*, by Alice Manfield (Melbourne: Robertson & Mullens, 1924), 1.

¹⁰⁷ Barrett, *Lyre-birds of Mount Buffalo*, 1.

¹⁰⁸ 'Photographing Lyrebirds', *Argus*, 1 October 1925, 15.

¹⁰⁹ Lindsay Roberts, 'A Maid of the Mountains', *Parkwatch* (Victorian National Parks Association) no. 175 (December 1993): 13.

¹¹⁰ Hoy, *Historiette*, 2.

Manfield made her emotional and relational knowledge claim at a time when violent and acquisitive methods of natural history were being challenged but not eradicated, and greater emotional and nationalistic value was placed on native fauna. A growing number of scientists and naturalists realised that older styles of ‘collecting’ animals – killing them in large numbers for the purposes of dissection and display – risked threatening the species they purported to care about. The 700 bird skins collected during a single expedition in 1885 seemed far less acceptable to ornithologists by the early decades of the twentieth century, and the RAOU was riven by disputes over the killing of even individual birds during their field trips.¹¹¹ In his 1929 Presidential Address, Dr. E. A. D’Ombrain acknowledged that collecting was ‘a very contentious subject, and one in which bigotry, over-zeal, and settled conviction on each side are apt to lead supporters of either colour into acrimonious and bitter argument’.¹¹²

These tensions persisted well into the twentieth century. Slowly but surely, however, weighty handbooks for identifying lifeless specimens in museums and private collections – ‘the bird in the hand, not the bird in the bush’, – were steadily supplanted by handy field guides aimed at non-invasive and edifying birdwatching, like J. A. Leach’s *Australian Bird Book* (1911) and Neville Cayley’s *What Bird Is That?* (1931).¹¹³ Alec Chisholm, one of Australia’s best-known naturalists of the twentieth century, published probably his most influential work, *Mateship with Birds*, in 1922. His evocative title resonated with the nationalist sentiments already being developed in relation to native animals, but also speaks to a new kind of relationship with some native species being promoted in Australia, one of friendship – albeit friendship coded as male – rather than exploitation, and live study and photography rather than hunting and taxidermy. A year before *Mateship with Birds* was published, Manfield encouraged children to pursue a similarly convivial relationship. ‘Making Friends with Lyrebirds’ was the name of her article, which recounted her discovery and befriending of the Mount Buffalo lyrebird family.¹¹⁴

¹¹¹ *Emu* XI (1 January 1912): 156; Libby Robin, *Flight of the Emu* (Carlton: Melbourne University Press, 2001), 100-103. In his 1929 Presidential Address, Dr. E. A. D’Ombrain canvassed the issue of collecting and non-collecting, acknowledging that it was ‘a very contentious subject, and one in which bigotry, over-zeal, and settled conviction on each side are apt to lead supporters of either colour into acrimonious and bitter argument’.
Emu XXVIII (1929): 225.

¹¹² *Emu* XXVIII (1929): 225.

¹¹³ Russell McGregor, ‘J. A. Leach’s *Australian Bird Book*: At the Interface of Science and Recreation’, *Historical Records of Australian Science* 33, no. 2 (30 May 2022): 97.

¹¹⁴ Alice Manfield, ‘Making Friends with Lyre-Birds’, *The school magazine of literature for our boys and girls* 6, no. 9, part 3 (2 October 1921): 2.

These narratives of friendship with animals promoted conservationist aims – you were less likely to shoot a lyrebird for its feathers or rob its nest if you saw it as a friend or mate. They also, relatedly, encouraged a sense of emotional connection to the Australian continent and its wildlife, that foregrounded indigenous animals and obscured Indigenous people. A number of scholars in recent decades have stressed the colonial violence and historical erasure underpinning the emergence and maintenance of these national parks in the settler-colonial world. Tracey Banivanua Mar has influentially argued that in order to create these spaces of patriotism-inducing ‘wilderness’ for settler citizens to appreciate, the Indigenous occupants of the land had first to be physically and imaginatively eliminated.¹¹⁵ This removal was not incidental but, rather, was ‘as critical to the colony’s creation of an authentic wilderness as the marking of boundaries’, given that ‘notions of wilderness were essentially empty spaces in the colonial imagination, and necessarily emptied spaces in colonial histories.’¹¹⁶

Mount Buffalo National Park was no exception. Prior to colonisation, the mountain and its surrounds had been a ceremonial gathering place for a number of Indigenous groups, including the Mogullumbidj people who lived around the mountain at least until 1838.¹¹⁷ Mount Buffalo, or *Dordordonga*, played host to significant gatherings of Aboriginal people who met each year to feast on some of the billions of protein-rich bogong moths which migrated from Queensland and northern New South Wales to wait out the summer in cool mountain caves.¹¹⁸ Rich in fat, the moths provided a usually-abundant, nutritional food source for nearby communities, who congregated in the mountains for about three months at a time. An opportunity for political negotiation, ceremonial story-telling, inter-group courtship, and cultural initiations, these feasts must have taken on new significance in the wake of European invasion.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁵ Tracey Banivanua Mar, ‘Carving Wilderness: Queensland’s National Parks and the Unsettling of Emptied Lands, 1890–1910’, in *Making Settler Colonial Space: Perspectives on Race, Place and Identity*, eds. Tracey Banivanua Mar and Penelope Edmonds (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 73–94. See also Mark David Spence, *Dispossessing the Wilderness: Indian Removal and the Making of the National Parks* (Cary, United States: Oxford University Press, 1999) and Ted Binnema and Melanie Niemi-Bohun, “‘Let the Line Be Drawn Now’: Wilderness, Conservation, and the Exclusion of Aboriginal People from Banff National Park in Canada,” *Environmental History* 11 (October 1, 2006): 724–50.

¹¹⁶ Banivanua Mar, ‘Carving Wilderness’, 74.

¹¹⁷ Jacqui Durrant, ‘Mogullumbidj: First People of Mount Buffalo’, *Victorian Historical Journal* 91, no. 1 (19 March 2021): 17–37. Only one of the 550 photographs in Alice Manfield’s photographic collection at the State Library of Victoria features Aboriginal people: five men dressed in European-style clothing, sitting on boulders on Mount Buffalo.

¹¹⁸ Numbers of bogong moths have crashed in the years since roughly 2017, removing a vital source of energy from the alpine ecosystem. Ken Green et al., ‘Australian Bogong Moths *Agrotis Infusa* (Lepidoptera: Noctuidae), 1951–2020: Decline and Crash’, *Austral Entomology* 60, no. 1 (2021): 66–81.

¹¹⁹ Webb and Adams, 11.

In subsequent decades, the shocking decline in the Aboriginal population was attributed to their vulnerability to smallpox epidemics and intoxicating alcohol, but Jacqui Durrant's recent research shows that deliberate shootings and poisonings by settlers also contributed importantly to the death toll.¹²⁰ Official records of the violence are few, since the settlement mostly happened outside of the purview of police, but some sense of the frontier situation in the Mount Buffalo region, however, emerges in reports about the pastoralist George Faithfull, who led the way in establishing the Buffalo River area as a heifer station. Faithfull boasted openly about the number of Aboriginal people he had ordered his convict men to shoot in retribution for the killings of four stockmen and the spearing of cows and sheep: sixty people according to his own estimate, or almost 300 according to his stockman's later reminiscences.¹²¹

There is no doubting the Manfields' cognisance of the Indigenous history of the Mount Buffalo 'province' which they claimed as their own. Alice's mother remembered Aboriginal labourers on the goldfields on which she had lived and worked on as a girl.¹²² Other regular reminders included the name of 'Blackfellows Plain', not far from famous beauty spots like The Cathedral and The Hump, which has evidence of being used by Aboriginal people for large summer gatherings. Settlers were also familiar with the cultural and spiritual significance of bogong moths to prior (and some remaining) inhabitants of the Alps.¹²³

Beyond acknowledging that her father and uncle had spotted 'traces' of Aboriginal occupation, however, Manfield rarely spoke or wrote about her home's Indigenous history. Nor did she refer the violence bound up in 'pioneering days', or the ongoing presence of some Aboriginal people around Mount Buffalo. Instead, she was the purveyor and willing subject of nostalgic colonial stories that valourised the struggles of pioneers without mentioning the original inhabitants. She deliberately drew on her colonial heritage in advertisements for her guiding

¹²⁰ Durrant, 30-1; Webb and Adams, 13.

¹²¹ The elderly stockman, James Howard, was reticent on the question of who precisely had engaged in the massacre, reminding the *Argus* reporter of the controversial consequences of the Myall Creek Massacre in 1838: 'Don't you know there were seven men hanged in Sydney for killing a gin? It is not for me to say who was there.' 'Settlement in the Kelly Country (By our special reporter)', *Argus*, 13 September 1883, 9.

¹²² 'Mother of Buffalo Guides: Romantic Marriage; Bushranging Reminiscences', *Herald* (Melbourne), 12 May 1927, 26.

¹²³ 'A TRIP TO THE BOGONG', *Ovens and Murray Advertiser*, 19 April 1883, 1.

services. ‘Guide Alice is the daughter of the Pioneers of Mt. Buffalo’ declared one sign, before giving the details of how tourists could join one of her tours.¹²⁴

Instead of acknowledging Aboriginal presence and history, visitors to Mount Buffalo were induced to see the land as basically primeval, beautiful, and uninhabited, populated only by attractive wildlife and valiant pioneers. In her fond allusions to early settlement and silence on the Aboriginal past and present of the place she claimed as her own, Manfield contributed to an Edenic vision of previously uninhabited mountains, a primordial playground where city-goers could find solace and retreat. In one sense, Manfield’s conservationist appeals to affectionate, sustained affinity with vulnerable native animals, like the lyrebird family, may seem incompatible with nostalgia for an era which was highly environmentally destructive, and involved more frequent and more direct violent conflict with the Indigenous owners. Both these approaches, however, enabled settlers to don a comforting and empowering ‘mantle of indigeneity’ and legitimise the violent colonisation of Indigenous land. ‘In any of its versions,’ Renato Rosaldo has argued, ‘imperialist nostalgia uses a pose of “innocent yearning” both to capture people’s imaginations and to conceal its complicity with often brutal domination.’¹²⁵ A guide like Manfield, who, though non-Indigenous, was seen as mystically and ancestrally connected to the local environment, could act as a valuable intermediary in this process.¹²⁶ Her profound impact is clear in the visitor books, letters and newspaper articles written about her: thrilling though a Mount Buffalo tour could be, Manfield’s guidance through the landscape she knew so well, also made settlers feel deeply at home.

Knowing Marsupial Moles

Thus far, we have seen how Alice Manfield and Mary Grant Roberts imparted knowledge about native fauna by appealing to sustained emotional relationships with specific living animals. These appeals leant on gendered ideas in slightly different ways – Roberts cut a motherly figure whereas as Manfield better fit a bold ‘Australian girl’ type – and they operated in the different spatial contexts of the zoo and the national park. But both articulated a special feminine capacity to understand native animals, and both reinforced settler colonial ideas and silences. There was, of course, another way to learn about and convey information about native animals

¹²⁴ ‘Buffalo Mountains – advertisement for conducted tours by Guide Alice’, glass lantern slide, Alice Manfield Collection, H2003.95/1, State Library of Victoria, Melbourne.

¹²⁵ Renato Rosaldo, ‘Imperialist nostalgia’, *Representations* 26 (1989): 108.

¹²⁶ Jarrod Hore, *Visions of Nature: How Landscape Photography Shaped Settler Colonialism* (Oakland, California: University of California Press, 2022), 5.

in this period. In the early twentieth century, some middle- and upper-class women were able to enter Australia's emergent scientific scene, not as marginal voices but as university students and professional scientists. Their methods and spaces could be starkly different, but gender remained significant, as did racial and colonial ideas. This chapter's final case study traces an influential example.

Settler Australian women around the turn of the twentieth century faced serious barriers in their pursuit scientific educations or careers, especially when attempting to move beyond lower-level roles.¹²⁷ These barriers were multiplied if a woman was married, had children, or lacked independent wealth. Such restrictions meant many women interested in studying native animals and plants from a scientific perspective had to find alternative pathways, such as education. When Thistle Harris (1902-1990) requested a job at her university laboratory, to support her further study, in 1920, her professor seemed 'horrified at the idea that a woman should be allowed into a laboratory at all'.¹²⁸ Harris pursued teaching instead, and became a leading figure in the nature study and conservationist movements.¹²⁹

However, as Jane Carey has argued, there *was* a substantial presence of women in science at Australian universities at the turn of the twentieth century, which was particularly evident in the fields of biology and botany.¹³⁰ The reality of women's scientific contributions in this period sits at odds with progress narratives of gradually increasing female participation in the workforce, and may have been obscured by the striking masculinisation of Australian science from the 1940s.¹³¹ Whereas British women attempting to enter science and medicine departments at venerable institutions like Oxford and Cambridge faced truculent opposition well into the twentieth century, Australian women were entering university spaces without long-held traditions of male exclusivity and without a large body of male scientists and science students ready to occupy available roles.¹³² Their presence in the archives indicates the 'very real ability of white, middle-class women to circumvent apparent obstacles of gender in this period, particularly if they remained unmarried.'¹³³

¹²⁷ Ann Moyal, 'Invisible Participants. Women in Science in Australia, 1830-1950', *Prometheus: Critical Studies in Innovation* 11, no. 2 (1993): 175-87. See also Claire Hooker, *Irresistible Forces: Australian Women in Science* (Carlton: Melbourne University Press, 2004).

¹²⁸ Thistle Harris, interviewed by Hazel de Berg, Hazel de Berg collection, 7 January 1972, National Library of Australia, Canberra, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.obj-220821099>.

¹²⁹ Harris and de Berg. Harris' career is discussed in further detail in the seventh chapter.

¹³⁰ Jane Carey, *Taking to the Field* (Clayton: Monash University Publishing, 2023).

¹³¹ Carey, *Taking to the Field*, especially 88-221.

¹³² Patricia Fara, *A Lab of One's Own* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 22.

¹³³ Carey, *Taking to the Field*, 9.

Georgina Sweet was arguably the most successful of those women who managed to attain a career in science in the early twentieth century. A university-trained zoologist and later leading parasitologist, her methods of knowing native animals were different from those of Manfield, Roberts, and their ilk. No one could accuse Sweet of giving undue attention to charismatic or aesthetically appealing animals: the giant earthworms she examined in her Masters thesis gave way during her PhD to carnivorous and eyeless moles, who were replaced later in her career by parasites infecting the eyes of native and imported fauna.¹³⁴ She rarely worked with living animals and (relatedly) did not foreground personal relationships in the same way – Sweet’s care, such as it was, was not relational. Nevertheless, her role as a woman played heavily into the way her knowledge claims were presented and understood.

Born in 1875 in the unglamorous outskirts of Melbourne, the young Georgina was encouraged in her scientific interests by her father, a tradesman and amateur geologist, and by teachers at Parkville Ladies College.¹³⁵ In 1896 she achieved her Bachelor of Science at the University of Melbourne, followed by an MSc two years later. Sweet would later found and help to fund a Melbourne women’s college, and was committed to enabling other women to pursue her academic path.¹³⁶ She became the first woman in the country to be awarded a Doctor of Science in 1904.¹³⁷ A figure of many firsts, she also became the first woman to be awarded the prestigious David Syme Research Prize (1911), the first woman Associate-Professor at the University (1920), and the first woman to be a member of the university council (1936).¹³⁸ Outside of the university setting, Sweet became the first president of the Pan-Pacific Women’s

¹³⁴ Georgina Sweet, ‘On the Structure of the Spermiducal Glands and Associated Parts in Australian Earthworms’, *Zoological Journal of the Linnean Society* 28, no. 180 (1900): 109–39; Georgina Sweet, ‘Contributions to our Knowledge of the Anatomy of Notoryctes typhlops, Stirling. Parts I & II’, *Proceedings of the Royal Society of Victoria* 17 (New Series) (1904): 76–111; Georgina Sweet, *Investigations into the occurrence of onchocerciasis in cattle & associated animals in countries other than Australia* (Melbourne: Government Printer, 1914); Georgina Sweet, ‘Contributions to our Knowledge of the Anatomy of Notoryctes typhlops, Stirling. Part III, the Eye’, *Quarterly Journal of Microscopical Science* 50 (1906): 547–572; Georgina Sweet, ‘The Skin, Hair, and Reproductive Organs of Notoryctes: Contributions to our Knowledge of the Anatomy of Notoryctes typhlops, Stirling – Parts IV and V’, *Quarterly Journal of Microscopical Science* 51 (1907): 325–344; Georgina Sweet, ‘The Endoparasites of Australian Stock and Native Fauna. Part I. Introduction, and Census of Forms recorded up to date’, *Proceedings of the Royal Society of Victoria* 21, New Series (1909): 454–502.

¹³⁵ Monica MacCallum, ‘Sweet, Georgina (1875–1946)’, *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, National Centre of Biography, Australian National University, <https://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/sweet-georgina-8728/text15281>, published first in hardcopy 1990.

¹³⁶ ‘Australia’s First Woman Professor’, *Darling Downs Gazette* (Queensland), 30 April 1921, 4; MacCallum, ‘Georgina Sweet’.

¹³⁷ At Sweet’s historic graduation ceremony, the Chancellor was greeted with derision when he punned about the ‘sweet girl graduate’. ‘The University Commencement’, *Leader* (Melbourne), 16 April 1904, 22.

¹³⁸ Karla Way and David Young have compiled a timeline of Sweet’s achievements in ‘A Sweet Collection: Georgina Sweet and the Tieg’s Museum’, 14–19.

Association in 1930, and from 1934 was the vice-president of the World Young Women's Christian Association.¹³⁹

One important influence on this stellar career was Sweet's mentor Baldwin Spencer, a politically influential biologist and anthropologist. As Ann Moyal has argued, the dearth of supportive male mentors was a major obstacle to many women's progression in science; promising female science students enjoyed little professional support, and some were actively held back in furthering their careers by male supervisors and colleagues.¹⁴⁰ Sweet's supervisor was a notable exception. Spencer was a strong supporter of women in science and higher education generally, and his department led the way in naming women as lecturers and associate professors.¹⁴¹ His proteges included Sweet and the biologist and reformer Ada Mary à Beckett.¹⁴² Spencer read Sweet's papers on the common green and golden bell frog to the Royal Society of Victoria in 1896; though she was not permitted able to speak for herself, the presentation made her the society's first woman author.¹⁴³ With reference to her marsupial mole publications, she credited to his generosity 'all the material used, together with much criticism and advice, and assistance in obtaining literature, without reference to which this research would have been incomplete'.¹⁴⁴ As we will see, he may also have influenced, or at least shared, her views on race and eugenics.

Moles in the desert

Sweet gained her historic doctorate by studying a little-known species: the marsupial mole. Small enough to hold in one's hand, with sandy colouring to match their desert habitat and a preference for staying underground, marsupial moles were, and are, rarely spotted by humans.¹⁴⁵ Like 'true' moles in Europe and South America, marsupial moles spend most of their time underground. With their large front claws, they appear to swim through the desert

¹³⁹ Way and Young, 'A Sweet Collection'.

¹⁴⁰ Moyal, 'Invisible Participants', 185.

¹⁴¹ D. J. Mulvaney, 'Spencer, Sir Walter Baldwin (1860–1929)', Australian Dictionary of Biography, National Centre of Biography, Australian National University, <https://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/spencer-sir-walter-baldwin-8606/text15031>, published first in hardcopy 1990.

¹⁴² Carey, *Taking to the field*, 83–84, 78–79.

¹⁴³ Georgina Sweet, 'On the variations in the spinal nerves of the hyla aurea'.

¹⁴⁴ Georgina Sweet, 'Contributions to our Knowledge of the Anatomy of Notorcytes typhlops, Stirling, Part III. – The Eye.', reprinted from *The Quarterly Journal of Microscopical Science* 50, Part 4 (1906): 547.

¹⁴⁵ Joe Benshemesh and Ken Johnson, 'Biology and Conservation of Marsupial Moles (*Notoryctes*)', in *Predators with Pouches: The Biology of Carnivorous Marsupials*, eds. Menna Jones, Mike Archer, and Chris Dickman (Collingwood: CSIRO Publishing, 2003), 464–72.

sands, backfilling the sand behind them rather than leaving a system of tunnels.¹⁴⁶ They are supremely well-adapted to their subterranean lifestyle, with their thickened rostral shield and well-developed claws.¹⁴⁷ Even the lack of a scrotum – a characteristic unique amongst marsupials – is speculated to reduce marsupial moles’ drag as they burrow.¹⁴⁸ When surfaced, the carnivorous marsupials tend to show bursts of extreme activity, swimming through the sand ‘with a frantic haste but very little speed’, before suddenly falling asleep.¹⁴⁹

Aboriginal people in central Australia were aware of this elusive animal for tens of thousands of years before European invasion.¹⁵⁰ Some groups incorporated them into their Dreaming stories, like the Anangu people who spoke of an ancestral being in the shape of a marsupial mole, Minyma Itjarijari, living in a cave on the edge of Uluru and emerging sometimes to watch children play.¹⁵¹ Marsupial moles were sometimes eaten by Indigenous people during lean years, but according to a survey of people living traditionally in the central desert regions in 1988, the species was commonly regarded with compassion, thanks to the sightless and clumsy animal’s resemblance to a ‘poor old man who cannot see’.¹⁵² Edward C. Stirling, the first white Australian to scientifically describe the animal, relied on Aboriginal knowledge and animal tracking capacity to form his reports, noting that almost every specimen was obtained by an Indigenous person.¹⁵³ As in other cases, their contributions to knowledge were not accepted as

¹⁴⁶ Joe Benshemesh, ‘Backfilled Tunnels Provide a Novel and Efficient Method of Revealing an Elusive Australian Burrowing Mammal’, *Journal of Mammalogy* 95, no. 5 (2014): 1054–63, <https://doi.org/10.1644/14-MAMM-A-051>.

¹⁴⁷ P. C. Withers, G. G. Thompson and R. S. Seymour, ‘Metabolic physiology of the north-western marsupial mole, *Notoryctes caurinus* (Marsupalia: Notoryctidae)’, *Australian Journal of Zoology* 48 (2000): 241.

¹⁴⁸ Stephen Frankenberg et al., ‘Unearthing the secrets of Australia’s most enigmatic and cryptic mammal, the marsupial mole’, *Science Advances* 11, no. 1 (1 January 2025): doi: 10.1126/sciadv.ado4140, 1.

¹⁴⁹ D. Howe, ‘Observations on a captive marsupial mole, *Notoryctes typhlops*’, *Australian Mammalogy* 1, no. 4 (1975): 361–5.

¹⁵⁰ A. A. Burbidge et al., ‘Aboriginal Knowledge of the Mammals of the Central Deserts of Australia’, *Wildlife Research* 15, no. 1 (1988): 18, <https://doi.org/10.1071/wr9880009>. This study was conducted to ascertain Aboriginal people’s knowledge of threatened desert mammals, as a conservationist measure.

¹⁵¹ ‘Southern marsupial mole’, Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park, Parks Australia, accessed January 23, 2026, <https://uluru.gov.au/discover/nature/animals/mammals/southern-marsupial-mole>. For recent scholarship on marsupial moles, which due to their rarity continue to raise questions, see Stephen Frankenberg et al., ‘Unearthing the secrets of Australia’s most enigmatic and cryptic mammal, the marsupial mole’, *Science Advances* 11, no. 1 (1 January 2025): doi: 10.1126/sciadv.ado4140; Joe Benshemesh and Ken Johnson, ‘Biology and Conservation of Marsupial Moles (*Notoryctes*)’, in *Predators with Pouches: The Biology of Carnivorous Marsupials*, edited by Menna Jones, Mike Archer, and Chris Dickman (Collingwood: CSIRO Publishing, 2003), 464–472; Joe Benshemesh, ‘Backfilled Tunnels Provide a Novel and Efficient Method of Revealing an Elusive Australian Burrowing Mammal’, *Journal of Mammalogy* 95, no. 5 (2014): 1054–63, <https://doi.org/10.1644/14-MAMM-A-051>.

¹⁵² Burbidge et al., ‘Aboriginal Knowledge’.

¹⁵³ E.C. Stirling, ‘A New Australian Mammal’, *Nature* 38 (1888): 588–9. Scientists now recognise two, highly similar species of the genus *Notoryctes*: the southern marsupial mole, known as the itjarijari from the Pitjantjatjara and Yankunytjatjara languages in Central Australia, and the northern marsupial mole or kakarratul (*Notoryctes caurinus*). It was the southern marsupial mole that was ‘discovered’ by Stirling and later examined by Sweet.

fact until verified by white scientists, preferably based in Britain, and were not attributed to named Indigenous individuals.¹⁵⁴ As Libby Robin put it in the case of egg-laying by platypuses, the appellation ‘Discovery’ was exclusively applied to ‘a British scientist of impeccable scientific lineage’.¹⁵⁵

The marsupial mole’s existence first came under Stirling’s attention when a specimen was sent from the Idracowra Head Station in the Northern Territory, to the South Australian Museum where Stirling worked.¹⁵⁶ Largely decomposed after its journey by packhorse and coach over thousands of kilometres of desert, soaked in kerosene and packed into a cartridge tin, the remains point to the difficulties of colonial zoology practised over a vast continent.¹⁵⁷ The female body’s state of decay meant Stirling could not determine the presence of a pouch.¹⁵⁸ This intrigue heightened international scientific interest in an animal which appeared to blur the boundaries of monotremes, marsupials, and placental mammals, and which seemed to be evolutionarily convergent with South America’s golden mole.¹⁵⁹ It also caused frustration in the metropole. Two years later, a British scientist wrote a terse letter to *Nature*, demanding that Stirling send specimens to England for proper investigation.¹⁶⁰ Though he and Spencer eventually did send specimens to British institutions (Figure 7), Stirling was among those who felt that research into native fauna should become an Australian-led endeavour, rejecting the tradition of sending specimens for classification to longer-established institutions in Britain. A supporter of Sweet, he approved especially of her status as a ‘product of the very excellent Australian School in which she was trained’.¹⁶¹

¹⁵⁴ Kathleen G. Dugan, ‘The Zoological Exploration of the Australian Region and Its Impact on Biological Theory’, in *Scientific Colonialism: A Cross-Cultural Comparison* ed. Nathan Reingold and Marc Rothenberg (Washington DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1987), 79-100.

¹⁵⁵ Libby Robin, ‘The platypus frontier: eggs, Aborigines and empire in 19th century Queensland’, in *Dislocating the frontier: Essaying the mystique of the outback*, eds. Deborah Bird Rose and Richard Davis (Canberra: ANU E Press, 2005): 101.

¹⁵⁶ E. C. Stirling, ‘Description of a New Genus and Species of Marsupalia (plates ii.-ix.)’, *Transactions of the Royal Society of South Australia* 14 (1890-91): 154.

¹⁵⁷ Stirling, ‘Description of a New Genus’, 154.

¹⁵⁸ Stirling, ‘A New Australian Mammal’, 589.

¹⁵⁹ Joe Benshemesh and Ken Johnson, ‘Biology and conservation of marsupial moles (*Notorcytes*)’, in *Predators with Pouches: The Biology of Carnivorous Marsupials*, by Menna Jones, Mikes Archer & Chris Dickman (eds.) (Collingwood: CSIRO Publishing, 2003), 465.

¹⁶⁰ P. L. Sclater, ‘The New Australian Mammal’, *Nature* 42, no. 1096 (30 October 1890): 645.

¹⁶¹ E. C. Stirling, Reference Letter, Reference Letter, Papers of Georgina Sweet, University of Melbourne Archives.



Figure 7 Marsupial moles excited the curiosity of British scientists and collectors, who wanted specimens sent to their institutions. This mole, collected in Charlotte Waters, Central Australia, was presented by Baldwin Spencer in 1896, after the Horn Expedition. It is now displayed at the Oxford Natural History Museum in the United Kingdom, as an illustrative example of convergent evolution. Specimen number ZC-02349.

A pet cat helped to bring marsupial moles under further intellectual control, by depositing another dead specimen outside its owner's Alice Springs home in 1894. The recipient presented the unfamiliar bundle of golden fur to Stirling when he passed through the area on the famous 'Horn Expedition' through central Australia.¹⁶² The remainder of the expedition produced many more marsupial mole bodies, almost all of which were collected by Aboriginal guides adept at spotting the 'peculiar sinuous triple track' the animals left behind as they swam through the sand.¹⁶³ Stirling wrote a more complete report in 1894, confirming the mystery animal's status as a pouched marsupial.¹⁶⁴ But many questions remained about its classification and evolutionary origins.¹⁶⁵

¹⁶² This expedition, organised by the same William Horn who declared Aboriginal people 'absolutely untameable', was foundational to Australian zoology and anthropology. See S.R. Morton and D.J. Mulvaney, *Exploring central Australia: society, the environment and the 1894 Horn Expedition* (Chipping Norton, NSW: Surrey Beatty & Sons, 1996).

¹⁶³ Stirling, 'Description of a new genus', 157. For more on the importance of Aboriginal guides in early zoology, including during the Horn Expedition, see Penny Olsen and Lynette Russell, *Australia's first naturalists: Indigenous peoples' contribution to early zoology* (Canberra: NLA Publishing, 2019); Shino Konishi, Maria Nugent and Tiffany Shellam (ed.), *Indigenous Intermediaries: New Perspectives on Exploration Archives* (Canberra: ANU Press, 2015).

¹⁶⁴ Stirling, 'Description of a new genus', 154–87.

¹⁶⁵ Baldwin Spencer, 'The Horn Expedition to Central Australia', *Nature* 51, no. 1314 (January 1895): 222–23.

Moles in the laboratory

Almost certainly, Sweet never encountered living, burrowing marsupial moles, because her studies of the species were based at the sandless Biology Hall at the University of Melbourne. Unlike Thistle Harris, who felt laughed out of the laboratory, Sweet was granted access to Baldwin Spencer's laboratory to conduct her research, and her work there led to important breakthroughs in the understanding of marsupial moles, and in some of the most pressing issues in evolutionary zoology.¹⁶⁶ The four academic papers which made up her 'Contributions to our Knowledge of the Anatomy of Notorcytes typhlops, Stirling,' published between 1904 and 1906, constituted the most detailed explanation thus far of the animal's anatomy, and they are still cited as authorities.¹⁶⁷ The work demonstrates Sweet's extraordinarily intimate comprehension of the marsupial mole and other related species, down to the smallest blood vessel or degenerated optic nerve.

Needless to say, Sweet did not achieve this knowledge by making friends with the marsupial moles, nor did she claim any kind of special affinity with this species. To be fair, neither did anyone else, because marsupial moles are difficult to observe in the wild or keep alive in captivity, let alone befriend: when a few men had attempted to keep some in buckets of sand for live inspection by Stirling, the moles burrowed fruitlessly all night and died before inspection in the morning.¹⁶⁸ Instead, Sweet achieved her familiarity with the marsupial mole species through dissection, slicing each body part thinly and analysing them under a microscope.

The marsupial mole's sightless eyes posed perhaps the most important anatomical and evolutionary puzzle. Sweet noted that only the conjunctival sac and lachrymal glands remained as functional remnants of the eyes. Had they always been that way, visible only as pink dots interrupting the dense golden fur? Did they retain a function, and if so, what could it be? Andrew Flack and Alice Would have traced Western scientists' fascination with dark-adapted creatures like the starry-nosed mole, whose very bodies challenged human understandings of animal senses. For a species as ocularcentric as humans, the mole's absence of conventional sight and a preference for darkness was troubling and intriguing. The mole, Flack and Would

¹⁶⁶ Sweet, 'Part III- The Eye', 547.

¹⁶⁷ Karla Way and David Young, 'A Sweet Collection: Georgina Sweet and the Tiegs Museum' (master's research report, University of Melbourne, 2018), 14-19.

¹⁶⁸ Stirling, 'Description of a New Genus', 157. Twenty-first-century biologists have also had enormous difficulty in keeping moles in captivity for more than a few weeks; they appear to die from respiratory complications or hypothermia. 'Biology and Conservation of Marsupial Moles', *Predators with Pouches*, Benshemesh and Johnson, 466.

explain, seemed to be ‘haunted by this supposed deficiency – by the spectre of an absent eye – as humans continued to examine its body’.¹⁶⁹ Though marsupial moles are in fact unrelated to European or American mole species – their similarities present a remarkable example of convergent evolution – they evoked similarly intense curiosity.¹⁷⁰

Sweet investigated this ‘interesting relic’ at length, dissecting ‘some seven or eight heads’ from Spencer’s collection to ascertain the function of the ‘eye’.¹⁷¹ She eventually concluded that the eye had degenerated over time, losing its basic function and sinking beneath the skin, thanks to natural selection. Sweet theorised that the sand disturbed by the mole’s constant burrowing was so great an irritant to the eyes as to outweigh the benefits of vision when it came to the surface.¹⁷² Without the burden of sensitive eyes, marsupial moles could use their toughened face as a battering ram through the sand, complementing the work achieved by their outsized claws and strong shoulders. She speculated about a sensory world deprived of sight: ‘The loss of the eye as a means of knowledge of the external world is compensated for by the great sensibility of the animal to sound, and probably from the presence of the supposed tactile sense-organs to touch.’¹⁷³

Sweet’s findings supported the argument for evolution by natural selection, which remained controversial amongst early twentieth-century scientists. She engaged directly with the ichthyologist Carl Eigenmann’s proposal that animals’ eyes degenerated because of disuse in low-light environments, positing instead that ‘as the result of natural selection, degeneration has taken place because the presence on the surface of the head of such a sensitive structure would be deleterious to the animal.’¹⁷⁴ Furthermore, Sweet noted that the marsupial mole’s

¹⁶⁹ Andrew Flack and Alice Would, ‘Echo Worlds and Mole-Thinking: Imagining the Nocturnal Sensorium in Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century Scientific Investigations’, *Environment and History* 31, no. 2 (1 May 2025): 183. See also Andrew Flack, ‘Dark Degenerations: Life, Light, and Transformation beneath the Earth, 1840–circa 1900’, *Isis* 113, no. 2 (2022): 331–51; Andrew Flack, ‘Dark Trails: Animal Histories beyond the Light of Day’, *Environmental History* 27, no. 2 (2022): 215–41.

¹⁷⁰ Eviatar Nevo, ‘Adaptive Convergence and Divergence of Subterranean Mammals’, *Annual Review of Ecology and Systematics* 10 (1979): 269–308; Mark S. Springer et al., ‘Three Blind Moles: Molecular Evolutionary Insights on the Tempo and Mode of Convergent Eye Degeneration in *Notoryctes Typhlops* (Southern Marsupial Mole) and Two *Chrysochlorids* (Golden Moles)’, *Genes* 14, no. 11 (2023), <https://doi.org/10.3390/genes14112018>.

¹⁷¹ Georgina Sweet, ‘Part III – The Eye’, 548.

¹⁷² Sweet, ‘Part III- The Eye’, 548.

¹⁷³ Sweet, ‘Part III- The Eye’, 568. More recently, Benshemesh and Johnson have affirmed this theory, adding that the olfactory senses seem especially well-developed. Benshemesh and Johnson, ‘Biology and Conservation’, 466.

¹⁷⁴ Sweet, ‘Part III – The Eye’, 567.

visual evolution was ongoing, since it seemed that the change in function of the organ remained incomplete.¹⁷⁵

How was Sweet's knowledge, derived from scientific modes and spaces coded as male, received and interpreted? Newspaper accounts of Sweet were broadly supportive, reflecting sometimes contradictory efforts to comprehend and contain the scientific and professional endeavours of a 'Lady Student' or 'Lady Doctor'.¹⁷⁶ On the one hand, Sweet was an unusual genius who did not reflect the 'average' woman's capabilities or wishes. On the other hand, the same article could stress that she was an ordinary woman who preserved her femininity through feminine accoutrements and refraining from unladylike parts of scientific work.¹⁷⁷ Sweet's reputed lack of fieldwork was attributed to her determination to 'never touch any branch of the [scientific] work that would be in any way repellent to her feminine interests'. The reporter went on to describe the 'valuable practical work' achieved by male professors in the field, in which it would not be possible for a woman to participate, no matter her claims to intelligence or energy.¹⁷⁸

Amongst her scientific colleagues, she appears to have been well-respected. Clearly Spencer admired and supported her work. He presented her paper on the anatomy of marsupial moles to the Royal Society of Victoria in 1904 – a significant stamp of approval that also pointed to her ongoing exclusion from at least some scientific spaces.¹⁷⁹ Then, in 1912, Sweet applied for the role of Chair of Biology at the soon-to-be established University of Western Australia, in Perth. She was unsuccessful, but the seventeen reference letters she marshalled for the application provide rich insight into how her zoological expertise was perceived and portrayed by her peers and admirers. On the one hand, some of the leading lights of Australian science, education, and politics were willing to speak strongly in favour of her and her original research, including Richard Berry and John Monash. On the other, their letters are evidently concerned with staving off doubts about considering a female candidate for such an important academic position. Some referees sidestepped the issue of her gender, while others addressed it directly.

¹⁷⁵ Sweet, 'Part III – The Eye', 569.

¹⁷⁶ 'David Syme Research Prize', *Toowoomba Chronicle* (Queensland), 26 April 1911, 5; 'Lady Doctor Wins Prize', *Geelong Advertiser*, 8 April 1911, 3.

¹⁷⁷ 'Dr Georgina Sweet. In the Laboratory. Research Work', *Herald* (Melbourne), 18 April 1911, 3.

¹⁷⁸ 'Dr Georgina Sweet. In the Laboratory'. In fact, Sweet did participate in some fieldwork, and travelled widely including a 1922 trek between Cape Town to Cairo, with leading Australian feminist Jessie Webb. Jessie Webb, *Cape Town to Cairo: a record by Jessie Webb of her journey with Georgina Sweet in 1922* ed. Margaret O'Callaghan (Canberra: Margaret O'Callaghan, 2013).

¹⁷⁹ Georgina Sweet, Contributions to our knowledge of the anatomy of *Notoryctes typhlops*, Stirling. Parts I and II', *Proceedings of the Royal Society of Victoria* 17 (1904-1905): 76.

Berry stressed that Sweet was as capable of the duties of Chair of Biology as any male rival for the position, and hoped that the selection committee would not rule her out only on the basis of sex.¹⁸⁰ Spencer insisted doubters would be reassured about a woman's capacity in the role if they were familiar with his protégée's accomplishments at the University of Melbourne.¹⁸¹

W. P. Morris, who worked with Sweet in the Veterinary Faculty, insisted that:

...though womanly through and through, Dr. Sweet has that poise, soundness of judgement and common sense which have enabled her to carry out her work as lecturer, Teacher, and Demonstrator without the slightest difficulty [...]

Only one of the suite of letters was penned by a woman: Isabel Henderson, a school principal and member of the Council of Education. Like others, she praised Sweet's educational skills, and noted that '[Georgina] was particularly careful that her pupils should be trained in such a way as to develop and strengthen their womanly qualities'. Henderson also assured the selection panel that, despite Sweet's impressive work at the university, she had never permitted her career to 'absorb her so much as to lessen in any degree the womanly and social side of her nature'.¹⁸² Whereas Roberts presented her relationship-based contributions to science as a correlative extension of her feminine sensibilities, Sweet's science was framed as a concession to the masculine which, many felt, had to be balanced by an insistence on her counterbalancing womanly qualities.

Regular assurances by male peers and journalists that Sweet remained a woman, despite her inclination towards science and paid work amongst men, could be a help and a hindrance. The fact that Sweet apparently demonstrated qualities associated with an idealised white womanhood, making aesthetic decisions like keeping bowls of flowers in her laboratory and adorning herself with 'dainty trifles', as well as philanthropic activities associated with women, helped to smooth her path to acceptance as a woman in a male-dominated field of knowledge production.¹⁸³ It could also lead to the belittlement of her achievements. When Sweet mentioned an interest in the economic aspects of her research into parasites affecting Australian cattle, a reporter attributed this to 'inherited housewifely thrift': probably not the framing a man would have received for the same answer.¹⁸⁴ Sweet could not control how her peers and

¹⁸⁰ Richard Berry, Reference Letter, Papers of Georgina Sweet, University of Melbourne Archives.

¹⁸¹ Baldwin Spencer, Reference Letter, Papers of Georgina Sweet, University of Melbourne Archives.

¹⁸² Isabel Henderson, Reference Letter, Papers of Georgina Sweet, University of Melbourne Archives.

¹⁸³ 'Dr Georgina Sweet. In the Laboratory'; 'Australia's First Woman Professor'.

¹⁸⁴ 'Dr Georgina Sweet. In the Laboratory'. Female scientists in countries would experience this demeaning treatment in the press well into the twentieth century: when Dorothy Hodgkin became the first British woman to win the Nobel Prize in 1964, for determining the atomic structure of vital molecules including penicillin and

the media interpreted her knowledge; it may be that she resented her interlocutors' emphasis on her womanhood. She did, however, mobilise her gender in the pursuit of a connected scientific project: eugenics.

Race in Sweet's science

Sweet was a dedicated eugenicist shaped by her cultural, institutional, and gendered contexts. She began her career at a moment when ideas about scientific approaches to dealing with 'degenerate' people were popular, merging with local anxieties about improving the Australian 'white race' were at a peak.¹⁸⁵ At the University of Melbourne she mixed with influential eugenicists including Spencer and Berry, the latter of whom was a craniologist who used stolen Tasmanian Aboriginal remains to argue for their inferiority, and suggested extreme measures such as sterilisation and segregation to counter the 'menace of the feeble-minded'.¹⁸⁶ What was more, white women were widely understood to have a particular responsibility for social reform initiatives that promoted the health and strength of Australia's white population.¹⁸⁷ In the early twentieth century these initiatives included kindergartens, public health programs, initiatives to improve infant and maternal health, medical services in schools, and the promotion of sex education and contraceptive use.¹⁸⁸

insulin, the headline ran 'Oxford housewife wins Nobel Carol V. Robinson, 'In Pursuit of Female Chemists', *Nature* 476, no. 7360 (August 2011): 275.

¹⁸⁵ Carey, *Taking to the Field*, 120. There is a rich body of scholarship on the cultivation of 'White Australia', which occurred both through methods of segregation and exclusion and, through improving the health and strength of the white population. Key works include Marilyn Lake and Henry Reynolds, *Drawing the Global Colour Line: White Men's Countries and the Question of Racial Equality* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2008); Warwick Anderson, *The Cultivation of Whiteness: Science Health and Racial Destiny in Australia* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2002); Alison Bashford, *Imperial Hygiene: A Critical History of Colonialism, Nationalism and Public Health* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003); Ruth A. Morgan, "Health, Hearth and Empire: Climate, Race and Reproduction in British India and Western Australia," *Environment and History* 27, no. 2 (2021): 229–250; Jane Carey and Claire McLisky (eds.), *Creating White Australia* (Sydney: Sydney University Press, 2009).

¹⁸⁶ Quoted in Mary Cawte, 'Cranometry and eugenics in Australia: R. J. A. Berry and the quest for social efficiency', *Australian Historical Studies* 22, no. 86 (1986): 35–53. See also Ross L Jones, 'Eugenics', in *Dhooibak Goobgoowana: A History of Indigenous Australia and the University of Melbourne Volume 1: Truth*, eds. Ross L Jones, James Waghorne, and Marcia Langton (Carlton, Victoria: Melbourne University Publishing, 2024).

¹⁸⁷ Significant work on white women and Australian eugenics includes Ann Curthoys, 'Eugenics, Feminism and Birth Control: The Case of Marion Piddington', *Hecate* 15, no. 1 (1989): 73–89; "'Wanted! A Real White Australia": The Women's Movement, Whiteness and the Settler Colonial Project, 1900–1940', in *Studies in Settler Colonialism*, ed. Fiona Bateman and Lionel Pilkington (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011); Jane Carey, "'Women's Objective – A Perfect Race": Whiteness, Eugenics, and the Articulation of Race', in *Re-Orienting Whiteness*, ed. Leigh Boucher, Jane Carey and Katherine Ellinghaus (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009).

¹⁸⁸ Carey, *Taking to the Field*, 132–39.

Thanks to a growing faith in the potential of science to create a better world, scientifically educated women like Sweet seemed to bear especial duties in these domains.¹⁸⁹ Many proudly claimed this role for themselves, like parliamentarian and feminist Irene Longman, who in 1930 called for women's 'scientific and courageous tackling' of problems like mental deficiency.¹⁹⁰ Appeals to 'mother-of-the-race' maternalism combined with a scientific imprimatur to allow Sweet and other early twentieth-century women scientists leading roles in eugenicist organisations.¹⁹¹ For Sweet this entailed leading a sex education society at the University of Melbourne, and taking part in a consultative committee for a dedicated eugenics society.¹⁹² She advised other unmarried women like herself to take up similar work, casting it as a morally satisfying, quasi-maternal alternative to 'fulfil[ling] woman's primal end', that is, bearing children.¹⁹³

Importantly, Sweet's scientific work with marsupial moles was not separate from her engagements with racial science and its manifestations in the eugenics movement. As James Poskett has argued, the broadly construed racial sciences were constituted and shaped in imperial contexts beyond the metropole, as empires sought to classify and contain both human and non-human subjects.¹⁹⁴ Discussions about the biological and evolutionary position of marsupial moles, slowly losing their sight in the heat of the desert, were connected to fears about racial fitness and degeneration, and shared a vocabulary with discourses on racial hierarchies.¹⁹⁵ They resonated in an anxious white-majority nation where Aboriginal people and native animals – both conceived as 'primitive' beings from an earlier evolutionary period

¹⁸⁹ See Alison Turtle, 'Education, Social Science and the "Common Weal"', in *The Commonwealth of Science: ANZAAS and the Scientific Enterprise in Australia 1888-1988*, ed. Roy Macleod (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1988), 222-46.

¹⁹⁰ Irene Longman, *Herself*, July 1930, quoted in Carey *Taking to the Field*, 133.

¹⁹¹ Carey, *Taking to the Field*, 132.

¹⁹² Carey, *Taking to the Field*, 138-9.

¹⁹³ Georgina Sweet, *The Responsibility of the Community Towards Sex Education* (Melbourne: Ford & Son, 1925), 13.

¹⁹⁴ James Poskett, 'Racial Science', in *Routledge Handbook of Science and Empire*, ed. Andrew Godd (Abingdon and New York: Routledge, 2021), 35-6. See also Warwick Anderson, 'Racial Conceptions in the Global South', *Isis* 105 (2014): 782-92; Suman Seth, 'Introduction: Relocating Race', *Isis* 105 (2014): 759-63; Chris Ballard, 'The Cultivation of Difference in Oceania', in *Foreign Bodies: Oceania and the Science of Race, 1750-1940*, eds. Bronwen Douglas and Chris Ballard (Canberra: Australian National University Press, 2008), 339.

¹⁹⁵ Discussing Spencer's comments on backward marsupials, Libby Robin speculates that '[t]he primitive fauna and flora were something colonial Australians were often uncomfortable about, perhaps fearing that they too might degenerate to a less civilised state in such a land.' Libby Robin, 'Weird and wonderful: The first objects of the National Historical Collection', *reCollections* 1, no. 2 (undated): https://www.recollections.nma.gov.au/issues/vol_1_no_2/papers/weird_and_wonderful.

– were observed to be dying out in the face of European colonisation, and fears about maintaining a virile white population abounded.¹⁹⁶

Connections between scientific racism and zoology could be very direct: the marsupial mole specimens that Sweet dissected were collected on the same expedition that led to influential pronouncements by Spencer and others about Aboriginal people's lack of intelligence and the hopelessness of reforming them. Expedition participants admitted how completely integral Aboriginal guides' environmental knowledge had been to their endeavours, yet they concluded Aboriginal people were un-reformable, unevolved, and unintelligent. Spencer's demeaning depictions of the Aranda people as 'naked savages ... chanting songs of which they do not know the meaning', proved influential, as did his later explicit calls for the removal of 'half-caste' children from their families.¹⁹⁷ These ideas helped to lay the groundwork for policies that devastated Aboriginal communities well into the twentieth century, now known as the Stolen Generations.¹⁹⁸ More broadly speaking, efforts to categorise species like the mole helped to bring the continent under intellectual control, overwriting the older knowledges of Aboriginal people even as they depended on them.

Conclusions

Sweet was one of thousands of Australian women at the turn of the twentieth century, including Alice Manfield and Mary Grant Roberts, making claims to expertise about native fauna. For Manfield and Roberts, this 'knowing' was twofold: they claimed to know about animals at least partly because they *knew* animals. Such assertions of intimacy, friendship and quasi-motherhood seem to have gained greater currency thanks to cultural assumptions about women's propensity for emotion and care, and a changing natural history field which valued

¹⁹⁶ For explorations of fears of racial degeneration, see also Warwick Anderson, *The Cultivation of Whiteness: Science, Health and Racial Destiny in Australia* (Carlton: Melbourne University Press, 2002); David Walker, *Anxious Nation: Australia and the Rise of Asia 1850–1939* (St. Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1999). Russell McGregor explicates the presumption that Aboriginal people would become extinct, in 'The Doomed Race: A Scientific Axiom of the Late Nineteenth Century', *Australian Journal of Politics & History*, 39, no. 1 (April 1993): 14–22.

¹⁹⁷ Baldwin Spencer and F. J. Gillen, *The northern tribes of central Australia* (London: Macmillan & Co, 1904), xiv; Baldwin Spencer, Department of External Affairs, 'Preliminary report on the Aborigines of the Northern Territory', *Bulletin of the Northern Territory*, no. 7, Dept. of External Affairs (1913): 23.

¹⁹⁸ Suzanne Parry, 'Identifying the Process: The Removal of 'Half-caste' Children from Aboriginal Mothers', *Aboriginal History* 19, no. 2 (1995): 146. This legacy is in spite of the fact that Spencer himself noted Aboriginal people's close emotional connection to their homeland. 'Every natural feature is associated in his mind with some ancestor, who not only wandered over the country, but actually created the sandhills, rocks, and trees that now exist, and away from them he would be miserable.' 'A Vanishing Race', *Argus* (Melbourne), 19 January 1929, 7.

interactions with living animals over interactions with dead ones. Even when women like Sweet did not directly draw upon claims of womanly or maternal qualities, their scholarly contributions were often framed in this way by observers, including their supporters.

Women's claims to knowing animals in this way implied that animals knew them, too. Native animals, some of them at least, were treated as individuals with individual personalities and the capacity to form friendships with the women who claimed to understand them. Given the lyrebird's impressive mimicry and dance skills and occasional audacious interactions with people the idea that they were able to befriend and understand humans seemed a credible one for Manfield's audiences, especially as the species experienced a boost in nationalistic affection and conservationist concern as the first half of the twentieth century progressed.¹⁹⁹ Roberts faced more of an up-hill battle to convince others of Tasmanian devils' ability to form emotional connections, but her 'devil-may-care' attitude was influential nationally and internationally, drawing on associations between tameability and intelligence, and between a nurturing female archetype and animal care.

Animals like the marsupial mole that were uncharismatic, rarely noticed, and lacking in familiar sensory organs, did not fit so easily into this mould of knowable and knowing animal, and often received different treatment. Georgina Sweet's methods of understanding this enigmatic creature relied on careful dissections of dead specimens trapped by anonymised Aboriginal people and transported to her laboratory from distant environments. Her knowledge claims took the form of contributions made to, and validated by, an almost exclusively male international scientific community. Eighty-nine marsupial mole specimens from Spencer's collection still hang in liquid in Museums Victoria's research collection, including those dissected by Sweet.²⁰⁰ This number is startling when we consider that, since the early 1900s, only five to ten marsupial mole sightings have been recorded each decade.²⁰¹ In an irony pointed out by an increasing number of conservationists in the early twentieth century, scientific efforts to collect and classify native animals could contribute to their rapid disappearance.

¹⁹⁹ Ruby Ekkel, 'Mimicking Lyrebirds in Multispecies History', *Environment and History* 30, no. 2 (May 2024): 172-75.

²⁰⁰ Kevin C. Rowe, Senior Curator of Mammals, Museums of Victoria, personal correspondence, 19 February 2024.

²⁰¹ Joe Benshemesh, 'Marsupial Moles', in *Fragile Balance: The extraordinary story of Australian marsupials*, eds. Chirstopher Dickman (Melbourne: Mallon, 2007), 143.

What these three early twentieth-century women had in common is their active participation in settler knowledge-making as a colonial process, one that marginalised Indigenous understandings and naturalised or romanticised invasion and continued occupation. Roberts, Manfield, and Sweet challenged the gendered coding of knowledge, including received ideas about how it ought to be constituted and acquired, but they did not challenge its racial underpinnings. Often, they reinforced them.

In her irascible Platypus character, Ethel Pedley gave an anthropomorphic voice to the imagined animal knower at the centre of many attempts to gather and disseminate knowledge about native animals addressed in this chapter. He knows he is under investigation, and rather than developing a friendship with those humans trying to understand him, he forms his own rather cutting conclusions about them. Dot, a young and open-minded girl who is taught by the titular kangaroo to appreciate and care for native animals, softens the Platypus' attitude towards humans, though he still looks forward to the day when all attempts at understanding him, relationship-based or otherwise, would come to an end. 'The age will come when they will understand, and cease to write books,' he predicted, and 'there will be peace for everyone.'²⁰²

Pedley's Platypus takes issue with the idea that it was necessary and justifiable to kill animals for the purposes of knowledge. Women like Pedley, Manfield, and Roberts typically came down on the side of *not* needing to kill animals in order to understand them, though Sweet's laboratory work (and Alec Chisholm's advocacy for live bird study) make clear that there was no absolute gendered distinction. What, though, of killing native animals for different reasons? Was it acceptable to kill for women's fashion, or for men's employment?²⁰³ In the fifth chapter, we analyse a Queensland controversy that brought these questions to the fore in emotionally and politically explosive ways. This catalytic furore over charismatic koalas drew together a number of themes traversed in the thesis thus far, namely the intersection of conservation and welfare concerns, the power of authors to shape care for animals, the significance of children as actors and as symbols, and more broadly, the gendered nature of environmental knowledge.

²⁰² Pedley, *Dot and the Kangaroo*, 31.

²⁰³ These purposes of commerce and knowledge production were not, of course, mutually exclusive: Kate Hunter notes that the antipodean market for natural history specimens overlapped with a clothing industry dealing in native animals' feathers and furs. Kate Hunter, 'A bird in the hand: Hunting, fashion and colonial culture', *Journal of New Zealand Studies* 12 (January 2011): 92.

Chapter Five: Killing Koalas

Gendered care and culpability in the 1927 Queensland koala open season

Man thy blood craveth
Stones his heart paveth –
Man steeped in bloodiest
Deeds known in sunlit lands;
Spoiler of the tenderest;
Robber with ruthless hands,
Man the destroyer,
Wanton in mischief,
Beauty's betrayer,
Blood-lover-in-Chief
From days prehistoric.

Amy Thornett, 'The Betrayed Koala', 1927¹

In July 1927, the Labor government of Queensland declared an open season on koalas and possums. During the month of August, more than 600 000 koalas were shot, trapped, or poisoned for their furs, a figure close to the total number of koalas estimated to survive in Australia today.² More than a million possums were also killed, but the fierce and broad-based campaign against the open season focused almost exclusively on koalas. Amy Thornett's poem, sent to the office of Acting Premier William Forgan-Smith after she heard the news, was not exceptional in its passionate condemnation of those 'Herods' who would allow the killing of the 'Pet of Australia'.³ The campaign of which she was part constituted one of the first large-scale organised conservationist movements in settler-Australian history. Although it failed to stop the open season, the campaign helped to bring down a state government, galvanised the emerging conservationist movement, and ensured koalas would no longer be legally slaughtered for fur in Queensland.

¹ Amy Thornett, 'The betrayed Koala' [extract], 24 July 1927, 'Individual Protests.', AGS/J463, GC, DAS, Queensland State Archives.

² Stephen M. Jackson, *Koala: Origins of an Icon* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 2007), 213; In 2023, the Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water gave an upper estimate of 628,010 individuals. Australian Government Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water, 'National Koala Monitoring Program', updated 19 May 2023, <https://www.dcceew.gov.au/environment/biodiversity/threatened/species/koalas/national-koala-monitoring-program>.

³ Thornett, 'The betrayed Koala'.

In this striking display of early twentieth-century attachments to native animals, the nation, and the bush, ideas about gender featured prominently. Concepts of authentically Australian forms of masculinity and femininity were mobilised in attempts to end the destruction; koala killing was framed as a debasement of idealised bushman identity and koala fur wearing as a betrayal of idealised, inherently caring womanhood. Slaughtering or wearing koalas was not just unnecessary; it was unmanly or unwomanly, and un-Australian either way. The interests of parents and children came to the fore in a campaign concerned with preserving the popular ‘native bear’ for the enjoyment of future generations, men were derided for hunting defenceless animals, and women were vilified for driving demand for the fur trade. Women and women’s organisations were a dominant force against the killing, but they faced derision from those who blamed their gender for supporting the destruction through consumption. This chapter traces how accounts of koalas and koala-killing in 1927 expressed and catalysed changing ideas and emotions about native wildlife, nationalism, and gender roles. Detailed attention to this brief, dramatic episode can throw new light on the themes encountered in earlier chapters, bringing together feminised animal welfare concerns, women’s nature writing for children, and increasing nationalism around charismatic species.



*Figure 4 Trappers stand with a truckload of koala skins during the 1927 open season.
State Library of Queensland, Brisbane.*

Although the 1927 open season rallied a remarkable range of groups, and taught politicians and conservationists difficult lessons about the fraught nature of animal protection, it has not been given a starring role in histories of Australian environmental thought and action.⁴ Historical narratives of the event have tended to highlight the extent of the carnage, casting the season as part of a long, shameful settler-Australian history of the quotidian slaughter of marsupials, and more generally of unthinking environmental abuse.⁵ Giving one of the first detailed accounts of the open season in 1966, A. J. Marshall boldly characterised it as the ‘most sordid episode in Queensland’s history’, apparently negating the devastating history of frontier violence against Indigenous people that marked the state’s history.⁶ More recently, the question of how and why such an environmentally destructive event could be allowed to take place has preoccupied historians: Marshall argues the ‘abominable business’ could be attributed to a misguided government attempt to gain votes and money, while Drew Hutton and Libby Connors understand the open season as part of a string of losses experienced by a burgeoning conservationist movement led at the time by the Wild Life Preservation Society and bird advocacy groups.⁷ While N. L. Howlett’s 1979 account also attributes the season to the triumph of government and fur lobby greed over sentiment, science, or nationalism, it is more attentive to the evident class divisions between those for and against the continuation of open seasons in general. Howlett concludes that as koala fur became less crucial to the fur lobby, trappers with less education and political clout were unable to represent their interests against ‘city elitists’ and rural land-owners who resented trappers’ intrusion onto their land.⁸

⁴ Histories tracing settler environmental destruction and the beginnings of conservation include A. J. Marshall, *The Great Extermination: A guide to Anglo-Australian Cupidity, Wickedness & Waste* (Adelaide: Heinemann, 1966); Vincent Serventy, *A Continent in Danger* (London : Andre Deutsch, 1966); J. M. Powell, *Environmental Management in Australia 1788-1914* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1976); William J. Lines, *Taming the Great South Land: A History of the Conquest of Nature in Australia* (University of California Press, 1991), Tim Flannery, *The Future Eaters: An Ecological History of the Australasian Lands and People* (Sydney: Reed Books, 1994); Drew Hutton and Libby Connors, *A History of the Australian Environment Movement* (Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 1999); Geoffrey Bolton, *Spoils and Spoilers: A history of Australians shaping their environment* (Sydney: George Allen & Unwin, 1981); Tim Bonyhady, *Colonial Earth* (Carlton: Miegunyah Press, 2000).

⁵ Jacqui Donegan, ‘Unfair Game: Queensland’s Open Season on Koalas in 1927’, *Access: History* 3, no. 1 (2000): 36; Alistair Paton, *Of Marsupials and Men* (Collingwood: Black Inc, 2022), 204-5.

⁶ Marshall, *The Great Extermination*, 26.

⁷ Hutton and Connors, *A History of the Australian Environment Movement* 43; Marshall, *Great Extermination*, 30.

⁸ N. L. Howlett, ‘The Bear You Couldn’t Buy. Shooting Koalas in Queensland: 1927’, *Bowyang*, 1. No. 2 (September-October 1979): 10-11; 17-18.

In her own study of these events, Jacqui Donegan contends that the open season ultimately demonstrates a pervading and persistent belief amongst the majority of white Australians that nature was ‘simply a resource to be plundered or a useless backdrop to progress.’⁹ There is much in settler Australian and Queensland environmental history to indicate an exploitative mentality, which writers such as Tim Flannery, William Lines and Marshall have emphasised. But this chapter sets out instead to investigate how the events surrounding the 1927 Queensland koala open season, especially in the broad-based and strident backlash it created, conveyed as much about the increased sympathy towards koalas as they did about any uniform apathy or unthinking exploitation.¹⁰ In his environmental history of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in Australia, Tim Bonyhady argues against the equation of colonisation with unthinking destruction and exploitation of the land, drawing out the strands of environmental sensibility which were discernible from the beginning of the colonial period, and which continued into twentieth-century disputes.¹¹

In line with Bonyhady’s argument, it is evident Queenslanders’ mobilisation against the slaughter of koalas did not simply arise spontaneously, but reflected broader and longer-term changes in how white Australians viewed their koalas and other native animals. Their opposition was an expression of and a catalyst for sympathies towards an animal which had quickly become a cherished national symbol. Especially as it was articulated in local newspapers that maintained a steady coverage of the controversy over several months, the furore surrounding the open season magnified already changing ideas and emotions about native animals, and about the ways in which it was appropriate for white Australian men and women to treat them.

The chapter looks to draw out the gendered dimensions of the broad-based and emotional campaign to save the koala, which followed the announcement in July and continued in a crescendo of outrage throughout the open season in August. I analyse the ways in which gender ideologies shaped responses to an open season cast as an economic boon but viscerally perceived by many as a cruelty and a threat to the survival of an increasingly popular animal. The thousands of articles, letters, cartoons and poems written in the defence of koalas are rich sources for the historian interested in gendered experiences of animals, because they centre on

⁹ Donegan, ‘Unfair Game’, 36.

¹⁰ Flannery, *Future Eaters*; Lines, *Taming the Great South Land*; Marshall, *Great Extermination*. Bonyhady takes issue with histories like those by Flannery and Lines for perpetuating an unnuanced view of colonists as gratuitously exploitative and destructive. Bonyhady, *Colonial Earth*, 3.

¹¹ Bonyhady, *Colonial Earth*.

a trade primarily conducted by men, a resource primarily consumed by and associated with women, and an animal capable of arousing high emotions and insightful iterations of environmental thought and feeling.

Making sense of a 'massacre'

By 1927 the lucrative koala fur trade was both well-established and highly controversial. Spurred by increasingly depleted and protected populations of furred animals in North America, the international fur market transferred its attentions to Australia. With relative ease, trappers could use cyanide, wire snares or guns to kill the koalas, so that by the mid-1910s, hundreds of thousands of koala skins – at least – were shipped from Australia each year.¹² Queensland in particular, the last stronghold of the commonly called 'native bear', offered large quantities of koalas' thick and fashionable skins.¹³ Once sold by trappers, pelts could be manipulated into rectangles of warm, soft, and waterproof fur, ready to be turned into coats, jacket linings, rugs, gloves, sleeping bags, and even stuffed koala toys.¹⁴ Because of high demand and the koala's lack of defences, populations went into rapid decline.¹⁵ Belated restrictions in all koala-inhabited states failed to stabilise populations, worrying both those seeking the long-term sustenance of the fur trade and those concerned with the animals' survival.¹⁶ As a result, the six-month open season in 1919, the last declared in Queensland before the notorious 1927 season, had been beleaguered by public criticism.¹⁷ Approximately one million koalas were killed. The Queensland Parliament passed the *Animal and Birds Act* in 1921, serving to regulate the trapping industry, provide protection to many species including the koala, and establish formal sanctuaries.¹⁸ As Hutton and Connors note, however, Queensland's rescission of koala protection six years later is a lesson for Australian conservationists concerning the fragility of government commitments to animal conservation.¹⁹ Legislative change did not guarantee effective or permanent protection.

¹² Donegan, 'Unfair Game', 38; Glenn Fowler, "'BLACK AUGUST': Queensland's Open Season on Koalas in 1927", Honours Thesis (Australian National University, 1993), 3. Koalas who survived the skinning died later from gangrene, starvation, or the cold.

¹³ Donegan, 'Unfair Game', 39. Queensland's koalas are smaller and lighter in colouration than their counterparts in Victoria and New South Wales.

¹⁴ Danielle Clode, *Koala: A Life in Trees* (Collingwood: Black Inc., 2022), 216.

¹⁵ William J. Lines, *Taming the Great South Land: A History of the Conquest of Nature in Australia* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 21.

¹⁶ Jackson, *Koala*, 201-2.

¹⁷ Jackson, *Koala*, 3.

¹⁸ Fowler, 'Black August', 5.

¹⁹ Hutton and Connors, *A History of the Australian Environment Movement*, 43.

In 1927, once the rumoured open season was confirmed, the Archbishop of Queensland Gerald Sharp led the response with a letter calling for ‘protests in large numbers’ against the decision.²⁰ His plea was answered by a remarkably wide range of groups including city and shire councils, religious groups, women’s organisations, Boy Scouts and Girl Guides, the Returned Sailors’ and Soldiers’ Imperial League, universities, and scientific bodies, all denouncing the decision.²¹ Journalists fuelled and amplified the public backlash. The *Brisbane Courier* ran an extended ‘Spare the Bear’ campaign. Although some letters deplored the cruelty of trappers whose actions left baby koalas attempting to nourish themselves from dead, skinless mothers, most focused their anger on the government; one caustic letter writer suggested that ‘an open season for Cabinet Ministers [would] be more appropriate.’²² Premier McCormack was overseas, so the Acting Premier and Minister for Agriculture and Stock, William Forgan Smith, received the brunt of the backlash.²³ Protest crossed party lines: one Labor supporter from Birkdale sent an outraged telegram calling the party’s claims to be the Humanity Party ‘Hypocrisy Cant Humbug if teddy bears slaughtered’.²⁴ The *Sydney Labor Daily* added a pointed by-line to an article criticising the slaughter: ‘And by Labor Govt., Too!’²⁵

All critics were united in disgust at the idea of the mass killing of such a ‘lovable, non-destructive and quite unique little native animal’ which, it was stressed, posed no threat to human interests.²⁶ Although one letter writer’s claim that ‘99 per cent’ of Queenslanders opposed the killings was an overstatement, opposition was powerful and widespread across both cities and rural areas.²⁷ The vehemence and pervasiveness of this response took decision-makers aback, and in late July 1927 the Queensland Cabinet met to consider revoking the proclaimed open season.²⁸ Opinion at the meeting was apparently fiercely divided, but under pressure from shooters’ and trappers’ groups who pointed out that many people had already

²⁰ ‘Slaughter of Bears’, *Brisbane Courier*, 18 July 1927, 13.

²¹ Fowler, ‘Black August’, 6.

²² *Brisbane Courier*, 22 July 1927; ‘Labour Disgust’, *Brisbane Courier*, 29 July 1927.

²³ At other times during the controversy, Mines Secretary Alf Jones served as Acting Premier. Marshall, ‘On the disadvantages of wearing fur’, 27.

²⁴ Telegram, July 27 1927, AGS/J463, General Correspondence, Department of Agriculture and Stock, Queensland State Archives, Brisbane.

²⁵ ‘Native Bears Slaughtered: No Mercy in Q’Land: And by Labor Govt., Too!’, clipping from the *Sydney Labor Daily*, 8 August 1927, AGS/J463, GC, DAS, QSA, Brisbane.

²⁶ *Voice of the North*, 10 August 1927. Eve Richardson complained that kookaburras were being protected by law, despite sometimes killing farmers’ chickens, while harmless koalas were not. 18 July 1927, GC, DAS, QSA, AGS/J464.

²⁷ ‘The stupidity of the decision’, *Brisbane Courier*, 29 July 1927, 15.

²⁸ ‘NOT YET!’, *Brisbane Courier* (Queensland), *Brisbane Courier*, 27 July 1927, 15.

purchased rifles and ammunition, the ministers upheld the decision.²⁹ The open season went ahead. Many protestors seemed genuinely to have expected the government to cancel the open season once the depth of pro-koala sentiment was understood, so the ongoing uproar was imbued with notes of betrayal.

Possums were also subject to the open season, but sympathy for these animals was comparatively subdued, usually an afterthought to greater concern about koalas. In an indicative incident a month prior to the open season announcement, the President of the Country Women's Association presented the visiting Duchess of York with a 'most wonderfully real and furry' stuffed koala made from possum skins. Her choice of gift suggests both the koala's power as a lovable Australian symbol and the possum's acceptability as a manufacturing resource.³⁰

Koalas as national symbols

When the inconspicuous koala was first reported on by European colonisers, the reclusive tree-dweller was met with mingled wonder and disdain. In 1803 *The Sydney Gazette* described the newly discovered animal as being 'somewhat larger than a Waumbut', noting its 'graveness of the visage', 'serenity that appears peculiarly characteristic', and its diet of gum leaves.³¹ The koala generated curiosity among scientists who debated whether the mammal was more like a monkey, bear or wombat.³² As Richard White notes, it was one species amongst many 'weird' and 'topsy-turvy' Australian mammals that fascinated scientists by troubling established systems of biological classification.³³ Both preserved and live specimens were sent to England for examination, classification and eventual taxidermy, resulting in some absurd results as Europeans modelled antipodean animals after their presumed northern-hemisphere counterparts.³⁴ As Jack Ashby has argued in his history of Australian mammals, marsupials like the koala were portrayed as evolutionarily inferior or aberrant, making their extinction in the face of settler and zoological invasion appear unfortunate but inevitable.³⁵ In this way,

²⁹ 'SENTENCE OF DEATH. HARMLESS NATIVE BEARS TO BE MASSACRED', *Brisbane Courier* (Queensland), July 28, 1927, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article21866216>., *Brisbane Courier*, 28 July 1927, 13; Telegram from J. F. Lindley to W. Forgan Smith, 26 July 1927, GC, DAS, QSA, AGS/J464.

³⁰ 'Country Women', *Cairns Post* (Queensland), 9 June 1927, 7.

³¹ *Sydney Gazette*, 21 August 1803.

³² Jacqui Donegan, 'Unfair Game', 37.

³³ Richard White, *Inventing Australia: Images and Identity 1688–1980* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1981), 6–7.

³⁴ See for example Bill Jenkins, 'The Platypus in Edinburgh: Robert Jameson, Robert Knox and the Place of the Ornithorhynchus in Nature, 1821–24', *Annals of Science* 73, no. 4 (1 October 2016): 425–41; Louis J. Pigott and Leslie Jessop, 'The Governor's Wombat: Early History of an Australian Marsupial', *Archives of Natural History* 34, no. 2 (1 October 2007): 207–18.

³⁵ Jack Ashby, *Platypus Matters* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2022), 307.

marsupials were frequently grouped along with First Nations people as interesting but doomed relics of an antiquated past.

In the lead-up to and aftermath of Australian Federation, native flora and fauna were recruited into the struggle to define a distinctive national identity. Eric Kaufmann has analysed the ways in which Americans at the turn of the twentieth century looked to their continent's distinctive natural environment as a basis for national identity, a process he describes as the 'naturalisation of the nation.'³⁶ Similarly, Federation-era Australians leant on the distinctiveness of natural flora and fauna to help forge a myth that validated the newly federated nation of Australia, and that distinguished them from their British or American counterparts.³⁷ As the population became more urbanised, a distinctive national culture emerged in which 'the bush' was valorised as the source of Australian identity. The relative values once placed by settlers on native versus introduced species were '[s]pectacularly' reversed as native animals came to represent the developing nation, while 'foreigner' animals – with the exception of livestock – appeared to endanger authentic Australian wildlife.³⁸

Rising national pride in connection to native animals lent urgency and passion to warnings of impending extinction. Whereas previously the sense of an expansive and abundant Australian continent had given an impression of environmental inexhaustibility, in the early 1900s it became clear that many of Australia's native animal populations were severely depleted.³⁹ The association between Australia and native animals was so widely understood that when the naturalist James Barrett edited a book urgently calling for more stringent protection of Australian flora and fauna, he entitled it simply *Save Australia*. Published in 1925, two years

³⁶ Eric Kaufmann, '“Naturalizing the Nation”: The Rise of Naturalistic Nationalism in the United States and Canada', *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 40, no. 4 (1998): 666-95;

³⁷ Scholarship on the entanglements of Australian nationalism and nature conservation continues to expand. Important accounts include Libby Robin, *How a Continent Created a Nation* (Sydney: University of New South Wales Press, 2007); Libby Robin, 'Nationalising nature: Wattle Days in Australia', *Journal of Australian Studies* 26, 73 (2002): 13-26; Tom Griffiths, *Hunters and Collectors: The Antiquarian Imagination in Australia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); Thomas Dunlap, *Nature and the English Diaspora: Environment and History in the United States, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), (ch.7). For more recent interventions, see Russell McGregor's work on Alec Chisholm's brand of nature-based nationalism in *Idling in Green Places* (Melbourne: Australian Scholarly Publishing, 2019) and 'Mateship with Nature: Nationalism and Conservation in the Writings of Alec Chisholm', *Environment and History* 27, no. 3 August 2021): 399-420. Chisholm was an active opponent of the open season. Glenn Fowler, 'Black August', 21-2.

³⁸ Adrian Franklin, *Animal Nation* (Sydney: University of New South Wales Press, 2006), 15.

³⁹ Dunlap, 'Australian Nature, European Culture', 32.

before the open season devastated Queensland koalas, the book notes that koalas were threatened by the temerity of the ‘so-called sportsmen of our community’.⁴⁰

In the push to couple threatened native wildlife with a distinctive national identity, the koala took a leading role. Only rivalled in iconic status by the kangaroo, the koala proved a remarkably versatile exemplar of supposedly authentic Australia, representing a wide range of Australian qualities or identities. Koalas could be variously invoked as a mascot for the manly ANZAC ‘diggers’ of the First World War, as mischievous children, or, in the case of ‘Mrs Koala’, as a distinctively Australian maternal archetype.⁴¹ Probably the best-known depiction of the koala in this period was Norman Lindsay’s cartoons in the influential, vehemently nationalist publication, *The Bulletin*. Beginning in 1904, Lindsay’s humorous sketches portrayed anthropomorphic koalas in ‘unmistakeably Australian’ ways, featuring qualities of good humour, loyalty, cheekiness, mateship and a healthy disregard for authority.⁴² A reviewer noted that these cartoon bears were so widely known that city dwellers who saw real koalas in zoos found they were reminded strangely of a ‘Lindsay drawing’.⁴³ Lindsay’s sketches culminated in the publication of his children’s book *The Magic Pudding: The Adventures of Bunyip Bluegum*. This story of a good-natured koala and his friends sold some 15 000 copies in a modestly populated country and remains in print today.⁴⁴

Ann Moyal and Michael Organ argue that the publication of *The Magic Pudding*, just as fur hunters were slaughtering koalas throughout the eastern states, propelled much of the widespread outrage against the 1927 open season. Speaking both to the crucial role of the book in changing attitudes towards native animals and to its participation in a wider shift, they write that Lindsay ‘had put his finger on the pulse of national sentiment and inspired a pervasive new feeling for Australia’s fauna’.⁴⁵ In the anti-open season campaign, references to ‘Billy Bluegum’ were common. One woman sent the editor of the *Brisbane Courier* an original Lindsay drawing to aid the newspaper’s efforts to save ‘the most innocently appealing of God’s creatures’.⁴⁶ J. F. Harding penned a fiery poem blaming politicians for the ‘Death of Bill

⁴⁰ A. S. Le Soeuf, ‘The Australian Animals: How they stand today, and the cause of the scarcity of certain species’, in James Barrett (ed.), *Save Australia: A plea for the right use of our Flora and Fauna* (Melbourne: Macmillan & Co, 1925), 181.

⁴¹ *The Telegraph*, 23 January 1924; ‘THE KOALA KIDS’, *Sydney Mail*, 15 April 1925; ‘Mrs. Koala’, *Eastern Recorder* (Kellerberrin, WA), 4 March 1927.

⁴² Donegan, ‘Unfair Game: Queensland’s Open Season on Koalas in 1927’, 44, Moyal and Organ, *Koala*, 36.

⁴³ J. Penn, ‘Literary Letter: A Note on Books’, *The Register* (Adelaide), 2 November 1918, 4.

⁴⁴ Norman Lindsay, *The Magic Pudding* (Mineola, N.Y.: Dover Publications, 2006, [first published 1918]).

⁴⁵ Moyal and Organ, *Koala*, 144.

⁴⁶ ‘Brisbane Lady’, ‘Save the Native Bear’, *Brisbane Courier*, 23 July 1927, 20.

Bluegum. It was printed alongside a cartoon of a koala waiting to be hanged.⁴⁷ The prominence and influence of animals in Australian children's stories can be linked also to longer trends in the United States and Britain, in which anthropomorphised animals featured in didactic tales in this period about the care of nature and its inhabitants. We can view endearing animal figures like Blinky Bill and May Gibbs' 'Gumnut Babies' as antecedents to Disney's *Bambi*, or as contemporaries to Felix Salten's original literary *Bambi* (1923), both of which Matt Cartmill has credited with a 'deep influence on modern attitudes toward the hunt, wildlife, and the wilderness.'⁴⁸

The dwindling number of koalas was not the only consideration for their advocates: one letter-writer argued that 'If there were forty millions of native bears in Queensland there would be no justification in slaughtering one'.⁴⁹ But the growing awareness that koalas might face extinction – even the conviction that they certainly would – lent greater urgency to calls for the open season's cessation. Conjecture over the koala's fate offered poignant material for the open season's most poetic opponents: the author of 'The Koala's Lament' imagined a future in which younger generations' only reminders of koalas would be teddy bears and 'golden folklore'.⁵⁰

Think of the children

The success of *The Magic Pudding* points to the role of settler Australian children in shifting attitudes towards and interactions with native wildlife. In one sense, stories about anthropomorphic native animals were part of a push to inculcate a love of nation during the uneasy period around Federation, when parents and teachers were encouraged to instil patriotic pride in their children and students.⁵¹ But, as the third chapter demonstrated, they also contained poignant messages about the broader necessity of caring for Australia's unique flora and fauna. Female authors like Ethel Pedley and Amy Mack dominated this genre near the beginning of the twentieth century.⁵² Dorothy Wall's enduringly popular *Blinky Bill* series, first introduced to readers six years after the open season in question, would tap into and solidify

⁴⁷ J. F. Harding, 'The Death of Bill Bluegum', *Queenslander*, 11 August, 1927, 3.

⁴⁸ Matt Cartmill, *A View to a Death in the Morning: Hunting and Nature Through History* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1993), 188.

⁴⁹ 'Labour Disgust', *Brisbane Courier*, 29 July 1927.

⁵⁰ 'The Koala's Lament', *Telegraph*, 6 August 1927.

⁵¹ White, *Inventing Australia*, 114.

⁵² Dunlap, 'Australian Nature, European Culture'; Ethel Pedley, *Dot and the Kangaroo* (HarperCollins Australia, 2014, first published 1899).

this perceived relationship.⁵³ Like Bunyip Bluegum, Wall's eponymous koala is cheeky, resilient and good-natured, appealing to notions of a corresponding national character, and fostering children's compassion for the fictional koala and his fellows in the real world. Blinky's father is shot by a hunter in Queensland before the story begins, and 'men with guns' remain a threat as Mrs Koala and her son search for a new, safer home.⁵⁴ These stories helped to impress a sympathetic image of native animals on the younger generation, and to communicate their need for protection and care.

The perceived connections between children and koalas influenced many letters written in protest against the open season: one correspondent viewed koalas as 'children of the woods...entwined in household affection'.⁵⁵ In the poem quoted at the outset of this chapter, Amy Thornett damned the 'Herods' who dared to hurt the 'Pet of Australia', evoking along with many others the tradition of children keeping koalas in their homes, and casting those who would kill such pets as the murderous enemies of innocent children and innocent koalas alike.⁵⁶ Categories blurred: koalas were not only valued because children loved them but also because they were *like* children. While characterisations of koalas as larrikin men or long-suffering mothers were present during the open season campaign, far more common were projections of humanlike childhood onto koalas both old and young. Among the most common words used to describe the animals were 'innocent', 'little' and 'child-like' – they went by 'bush babies', 'teddy bears' and 'little bush friends'⁵⁷.

A common motif in the protest letters and articles was the description of the sound koalas made when poisoned, shot or trapped, as akin to a baby's cry. One Ipswich local drew on a kind of second-hand Indigenous moral authority, arguing that 'nothing short of starvation would induce the blacks to kill a native bear'. She recounted that an Aboriginal woman named Rosie had told her the deterring factor was the koala's pitiful and childlike cry in death.⁵⁸ Some Aboriginal groups are known, in fact, to have hunted koalas for their skins. But Indigenous perspectives in the public debate over the open season were almost entirely mediated by settler

⁵³ Marylouise Caldwell and Paul C. Henry, 'How Cultural Branding, Story-Telling, and Personification Can Save the Iconic Australian Koala', *Psychology & Marketing* 37, no. 12 (2020): 1781–89; Dorothy Wall, *The Complete Adventures of Blinky Bill* (North Ryde, N.S.W. : HarperCollins/Angus & Robertson, 1990).

⁵⁴ Dorothy Wall, *Blinky Bill, a quaint little Australian* (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1933), 13–15.

⁵⁵ John Brandon, 'Letter to the Editor', *Brisbane Courier*, 21 July 1927, 9; Dickson 'Letter to the Editor', 15.

⁵⁶ Handwritten poem by Amy Thornett, 'The betrayed Koala', July 24, 1927, 'Individual Protests', AGS/J463, GC, DAS, QSA,

⁵⁷ Koala teddy bears were popular in Australia and internationally by the 1920s. They were made from rabbit, mohair, kangaroo, wallaby, or koala fur. Clode, *Koala*, 215.

⁵⁸ K. L. Simpson, 'Gentle Native Bear', *Brisbane Courier*, 18 July 1927, 15.

Australians for their own purposes.⁵⁹ One of those purposes was to draw negative comparison: an angry letter-writer complained that '[w]e have spent a lot of money in protecting the native black [...] Why not protect the native bear?'⁶⁰ His anger suggests not only an exasperation at the resources supposedly spent on Aboriginal people's welfare, but also a belief that native animals were equally or perhaps *more* deserving of protection, when compared with Indigenous people.

The infantilisation of koalas was influenced by and contributed to their association with human children. Many young people wrote directly to the Acting Premier to beg for clemency for animals they considered friends, fellow Australians, and, often, 'pets'. Most of the juvenile protestors were girls, reflecting the trend of greater female participation in children's animal welfare initiatives in early twentieth-century Australia, such as Frances Levvy's Bands of Mercy and essay competitions run by the Women's Branch of the RSPCA, as discussed in Chapter One. Girls were less likely than boys to take part in hunting, and were encouraged to see kindness to animals as a prerequisite of 'lovely womanhood' and eventual motherhood.⁶¹ 'The native bear is a true Australian and so am I, and as they are very harmless, I think it is a shame to kill them' wrote Isobel Perwick, aged 12. Another, signing off as 'Schoolgirl', wrote that 'many a little child has enjoyed the leisure of the company of a little native bear, and to think that such an innocent little creature should be put to death would be a heartrending matter.' She suggested the government should earn revenue by declaring an open season on snakes instead.⁶²

Closeness with animals in the home, as scholars including Erica Fudge and Monica Flegel have noted, tends to trouble conventional boundaries between the human and non-human, and between domestic interior and dangerous outdoors.⁶³ Children, who shared physical and symbolic places with animals, were especially likely to blur these divisions.⁶⁴ In Queensland, juvenile affection for individual koalas drew the wild animals, conceptually and sometimes

⁵⁹ Clode, *Koala*, 188-199.

⁶⁰ *Brisbane Courier*, 20 July 1927, 19.

⁶¹ See for example Frances Levvy, 'Women's Society, Prevention of Cruelty to Animals', *BMHJNSW* 30, no. 7 (25 July 1914): 2; 'Civilised', *BMHJNSW* 36, no. 7 (30 April 1920): 4.

⁶² Correspondence from Isabel Perwick and 'Schoolgirl' to William Forgan Smith, 25 July 1927, 'Individual Protests', AGS/J463, GC, DAS, QSA, Brisbane.

⁶³ Erica Fudge, *Pets* (Abington and New York: Routledge, 2014), 8; Monica Flegel, *Animals in the Family: Pet Relations in Victorian Literature and Culture* (New York: Routledge, 2015), 139-40.

⁶⁴ Flegel, *Animals in the Family*, 139.

literally, into the moral realm of family and domestic life. This was a move well-suited to the emotional framework of the anti-open-season campaign.

Indeed, as the second chapter established, the pet koala was a reality – not just a symbol of innocence and vulnerability – for many bush families, either as a temporary visitor or longer-term companion. The practice of ‘adopting’ a koala and keeping it as a companion animal, especially in homes with children, seems to have been quite common in Queensland, even though, with their highly specialised eating requirements, the species was difficult to keep alive.⁶⁵ Fond memories of particular pet koalas shaped the public’s responses to the open season, and were mobilised in koalas’ defence. Four young sisters shared a story about a koala joey they had cared for at their family home until its mother arrived to happily reclaim it. ‘We hope mother will tell us soon that a notice is in your paper saving the life of our bush pets,’ they opined.⁶⁶ In such responses, gendered ideas about maternity, girlhood, and shared domesticity coalesced to frame the koala family member and beloved dependent, whose persecution was shameful and unmanly.

Women and the open season

Women and the organisations which represented them featured prominently in the protests. Indeed, there was a sense among open season defenders that all women were against the killing (Figure 2). Christina Thynne, a leader in the National Council of Women, Queensland Women’s Electoral League, and the Lyceum Club, wrote to Forgan-Smith that ‘[e]very woman to whom I have spoken has expressed shocked horror’, and warned the Acting Premier that he was being blamed personally for ‘cruelty’.⁶⁷

The Country Women’s Association of Queensland responded to the announcement immediately, firstly in the form of spontaneous protests from local branches and then collectively in centrally organised petitions and letters. Eva Wallis on behalf of the Cambooya CWA branch was the first off the mark, forwarding a *Sydney Mail* article describing a skinless koala left for dead by a trapper but still agonisingly struggling to climb a telegraph pole. The Pittsworth Branch reached out next, asking both for the cessation of the proposed open season and long-term protection for koalas, and warning that ‘the co-operation of the surrounding

⁶⁵ See for example ‘To the Editor’, W. H. Symes, *Brisbane Courier*, 25 July 1927, 15.

⁶⁶ Joyce Weedon, Thelma Weedon, Gwladys [sic] Weedon & Beryl Weedon, ‘PLEA BY GIRLS’, *Brisbane Courier*, 25 July 1927, 15.

⁶⁷ Correspondence from Christina Thynne to William Forgan Smith, 13 July 1927, AGS/J464, GC, DAS, QSA, Brisbane.

branches is being sought'. By 20 July, two days after the announcement had been made, an urgent telegram declared that a special meeting of the broader CWA had unanimously voted to oppose the open season in order to 'prevent our native bear being destroyed'.⁶⁸ The CWA and other women's groups tended not to draw attention explicitly to themselves as women in their protests, but did focus on concerns for future generations, and stressed the country credentials of those they claimed to represent. Amongst the imposing stacks of letters and articles documented by the Department of Stock and Trade, an entire folder is dedicated to CWA protests.

The Queensland Women's Electoral League (WEL) also drew on the bush credentials of many of their members: its organising secretary, the feminist advocate and avid bushwalker Margaret Ogg, noted that many of their 16 000 members were 'located in the country' before launching into her protest. She argued that a government's first priority should not be the getting of revenue and that, in any case, nothing warranted the 'sacrifice of this gentle and harmless animal' to such a mercenary aim.⁶⁹ The Queensland branch of the National Council of Women and the Brisbane Women's Club also registered their protest and were represented amongst the cobbled-together deputation who appeared before the Acting Premier to ask him to reverse the decision.⁷⁰ Taken together these various women's groups represented a wide range of political views: care for koalas was a unifying issue.

Individual women often framed their protests against the open season on behalf of children, arguing either that future generations had a right to see koalas, or that their own children loved individual pet koalas. Eileen Collins wrote on behalf of the Queensland Country Women's Association to express sympathy with children affected by the announcement. They were, she said, 'nearly frantic about it.' Collins urged decision-makers to imagine 'if you had a lot of quiet, harmless, defenceless animals in your back yard how you would feel if men stole in & shot them'.⁷¹ Women also appealed to the potentially brutalising impacts of the trade on boys

⁶⁸ Alice E. Kash to William Forgan Smith, 22 July 1927, 'Animals and Birds Acts Protests from Country Women Associs.', AGS/J464, GC, DAS, QSA, Brisbane; Correspondence from Eva Wallis to William Forgan Smith, 18 July 1927, 'Animals and Birds Acts Protests from Country Women Associs.', AGS/J464, GC, DAS, QSA, Brisbane; Correspondence from K. Cunningham to E. Graham (Under Secretary), 20 July 1927, 'Animals and Birds Acts Protests from Country Women Associs.', AGS/J464, GC, DAS, QSA, Brisbane; Telegram from S Cater, 20 July 1927, 'Animals and Birds Acts Protests from Country Women Associs.', AGS/J464, GC, DAS, QSA, Brisbane.

⁶⁹ Correspondence from Margaret A. Ogg, 21 July 1927, Animals and Birds Acts Protests from Country Women Associs.', GC, DAS, QSA, AGS/J464.

⁷⁰ The others were representatives of the Royal Society, the Nature Lovers' League, the Royal Australasian Ornithologists' Union and the Boy Scouts' Association, along with a farmer, Hector Dinning. Glenn Fowler, 'Black August', 19.

⁷¹ F.E. Collins to Acting Premier, 25 July 1927, GC, DAS, QSA.

and men. Queensland woman Helen Corbett Taylor wrote to Forgan Smith in July 1927: ‘I consider it a crying shame that the ruthless men & boys should be allowed to slaughter the Native Bear especially when it has absolutely no means of defending itself.’ She warned darkly that ‘Any man guilty of killing one, would be quite capable of murdering his own flesh.’⁷²



Figure 2 This advertisement from 1928 recalls a presumed consensus amongst women against the open season. *Daily Standard (Brisbane)*, 16 October 1928, 2.

Because women were the primary market for koala products like coats and gloves, the many women campaigning against the open season faced some accusations that their gender was ultimately responsible for the slaughter. When Ogg’s WEL protest was reported in the press, for example, a man going by the pseudonym ‘Hugh K. Liptus’ accused her of writing only for ‘propaganda purposes’. He argued that she could do far more to save koalas by instructing those she represented to discard their fur-trimmed outfits, because ‘girls and women are the main cause of the destruction of native fauna’.⁷³ Another angry letter-writer pronounced that the ‘abolition of this hideous torture rests wholly with women’ and appealed to them to imagine the dying animals’ agony whenever they were tempted to buy fur.⁷⁴

David Stead, a prominent naturalist and President of the Wild Life Preservation Society of Australia, was a leading figure in the campaign to save the koala. Alongside the organisation’s usual annual report for 1927, he produced an emotive special report on the open season and its

⁷² Correspondence from Helen Corbett Taylor to William Forgan Smith, 25 July 1927, AGS/J463 ‘Individual Protests’, GC, DAS, QSA, Brisbane.

⁷³ ‘Hugh K. Liptus’, ‘The Native Bear’, *Daily Standard* (Queensland), 26 July, 1927, 6.

⁷⁴ ‘Wearing furs’, *Brisbane Courier*, 27 July 1927.

discontents, making no apologies for what he admitted was a sensationalist choice for a title: *The Great Slaughter: The Death Knell of the Native Bear*. On the first page, he bitterly blamed women for the killing, in a mode similar to his complaints about the feather trade:

The world's woman must have furs; and at any cost! If they are rare – whether valuable, handsome, and durable, or not – so much the better. The Native Bear's fur is not a particularly good one, but, among the world's furs it is rare, and correspondingly costly, and when properly worn, may be a mark of financial distinction. Primarily then, this destruction of the little animal is a woman's affair.

Stead did acknowledge Australian women's contributions to open season opposition, but his contempt for their sex's animal sacrifices at the 'altar of human greed and vanity' predominated.⁷⁵

In fact, as some commentators noted at the time, most koala fur products were sold to women in the United States. Furs of native animals do not seem to have been popular within Australia where international visitors decked in platypus or koala fur products tended to raise eyebrows.⁷⁶ A decade after the open season, a writer for *The Argus* evidently expected to shock their Melbourne audience when reporting on the sale of koala fur products overseas, apparently made from furs apparently obtained during the 1927 open season. They noted that traders had been 'too wise' to attempt to sell them to Australian women.⁷⁷ The alarm was first raised by an Australian living in London who had been appalled by an advertisement for koala fur-lined gloves, and gone to the shop in question to investigate and register their opposition. The shopkeeper told them they were one of dozens of Australians who had made the same indignant expedition.

Is it manly to kill a koala?

Intertwined with the idea of the childlike and child-loved anthropomorphised koala, and the woman-blaming debate over the fur industry, was the argument that hunting such defenceless and harmless animals was dishonourable and unmanly. It was a betrayal, many thought, of a particular code of white Australian bush masculinity. Considerable scholarship has been dedicated to the ways in which masculine colonial domination was tied to the practice of hunting, particularly in the British Empire. Killing native animals, especially large or dangerous ones, was a symbolically powerful method of asserting supremacy over invaded

⁷⁵ David Stead, *The Great Slaughter: The Death Knell of the Native Bear* (Sydney: Epworth Press, 17 May 1927) 11; 13-14.

⁷⁶ Howlett, 'The Bear You Couldn't Buy', 9.

⁷⁷ 'Koala Fur Coats', *The Argus*, 23 June 1939, 3.

landscapes and their inhabitants. In his book *Empire of Nature*, John MacKenzie argues that ‘the colonial frontier was also a hunting frontier’, one which evolved into ritual displays of European dominance over frontier environments. Participation in ‘the Hunt’ was widely thought to express and nurture masculine virtues, especially in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.⁷⁸

The hunting of both native animals and imported European species was common and widely accepted in Australia, where, especially among the higher classes, the sport was associated with the qualities of vigour and manliness, and the colonial domination of new lands, environments and peoples.⁷⁹ But in comparison to other colonised continents, like Africa, indigenous wildlife in Australia did not have much to offer that, as Jack Ashby puts it, ‘a boastful hunter would want to demonstrate that they had overcome.’⁸⁰ ‘What business’, asked a veteran hunter in 1871, ‘had a sportsman who is in earnest, to waste his prime in trapping wombats, or in coursing boomers [kangaroos] over the easy plains of New South Wales, whilst the lioness leaps with her cub in her mouth, over the garden gates of Blidah?’⁸¹ The writer went on to acknowledge the respectably carnivorous Tasmanian devil, but on the mainland there seemed to be little that rivalled the lion or tiger as a legitimate quarry.⁸²

In particular, the sleepy koala with its endearingly anthropomorphic appearance, tendency to leave humans be, and inability to flee or fight back, did not fit into a mould of noble imperial prey. Nor did it seem even an acceptable victim for trappers who killed not for recreation, glory, or manly refinement, but for food and money. The koala could not ‘hit back’ nor escape at speed like wallabies or kangaroos.⁸³ One writer to Forgan Smith, urging against the rumoured announcement of the open season, added a photograph of an apparently vulnerable koala, and scribbled in the margins: ‘No harm to anyone’ and ‘Don’t shoot me I am innocent’: this is not

⁷⁸ John M. MacKenzie, *The Empire of Nature: Hunting, Conservationism and British Imperialism*, (Manchester University Press, Manchester and New York: 1988), 7, 21.

⁷⁹ MacKenzie, *The Empire of Nature*, 135, 143.

⁸⁰ Ashby, *Platypus Matters*, 311. Ashby suggests the thylacine has the only possible exception to this rule.

⁸¹ ‘The Tasmanian Devil’, *South Australian Advertiser* (Adelaide), 16 October 1871, 3. Not everyone shared this author’s disdain for hunting kangaroos, as Rachel Weaver and Ken Gelder have explored in *The Colonial Kangaroo Hunt* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Publishing, 2020).

⁸² There were other possible exceptions. Around the middle of the twentieth century, crocodile hunting ‘safaris’ in Queensland drew directly on older colonial traditions of African hunting to attract southern tourists Claire Brennan, ‘Australian Safari: Hunting Dangerous Game in Australia’s Tropical North’, in *Lectures in North Queensland History 30 November 2009-27 February 2012* (Townsville City Council, 2013), 91–101. See also Claire Brennan, ‘Imperial Game: A History of Hunting, Society, Exotic Species and the Environment in New Zealand and Victoria 1840-1901’, (PhD Thesis, University of Melbourne, 2004), University Library Catalogue, <https://cat2.lib.unimelb.edu.au/record=b2942796> . COULD ADD SOMETHING ON SNAKES?

⁸³ Letter from W.J.A. Olm July 18 1927 to Mr Forgan-Smith; *Brisbane Courier*, 21 July 1927.

quite the valiant, man-making foe of the heroic hunting imaginary.⁸⁴ Thus men who claimed to be otherwise intrepid hunters rejected the idea of hunting the ‘helpless and defenseless native bear’ which posed no threat to human safety or interests.⁸⁵

In his letter to the *Courier*, quoted at the outset, Francis Dickson called for fur trappers to take on a more masculine occupation.

As one born and bred in the bush, please let me voice my protest against an open season for the slaying of the native bear and ‘possum. I can call it nothing short of animal murder to shoot and kill these harmless animals, more especially the bear, whose worst crime is his sitting in the gum tree, an easy target for the heartless gunman. Let the bear and ‘possum killers take on a man’s job, by getting the fox and dingo.⁸⁶

His self-positioning as a man ‘born and bred in the bush’ is representative of the campaign of which he was part. Although Labor politicians and advocates for fur trappers argued that critics were out-of-touch and elites in Melbourne and Sydney, the majority of writers to the Acting Premier and to the newspapers identified themselves as rural Queenslanders, who saw and interacted with koalas and other native wildlife in their day-to-day lives. Many men, in particular, began their letters by establishing their credentials as a ‘true bushman’ before stating their own opposition to the koala open season. Monikers such as ‘Disgusted Bushman’, ‘Queensland Native’, ‘No True Australian’ and ‘A Bushman’s Resentment’ were typical. True men, true Australians and true bushmen, it was argued, would not dream of hurting a koala.

‘I have been engaged in rural industry over three States pretty well the whole of my life, and in that time I have tackled almost every job that the bushman knows of,’ began another letter-writer. ‘I am not squeamish’, he went on, ‘but I fervently thank God that I have never knowingly caused the death of a koala. In my opinion the person who kills this defenceless little chap is no true Australian [...]’⁸⁷ Caring about koalas, the writer underlined, was not the domain of mawkish or feminine animal-lovers: some of the ‘most unsentimental Queenslanders’ refrained from killing the defenceless and cute koala.⁸⁸ In these and other similar assertions, the anti-open-season campaign evoked the reputed qualities of the experienced bushman, who was seen to be both down-to-earth and sympathetic to the koala.

⁸⁴ Correspondence from George H Haughton to William Forgan Smith, 30 May 1927, ‘Individual Protests’, AGS/J463, GC, DAS, QSA.

⁸⁵ *Voice of the North*, 10 August 1927; *Brisbane Courier*, 29 July 1927.

⁸⁶ Dickson, ‘To the Editor’, 15.

⁸⁷ ‘No True Australian’, clipping from *The Mail*, 1 August 1927, AGS/J463, GC, DAS, QSA, Brisbane.

⁸⁸ Malicia Demons, ‘Little Grey Brothers’, *Brisbane Courier*, 27 July 1927, 17.

His toughness and decency, deemed the traditional attributes of the honourable and hardy settler on the land, lent legitimacy to the cause.

This way of thinking about white Australian manhood was one of a set of competing and evolving codes of masculinity. The people killing koalas were not the monsters they were often made out to be in the anti-open-season press. Rather, they were primarily men suffering the effects of the Queensland recession which preceded the Great Depression and caused widespread unemployment in rural areas. In deciding to open the season, officials were responding in part to numerous requests by unemployed and poverty-stricken men, and their wives, for a possum or koala open season to ‘help the working man along’.⁸⁹ Bot Bradbury, for example, wrote to Forgan-Smith in February of 1927 that he and his brothers-in-law were considering ‘having a go at the opossum’ for the first time, since work had been so thin for several months.⁹⁰ Bradbury hoped Forgan-Smith might give him inside information about when a rumoured open season might begin. Petitioners stressed the needs of children in poor families. In appeals to a breadwinner masculinity, it was argued that men, especially those loyal to the labour movement, had a right to be able to work to provide for their families. W. H. Butterworth wrote to the Acting Premier in April of 1927, foregrounding his role as a husband and provider for his family:

I have had no employment since Christmas & am practically on the bread line. I have been a supporter of the labour movement all my life & I think I am only asking what I think is right. There are various places in the district where there are abundances of opossums which I can prove beyond any doubt.⁹¹

The Secretary of the Unemployed of Mount Morgan, in central Queensland, wrote to Forgan Smith that an open season would allow unemployed men to ‘keep their home fires burning’.⁹²

In this light, it is perhaps no surprise that the only sustained defence of the open season in the media came from *The Worker*, the official journal of the Associated Workers of Queensland. *The Worker* criticised the ‘hysterical champions of the koala’, and saw in the anti-open season campaign a transparent attempt by the ‘Tory tabbies’ to remove a Labor government from power.⁹³ Looking back on the campaign in 1929, the editor stressed that ‘the wives of the workless never, at any time, could make an appeal’ to newspapers like the *Brisbane Courier*, and suggested that some of the more violent ‘ravings’ of anti-open-season writers were in fact

⁸⁹ Correspondence to Acting Premier, Mr Boyle, March 27, 1927, Archives.

⁹⁰ Correspondence from Bot Bradbury to Forgan-Smith, 19 February 1927, GC, DAS, QSA, Brisbane.

⁹¹ Correspondence from W.H. Butterworth to William Forgan-Smith, 1 April 1927, Queensland Archives.

⁹² Correspondence from A. Rowley to William Forgan-Smith, 5 April 1927, GC, DAS, QSA, AGS/J464.

⁹³ *Worker*, 26 June 1929.

penned by one angry person at the *Courier's* offices, to be passed off as the views of the public.⁹⁴

Another defence came from Labor politician Thomas Foley, who made his case for the open season in July. Foley raised a number of points, including that koalas were dying from disease anyway, that they were not in fact close to extinction, and that it was just as cruel to shoot a lamb as a koala. But it was his claim that open season opponents lacked accurate knowledge that triggered the angriest reaction.⁹⁵ Indeed, questions of bush authenticity and expertise were at the heart of the open season controversy. 'Those of us who have cherished the Koala as a domestic pet in our homes' reasoned W. H. Symes, 'must surely know as much about it as Mr Foley'.⁹⁶ J. J. Banks was equally contemptuous of Foley's claim to 'bushman' status: 'He may think he is [a bushman], but many people who are able to find their way along a well-defined bush track from one township to another labour under the same delusion.'⁹⁷ The 'true-blue bushman', it was claimed by another, would go so far as to physically fight other men who killed koalas. The letter concluded:

It is not the bushmen who hunt for the native bear, at least, very few who are proud of the word "bushman" will. In most cases it is a town "drifter" from the parks, unused to the bush, and not in tune with the bushland "fitness of things," its chivalry and respect for its own bush folk.⁹⁸

Men who killed koalas were not only inauthentic Australian bushmen: they were also accused of failing to uphold their British heritage. Enduring ideas about appropriate performances of British colonial masculinity were inverted in defence of the koala. One letter writer implored Queensland bushmen to be worthy of their British pedigree by preventing what he saw as the "murder of the innocents". He provided a euphemistic interpretation of British imperialism, asserting that British colonial forefathers 'never oppressed the weak and helpless'. He went on to explain:

[...] their sons fought for our Empire; their forefathers it was who went out in small boats to all parts of this world to get necessary foods – pepper, spices, fish – for the people's need. Bushmen of Queensland, love the native bear, - be Britishers, "play cricket". There are plenty of traitors and tigers of humanity. Save your shot for them.⁹⁹

⁹⁴ 'Open Season for Opossums', *Worker* (Brisbane), 26 June 1929, 20; 'Assassination Threatened?', *Worker* (Brisbane), 3 August 1927, 5.

⁹⁵ Thomas Foley, 'Open Season Defended', *Brisbane Courier*, 21 July 1927, 9.

⁹⁶ 'To the Editor', W. H. Symes, *Brisbane Courier*, 25 July 1927, 15.

⁹⁷ J. J. Banks, 'To the Editor', *Brisbane Courier*, 25 July 1927, 15.

⁹⁸ Chas. Chauvel, 'Country Protests', *Brisbane Courier*, 25 July, 1927, 15.

⁹⁹ Geddes Crawford, 'Our Native Bear', *Brisbane Courier*, 27 July 1927, 17.

Women girls contributed to these gendered arguments as well, condemning men who killed koalas for dishonourable unfairness and cowardice. A patrol leader felt she was speaking on behalf of all Girl Guides in criticising the open season when she claimed that no authentic Australian person would ‘aid in the extermination of such true Aussies as the little koalas’. She went on:

One of the Girl Guide laws says: “A Guide is a friend to animals”: and I think it a most unfriendly, and also cowardly, action, to slay these innocent animals. What makes the crime more despicable is the fact that most of these little bush inhabitants are slain by cunning or foul means. They are not given a fair chance.¹⁰⁰

The belief animating many of these letters is that to participate in the killing of koalas, anthropomorphically depicted as defenceless, innocent, and childlike representatives of the nation, was unmanly and un-Australian. True men did not kill koalas; those who did were insulted as ‘paltry men’ or ‘crawler[s]’.¹⁰¹

This reaction to the open season demonstrated that there were limits and complications to associations drawn between the killing and white colonial masculinity, especially in the early twentieth century when overlapping ideas about conservation and animal cruelty were gaining traction. When the hunted animal was perceived as unable to fight back, and especially when it was so closely tied to burgeoning national and bush identities, and with the concerns of children, killing it for profit could in fact be read as a lack of proper masculine virtue.

Such debates resonated with well-publicised accounts of settler vigilante violence against Aboriginal people, including a massacre in Western Australia that was being investigated and reported on in 1927, the same year as the controversial koala open season. In condemning the murder and burning of at least four Oombulgurri people in Forrest River, *The Brisbane Courier* acknowledged that Queensland had witnessed similar crimes in its earlier colonial days.¹⁰² Those Queensland settlers, however, unlike the Forrest River perpetrators, had had ‘the excuse that the natives at that time were dangerous and uncompromising’.¹⁰³ Only months later, the newspaper would be making similar accusations and similar qualifications, in the context of the koala open season. Denunciations of ‘hideous slaughter’ and of the destruction of innocent

¹⁰⁰ Patrol Leader, ‘A Plea from the North’, *Brisbane Courier*, 28 July 1927, 13.

¹⁰¹ Stead, *Great Slaughter*, 14; Chauvel, ‘Country Protests’, 15.

¹⁰² Kate Auty compiles and analyses the massacre evidence and the efforts to obscure it in: *O’Leary of the Underworld: The Untold Story of the Forrest River Massacre* (Melbourne: Black Inc, 2023). Later research put the number at at least eleven killings.

¹⁰³ ‘Massacre of Natives’, *Brisbane Courier*, 10 March 1927, 12.

lives were common to both the massacre and the open season, as were delineations between permissible and impermissible versions of white men's violence.¹⁰⁴ Killing dangerous enemies – whether an 'uncompromising' Indigenous person or life-threatening dingo – was excusable and even manly, but killing vulnerable people and animals unnecessarily was beyond the pale.

At a fundamental level, the male trope of the 'manly hunter' thus went unchallenged by most of the open season's opponents, who objected to the target – the unthreatening koala – rather than the practice of hunting itself. The association between masculinity and (permissible) violence against nonhuman animals was maintained, and perhaps even strengthened, by protestors who stressed the 'true' bushman's moral discernment between legitimate and illegitimate quarries. Only the open season's defenders raised the prospect of a more general abstinence from killing, and then only with the intention of highlighting the 'sentimental inconsistency' of people who would protect koalas in the bush but eat meat at the dinner table, or who neglected to fight for the other marsupials being killed in large numbers: possums.¹⁰⁵ 'I suppose many of the ladies who weep for sympathy for the native bear, would casually pass their plate for a second helping of lamb and mint sauce' speculated one writer.¹⁰⁶ For most of the open season's opponents, however, the fight for the koala rested less on a universal principle of animal rights in which a lamb might share, and more on the species' particular affective and cultural appeal. That included the koala's status as a 'true Australian'.¹⁰⁷

Conclusions

In spite of an extended chorus of outraged opposition, the open season went ahead. The figure of 600 000 koala deaths has been cited in accounts of the open season, but William Lines points out that this number does not include those whose unsatisfactory furs were not accepted by dealers.¹⁰⁸ Nor does it account for young koalas who were killed along with their parents or abandoned to starve without them, and those whose furs were sold in combination with other marsupial skins. It is likely that the total is closer to 800 000.¹⁰⁹

The public backlash to the open season, on the other hand, was so intense and widespread that the government was forced to recognise it had badly misjudged public feeling. On 11 October,

¹⁰⁴ See for example 'Ghoulish Native Massacre: Special Commissioner's Report', *Truth* (Brisbane), 29 May 1927, 15.

¹⁰⁵ Foley, 'Open Season Defended', 9.

¹⁰⁶ 'Diogenes', 'Open Season for Bears', *Toowoomba Chronicle and Darling Downs Gazette*, 2 August 1927, 9.

¹⁰⁷ 'No True Australian'.

¹⁰⁸ Lines, *Taming the Great South Land*, 171.

¹⁰⁹ Lines, *Taming the Great South Land*, 171.

the Acting Premier announced a plan to restock areas of the state which had been stripped of native animals.¹¹⁰ The 1927 open season would be the last: the koala was finally afforded lasting protection in Queensland.¹¹¹ In 1929, the Labor government lost the election it had been trying to salvage, and although it is impossible to be sure of the extent to which the open season factored in the result, the impassioned pledges of committed Labor supporters to vote against their own party over the koala issue suggest it at least played a role.¹¹²

There were further consequences: Donegan credits the movement against koala killing with kick-starting the Australian conservation movement, by fostering the development of wildlife societies, campaigns for national parks, and nature studies for school students.¹¹³ Noel Burnett was inspired by the open season to institute Australia's first koala sanctuary, which still operates as 'Koala Park' in Sydney.¹¹⁴

This chapter's account of the Queensland koala open season demonstrates the great potency of emotionally loaded questions of care for native animals in the 1920s, while highlighting the complexities and contingencies of how this care was applied. Differences of class, locale, and species influenced how care was expressed and who received it. They also shaped the ways that feminine or masculine behaviour manifested and was policed. Secondly, it makes clear that care for native animals, especially infantilised koalas cast as 'pets' and 'teddy bears', was significantly contoured by gender. Arguments against killing koalas drew on ideas about innocent children and their mothers, the requirements of authentic bushman masculinity, ideas about noble or ignoble prey, and on the association (or otherwise) of women consumers with the qualities of care and mercy. Though their gender was accused of hypocritically fuelling the fur trade, women played important roles in a watershed campaign to defend a species that, thanks largely to the practices of pet-keeping, children's literature, and animal protectionism traced in the thesis thus far, was becoming the nation's icon and its darling.

¹¹⁰ Jackson, *Koala*, 214-5.

¹¹¹ Department of Agriculture Water and the Environment, 'Conservation Advice for *Phascolarctos cinereus* (Koala) combined populations of Queensland, New South Wales and the Australian Capital Territory', February 2022, 5-6, <https://www.environment.gov.au/biodiversity/threatened/species/pubs/85104-conservation-advice-12022022.pdf>.

¹¹² 'How Koalas Won', *Sunday Times (Sydney)*, 19 May 1929.

¹¹³ Donegan, 'Unfair Game', 45.

¹¹⁴ Noel Burnett, 'A Letter to Nature-Lovers in Connection with a Proposed Re-establishment Sanctuary for the Native Bear at West Pennant Hills (Sydney): A Practical Effort to Save the Koala for Posterity', 11 November 1929, FER6/6496, National Library of Australia, Canberra.

As questions of koala killing (and secondarily, possum killing) were thrashed out in the fight against the open season, other settler Australians were visiting bush environments with very different purposes. In place of guns, they brought homemade sleeping bags, a billy, and sometimes a camera. They might have hoped to spot a koala, but by the 1920s most would not have thought to kill it *or* take it home as a pet, because such interference was against the bushwalker's ethos. The sixth chapter examines women's bushwalking as a mode of caring engagement with native animals and an expression of Australian women's modernity, entailing intentional and often joyful immersion in animals' increasingly threatened habitats.

Chapter Six: Wayfaring Women

Bushwalking amongst animals with the Melbourne Women's Walking Club, 1922-1945

It is late afternoon. A cleared, grassy spot, surrounded by gum trees, shrubs. Below, the creek flows by, and on a fallen tree-trunk are two Yellow Robins. Here is peace and quietness, broken only by the singing of the water, the chirping of the birds.

Suddenly the peal of the Laughing Jackass rings out.¹ There is a sudden disturbance in the Bush, sounds of voices and the breaking of twigs underfoot. The Yellow Robins cocking their heads from side to side, wonder whatever can it be. Sounds like an elephant, or some other beast of the bush. So with fluttering of wings they fly to the big gum trees, and this is what they see: A figure comes into view to be followed by others, dressed in shorts and carrying large packs. They wear a badge – a tree, mountains and tracks in the centre, and outside some lettering. Let us look closer: 'Melbourne Women's Walking Club'. They are going to make camp.

Gretchen Fordyce, *Wayfaring*, 1937²

When Gretchen Fordyce sat down in 1937 to reflect on her experiences with the Melbourne Women's Walking Club, she adopted the perspective of native animals. She imagined the bemused curiosity of a pair of Eastern yellow robins whose 'peace and quietness' is punctured by a group of unusually attired women loudly setting up camp. Wonderingly, the 'animal life of the Bush watches on' as the human arrivals cook a three-course meal on the campfire, wash dishes, pick off leeches, boil billies for washing, talk and laugh, and finally fall asleep. Once silence is restored (save for a few snores), nocturnal marsupials emerge to make their own inspections:

Then comes Master 'Possum: "There's a funny white bag there. Smells good, too... Master Wombat, who has been waiting, wanders around. "I wonder is there anything for me. Oh, a frying pan with something in it. Ah! a bag of cake. What's the noise? Let's go". And the owner finds the frying pan yards away next morning, but no cake.³

Fordyce's light-hearted article was intended as a warning to fellow walkers not to leave out their food overnight. But the editorial also imparts a number of insights about the ways settler women interacted with natural spaces, animals, and each other, through the mode of bushwalking. Partly, animals are featured here as inconveniences, part of the struggles and 'thrills' that seemed to make bushwalking meaningful and memorable, and as symbols of the

¹ Laughing jackasses are now commonly known as kookaburras.

² Gretchen Fordyce, 'Editorial', *Wayfaring* no. 4 (December 1937): 1.

³ Fordyce, 'Editorial', 1.

bushland serenity that attracted so many walkers.⁴ But they are also presented as curious witnesses, astonished by the sights and sounds of women entering their homes. The author shows a clear awareness of the bush as a previously occupied space which, though refreshingly peaceful, was filled with interesting animals going about their own lives. These lives would continue after the rowdy club's departure. The fact that these intruders were women, and, what was more, women wearing shorts, also mattered to this picture of human-animal engagement. As this chapter will make clear, women's bushwalking could challenge gendered restrictions on movement, dress, and self-expression, at a time when settler Australian women were negotiating multiple contested forms of female modernity.

The Melbourne Women's Walking Club (MWWC), to which Fordyce belonged, was the first of its kind in Australia. Established in 1922 out of frustration over women's exclusion from existing walking clubs, the MWWC gave members structured opportunities to explore, exercise, and socialise in the Victorian bush, and to take a self-conscious role in the traditionally masculine bushwalking movement and related conservation efforts that grew in the 1920s and flourished in the 1930s. This chapter investigates MWWC members' experiences of collective women's bushwalking, even and especially when it was made difficult by obstacles ranging from hungry wombats to condemnatory clergymen, between the club's founding and the end of the Second World War. It asks what walking and camping in bush spaces, with one another and generally without men, meant to participants, as a communal expression of women's modernity and, relatedly, as a distinctive kind of encounter with native animals in their habitat that fostered care for natural spaces as well as the animals themselves.

Melissa Harper has spearheaded a developing body of scholarship on bushwalking as an environmentally and socially embedded practice.⁵ She draws out its relationship to nature-based nationalism and changing environmental attitudes in Australia, noting a continuing need for histories dedicated to the cultural and personal meanings attached to bushwalking, alongside those accounts which incorporate the activity into broader histories of tourism, conservationism, and environmentalism.⁶ Although women made up a significant part of the

⁴ Margery Luth, 'THRILLS! and MORE THRILLS!!!', *Wayfaring* 5 (May 1938): 32–5.

⁵ Melissa Harper, *The Ways of the Bushwalker: On Foot in Australia* (Sydney: New South Publishing, 2020 [first published 2007]); Melissa Harper, 'The Bushwalker's Diet: The Relationship Between Food, Walking Practice and Identity', *Food, Culture & Society*, 18, no. 2 (September 2015): 419–440; Melissa Harper, 'Sensuality in Sandshoes Representations of the Bush in the Walking and Writing of John Le Gay Brereton and Percy Grainger', *Australian Historical Studies* 31, no. 115 (October 1, 2000): 287–303.

⁶ Melissa Harper, "Locating Histories of Bush-Based Recreation in Australia," *History Compass* 15, no. 4 (2017): e12377, <https://doi.org/10.1111/hic3.123>.

bushwalking movement in numbers and enthusiasm, Harper and other scholars have demonstrated that it was predominantly construed as a masculine activity for ‘rugged hair-on-the-chest’ types.⁷ Long hikes were often viewed as tests of manly and supposedly authentically Australian character, and some felt that a proper experience of ‘bush brotherhood’ was only possible without the stultifying effects of nearby women.⁸

These analyses intersect with a far deeper field of scholarship concerned with settler Australians’ relationships to ‘the Bush’ as a gendered place and construct. Since Russel Ward articulated the ‘Australian legend’, women’s historians have investigated the subordination of the feminine in this masculinist and nationalist mythology.⁹ Particular attention has been paid to real and represented frontier women who struggled alone or alongside men in remote, inhospitable spaces, and to the projection of the bush as a cruel mistress or good-hearted ‘Bush mother’.¹⁰ The voices of women who actively sought out bush experiences for leisure and self-fulfilment have been fainter, although a more recent flourishing of recreation and tourism history has made advances in their recovery and analysis.¹¹

MWWC members have been conscientious about preserving and telling their own history. Two commemorative histories, published in 1986 and 2021, offer an optimistic vision of a plucky club which survived through the stresses of the Second World War and a slump in membership in the 1950s; both emphasise shared struggle and the importance of enduring personal relationships on and off the track.¹² The collaboratively produced *Still on Track* (2021) reflects

⁷ Harper, *Ways of the Bushwalker*; Graeme Davison, ‘Louis Henry, the Wallaby Club and Melbourne’s Federal Elite’, *Australian Historical Studies* 56, no. 3 (2025): 454; Allison Jane Cadzow ‘Waltzing matildas: a study of select Australian women explorers’, (PhD thesis, University of Technology Sydney, 2002). Quote drawn from Paddy Pallin, Letter to Mr David, Honorary Secretary of the Bush Club, 8 December 1961, Bush Club, ML MSS 5495 1(2), Mitchell Library, Sydney. In this letter Pallin reflected on the creation of the Bush Club in 1939 in response to the exacting physical standards of this ‘rugged hair-on-the-chest’ bushwalking culture.

⁸ George Sutherland, ‘A camp in the mountains’, part 1, *Melbourne Review* 7, no. 25 January 1882, 42. For some men’s resentment of women’s ‘invasion’ of the masculine bush, see also Robert Croll, *I recall*, (Melbourne: Robertson & Mullens, 1939), 84.

⁹ Russel Ward, *The Australian legend* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1958).

¹⁰ Marilyn Lake, ‘Frontier Feminism and the Marauding White Man’, *Journal of Australian Studies* 20, no. 49 (1996): 12-20; Karen Twigg, ‘Dust, Dryness and Departure’: Constructions of Masculinity and Femininity during the WWII Drought’, *History Australia* 18, no. 4 (October 2, 2021): 694–713; Kay Schaffer, *Women and the bush* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988): 22-3. ‘Bush mother’ quote taken from *The Melbourne Walker* 6, 1934, 15.

¹¹ See for example Fiona Kinsey, ‘Reading photographic portraits of Australian women cyclists in the 1890s: From costume and cycling choices to the construction of feminine identity’, *International Journal of the History of Sport* 28 (May-June 2011): 1121–1137; Julia Horne, *In pursuit of wonder: How Australia’s landscape was explored, nature discovered and tourism unleashed* (Melbourne: Miegunyah Press, 2005); Michael Meadows, *The living rock: The invention of climbing in Eastern Australia* (Brisbane: Living Rock Press, 2015).

¹² Amy Eastwood, Isabel Eastwood and Hazel Merlo, *Uphill after lunch* (Melbourne: Melbourne Women’s Walking Club, 1986); Keng Chong et al., *Still on track: 100 years of the Melbourne Women’s Walking Club* (Murrumbidgee, New South Wales, 2021).

the increasing diversity of the club since membership began to be advertised online, rather than only by word of mouth.¹³

Beyond these insightful institutional histories, no scholarly work has specifically examined the early decades of the MWWC, despite its status as the first women's walking club in Australia. While Graeme Wheeler credits the MWWC for its role in the 'pioneering days' of recreational walking, his account of bushwalking in Victoria is mostly concerned with their male counterparts in the Melbourne Amateur Touring and Walking Club (MATWC)¹⁴ The MWWC's archives of journals, maps, minute-books, memoirs, drawings, photographic albums and walking programmes, forwarded to the State Library of Victoria in 2012 after a lengthy process of consolidation and organisation, offer rich potential for a study of this kind, particularly when placed in conversation with comparable material from all-male and mixed-sex walking clubs.¹⁵ A focus on women walking in nature amongst animals, especially without men and with each other, can speak back to the nature-writing norm of the 'lone enraptured male' identified by Kathleen Jamie, and challenge a tendency to analyse settler Australian interactions with the bush primarily in terms of the meanings attached to them by men.¹⁶ Attending to bushwalkers' interactions with native animals also promises to extend the analytical potential of the animal turn to the anthropocentric field of leisure studies. As Paula Danby, Katherine Dashper, and Rebecca Finkel argue, leisure activities must be recognised as part of, and constituted by, a 'complex, vibrant and sometimes chaotic multispecies world'.¹⁷

The MWWC can be understood as part of the broader bushwalking movement of the 1920s, 30s, and 40s, which embraced opportunities to escape the confines of modern urban life through a 'return' to a supposedly older, more natural way of communing with nature. This was a movement which led efforts for the preservation of natural spaces and native animals for their own sake and for the purposes of recreation.¹⁸ In addition, time in the bush, especially amongst other women and without men, could also represent a thrilling and temporary

¹³ Personal communication, Sheila Hirst, 30 May 2024.

¹⁴ Graeme Wheeler, *The Scroggin Eaters: A History of Bushwalking in Victoria* (Melbourne: Federation of Victorian Walking Clubs, 1991), 34-7.

¹⁵ In the mid-2000s, an older member of the MWWC was concerned about the historic MWWC documents stored in her garage, prompting a three-year project to review, record, and box the materials according to State Library requirements. Personal communication, Sheila Hirst, 30 May 2024.

¹⁶ Kathleen Jamie, 'A Lone Enraptured Male', *London Review of Books* 30, no. 5 (6 March 2008), <https://www.lrb.co.uk/the-paper/v30/n05/kathleen-jamie/a-lone-enraptured-male>.

¹⁷ Paula Danby, Katherine Dashper and Rebecca Finkel, 'Multispecies Leisure: Human-Animal Interactions in Leisure Landscapes', *Leisure Studies* 38, no. 3 (2019): 291, <https://doi.org/10.1080/02614367.2019.1628802>.

¹⁸ These purposes sometimes led to clashes within the bushwalking community, as we will see in the final chapter.

departure from domestic spaces and their attendant gendered expectations. The MWWC provided members with the opportunity to experiment with alternative, thoroughly modern modes of behaving and dressing, to cope with and even enjoy the difficulties of both the bush environment and prejudiced social responses, and to do so while surrounded by supportive women doing the same.

The Melbourne Women's Walking Club

Like many of the bushwalking clubs formed in the first half of the twentieth century, the MWWC's emergence was motivated by the exclusiveness of established clubs, in this case along the lines of gender. Gretchen Fordyce had grown up entranced by her father and brother's stories of intrepid walking adventures, but the earliest bushwalking clubs in Australia were closed to women, including the Melbourne Amateur Touring and Walking Club (MATWC). Unsatisfied with attending the occasional 'Ladies' Day' offered by MATWC – when an appropriately easy walk would be selected to accommodate women – Fordyce and her friend Annie Alpen formed their own walking club in October 1922.¹⁹ Their stated goal was to 'promote and encourage walking & touring generally', and the first order of business was to develop a programme of walks for the remainder of the year.²⁰ Carrying homemade sleeping bags and packs laden with food, members of the early MWWC walked in the bush areas and hills around Melbourne on weekends and holidays, sometimes for ten days or more. There was a well-organised committee that arranged annual programs of activities and managed the membership, while the responsibilities of scouting and leading each hike were dispersed amongst experienced club members.²¹

The offerings for members were many and varied. The program for 1925-26 (Figure 1), for example, offered thirty-nine walks to members, including two extended Christmas trips to Wilson's Promontory and Warburton, two combined walks with the men of the MATWC in the You Yangs and at Moorooduc, one opportunity for blackberrying, three for swimming, and a handful of purely social occasions.²² This busy schedule was common to the

¹⁹ Miss G. (Bill) Williamson, 'Editorial', *Wayfaring* no. 1 (1935/36), 2. The MATWC secretary, Mr Shugg, advised the first committee in creating a constitution for the club.

²⁰ 'Report of Inaugural Meeting 11 October, 1922', Minute Book MWWC 1922-32, Box 1, Records of the Melbourne Women's Walking Club, YMS15464, SLV.

²¹ Sheila Harris, in 'The Club You Join For Life: Stories from long-standing members to acknowledge the Centenary, in 2022, of the Melbourne Women's Walking Club', Desma Burford et. al. (ed.), internal club publication shared with the author, (2020): 25.

²² MWWC, 'Programme 1935-26', printed in Eastwood, Eastwood and Merlo, *Uphill after lunch*, 16.

bushwalking club culture of the period: a leading member of the Sydney Bushwalkers, Dorothy Butler, recalled that ‘our whole social lives revolved around bushwalking.’²³

By 1927, the MWWC had approximately seventy members, and membership stayed close to 100 during the period under examination. Based on the memories recounted in this chapter, membership seems to have been drawn predominantly from the middle and lower-middle classes in Melbourne and surrounding towns – the annual subscription fee of five shillings was reasonable for most women. Schedules of walks accommodated working women. Merle Griffin wrote about the panicked ‘dash through traffic at about 1 p.m.’ after work concluded for the day on Saturday, hoping to make it to the MWWC meeting point in time, ideally without spilling her sausages out of her pack and over Swanston Street.²⁴ In its class makeup the club differed from contemporaneous elite men’s walking clubs, especially the Wallaby Club, which attracted multiple prime ministers, High Court judges, and generals.²⁵

Its gender makeup, of course, was also different. Only women could join the MWWC, though there was a generally amicable relationship between the MWWC and MATWC. Isobel Eastwood, who joined the club in her twenties in 1929 recalled in her memoir ‘a great deal of affection between the men and the women’ and joked about romances kindled on shared walks and at social events.²⁶ A notable number of members were married to each other. Men were also sometimes present as drivers on caravanning trips, or at the regular social events including bridge nights and an annual ball.²⁷

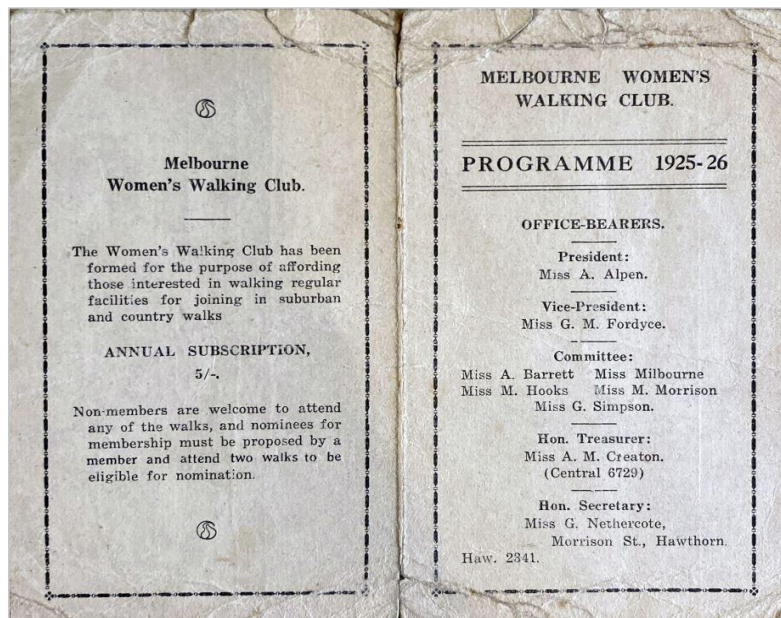
²³ Dorothy Butler, quoted in Harper, *Ways of the Bushwalker*, 194.

²⁴ Merle Griffin, ‘Preparation’, *Wayfaring* no. 2 (1936/37): 10.

²⁵ Davison, ‘Louis Henry’, 436.

²⁶ ‘Memoirs of Isobel Eastwood’ [manuscript], 25 September 1983, MS BOX 3504/5, Records of the Melbourne Women’s Walking Club, SLV, 2.

²⁷ ‘Memoirs of Isobel Eastwood’, 2.



PROGRAMME 1925-26			
		Leader.	Miles.
1925.			
Oct. 31	Mooroolbark-View Rd.-Mt. Dandenong, Flinders St., 10.15 a.m.	Miss Hooks	14
Nov. 3	(Cup Day), Little River-You Yangs (Combined Clubs).		
	Spencer St., 6.30 a.m.	Mr. Briggs	8
14-15	Healesville-Mt. Monda, Flinders St., 1.21 p.m.	Miss Wolfe	18
22	Hurstbridge-Garden Hill, Princes Bridge, 11 a.m.	Mr. Barnard	13
26	Berwick-Harkaway, Flinders St., 11.5 a.m.	Miss Alpen	9
Dec. 12	Mordialloc-Black Rock (Bathing), Flinders St., 1.20 p.m.	" Simpson	6
25	Christmas (a) Wilson's Promontory Camp (Tents). (b) Big Pat's Creek, Warburton.	" Nethercote	
1926.			
Jan. 17	Frankston (Bathing), Flinders St., 10.40 a.m.	" Simpson	6
30-Feb. 1	Big Pat's Creek, Warburton.		
Feb. 6	Carrum (Bathing), Flinders St., 1.21 p.m.	" Alpen	14
13-14	Healesville-Ben Cairn-Warburton, Flinders St., 1.21 p.m.	" Nethercote	13
21	Emerald-Aura (Blackberries), Flinders St., 10.10 a.m.	" Milbourne	6
27	Botanical Gardens (Tea). Meet cr. St. Kilda Rd. and Alexandra Av., 3 p.m.	Committee	
Mar. 6-7	Warburton-O'Shannassy Weir, Flinders St.	Miss Nethercote	5
14	Wandin-Queen's Road, Flinders St., 10.15 a.m.	" Nethercote	7
27	Heidelberg-Plenty Junction, Princes Bridge, 1.20 p.m.	" Fordyce	7
Apr. 12-15	(Easter), Cores.		
18	Yarra Glen-Christmas Hills, Flinders St., 10.55 a.m.	" Barrett	8
24-26	Kings Parrot Creek.	" Nethercote	10
May 2	Hurstbridge-Arthur's Creek, Princes Bridge, 11 a.m.	" Creation	10
13	Dinner and Social (Half-yearly).		
14-15	Mornington-Frankston, Flinders St., 1.47 p.m.	" Hooks	15
22	Ringwood-Wantirna, Bayswater, Flinders St., 1.18 p.m.	" Milbourne	10
30	Seville-Steel's Range-Killara, Flinders St., 10.15 a.m.	" Fordyce	10
June 5-7	Macedon-Woodend.	" Morrison	7
12	Ferntree Gully-One Tree Hill-Boronia, Flinders St., 1.34 p.m.	" Hooks	7
20	Moorooduc (Combined Clubs), Flinders St., 10.50 a.m.	Mr. Briggs	7
Jul. 3-4	Emerald-Maccesfield-Woori Yallock, Flinders St., 1.34 p.m.	Miss Barrett	17
11	Belgrave-Sherbrook, Flinders St., 10.25 a.m.	" Creation	10
25	Frankton-Mt. Eliza, Flinders St., 10.40 a.m.	" Simpson	10
Aug. 8	Mooroolbark-Mt. Dandenong-Evelyn, Flinders St., 10.15 a.m.	" Morrison	10
14	Sydenham-Organ Pipes, Spencer St., 12.45 p.m.	" Sibthorpe	6
22	Eltham-Warrandyte-Tunstall, Princes Bridge, 10.45 a.m.	" Fordyce	7
29	Beaconsfield-Reservoir, Flinders St., 11.5 a.m.	" Creation	5
Sept. 4-5	Black Sand-Gliders-Gembrook, Flinders St.	" Hooks	4
19	Tarrawarra-Healesville, Flinders St., 10.55 a.m.	" Ward	10
25	Boronia-Bayswater, Flinders St., 1.34 p.m.	" Milbourne	6
Oct. 2-3	Yarra Junction, Flinders St.	" Nethercote	15
7	Annual Dinner.		
10	Yan Yean, Princes Bridge, 10.55 a.m.	" Alpen	12
16-17	Aura, Flinders St., 1.34 p.m.	" Wolfe	12

Club's Cottage at Big Pat's Creek, Warburton, available for use of Members and friends. Apply Secretary.

IMPORTANT! Members must verify train times. Owing to electrification, several alterations are expected to be made.

Provide for meals. Leader arranges for bilbies and tea. Names for week-ends to be sent to Secretary as early as possible. For further information, communicate with Hon. Secretary, Morrison Street, Hawthorn. Phone: Haw. 2341.

Figure 1 Programme of walks 1925-26, Records of the Melbourne Women's Walking Club, YMS 15464, Box 11, State Library of Victoria, Melbourne.

In a time before most women had access to cars, the meeting point for most walking trips was Flinders Street Station in central Melbourne. The shared train or bus ride to the beginning point of the walk was a key part of the bushwalking experience for many MWWC women, vividly recalled by older members. Monica Meares reflected on the experience of

leaving the bustle of central Melbourne to embark on a walking trip to southern Victoria. Workplace worries and the need to be fashionable were both burdens to be happily relinquished.

At 9.35 a.m., our troubles neatly pigeon-holed in warehouses, shop, and office desk, and our more attractive appurtenances packed in “ye olde suitcase”, we leave Flinders Street station en route for Fish Creek, the first stage in our trip to Victoria’s National Park, Wilson’s Promontory, and to the realisation of one of my life-long ambitions.²⁸

For Meares, the troubles she and her friends left behind were those of the urban working woman. Her list of commercial spaces to be escaped – offices, stores, warehouses – reflects the changing role of Australian women by the 1930s. Indeed, many commentators saw a clear connection between women’s greater participation in outdoor recreation and their increased participation in the workforce: ‘Time was when reading and sewing and perhaps a little music on the harpsicord were looked on as the only fit and proper recreations for young women,’ a reporter in the *Sydney Morning Herald* commented in 1938. ‘But those days are gone,’ the article assured, ‘and present-day girls show their independence in their pleasures as well as in their business careers.’²⁹ Bushwalking is given as the first example of the kind of activities young women were taking up as an expression of newfound independence. Meares’ description also alludes to the intensifying processes of urbanisation which were sending city Australians – men and women – in search of a break in the bush.

Women’s escape to nature

Proponents framed bushwalking as a necessary antidote to the busyness, pollution, and artificiality of urban and modern life, which were increasingly felt to define the settler Australian experience in the early-to-mid twentieth century. The need for an escape from the perils and degradations of city living in the early and mid-twentieth century was often discussed in gendered terms, especially by Myles Dunphy, often credited as the ‘father of bushwalking’. He saw the pastime as a cure for the ‘short-winded, effete, stale, and partly dead’ working men in Australian cities.³⁰ Nancy Unger has argued that the emergence of outdoor clubs provided middle-class American men, whose jobs were shifting indoors, assurances of their

²⁸ Monica Meares, ‘Wonderful Wilson’s Promontory’, *Wayfaring*, no. 2 (1936/37): 23-6.

²⁹ “Those nine to six girls,” *Sydney Morning Herald*, 7 June 1938, 12.

³⁰ Myles Dunphy, ‘Campcraft and Trailing’, 3-volume unpublished manuscript, 1930, Box MLK 3335, Dunphy papers, Mitchell Library, Sydney, quoted in Thomas Dunlap, ‘Australian Nature, European Culture: Anglo Settlers in Australia’, *Environmental History Review* 17, no. 1 (Spring 1993): 33.

continued masculinity and capacity to survive in what was imagined as the pioneer tradition.³¹ Similarly in Australia, bushwalking and camping attracted many men who looked to reconnect with (and reinvent) a set of experiences and skills which were associated with an older bushman tradition and were understood by many to offer bracing antidote to pressures and possible emasculations of modernity.³²

Men were not the only people increasingly living and working in cities, however, and many women felt a similar pull towards the bracing authenticity and refreshment felt to belong to the bush. Merle Griffin remembered that she had been ‘completely a city person’ when she joined the MWWC in 1929, on the suggestion of an office colleague. Her admitted lack of any knowledge of the bush made her first overnight hike all the more exhilarating; she was thrilled to tuck herself into a sleeping bag under the stars at Anakie Ranges.³³

The appeal of escaping from modern urban life was often symbolised for MWWC members by birdsong. Sensory immersion amongst more-than-human life – especially the avian kind – promoted a sense of ‘natural’ peace and grounded-ness, much sought after by those ensconced in ‘a noisy and troubled world’.³⁴ As in Amy Mack’s nature writing explored in Chapter Three, poems and reflections published in *Wayfaring* counterposed the jangling sounds of city trams and preoccupied pedestrians against the pleasanter notes of birds: ‘the whip-bird’s sudden call’ and ‘the magpie’s liquid fluting, rapture taught’.³⁵ This relish for the sounds of nature was shared by the blind schoolgirls whom the MWWC hosted each year on walking trips and lunches. About trips to Sherwood Forest, Isobel Eastwood remembered: ‘I found what they like best [...] was hearing the kookaburras, and when one flew down and took a piece of ham out of the roll one of the blind girls had in her hand, she thought it was marvellous.’³⁶ Her memories call to mind the multisensory aspects of bushwalking as a means of interacting with native animals. Each edition of *Wayfaring* is rich with reflections on the

³¹ Nancy Unger, *Beyond Nature’s Housekeepers* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012): 77.

³² Tom Griffiths, *Secrets of the forest: Discovering history in Melbourne’s Ash Range* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1992): 80; Katie Holmes and Karen Twigg, ‘Saving Hattah Lakes: Changing Masculinities and the Campaigns for a National Park, 1900–1960’, *Australian Historical Studies* 56 (2025): 329–30.

³³ ‘Memoirs of Merle Griffin’ [manuscript], 12 June 1983, MS BOX 3504/5, Melbourne Women’s Walking Club, State Library of Victoria, Melbourne, Victoria, 2.

³⁴ *Wayfaring* no. 12 (December 1941): 1.

³⁵ Gertrude Hart, ‘Longing’, *Wayfaring* no. 2 ():17.

³⁶ ‘Memoirs of Isobel Eastwood’, 10. For a discussion of settler Australians’ complex responses to the kookaburra’s laugh and the contested adoption of the kookaburra as symbol both of Australia and of Australian character, see Diane Collins, ‘The “voice” of nature? Kookaburras, culture and Australian sound’, *Journal of Australian Studies* 35, no. 3 (2011): 281–95.

sights, scents, sounds, and textures of their walking trips, all of which contributed to a sense of refreshing distance from walkers' regular lives in homes and workplaces.

One distinctive aspect of the MWWC's sensory encounters with native animals was the cover of darkness. Though day trips were also common, many club walks involved at least one night in a sleeping bag under the stars or, later, in a tent. Given that most Australian animals are nocturnal, these overnight stays allowed women access to different, embodied experiences of a more diverse more-than-human world.³⁷ Members reflected at length about nighttime animal encounters. One member, who published many poems in *Wayfaring* under the name N.C.B., wrote the following in 1938:

The darkness deepens, the Bush grows still.
The night-moths flutter along the track,
Till the lonely mopoke calls to his mate,
Breaking the hush of the scented dark.³⁸

These experiences had long been difficult for settler women to enjoy within the bounds of respectability and, as we will see, many critics remained. But the interrelated progress of feminism and women's outdoor leisure in Australia meant that, in the words of Sydney naturalist Ella McFadyen, by the early-to-mid-twentieth century it was 'no longer the peculiar privilege of men to drink of running rivers and sleep under trees'.³⁹ Even nighttime interactions that were less conducive to serenity, like a possum dropping onto a sleeping bag or a mouse running across a dozing walker's face, remained tied up with women's greater independence, and a feeling of authentic adventure far from the drudgery and bustle of normal life.⁴⁰

From September 1939, bushwalking's associations with escape were infused with wartime anxieties, and birdsong's association with peace took on new dimensions. One member described a 1942 weekend in the Blue Mountains as 'truly a re-creation of mind and body and spirit, right away from the war, and the work and the worry of the everyday world.'⁴¹ In the same 1942 issue, another member wrote a short poem about a hike in central Victoria.

³⁷ Martyn Robinson, *Australian Wildlife After Dark* (Clayton, Victoria: CSIRO Publishing, 2016). vii, 1-2. Darkness, and different cultures of darkness, deeply shape humans' relationships with animals, as Andrew Flack has argued. He calls for environmental historians to 'adjust their night vision and learn to follow dark trails in search of new kinds of animal histories.' Andrew Flack, 'Dark Trails: Animal Histories beyond the Light of Day', *Environmental History* 27, no. 2 (April 2022): 219.

³⁸ N.C.B., 'The Bush', *Wayfaring*, no. 5 (May 1938): 28.

³⁹ Ella McFadyen, *N.S.W. Red Cross Record* 25, no. 12 (1 December 1939): 10.

⁴⁰ These light-hearted descriptions of nocturnal 'disturbers' featured on the same page as N.C.B.'s reverential poem. 'Beds in the Bush', *Wayfaring*, no. 5 (May 1938): 28.

⁴¹ D. Brigden, 'Blue Mountains Weekend', *Wayfaring*, no. 13 (1942/43): 8.

There was no war at Pyalong – but Peace and Quietness, and song
Of birds and lovely trees – and grassed leaving in the breeze.

We'll go again to Pyalong.⁴²

Their experience differed from the men of the MATWC, whose numbers were diminished through enlistments and at least one wartime death, but both men and women expressed feelings of spiritual relief from the world's woes when they were able to walk in nature again.⁴³

'Back to the world': gendered domesticity and women's bushwalking

Gretchen Fordyce's 1923 photo album depicts moments from the first full year of the club's existence. Fordyce, who is recalled in club histories as a significant and much-beloved early leader, pasted in a photograph of members returning from a hike up Mount Wellington in the Grampians and captioned it wistfully: 'Back to the world'.⁴⁴ It was at this point in the hike, or shortly beforehand, that women would don the respectable longer skirts they had stowed away in their backpacks when out of sight of polite society. For women, then, returning from a bushwalk meant a return to conventions of feminine respectability and responsibility as well as a return to the bustle and routine of the city.

This potential for literal and metaphorical removal from gendered expectations and conventions was articulated clearly in 1941 when the club hosted a special hike for their married members, who were encouraged just this once to 'walk away from their responsibilities'.⁴⁵ During the 1920s and 30s especially, there was an assumption that a member's marriage would at the least curtail her bushwalking with the MWWC, and likely end it. Notices of congratulations published in the Club journal, *Wayfaring*, were tinged with sadness: 'And we hear that wedding bells are to ring in the very near future when our Gladys (Knight) takes a spouse,' wrote the editor in 1936. 'We are unanimous in hope', she went on, 'that this said spouse will not put his foot down with so heavy a hand that she must forgo tripping with the troops to keep him in holeless socks and juicy steaks!'⁴⁶ By 1941, Gretchen Fordyce could joke that although matrimony, like other activities like skiing, cycling, tennis,

⁴² *Wayfaring*, no. 13 (1942/43): 24.

⁴³ *Melbourne Walker* 15 (1944): 74

⁴⁴ 'Back to the world', photograph in album, Box 17, Records of the Melbourne Women's Walking Club, SLV.

⁴⁵ Editorial, *Wayfaring* no. 11 (May 1941): 3-4.

⁴⁶ 'Social and Personal', *Wayfaring*, no. 2 (1936/37): 39. The Sydney Bushwalkers boasted that unlike single-sex clubs, 'Cupid causes no falling off in members in a mixed club. On the contrary by adding baby bushwalkers he tends rather to increase them.' *Sydney Bushwalker*, no. 35 (October 1937): 19.

surfing or golf, might absorb members' energies 'for a time', ultimately walking remained their chief occupation.⁴⁷

Motherhood, more-so than marriage, prevented bush-loving women from walking. A new mother wrote a light-hearted but poignant article for *Wayfaring* in the mid-1930s, reflecting on the sadness she felt without her MWWC experiences and friends. She wrote about starting her own 'rival walking club' consisting of herself, her toddler, and her dog. 'In common with the M.W.W. Club, we love Nature', she wrote, but in place of mountains and winding tracks, they appreciated the unclipped hedges, paling fences throwing patterns of light and shade on the pavement, and waving branches in her neighbours' gardens. 'So the activities of this small, select Club go on, day after day', the member wrote, 'but in such rambles the soul of a real walker is born.'⁴⁸ Some women searched for ways to balance bushwalking with parental responsibilities, and it was not unheard of for a mother to bring children with her.⁴⁹ Margaret Dunphy departed from prevailing trends when she accompanied her husband Myles on a fifteen-day walk in the Blue Mountains, pushing her twenty-month-old son Milo in a modified pram (see Figure 2).⁵⁰ Though the expectation that women would be solely responsible for childrearing waned over time, motherhood continued to shape many female bushwalkers' experiences.⁵¹ Even in the latter half of the twentieth century, a number of women waited until their children were independent to join the MWWC, while others found bushwalks a rare and welcome relief from caring responsibilities at home.⁵²

⁴⁷ 'Editorial', *Wayfaring*, no. 12 (December 1941): 1.

⁴⁸ E. M. A., *Wayfaring*, no. 2 (1936/37): 11.

⁴⁹ Harper, *Ways of the Bushwalker*, 205.

⁵⁰ Richard Gowers, 'Dunphy, Myles Joseph (1891–1985)', *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, National Centre of Biography, Australian National University, <https://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/dunphy-myles-joseph-12446/text22381>, published first in hardcopy 2007. At other times Myles expressed dubiousness about women's equal capacities as bushwalkers: the influential 'Mountain Trails Club' he formed in 1914 did not allow women to join.

⁵¹ Geographers Susannah Clement and Gordon Waitt have brought a material feminist perspective to mothers' experiences of walking with children, wherein 'care emerges not just as a gendered practice, but as an affective force and embodiment of motherhood'. Susannah Clement and Gordon Waitt, 'Walking, mothering and care: a sensory ethnography of journeying on-foot with children in Wollongong, Australia', *A Journal of Feminist Geography* 24, no. 8 (2017): 1185.

⁵² 'The Club You Join For Life', 2, 12-3, 42, 52, 53.



Figure 2 Family responsibilities kept many women from bushwalking and other forms of outdoor recreation, but Margaret Dunphy defied convention by accompanying her conservationist husband Myles Dunphy on many of his walks, pushing her young son Milo in this modified wicker pram. Myles modified the pram so that the wheels could be folded up, creating a rocking cradle. 'Kanangra Express' pram, used by bushwalkers Myles and Margaret Dunphy in the Blue Mountains, 1930-1931', National Museum of Australia. Milo Dunphy grew up to be a leading conservationist and keen bushwalker, who succeeded in creating national parks in the Blue Mountains and worked with Judith Wright on the Whitlam government's 'Task Force on the National Estate'.

MWWC activities and self-representations – athletic, healthy, modern – can be linked to the nationalist trope of the ‘Australian girl’, a boldly modern feminine counterpart to the enduring trope of the hardy bushman, and an Antipodean counterpart to a stereotyped duller, unhappier, more straitlaced English girl. The Australian girl was active, self-possessed, frank, independent and outdoorsy. *The Olympic Magazine* contrasted the distinctively modern Australian woman, who was blessed with good health, good humour, and excellence in physical recreation, to her Victorian feminine forebears, restricted by uncomfortable corsets and prone to fainting. ‘Believe me, the girl of to-day does not faint,’ the editor assured readers in 1932, ‘she is far too healthy for that, [...] she is fit, well, and splendidly strong.’⁵³ As Angela Woollacott has noted, Australian women and girls themselves actively fostered and participated in this trope. They could presumably appreciate the political and social possibilities in a generally positive view

⁵³ ‘Editress’, ‘Physical Culture for Women’, *The Olympic Magazine* 1, no. 1 (November 1932): 14-15.

of white women as capable and independent.⁵⁴ In MWWC accounts, there is little to match the *Olympic's* preoccupation with the beatifying effects of hiking and other outdoor recreation; club members were more likely to make fun of their own state of disarray than to extol the 'rounded slimness of glowing health'.⁵⁵ Nor did they mirror the magazine's explicit promotion of young people's physical advancement as a crucial aspect of the eugenics movement.⁵⁶

Club members did perceive of themselves as remarkably strong, fit, and able, sometimes in contrast to women in other countries.⁵⁷ Apart from walking, they often took part in swimming, skiing, cycling, equestrianism, and international travel, and were proud when their reputation as strong and brave women spread overseas. *Wayfaring* published an article from an English member who, before moving to Australia and joining the club, had heard so much of what she called the 'Wonderful Melbourne Walking Club' that she formed a mental picture of 'truly amazon women'. She was surprised to find them of average stature in real life.⁵⁸ Women's generally shorter frames, members were proud to assert, were no hindrance to physical feats.⁵⁹ MWWC women were especially gratified by achievements which had formerly been the preserve of men, such as the success of four members in climbing the Barry Mountains, where 'hitherto only the bravest of male footsteps trod'.⁶⁰

Men could also frame their bushwalks in terms of an escape from home and family life, though they usually framed the problems of domesticity differently. In 1933, R. G. Hemmy dedicated a poem to the men who had stayed home from the annual MATWC Christmas walking trip to be with their families.⁶¹ The opening stanza conjures a reluctantly homebound man dozing off after the Yuletide meal:

The Christmas feast is finished, the festive table clear,
All through the drowsy afternoon he slumbers in his chair.
He does not hear the children, a-laughing at their play;
He hearkens not the homely sounds, his thoughts are far away.

⁵⁴ Angela Woollacott, *To Try Her Fortune in London* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 57-9. Woollacott notes that the term 'Australian girl' could continue to apply to women into their middle age, if they stayed unmarried.

⁵⁵ 'Physical Culture for Women', 15.

⁵⁶ See for example 'Eugenics: The Science of Race Culture', *The Olympic Magazine* 1, no. 3 (January 1933): 6, 22.

⁵⁷ K. S., 'General Impressions', *Wayfaring* no. 2 (1936/37): 36.

⁵⁸ K. S., 'General Impressions', *Wayfaring*.

⁵⁹ 'A Club Christmas Caravan Trip, By "A Pansy"', *Wayfaring* no. 8 (December 1939): 7.

⁶⁰ 'A Club Christmas Caravan Trip'.

⁶¹ R. G. Hemmy, 'Christmas Musings', *Melbourne Walker* 5 (1933): 35.

The protagonist's problem in this poem is an inability to enjoy the freedom of earlier 'vagrant mountain ways' shared with male friends in the MATWC, curbed as they now were by marriage, children, and age. Falling asleep in his chair, he is unconcerned with the domestic labour, invisible here, of preparing the feast in question, or with the work of making 'the festive table clear' and tending to the boisterous children. Women, bushwalkers or otherwise, were considered responsible for these tasks.⁶²

Despite the close relationship between the two clubs, the MATWC journal, *The Melbourne Walker*, was more likely to present women as longsuffering wives and mothers who waited at home 'knitting our pom pom caps, and socks' than as fellow bushwalkers.⁶³ In relating a disastrous walking trip to Mt. Evelyn, which saw him arrive home wet and exhausted, C. B. Green noted that 'as anti-climax, I found a faithful wife waiting up for me with hot coffee and toast.' He added: 'Women-haters, please note!'⁶⁴

Naturally, overnight bushwalks entailed cooking, cleaning, and domestic organisation for both men and women. Food preparation, in particular, became a marker of bushwalker identity and skill, and was a favoured topic of discussion in the MWWC and MATWC.⁶⁵ Sometimes, women in mixed bushwalking clubs found themselves reluctantly returning to traditional gender roles, like Rae Page of the Sydney Bushwalkers, who complained she was not allowed to use maps, but was allowed to do the dishes.⁶⁶ It was usually men, however, who took charge of the cooking on bushwalking expeditions where they were present. This was in spite of the fact that, as some joked, they maintained a 'lordly disdain for the kitchen' in a domestic setting.⁶⁷ Maintaining a food supply in quasi-survival conditions was one of the aspects which made bushwalking 'serious leisure'.⁶⁸ Thus, like the art of barbequing, camp cooking was often framed as a masculine domain.⁶⁹

⁶² This gap in attitudes towards domestic labour and bushwalking was parodied in a 1921 story printed in *The Age*, prior to hiking's explosion in the 1930s, in which a wife refuses to go walking with her husband:

'My dear, if only you could measure the distance I have to cover in any one day round the rooms and between the kitchen stove and the dining room table you would be forever ashamed to ask me to do another foot of walking not absolutely essential.' 'Walking', *The Age*, 22 January 1921, 4.

⁶³ 'Why do we walk?', *The Melbourne Walker* 14 (1 January 1943): 14.

⁶⁴ C. B. Green, 'An unlucky night in the bush', *Melbourne Walker* 5 (1933): 27.

⁶⁵ Harper, 'The Bushwalker's Diet.'

⁶⁶ Harper, *Ways of the Bushwalker*, 205.

⁶⁷ W. G. P., 'The open road: Art of the Hiker (Purloined from a N.Z. newspaper)', *Wayfaring*, no. 7 (May 1939): 10.

⁶⁸ Elery Hamilton-Smith, 'In the Australian Bush: Some Reflections on Serious Leisure', *World Leisure & Recreation* 35, no. 1 (Spring 1993): 10–13.

⁶⁹ Lauren Samuelsson, 'A Matter of Taste: The Australian Women's Weekly and the birth of a modern Australian food culture, 1933-1982', (PhD thesis, University of Wollongong, June 2021), 237-8.

In the absence of men, cooking on MWWC trips was a communal activity shared by women outside of their usual spheres. While club numbers remained small, the walk leader would bring a communal billy to make much-appreciated cups of tea, while the rest of the walkers organised and carried their own food (in later years each member was responsible for her own tea supplies). The matter was taken seriously by experienced bushwalkers who instructed others about weight, efficiency, and safe storage. For a weekend walking trip, Alma Meddows recommended a packing list including creamed rice, pre-cooked stew and vegetables, tinned pineapple and cream, grapefruit, eggs and bacon, steak for grilling over the campfire, six teaspoons of tea, and four of coffee. Finally, for tea on Sunday: two crumpets.⁷⁰ Food provided comfort after long days of walking and was at the crux of many treasured stories: one walker earned a reputation by pouring horseradish sauce over her plum pudding when she mistook it for cream. Others fondly remembered fighting off hungry animals for their dinner in a ‘glorious mix-up of girls, dogs, plates, and sausages.’⁷¹ Historian of Australian camping, Bill Garner, has postulated that camping ‘breaks down the unthinkingness of ordinary life’ by bringing conventional routines and practices suddenly into question and suggesting other forms of domestic and social existence.⁷² Interwar bushwalking – which its more vociferous proponents insisted must include camping – offered similar opportunities for experimenting with alternative forms of eating, engaging with nature and socialising. The most quotidian acts became sites for rethinking and innovation and was necessarily less bounded by convention. One such act was getting dressed.

The polemics of pants

Bushwalking gave women an opportunity to experiment with unconventional forms of dress. Historian Rebecca Solnit has argued that restrictive styles of women’s clothing are part of the social norms which have ‘handicapped women as effectively as laws and fears’.⁷³ For this reason, the adoption of more comfortable clothing has long been understood as an act of women’s emancipation, either feared or embraced according to politics and taste.⁷⁴ Clothing innovations by women bushwalkers in the 1920s and 30s were no exception. Would-be woman

⁷⁰ Alma [Meddows], *Wayfaring* no. 1 (1935/36): 31.

⁷¹ Eastwood, Eastwood and Merlo, *Uphill after lunch*, 31-2.

⁷² Bill Garner, *How camping makes us Australian* (Sydney: New South Publishing, 2013), 22.

⁷³ Rebecca Solnit, *Wanderlust: A History of Walking* (London: Verso, 2001), 234.

⁷⁴ Elizabeth Wilson and Lou Taylor, *Through the Looking Glass: A History of Dress from 1860 to the Present day* (London: BBC Books, 1989), 28.

walkers were held back in the nineteenth and early-twentieth century by expectations of impractically long skirts and high heels, and in the heat of an Australian summer, the requirement for feminine modesty could be particularly oppressive. On a multiple-day walk from Warburton to Alexandra in 1910, Ethel Luth (Margery's mother and later MWWC President) attempted to solve questions of respectability by organising a dress basket to be sent ahead to a friend on each stage of their journey, so the women could seem 'presentable enough' on their return to Melbourne. Local people nevertheless gathered to stare at the 'decided novelty' of two women in their walking attire.⁷⁵

As bushwalking's popularity grew, and women attempted increasingly challenging walks, a new wardrobe was gradually improvised. In 1932, *The Australasian* newspaper reported that members of the MWWC 'do not wear any special walking uniform, but each wears what she considers most suitable and comfortable' – whether a skirt or a pair of breeches. Common to all members' outfits was a pair of 'good, strong, stout boots' (Figure 3).⁷⁶ Often borrowed from men or sewn by hand, long pants and eventually even shorts became the norm for women on the track, although Byles complained that Australian women were slower than overseas counterparts to shed old-fashioned accoutrements. Shorts were 'cool and comfortable and extremely becoming on the girl with nicely-shaped legs', she advised.⁷⁷ In the 1920s and 1930s, MWWC members would wear skirts on public transport and into the bush and, once out of sight, remove them and stuff them into their packs. *Wayfaring* organised clothing advice to inexperienced walkers under the categories of 'To train or bus' and 'To wear on trip'.⁷⁸

Changes in women's outdoor wear attracted some criticism, including by writers to newspaper editors who insisted that 'Not one girl in fifty can look smart in slacks!'. Another letter-writer, more abstrusely, argued that a woman in bushwalking pants risked being mistaken for a 'rainbow trout'.⁷⁹ Some walkers were themselves concerned that scantily clad women would bring the pastime into disrepute.⁸⁰ Clergymen, already bothered by the idea of young people hiking on Sundays, worried that the adoption of men's typical clothing would masculinise Australian women and encourage unfeminine behaviour. The Archbishop of Brisbane, James

⁷⁵ Ethel Luth, 'A Fortnight's Walk in Pre-Club Days.', *Wayfaring*, no. 2 (1936/7) 5-8.

⁷⁶ 'Women's Sports', *The Australasian* (Melbourne), 29 October 1932, 58.

⁷⁷ Marie Byles, *The Australian's Woman's Mirror*, April 30 1929, 11.

⁷⁸ Alma Meddows, *Wayfaring* no. 1 (1935/36): 31.

⁷⁹ Whitford, 'On the Open Road', 'What Readers Think—', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 26 July 1934; 'Another Mere Man', 'A Blow for Slacks', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 26 July 1934.

⁸⁰ Harper, *Way of the Bushwalker*, 205.

Duhig warned of the ways in which practical clothing on the bushwalking track might expand women's literal and metaphorical spheres of action:

Men getting into women's clothing is quite bad enough but the reverse is worse. I know that young girls dressed in men's garments would go to places where they would never venture in their proper attire.⁸¹

A Rabbi interviewed for the same article countered that women 'could not enjoy their hike if they were attired in ball-room style.'⁸²

Indeed, few commentators were quite so vehement as Duhig, and some celebrated the apparent connection between new forms of clothing for bushwalking women and a growing sense of female independence in interwar Australian society. Bushwalker Dorothy Lawry's outfit of 'sports coat, knickerbocker trousers, and brogues' convinced one writer that 'no one can say that we women are bounded by convention'.⁸³ As one walker declared in 1939, innovations in dress necessitated by increasingly challenging hikes, in turn prompted new levels of adventurousness for some 'veritable amazons'.⁸⁴ Older members interviewed in the 1980s and 1990s invariably recalled clothing-related firsts or missteps, like the first time shorts were worn on a hike, or how amusing it was when a new member did not know to wear sensible shoes.⁸⁵ Isobel Fielding, who joined in the club in 1937, recalled being stared at and commented upon in her bushwalking attire, but downplayed claims to a pioneering status: 'I've never been a leader in fashion and certainly wouldn't have been "way-out" in those days', she reflected.⁸⁶

Some club members were delighted with their 'way-out' transgressive-ness, however, which could find its most visible expression in clothing (or lack of it). On an extended trip to the Bogong High Plains in 1928, for example, a group of weary club members were offered the chance to swim in a dam by a friendly farmer. The women only had one pair of bathers between them but landed on a solution: one walker would wear the bathers and jump in the dam, and when she was decently covered in water, wriggle out and throw them to the next would-be swimmer, and so on. There is a sense in reading this account of the enjoyment of the small,

⁸¹ 'Sunday Hiking Movement: Views of Church Leaders', *The Telegraph* (Brisbane), 13 July 1932.

⁸² 'Sunday Hiking Movement'.

⁸³ 'Yvonne's Weekly Diary', *The Sun* (Sydney), 29 August 1937, 29.

⁸⁴ Wayfaring no. 8 (December 1939): 7.

⁸⁵ See for example 'Memoirs of Merle Griffin'.

⁸⁶ 'Memoirs of Isobel Fielding' [manuscript], 12 June 1983, MS BOX 3504/5, Melbourne Women's Walking Club, State Library of Victoria, Melbourne, Victoria, 2.

shared scandal of this moment.⁸⁷ ‘Like Eve before the fall!’ exclaimed one tongue-in-cheek poem in *Wayfaring* on another occasion, describing her fellow walkers who had washed themselves naked in the forest.⁸⁸



*Figure 3 Seven early MWWC members pose during a Christmas walking trip in 1928. The delight on their faces is characteristic of similar MWWC photographs, although in this case it was heightened by relief: they had just found shelter after two days lost in the Bogong High Plains, with diminishing food supplies. Despite the punishing December heat, the wearing of shorts was not yet common practice. Left to right: Gladys Knight, Shadder (Annie) Creaton, Merle Griffin, Alma Broad (nee Meddows), Pat Patterson (the group leader), Gretchen Fordyce, Molly Hill. ‘Outside Tawonga Hut, Xmas 1928’. Records of the Melbourne Women’s Walking Club, SLV. Details from the trip are drawn from Eastwood, Eastwood, and Merlo, *Uphill after lunch*, 19.*

Bushwalking women were not alone in experimenting with new styles of feminine dress during this period, nor in eliciting a mixture of criticism and admiration in so doing. The figure of the fashionable and sexually confident flapper, and the rancour she aroused, epitomised the polarising cultural phenomenon of women’s increasing visibility in public, as Liz Conor has argued in her study of the ‘spectacularisation’ of modern women in the early

⁸⁷ Eastwood, Eastwood and Merlo, *Uphill after lunch*, 20.

⁸⁸ ‘Toolangi’, *Wayfaring* no. 1 (1935/36): 23.

twentieth century.⁸⁹ Though they were frequently treated as a ‘spectacle’, especially as they left the city, MWWC women did not necessarily identify with the transgressive flapper; when recounting a typical tram journey to the beginning of a walk, one club member joked about the discomfiting difference between them:

At the next tram stop you feel a little smaller as an ultra-fashionable flapper gets in and sits next to you, placing her small lizard skin shoes next to your dubbin-soaked, thick-soled high boots which were sized five when you left home but which now appear to have taken on colossal proportions. In a pitiful attempt to preserve a dignified front you sit up stiffly and glance coolly round the compartment, drawing a wink from a man in the corner and inadvertently hitting the flapper with a hard corner of your knapsack which happens to be the corner where an enamel mug lies.⁹⁰

MWWC outfits were also more hodgepodge and improvisatory than the metropolitan ‘feminine types’ identified by Conor, often bringing together borrowed men’s clothing and hand-sewn garments. As Melissa Bellanta and Alana Piper have argued, historians of consumption and gender in this period should not overlook the still-important role of the second-hand, the eclectic, and the traditional in women’s self-presentation.⁹¹

Nevertheless, MWWC bushwalkers were among the many women in this era expressing themselves in controversial and new visual styles whose images were photographed, reproduced, consumed, analysed, sexualised, and objectified, and who seemed to foster new ways of conceptualising modern feminine selfhood. Conor argues persuasively for a kind of active self-fashioning among such women. It is possible to detect this kind of self-conscious agency in the humour and pride with which MWWC members reflected upon their clothing choices. Though the flapper predominates as a visually powerful and much-reproduced image from this era, Australian women’s modernity did not come in any one style: it could look like Portia Geach applying scientific principles to women’s domestic duties, for instance, or like peace activists with specific dress codes advocating for Pan-Pacific cooperation in international fora.⁹² MWWC walkers in their shorts and trousers offered another brand of womanly modernity.

⁸⁹ Liz Conor, *The Spectacular Modern Woman: Feminine Visibility in the 1920s* (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2004).

⁹⁰ ‘The Truth About Walking Tours’, *Wayfaring* no. 1 (1935/36): 5-6.

⁹¹ Melissa Bellanta and Alana Piper, “Looking Flash: Disreputable Women’s Dress and ‘Modernity’, 1870–1910,” *History Workshop Journal* 78, no. 1 (October 1, 2014): 58–81.

⁹² Thea Gardiner, ‘The Nation’s Health Is the Nation’s Wealth’: Portia Geach (1873–1959) and the Good Health Movement in Interwar Australia,” *Australian Historical Studies* 55, no. 1 (January 2, 2024): 90–114; Fiona Paisley, “Cultivating Modernity: Culture and Internationalism in Australian Feminism’s Pacific Age,” *Journal of Women’s History* 14, no. 3 (2002): 105–32.

Harassment

Both the donning of allegedly masculine clothing and the sheer act of walking by women, brought unwelcome attention and sexual harassment. Historically, an underlying misogynist assumption has held that female pedestrians walk not for their own enjoyment or utility but for the benefit of a male gaze, with the implication that ‘they are asking for whatever attention they receive.’⁹³ Women hikers in the 1930s were accused of walking merely because it was fashionable, or as an opportunity to show off their legs.⁹⁴ Archbishop Duhig added to his condemnation the charge that women bushwalked only to ‘attract attention’ rather than for the more appropriate end of education.⁹⁵ A self-professed veteran walker complained to the *Argus* that women bushwalked ‘not because they love the bush or because they like walking [but] because everybody else is doing it’, and a shopkeeper suggested it was because they wanted to add new, daring items to their wardrobes.⁹⁶ A columnist in the *Melbourne Punch* predicted this kind of double standard in 1912 when satirising the wealthy male members of the Wallaby Club, an early Melbourne walking society. ‘If women did such things we would be chaffed unceasingly because of the aimlessness of the thing,’ she joked, ‘but it is quite a solemn, serious proceeding with these men.’⁹⁷ As Harper argues, characterisations of women’s walking as a superficial or vain endeavour contributed to broader efforts to restrict the independence of the emerging ‘new woman’ in the early twentieth century.⁹⁸

Assumptions about the performativity of bushwalking underlay the sexualisation and harassment of women walkers, especially when travelling by train to the beginnings of their walks. ‘Do you fellow-members of the M.W.W.C. really realise how courageous we are?’ began the editor of *Wayfaring* in 1936, before detailing the ‘dangers, embarrassments, indignities and humiliations which face us on even a small walk’. Young boys’ stares and comments – ‘Look at the girl in trousers!’ yelled one – could be borne.⁹⁹ But the manners of older men, she said, were ‘too well-known to enlarge upon this abominable person.’¹⁰⁰ The writer and public servant Robert Croll, who belonged to the MATWC, mocked the spectacle

⁹³ Solnit, *Wanderlust*, 234.

⁹⁴ Harper, *Ways of the Bushwalker*, 166-7.

⁹⁵ ‘Sunday Hiking Movement’. Assumptions about female walkers’ performativity for the male gaze echoed criticisms of Australian women’s adoption of cycling in the 1890s. Penny Russell, ‘Recycling Femininity: Old Ladies and New Women’, *Australian Cultural History*, no. 13 (1994): 47-8.

⁹⁶ ‘Why Girls Like To Hike,’ *Argus*, July 14, 1932, 6.

⁹⁷ ‘Clio’, ‘Ladies’ Letter’, *Melbourne Punch*, 21 September 1911, 36.

⁹⁸ Harper, *Ways of the Bushwalker*, 168.

⁹⁹ ‘Brave Women’, *Wayfaring* no. 7 (May 1938): 17.

¹⁰⁰ ‘Brave Women’.

of MWWC women piling into a rickety vehicle for caravan trip, dubbing it the ‘Suffragette Circus’.¹⁰¹ Although MWWC accounts mostly remain light-hearted, club members were evidently highly conscious of being observed, as an ‘assemblage of femininity laden with packs’ to be gawked at by tourists and lewdly commented upon by men.¹⁰² Harassment, surveillance, and sexist criticism served in conjunction with a ‘tide of combative representations’ to ‘contain the feminine within the traditional symbolism of the home’ and limit women’s ability to be agents of their own cultural subjectivity through dress and other styles of self-expression, as Conor describes in a metropolitan context.¹⁰³ Members stressed the relief of finally meeting with friends in similar eye-catching garb and dealing with the leers, laughs, raised eyebrows, and unwanted comments together. Then came the relief of commencing the bushwalk proper, as the male gaze gave way to the less threatening gaze of ‘the wombats and wallabies’.¹⁰⁴ With the relative obscurity it offered, the bush became in many ways a safer place for MWWC women than the city.

Shared struggle

Club members did not shy away from complaining about the various ailments and difficulties they faced before and during hikes, including men’s harassment. But these problems were often framed as crucial to the experience and as a way to form strong emotional bonds. Members often joked about the bushwalker’s propensity to declare ‘never again’ after a particularly taxing hike, only to immediately begin planning the next one.¹⁰⁵ A *shared* experience of natural beauty, adventurous difficulties, animals creeping into sleeping bags, and boisterous fun was what made somebody a ‘dinkum member of our club’, according to one member in 1936.¹⁰⁶ These friendships were deeply valued, and members often wrote affectionately and jokingly about the community of women with which they had walked, sometimes for decades on end. They expressed deep sadness when someone moved overseas or passed away. In 1937, Olive Sandell, a young clerk at the Melbourne Children’s Hospital, stumbled off a cliff edge while climbing Mount Cathedral, and died several hours later surrounded by other club members.

¹⁰¹ Robert Croll, ‘The Caravan: Women on the Open Road’, in *Along the Track* (Melbourne: Robertson & Mullens, 1930), 85-9.

¹⁰² ‘The C. O. (Casual Observer) Looks Us Over’, Box 8, Records of the Melbourne Women’s Walking Club, State Library of Victoria.

¹⁰³ Conor, *The Spectacular Modern Woman*, 76.

¹⁰⁴ Gretchen Fordyce, ‘Editorial’, *Wayfaring* no. 4 (December 1937): 1; ‘The Truth about Walking Tours’, *Wayfaring* no. 1 (1935/36): 6.

¹⁰⁵ Reta (Anna) Conder, ‘Two Early Walks’, *Wayfaring*, no. 1 (1935/36): 15.

¹⁰⁶ D. M. B., *Wayfaring*, no. 1 (1935/36): 9.

Remembered by the club leadership as ‘Enterprising, vigorous, and full of the joy of life’, she was especially mourned by her long-time friend Molly Levy, who had convinced Olive to join the club and was with her when she died.

Levy wrote a poem reflecting on the special kind of friendship the two had shared:

I wonder if they really know
What it means to lose a pal of the bush,
Who has shared so much with me.
We’ve slept in grass or tent or hut
Side by side; and carried our packs [...]

She concluded:

And I keep in mind the wonderful thought
Of a pal who waits in the Bush for me:
A pal who understood.¹⁰⁷

Levy’s poem gives a sense of how experiences of women in the bush seemed to imbue friendships with special significance. The privations and prejudices which this hobby could entail were rendered more bearable, meaningful, and even thrilling, by being shared with likeminded women who often loved each other deeply.

Unsurprisingly, given the social restrictions of the period, there is no explicit discussion of romantic relationships between women in the MWWC archives. It is clear, however, that women bushwalkers throughout Australia could and did find possibilities for same-sex intimacy, companionship, and non-heteronormative self-expression in ways that were far less possible or permissible in other areas of their lives.¹⁰⁸ Marie Byles wrote frankly in an unpublished autobiography about her lack of sexual attraction to any of her fellow law students, all of whom were men, and her reluctance to appear conventionally attractive to them.¹⁰⁹ ‘Being made as I am, I was not one of the mixers’, she wrote later, professing to prefer ‘interesting books to read, lectures to listen to, mountains calling to be climbed [and], worthy causes to be espoused’ over romance.¹¹⁰ Many MWWC members never married, all were to some extent transgressive in their choices of clothing, and many went by male nicknames within the club,

¹⁰⁷ Molly Levy, ‘Olive Sandell’, *Wayfaring* no. 4 (December 1937): 41.

¹⁰⁸ Anne McLeod, *The Summit of her ambition: the spirited life of Marie Byles 1900-1979* (New South Wales: Anne McLeod, 2016), 60-2.

¹⁰⁹ Marie Byles, ‘Many Lives in One, Being the Autobiography of a Pioneer in Various Fields’, unpublished manuscript, ML MSS 3833, Further Papers, including autobiography, c. 1972, State Library of New South Wales, Sydney, 2.

¹¹⁰ ‘As for copulation, which we share with the animals, this was merely repulsive’, she added. Byles, *Many Lives in One*, 37. Byles’ biographer, Anne McLeod, writes about Byles’ romantic advances to her close friend from university, Ellen Dymphna, which were painfully rejected. McLeod, *Summit*, 61-2.

like Miss G. ‘Bill’ Williamson, who was club secretary and *Wayfaring* editor in 1936 and 1937.¹¹¹ These decisions likely meant different things to different women, but taken together they show how the bushwalking track enabled experimentation and non-conformity.

How did native animals figure in these negotiations of identity and modernity made possible on a bushwalk with the Melbourne Women’s Walking Club? We have seen native animals’ significance as symbols of peaceful removal from modern city life, and as causes of the thrills and frustrations that defined many bushwalkers’ experience. They also featured as real and imagined witnesses to walkers’ intrusions, like the yellow robins who watched the MWWC make camp in Fordyce’s story; walkers were cognisant of animals’ prior claims, so to speak, and took pleasure in the idea of meeting native animals in their own habitats.¹¹² Care and appreciation for native animals were deeply entwined in bushwalkers’ efforts to protect the natural spaces where they walked. In the final part of this chapter, therefore, we consider walkers’ commitments to conservationism.

Care and conservation in animal spaces

Intentional immersion in natural spaces fostered deep affection for the forests, beaches, mountains, and valleys visited by bushwalkers. MWWC members’ love for the grand and subtle beauties of the places they walked was conveyed in poetry, reflections and trip reports in the club journal, in what can be fairly characterised as amateur forms of Australian nature writing, popularised in the early and mid-twentieth century by male authors like Alec Chisholm and Charles Barrett.¹¹³ (Amy, Charles’ sister, walked with the MWWC). In Margery Luth’s aforementioned account, her rollicking, adventurous description of the ill-fated Mount Buller trip occasionally gives way to a softer, more sensuous writing style, as she reflects on the natural beauty surrounding them. Luth evokes the diffusion of ‘faint mist’ which painted the wattles, gum trees, and tree ferns in a ‘delicate scale of greys’.¹¹⁴ This abrupt move between narrative modes is representative of bushwalking accounts more generally, whose authors drew on a sometimes-awkward melange of Romantic, field naturalist, conservationist, explorer, and adventurer traditions. Against this beautiful backdrop, sightings of animals like lyrebirds,

¹¹¹ *Wayfaring* no. 1 (1935/36): 1. In 1937, ‘Bill’ Williamson and Merle Griffin, another member, were reported in 1937 to have resigned their positions in the club ‘[o]wing to the pressure of private affairs’. *Wayfaring* no. 4 (December 1937): 2.

¹¹² Fordyce, ‘Editorial’, 1.

¹¹³ Chisholm shared with bushwalkers the belief that Australian nature was edifying and interactive, enlivening those who took the time to appreciate and respect it. Russell McGregor, *Idling in Green Places: A Life of Alec Chisholm* (North Melbourne: Australian Scholarly, 2019).

¹¹⁴ Luth, ‘THRILLS!!’, 35.

eagles, and wombats put them in mind of the ‘Garden of Eden’, and, as I have discussed, seemed tied to the unusual sense of freedom and peace offered by the bushwalking experience.¹¹⁵

Walkers’ affectionate awareness of animals’ prior claims to the lands they walked through – the ‘wombats and wallabies’ who might still be talking of their raucous visit – contrasted with a silence, by and large, on Aboriginal custodianship. Although the women were realistic about the fact that they were rarely forging brand new trails or crossing undiscovered terrain – they enthused about the ruined buildings of earlier generations of settlers and often sheltered within them – the idea of exploring untamed and pristine wilderness enlivened many bushwalkers’ experiences and was reflected in the way they wrote about them.¹¹⁶ In MWWC women’s copious intellectual, poetic, and artistic reflections on nature, there was little consideration of the role of Indigenous people in shaping and caring for the landscapes walkers loved. Where Aboriginal people did feature in the women’s writing, they were generally conflated with fauna and flora as part of attempts to condemn early colonisers for environmental destruction. The first settlers’ mistakes in expelling ‘the Black Indigene’ and ‘killing off the game’ were equated in one member’s poem.¹¹⁷ Like Alice Manfield, they condemned the environmental destructiveness of some settler Australians without questioning the underpinnings of settler presence in Australia, nor taking seriously the idea of Aboriginal custodianship. As the final chapter will argue in more detail, the women shared with male bushwalkers an assumption of their right to move through a colonised landscape, and to invest it with their own meanings and traditions.

Bushwalkers were keenly conscious of how ‘wild’ spaces, including their animal inhabitants, were threatened by human encroachment. This threat might manifest in commercial deforestation, a bushfire sparked by a careless walker, an ill-advised tourist development, the dissolution of existing national park borders, or even in a simple handful of litter left behind by a bushwalker. Thus, while bushwalkers treasured their bush experiences and believed they had a right to them, they also worried about the possible negative impacts of humans – in particular, too many humans – disturbing ‘pristine’ and ‘unspoiled’ vulnerable animal

¹¹⁵ After pausing to watch birds in Kangaroo Valley, one member wrote that it was sad to ‘move on down the [road] to the world of “doing things” again.’ *Wayfaring*, no. 10 (December 1940): 19.

¹¹⁶ See for example, ‘Memories of Little River’, *Wayfaring*, no. 20 (December 1949): 11. For more on the relationship between nature conservation and the appreciation of historic sites, see Tom Griffiths, *Hunters and Collectors: The Antiquarian Imagination in Australia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996): 152–6.

¹¹⁷ ‘Life and Death of a Forest Monarch’, 25.

habitats.¹¹⁸ They wanted forests and other ecosystems to remain intact, both to allow for their own bracing experiences of ‘the purest beauty and the most intense solitude’, *and* to protect the lives of animals and plants therein.¹¹⁹ Animals who were free to live their lives unmolested helped to enable the ideal bushwalker experience: as Myles Dunphy put it in 1934, ‘the only track worth walking on is the narrow, single-file, foot-beaten path, where the flowering bushes can tickle the legs, which spiders can spin their webs across, and along which cunning little lizards can sun themselves.’¹²⁰ These interlocking concerns help to explain why, by the 1930s and 40s, the imperative to leave natural spaces the way they had been found – ‘to use but not abuse’ – had become key to most bushwalkers’ ethos.¹²¹

Kath Mackay, who joined the Sydney Bush Walkers Club in 1937, captured these sentiments in her poem ‘Bivouac’ (referring to a lightweight tent popular with walkers).¹²² Animals again feature as ‘witness’ to humans’ temporary interruption, after which their lives can continue – hopefully peacefully.

Now, we depart; and on the springing turf
scarce lingers yet the imprint of our bed.
Only a wisp of fern, some blackened stones
remain, mute witness to our sojourn here,
and in the sunlit silence blue wren flits,
prospecting with his little brownie wife
for morsels hidden from the human glance.

She compared her walking friends’ impact on the earth to that of ‘conquerors who strode the earth’, leaving behind ‘embittered soil’ and ‘torn hills’: environmental devastation that would take decades to repair.¹²³ The poem concludes by linking bushwalkers’ light-touch approach to nature to a broader life philosophy:

Paltry ambition this, and negative,
but fame enough; when we pack up at last
our bivouac of threescore years and ten
sufficient if we leave no hurt to mar
earth’s face or man’s; but only where we lived
may there be sunlight and such sense of peace
that wanderers who come upon the place
must pause and say, “Someone was happy here.”

¹¹⁸ Harper, *Ways of the Bushwalker*, 225.

¹¹⁹ Harper, *Ways of the Bushwalker*, 225.

¹²⁰ Myles Dunphy, *Katoomba Daily*, 24 August 1934.

¹²¹ In a poem published in *Wayfaring*, a writer appealed: ‘Australians All! Be yours the slogan “To use but not abuse”/ The matchless treasures of the land you hold’. ‘The Life and Death of a Forest Monarch’, *Wayfaring*, no. 4 (December 1937): 25.

¹²² Kath Mackay, ‘Bivouac’, *Sydney Bushwalker* no. 182 (January 1950): 5.

¹²³ Mackay, ‘Bivouac’.

By the middle of the twentieth century, this set of priorities and practices had helped to put bushwalkers at the forefront of the Australian National Parks and conservation movement. As Thomas Dunlap has argued, Australian recreational walkers' centrality to efforts to protect the environment was unparalleled in the English-speaking world.¹²⁴ The MWWC was less politically engaged than the New South Wales clubs, and none of the Melbourne members reached the fame of a walker like Marie Byles, a committed feminist and early female lawyer who instigated the creation of Bouddi National Park after camping there with girlfriends, or Jessie Luckman, who mounted influential campaigns to protect Mount Field National Park in Tasmania.¹²⁵ Indeed there is a touch of exasperation in Fordyce's 1938 reminder to members to 'not overlook the larger questions of National importance, which also concern us as Walkers.' Those members 'who think as well as walk', she wrote, ought to pay attention not only to internal club affairs, but to soil erosion, afforestation (because 'a countryside denuded of trees loses its charm for the Wayfarer') and irresponsible fire practices that led to bushfires.¹²⁶

Yet even if their political commitments to conservationist issues was not as direct as Fordyce hoped, participation in bushwalks did foster an ethic of active care for natural spaces which reverberated through many members' lives. MWWC women played important roles in the creation and development of the Federation of Victorian Walking Clubs, formed in 1934 to promote the sport's popularity and push for the conservation of natural spaces.¹²⁷ The club would also go on to be represented on the Conservation Council of Victoria, later Environment Victoria.¹²⁸ For women such as Jean Blackburn, who joined the MWWC in 1934 and was an enthusiastic member until her death in 1983, an immersion in the world of bushwalking led to lives dedicated to conservation. Blackburn played an important role in the influential Report on Victorian National Parks, which contributed to the emergence of Victoria's National Parks Authority and the National Parks Association.¹²⁹

¹²⁴ Thomas Dunlap, *Nature and the English Diaspora: Environment and history in the United States, Canada, Australia and New Zealand* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 191.

¹²⁵ McLeod, *Summit of her ambition*, 50-58; Jessie Luckman, 'Fighting for the Florentine', in Helen Gee (ed.), *For the Forests* (Hobart: The Wilderness Society, 2001), 2-4. The following chapter traces both walkers' conservationist interventions in more detail.

¹²⁶ Gretchen Fordyce, 'Editorial', *Wayfaring* no. 4 (1937/38): 2.

¹²⁷ *Wayfaring*, no. 10: 19.

¹²⁸ Chong et. al, *Still on Track*, 43.

¹²⁹ J. Ros Garnet, 'Jean Blackburn – a tribute', *Parkwatch: official journal of the Victorian National Parks Association*, no. 134 (Spring 1983): 30.

Monica Meares, who celebrated the natural beauty of Wilson's Promontory in *Wayfaring*, also published children's stories in *The Argus*, in which the influence of the MWWC's conservationist ethos is clear. Through the voices of anthropomorphic animal characters, akin to those created by Amy Mack, she encouraged young readers to 'call all the bush creatures our brothers and sisters' and to refrain from killing them.¹³⁰ While Harper has established the strong links between hunting and walking in the early twentieth century, and some members of the MATWC brought guns on their bushwalks, according to longtime member Amy Eastwood, the MWWC preferred to shoot animals with cameras.¹³¹ Guns aside, native animals in women's bushwalking manifested most visibly in the protection of natural 'wilderness' spaces, where humans could visit seeking freedom, fun, and a refreshing dose of authenticity, and where animals made their homes.

Conclusions

In small part thanks to the advocacy and audacity of the MWWC's early members it is no longer so controversial for Australian women to take long, unsupervised walks or to wear shorts. The opportunity to walk with other women in nature and to share the difficulties of a long, dangerous, hot, or flooded bushwalk, evidently retains its appeal, because the Melbourne Women's Walking Club remains active and boasts its largest ever membership.¹³² The club welcomes new members but retains its rule, in place since 1922, of proving their mettle in two day-long walks before officially joining the MWWC. Melbourne's suburbs have encroached onto what was once bushwalking territory, so current-day members must go further afield to begin their walks, though most now have the benefit of cars. Now decked in neon Gore-Tex and waterproof pants, MWWC members continue to live out Duhig's dark prophecy, going to 'places where they would never venture in their proper attire'.¹³³

This chapter has explored how women in the interwar and Second World War period drew solace and enjoyment from spending time in nature away from city life, and developed a commitment to protecting natural spaces that profoundly shaped Australian environmental relationships in the middle and latter parts of the twentieth century. While for male

¹³⁰ Monica Meares, 'Bushland Adventure', *The Argus*, 22 June 1936, 18.

¹³¹ Harper, *Ways of the Bushwalker*, 61-62, 180, 182, 231; 'Julie Fenley. & K Lothian, Trudging on manfully': Dr Andrew and the evolution of bushwalking', in Erik Eklund and Julie Fenley (ed.), *Earth and industry: stories from Gippsland* (Clayton: Monash Univ. Publishing, 2015), 67; Amy Eastwood, reported in *Australian Women's Weekly*, 20 September 1961.

¹³² 'Home Page', Melbourne Women's Walking Club Inc., accessed 1 July 2023, <https://www.mwwc.org.au/>.

¹³³ Sunday Hiking Movement'.

bushwalkers, bushwalking was often tied to feelings of nostalgia for a lost sense of bush-based male authenticity, an MWWC bushwalk provided also a temporary and emboldening escape from domestic spaces and responsibilities, and the constraints of appropriately feminine deportment and attire. It offered opportunities to experiment with new forms of a modern female subjectivity, and, relatedly, with different forms of engagement with nature. Women's bushwalking amongst native animals offered an incipiently feminist mode of behaving, dressing, and expressing themselves, one that celebrated women's athleticism and independent capacity to go 'untrammelled into the wilds'.¹³⁴ The activity brought many challenges, some of them distinctive to women (such as ridicule and male disapproval) and some not (hungry marsupials and thunderstorms), but MWWC members found it far easier to bear and even relish the burdens of difficulty and difference when surrounded by other women doing the same.

Progressive and transgressive as women's bushwalking could be, it was deeply invested in settler ownership of and belonging to the Australian landscape, almost never calling into question their own right as white Australians to occupy, enjoy, and make meanings about the environment. While a bushwalk with the early MWWC was formative and emblematic of an emergent version of modern Australian femininity, this version was of a decidedly white, settler kind, interested in re-envisioning and diversifying, but not fundamentally transforming, settler modes of interacting with the colonised environment. Settler women who blazed trails in the related arenas of nature-based recreation and nature conservation, were also participants in the ongoing re-inscription of colonised landscapes, in processes especially relevant to national parks.¹³⁵

We will pursue these themes and tensions in the following chapter, which again turns its gaze southwards to Tasmania, where a bushwalker with the Hobart Walking Club was gearing up for her own fight for the forest areas she had walked in since childhood. Though rarely remembered today, Jessie Luckman's catalytic conservationism, like that of numerous other women conservationists of her period, negotiated care for native animals at wide scales, helping to redefine settler relationships with 'wilderness' spaces and the animals who depended on them.

¹³⁴ 'Editorial', *Wayfaring* no. 12 (December 1941): 1.

¹³⁵ Tracey Banivanua Mar, 'Carving Wilderness: Queensland's National Parks and the Unsettling of Emptied Lands, 1890–1910', in *Making Settler Colonial Space: Perspectives on Race, Place and Identity*, ed. Tracey Banivanua Mar and Penelope Edmonds (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 73–94.

Chapter Seven: Protection at Arm's Length

Long-distance care in mid-century national parks

Cannot man for once admit that there are other things beside himself with rights, and that he is not the only being in the universe. The majority of bushwalkers say he can and should. Human beings will not be excluded from the primitive area but no facilities for entering it will be given, and the flowers may blossom and the kangaroos and wombats enjoy their lives there, whether anyone sees them or not.

Marie Byles, *Sydney Bushwalker*, 1946¹

The year was 1946 and Robert Cosgrove was furious. In Parliament, purpled with anger, the Tasmanian Premier denounced the 'well organised' opposition which sought to stymie his plans without reference to 'the facts'.² Behind the scenes, he rushed between numerous government offices, demanding to know who was responsible for leaking secrets to the press. He frightened governmental staff with his 'dashing around', falsely blaming one for the leak and threatening to fire him for it.³ Several departmental heads and members of the Scenery Preservation Board also stood accused. There were concerns Cosgrove was at risk of a heart attack.⁴

The state government's plan to hand thousands of acres of forest inside Mount Field National Park for sawmilling by Australian Newsprint Mills had been progressing smoothly and quietly.⁵ In a post-World War II political environment in which development was the watchword, the transaction seemed almost a *fait accompli*. It would make use of 'useless' land that Tasmanian residents rarely saw, let alone turned a profit from. What was more, sufficient

¹ Marie Byles, 'What is a Primitive Area', *Sydney Bushwalker* (July 1945): 5.

² Jessie Luckman, interview by Roger Penny, May 31, 1994, oral history sound recording, National Library of Australia, Canberra, 128 of transcript.

³ Jessie Luckman, interview by Roger Penny, 128.

⁴ The above description is a composite sketch taken from Luckman's later recollections in a number of publications and oral history recordings, and may include some exaggeration. Bothering the Premier was a small victory worth celebrating in light of the loss of the Florentine Forest. Jessie Luckman, 'Fighting for the Florentine', in Helen Gee (ed.), *For the Forests* (Hobart: The Wilderness Society, 2001), 3-5; Jessie Luckman, interview by Roger Penny, 127-28; Jessie Luckman, interview by Gregg Borschmann, *Environmental Awareness in Australia Oral History Project*, March 17, 1994, oral history sound recording, National Library of Australia, Canberra; Jessie Luckman, 'Some notes on Tasmanian Fauna and Flora Conservation Committee', c. 1966, File – Tasmanian Fauna and Flora Conservation Committee, Jessie and Leo Luckman Archives, NS5867/2/24, Tasmanian Archives, Hobart.

⁵ The exact proportions of the excision remained in doubt and under debate during the controversy. The proposed size was initially reported as 'between 6, 000 and 8, 000 acres of forest land'. 'Land at National Park Sought for Pulp Timber', *Mercury* (Hobart), 15 October 1946, 9. In 1948 the Premier told *The Mercury* that the government planned to 'submit a bill for the exchange of an area of 5, 000 acres of Mt. Field National Park for an area of 4, 000 acres held by Australian Newsprint Mills'. 'Timber Concession Legislation', *Mercury* (Hobart), 26 June 1948, 8.

‘money had already changed hands’ – allegedly – to make backing out of the plan politically difficult for Cosgrove’s government.⁶

Now, however, Hobart’s leading newspaper had published a map marking the original borders of the national park, along with a letter directly challenging the Premier to confirm or deny the plan.⁷ Cosgrove must have felt doubly betrayed because the editor of *The Mercury*, Cecil Davies, stood to gain from the transfer of national park lands to logging interests. His publication relied on a supply of newspaper pulp from ANM, so Davies had so far seemed onside.⁸ What had changed, and who was to blame? For now, no one could give him a satisfactory answer, because the real object of his ire was not a government worker or a newspaper editor, but a pianist with the Hobart Symphony Orchestra: Jessie Luckman.

A longtime bushwalker, Luckman (nee Wakefield) had uncovered the government’s plans to excise parts of her beloved Mount Field National Park after hearing rumours through a contact at a cocktail party. Over the next three years, she and the hastily assembled Tasmanian Fauna and Flora Conservation Committee (TFFCC), the first of its kind in the state, fought to protect the threatened Florentine Forest, with its towering *regnans* trees and the rich animal life they supported. The TFFCC’s campaign failed, but not before teaching activists important lessons about political and public persuasion, and laying significant groundwork for the more successful – and much better remembered – campaigns to save Lake Pedder and the Franklin River between the 1950s and the 1980s. Luckman and her allies sparked public debate about the meanings and purposes of protected spaces for nature, and about the extent of settler Australians’ responsibilities to care for and about animals they might never directly encounter.

The fight for Mount Field National Park was mostly a local operation, but Luckman was not alone in battling for Australian national parks in the decades around World War Two.⁹ Conservationists across the country, including a striking number of leading women, fought to create new national parks and prevent the erosion of older ones, in the face of inimical political circumstances. Informed by emergent ecological thinking, they tried to preserve spaces for native animals, where they could be safe from the escalating environmental damage wrought by postwar industrialisation. These women’s mid-century, long-distance care has been little

⁶ Luckman, ‘Fighting for the Florentine’, 4.

⁷ Luckman and Borschmann, Cassette 1/b, 20-21.

⁸ Kevin Kiernan, *Eroding the Edges of Nature* (Hobart: Fullers Publishing, 2018), 109-10.

⁹ The activists did, however, receive advice from the Sierra Club, an influential environmental society established in the United States in 1892. Luckman, ‘Fighting for the Florentine’, 4.

accounted for in histories that draw a sharp distinction between early twentieth-century conservationism and later twentieth-century environmentalism.

This final chapter, then, takes settler women's organised conservationism as its theme, with particular emphasis on their efforts to create and protect national parks in the 1930s, 40s and 50s. Because it has received the least historiographical attention, I focus on Jessie Luckman's catalytic advocacy for Mount Field National Park, with comparative reference to the conservationist struggles of some of her contemporaries, including the botanist Thistle Harris, lawyer Marie Byles, both in New South Wales, and the poet Judith Wright, in Queensland. I detail how Luckman rallied a community response against the destruction of the national park's forests, creating what was arguably Tasmania's first environmental organisation in so doing.

Drawing on oral history recordings, newspaper commentary, and rich personal archival papers, the chapter advances two related arguments. Firstly, it points to how the work of Luckman and other women conservationists in the middle of the twentieth century was connected to and deeply shaped later environmental campaigns. Secondly, it articulates a contested ethic of distanced care in mid-twentieth-century conservationism, which prioritised preserving native animal habitats in national parks, and protecting animals by keeping humans away from them.

A closer look at Luckman and her mid-century conservationist contemporaries is insightful for a number of reasons. First, the influential Mount Field campaign challenges a periodisation of Australian environmental action that skims over the middle of the twentieth century. Explicitly or implicitly, historians have often divided the story of Australian environmental action into two 'waves' of action, with an abeyance in the decades during and after World War Two.¹⁰ In this telling, the organised conservationism of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century (sometimes framed as only a 'proto-movement') was followed by a pronounced lull during the middle decades of the century. Then, the 1970s and 80s saw a radical resurgence sparked by the Tasmanian dam campaigns at Lake Pedder (1972) and the Franklin River (1983), giving rise to modern environmentalism and 'green politics' in Australia. Drew Hutton and Libby Connors' *A History of the Australian Environment Movement* – which remains the only study of its scope and subject matter – is divided structurally into these different 'waves', though the authors stress some continuities between the two periods and the role of the movement in

¹⁰ Drew Hutton and Libby Connors, *A History of the Australian Environment Movement* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 2-3, 15, 89. Rohan Lloyd, for example, cites Hutton and Connors in locating the cadre of groups that coalesced to advocate for the Great Barrier Reef in the 1960s as 'part of a 'second wave' of the Australian environmental movement'. Rohan Lloyd, *Saving the Reef: The Human Story Behind One of Australia's Greatest Environmental Treasures* (Brisbane: University of Queensland Press, 2024), 67.

‘quiescent mode’ in the century’s middle.¹¹ Smaller-scale historical studies of Australian environmental action tend to isolate events and people in one end of the twentieth century or the other.¹² Accounts of the Lake Pedder and Franklin campaigns have mostly been written by participant activists, who, as Libby Robin observes, often present their efforts as original and autonomous breaks with tradition, or as the first environmental campaigns in Australia.¹³ This framing helped to give a sense of vitality and urgency to the movement at the time, but overshadowed the work of those who had come before, including some, like Luckman, whose activism spanned both ‘waves’.

World War Two indubitably disrupted organised conservationism in Australia. Some parks were neglected due to redirected government funds, while others were appropriated as military training grounds.¹⁴ Their very value seemed in doubt in light of the human devastation overseas. Arthur Groom, on the Queensland National Parks Association, wondered after reading about the Dunkirk evacuation:

‘Were National Parks to be considered unnecessary luxury during war-time? So much of the old goodwill had gone into service [...] Was it essential that the remaining civilians should have holidays while others were being blasted to bits elsewhere, starved, tortured, murdered, and were suffering physical illness?’¹⁵

For Groom, and many bushwalkers, the answer remained a resounding yes: indeed, the experience of World War Two seemed an extreme manifestation of the dangers of industrial civilisation, and evidence of the need for the counteracting effect of wilderness spaces.¹⁶ But Allied victory brought in its wake a wave of industrial developmentalism, fuelled by postwar economic growth and increased foreign investment that made fighting for conservation

¹¹ Hutton and Connors, *History of the Australian Environment Movement*, 2-3, 15.

¹² Important exceptions including Ruth Morgan’s account of mid-century women’s activism on soil erosion, and Libby Robin’s account of the 1969 Little Desert controversy in western Victoria, and Heather Goodall’s account of the Georges River conflict between 1945 and 1980. Ruth Morgan, ‘Propagandists for the Soil’: Gender, Erosion and the Murray Valley in the Mid-Twentieth Century’, *Australian Historical Studies* 56, no. 2 (2025): 293-312; Libby Robin, *Defending the Little Desert: The Rise of Ecological Consciousness in Australia* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1998); Heather Goodall, *Georges River Blues: Swamps, Mangroves and Resident Action, 1945-1980* (Canberra: ANU Press, 2022).

¹³ Robin, *Defending the Little Desert*, 3, 139. This book, like this chapter’s account of Mount Field, troubles any simple dichotomy of old and new environmental action, and similarly questions the Lake Pedder-as-starting-point legend.

¹⁴ Hutton and Connors, *History of the Australian Environment Movement*, 93.

¹⁵ Arthur Groom, *One Mountain After Another* (Sydney, London: Angus & Robertson, 1949), 174-5.

¹⁶ Hutton and Connors, *History of the Australian Environment Movement*, 93.

concerns very difficult.¹⁷ Moreover, the Cold War political milieu, with its hair-trigger accusations of veiled communism, made radical critique more difficult.¹⁸

Thinking about environmental action in waves, however, risks obscuring as much as it illuminates. We might draw on feminist historians' critiques, in recent decades, of the well-established model of separate 'waves' of feminism. This framework, as Nancy Hewitt and others have argued, can imply a false sense of intellectual and tactical unity across time and space, privilege Western and institutional perspectives, and obscure continuity, diversity, and interconnection in the periods between designated waves.¹⁹ Crucially, a wave model tends to marginalise certain groups of people, typically those with less cultural and political clout, whose stories 'have often fallen in the trough created by the "waves" metaphor', as Michelle Staff has put it.²⁰ In feminist history, these marginalised groups include interwar feminist internationalists and peace activists and, particularly, non-white women whose priorities, timelines, and circumstances were often vastly different than those of the white feminists dominant in conventional archives.²¹

Similarly, a vision of separate waves of environmental action can marginalise the significant number of women who came into their own as environmental leaders in the mid-twentieth century. Jessie Luckman is among those leaders whose stories have 'fallen in the trough'. A longer list would also include Ina Watson, elected the first female president of the Field Naturalists of Victoria in 1947, Pat Wessings, who worked with Luckman and established Chancey Vale Sanctuary in 1946 and Florence Oswin Roberts, who fought to create wildlife sanctuaries on Phillip Island. The poet Judith Wright would not commit to fully fledged organised conservationism and environmentalism until the 1960s, but important intellectual

¹⁷ Kiernan suggests the Tasmanian wartime and postwar context in *Eroding the Edges of Nature*, 125, 133-39, 145.

¹⁸ For more on Cold War entanglements with feminist, pacifist, and anti-nuclear activism, see Barbara Carter, 'The Peace Movement in the 1950s', in *Better Dead than Red, Australia's First Cold War: 1945-1959 Volume Two*, eds. Ann Curthoys and John Merritt (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1986), 58-73; Hannah Viney, "'Actual Political Affiliations Are of Secondary Importance": Communism and Women's Entangled Loyalties in the Australian Anti-Nuclear Movement 1945-65', *Australian Journal of Politics and History* 68, no. 4 (2022): 485-504.

¹⁹ Nancy A. Hewitt, 'Feminist Frequencies: Regenerating the Wave Metaphor', *Feminist Studies* 38, no. 3 (Fall 2012): 658-80; Linda Nicholson, 'Feminism in "Waves": Useful Metaphor or Not?', *New Politics* XII- 4, no. 48 (2010), <http://newpol.org/content/feminism-waves-useful-metaphor-or-not>.

²⁰ Michelle Staff, *Women Going Global: Australian and British Feminist Internationalists, 1919-39* (PhD thesis, Australian National University, 2023), v.

²¹ For critiques of the feminist wave model's obfuscation of non-white women's experiences, see: Becky Thompson, 'Multiracial Feminism: Recasting the Chronology of Second Wave Feminism', *Feminist Studies* 28 (2) (Summer 2002): 337-360 and Benita Roth, *Separate Roads to Feminism: Black, Chicana, and White Feminist Movements in America's Second Wave* (Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

and experiential groundwork was laid in these earlier decades.²² Luckman is celebrated by elder Greens politicians for the foundational effects of her activism on Australian environmental politics, but Bob Brown is right to depict her as a campaigner ‘on way to being almost entirely forgotten’.²³ Thistle Harris has a biography, but it begins and ends with a misleading statement of her almost total dependence on her husband, David Stead, who figures as the inspiration and guide for her ‘life force with all its passions, projects and polemics’.²⁴ Given that she far outlived him, continuing to work in conservation and develop her environmental thinking, Thistle’s work deserves consideration in its own right. Byles is slightly better known, but her fierce and distinctive defence of national parks shaped by emergent Buddhism, merits re-examination, especially in conversation with her peers.²⁵ Retrieving and centring these women and their work has the potential to change historiographical understandings of the middle of the twentieth century: a dispiriting time for conservationists but *not* an inactive or inconsequential one.

Analysing women’s mid-century environmental activism is also powerful for the light it sheds on the changing dynamics of care and conservation at different scales. Protecting large swathes of animal habitat in a context of global environmental threats, emerging ecological science, and changing settler colonial attachments to land, required a particular set of priorities and tactics. In following the stories of Jessie Luckman and other conservationists concerned with national parks in the 1940s and 50s, therefore, I draw out an ethic of what I call long-distance care. The kind of care that these women advanced was not only ‘long-distance’ because it pertained to animals in difficult-to-access spaces, though this was often the case – the Florentine Forest was difficult for even the hardiest of bushwalkers to reach. The care was also ‘long-distance’ in that it reflected a principle of non-interference and a belief that animals were safer and generally better-off if most humans kept a respectful distance. In other words, it was

²² Judith Wright, *Going on Talking* (Springwood: Butterfly Books, 1992), 39-44; Tom Griffiths, *The Art of Time Travel: Historians and their Craft* (Carlton: Black Inc., 2016), 94-113.

²³ Bob Brown, ‘Savaging a Priceless Landscape’, *Mercury* (Hobart), 28 December 2019, <https://www.themercury.com.au/news/opinion/talking-point-savaging-a-priceless-landscape/news-story/7336797900b5687d585b842d66f711a8>.

²⁴ Though Harris’ interest in Australian nature and its preservation predated meeting David Stead, Joan Webb writes that ‘David Stead’s commitment to wildlife preservation, education and international peace became the commitments in Thistle’s life also.’ She also attributes Harris’ best-known book *Wild Flowers of Australia* (1938) to Stead’s inspiration. Joan Webb, *Thistle Y. Harris* (Chipping Norton, New South Wales: Surrey Beatty & Sons, 1998), xi, vi, 245.

²⁵ Important extant scholarship on Marie Byles includes Anne McLeod, *The Summit of Her Ambition: The Spirited Life of Marie Byles 1900–1979* (Katoomba, NSW: Anne McLeod, 2016); Allison Cadzow, ‘Footprints, imprints: Seeing environmentalist and Buddhist Marie Byles as an eastern Australian’, *Portal: Journal of Multidisciplinary International Studies* 4, no. 1 (January 2007): 1-24; Peggy James, ‘The Eco-Buddhism of Marie Byles’, *Journal of Buddhist Ethics* 22 (January 1, 2015): 215-46.

not that elusive animals like the thylacine or marsh pygmy shrimp just *happened* to be distant and inaccessible and therefore required protection from a distance; rather, preserving these creatures' distance from humans was the point.

With its wariness about human excess, long-distance care resonated with an emergent idea of 'wilderness' as a vital refuge that needed protection from 'the polluted sea of urban-industrial modernity'.²⁶ The wilderness of national parks could be perceived, as William Cronon put it in his influential critique of the concept, as an untainted natural paradise and 'the one place we can turn for escape from our own too-muchness'.²⁷ The role caring humans might play in such natural retreats was contested: many bushwalkers and conservationists felt that they should have privileged access to animals in their habitat, even if the majority of people and the 'all too human disease' of civilisation were to be kept safely at bay.²⁸ Others, like Marie Byles, went further, arguing for wildlife sanctuaries where no humans at all need enter. As I will discuss, attitudes towards wilderness as pristine and unpeopled, and valuable for those reasons, tended to obscure Aboriginal people, their ongoing relationships to Country, and the histories of dispossession that were necessary for the creation of 'pristine' national parks.²⁹

Long-distance care was often an attempted corrective – sometimes an explicit one – to the kind of care that seemed overly sentimental or that interfered too much: the kind of caring that clipped a budgerigar's wings so that she remained a constant and coerced companion, or that enclosed a Tasmanian devil in a zoo.³⁰ Suspicious of sentimental or emotional approaches, practitioners of long-distance care often advocated for the adoption of scientific methods. Cognisant of what María Puig de la Bellacasa calls in a different context 'the predicaments of closeness to fragile nonhuman others', their activism was often at odds with the more

²⁶ William Cronon, 'The Trouble with Wilderness: Or, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature', *Environmental History* 1, no. 1 (January 1996): 7. 'Wilderness' reached its apotheosis as a catch-cry of the environmentalist movement after the events of this chapter, but it has a long history, as Chapter Three's analysis of Amy Mack's Sydney 'wilderness' demonstrates. It is an important concept for understanding the campaign to protect Mount Field, particularly because those events laid such important groundwork for the Lake Pedder and Franklin River campaigns, that came to define wilderness politics in Australia. Kate Crowley, 'Saving the Franklin: A people's rebellion in a distant forest', *Island*, no. 3/4 (June 2003): 36; Lyn McGaurr et al., 'Wilderness and the Media Politics of Place Branding', *Environmental Communication* 9, no. 3 (2015): 269-87.

²⁷ Cronon, 'The Trouble with Wilderness', 7.

²⁸ Cronon, 'The Trouble with Wilderness', 7.

²⁹ Cronon, 'The Trouble with Wilderness', 15; Tracey Banivanua Mar, 'Carving Wilderness: Queensland's National Parks and the Unsettling of Emptied Lands, 1890–1910', in *Making Settler Colonial Space: Perspectives on Race, Place and Identity*, eds. Tracey Banivanua Mar and Penelope Edmonds (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 73-94; Marcia Langton, 'The conceit of wilderness ideology', Boyer Lecture, 9 December 2012, <https://www.abc.net.au/listen/programs/boyerlectures/the-conceit-of-wilderness-ideology/4409022#transcript>.

³⁰ María Puig de la Bellacasa, "'Nothing comes without its world": thinking with care', *The Sociological Review* 60, no. 2 (May 2012): 212.

emotional, intimate, and literally hands-on approaches to animal care explored in the earlier chapters of this thesis, though feelings of transcendence, anger, possessiveness, and love are still clearly detectable in the archive.³¹

Creation of a national park

Australians had been quick to embrace the concept of national parks, though ambiguity over their purpose was evident from the beginning. The second national park in the world, following the United States' Yellowstone National Park in 1872, was established a little south of Sydney in 1879.³² This park's creation was inspired by a melange of anxieties about public health and racial fitness, as well as a colonial socialist commitment to preserving citizens from the worst dangers of capitalism in a fast-growing city.³³ Royal National Park, as it is now known, was intended primarily for recreational and therapeutic use by Sydney's (human) residents. '[I]n half an hour,' enthused one letter writer, the toil-weary citizen will be able to recreate himself amid scenes of natural beauty and grandeur.'³⁴ The *Australian Town and Country Journal* stressed the park's proximity to the city: it was 'but 14 miles from the General Post Office'.³⁵

³¹ Though Puig de la Bellacasa develops this conceptualisation of distanced care in a different context, considering haptic technologies that allow medical professional to 'touch' patients without being physically present, her analysis of the ambivalences of proximity and touch in care practices are insightful. She writes: 'The unavoidable ambivalence of touch is thus of conveying a vital form of relation and a threat of violence and invasion'. María Puig de la Bellacasa, 'Touching Visions', in *Matters of Care: Speculative Ethics in More than Human Worlds*, edited by María Puig de la Bellacasa (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2017), 107, 115, 100. See also Eva Hayward, "'Fingeryeyes': Impressions of Cup Corals", *Cultural Anthropology* 4, no. 24 (2010): 577–99.

³² Though Yosemite (as a state park in 1864) and Yellowstone came first, the conceptualisation and practice of national parks in Australia had little in common with the American precedent example, as Richard White, Melissa Harper, Warwick Frost, and Jennifer Laing have argued. Melissa Harper and Richard White, 'How National Were the First National Parks?: Comparative Perspectives from the British Settler Societies', in *Civilizing Nature: National Parks in Global Historical Perspective*, ed. Bernhard Gissibl, Sabine Höhler, and Patrick Kupper (New York: Berghahn Books, 2012), 50–67; Warwick Frost and Jennifer Laing, 'From Yellowstone to Australia and New Zealand: National Parks 2.0', *Global Environment* 12 (2013): 62–79. For more discussion on the distinctions between the histories of national parks in settler colonial countries, see Thomas Dunlap, *Nature and the English Diaspora: Environment and History in the United States, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand* (Cambridge, 1999), especially 118; Jane Carruthers, 'Nationhood and national parks: comparative examples from post-imperial experience', in *Ecology and empire: environmental history of settler societies*, eds. Tom Griffiths and Libby Robin (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1997), 141–42; Warwick Frost and C Michael Hall (eds), *Tourism and national parks: international perspectives on development, histories and change* (London: Routledge, 2009).

³³ Harper and White, 'How National Were the First National Parks?', 62.

³⁴ *Sydney Morning Herald*, 24 April 1879. For the tensions between recreational and conservationist purposes of national parks in New South Wales, see Richard White and Caroline Ford (eds.), *Playing in the bush: Recreation and national parks in New South Wales* (Sydney: Sydney University Press, 2012).

³⁵ 'National Park', *Australian Town and Country Journal* (Sydney), 29 March 1879, 13.

Conservationist values, then, were muted in this first iteration of a national park, but they played a bigger role in the parks that emerged across every state in the following forty years.³⁶ Advocates argued that Australian animals had a particularly strong need for adequately protected sanctuaries, because they were evolutionarily backward and therefore especially vulnerable to the pressures of modernity.³⁷ Due to the geographical isolation of the Australian continent and absence of introduced predators apart from the dingo, explained Albert Sherbourne Le Souef in 1923, marsupials ‘have stayed in their primitive state – remarkably harmless and with a low instinct of self-preservation.’ In a racial analogy that was common to the period, he went on to argue that, faced with the advanced forms of introduced species, ‘it is just as inevitable that [native animals] should go down before the invader, as that the aboriginal should give place to the white man.’³⁸ In this vision, parks served an important purpose in protecting animals *from* (white) humans, including the increasing numbers of tourists.

Tasmania was the last state to declare a national park: Mount Field National Park was established in August 1916 and officially opened amid much fanfare the following year.³⁹ The Governor of Tasmania hoped it would be ‘a typical example of Tasmanian forest [...] retained in its natural state, in order that generations yet unborn may see for themselves what virgin Tasmania was like’. He hoped, too that it would be a ‘sanctuary for the flora and fauna, so as to guard against total extinction in some cases’.⁴⁰ The area took in spectacular glaciated landforms, limestone caves, giant tree-ferns, and Australia’s only cold climate deciduous tree, the *Fagus*, which in autumn adorned hillsides in a riotous assortment of gold and red.⁴¹ The park was rich in animal life, including seventy-five species of native bird, and was thought to be one of the dwindling stomping grounds of the Tasmanian tiger.⁴²

From its beginnings, there were competing visions of the purpose and value of the park. Board members tasked with administering the area included representatives of commercial and

³⁶ See Harper and White, ‘How National Were the First National Parks?’.

³⁷ For a range of conservationist perspectives on threatened fauna and flora in 1925, including a number of pleas for better protected sanctuaries and national parks, see James Barrett (ed.), *Save Australia: A plea for the right use of our Flora and Fauna* (Melbourne: Macmillan & Co, 1925).

³⁸ A. S. Le Souef, ‘The Australian Native Animal’, *Scone Advocate* (New South Wales), 3 August 1923, 3. Le Souef, a significant zoologist and zoo-keeper, also blamed the uncontrolled fur trade for the decline in many native species.

³⁹ Mount Field National Park was known simply as the National Park until 1937. Freycinet National Park was gazetted at the same time. Jessie Luckman, ‘Historical Notes’, *Tasmanian Tramp* 11 (1953): 30-34.

⁴⁰ ‘National Park’, *Mercury* (Hobart), 15 October 1917, 2.

⁴¹ Kiernan, *Eroding the Edges of Nature*, 49-83; ‘“Fagus” in Autumn’, *Mercury* (Hobart), 22 May 1948, 7.

⁴² ‘A National Park’, *Mercury* (Hobart), 2 October 1913, 2.

extractive interests, particularly those concerned with timber, water supply, and tourism development.⁴³ By contrast, Hobart's leading newspaper, *The Mercury*, adopted a purist message of conservation for its own sake. An editorial defended the inherent value of the landscape and its nonhuman inhabitants, and warned against those tempted to part with them for money:

The only creature to be driven out of the park and kept out is the utilitarian, who would indiscriminately chop trees, spoil waterfalls, dig up rare plants, kill live things and spoil and ravage and destroy everything for a money profit ... if ever there comes to exist legislators who cannot see the value of such a place we hope it will become a recognised custom to shoot them on sight whenever seen within three miles of the park.⁴⁴

The violent rhetorical flourish is startling but seems to have been proven prescient: a few decades later Premier Cosgrove was arranging for part of the park to be transferred to Australian Newsprint Mills (ANM).

Jessie Wakefield (as she was then) was one of the new national park's first visitors, brought there as a child by a camping enthusiast father who 'had to go and see what it was all about.'⁴⁵ The Wakefield family, descendants of the colonial promoter Edward Gibbon Wakefield, had moved to Hobart from Sydney in 1914. They began to explore their new home state, equipped with an adapted military tent and a motor bike, at a time when such leisure activities were highly unusual, especially for women.⁴⁶ At about age seven, Jessie could appreciate the beauty of Russell Falls and the spice which seemed to infuse the air, but overall 'wasn't terribly keen' on the National Park, finding it 'all rather damp'.⁴⁷ Jessie's passion for exploring and protecting the Tasmanian bush came to the fore later in life, as a dedicated member of the Hobart Walking Club. A pianist and cellist by profession, she joined the club in 1936 as a means of taking a break from constant rehearsals, and it quickly came to shape her social life and ethical commitments.⁴⁸ It was through bushwalking in remote parts of Tasmania that she met her husband Leo, a stonemason who came to share in many of her conservationist battles. She became Club President in 1952, and an Honorary Life Member in 1963. Luckman thrilled to

⁴³ Kiernan, *Eroding the Edges of Nature*, 86.

⁴⁴ 'The National Park', *The Mercury* (Hobart), 15 October 1917, 4.

⁴⁵ Luckman and Borschmann, Cassette 1/a, 6.

⁴⁶ About her family's regular camping trips around Tasmania, Luckman recalled that 'people thought at that time that we were a bit mad'. Luckman and Borschmann, Cassette 1/a, 2.

⁴⁷ Luckman and Borschman, Cassette 1/a, 6.

⁴⁸ One of the highlights of her walking career came in 1953 when Luckman undertook a hike with five other members of the Hobart Walking Club retracing the arduous overland route taken by Lieutenant-Governor Sir John Franklin and his wife Lady Jane Franklin, in 1842. Jessie Luckman, 'In the Steps of Lady Franklin', *Tasmanian Tramp* no. 23 (1979): 101-10. Notes and photographs from the trip in Jessie and Leo Luckman Archives, NS5860/1/11, Tasmanian Archives, Hobart.

the ‘sense of exploration’ she experienced in the early days of the Hobart Walking Club – the joy of being ‘able to go places to open them up’. Later, she said: ‘these days I wonder if we perhaps opened them up too much.’⁴⁹

In 1946 Luckman uncovered plans to carve out part of Mount Field through an acquaintance who talked with ANM’s general manager at a cocktail party.⁵⁰ This was the first in a number of encounters where personal relationships and private meetings mattered: we hear of secret plans overheard or deliberately passed on, ‘flies on the wall’, and whispers of corruption in government hallways or private homes. In what has been called the ‘old boys club’ culture that dominated Tasmanian government in this period and afterwards, women like Luckman and her cocktail contact seem sometimes to have benefited from being unobtrusive female presences in rooms dominated by important men.⁵¹ At other times Luckman was treated as a shocking upstart when her advocacy generated serious problems for governmental or commercial plans.

Ron Smith, a surveyor and friend of Luckman’s through field naturalism, calculated the probable acreage of the land rumoured to be excised from the park – about 7 000 acres.⁵² Luckman then wrote to the editor of *The Mercury*, putting forward Smith’s estimate and demanding the Premier confirm or deny the plan. She suspected, correctly, that the letter would not be published, since *The Mercury* now depended on ANM for much of its paper supply.⁵³ Despite its earlier blustery condemnation of those who might harm the park, the newspaper was now mostly editorialising in favour of excising the Florentine. After *The Mercury*’s editor gave a speech on the importance of freedom of the press, Luckman sent her letter again, noting that she ‘would like to see it printed in its entirety in the name of ‘the freedom of the press’ of which the editor had spoken so eloquently.’⁵⁴ This approach seemed to have worked on the editor, Mr Davies. Luckman’s letter was published, provoking widespread public concern and Cosgrove’s furious accusations that government employees had been ‘letting out state secrets’.⁵⁵ In oral histories recorded much later, Luckman sounds amused and satisfied at having caused such a shock.

⁴⁹ Jessie Luckman, quoted in Ted Mead, ‘Wilderness Access – A Conservationist’s Paradox’, *Tasmanian Times.com*, 24 April 2018, accessed 23 September 2025, <https://tasmaniantimes.com/2018/04/wilderness-access-a-conservationists-paradox>.

⁵⁰ Luckman, ‘Fighting for the Florentine’, 3.

⁵¹ Kiernan, *Eroding the Edges of Nature*, 451. See also 145-51.

⁵² Helen Gee, ‘The Florentine’, in *For the Forests*, ed. Helen Gee (Hobart: The Wilderness Society, 2001), 2.

⁵³ Kiernan, *Eroding the Edges*, 109.

⁵⁴ Luckman, ‘Fighting for the Florentine’, 3.

⁵⁵ Luckman, ‘Fighting for the Florentine’, 3.

Jessie's early action roused a significant group of people who opposed the mooted changes, and greatly slowed the government's progress on the excision. Her motley organisation brought together field naturalists, bushwalkers, and ornithologists, alongside representatives from the Australian Natives Association, and some city councils. The RSPCA was also closely involved in this and later campaigns, indicating a continued overlap between animal welfare and conservationist interests in Tasmania. The group was also supported by the National Park Board and the Scenery Preservation Board, both of which opposed the excision.⁵⁶ Leo Luckman was a member of the latter. Luckman's group would come to be known as the Tasmanian Fauna and Flora Conservation Committee (TFFCC), the first of its kind in the state, but for the time being the operation was slapdash. Pat Wessings recalled: '[m]ostly we did it in the Luckmans' rooms till two o'clock in the morning. You wrote letters and you just got around whoever you could at the time.'⁵⁷

Increased public scrutiny complicated what Cosgrove and Kessel had hoped would be a straightforward matter. A Select Committee was appointed to investigate the issue, because, at least in Luckman's interpretation, '[t]he Legislative Council had never been asked to tackle a thing like this and they were quite flummoxed.'⁵⁸ As one of the representatives of the Hobart Walking Club who gave evidence, Luckman stressed the ecological value of the huge and rare *regnans* trees that made up the Florentine, and warned against setting a precedent whereby protected national park land could be sacrificed to commercial interests.⁵⁹ The principle at stake', she argued in 1949, 'is that of attempted alienation of a declared national reserve – whether to pulping interests or to anyone else is immaterial.'⁶⁰

One of the main questions considered by the Select Committee was whether the Florentine was actually *in* Mount Field National Park. From 1949, Cosgrove began to claim that, in fact, the area proposed for pulping had never been intended to be part of the national park.⁶¹ He promised to introduce a new bill that would 'clear up doubts about boundaries of Mt. Field National Park' – in favour of the government's interests.⁶² In response, representatives from the Australian Natives Association submitted six different maps for the Select Committee's

⁵⁶ 'Board Opposes Park Alienation', *Mercury* (Hobart), 31 October 1946, 9; 'Newsprint Concession Sought', *Mercury* (Hobart), 13 February 1948, 5.

⁵⁷ Pat Wessings, quoted in Luckman, 'Fighting for the Florentine', 5.

⁵⁸ 'Park Alienation for Newsprint May Go to Select Committee', *Mercury* (Hobart), 18 June 1948, 4; Luckman, 'Fighting for the Florentine', 4.

⁵⁹ 'Joint select committee to inquire into transfer of forest land', *Mercury* (Hobart), 23 March 1949, 2.

⁶⁰ J. S. Wakefield [Luckman], 'National Park', *Mercury* (Hobart), 29 March 1949, 3.

⁶¹ 'Newsprint Company May Extend Mills to Maydena', *Mercury* (Hobart), 9 November 1949, 5.

⁶² 'Bill will Define Park, A.N.M. Boundaries', *Mercury* (Hobart), 3 February 1949, 11.

consideration, all produced by the government in the previous decade, and all showing the contested forest to be inside the park.⁶³ Luckman, too, was relentless in poking holes in this argument. If there was indeed an ‘overlapping of the newsprint concessions with the edge of the reserve,’ she posited, ‘why, in view of the 400sq. miles of concessions already held by the company, should the park be the loser?’⁶⁴ The Select Committee seems to have taken the conservationists’ concerns seriously, and issued ‘no report’, thus keeping the issue open. Though advocates for the excision had claimed that tree-felling must commence in the Florentine as a matter of great urgency, the controversy then continued for three years.⁶⁵

The Mount Field campaign failed. In the middle of the night on 29 November 1950, after multiple delays and three parliamentary inquiries, a bill was passed officially redrawing the park’s boundaries and overriding the government’s own Scenery Preservation Board.⁶⁶ Conservationists were angry at the seemingly underhanded way the legislation been rushed through – Luckman remembered being rendered speechless with rage – and questions about the legitimacy of the process were never resolved.⁶⁷ An ANM company prospectus had exacerbated concerns about illegitimate processes when it informed readers of ‘certain minor adjustments in boundaries and access routes [that] have been promised by the Tasmanian government.’⁶⁸ Conservationists’ suspicions were not unreasonable, given that Premier Cosgrove had recently been tried for corruption over a different forestry issue: he was acquitted when the case could not be proven beyond reasonable doubt. Another minister in his government was found to have been illegally bribed, escaping penalty because he was ‘not in the habit’ of corruption.⁶⁹

⁶³ Kiernan, *Eroding the Edges of Nature*, 11.

⁶⁴ Jessie Luckman, *Mercury* (Hobart), 22 March 1949, 3.

⁶⁵ ‘Timber Belt Vital for Newsprint’, *Mercury* (Hobart), 21 March 1949, 4.

⁶⁶ ‘Proceedings Yesterday in State Parliament’, *Mercury* (Hobart), 30 November 1950, 2. For an earlier stage of the legislative manoeuvring see ‘Yesterday’s Work in Parliament’, *Mercury* (Hobart), 9 November 1950, 6.

⁶⁷ Luckman and Borschmann, Cassette 1/b, 22.

⁶⁸ Quoted in Kiernan, *Eroding the Edges of Nature*, 119.

⁶⁹ Minutes of The Parliamentary Committee, Thursday September 29, 1949, The National Park and Florentine Valley Bill (no. 31), quoted in Luckman, ‘Fighting for the Florentine’, 4. See Luckman, ‘Historical Notes’, 30–33.

With their protection lifted, most of the Florentine's tall eucalypts were felled for newsprint pulp. A few years later, *The Mercury Centenary Magazine* could reflect:

Because of Boyer [the location of the ANM mill], huge swamp gums which began life in the virgin forests of the Styx, Russell and Florentine Valleys almost a century before Tasman sighted Van Diemen's Land, have disappeared and become newspapers carrying the daily serial of a changing world to the Australian people.⁷⁰

This account, steeped in colonial and gendered ideas about untainted and virginal nature awaiting European claims, frames the elimination of ancient forests as the means of Tasmania's entry into a globalising modern world.



Figure 5 A tree is processed at the Australian Newsprint Mills factory at Boyer, Tasmania, c. 1952. The trees were fed to pulping machines that converted them into the light, cheap paper relied upon by newspaper publishers. AB713/1/992, Tasmanian Archives, Hobart.

For those who preferred that the swamp gums remained in tree form, the fight to preserve Mount Field's original borders largely played out in private homes, newspaper offices, and government buildings in Hobart and Launceston.⁷¹ In this sense, it seems mostly a human and urban story where native animals rarely featured as physical presences, except for the 'damned

⁷⁰ *Mercury Centenary Magazine*, 5 July 1954.

⁷¹ Luckman discussed the role of Launceston-based campaigners in Luckman and Penny, 127.

lizards' who disturbed campaigners' late-night letter-typing sessions by running across the duplicator and leaving inky footprints in their wake.⁷² Even in the conservationists' rhetoric, the spectacular *regnans* eucalypts – enormous, rare, condemned – loomed larger than the many birds and mammals that depended on those trees for survival. Native animals, however, did matter in this campaign; Mount Field remains a story about caring for animals, but it was clearly shaped by humans' distance from them – a distance that was sometimes a goal and sometimes a major frustration. The remainder of this chapter investigates the dynamics of long-distance care for native animals that emerged in this and other mid-century fights for national parks, drawing out how questions of space, scale, and remoteness contoured conservationist care at Mount Field and beyond.

Animals in the distance: care at new scales

After World War Two, conservationists could see that they were facing environmental threats at bigger scales than before. For some, wartime experiences encouraged a more appreciative and protective attitude towards nature, but the global conflict also led to technological developments that allowed faster and wider environmental destruction.⁷³ To conservationists' distress, this destruction went largely unimpeded by a political culture committed to rapid industrial development.⁷⁴ Reflecting on the reasons for her own increased commitments to organised conservationism in the middle of the century, Luckman distinguished between an earlier period of 'hand logging with men and oxen and horses and so on', when the slower speed of logging allowed forests to somewhat regenerate, and the 'growth of heavy machinery which came out of the war effort' that vastly increased the scale of logging.⁷⁵ She drew a moral dichotomy between earlier hunters, who she respected for their close knowledge of wildlife behaviour and controlled management of wallaby and possum populations, and later hunters who pursued their 'so-called sport' with 'more and more high-powered and skilful ammunition and guns'.⁷⁶ A dread-inducing awareness of accelerating environmental loss was a powerful motivator for Luckman and her allies, both in mounting the Mount Field campaign and in choosing to keep up the battle.

⁷² Pat Wessing, quoted in Jessie Luckman, 'Fighting for the Florentine', 5.

⁷³ See for example Groom, *One Mountain After Another*, 174-5.

⁷⁴ Luckman and Borschmann, Cassette 1/b, 17.

⁷⁵ Luckman and Borschmann, Cassette 1/a, 12, 17-18.

⁷⁶ Luckman and Borschmann, Cassette 2/a, 31.

As I said, with all the sudden speeding up of destruction, the sudden speeding up with heavy machinery and so on and the urge for getting more commercialism and the growth of industry, we began to realise with alarm just the damage that could be done to parks and just how the legal system worked – no law is inviolable; you make laws to break laws. So we felt, dash it all, we'll fight on.⁷⁷

Conservationists' sense of scale was changing under the shadow of a mushroom cloud. The new threat of nuclear weapons concerned many conservationists deeply. The dual catastrophe of Hiroshima and Nagasaki showed conservationists 'how quickly life could be extinguished', an impression that encouraged a more global and cohesive outlook on environmental protection alongside a more pessimistic view of humans' impact on the globe.⁷⁸ Anti-nuclear and anti-uranium movements would later become elements of the Australian environmentalist movement, but in the 1940s and early 50s conservationists like Thistle Harris and Judith Wright were already grappling with humans' exponentially increased capacity to destroy.⁷⁹ The power of certain governments to destroy landscapes in one fell swoop was terrifying. It was disorienting to fight for small tracts of lands or an endangered bird population in the knowledge of the terrible power of total destruction we now possessed.⁸⁰

Wright explored nuclear devastation through her poetry, including through the metaphor of native animals killed in bushfires.⁸¹ She deplored the nuclear sabre-rattling of the Korean War and later became a patron of the Campaign Against Nuclear Power. 'I was watching, with increasing distress and horror,' she reflected later, 'not only the terrible building up of the great weaponry of the Cold War, but the effects of the technological and industrial invasion of the land I loved.' This helped to commit her to 'a kind of resistance movement, called conservation.'⁸² Harris was also deeply influenced by the atomic conclusion to World War Two, and pursued committed peace activism for the rest of her life, undeterred by accusations of Communist sympathies.⁸³ For both women, peace activism and conservationist activism

⁷⁷ Luckman and Borschmann, Cassette 1/b, transcript, 24.

⁷⁸ Lloyd, *Saving the Reef: The Human Story Behind One of Australia's Greatest Environmental Treasures* (Brisbane: University of Queensland Press, 2024), 65.

⁷⁹ For the history of nuclear development and anti-nuclear activism, including in relation to environmentalism and settler colonialism, see Jessica Urwin, *Contaminated Country* (Washington: University of Washington Press, 2025).

⁸⁰ Wright, *Going on Talking*, 40.

⁸¹ Wright, *Going on Talking*, 39-40. Poems first published in Judith Wright, *The Gateway* (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1953).

⁸² Griffiths, *The Art of Time Travel*, 101.

⁸³ Griffiths, *The Art of Time Travel*, 100.

were necessarily connected responses to the growing scale of destruction in the postwar world.⁸⁴

Protecting ecosystems

As conservationists adapted to growing scales of environmental threat, ecological scientists were pressing the importance of preserving entire interconnected ecosystems, rather than individual plant or animal species. Luckman's activism for Mount Field played out at a threshold moment for international ecological thinking: Arthur Tansley's 1935 concept of the ecosystem was gaining traction in scientific circles and Aldo Leopold's *A Sand County Almanac* had just been published, but the widely influential warnings of Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* was more than a decade away.⁸⁵ There was an increasing awareness – though not a completely new one – that conserving native animals meant conserving their habitat, with as little interference as possible with all the complex, imperfectly understood ecological relationships that made it up.⁸⁶ 'If environment disappears, so does fauna', jotted Jessie in her notes from a conservation conference in 1949.⁸⁷ To her frustration, scientific consensus around the indivisibility of ecosystems was not reflected in government policy that still divided 'animals' from the 'scenery' upon which they relied. Luckman pointed out the absurdity in having one governmental board charged with administering fauna (the Animals and Birds Protection Board) and another with administering faunal habitat (the Scenery Preservation Board).⁸⁸ As she put it, 'So what if the poor animals and birds had nowhere to live, that was really just too bad, as long as they were protected.'⁸⁹

As a long-time leader of the WLPSA, Thistle Harris was an early and committed advocate for habitat preservation. Her adoption and promotion of an ecological worldview is one way in

⁸⁴ For example, Harris stated in 1951: 'I believe in man and his great capacity to conquer both himself and nature. In trying to open up the eyes of our young people to the beauty of nature and the value of the conservation of natural resources I hope that I am paving the way to a better understanding of man for man.' 'A Thistle Among the Wildflowers', *People*, 20 June 1951, 18.

⁸⁵ Arthur Tansley, 'The Use and Abuse of Vegetational Concepts and Terms', *Ecology* 16, no. 3 (July 1935): 284-307; Aldo Leopold, *A Sand County Almanac* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971 [first published 1949]; Rachel Carson, *Silent Spring* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1962).

⁸⁶ For the establishment of ecology as a concept legible to the general public in Australia (especially Victoria), see Robin, *Defending the Little Desert*, 62-71.

⁸⁷ Conference notes, c. 7-10 December 1949, File – Tasmanian Fauna and Flora Conservation Committee, Jessie and Leo Luckman Archives, NS5867/2/24, Tasmanian Archives, Hobart.

⁸⁸ Jessie Luckman to the President of the Tasmanian Field Naturalists Club, c. 1968, File – Tasmanian Fauna and Flora Conservation Committee, Jessie and Leo Luckman Archives, NS5867/2/24, Tasmanian Archives, Hobart.

⁸⁹ Luckman and Borschmann, *Cassette 2/a*, 30-31.

which her relationship to the environment continued to evolve after her husband David Stead's death. She argued for the importance of habitat when discussing the educational wildlife sanctuary, Wirrimibirra, that she set up in his honour:

We feel that it is tremendously important to preserve habitat [...] We have extraordinary animals like platypus, spiny anteater, marsupials of many kinds which are isolated in this area about which we still need to know a good deal and which we cannot learn about unless we have them preserved in adequate numbers. Now in order to do this we have to preserve not only the animals but the plants associated with them in fact their whole habitat and this is the theme of our teaching.⁹⁰

Particularly after she took a course in landscape design in the early 1960s, Harris found that the arrangements and interrelationship of species in environments supplanted her earlier interest in individual species.⁹¹

In this context of expanding environmental threats and emergent ecological thinking, the proposal to alienate parts of Mount Field National Park was deeply worrying. One of the driving reasons Luckman and her allies fought the plan was to avoid a precedent whereby politicians and businesspeople could chip away at legally protected natural areas that had been set aside 'for all time' by previous governments.⁹² The Florentine Forest was, in fact, a relatively small pocket of a large national park, and ANM was offering a sweetening 'compensation area' of 'prime forest' from their existing logging concession.⁹³ Neither fact, however, dissuaded Luckman from battling for the integrity of the initial park, as she explained in retrospect. Later she reflected:

The Florentine Forest had been protected by national park status; to us it was sacrosanct. One of the members of parliament expressed surprise that it would take an act of parliament to excise the forest. He was amazed that any national park should be so protected. We began to realise with alarm the damage that could be done to any park and that no law is inviolable [...]⁹⁴

For the TFFCC, the Mount Field issue was existential: if the Florentine Forest was not safe from the encroachments of industry, what was? 'No necessity, however great, of any commercial enterprise will be of sufficient value to me,' wrote another advocate, 'as an excuse

⁹⁰ Thistle Harris interviewed by Hazel de Berg, 7 January 1972, oral history recording, Side 2, Hazel de Berg Collection, National Library of Australia, Canberra.

⁹¹ Thistle Y. Stead, 'Thistle Y. Stead – My Interest in Landscape Design.' [typewritten draft speech or article], 5 June 1988, MLMSS 5715, Box 2, State Library of New South Wales, Sydney.

⁹² In fact, it was not a totally new development – Lake St Clair had already been flooded, which Luckman and her friends 'got quite annoyed about'. Luckman and Borschmann, Cassette 1/a, 15.

⁹³ Kiernan, *Eroding the Edges of Nature*, 113.

⁹⁴ Luckman, 'Fighting for the Florentine', 5.

to rob posterity of the reserves which have, too little and too late, been set aside for it.’⁹⁵ It felt vital to prevent the normalisation of whittling away at the already protected natural spaces so precious to human and non-human animals.

Scientific approaches to care and conservation

Luckman advocated strongly for a more scientific approach to the conservation of endangered native animals and threatened natural spaces. Her belief in the importance of science and scientists for the meaningful protection of the environment was increasingly common, despite the fraught relationship between the two arenas that emerged after 1945. Science bore fresh glamour after the war, and many scientists who had formerly been aligned with conservationist groups withdrew to professional concerns.⁹⁶ Men flocked to professional science in greater numbers than before, making it harder for women to pursue a career in the field, a phenomenon that helps to explain the growing number of scientifically literate women taking up unpaid roles as the leaders of conservationist groups.⁹⁷ Government scientists were pressured to set aside conservationist or environmentalist concerns in favour of aiding industrial growth; some professional scientific organisations became actively hostile to conservationists. By 1966, when leading biologist A. J. Marshall warned of the impending extinction of many native species in his book *The Great Extermination*, he shocked readers not only with his predictions but also ‘simply because so few scientists were prepared to stand up and point out such truths in the postwar period.’⁹⁸

Despite the reticence of many scientists, conservationists including Marshall, Luckman, and Harris were determined that a scientific approach was needed. Luckman approved of a ‘more practical, scientific and balanced attitude’ in place of a ‘more emotional and sentimental approach’.⁹⁹ One of the first initiatives of the TFFCC, born out of the Mount Field campaign, was to lobby for greater scientific representation on the Animals and Birds Protection Board (sometimes referred to as the Fauna Board). In 1950, seven of the eight standing board members – all of whom were men – represented some kind of commercial interest in the killing of animals. The Conservation Committee lobbied the attorney general, positing that ‘the most important function of the Board should be the preservation of native fauna, particularly those

⁹⁵ A. V. Colbeck, ‘National Park’, *Mercury* (Hobart), 20.

⁹⁶ Hutton and Connors, *History of the Australian Environment Movement*, 97.

⁹⁷ Jane Carey, *Taking to the Field* (Clayton, Victoria: Monash University Publishing, 2023), especially 189–221.

⁹⁸ A. J. Marshall, *The Great Extermination*; Hutton and Connors, 97.

⁹⁹ Luckman, ‘Some notes on Tasmanian Fauna & Flora Committee’, 2.

of great interest and value in grave danger of extinction' and that such a goal would not be achieved with the current constitution of the board.¹⁰⁰ Luckman tried to canvas public support for a change. Writing under the moniker 'Thylacine', she told the editor of *The Mercury* that 'it is unsatisfactory, as well as unfair to the member concerned, that one man shd. [sic] be expected to uphold the strictly scientific angle.'¹⁰¹ She put her request in terms of spatial and temporal change: 'It cannot be denied that, with the rapid expansion of civilisation into hitherto remote areas, a scientific approach to all aspects of conservation is a most urgent matter.'¹⁰²

In 1953, the TFFCC was successful in its goal of increased scientific representation, celebrating when one of its members, the distinguished zoologist and thylacine expert Eric Guiler, was appointed to the Fauna Board.¹⁰³ In the same year, the field naturalist and ornithologist Michael Sharland, one of Luckman's fellow walkers in the Hobart Walking Club, was also appointed, 'increasing still further the representation of scientific and conservation interests'.¹⁰⁴ Both Guiler and Sharland were keenly interested in the continued existence of thylacines and pushed for the preservation of their likely habitat, a question on which the board had previously prevaricated. By 1966 Luckman noted that it was 'interesting to note the gradual decrease in the more emotional and sentimental approach to conservation among nature-lovers [...] and the rise of a more practical, scientific and balanced attitude.'¹⁰⁵

In New South Wales, Thistle Harris was even more firmly convinced of the need for an outlook of 'scientific realism' in conservationism, and in life generally.¹⁰⁶ A 1951 feature article assured readers that Harris was not the kind of 'sentimental, nature-loving crackpot' who delivered 'naturalist mumbo-jumbo to create a worshipful reverence for nature.'¹⁰⁷ She probably would not have chosen those precise words herself – the article is subtly derisive towards her work, drawing attention to her 'zippered shorts' – but she was certainly committed to advocating

¹⁰⁰ Tasmanian Fauna Conservation Committee Annual Report 1950/51, 30 April 1950.

¹⁰¹ 'Fauna Board', *Mercury* (Hobart), 3 March 1953, 4. The choice of moniker may have been a gesture towards a particularly Tasmanian threat of endangerment and extinction, as discussed in Chapter One and Four.

¹⁰² 'Fauna Board'.

¹⁰³ Draft of Annual Report of Tasmanian Conservation Committee, 1953, File - Tasmanian Fauna and Flora Conservation Committee, NS5867/2/24, Jessie and Leo Luckman Archives, Hobart.

On his appointment to the Animals and Birds Protection Board, Guiler chose to resign from the Conservation Committee to avoid a conflict of interest.

¹⁰⁴ Draft of Annual Report.

¹⁰⁵ Luckman, 'Some notes on Tasmanian Fauna and Flora Conservation Committee'.

¹⁰⁶ Thistle's approach was a sharp diversion from religious moralism of Frances Levvy and the spiritual writing of Amy Mack. Interestingly, Mack and Harris sometimes compared as female writers who both encouraged children in their appreciation for Australian nature.

¹⁰⁷ 'A Thistle Among the Wildflowers', 18. Twenty years after the consternation over bushwalking women's adoption of shorts and trousers, a photograph of her helping students emphasised her 'zippered shorts'.

science and avoiding the sentimental and spiritual. Staunchly atheist, Harris was frustrated by the persistence of Christian or animistic beliefs that emerged in her extensive survey of nature study in New South Wales.¹⁰⁸ Thistle was disdainful of zoos and ‘fake sanctuaries’ that purported conservationist activism but, she felt, did more harm than good to the animals. ‘At many such “sanctuaries,” the public is invited to buy photographs of themselves fondling koalas which prefer to be on top of a gum tree asleep.’¹⁰⁹

Bridging the gap

Different scales of care brought different challenges. Conservationists were convinced of the value of large swathes of animal habitat, far from humans and their bulldozers and ‘fondling’ hands, but convincing politicians and the public was more difficult: how could they persuade others to preserve a place they might never personally encounter, especially when doing so might hinder the state’s economic development? After all, the difficulty of recreational access was fodder for the government and Australian Newsprint Mills’s case for the excision.¹¹⁰ Why preserve a national park, the argument went, when it was so difficult for anyone to access? Why leave such commercially valuable trees ‘sitting there doing nothing’?¹¹¹ Luckman acknowledged the problem: ‘You couldn’t put it over to people. People couldn’t get at it; you couldn’t get a car in.’¹¹² In contrast, advocates for the revocation argued that the proposed Compensation Area might be popular with tourists. Cosgrove and ANM head Stephen Kessell speculated about a stretch of the Junee River that might flow beneath the ground, and associated caves that might one day be discovered. Luckman responded that ‘I quite fail to see the scenic value of an ‘underground stretch of river’ particularly as there is no known entrance to it.’¹¹³

Bushwalkers were well-placed to counter the suggestion that *no* humans could access the Florentine Forest, because they had gone themselves, like Luckman in her childhood.¹¹⁴ ‘To

¹⁰⁸ ‘An Investigation into the Teaching of Nature Study in Primary Schools (Third and Fourth Grades) with some Evidence of its Basic Value in the Training of Young Children’, 1952, Thistle Harris and David Stead Papers, MLMSS 5715 23 (25), State Library of New South Wales, Sydney.

¹⁰⁹ ‘Thistle Among the Wildflowers’, 20.

¹¹⁰ ‘Bill will Define Park’.

¹¹¹ Luckman, ‘Fighting for the Florentine’, 3.

¹¹² Luckman, ‘Fighting for the Florentine’, 3. For many, the inability of cars to access wilderness spaces was integral: for the contested place of cars withing national parks, see Paul Sutter, *Driven Wild: How the Fight against Automobiles Launched the Modern Wilderness Movement* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2002).

¹¹³ Kiernan, *Eroding the Edges of Nature*, 114-5; Jessie Wakefield [Luckman], ‘National park’, *Mercury* (Hobart), 9 February 1949, 20.

¹¹⁴ The concerned secretary of the Alpine Club of Southern Tasmania predicted that ‘it will be represented that the area required by the paper pulp interests is situated in a remote area of the park, but it must be remembered

say it has never been accessible to tourists is nonsense’, wrote Luckman, ‘for years it has been an easy walk for hikers who go via the Adamsfield Track.’¹¹⁵ Some campaigners guided MPs on walks to the area, facilitating visceral encounters with the ‘marvellous’ and cathedral-like spaces slated for felling.¹¹⁶ Few politicians were willing and able to go to the threatened area personally, however, so photography offered another means of bridging the geographical and informational gap.

The Hobart Walking Club, especially Jessie and Leo Luckman, were among the first conservationists to grasp the significance of beautiful natural images in fostering support for environmental causes. They sought to remove the visual distance between cities (where most Australians lived) and the remote wilderness areas conservationists wanted to protect. From the 1940s, Leo put on regular slideshows on behalf of the Hobart Walking Club and, later, the South West Committee, showing packed-out audiences colourful photographs taken on bushwalks all around the state. Given that colour television only came to Tasmania in 1975, these shows offered a rare visual spectacle. It was a chance for urban populations to feel connected to distant spaces.¹¹⁷ Still, it was an imperfect medium. The Florentine Forest’s aesthetic value was difficult to convey in its entirety; many of the *regnans* trees were too tall to be captured on camera.

Rights for wombats?

That a national park might merit protection for its own sake, regardless of direct human interests, was not an idea seriously canvassed in the Mount Field debate. The omission probably reflected conservationists’ sense that appeals to the rights of flora and fauna would not be well-received; Luckman often commented on the difficulty her alliance faced in trying to make people see the value in a forest when their main concern was ‘the commercial side and the money’.¹¹⁸ Some of her conservationist contemporaries in other parts of Australia, however,

the whole of [Mount Field] National Park is used by walkers and tourists.’ ‘Alpine Club Concerned About Park’, *Mercury* (Hobart), 16 October 1946, 7.

¹¹⁵ Wakefield [Luckman], ‘National Park’.

¹¹⁶ Wakefield [Luckman], ‘National Park’.

¹¹⁷ These photographic techniques became the bread and butter of modern environmental campaigning in Australia – especially in other difficult-to-access areas like the Great Barrier Reef and the Franklin River. See Bob Brown, ‘Bob Brown reflects on saving the Franklin River’, *Australian Geographic*, 10 June 2014, <https://www.australiangeographic.com.au/nature-wildlife/biodiversity/2014/06/reflecting-on-the-conservation-of-the-franklin-river/>; Lloyd, *Saving the Reef*, 90.

¹¹⁸ Luckman, ‘Fighting for the Florentine’, 3.

were beginning to think seriously about the inherent right of native animals to exist free from human interference.

Around the same time that Luckman was defending Mount Field's borders, Marie Byles was engaged in a protracted dispute with erstwhile ally Myles Dunphy. The pair were two of the most important shapers of New South Wales and Australian bushwalking culture, so their clash is insightful. Byles and Dunphy were fighting over the proper approach to Kosciuszko Primitive Area in New South Wales, which was being proposed as a national park.¹¹⁹ The two Sydney-based professionals shared a distaste for overtourism and the advent of mass car usage in remoter areas, and a commitment to an ideal of bushwalkers as caring and educated bush users with a particular right to enjoy and speak for Australian nature.¹²⁰ But the debate over how much humans should be allowed to access so-called 'primitive areas' – now more commonly described as wilderness areas and national parks – revealed their 'fundamentally different cosmological views of the world'.¹²¹

Whereas Dunphy thought plans for Kosciuszko should prioritise access for human recreational use of the space, Byles wanted to preserve parts of it essentially free of human interference.¹²² She argued for the rights of animals and plants in and of themselves. Especially after her conversion to Buddhism during the 1940s, Byles treasured an idea of a holistic and reciprocal natural world.¹²³ In such a world, not only humans and other animals but trees and rocks had lives worth championing in their own right.¹²⁴ She asked her fellow walkers and conservationists to question 'whether we are considering the trees and the stalactites as having a being of their own and there for their own sake and not merely for the pleasure of bushwalkers

¹¹⁹ The area is now called Kosciuszko National Park.

¹²⁰ Deirdre Slattery, 'Bushwalking and Access: The Kosciuszko Primitive Area Debate 1943–6', *Journal of Outdoor and Environmental Education* 13, no. 2 (December 1, 2009): 17.

¹²¹ McLeod, *Summit of Her Ambition*, 99.

¹²² It was not that Byles did not want people to ever access bush spaces; indeed, she pushed for female participation in walking clubs and women's adoption of comfortable clothing for bush creation. She also started the Bush Club with Paddy Pallin in 1944, catering for walkers who did not want to camp overnight – contrary to Dunphy's strong emphasis on camping. As World War Two progressed, the club's rules meant it catered well to European refugees who had a curfew. The Bush Club thus became an exception to a general rule of British whiteness in organised bushwalking. See for example Marie Byles, *The Australian's Woman's Mirror*, April 30 1929, 11; Harper, *Ways of the Bushwalker*, 213–14.

¹²³ Byles first became interested in Buddhism during her travels in Tibet and Burma in 1938. In 1951 she was a founding member of the Buddhist Society of New South Wales. Cadzow, 'Footprints, Imprints', 4–5, 13.

¹²⁴ For a more in-depth analysis of Byles' Buddhist ideas, see Cadzow, 'Footprints, Imprints'; Peggy James, 'The Eco-Buddhism of Marie Byles,' *Journal of Buddhist Ethics* 22 (January 1, 2015): 215–46. Byles explicated her Buddhist ideas in relation to the environment in a range of articles, including 'Our Attitude to Nature,' *Bushwalker Annual* (1948), 33; 'Pollution, Grasping and Us', *Middle Way* 46, no. 1 (1971): 35–6; Byles, 'What is a Primitive Area'.

– and tourists!’¹²⁵ The cyclical interconnected nature of the universe, Byles felt, meant that ‘we must take as little as possible out of nature even though this means giving up our most cherished desires’.¹²⁶

Dunphy was not ready to give up his cherished desires in this case, however. He experienced Byles’ dissent as a major betrayal, and ‘the first and only serious setback’ in his record as a conservationist. The stalemate over the future of the area lasted decades, playing out in the pages of the *Sydney Bushwalker*, which Byles edited. She articulated an ethic of long-distance care in an article entitled ‘What is a Primitive Area’:

The minority opinion regards a primitive area as a place where nature-lovers may go freely to see the wild life in its natural state. It is to be educational, and therefore of use to human beings. It is asserted that a primitive area would serve no purpose if human beings were not to have the pleasure of seeing it. There is also the important point that perhaps the only way of keeping the wild life is to educate mankind to appreciate and enjoy it.

If it is at once admitted that a primitive area exists for the pleasure of human beings, then it automatically follows that facilities must be given for human beings to go into it. Perhaps roads and motorists might be excluded, but tracks, huts and pasture grounds must be arranged.

... However, the vast majority of bushwalkers have ruled that a primitive area must be for the wild life, which shall flourish there, not for our pleasure, but for its own. After all, why should man in his arrogance say that primeval lands are of value only in so far as they subserve his ends? Is not this the vicious old profit motive coming out in another form?¹²⁷

Humans’ recreational interests were not dismissed, but they were not all-important: ‘the flowers may blossom and the kangaroos and wombats enjoy their lives there, whether anyone sees them or not.’¹²⁸ Eventually, Dunphy’s ideas largely won out, but Deirdre Slattery has noted that Byles’ ideas resonate in the twenty-first century, for example in debates about the ban on climbing Uluru.¹²⁹

¹²⁵ Heather Radi, ‘Byles, Marie Beuzeville (1900–1979)’, *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, National Centre of Biography, Australian National University, published first in hardcopy 1993.

¹²⁶ Marie Byles, ‘Can Bushwalkers Save the Bush?’, undated typescript, Marie Byles Papers, ML MSS 3833, Box 12(13), Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales, Sydney.

¹²⁷ Byles, ‘What is a Primitive Area’.

¹²⁸ Byles, ‘What is a Primitive Area’.

¹²⁹ Slattery, ‘Bushwalking and Access’, 21. See also Geoff Mosley, *Battle for the Bush* (Sydney: Envirobook: 1999).

Caring for the distant and possibly dead

Campaigners' long-distance care for native animals was epitomised in their approach to the disappearing, or disappeared, thylacine. Luckman was old enough to have visited thylacines at Mary Grant Roberts' Beaumaris Zoo as a child.¹³⁰ Though the last Tasmanian tiger to die in captivity had passed away in 1936, conservationists hoped that more individuals remained in the remoter parts of the island.¹³¹ Children's author Nan Chauncey and teacher and conservationist Pat Wessing, both of whom worked with Luckman on several major campaigns, came across an elderly thylacine in 1947. The animal, 'resting in tussocks of button-grass', must have seemed miraculous, but according to Wessing, the two women kept their experience a secret for many years. This decision was made 'out of respect to the animal, and because they strongly disapproved of the callous and short-sighted attitude of the then Tasmanian Government, which, had it known about it, would have set about capturing it, so as to sell it abroad to the highest bidder.'¹³²

Long-distance care could also entail fighting for animals not yet catalogued by Western science. Proposed industrial interventions like dam-building and logging tended to threaten ecological networks in southwest Tasmania about which even conservationists 'very largely knew nothing'.¹³³ Little biological research had been conducted on the animal life of the Florentine Forest when its excision was proposed though it was clear the old forests supported significant numbers of marsupials and birds, including several endangered species.¹³⁴ As a result, Luckman and her comrades found themselves fighting for the rights (and the scientific value) of animals yet to be discovered.

This issue resurfaced during the Lake Pedder conflict, when the Hydroelectric Commission argued that very few species occupied the remote area proposed for flooding. What was more, those animals that did rely on Lake Pedder and its moorlands for their habitat, it was said, were only small.¹³⁵ This attitude is reflected in substantial recent research linking animal charisma

¹³⁰ See Chapters One and Four.

¹³¹ David Owen and David Pemberton, *Tasmanian Tiger: The tragic story of the thylacine* (Crows Nest, NSW: Allen & Unwin, 2023), 175.

¹³² John Wilson, Citation for the 2012 Kate and Gustav Weindorfer Honours List Award, November 2012 and April 2013, accessed 3 July 2025, <https://friendsofcradlevalley.org/honours-list/pat-wessing-am/>. Likely, the highest international bidder would have been the London Zoo, where Mary Grant Roberts sent several thylacines.

¹³³ Luckman and Borschmann, Cassette 2/a, 32.

¹³⁴ Kiernan, *Eroding the Edges of Nature*, 75-77.

¹³⁵ Luckman and Borschmann, Cassette 2/a, 32.

(and resultant human concern and affection) with larger body size.¹³⁶ Luckman and other conservationists hoped the discovery in 1970 and 1971 of two new species of the ancient crustacean genus *Anaspidesidae*, with a range restricted to southwest Tasmania, might impede the inundation plans, despite their small size.¹³⁷ But the emergence of the species – named the marsh pygmy shrimp and Hickman’s pygmy shrimp – onto the scientific stage was too little and too late. At that point, Luckman commented sardonically, ‘what’s just a few odd species of an anaspides to hydro-electric power?’¹³⁸

Colonial spaces and silences

The Mount Field campaign, like other battles for protected natural spaces in this period, drew on the vocabulary and imaginary of a virgin, primeval forest that ought to be protected from the excesses of human civilisation, development, and modernisation. It is this image of undisturbed, unpeopled land, home only to wombats or an elusive thylacine, that would be powerfully employed by protestors in the ‘wilderness politics’ of the later twentieth century.¹³⁹ As scholars of settler colonial space have argued in recent years, this is an image which occludes Aboriginal presence and history. In a lecture that sparked significant debate about Indigenous land rights and the mining industry in 2012, Marcia Langton stated:

These vast areas owned by Aboriginal people are the repository of Australia’s megadiversity of fauna, flora and ecosystems because of the ancient Aboriginal system of management, and because, Aboriginal people fought to protect their territories from white incursion. They are not wilderness areas. They are Aboriginal homelands, shaped over millennia by Aboriginal people.¹⁴⁰

Her argument contributes to a growing body of work, most notably by Bill Gammage and Bruce Pascoe, that demonstrates how Aboriginal people actively managed and changed the land before European colonisation.¹⁴¹ Beyond an erasure of Aboriginal presence and

¹³⁶ Céline Albert et al., ‘The Twenty Most Charismatic Species’, *PLOS ONE* 13, no. 7 (2018): e0199149, <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0199149>; Pavol Prokop et al., ‘Charismatic Species Should Be Large: The Role of Admiration and Fear’, *People and Nature* 6, no. 3 (2024): 945–57, <https://doi.org/10.1002/pan3.10504>.

¹³⁷ R Swain, I. S. Wilson & J. L. Hickman, ‘Allanaspides helonomus gen. et. sp. Nov. (Crustacea: Syncarida) from Tasmania’, *Records of the Queen Victoria Museum* 35 (1970): 1–13; R Swain, I. S. Wilson & J. E. Ong, ‘A new species of Allanaspides (Syncarida, Anaspididae) from south-western Tasmania’, *Crustaceana* 21 (1971): 196–202.

¹³⁸ Luckman and Borschmann, *Cassette 2/a*, 32.

¹³⁹ Crowley, ‘Saving the Franklin: A people’s rebellion in a distant forest’, 34–43; Lyn McGaurr et al., ‘Wilderness and the Media Politics of Place Branding’, 269–87.

¹⁴⁰ Langton, ‘The conceit of wilderness ideology’.

¹⁴¹ Bill Gammage, *The Biggest Estate on Earth: how Aborigines made Australia* (Crows Nest, NSW: Allen & Unwin, 2011); Bruce Pascoe, *Dark Emu: Aboriginal Australia and the Birth of Agriculture* (Broome, Western Australia: Magabala Books, 2018).

relationships to the land, national parks and their settler mythologies served to efface the histories of dispossession and violence that were necessary to their establishment, like Alice Manfield's nostalgic colonial retellings in Mount Buffalo National Park.¹⁴² According to Tracey Banivanua Mar, the formation of these create 'natural', patriotism-inspiring 'wilderness' spaces, for settler citizens to appreciate, entailed the imaginative and physical removal of the Indigenous occupants of the land.¹⁴³ Settler women's efforts to protect the borders of remote wilderness spaces grew out of, and helped to reproduce, these patterns of colonial violence, erasure, and the reinvestment of the colonised landscape with settler meanings.

Luckman was exceptional amongst conservationists for her deep interest in the Indigenous heritage of the places in which she walked. 'Heritage' is the right word, though, because her interest was almost completely a historical one, as she clarified in an oral history recording in 1994. When asked if her geological interest in Aboriginal stone carvings was related to personal connections to the Aboriginal community, she replied in the negative.¹⁴⁴ Luckman was fascinated by Aboriginal stone carvings for similar reasons that she was fascinated by the settler and convict history of her island state. In line with the enduring perception that Tasmanian Aboriginal people had been completely or functionally wiped out by genocidal campaigns by the end of the nineteenth century, Indigenous history for Luckman was interesting and over.¹⁴⁵

¹⁴² Guide Alice Manfield, 'Pioneering Days of Mount Buffalo', *Age* (Melbourne), 18 July 1936, 9.

¹⁴³ Banivanua Mar, 'Carving Wilderness', 73–94. See also Mark David Spence, *Dispossessing the Wilderness: Indian Removal and the Making of the National Parks* (Cary, United States: Oxford University Press, 1999); Jarrod Hore, *Visions of Nature: How Landscape Photography Shaped Settler Colonialism* (Oakland, California: University of California Press, 2022); Ted Binnema and Melanie Niemi-Bohun, "'Let the Line Be Drawn Now': Wilderness, Conservation, and the Exclusion of Aboriginal People from Banff National Park in Canada', *Environmental History* 11 (October 1, 2006): 724–50.

¹⁴⁴ Luckman and Penny, 122.

¹⁴⁵ Luckman's papers do, however, include an undated photograph taken by her husband of a remaining relative of Fanny Cochrane-Smith, suggesting that the couple knew that Aboriginal descendants continued to live in Tasmania. Photograph entitled 'Mrs Miller, daughter of Fanny Cochrane-Smith', 'Aborigines, letters etc', Jessie and Leo Luckman Archives, NS5860/1/13, Tasmanian Archives, Hobart.

Luckman's 1951 article in the popular *Walkabout* magazine is insightful on two fronts: it reflects her distinctive interest in the culture and arts of pre-colonisation Tasmania, and it showcases commoner beliefs about Tasmanian Aboriginal people as extremely 'primitive' and, however sad the case may be, now extinct.¹⁴⁶ She began:

Before the coming of the white man the island of Tasmania was peopled by a primitive race having dark-brown skin and curly or woolly hair, distinct from the natives of the Australian mainland. Very little first-hand knowledge is available concerning their arts and crafts [...] although Tasmania was first settled by white men in 1803 and the aborigines did not die out until some seventy years later. Of that seventy years, however, the last forty were spent by the aborigines in confinement on Flinders Island after they had been rounded up in 1835, and no doubt prior to that date the early white settlers were too concerned with wresting a living from the new colony to bother themselves with study of the culture of such a primitive people.¹⁴⁷

After documenting her team's careful excavations of more than fifty carving sites, Luckman imagined the vibrant animal and plant life that sustained the Aboriginal groups who had lived there. She offered an arcadian vision of a flourishing Indigenous culture in tune with nature but now irrevocably extinguished, contrasting it to the environmental degradation of her own period.

Rocky reefs jutting out from the point a few chains to the north would supply shell-fish; there were several streams of fresh water, one of which apparently flowed between the two areas of carvings; while the swamps and plains inland would provide birds and game. [...] Today, however, as a result of over-grazing by stock, the sheltering scrub has dwindled to a few isolated clumps of bushes and the sand dunes have choked most of the streams and are slowly spreading inland over the swamps and plains. Only the carvings, the warm brown of their sandstone, standing out against the harsh whiteness of the sand, bear witness to the fact that this was once the happy home of a happy people, their story and meaning, like the people themselves, lost forever.¹⁴⁸

Even with its limitations, Luckman's thoughtfulness about the Aboriginal history of the lands she loved was rare. Unlike in Tasmania, no one could doubt the continued presence of Aboriginal traditional owners in Marie Byles' stomping grounds, but she rarely engaged with the idea of their custodianship, past or present. Nor did she grapple with the colonial violence that had helped to create her beloved 'pristine' and 'empty' spaces. In fact, Byles' efforts to create and protect national spaces were often driven by a personal sense of ownership that tacitly negated Aboriginal claims to priority. This ownership was light-heartedly affirmed in 1935, when friends in the Sydney Bushwalkers presented Byles with a 'deed to Maitland Bay' in celebration of the new national park achieved through her advocacy (Figure 3).

¹⁴⁶ Jessie S. Luckman, 'Tasmanian Aboriginal Carvings', *Walkabout Magazine* (1 September 1951): 31-3.

¹⁴⁷ Luckman, 'Tasmanian Aboriginal Carvings', 31.

¹⁴⁸ Luckman, 'Tasmanian Aboriginal Carvings', 32.



Figure 2 A spoof deed bestowing the Maitland's Bay area on Marie Byles, following Byles' success in preserving it as a National Park. ML MSS 3833, Box 5, State Library of New South Wales, Sydney.

The scroll's text begins:

Greetings illustrious conqueror of many heights and take notice that on account of your finding Maitland Bay (oh how we wish you had not disturbed its sleep) & your noble efforts in having that said place set aside as a National Park, We [...] do hereby hand over to you, holus bolus, lock stock and barrel the whole of Maitland Bay – until death do you part.

Byles' possessions were to include 'the waters of Maitland Bay, the fish & sharks therein, the rusty boilers on the point, the birds in the trees, the air surrounding the place, the sleepless nights of those visiting the place & in brief THE WHOLE DOG GONE PLACE.'¹⁴⁹ Rock engravings and middens around Maitland Bay indicate the significance of the area to the

¹⁴⁹ Hand-drawn scroll entitled 'Deed of Maitland Bay', Marie Byles, ML MSS.3833, Box 5(13), State Library of New South Wales, Sydney.

Darkinjung people but these did not destabilise either the idea of Byles as the true owner, or the idea of a sleeping and undiscovered landscape.¹⁵⁰ The deed exemplifies how the stories, achievements, jokes, and emotional investments of bushwalkers and conservationists were overlaid on colonised landscapes cast as empty places sleepily awaiting discovery, ownership, or proper management. These settler attachments, even when couched in terms of enlightened environmental conservation, tended to reinforce what Aileen Moreton-Robinson identifies as the ‘white possessive logics’ of settler sovereignty and the concomitant and ongoing disavowal of Indigenous sovereignty.¹⁵¹

When Byles did acknowledge Aboriginal people’s existence, she was dismissive. In one article draft condemning natural destruction in northern Australia, she acknowledged that traditional owners had used the environment in a sustainable way before colonisation, but attributed this to their ignorance, rather than to any special or thoughtful relationship to the land:

The aborigines of Australia were able to sustain life in an arid continent without destroying it, or making it more arid. We are not. I do not suggest that primitive man had any more concern for the well being of nature than we have. But his lack of knowledge, experience and technology did not hurt nature. He was therefore incapable of injuring it. But we are.¹⁵²

It is striking that a woman so fascinated by some non-Western cultures and philosophies did not extend similar respect or curiosity towards Indigenous cultures within her own country.

There was not much room for Indigenous acknowledgement in Thistle Harris’ conservationism, either. She feared the accelerating pace of Western industrialisation and its destructive impacts on the environment, but did not view these phenomena as part of ongoing colonial processes. Her efforts to preserve natural spaces made little or no reference to earlier or disrupted forms of custodianship. Harris’ racial views are evasive: she enjoined teachers not to hide Western history’s ‘skeletons in the cupboard’ but seemed dubious about the continued existence of racial prejudice, writing in 1945 that scientific realism might shed light on ‘the problems of world population and racism (if there is such a thing)’.¹⁵³ This is a remarkable

¹⁵⁰ McLeod, *Summit of Her Ambition*, 58.

¹⁵¹ Aileen Moreton-Robinson, *The White Possessive: Property, Power, and Indigenous Sovereignty* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015), xii.

¹⁵² Marie Byles, ‘Ayers Rock and the Spoilation of Nature’, undated, Marie Byles, ML MSS 3833, Box 12 (13), State Library of New South Wales, Sydney. The only problem with the ‘set-up of primitive man’ she joked in parentheses, was ‘that Germaine Greer [leading Australian feminist] might have had a more uphill task than she has today!’

¹⁵³ Thistle Y. Harris, ‘Science, Research, Imagination’, *Education: journal of the N.S.W. Public School Teachers Federation* 26 no. 11 (29 September 1945): 332; Thistle Harris, Letter to the Editor of the *Sydney Morning Herald*, c. August 1987, ‘Articles, notes, newscuttings’, Thistle Harris and David Stead Papers ML MSS 5715 2 (26), State Library of New South Wales, Sydney.

equivocation in light of Harris' personal experience as a teacher: she recollected complaints from white parents about their children being educated alongside Aboriginal classmates.¹⁵⁴

Forty years later, as debates flared about how and whether to celebrate the bicentennial of colonisation, Harris drafted a response to Judith Wright's strong condemnations of settlers' treatment of Aboriginal people. She agreed with Wright's call for change and was even open to a treaty 'in general terms' – but warned against any kind of compensation, including in land. 'Greed is common to all humans', Harris cautioned. '[I]f aboriginals think material gains are to be offered they will take the maximum and try for more'.¹⁵⁵ Wright and Harris' disagreement exemplifies enduring tensions between the environmentalist movement and the Aboriginal land justice movement that strengthened throughout the 1970s and 80s. Though many park systems now recognise precolonial custodianship, and to varying extents incorporate Indigenous leadership, the settler imaginary of remote and untouched wilderness has proven remarkably resilient.¹⁵⁶

Conclusions

Members of TFFCC felt vindicated in their warnings of a slippery slope of national park degradation. Over the following decades, significant portions of Hartz National Park in southeast Tasmania were similarly revoked for forestry.¹⁵⁷ And, shortly after the Mount Field campaign wrapped up, bushwalkers noticed gauges placed in Lake Pedder, a glacial outwash lake fringed with pink sand that represented a 'mecca' for many walkers.¹⁵⁸ This was the first intimation of the Hydro-Electric Commission's plans for turning the lake into an impoundment and diversion lake as part of the hydroelectric generation scheme that was gathering pace and power in Tasmania.¹⁵⁹ Wary after their 1949 experiences, conservationists jumped into action,

¹⁵⁴ Harris, 'Science, Research, Imagination'.

¹⁵⁵ Harris, Letter to the Editor of the *Sydney Morning Herald*.

¹⁵⁶ Jenny Pickerill, 'From wilderness to WildCountry: the power of language in environmental campaigns in Australia', *Environmental Politics* 17, no. 1 (2008): 95-104. For examples of Indigenous leadership in national parks see Ronan O'Connell, 'Australia hands control of its newest national parks to Indigenous peoples', *National Geographic*, 6 October 2022, <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/travel/article/australia-hands-control-newest-national-parks-to-indigenous-peoples>; 'Aboriginal joint management of parks', NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service, accessed 3 June 2025, <https://www.nationalparks.nsw.gov.au/conservation-and-heritage/aboriginal-joint-management-of-parks>.

¹⁵⁷ Kiernan, *Eroding the Edges of Nature*, 144-45.

¹⁵⁸ Helen Gee, 'Social and Cultural Grounds for the Restoration of Lake Pedder', in C. Sharples (ed.), *Lake Pedder: Values and Restoration*, Occasional Paper No. 27, Centre for Environmental Studies, University of Tasmania (2001): 109.

¹⁵⁹ For an account of the growth of the Hydro-Electric Commission in Tasmania, see Greg Buckman, *Tasmania's Wilderness Battles*, 3-36.

and succeeded in making Lake Pedder a national park by 1955, but they had learned the hard way that legal protections were not necessarily sufficient to protect natural spaces and their nonhuman inhabitants.¹⁶⁰

Politicians and business leaders had learned lessons too. The same justifications used to argue for excising the Florentine Forest, like industrial necessity, economic urgency, and aesthetic improvement, would later be deployed to push for the flooding of Lake Pedder and the attempted damming of the Franklin River. Luckman acknowledged the mixed legacies of Mount Field, reflecting that ‘The Government met its first real conservation resistance in the Florentine, but it was overall a black day for conservation.’¹⁶¹ Kiernan, who was not present for this campaign but became a leading voice in subsequent Tasmanian wilderness battles, puts it more strongly: Mount Field became ‘a template for the violation and undoing of Tasmania’s protected areas at the first smell of money.’¹⁶²

Jessie Luckman died in Hobart in 2014, aged 104. The mercurial *Mercury* celebrated a ‘trailblazing bushwalker, conservationist and musician’, while the Tasmanian Greens Party praised her a leader whose ‘pioneering environmentalism’ would surely ‘live on in the wilderness she loved’.¹⁶³ After the Mount Field campaign, Luckman had stayed an important part of the conservationist and environmentalist movements in her state. In 1959, for example, the bounds of long-distance care were tested again when the TFFCC caught wind of tentative plans to recommence sealing on Macquarie Island, a sub-Antarctic territory 1500 kilometres off the coast of Tasmania.¹⁶⁴ The island had been protected as a wildlife sanctuary since 1933.¹⁶⁵ Committee members, tipped off by sympathetic connections in the media, publicised the plan and pressured politicians until the boat was radioed with an urgent message to stop.

¹⁶⁰ Luckman and Borschmann, Cassette 2/a, 33–34.

¹⁶¹ Luckman, ‘Fighting for the Florentine’, 5.

¹⁶² Kiernan, *Eroding the Edges of Nature*, 48.

¹⁶³ ‘Jessie Luckman, ‘scion’ of Tasmanian bushwalking and TSO pianist, dies aged 104’, *Mercury*, 15 May 2014, accessed 2 April 2023, <https://www.themercury.com.au/news/tasmania/jessie-luckman-scion-of-tasmanian-bushwalking-and-tso-pianist-dies-aged-104/news-story/0f0a2a78b693d0a37168c362b2f2b6ef>; ‘Death notice for Luckman, Jessie Sheila’, *My Tributes*, 17 May 2014, accessed 2 April 2023, <https://www.mytributes.com.au/notice/death-notices/luckman-jessie-sheila/4182539/>.

¹⁶⁴ Luckman and Borschmann, Cassette 1/b, 27–8. See also Adrian Dean and Tim Martain, ‘Scratch the Surface: It floats his boat’, *Mercury* (Hobart), 14 May 2016, <https://www.themercury.com.au/lifestyle/scratch-the-surface-it-floats-his-boat/news-story/9dd69114927440f8a8a94ceb50cba401>.

¹⁶⁵ For histories of extraction and protection on Macquarie Island, see Rohan Howitt, ‘Oil from penguins: Mentalities of extraction in the Southern Ocean World, 1889–1919’, *International Review of Environmental History* 9, no. 2 (August 2023): 51–76.

The would-be sealing vessel was already on its way, but was required to turn back around.¹⁶⁶ The island's elephant seals, huge yet vulnerable to the vagaries of distant human politics, remained protected. In her old age, Luckman was also closely involved in the Lake Pedder and Franklin Dam campaigns – though by then she was happy to 'let somebody else do the yelling'.¹⁶⁷

With an evident eye to the future, Luckman recorded the several oral histories featured in this chapter, and carefully compiled and edited her archives. She disputed accounts that minimised or oversimplified conservationists' mid-century efforts; in her opinion, the Mount Field campaign was the beginning of the Australian environmental movement.¹⁶⁸ Contained in her archives are sepia photographs of a young Luckman climbing mountains with the Hobart Walking Club in the 1930s, which, as an older woman, she had mounted on cardboard snipped out of 1990s pamphlet encouraging Tasmanians to vote for Greens politicians Bob Brown and Christine Milne.¹⁶⁹ A coincidence, probably, but evocative of the ways her life and activism trouble the boundaries of two periods of Australian environmental history that are usually sharply delineated. The Mount Field campaign in particular is at odds with a vision of two waves of environmental action separated by a mid-century lull. Luckman's story, alongside those of Harris, Byles, and Wright exemplifies how the history of Australian environmental thought and action takes new shape when historians foreground women's tangible and intellectual interventions.

¹⁶⁶ There are some discrepancies in Luckman's and Adrian Dean's recollections of this incident: Luckman's account suggests that no boat ever reached Macquarie Island for the purposes of sealing or investigating the potential of sealing, whereas Dean, who was a carpenter with the 1959 Antarctic scientific mission to Macquarie Island, suggests that an initial boat arrived, leading Dean and others share the news with contacts on the mainland. Luckman and Borschmann, *Cassette 1/b*, 27-8; Dean and Martain, 'Scratch the Surface'.

¹⁶⁷ Luckman and Penny, 132.

¹⁶⁸ Letter from Jessie Luckman to the President of the Tasmanian Field Naturalists Club, File – Tasmanian Fauna and Flora Conservation Committee, Jessie and Leo Luckman Archives, NS5867/2/24, Tasmanian Archives, Hobart.

¹⁶⁹ Photograph of Lake St. Clair, Mt Olympus, Mt Byron, and Mt Gould, mounted on cardboard advertisement, Photographs taken or acquired by Jessie Luckman, NS 5855/1/19, Tasmanian Archives, Hobart.

More specifically, this chapter has drawn out the dynamics of long-distance care for native animals that manifested and evolved in mid-century conservationist fights over national parks. In a postwar context of expanded environmental destruction – both the actual and the possible – and the erosion of hard-fought conservationist victories, coupled with emergent ecological thinking that championed ecosystem preservation, conservationists like Luckman, Harris, and Byles stressed native animals’ need for space. They understood that distance from humans could be a blessing, not a curse. This approach raised questions about how to foster care for ‘useless’ animals and landscapes that the public might never, or, perhaps, *should* never visit.



Figure 3 Photographs in Luckman’s archives testify to a long life and a career that spanned almost every phase of the Australian environmental action in the twentieth century. Left: Jessie Luckman photographed in the 1940s as part of the Army’s Education Unit. Right: Luckman captured in the early 2000s. Jessie and Leo Luckman Archives, NG2566, Tasmanian Archives, Hobart.

Luckman and her contemporaries’ long-range work for animal spaces was, in many ways, a far cry from the close personal encounters of an Alice Manfield photographing lyrebirds on Mount Buffalo, or the impassioned moral appeals of a Francis Levvy writing for young children. It was a direct rebuke of Mary Grant Roberts’ ‘loving’ capture, confinement, and caressing of thylacines far from their native ranges. There was an acknowledgement amongst mid-century conservationists, often tacit, that the wrong kind of care could ‘asphyxiate’ the cared-for, coupled with an insistence on a more scientific approach to conservation.¹⁷⁰ Nevertheless, mid-century fights for national parks and other conservationist goals were never completely

¹⁷⁰ María Puig de la Bellacasa, “‘Nothing comes without its world’: thinking with care”, *The Sociological Review* 60, no. 2 (May 2012): 212.

separate from the more intimate and emotional forms of care traced throughout this thesis. There was an animating tension between the love of spaces and creatures fostered by direct contact – for example on a bushwalk – and the painful awareness of the destruction that humans seemed so capable of wreaking on native animal lives. This unsolved tension remains at the heart of contemporary conservation practice.

With complex exceptions, long-distance care absented the Aboriginal history of national parks, casting them as pristine and ‘primitive’ spaces made sacred for settlers by remoteness, isolation, and a lack of human history, industry, or culture. This silencing erased both the ancient meanings attached to spaces and animals by Indigenous people, and the history of displacement and killing that was necessary for the later establishment of settler-owned, settler-affirming, ‘empty’ national parks. The reification of wilderness and related obscuring of active Aboriginal custodianship – except where politically convenient – would be mainstays of wilderness campaigning in Australia, as in other settler colonial nations, for decades to come.¹⁷¹

¹⁷¹ For further discussion of evolving representations of Aboriginal presence and custodianship in wilderness politics and advertising, see Jay Arthur, ‘Natural Beauty, Man-Made’, *Words for Country: Landscape and Language in Australia*, eds. Tim Bonyhady and Tom Griffiths (Sydney: UNSW Press, 2002), 190-205.

Conclusion: Duties of Care

Over the west side of this mountain
that's lyrebird country.
I could go down there, they say, in the early morning,
and I'd see them, I'd hear them.

Ten years, and I have never gone.
I'll never go.
I'll never see the lyrebirds –
the few, the shy, the fabulous,
the dying poets.

I should see them, if I lay there in the dew:
first a single movement
like a waterdrop falling, then stillness,
then a brown head, brown eyes,
a splendid bird, bearing
like a crest the symbol of his art,
the high symmetrical shape of the perfect lyre.
I should hear that master practising his art.

No, I have never gone.
Some things ought to be left secret, alone;
some things – birds like walking fables –
ought to inhabit nowhere but the reverence of the heart.

Judith Wright, 'Lyrebirds', 1962¹

Like so many settler Australians before her, Judith Wright was entranced by lyrebirds. Their beautifully arching tails, dance-like performances, and breath-taking capacity for mimicry tugged at the poet's emotions and imagination. Nevertheless, Wright felt that she ought not impose on these ethereal songbirds who lived near her home on Mount Tamborine, in southeastern Queensland. Unlike Alice Manfield patiently hiding in a tree until she could snap the first photograph of a male lyrebird, or Edith Wilkinson acting as mediator between her 'pet' lyrebird and eager journalists, Wright kept her distance. Even merely seeing or hearing them seemed too great of an intrusion on the lives of these 'dying poets' – an elegiac phrase that evoked the continued threats to the birds' habitat by the middle of the twentieth century.

¹ Judith Wright, 'Lyrebirds', in *Birds*, ed. Judith Wright (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1962), 33.

Perhaps Wright stayed away because she felt that, by the 1960s, humans had already done them enough harm. Care for native animals, as captured in this poem, entailed keeping a reverential distance, foregoing the pleasures of close contact for the benefit of the beloved.

Other entries in Wright's collection, published in 1962 and dedicated to her young daughter, depict more intimate interactions with Australian animals. The speaker gazes at thirty egrets – 'lovely past believing'; wrestles with an injured night-bird frantic with pain; and feeds bread to a disdainful brush turkey 'whose ancient forest-meanings', she muses, 'no longer grant him cover.'² The joys and discomforts of loving birds whose lives and homes had been transformed by settler Australians' interventions, rarely for the better, are threaded throughout the collection.

Wright's care for animals was expressed in multiple forms and at multiple scales, including organised conservationism. Her founding leadership of the Wild Life Preservation Society of Queensland helped to galvanise protection of the Great Barrier Reef, and she was a leading voice against the rising nuclearism that threatened animals, humans, and landscapes alike.³ She and her contemporaries have often been presented, therefore, as catalysts for a new environmentalism in Australia, a 'second wave' beginning in the 1960s.⁴ There was indeed much that was new about Wright's approach, especially in the way she combined environmental struggles with fights for Indigenous rights. Haunted by histories of violent colonisation on her white family's property, and influenced by a long friendship with Indigenous poet and activist Oodgeroo Noonuccal, Wright felt strongly about the need for Aboriginal land rights. Love of the land and sorrow over invasion's legacies were the two intertwined threads of her activism, and she was angry that so many environmentalists did not make the same connection.⁵

² Wright, 'Egrets', in *Birds*, 3; Wright, 'Wounded Night-bird', *Birds*, 16; Wright, 'Brush Turkey', *Birds*, 31.

³ Wright also fought important campaigns against sand mining at Queensland's Fraser Island (now known as K'gari), and near Noosa. In 1966 she was a founding member of the Australian Conservation Foundation and was later part of the Whitlam government's influential Hope Inquiry into the National Estate, which reported in 1974. Tom Griffiths, *The Art of Time Travel* (Carlton: Black Inc., 2016), 100.

⁴ Rohan Lloyd, *Saving the Reef: The Human Story Behind One of Australia's Greatest Environmental Treasures* (Brisbane: University of Queensland Press, 2024), 67.

⁵ Griffiths, *The Art of Time Travel*, 111. Wright's most sustained literary engagements with the legacies of colonialism, including reflections on her own family history as pastoralists, is found in Judith Wright, *The Generations of Men* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1959); Judith Wright, *The Cry for the Dead* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1981); Judith Wright, *Born of the Conquerors* (Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press, 1991).

This poet-activist was, however, also part of a longer tradition of settler women's care for natural spaces and native species. As a ten-year-old, she sent her first nature poems to Ella McFadyen, whose Children's Pages in *The Sydney Mail* engaged so many young Australians in two-way conversations about animals throughout the 1920s and 1930s.⁶ Like Ada Jane Fletcher, her love of gardens and gardening fostered the 'formation of a new consciousness' that drove later activism for spaces far beyond the garden gate, and like Amy Mack she abhorred the bulldozer and the 'Progress' for which it made way.⁷ And her dread of humans' growing capacity for destruction chimed with other mid-century conservationists' pained hopes for the future of endangered native animals and habitats, like Jessie Luckman, who hoped that thylacines remained in the Tasmanian wilderness but would never be found. Though highly critical of earlier approaches to Aboriginal lives and cultures, she was deeply concerned with the longstanding questions of how settlers could, or whether they should, make homes for themselves in a country haunted by legacies of invasion. For my purposes, then, Wright's tender meditation on unseen lyrebirds can be read both as a transitional moment – a sign of things to come – and a continuation of the customs of women's care for native animals traced throughout this thesis.

For much of the nineteenth century, native animals were viewed primarily as resources to be hunted, collected, dissected or eliminated. If they were valued, it was for their ornamental tails or warm furs, or as intriguing 'freaks of nature' doomed to almost inevitable extinction. In this, the first sustained study of settler women's relationships with native fauna in Australia, I demonstrate that women's perspectives and interventions were vital to a radical reframing of many now-iconic creatures. They cast native animals as vulnerable individuals worthy of moral consideration and symbolically intrinsic to the Australian settler colonial nation. Drawing on a novel collection of archives – from writers, pet keepers, bushwalkers, scientists, mothers, teachers, welfarists, and conservationist campaigners – and spanning seven interconnected domains of encounter, I argue that settler women fostered a contested ethic of care for native animals between the late nineteenth and mid-twentieth century. In interactions intimate and

⁶ Judith Wright to 'Cinderella' [Ella McFadyen], 9 September 1925 and Judith Wright to 'Cinderella' [Ella McFadyen], 1 September 1926, in *With Love & Fury: Selected Letters of Judith Wright*, eds. Patricia Clarke and Meredith McKinney (Canberra: National Library of Australia, 2006), 7-8. Between 1925 and 1929, eight of Wright's poems were published in the *Sydney Mail*.

⁷ Katie Holmes, *Between the Leaves: Stories of Australian Women, Writing and Gardens* (Crawley: UWA Publishing, 2011), 227, 248.

shared, and on scales wide and small, women sought to draw native animals into the sphere of moral, religious, and political concern, with profound consequences for conservation practice and thinking, and a deep impact on settler Australian culture and environmental relationships.

Connecting the fields of environmental history, gender history, animal history, and settler colonial studies, *Untamed Affections* makes three major interventions. First, it demonstrates the insights that can be generated through a gendered approach to understanding settler relationships to non-humans and to the environment. When we take seriously women's encounters with native animals, the environmental history of settler Australia looks different: animal protectionism and pet-keeping emerge as overlooked, highly gendered modes of environmental engagement, while practices like bushwalking and nature writing are shown to have held what could be very different meanings for men and women. Foregrounding women and gendered dynamics also challenges periodisations that are chiefly based on men's experiences: an account of twentieth-century environmental action consisting of two waves and a mid-century trough does not stand up when considering the contributions of leading female conservationists like Jessie Luckman, Thistle Harris, and Marie Byles. On that note, a second contribution is the recovery of many women previously absent or muted in the historiography, despite their significant interventions in settler Australian relationships with native animals and natural spaces. Placed in conversation with better-known male figures, these women cast a critical new light on older national and environmental stories. Finally, the thesis highlights the significance and potential of care as a critical analytical framework in environmental history. Attending to practices of care reveals dimensions of environmental encounter and women's activism that can otherwise remain invisible, including the role of religion and emotion in shaping environmental relationships, and the tangled phenomena of care and control, and freedom and captivity, that characterized settler encounters with native animals.

This thesis seeks not only to draw women's stories into a gender-conscious environmental history, but to illuminate and enrich Australian women's histories; a history of evolving relationships with native animals is also a history of white women's changing roles and opportunities in the decades between 1880 and 1950. This research makes clear that the natural environment was never an immobile backdrop to Australian women's histories. Rather, interactions with native animals reflected and affected women's lives, offering an important source of interest, inspiration, legitimacy, liberation, experimentation, containment, camaraderie, danger, and pleasure – in short, they were a lively and shaping force. Women

projected their beliefs and emotions onto native animals, using them literally and figuratively to mould unstable environmental and social worlds and to forge identities as modern Australian women.

Within the maternalist politics and nervous nation-making of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, many settler Australian women positioned themselves as maternal figures over infantilised animals, with a special feminine ability to understand and care for them.⁸ Paired with a perceived feminine role as moral guides to children, leveraging care for animals allowed women to claim moral and civic authority in a time of greatly restricted rights for their gender, and to shape what was felt by many to be a period of dangerously unfettered masculine power and uncontrolled environmental destruction.⁹ In this framework, native animals were often figured as diminutive pets or metaphorical children, though many resisted this categorisation by dying, escaping, or behaving in ways that were otherwise difficult to imaginatively wrangle into the image of a loveable pet. Animal protection, for all its genuinely felt concern for a broad spectrum of animals, emerges alongside the temperance and suffrage movements as a more-than-human dimension of feminists' effort to reform a masculinist society born of a brutal frontier.¹⁰

As Australian society urbanised and industrialised in the early twentieth century, enfranchised white women moved into more educational and working spaces.¹¹ Expanded opportunities for women and a cultural shift towards cities and new forms of recreation, meant that women's engagements with animals could be more public and professional: journalists like Amy Mack and scientists like Georgina Sweet used their engagements with animals as avenues of

⁸ For histories of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century maternalist politics, see Shurlee Swain, 'Women and Philanthropy in Colonial and Post-Colonial Australia', in *Women, Philanthropy, and Civil Society*, ed. Kathleen MacArthur (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001), 153-68; Marilyn Lake, 'Feminism and the gendered politics of antiracism, Australia 1927-1957: From maternal protectionism to leftist assimilationism', *Australian Historical Studies* 29, no. 110 (1998): 91-109; Seth Koven and Sonya Michel, eds., *Mothers of a New World: Maternalist Politics and the Origins of Welfare States* (New York: Routledge, 1993); Marian Quartly & Judith Smart, *Respectable Radicals: A History of the National Council of Women of Australia, 1896-2006* (Melbourne: Monash University Publishing, 2015); James Keating, '“Woman as Wife, mother, and Home-Maker”: Equal Rights International and Australian Feminists' Interwar Advocacy for Mothers' Economic Rights', *Signs* 47, no. 4 (2022): 957-85. For the 'nervous' nation-making of the 1890s see John Docker, *The nervous nineties: Australian cultural life in the 1890s* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1991).

⁹ Marilyn Lake, 'Frontier Feminism and the Marauding White Man', *Journal of Australian Studies* 20, no. 49 (1996): 12-20.

¹⁰ Lake, 'Frontier Feminism'; Jennifer MacCulloch, *Creatures of Culture: The Animal Protection and Preservation Movements in Sydney, 1880-1930* (PhD thesis, University of Sydney, 1993), 47-78, 145-74. Writing about the Victorian English context, Brian Harrison drew connections between numerous reform movements including animal protection, Sabbatarianism, and animal protection. Brian Harrison, *Peaceable Kingdom: Stability and Change in Modern Britain* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 123-56.

¹¹ Ellen Warne, *Agitate, Educate, Organise, Legislate: Protestant Women's Social Action in Post-Suffrage Australia* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2017).

professional expertise and legitimacy, though appeals to motherhood remained.¹² Meanwhile, as the bush moved imaginatively from a place of danger to one of romanticised retreat, urban women delighted in entering the male-coded terrain of bushwalking. Women's bushwalking amongst animals took on different meanings from that of men, expressing and furthering women's increased independence and enabling experimentation with new ways of dressing and behaving.¹³ Bushwalking was an oft-overlooked way that women made themselves modern; at the same time, consternation about the harms that 'civilised' and 'modern' people seemed to inflict on animals made many animal advocates wary of modernity even as they participated in its formation.

By the middle of the twentieth century, women's gains in civic and cultural participation had been substantially consolidated, even as some gender barriers persisted. Though they continued to move through governmental or scientific spaces dominated by men who often underestimated or resisted women's authority, activists such as Jessie Luckman, Marie Byles, and Thistle Harris operated in a markedly different context from that of 1880. Their concerns and styles were changing too. Emboldened by a growing awareness of humans' capacity for large-scale environmental destruction, these mid-century conservationists were influential in promoting forms of care for native animals that emphasised scientific expertise, a degree of distance from individual animals, and an increasingly global perspective. Despite ongoing exclusions, including the contraction of opportunities for women scientists as the field's postwar prestige increased, their work laid crucial logistical and intellectual foundations for the environmental campaigns of the later twentieth century.¹⁴

¹² Angela Woollacott, *To Try Her Fortune in London* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 219; Georgina Sweet, *The Responsibility of the Community Towards Sex Education* (Melbourne: Ford & Son, 1925), 13.

¹³ Liz Conor, *The Spectacular Modern Woman: Feminine Visibility in the 1920s* (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2004).

¹⁴ Jane Carey, *Taking to the Field* (Clayton, Victoria: Monash University Publishing, 2023), 189-221.

Throughout these seventy years of social change, one common thread was that care for native animals was complex and deeply contested. The contestation manifested in two main ways. Firstly, women's care for native animals was disputed by those who objected to it outright: Broughton Barnabus O'Connor's complaint in 1903 about protecting animals 'of no use whatever' echoed throughout the century and never disappeared, especially amongst those who saw measures to protect native animals as contrary to the interests of farmers.¹⁵ Settler attitudes towards native animals were always heterogenous, fractured along lines not just of gender but of class, profession, and age.

Secondly, the care articulated in this thesis was contested by those who argued about how and where to care for native animals. The reframing of wombats, Tasmanian devils, koalas, or birds as tameable and vulnerable 'pets', fostered a fond sense of responsibility over defenceless species, with their perceived evolutionary backwardness fronting up against European faunal arrivals, and allowed women such as Mary Grant Roberts to claim a special capacity to nurture and understand her zoo inhabitants. Such modes of interaction were often intimate, domestic, and close-range, and they helped to produce a gendered image of native animals as diminutive and tameable creatures with individual personalities and a moral right to protection.

Actually treating native animals as pets or zoo animals, however, had the potential to cause them injury, distress, and death. Moreover, settlers increasingly valued an ambiguous but emotionally satisfying sense of wildness that seemed to belong to native animals. Many women in this thesis grappled with this tension between control and relinquishment, which could both be framed as care. To recall just a few examples, Frances Levvy counselled children on how to care for their pets with kindness, Ada Jane Fletcher wrote stories grappling with the distress of orphaned baby animals, and an exasperated Marie Byles demanded people accept that animals other than humans might have a right to be left alone in their natural habitat.

Despite such complexities and sometimes because of them, settler women's advocacy of these creatures as moral, knowable, lovable and vulnerable individuals had real and lasting consequences, including opposing cruel practices, creating and protecting national parks, and promoting some species as friendly national icons. Crucially, these icons could be enlisted to affirm the ongoing settler-colonial project. Though settler women often opposed exploitative and violent approaches to animals and the environment, condemning the 'wanton'

¹⁵ Broughton Barnabus O'Connor, New South Wales, *Parliamentary Debates*, Legislative Assembly, 1 September 1903, 1986.

destructiveness of white men past and present, they nevertheless remained closely invested in the broader settler colonial project that claimed the Australian continent and its more-than-human inhabitants for non-Indigenous people. In fact, fostering caring attachments to native animals was a powerful way to heighten a sense of settler attachment to land, and to erase the deep history of Aboriginal people's profoundly different relationships to animals, as well as more recent histories of violent colonisation and dispossession.

Though the significance of women's animal encounters had national and sometimes international dimensions, many of the encounters threaded throughout the thesis played out at local and intimate scales. So many caring interactions only entered the archives because someone was moved to write down their impressions of, for example, the lizard that visited their kitchen each day to nibble proffered crumbs, or the koala joey who died in their arms. I have sought out these fine-grained stories deliberately: Andrea Gaynor notes in her advocacy for 'regenerative histories' that respond to a troubled present, 'local-scale histories matter deeply, and can be more transformative than larger-scale stories.'¹⁶ These categories are not, of course, mutually exclusive, and my research indicates how many women's public commitments to animal advocacy sprouted from specific and local interactions in homes and gardens, or on casual walks with friends. Close reading of an expanded range of archives enables these moves between the large and small view of animal engagements. Looking further afield, the processes examined here, of how colonial societies transformed 'useless' or threatening animals into beloved national symbols through gendered practices of care, can also be observed across similar contexts in Canada, New Zealand, the United States, and South Africa. My analysis of gendered approaches to environmental stewardship and animal encounters offers, therefore, a framework for understanding and furthering contemporary conservation and environmentalist debates.

Today, questions about how to care for native animals are far from resolved. On the one hand, a love for native species, especially charismatic ones like the platypus or kangaroo, is widespread, highly visible, and closely entwined with modern Australian nationalism. Debates over particular policies can be fierce, but a general sense of patriotic protectiveness about 'our' native animals spans the political spectrum in a way that net zero or carbon tax policies do not.

¹⁶ Andrea Gaynor, 'Regenerative Histories for Troubled Times', (edited oration first delivered 2 July 2025) *History Australia*, 22, no. 4 (2025): 515.

When an American hunting influencer posted a video of her handling a wombat joey as its mother screamed her distress, both the sitting prime minister Anthony Albanese and leader of the opposition Peter Dutton angrily condemned the intervention.¹⁷ At a larger scale, Albanese's Labor government has recently committed to a 'no new extinction' target under a new National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan.¹⁸ Conservationists across the country fight to protect biodiversity by monitoring native species, purchasing swathes of bushland habitat to protect it from development, partnering with Indigenous owners, culling introduced species, and running reintroduction programs in spaces where populations had once died out.¹⁹

On the other hand, the country's record for conserving native animals remains dismal. The oft-quoted and correct statistic that Australia has the highest mammalian extinction rate in the world obscures other troubling realities.²⁰ Amphibians have suffered numerous extinctions due to the introduced chytrid fungus and habitat loss, and native bird populations have declined across the continent.²¹ Invertebrates, least loved and least monitored, are dying out at a staggering rate – a recent study estimates that between one and three species are lost each week.²² Indeed it is moving to consider that many of the animals that interacted with the women

¹⁷ Though she later apologised, Same Jones drew attention to wombat culls happening in other parts of the country where they are considered pests, suggesting an inconsistency about the outrage levelled against her. David Aidone, 'Wombat-grabbing US influencer apologises but asks: "Am I a villain?"', *SBS News*, 15 March 2025, <https://www.sbs.com.au/news/article/wombat-grabbing-us-influencer-apologises-but-asks-am-i-a-villain/asvlibp8r>; 'Influencer who snatched baby wombat leaves Australia', *ABC News*, 14 March 2025, <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2025-03-14/sam-jones-baby-wombat-video-leaves-australia/105051630>.

¹⁸ Commonwealth of Australia, *Australia's Strategy for Nature 2024-2030: Australia's National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan* (Canberra: Australian Government, 2024), 16.

¹⁹ See amongst many examples 'Scaling Conservation: Insights from Australia's Land Purchase Strategy', *Nature Conservancy*, 22 October 2025, <https://www.nature.org/en-us/what-we-do/our-insights/perspectives/australian-land-purchase-insights/>; David M Watson, 'Kosciuszko bouncing back after brumby numbers reduced', *Australian Geographic*, 8 January 2026, <https://www.australiangeographic.com.au/nature-wildlife/biodiversity/2026/01/kosciuszko-bouncing-back-after-brumby-cull/>; Dorian Moro et al., 'Partnering and engaging with Traditional Owners in conservation translocations', *Wildlife Research* 51 (2024): WR24053, doi:10.1071/WR24053; Wade Stephens and Ben Murphy, 'Endangered bandicoots given new home free of feral predators in regional NSW', *ABC News*, 16 November 2025, <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2025-11-16/bandicoots-given-a-new-home-mallee-cliffs-national-park/105995106>.

²⁰ For a comprehensive recent review of this mammalian decline and its causes, see John C. Z. Woinarski et al., 'Ongoing Unraveling of a Continental Fauna: Decline and Extinction of Australian Mammals since European Settlement', *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 112, no. 15 (2015): 4531–40, <https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1417301112>. See also John C. Z. Woinarski et al., 'Reading the Black Book: The Number, Timing, Distribution and Causes of Listed Extinctions in Australia', *Biological Conservation* 239 (November 2019): 108261, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.biocon.2019.108261>.

²¹ Ben C. Scheele, 'Amphibian fungal panzootic causes catastrophic and ongoing loss of biodiversity', *Science* 363, no. 6434 (March 2019): 1459–63; Michelle Ward et al., 'Creating past habitat maps to quantify local extirpation of Australian threatened birds', *Environmental Research Letters* 17, no. 2 (February 2022): 024032, <https://doi.org/10.1088/1748-9326/ac4f8b>.

²² John C.Z. Woinarski et al., 'This Is the Way the World Ends; Not with a Bang but a Whimper: Estimating the Number and Ongoing Rate of Extinctions of Australian Non-Marine Invertebrates', *Cambridge Prisms: Extinction* 2 (December 2024): e23, <https://doi.org/10.1017/ext.2024.26>.

in this thesis are no longer with us: thylacines most famously, but also several species of bandicoot, bilby, native rodent, and frog. More than a century since Georgina Sweet dissected hundreds of marsupial mole specimens in her Melbourne laboratory, the species now makes headlines if spotted.²³ When we look beyond the black-and-white categories of extinction and existence, and see that since the year 2000 the abundance of threatened mammals, plants, frogs, and birds has dropped by an average of 58%, it is clear that people in the past moved through a world far more thickly inhabited with native animals than we do now.²⁴ These contradictions, between professed love and the reality of loss, play out in microcosm in debates over individual species, no more so than in impassioned debates about the once-called ‘native bear’.

Koala exceptionalism retains its political capital. A how-to-vote card in the 2025 federal election promised to ‘stop koala and wildlife extinctions’ – an intriguing distinction.²⁵ A long-promised ‘Great Koala National Park’, meanwhile, would protect its banner species as well as at least 66 other threatened species in New South Wales, but the state government stated in September 2025 that the thousands of hectares of forest would only be saved if the move can be monetised for carbon credits. Critics warn that this unprecedented initiative would make native forests a ‘vehicle for continued or expanded use of the fossil fuels that cause the climate change that threatens the forests’ very survival – and the survival of the koalas and other endangered plants and animals within them’.²⁶ Whereas the Tasmanian state government catered to commercial interests by excising parts of Mount Field National Park in 1951, the New South Wales state government is now aiming to keep another National Park whole in order to fund commercial interests elsewhere. Questions of scale and focus reemerge consistently in such negotiations.

²³ Erin Parke, ‘Excitement as rare marsupial mole sighted in Australian desert region rich with weird wildlife’, *ABC News*, 7 April 2024, <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2024-04-07/-northern-marsupial-mole-kakarratul-sighted-/103662744>.

²⁴ ‘Threatened Species Index’, in *Australia’s Environment Report 2024* (Canberra: Terrestrial Ecosystem Research Network and Australian National University, 2024), <https://ausenv.tern.org.au/aer/biodiversity/index.html>.

²⁵ Australian Capital Territory Greens How-To-Vote Card, personal photograph, taken 3 May 2025.

²⁶ Stephen Long, ‘Koala Sanctuary May Come with Diabolical Trade Off’, *The Australia Institute*, September 11, 2025, <https://australiainstitute.org.au/post/koala-sanctuary-may-come-with-diabolical-trade-off/>.

Because introduced species have received most of the blame for Australian native animal extinctions, concern for native animals has often been paired with a corollary hatred for non-native ‘ferals’ and ‘pests’.²⁷ In a national culture of hatred towards these ‘invasive species’, questions of care and sentiment continue to hold particular currency. The apparent tensions between, on the one hand, caring for the wellbeing of individual animals (whether they be a ‘surplus’ kangaroo or a rogue pet cat), and trying to conserve entire species and ecosystems, on the other, have not gone away. In a highly influential 1985 article, ‘What is Conservation Biology?’, Michael Soulé argued that scientists working in conservation biology ought to divorce emotion from their work with animals.

It may seem logical to extend the aversion of anthropogenic extinction of populations to the suffering and untimely deaths of individuals because populations are composed of individuals. However I do not believe this step is necessary or desirable for conservation biology [because] biologists recognize that conservation is engaged in the protection of the integrity and continuity of natural processes, not the welfare of individuals [...] For this reason, biologists often overcome their emotional identification with individual victims.²⁸

As essayist and environmentalist Jane Rawson puts it, with reference to views of emotion in both conservation and wildlife welfare work: ‘Compassion is feminine, irrational and weak, to be avoided and stamped out.’²⁹ Writing in 1993 in a literary context, Judith Wright made a similar observation: ‘imagination and feeling are now devalued in favour of the harder values of so-called rationalism.’³⁰ The ideas of earlier women advocates for native animals continue to resonate in these gendered negotiations of the personal and political in vexed questions of conservation – or they might do, if they were better remembered. Figures like Amy Mack, Alice Manfield, Frances Levvy, or Mary Grant Roberts would almost certainly have taken issue with Soulé’s stark division between concern for individuals and concern for species, and with his rejection of emotional identification and compassion in conservation work. Recovering these women’s conviction that care for individuals and care for species need not be opposed, and their sustained engagements with the emotional, moral, and religious dimensions of human-animal relations, may offer alternative ways of approaching the current impasses of native animal care.

²⁷ A number of scholars have compellingly argued that this rejection of animal ‘foreign invaders’ relates to xenophobia and fear of invasion. Adrian Franklin, *Animal Nation* (Sydney: UNSW Press, 2006); Simon Farley, “‘Alien Hordes’: A Cultural History of Non-Native Birds in Australia” (PhD thesis, University of Melbourne, 2024).

²⁸ Michael E. Soulé, ‘What Is Conservation Biology?’, *BioScience* 35, no. 11 (1985): 731.

²⁹ Jane Rawson, *Human/ Nature* (Sydney: NewSouth, 2025), 149.

³⁰ Judith Wright, foreword (1993 edition) to *Judith Wright: Collected Poems 1942 to 1985*, ed. Judith Wright (Sydney: Fourth Estate, 2016), xxxiv.

We need not sanitise or idealise settler women's encounters with animals to see in them possibilities for alternative modes of engagement with the natural world. These are modes that have often been overlooked both in our histories of settler relationships to the environment and in more contemporary policy debates. The sheer presence of women's evolving perspectives in the archives, even if muted, demonstrates that, 'shifts in these understandings and relationships are possible.' Put simply, as Emily O'Gorman writes about the more-than-human worlds of wetlands, these histories of change and adaptation suggest that: 'Things could be different.'³¹ Environmental and animal histories that look for women's interventions and perspectives and think through the lens of care can bring to light overlooked dynamics of 'care, stewardship and justice', qualities that Katie Holmes has advocated should be centred by environmental historians who, inevitably, are writing in 'urgent times'.³²

The layered human-animal encounters at the heart of this thesis, then, elucidate why our relationships with native animals remain so fraught, shaped as they are by colonial and gendered forces. They also offer new and needed perspectives on the pressing questions of how, whether, and where we care, and for whom.

³¹ Emily O'Gorman, *Wetlands in a Dry Land: More-Than-Human Histories of Australia's Murray-Darling Basin* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2021), 198.

³² Katie Holmes, Andrea Gaynor, and Ruth Morgan, 'Doing Environmental History in Urgent Times', *History Australia* 17, no. 2, (2020): 239.

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