

## 3 ART & NARRATIVE

### 3.1 Introduction



Figure 3-1 Paddy Bedford *Dingo Springs* 2005. Ochre on canvas, 150 x 180 cm  
Source: Jirrawun Arts

In this chapter I examine the work of five Aboriginal artists whose work features dingo mythology, and whose paintings are representative of a body of artworks that center on dingo knowledge, dingo culture and dingo heritage. The stories are interwoven with the themes of water and navigation, containing local knowledge of specific locations and landmarks. The paintings tell the story of ancestral figures and the Dreaming. The artworks are a medium for the transmission of local knowledge, involving ecology, native food sources, stewardship and history. They both celebrate and disseminate cultural and ecological knowledge.

Anthropologist Howard Morphy (1999, p. 13) wrote:

For art in Aboriginal Australia is seen as a form of spiritual power; it is an intervention of the world of the mythical past in the present. It is a means by which knowledge is passed from generation to generation about the creative forces that shaped the world and will enable it to continue into the future. Art in Aboriginal Australia is, in this respect, information...

Morphy (1999) describes the artworks as an encoding system of secret and non-secret knowledge. The dingo paintings represented in this chapter, with the exception of the work of Dick Roughsey (1985), are not in the figurative style of 'public art,' but in the interpretative style of restricted topics, using geometric forms rather than recognizable figures – it is the artists themselves who interpret the paintings and allow a Non-Aboriginal audience to gain insight into the themes and information contained within the images. The stories within the artworks are heavily encoded and require interpretation (Morphy, 1999). This system of representation “conceals meaning and is thus suited to a system of restricted knowledge” (Morphy, 1999, p. 20), Understanding the levels of symbolic systems that are encoded within these artworks with the titles of *Dingo Dreaming*, *Dingo Springs*, *Dingoes watch a Corroboree* are only possible to the extent of how much the artists are prepared to share with curators of these exhibitions (and with the reader), but common themes emerge – the three way relationship between the dingo, humans and the landscape, and recurrent themes of water and navigation. These are presented here in visual form, and discussed further throughout the chapter.

## 3.2 The Artworks

### 3.2.1 Paddy Bedford, 1922-2007

Paddy Bedford's work features *Dingo Dreaming* (Glossary, p. xii), tracing sacred sites on his traditional lands as a central theme (Figure 3.1). The artist was born at Bedford Station, Eastern Kimberly in 1922. The area had a tragic history of poisoning, massacre and dislocation of the Aboriginal community over the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Bedford was born two years after a local massacre of had taken place in the region in 1920. Bedford's Gija relations had been killed by strychnine poison for

stealing a milking cow found on (formerly) traditional land. The family group eventually moved to Warmun after another altercation, where the station-master killed all of their dogs. The killing of dingoes and dogs was a common tactic against the Aboriginal communities in the colonizing process (see p. 90).

Bedford began painting at the age of 75. The catalogue for the exhibition HEART OF DARKNESS EXHIBITION, 2005 reads (William Mora Galleries, 2005):

Brumby Springs is on the old Greenvale Station north of Bedford Downs ... part of the artist's father's country, it is a place where the dingo travelled when he was a man in the Dreamtime. The waterhole, Dreaming place of the dingo, is shown by the red circle in the upper part of the painting. A road passes the waterhole. The artist travelled on the road both on foot when very young, and by horseback while working as a stockman and a drover.

### 3.2.2 Clifford Possum Japhaljarr

The artwork of Clifford Possum depicts dingo and human pathways through country and connecting watersources. Figure 3-2, *Five Dreamings* recorded central figures in these shared journeys - Honey Ant (*Camponotus inflatus*); *Mala*, Rufous hare-wallaby (*Lagorchestes hirsutus*); *Nugarrayi*, woman; *Malaki*, the Dingo ancestor; and *Malaki*, the Dingo changing into human form (represented by the mixture of animal and human tracks). This interchangeability of dingo and human form appears often in Aboriginal cosmology, and features prominently in the work of Deborah Bird Rose DINGO MAKES US HUMAN (1992) and WILD DOG DREAMING: LOVE AND EXTINCTION (2011).

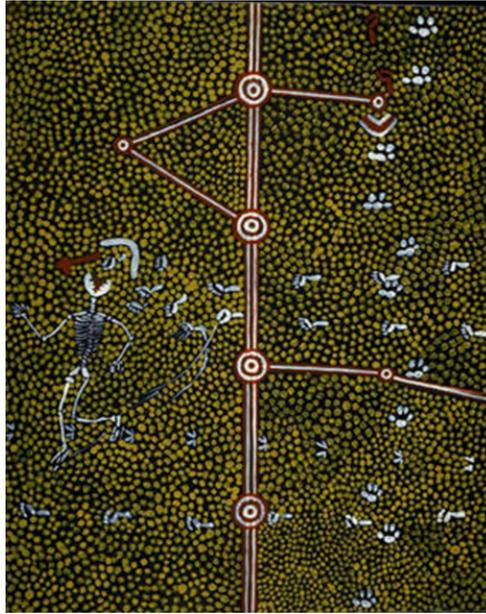
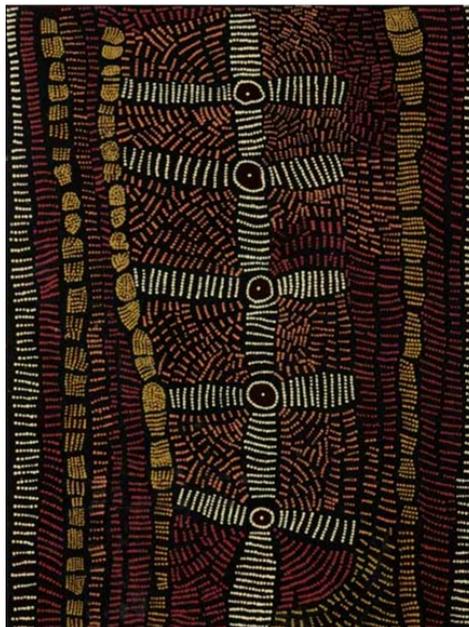


Figure 3-2 Clifford Possum Japhaljarr *Five Dreamings* 1976 Mbunghara, Central Australia,  
Source: South Australian Museum

### 3.2.3 Doris Bush Nungarrayi

Doris Bush Nungarrayi was born in Haasts Bluff in the remote Northern Territory in 1942. She paints *Papa Tjukurrpa* (Dog Dreaming) and the story of her ancestral Dingo Dreaming site *Nyunmanu*, south east of Kintore, the center of the Western desert art movement.



3-3 Doris Bush Nungarrayi *Dingo Dreaming* Acrylic on Linen 122cm x 91cm  
Source: Papunya Tjupi, Central Australia

In Figure 3-3, the painting depicted the story of the dingo pups from this area, said to have risen up into the sky and became stars at a time when the ancestral mother dingo and her pup were away hunting. When they returned to the site, they were too tired to rise up to the sky. The mother and pup transformed into the large rock that marks the sacred dreaming site (Bush, 2016):

It is said that if you sleep in this place you will dream of the ancestral puppies. The story goes that if you remove one of the gleaming stones found at *Nyunmanu*, the puppies will haunt your dreams until you return it to the place where it belongs.

The circles in the paintings are representative of important waterholes, and the roundels extending from the circles are designs the women paint on their breasts (see Chapter 6 MAMMALIAN MOTHERS, and Chapter 7 THE DINGO NURSLING).

### 3.2.4 Cecily Winiragu Yates



Figure 3-4 Cecily Winiragu Yates, *Tjambu Tjukurrpa* 2011 Acrylic on canvas, 1518cm x 760  
Source: National Museum of Australia

This painting, Figure 3-4, tells the story of the artist's grandfather, as he walked from Warakurna to Warburton, to get food from the Mission Station there. The journey took many weeks, travelling on foot; he would stop to camp on the way, lighting fires to let the local people know he was there, and to let the family know he was travelling. In Cecily Winiragu Yates' description of her painting she tells the story of how the dingo scalp trade allowed for her Grandfather to travel, maintaining connections between displaced communities and their country (Yates, 2011):

My grandfather's family from near Warburton would see the fires and Rhonda Walkabout, my mother's sister would get happy that he was nearly in Warburton. He would sell dingo scalps to the whitefellas for food for his family. He would stay in Warburton a little while and get a feed, he'd then start walking back to Warakurna. He would carry very heavy loads of food back for his family. This is what people did before they had cars.

This narrative provides an indication of the value that the dingo gained as a currency from the 1920s to 1960s – dingo bounties provided a reliable source of income for Aboriginal people over many decades. Anthropologist Diana Young emphasized that in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century “the importance of the dingo trade in the development of a ‘frontier economy’ ... was far from a marginal activity but one that lasted for 40 years” (2010, p. 103). The young dingoes provided good bush tucker (Young notes that the consumption of pups was usually concealed from Euro-Australians), and the scalps traded for Euro-Australian food and goods. The pups were harvested, insuring that the mature dingoes were left to breed the following year, so rather than eliminating the dingo as intended by the government, the scheme provided what appears to be a sustainable harvest (Meggitt 1965, Rolls, 1969). Young also noted (2010, p. 101):

There was some complaint that Aboriginal people were ‘farming dingo’ by only getting the pups and not the adults (cf. Sheppard 2004:39). As Sheppard notes, the ‘farming’ accusation was almost certainly true.

In Yates’ painting *Tjamu Tjukurrpa*, the circles in the image represent neighboring communities: Tjirrkarli, Karliwara (Patjarr), Warburton, Warakurna, Wanarn, Jameson, Blackstone and Irrunytju. The children had been removed from all of these communities into the Mission School in Warburton that was established in 1934. The adults would walk for many days to reach the mission to visit their children, before buying food and returning on foot to their communities (Yates, 2011).

### 3.2.5 Johnny Warangkula Tjupurrula 1932-2001

Warangkula was a rainman, best known for his paintings of Water Dreaming and Storm Dreaming. The painting Figure 3-5, is one of a series based on the travels of a dingo family through the MacDonnell Ranges to Kintore in the Northern Territory. The stories center around Haasts Bluff, (where painter Doris Bush Nungarrayi was

born). Warangkula had maintained connection to country supported by the dingo scalp trade. Anthropologist John Kean recorded (2014):

Warangkula was painting about land that he had a ritual responsibility towards. He knew the land well and had travelled on foot across the country, earning an income as a "dogger" when he was a young man. Travelling out from Haast Bluff in dingo whelping season, Warangkula would track the adult dingoes to their dens hidden in logs, burrows or caves, and then dispatch litters of pups - the scalps earning £\ each



Figure 3-5 Johnny Warangkula Tjupurrula *Dingoes watch a Corroboree* (1973) Papunya NT Synthetic polymer paint on composition board, 79 x 61.2 cm

The series, Kean notes, is exceptional because the subject of Dingo Dreaming was so rarely encountered.

### 3.3 Rock art and geological features

The Australian continent is a land of ancient stories, featuring in rock art and geological structures across the landscape. Deborah Bird Rose wrote in *Wild dog dreaming: love and extinction* (2011, p. 17):

The Australian continent is crisscrossed with the tracks of the creator beings, called Dreamings in Aboriginal English. Walking, slithering,

crawling, flying, swimming, chasing, hunting, weeping, dying, giving birth, Dreamings were ...making the landforms and water, and making the relationships between one place and another, one species and another.

Figure 3-6 (Southern Australia), and Figure 3-7 (Northern Australia), illustrate two examples of landscape artworks that feature dingo mythology. Figure 3-6 is one of the oldest known rock art sites in Victoria. It features Banjil, a benevolent father figure in the cosmology of Aboriginal tribes of South-East of Australia, accompanied by his two dogs. The artwork was mentioned by Howitt (1904):

... one of the *Mujarawaint* (tribe) said that at one time there was a figure of Bunjil and his dog painted in a small cave behind a large rock in the Black Range near Stawell.

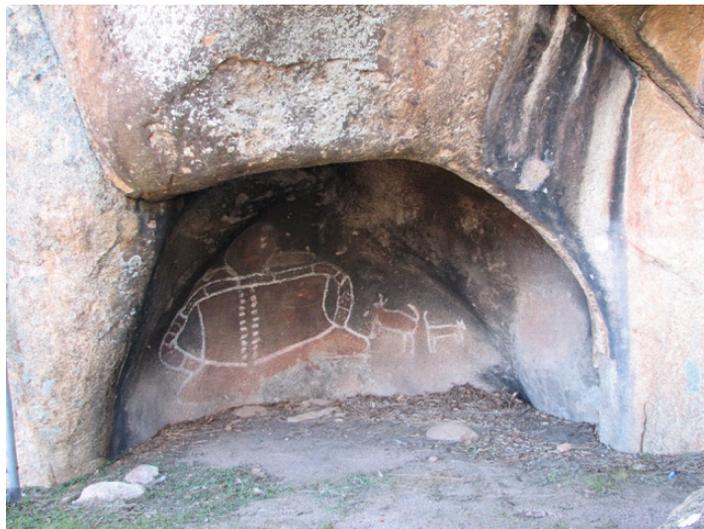


Figure 3-6 Banjil and his two canine companions, Stawell Victoria. Photo: J Philip 2009

Bunjil is attributed as the creator of men, “he made men out of clay and imparted life to them, while his brother, Pallina, the bat, brought women up out of the water to be their wives” (Howitt, 1904, p. 484). Cahir & Clark (2013, p. 194) wrote of the legend behind the rock site, now protected behind bars on site:

It is believed that the dingo-dogs could speak until Bunjil took the power away from them, and after that time, if you heard a dingo speaking you would immediately turn to stone (Howitt, 1904). The rock art site is considered "one of the most significant Aboriginal art sites in Victoria".



Figure 3-7 Rock Art painting near Oenpelli in Arnhem land tells the story of the travels of Omwarl, the three legged dingo-dog. Photo J Philip

Figure 3-7 is a rock art site near Oenpelli in Arnhem Land tells the story of the travels of Omwarl, the three legged dingo and her partner Adjumallarl. Their journey traces the formation of waterholes, rivers and waterfalls that make up the geological map of the region of Oenpelli today (see Chapter 4, WATER). Figure 3-8 pictures the three legged dingo rock, Nginjdjanh, a sacred site where it is believed that Omwarl turned to stone while waiting for Adjumallarl to return.

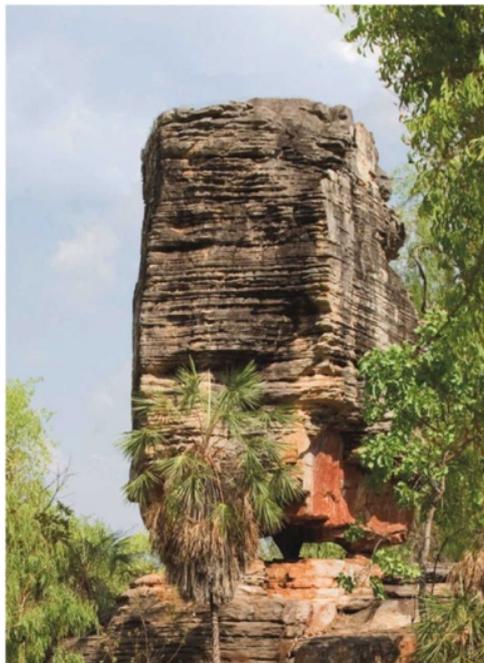


Figure 3-8 Nginjdjanh the three legged Dingo rock near Oenpelli Photo: J Philip

The Gunbalanya people believe that the spirits of Adjamallarl and Omwarl still roam

around Oenpelli today, 'keeping an eye on them and making sure that the people are ok' (Injalak arts, 2009).

### 3.4 Dingo Paint-Up

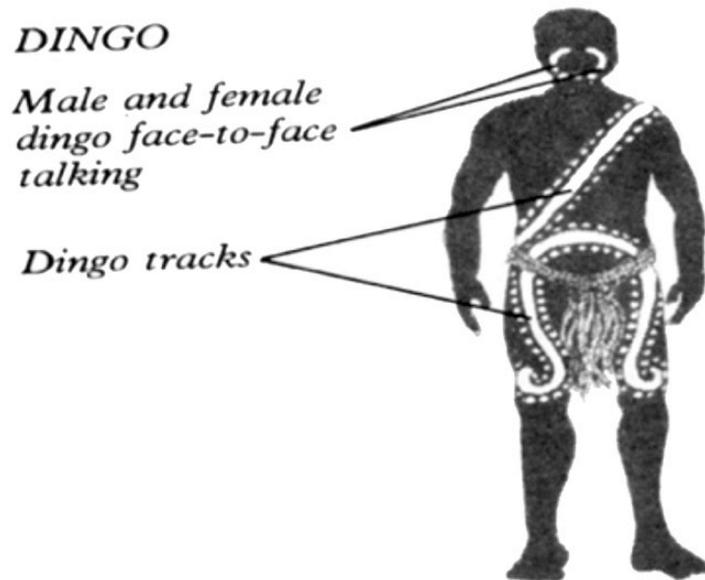


Figure 3-9 Ceremonial *Nyaranbi* dingo paint-up, Mornington Island. Source: Mirndiyan Gununa, 2015

In the belief system of the Lardil people of Mornington Island (Chapter 7.4, p 83), the Rainbow Serpent, Thuwathu, and the dingo, Nyaranbi, laid down the customary laws and gave the people their “totems, kinship system, and land and sea story places”. This included ceremonies and laws governing the stewardship of natural resources, governing conduct towards one another, and the treatment of ‘land and sea country’ (Mirndiyan Gununa, 2015).

Creation stories are sung and danced at corroborees where the traditional ‘paint-up’ represents the totemic figures: lightning, moon, rainbow, rainbow serpent, dingo (Mirndiyan Gununa, 2015). Figure 3.9 shows the patterns of the dingo paint-up. Dingo Dance and the Rain Dance feature in Dick Roughsey’s paintings, the scene in Figure 3-10 is a figurative portrayal of the one described by Johnny Warangkula Tjupurrula, *Dingoes watch a Corroboree*. This is a departure from the interpretive style of earlier works.



Figure 3-10 The rain dance. Oil on board, signed Goobalathaldi lower right, 62 x 93 cm  
© Dick Roughsey 1985

### 3.5 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have provided examples of Aboriginal rock art and contemporary Aboriginal artworks that are representative of the body of work featuring the dingo as a central theme. The artistic medium is used in this context as a pedagogical tool through which to transfer indigenous ecological knowledge (IEK). The narrative reveals the multifaceted role of the dingo within Aboriginal culture, as a powerful metaphorical and physical presence, with both cultural and economic value.

The paintings are representative of a much larger body of artwork, presenting the dingo story in context of regional cosmology. The themes that emerge from these collections are the *connections* between dingoes, water, land and people. The stories are told through the Songlines, Dreamtime mythology, and represented in artworks, and at sacred sites around the country. These themes are explored in greater detail in the following Chapters 4-9.

## 4 WATER

### 4.1 Introduction

Through the examination of 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century archival records, this chapter reveals that dingoes in the past were well known for their water knowledge. This included an ability to guide people to water, and prior knowledge of the location of water-sources above and below ground (Dewar, 2012; Parker, 2006). This is demonstrated through the following collation of archival records in this chapter, revealing the dingo's role as an able and skillful ally, who aided human survival in remote and arid environments.

Dingo-water themes have arisen in the previous chapter of the thesis, through Aboriginal artworks featuring Dingo Dreaming – stories providing navigational pathways between water sources in the landscape. Dingoes were also portrayed as observers to ceremonial dances involving rain magic. In the ethnographic collection, Chapter 2, dingo body parts appeared as a talisman for rain magic, and in physical form, as the dingo water-bag, adding layers to the dingo-human narrative.

Dingo water knowledge was not purely symbolic. Within the science of Australian cartography, a 'dingo soak' referred to specific locations on the map where springs of water have been revealed under the surface of dried up riverbeds and waterholes. The name appears at a number of locations across the Australian map today (Geodata,

2016). These locations are waterholes that were uncovered by the diggings of a dingo, referring to either a metaphoric or physical living being. A number of these diggings became permanent waterholes. One record from *The Sketcher*, (1923 p. 42) reads:

Dingo Soak: It lies away out to the northward, where the long reaches of grey-green, sun-burnt plains come down to meet in a small, lonely gully, sparsely timbered with fire-blackened jam trees – a still, silent, grass-fringed waterhole, where the wild folk have come to have a drink since those mythical days.

Dingo water knowledge is well known to Aboriginal communities. In a presentation at the Animal Management in Rural and Remote Indigenous Communities (AMRRIC) conference 2014, Sophie Constable presented records of local dingo water knowledge gathered from first-hand accounts in her interviews with Aboriginal people. They had stated (Constable, 2014):

Dingoes are important in our Dreamings. Out in the bush dingoes helped us hunt and find water... Dingoes can live without people... They can smell water and hunt very well. They are an important part of keeping country healthy.

The dingo's ability to find water can be compared to snow dogs and their instinct for 'dead-reckoning' or path integration. These graphemic maps (unwritten maps) (see Glossary p. xxii and Chapter 5, p. 70) involve a process of spatial, temporal and social memory, assisted by the canine's heightened visual and olfactory senses. Dingo water knowledge was greatly valued in traditional society as is evident in Chapter 4, but has been notably absent from the anthropological and scientific records of dingo-human interactions. This may be because of the paucity of value that has been attributed to the dingo and its 'feral status' in western science (see Table 4, pp. 241-42), or it could be that elements of this knowledge are secret knowledge as outlined on page 36. AMRRIC Veterinarian and researcher Samantha Phelan wrote (2007, p. 4):

Individuals will carry with them "dog dreaming", that is, they are the custodians of the law and history of dingoes and dogs. Much of the law as it pertains to dogs remains secret and is often held in the hands of only a few in a community.

My intent is to elucidate only areas of dingo knowledge that respectfully maintain these boundaries.

## 4.2 Dreamtime & Songlines:

Songlines in Aboriginal culture are graphemic maps tracing water sources across country - they can extend across hundreds of kilometers (Rose, 2011). Songlines are journeys, told through the oral history of Dreamtime stories and songs that weave their way through the physical landscape, forming invisible pathways from waterhole to waterhole throughout the continent, tracing the footsteps of totem animals and mythological beings. Dingoes travelled with Aboriginal people on these journeys, and also retained memory of these well-travelled paths. Phelan recorded (2007, p. 4):

There are many dog dreaming sites located around the Australian continent. Each has its own and often interconnected story of creation and movement of the dingo through the country. Stories are told covering areas over thousands of kilometers and across different language groups. Ceremonies that are based around the dingo and dog continue to be practiced across northern Australia with relevant songs, dances and stories being very much intact.

Linguist Merryl Parker also examined records of the journeys of ancestral dingoes in her thesis *Discursive Representations Of The Dingo*, noting (2006, p. 135):

The travels of the first dingoes are told and retold until they forge memory paths, which take the people to water and food and explain how people arrived in the land and where they will finally go.

The rainbow snake and the dingo are two of the most represented creatures in the Aboriginal Dreamtime (Tacon & Pardoe, 2002). They are both powerful symbols of water, metaphorically embodied in the geological formations of the land and waterways throughout the continent. *Australian Myths*, (1895, p. 3) provided a descriptive view of the Australian landscape:

Every stump, every tree, every pond, every waterfall, every cave, and every hill and valley are full of legendary lore ...

The three-way relationship of the dingo-water-human, crossed physical and spiritual realms. Both the mythological dingo and the physical dingo, as ascertained later through historical accounts in this chapter, helped guide people to water in their travels across country. Parker wrote (2006, p. 133):

(The dingo) appeared in creative myths as a Dreaming ancestor, giving birth to the first people, making rivers and scratching out waterholes

Water locations and the protection of water sites have been an important theme throughout the Songlines and Dreamtime narratives. Dreamtime, as described by Rose (2011, p. 17) tells the story of creation and ancestors, where birth and death are unconstrained by temporal associations:

The Australian continent is crisscrossed with the tracks of the creator beings, called Dreamings in Aboriginal English. Walking, slithering, crawling, flying, swimming, chasing, hunting, weeping, dying, giving birth, Dreamings were ...making the landforms and water, and making the relationships between one place and another, one species and another.

Dreamtime stories are a powerful educational tool, for the passing on of ecological knowledge and intergenerational obligations of care. Rose describes this as a system of renewal and reciprocity (2002, p. 4):

The term Dreaming refers to the beings who made the world to be as it is, and it further refers to the process of coming forth into the world. In terms of connection, Dreaming speaks to relationships that structure obligations of care, and that constitute webs of reciprocities within the created world.

Songlines are ritual journeys across country, based on ancestral relationships to land and the connection between sacred sites – these are ceremonial sites, water-sources and prominent geographic locations. The National Aboriginal and Islander Day Observance Committee (NAIDOC, 2016) description reads:

Dreaming tracks crisscross Australia and trace the journeys of our ancestral spirits as they created the land, animals and lores. These dreaming tracks are sometimes called 'Songlines' as they record the travels of these ancestral spirits who 'sung' the land into life.

These Songlines are recorded in traditional songs, stories, dance and art. They carry significant spiritual and cultural connection to knowledge, customs, ceremony and Lore of many Aboriginal nations and Torres Strait Islander language groups.

Songlines are intricate maps of land, sea and country. They describe

travel and trade routes, the location of waterholes and the presence of food. In many cases, Songlines on the earth are mirrored by sky Songlines, which allowed people to navigate vast distances of this nation and its waters.

Songlines take these epic journeys of the ancestors across the landscape, following invisible pathways that connect water sources, following a graphemic map or mode of spatial representation. Songlines, in western ethnographic discourse, are best described as “alternative ways in which cultures dream and map space” (Huggan, 1991, p. 66).

### 4.3 Archival Accounts

To illustrate the complexity of the dingo-water history I have included accounts from archival sources, documenting how ‘dingo water knowledge’ was used to advantage by a number of Euro-Australians. Through the retelling of these historical encounters, I hope to illustrate the tangibility of dingo knowledge, an area that has been rarely examined within the context of Euro-Australian scholarship. Parker (2006, p. 122) wrote:

Accounts of dingoes getting married, trying to light fires and creating water holes are reduced to fairy tales by the colonists’ facts and dates which function as their “regime of truth” (in the ago of reason and science).

I have ordered these seven records in chronological sequence, followed by a brief analysis.

### 4.4 Fresh Water Dingo Stories

**1. 1844-5 Queensland. Explorer Ludwig Leichardt** recorded when travelling overland on expedition in 1844-1845, that after passing many dry waterholes surrounded by numerous numbers of emu tracks, they crossed a broad dried up watercourse lined by long trails of burnt grass (Leichardt, 1847, p. 208):

The Pandanus and the bloodwood grew on its limited flats. At the end of

our stage, we came to a rocky watercourse, which we followed down, and in which a native dog betrayed to us a deep pool of water, covered with Villarsia leaves, and surrounded by Polygonums.

**2. 1861 NSW. Dr. Herman Beckler** (surgeon and botanist) described an account in a dispatch to the Royal Society of NSW in 1861. Entitled *The Exploration Expedition*, this recorded a 160 mile journey across the NSW interior in mid summer that year. He wrote from the Darling River, NSW, on 5 January (Beckler, 1861, p. 6):

we were very anxious to find water ... at the time of my visit not a drop could be found. We followed different watercourses; at last Peter seeing everything, although apparently paying attention to nothing, discovered at the base of some slaty rocks at the bottom of the creek, a slight scratch, still damp, where, as he said, dingoes had been looking for water, and in a very short time we had a supply sufficient for our purpose.

Peter, in the account, was Beckler's Aboriginal guide.

**3. 1873 Western Australia. Peter Egert Warburton** wrote in 1873 *Journey Across the Western Interior of Australia*, that the wild dog or dingo was a good indicator of water – though finding the source that they survived on required local knowledge. Baldwin Spencer recorded during the Horn expedition in 1894 (Horn & Spencer, 1896, p. 78):

Amongst animals we find the kangaroo and the dingo, which can travel long distances with ease, or else, like the native blacks, can subsist, if need be, on the dew which in early morning condenses on the grass, smaller marsupials which can feed upon the ants or dried up vegetation, frogs and mollusca which remain hidden in the damper ground beneath the bard-baked surface, and crustacea such as Apus and Estherias, the eggs of which will not develop unless the water in which they have been deposited dries up.

**4. 1885 Western Australia. Mr. Foley**, a retired clerk from Fremantle, recorded an account of his search for land to start an orchard in the south-west region of Western Australia. Foley was interviewed for the *Western Mail* 21 years later, and told the story of travelling through the arid region looking for a suitable site to settle. Eventually he came across land with suitable good light sandy soil for an orchard. He arrived at the spot one evening after a run of hot weather, and it was the diggings of a dingo that

convinced him to buy the plot of land between Kojonup and Bridgetown (*In the Untamed Wilderness* Anon., 1906, p. 9):

Here a dingo in quest of water had scraped out a hole with his paws, and at the bottom of this shallow excavation lay a few inches of fresh water. Mr. Foley was impressed with the propinquity of the water to the surface, He selected a small holding covering the spot, and on having the land surveyed commenced to work upon it with unremitting industry. The new farm was 50 miles from Bridgetown.

The land was wrestled from the embrace of the forest and converted mainly into a thriving orchard.

**5. 1885, Western desert, Australia. Writer Dick Broughton** published an account that appeared in the *Rockhampton Capricorn* (9 December 1926) under the title *Saved by a Dingo*. It tells of his experience as a young inexperienced traveller, when he had walked into unknown territory crossing the desert region of south-west Australia in the middle of summer, around 1885. Together with an English companion, the pair took a misguided ‘shortcut’ across the desert before losing their way. Over a number of days their water supply ran out, and they were in serious trouble by the time Broughton, being of stronger constitution, left his delirious companion in the shade of a dry billabong, and went out on his own in search of water. He followed a dried riverbed for miles.

After walking for over two hours, Broughton recalled he had turned a bend in the creek and saw a fairly big pool of water ahead. Running up to it, he started shouting in disbelief; “Thank-you! ... Saved Saved!” he called out. He filled his billy, raised the can to his lips to take a mouthful, then stopped short – the billy was full of saltwater (Broughton in *Saved by a Dingo* 1926, p. 11):

For a time I was a raving lunatic. In despair I threw myself down under the shade of a tree ... and like the ancient mariner cried ‘water, water everywhere, but not a drop to drink’ ... I suppose I had been there almost five minutes when I happened to look up and to my surprise I saw a dingo approaching. Fortunately the wind was blowing from him to me – and a mighty hot breeze it was. He was about 50 yards away. To my great surprise I saw him walk down to the bank and start lapping the water. I thought the brute must have been perished for a drink when

he drank salt water. Having had his fill he went away. I suppose I puzzled over this a full quarter of an hour. It was firmly fixed in my mind that dingo was so famished that it actually drank salt water.

Out of curiosity, I went to the place where he had drunk. There was a well-defined track leading to the spot. Even then I did not realize why this should be so. Almost involuntarily I dipped the billy and lifted it to my mouth to taste it. It was fresh! A miracle had happened.

I was tempted to tame a copious drought but I remembered. I swilled my mouth out several times. I poured it on my head. I bathed my face. I drank a little, then a little more, and then a little again. I felt a new man.

The dingo had pointed the man towards a fresh water spring that was flowing up to the surface from below the salty pond.

**6. 1933 Central Australia. Prospector Michael Terry** recorded the most detailed account of dingo water knowledge that I have found in explorers' archives. Terry's explorations on camel back across the Australian desert in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century earned him a place on the commemorative bicentenary \$10 bill in 1988 (Dewar, 2012). While looking for gold in the West Australian outback in 1933, Terry's team charted between 20 to 30 previously unknown native wells and rock holes, while travelling in the company of a dingo that they found at an abandoned Aboriginal camp. Terry's story is covered in detail in Appendix 2. Terry wrote: "*Chou-Chou* [the dingo] gave evidence of a quite spectacular memory", leading the expedition team to the hidden waterholes across the arid landscape (Dewar, 1933. p. 3).

**7. 1951 Northern Australia.** In an account from Lacrosse Island, near Wyndham in north-west Australia, a wild dingo was credited with saving the lives of four men on the remote island. They were the crew of a 40-ton barge that had gone aground at Lacrosse Island after the barge batteries had failed at sea four days earlier. Using a tarpaulin as a sail, they had managed to drift 20 miles before running aground on the island.

The crew had a map of the island that marked out all the known water sources, but all the lagoons they located were sea-water, and they had been unable to locate any fresh water source further inland on the island. They survived the first few days on a crate of tinned cream until it ran dry. On the fourth evening after reaching land, the men

were returning to the barge severely dehydrated. Neale, the 29-year-old skipper, said he was “saving a bullet to shoot himself, rather than die of thirst”. The *Adelaide News* reported the following story (*Dingo led dying men to water*, 1951, p. 2):

The four men searched inland all the afternoon, and at sundown were returning to the barge with tongues swollen when they stumbled on a dingo’s soak on the beach just below the high tidal limit.

“The dog had dug about 18 inches in sand to beautiful fresh water” said the skipper Allan Neale. “We wouldn’t have thought of looking for it there. He certainly saved our lives.

The men survived on the fresh water, shark meat and wallaby until they were rescued by the Wyndham pilot launch two weeks later. They had unsuccessfully tried to signal two planes and a ship passing the island, but were mistaken for local fishermen. The story made headlines across Australia: *Water Soak Dug By Dingo Saves Men*, *Men Saved By Dingo Soak*, and *Dingo’s water soak saves lives of four dying men*.

#### 4.5 Conclusion

In this section I have examined documents from media and archival sources that record encounters between people and ‘dingo water knowledge’. These were often recorded as life saving encounters, and provide tangible evidence of the role of the dingo in assisting human survival in the arid environment.

The work of Deborah Bird Rose provides a description of the Dreaming and water cosmology in her paper *Nourishing Terrains* (1996, p. 86):

Rock holes, soaks, wells, rivers, clay pans, springs and the like form part of the subsistence geography of country and invariably part of the sacred geography as well. Especially in the deserts, the tracks and sites of Dreaming significance link surface and subsurface water sources ... the most plentiful and most reliable water sources are also likely to be sites in which plants and animals are protected. In arid Australia, water is life for everybody, not just for people.

Archaeologist Paul Tacon wrote of the rainbow snake and the dingo as both powerful water figures, appearing at a similar time in Aboriginal cosmology, with the rainbow serpents emerging in rock art around 6,000 years ago (2008, p. 171):

Both rising sea levels and dingoes initiated many different forms of change to fauna, ecosystems and human environments. Among other things, changes to climate meant rainbows may have appeared more frequently in the sky.

Similarly, there are accounts of dingoes disappearing back into the earth, and transforming into rainbows (Cole, 2001), providing layers of connection between the dingo, water, and land through accounts of rain, rainbows, land, burrows, waterholes etc.

Parker (2006) also records stories of ancestral beings that created water sources, dug up soaks, and transformed the landscape. In this mythic terrain, the ancestors were shape-shifters, moving from human to dingo form and back again. They were capable of giving birth to dingo or human young (Parker, 2006, p. 143-44):

..the myth describes the dingo as a powerful Dreaming deity, creating vital water holes, good deep ones which will serve several language groups. God-like, the dingo's power is tempered with kindness ("Let's make it deep, so that other people will come here and drink from it") and forgiveness ("They left that water for the old man, Ilbad").

These are carefully chosen symbols, that emphasize the vitality of the dingo – Parker describes the waterholes as *vital*; they are essential, pathways of energy, vivacity, liveliness, strength, life, vigor. The multi-species sharing of water sources described in this chapter is a recognition of our (human–animal) commonality, mutual dependencies and, importantly, mutual vulnerabilities.

Another common theme emerged from the archival material, that has not been explored in any detail before, outside of Indigenous knowledge systems. That is the relationship between dingoes and fire, and it will be examined through a similar process of referencing to archival material and narrative accounts, in the following chapter.

## 5 FIRE

### 5.1 Introduction

The relationship between the dingo and fire is ambiguous, but emerges from narrative sources and brief accounts recorded in anthropological journals, and will be examined in this chapter.

The records evaluated indicate an absence of fear of fire, both by the aboriginal community and dingo populations. This provides evidence of the well-moderated use of fire recorded in systems of Aboriginal land management (Adams, 2011). Aboriginal communities are said to have ‘tamed fire’ and have used a systematic method of ‘firestick farming’.

Deborah Bird Rose described the difference between Aboriginal and European relationship to fire, in *Nourishing Terrains. Australian Aboriginal views of landscape and wilderness* (1996, p. 70):

The ambivalent quality of fire— its power for destruction as well as regeneration – is ever present for many Aboriginal people. They also know that people of European origins understand fire quite differently. Aboriginal people have brought fire within the domain of human control, working with it rather than against it. Settlers, in contrast, have sought to control fire primarily by suppressing it, and then fighting it when it refuses to remain suppressed.

By extension of the Aboriginal-fire relationship it is not surprising to find the dingo

exhibits a similar familiarity with fire. Robert Kaleski, a popular author and naturalist, wrote of the dingo in 1914 (p. 79):

A curious thing about the Dingo is that he is not in the least afraid of either Man or fire ... Fire, the Dingo treats with lordly indifference; he has been used to it by the (Aboriginal people) ... A camp-fire draws them like a magnet.

Historical and contemporary records indicate that the Aboriginal people had effectively used fire, and exercised great skill in its use as a land management tool, for thousands of years (Flannery, 1994). Their fire management shaped the environment, with around 70% of Australian plant species either tolerant to – or reliant on – fire to survive. Environmental Historian, Stephen Pyne (1991, p. 85), wrote:

... if fire was maintained by the Aborigines, it is also true, as Phyllis Nicholson notes, “that the Aborigines were maintained by fire.” The relationship between them was reciprocal, symbiotic. “The evidence that fire was the indispensable agent by which Aboriginal man extracted many of his resources from the environment is irrefutable”.

Fire was celebrated in ceremonies, and controlled through a mosaic system of burning of selected bush and grasslands. These were skillfully and consciously managed environmental interventions, that supported biodiversity and cleared hunting grounds (Bowman et al., 2011; Adams, 2011). This systematic approach ensured regeneration of native flora, provided a fine-scale habitat mosaic for diverse fauna, and afforded a level of control over the environment—avoiding exposure to the severity of bush fires that threaten society and biodiversity in the contemporary environment. Thomas Mitchell recorded in 1848:

Fire, grass, kangaroos, and human inhabitants, seem all dependent on each other for existence in Australia, for any one of these being wanting, the others could no longer continue ... In summer, the burning of long grass also discloses vermin, birds’ nests, etc., on which the females and children, who chiefly burn the grass, feed.

## 5.2 Donald Thomson 1928

The accounts of anthropologist Donald Thomson shed some light on the dingo’s singular relationship to fire (Thomson et al., 1985). In September 1928, Thomson

raised three dingo pups while he was living with Aboriginal people in remote Arnhem Land. Thomson noted their daily progress in relation to Aboriginal-dingo coexistence. He brought the dingo pups from his Aboriginal companions, paying a stub of tobacco and knife and sheath each (the scalps were worth 15 shillings each at this time). The men had found the pups in the mangroves when they were fishing, north of Edward River, and had rescued them from the jaws of their hunting dogs. Thomson noted also that the men showed immediate affection for the pups.

Thomson tethered the pups for the first few days, and after that they settled well into camp life – following the Aboriginal people on their walks and sharing their fireside at night. Thomson's diary, 18 September 1928, notes (Thomson et al., 1985, p. 164):

Dingoes free about the natives' fire – quiet and quite domesticated, eat and behave like ordinary pups, except that they are a bit wise in the ways of the world and not so playful.

Around ten days after the pups had joined camp, Thomson wrote (1985, p. 164):

Last night, 20.9.28, I noticed that they came up and lay actually in the ashes of the fire after the camp had settled down. The fire was of course out but the ashes were warm still. Tonight again one lay in the ashes at the edge of our fire and seemed quite at home. All of this is of interest to me on account of the relation between the natives and the Dingo.

Records of using earth and ashes to keep infants warm had also been recorded in the work of Josephine Flood (2006, p. 146-47):

On cold nights the mother scooped a shallow hole in sand or earth, lit a small fire in it, and, when it had burned down, placed the baby in the cradle in the fire-warmed hole and covered it with warm ashes. Babies were carried everywhere on the hip, under one arm or slung across the small of the back with feet through one arm and neck through the other, where they slept peacefully. (Childless women carried dingo pups slung the same way and used them for warmth on frosty, 'five-dog nights'.)

Figure 8-12 by Herbert Basedow (see page 116), is a photographic record of three women carrying their dogs in this manner. I discovered the original glass plate negative in an unpublished box negatives in the J. L. Shellshear museum in Sydney 2013, partner image to one that was printed by Basedow in 1925. A detailed examination of the dingo's symbiotic partnership with women and children in

Aboriginal communities is looked at in detail in Chapter 7.

### 5.3 Fire Ceremonies

Fire also had a polyfunctional, and polysemic history. There were ceremonies held for fire, and it was used in rituals. Fire was used to clean areas before camping, used in medicine, warfare, and to drive away malevolent spirits (Rose, 1992, p. 64). It was used for cooking and as a hunting tool, and in the maintenance of native vegetation; forming the mosaic patterns of differing habitat across the continent. It was also used for warmth, as a light source, and a communication tool.

Fire provided an effective hunting tool; bush and grass fires were used to drive prey towards the waiting people and dingoes, already mentioned in Mitchell, 1848 on p. 58 this thesis, and here in Fogg (2012, p. 18):

... accounts from the Garawa involve dingoes driving animals towards hunters or grabbing frilled lizards as they ran in front of the grass fires used to drive other animals in a certain direction.

Nineteenth century trappers also knew of the attraction between dingoes and fire, and used this to their advantage to lure them into rabbit-baited traps. The method involved burning a fire around the baits or hanging up the carcass of a kangaroo or wallaby, and setting traps beneath the bait. A successful trapper's technique was recorded in *The Bulletin (Dingoes, 1959)*:

He always made a fire, so that there would be some ashes about. A dingo does not seem to be able to resist walking in ashes.

Explorer and medical doctor Herbert Basedow (1925, p. 119) wrote this account in 1925 from north-west Australia:

(The dingo/dogs) are so well looked after, and regularly steal so much from the general supplies of the camp, that they grow fat and lazy. When a dog seems to be off color, or has been accidentally hurt, it is nursed like a sick child; it is placed by the fireside, upon the best rug available, and covered with other rugs, the natives themselves going without any covering. One might occasionally find a (woman) going so far as to even suckle a pup at her breast.

## 5.4 Aboriginal Fire Mythology

A legend from northern Queensland and the Northern Territory region, attributes the bringing of fire to the dingo. It is said to have been a gift from “Warrigal, the shaggy one, the bringing of light” (Swan, 1927). Here Warrigal is used to describe the camp dingo, though the word originated from south-east Australia (Leitner, 2004).

In the Promethean legend, Warrigal wanted to help his people who were suffering from a long, dark and cold winter, and so he went to great lengths to find a source of warmth for them. Eventually he discovered a shining fireball in the camp of a distant tribe, and stole it from them, not realizing that this action would bring about retribution once he returned home. After initially being very happy with his gift, soon his own tribe turned against him, and blamed him for putting them in danger despite having brought warmth and light to them.

The Great Spirit took pity on *Warrigal* and went to his defense, calling the tribe to a meeting where he made his announcement (Swan, 1927, p. 23):

This is my judgment with regard to the shining ball: The tribes of the south have proved themselves selfish, for they kept warmth and light to themselves alone, and you tribe of the northland have proved yourselves of little courage, that you murmur when question comes of fighting for the benefits which Warrigal obtained for you. And so I myself will take the great ball, hanging it by the entrance to my Great Gonyah, that it give comfort to all tribes alike. And, at stated times will I unhook the ball, placing it within my gonyah. This shall be night – the time for sleep and rest...While for ever more in honour of Warrigal, the friendly one, shall your token be that of the dingo.

This story was embedded in the customs and rituals of the northern tribes, where for generations, a totem pole carved with a dingo’s head at the top was placed over the burial site of the chiefs of the tribe (Swan, 1927).

Aboriginal legends involving landforms, plants, animals, sky, fire, water etc. were related to synchronized events in physical world. Roslynn Haynes (2013, p. 108) records the following in her study of Indigenous astronomy, illustrating this constant dialogue between the physical and the spiritual realms:

In most areas, the Sun is regarded as a woman who daily awakes in her

camp in the east and lights a fire to kindle the bark torch she will carry across the sky, thus providing the first light of dawn ... In other legends meteors are associated with fire and linked to the waratah plant, *Telopea speciosissima*, a member of the Protea family, which is resistant to fire and whose brilliant red flowers seemed to the Aborigines like sparks from a fire. This was why, in the early years of white settlement, some Aborigines brought waratahs to the European blacksmiths: they identified the sparks from the anvil with the sparks from meteors and hence with the waratahs.

Haynes (1997, p. 73) recorded Aboriginal sky Dreaming – strikingly similar to Greek mythology – that includes the dingo:

Among the Pitjantjatjara of the Western Desert, the rising of the Pleiades in the dawn sky in autumn signified that the annual breeding season of the wild dogs or dingoes had begun. Fertility ceremonies were performed, and some weeks later the young pups were culled for a feast. According to legend, the Kungkarungkara, or ancestral women, kept a pack of dingoes to protect them from a man named Njiru (Orion). He succeeded in raping one of the girls (the obscure Pleiad), who died, but continued to pursue the others. Eventually the seven women assumed their totem form of birds and flew into the sky but, defying their dingoes, Njiru followed the women across the sky.

## 5.5 Prosopography, Fire

A detailed account of a shepherd's encounter between a wild dingo and fire was published in *The Age*, 1857 (*Experiences of an Australian Shepherd*). A pack of dingoes had been troubling the sheep until sorted out with a firearm (Queen Anne muscat), leaving just the Alpha male, described as the 'old grey haired leader', as the lone survivor.

The dingo was wise to all the traps set for him, and kept well clear of the shepherds for a week before finally taking a shot to the shoulder. He took off back into the bush leaving a trail of blood behind him. The following day the shepherd followed the blood trail on foot for around half an hour, and found the dingo's hideout in a large hollow trunk of a fallen tree. The tunnel had a small opening at the top end and a large cavernous opening at the front, so the shepherd decided to smoke out the old dingo,

driving him to the small exit of the burrow (*Experiences of an Australian Shepherd*, 1857, p. 3):

I placed my dog to watch the small end, while I made a smoke at the big end, to drive him through. After making the fire I went to the other end, thinking to help the dog, when the infernal old Dingo fairly faced the music, and pushed out right through the fire. This was so unexpected that it gave him a considerable start.

Having jumped through the fire, a chase was on with another two shepherds and their dogs soon joining in. Bypassing a waterhole, they headed the dingo towards the shepherd's hut, where they were planning to corner him in the yard, but again the dingo's behavior was unpredictable. The shepherds had left the day's bread baking in the smoldering ashes of the fire, in the center of the hut (1857, p. 3):

Coming to the door of the hut, the old wretch, as if to be revenged on me to the last, bolted in, locating himself on the top of the 'damper', in the ashes. There he showed fight, and such a scattering of damper cinders for the next five minutes was awful. When it subsided, Dingo was dead and all that remained of the damper the dogs were quietly dispatching for their share of the spoils.

Twice during the chase the dingo had acted in a way unanticipated and in alliance with fire.

## 5.6 Conclusion

In *Nourishing Terrains*, Deborah Bird Rose (1996, p. 69) wrote, "the centrality of fire in Aboriginal life cannot be overestimated". The adaptations of Australian plants and animals to this powerful force of nature are pervasive (Adams, 2011), as is the inclusion of fire in Aboriginal cosmology. It follows, then, that co-evolution of the human and dingo populations for over 4,700 years would include knowledge exchange relating to fire management, and an in-depth understanding of how to live harmoniously with fire.

This interface between nature and culture, and its importance within systems of Indigenous ecological knowledge, is based on a shared vulnerability and resilience. This will be explored further in the following chapters through examining the relationship between Aboriginal woman and dingoes in traditional society.

In order to study this area of human–animal interactions, I found that it was necessary to first provide a cross-cultural examination of interspecies breastfeeding, as recorded in pre-industrial society, in Chapter 6. This involved reviewing and summarizing published historical research, to establish the spatial and temporal context of the traditions of nurture and care that were evident worldwide pre-industrialization. This gives historical context to specific Aboriginal–dingo encounters explored in Chapter 7.

## 6 MAMMALIAN MOTHERS

### 6.1 Introduction

This chapter presents a cross-cultural historical study of interspecies breastfeeding in pre-industrial and traditional societies. The study aims to demystify a tradition of nurture, care, and ritual that has been treated as a taboo subject of social and scientific enquiry in Western academic traditions. The chapter explores the formative circumstances, motivations and traditions in interspecies wet-nursing. This study is necessary in order to fully understand the polyfunctional and polysemic relationship that existed between the dingo and the human community, pre-colonization. The tradition of breast feeding young dingo pups and adopting them into human society was deeply embedded in ritual and customs of traditional Aboriginal society, as was the tradition of interspecies breast-feeding in most cultures before technological advances presented a safe alternative method to sustain orphaned or abandoned mammalian life. The study finds that the loss of these traditions implied a loss of status for women in their respective communities, and possibly was one of the main catalysts that expedited the exclusion of the dingo from their former symbiotic partnership with the human community.

Hand raising orphaned or abandoned animals occurred frequently throughout human history, and remains a widespread practice today (Walraven, 1999). However, historical accounts of interspecies ‘wet nursing’ remains a relatively uncharted area of human–animal studies. Despite its importance as a symbiotic mammalian survival mechanism, it has been largely absent from debates on human–animal coexistence in

recent history. Notably, there has been a paucity of interest in ancient traditions that could have charted one formative evolutionary pathway towards domestication.

Modern technology including milk pasteurization, refrigeration, powdered milk formulas, along with a detailed understanding of nutritional requirements for young mammals, has made artificial feeding a reasonably successful undertaking for both human and non-human young (Figure 6-1). Prior to these discoveries in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, however, artificial feeding was a very dangerous option for a young mammal and the chances of survival were slim (Fildes, 1988). Historically the only safe alternative for motherless young, was ‘wet-nursing’, where lactating mammals were assigned to raise orphans and foundlings (Macadam & Dettwyler, 1995). Wet nurses were also employed at times to relieve the birth mother of the duty of breast-feeding for health or cultural reasons, alongside or in replacement of their own young. This fostering of young was not species-specific (Simoons & Baldwin, 1982), and this report aims to outline instances where the raising of young crossed human–non-human animal boundaries, to explore the circumstances, motivations and traditions involving interspecies nursing.

As an introduction, Chapter 6 first details one 19<sup>th</sup> century account of interspecies fostering, that demonstrated the shared vulnerabilities and symbiotic nature of mammalian survival within in extreme environments. I then outline briefly the classification and status of the ‘mammal’ from a biological and historical viewpoint, before tracing ancient accounts and traditions of interspecies nursing from many different cultures: exploring issues concerning human welfare, animal welfare, and other incentives such as ceremonial functions, and economic or emotional benefits. In the light of this background, the report then looks at the historical records of the nursing the young of dingoes in Aboriginal society in Australia in Chapter 7; examining where these traditions are similar and how they diverge from previous accounts examined.

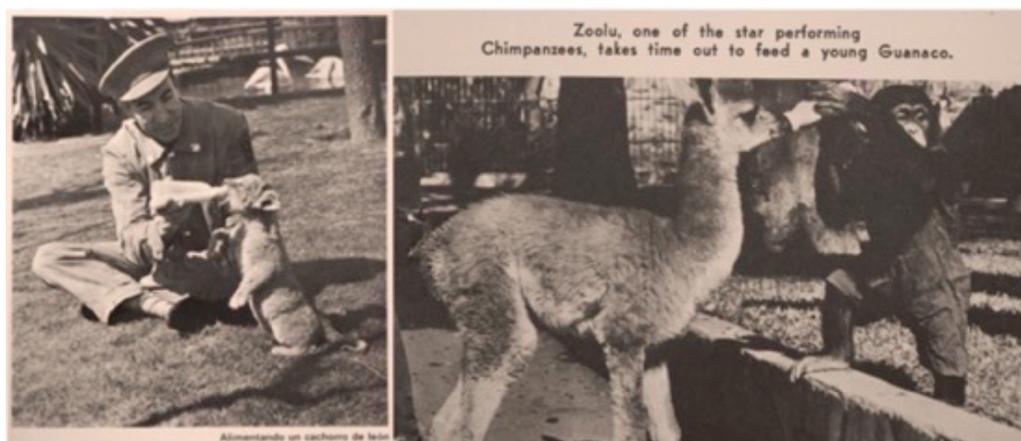


Figure 6-1 Hand raising of mammals in the 20th century. Source: Smithsonian Libraries, National Zoological Park Library, Zoo Guidebooks Collection.

The aim is to explore possible pathways towards domestication, the complexity of the human-dingo relationship, and to elucidate how the semi-wild dingo managed to move with apparent ease – for thousands of years – between both human and non-human worlds. Central to the study, is the need to contextualize and de-stigmatize the historical study of interspecies fostering, to examine a poorly understood area of our evolving, and intricately connected relationship, with the other mammalian species that share our world.

## 6.2 Contextual History: Russian Polar Region, 1820-1822

Conditions for mammalian life do not get more extreme than in the Russian arctic zone. The journals of explorer Ferdinand von Wrangell (1797-1870) offer a rare insight, detailing his observations while on assignment to chart the Russian Polar Seas in 1820. Starting from St Petersburg, Wrangell (in command of the expedition) sailed up the coastline, crossed Cape Shelagskiy on dog-drawn sledge, and sailed up the Kolma River and back, on a journey that took four years to complete. In his journals, Wrangell wrote of the customs of the local Iukahir (the modern spelling is Yukaghir) peoples native to the area, and noted their absolute reliance on the dog teams for their survival (1840, p. 74):

In travelling across the wide tundra, in dark nights, or when the vast plain is veiled in impenetrable mist, or in storms or snow-tempests, when the traveller is in danger of missing the sheltering *pozvarna* (поварна or hut), and of perishing in the snow, he will frequently owe his safety to a good (canine) leader; if the animal has ever been in this

plain, and has stopped with his master at the *powarna*, he will be sure to bring the sledge to the place where the hut lies deeply buried in the snow; when arrived at it he will suddenly stop, and indicate, significantly, the spot where his master is to dig.

Wrangell's journals became a formative resource for Charles Darwin's theories on animal navigation – what Darwin (1873) termed 'dead reckoning' (see Glossary: 'graphemic maps' *p. xiii*), the ability of animals to keep true course and find their way home or to previous locations, despite lack of indicators, visible or otherwise, even through snow, ice and blizzard conditions.

The dogs (*Canis familiaris*) were indispensable (Wrangell, 1840, p. 75). In teams of twelve, they hauled the sledges over the icy desert, transporting people over long distances to hunt for fish and game, and to collect essential supplies – wood for stoves, oil for lamps, medicines, mail and communications. The dogs survived well on a simple and portable diet of fresh and dried fish, and slept tethered out in the open – burrowing into the snow to make their own shelter in bad weather. They were also light enough to be able to move quickly over the surface of the deep snow, an action beyond the capabilities of large draught animals like the horse.

Just months after Wrangell commenced his mapping of the Polar region, a fatal disease spread through the sled dog population across the peninsula, and few animals survived. His journal recorded the terrible consequences that this had on the human community in the ensuing year (Wrangell, 1840, p. 74):

In the year of 1822, when most of the inhabitants had lost their dogs by the sickness, they were in a most melancholy condition; they had to draw home their own fuel; and both time and strength failed them in bringing home the fish which had been caught in distant places; moreover, whilst thus occupied, the season passed for fowling and fur-hunting; and a general and severe famine, in which numbers perished, was the consequence.

Even in summer the dogs had proved indispensable. They would dive into the thawing rivers and lakes at their owner's command, and tow the small fishing vessels across the lakes, along river banks, occasionally drawing the boats over land from one water source to another.

One devastated Iukahir family lost all 20 of their sled dogs to the disease in 1821. The last dog died shortly after giving birth to two live pups. The young wife of the Iukahir was breast-feeding a child at the time, and “rather than lose the last remains of their former wealth” she took on the task of suckling the pups, alongside her own child (Wrangell, 1840, p. 73). The family was richly rewarded as the nurslings survived, and carried on to become the formative members of a new and vigorous line of sled dogs.

### 6.3 Pathways To Domestication

The polar experience of human–canine survival in extreme and isolated geography, demonstrates commonalities and interchangeability in the mammalian experience. Being a mammalian mother is not species-specific, and while this area of cross-species fostering may appear to stand on shaky moral and ethical ground, exploring the prevalence of these customs in a historical context elucidates a relatively uncharted part of human history, and presents a hypothesis on the evolutionary pathway towards the domestication of animals as centered on the female experience (Ryder, 1983). This is a departure from the common hypothesis of commensal pathways and co-evolution of hunting techniques with a male focus (Lorenz, 1954, see Clutton-Brock, 2012).

In a comprehensive monograph on the history and evolution of sheep (*Ovis aries*), Michael Ryder places their domestication at around 9000BC, writing (1983, abstract):

Early evidence is archaeological and is obtained solely from bones. It is deduced that domestication took place by the imprinting of a human sensory image as the result of lambs being suckled by women and thus accepting them as their mothers.

This filial imprinting is the process whereby a sensory image of the mother or her substitute, is etched into the memory of the nursling. The critical period for this to take place in the birth of sheep and other hoofed animals is in the first few hours after birth, indicating that for this to occur, a human wet-nurse would be essential (Ryder, 1983). Zoologist Charles Reed (1966, p. 196), also noted there were women of primitive tribes who still engaged in the breast-feeding of the young of other mammals “thus providing a proper model”: Ryder explained (1983, p. 27):

What emerges from all this is that, as so often in history, woman was the key. Thus not man the hunter, but women ... had the most important role in domestication. Once the domestication of sheep and

goats had been accomplished, their milk would have been available to assist the domestication of other species. There are many instances on record of animals assisting as foster mothers to other species.

The suggestion in the work of both Ryder and earlier in Reed is that the lamb was the first animal to become domesticated. This is not a commonly held view but it is interesting in that they put women at the center of their investigations into pathways towards domestication.

Domestication (from *Domesticus*, of the home), is by definition an evolutionary process, whereby populations of animals and plants have become adapted to specific human-created environments, and adjusted genetically to accommodate to this anthropogenic niche (Miklosi, 2007, p. 95). Domesticated animals adapted physiologically and behaviorally to selective pressures introduced through human control, exhibiting a high degree of genetic plasticity and flexibility – for example, the adaptation to breed best in captivity, and the selection for docile traits (Zeder *et al.*, 2006) see also Glossary *p. xi-xii*.

The story of the lamb nursling comes up again in historical studies; the interchangeability of the human and animal form appeared in early Celtic mythology, (as did traditions of animal worship), and later in Christian traditions. Scientific historian Londa Schiebinger wrote in her paper *Why mammals are called mammals: gender politics in eighteenth-century natural history* (1993[a], p. 395):

Veronica Giuliani, beatified by Pius II (1405-1464), took a real lamb to bed with her and suckled it at her breast in memory of the lamb of God. (Schiebinger, 1993, p. 395)

Myths and legends have an ancient history in this interspecies exchange where the nursling becomes an intermediary between the human and the animal worlds, as Schiebinger outlines (1993[b], p. 56):

Myths and legends also portrayed suckling as a point of close connection between humans and beasts, suggesting the interchangeability of human and animal breasts in this respect. A nanny goat, Amaltheia, was said to have nursed the young Zeus. A she wolf served as legendary nurse to Romulus and Remus, the founders of Rome. From the Middle Ages to the seventeenth century, bears and wolves were reported to have suckled abandoned children.

The accounts of humans nursing young of other species are numerous in historical and anthropological literature, from ancient texts to recent history, particularly but not exclusively in cultures where there had been no dairy animals (Simoons & Baldwin, 1982). Hunting and gathering groups of the Malay Peninsular breastfed pigs (*Sus narnatus*), dogs and monkeys (*langurs* or *macaques*), and the animals sometimes returned to the wild, or on occasion were traded as a food source, though they could never kill them themselves.

An account from Burma recorded in 1886 reported that young mothers considered it an honor to breast feed infant white elephants (*Elephas maximus borneensis* or Borneo pygmy elephant), (Joest, cited in Simoons & Baldwin, 1982, p. 423). The white elephant was widely regarded a symbol of fertility and power throughout south-east Asia, and the “most auspicious of all animals”: enshrined in Buddhist lore with the Queen Mahamaya, dreaming of carrying a white baby elephant when she conceived the young Buddha. As such they held enormous economic and cultural value. “In India, milk is still used to ‘feed’ the elephant-headed god of wisdom, Ganesha” (Gaard, 2013, p. 596).

South American Indians kept monkeys, capybaras (*Hydrochoerus hydrochaeris*), peccaries (*Tayassu pecari*), tapirs (*Tapirus terrestris*) and agouti (perhaps *Dasyprocta Mexicana*), as pets, and captive wild animals were frequently breast-fed, most commonly the dog, monkey and peccary (Simoons & Baldwin, 1982). Sixteenth century accounts include captive deer (perhaps the worlds smallest deer species, *Pudu mephistophiles*) nursed by the Maya. The early written accounts of New Guinea, Tahitians and Maori frequently mention the nursing of dogs, pigs and kiore (*Rattus exulans*, or native rat, an important totem species – noteworthy also is that Maori Warriors tattooed the nest of the Kiore on their shoulders (Haami, 1994). The Ainu people of northern Japan practiced ancient ceremonial traditions of nursing and raising of bear cubs (perhaps *Ursus thibetanus*) up until the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century. Accounts of North American Indian and Eskimo groups include women breast-feeding animals, often to save the life of a nursling whose mother had been killed by hunters, or in the case of orphaned household animals or pets (Simoons & Baldwin, 1982, p. 431):

Crow women nursed captive young beavers, Pomo women who nursed pet fawns, Hidatsa woman who suckled a favorite puppy or wounded bear cub, or Eskimo women who nursed a puppy whose mother had died.

Dogs and raccoons (*Procyon lotor*) were also used to suckle at the breast, for the comfort and wellbeing of the mother and child, in the belief that they could keep the surplus milk from going bad (Simoons & Baldwin, 1982).

Other accounts from Europe include the nursing of young mammals more commonly for medical reasons concerning the health of the human mother, as is illustrated in the following accounts.

William Godwin recorded that as Mary Wollstonecraft (author of *A vindication of the rights of women*, 1792) lay dying after childbirth, the doctor forbade the child the breast for fear that the child would become infected, and "procured puppies to draw off the milk" (Schiebinger, 1993[a], p 395).

In foundling hospitals in the 19<sup>th</sup> century (these were institutions set up to look after abandoned children), animal suckling was employed with success, particularly when the children had infectious diseases that ruled out the possibility of wet-nursing. The disease did not affect the health of the distantly related ungulates nursing them (Figure 6-2) as outlined by medical historian Valerie Fildes (1988, p. 240):

The French physician, Parrot, was one of the main advocates of animal suckling, and experimented with it at the children's hospital in Paris. He kept goats and Asses in a special ward attached to that of the syphilitic infants and there were used to feed the babies several times a day...In some hospitals every goat was a sole nurse to between one and three children so that the animal knew and recognized its particular nursling.

The dangers of artificial feeding can be witnessed through the death rates in foundling hospitals in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. In Dublin, the foundling hospital opened in 1702 and was closed 128 years later having recorded a 99.6% mortality rate of the infants under its jurisdiction (Fildes, 1988, p. 155). The infants were fed on bread, water pap and small amounts of milk, which clearly was not sufficient to sustain life. It was finally closed down in 1830, "because it was judged incapable of raising any of its infants to health and maturity."



Figure 6-2 Suckling of an infant by a goat, 1816. Source: Wellcome Institute Library, London.

Technological advances saw the phasing out of the traditional wet nurse and a shift towards safe artificial feeding by the 1870s, providing a viable alternative to live suckling and a move towards commercialization of what had previously been an exclusively female area of enterprise.

## 6.4 Mammals, By Definition

Mammals are lactogenic, hirsute homeotherms (Greenburg, 1980). Mammals produce milk for the nourishment of their young, but it is only the females that possess this “viviparous and lactiferous nature” (Schiebinger, 1993a), Macadam & Dettwyler wrote in *Breastfeeding: biocultural perspectives* (1995, p. 169):

Mammals are characterized by having a constant internal body temperature, hair or fur, a four chambered heart, giving birth to live young instead of laying eggs, and nourishing their young for some time after birth through secretions of the mammary glands.

The term ‘mammalian’ was introduced by Carolus Linneaus in 1758, in his tenth edition of the *Systema naturae*. The term means literally ‘of the breast’, referring to the animal’s capacity to produce milk (McClellan et al., 2008). Schiebinger also pointed out that ‘mammalia’ resonates with the much older term animalia, from *anima* the Latin for breath, vital force, spirit, soul. Production of milk is a unique mammalian function (McClellan et al., 2008, p. 98):

Although other animals such as pigeons, sharks, salamanders and skinks can nourish their young from various bodily secretions, mammals are the only animals that secrete a complex nutritive and protective fluid

from complicated skin glands to provide the sole source of nourishment for the growth, development and protection for either their hatchlings or neonates.

Milk not only provides nutrition but also ‘innate immunological protection’ (2008, p. 98). Its primary advantage is that the lactating mammal can provide nourishment in any environment that can support parental (or in some cases, foster-parental) health and wellbeing (McClellan, et al., 2008, p. 97–98):

... lactation allows for nutrients that are both distant in time and space to be transferred to the young. For example, brown bears nourish their young while estivating, baleen right whales nourish their young while fasting for several months (lactation strategies that only may be possible because of these animals' size) and primates lactate for several years in tropical regions where fast-growing vegetation has a low nutritional value for the weanling.

## 6.5 Discussion

Despite the complex composition of milk and the differences in composition between species, there are numerous records of successful cross-fostering of mammalian species. Interestingly, the paper by McClellan et. al., (2008) looked at the evolution of lactation, by examining the characteristics of five species of lactating mammals – two wild – quokkas (*Setonix brachyurus*), rabbits (*Oryctolagus cuniculus*) – two domestic (pigs, (*Sus domesticus*), cows (*Bos taurus*) – and women, who they classify as ‘neither wild nor domesticated’ (2008, p. 100). Their findings link the evolution of immunological protection and nutrition, with the mammary gland having evolved from the innate immune system.

Carolus Linnaeus (1752) was active in the campaign to abolish the custom of elective wet nursing that was popular in Europe in the 18<sup>th</sup> century — his emphasis was on the practice of young mammals being fed “by their *own* mothers” (cited in Schiebinger, 1993[b], p. 67). This, he argued, was best for both mother and young, and was importantly a way of addressing concerns about the increasingly public role of women in society, that Linnaeus and his contemporaries believed was inappropriate; women were to be “empowered mothers in the home”. He outlined this sentiment in his dissertation titled *Step nurse* in 1752, announcing that to *not* breast feed was barbarous

in comparison to "the gentle care of great beasts – the whale, the fearsome lioness, and fierce tigeress – who willingly offer their young the teat." Appealing to 'nature and law and order' and to 'animal instinct', Schiebinger (1993[a], p. 411) also pointed out:

The story of the origins of the term Mammalia provides yet another example of how science is not value neutral but emerges from complex cultural matrices.

Having established the contextual history around traditions of wet nursing and interspecies breast-feeding in pre-industrial society, the following chapter looks specifically at these traditions in the dingo–human interface. The study aimed to reveal fundamental significance and function of the relationship between the dingo and women in Aboriginal society.

## 7 THE DINGO NURSLING

The dingo, as a species, held an extraordinary place in the Aboriginal world, as one who could live in both the human (social), animal (natural) and spiritual worlds. (Gunn, et al., 2010, p. 15)

### 7.1 Introduction

This chapter investigates the historical context and traditions of breast-feeding dingo pups, and their adoption into Aboriginal communities. It examines the deeply embedded culture of reciprocity between the human community, dingoes and the environment (Roughsey, 1971; Thomson, et. al., 1985). This relationship was well-established in ancient laws and totemic beliefs within Aboriginal cultural systems. Part A of the chapter looks at the relationship between the dingo and Aboriginal women, as well as general health issues concerning the human–animal interactions in the community, and Part B examines the cultural status of the dingo, and insight into the traditional relationship between children and dingoes.

The centrality of the dingo to the lives of Aboriginal women and children is a topic that has been documented in ethnographic and environmental studies, but rarely investigated. Archeologists Balme & O’Connor (2016) and Meehan, Jones & Vincent (1999, p. 103), both describe the dingo/dog as “women’s best friend” in terms of utilitarian function and partnership. Balme & O’Connor wrote of the dingo (2016, p. 780): “Their rapid incorporation into Aboriginal people’s lives demonstrated that they were highly valued and used for many purposes, including as hunting tools.”

Records from early anthropologists and explorers are detailed in this chapter. It is possible to determine from these records, that the raising of dingoes within the Aboriginal community was not just a random, compassionate response to care for orphaned or abandoned mammalian young, but was a deeply embedded cultural practice, and actively instigated by the human community (Thomson, et. al., 1985). The pups were highly valued as a resource – taken from their burrows or dens when very young to be utilised as a food source, or brought up as companions and family members within the Aboriginal community (Breckwoldt, 1988, Smith & Litchfield, 2009). Geographers Simoons & Baldwin compare these traditions with pig raising traditions in New Guinea (1982, p. 436):

What we are dealing with here, both in Australia and in lowland New Guinea, is a kind of “institutionalized” pet-keeping, in which both the capture and the nursing of infant wild animals have become integral parts of the system ... The dog and the pig are vital, both economically and ritually for the functioning of their respective human societies, but these societies are able to obtain all the animals they require from the wild, thus avoiding the difficulties involved with maintaining a breeding stock of animals.

## 7.2 PART ONE: The Prevalence Of Dingo Nursing In Aboriginal Society

The practice of breast-feeding dingo pups was commonly recorded throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century, across the geographic range of the Australian continent. One of the earliest records of Aboriginal women and dingoes was by made by surveyor/explorer Sir Thomas Mitchell, in south-eastern Australia, 1838. His reference is casual, noting that the raising of pups was a common occurrence (Mitchell, 1836, Vol. II, p. 341.):

The Australian natives evince great humanity in their behaviour to these dogs. In the interior we saw few natives who were not followed by some of these animals, although they did not appear of much use to them. The women not infrequently suckle the young pups and so bring them up.

George Grey, Governor of South Australia, wrote an account in 1841 of the tribes in north–western Australia, recording also the importance of the dingoes as a food source (Grey, 1941, Vol. II, p. 279.):

There is nothing peculiar in their mode of killing wild dogs; puppies are of course the greatest delicacy, and are often feasted on; they sometimes however save these in order to keep them in a domesticated state, and in this case one of the elder females of the family suckles them at her own breast and soon grows almost as fond of them as of children.

Another account was recorded up in the north-east of Australia, in the Coburg Peninsular (Northern Territory) by Keppel (1853, p. 473):

The natives about Port Essington tame these dogs, when they catch them very young; the women suckle them with their children.

Donald Thomson's journal entry from Arnhem Land, 1926, reads (Thomson et. al., 1985, p. 165-166) :

Tommy told me tonight that when the puppies are captured very young they are fed on meat hammered to pulp, and if too young for that, are fed at the breast (*'tjo'tjo*) by the women. His own wife, Chako, fed one of the dogs he still has in this fashion. When rearing it – as Tommy put it, the child had one side, the puppy the other.

Many accounts offer little insight into the traditions, other than they existed, and appeared to be motivated by a fondness for the animals.

### 7.3 Physical Benefits In Dingo-Nurslings

For Aboriginal women, breast-feeding of the dingoes many have offered health benefits, in addition to the external benefits of having the company of dingoes in the camps. In order to contextualize the traditions, I have examined research by medical and eco-feminist scholars in the area of general breast-feeding of infants.

The woman's body is described as the 'first environment' (Gaard, 2013, p. 607) and responds in a profound internal way to the feeding of young, triggering a range of physiological and psychological benefits. Breast-feeding releases oxytocin, the hormone responsible for the recovery of the body from childbirth and the prevention of post-partum hemorrhage. In instances where an infant died in childbirth or shortly there after, feeding a pup would assist in the production of beneficial hormones, and also prevent pain and discomfort associated with excess milk (Viswanath & Sarma, 2015) – as was described in Chapter 6, and in the instance of Mary Wollstonecraft

(Chapter 6, p. 71). In a culture where the human population was self-regulated through ritual and ceremonial processes, as in traditional Aboriginal society, (Flood 2006), the pups would have functioned as a physical and emotional comfort to women who through strict tribal regulations could not keep their own child.

Breastfeeding also releases prolactin, which inhibits ovulation. Suckling pups could have acted as a non-pharmacological ‘family planning’, encouraging longer birth intervals, giving the mother’s body time to recover from pregnancy and childbirth, and affording the mother some control over conception (Macadam & Dettwyle, 1995), though this would not have only been for a brief period of time, however it is still worthy of some consideration.

The rewards for adopting dingo pups into human society would have benefited other community members as well, through social contact, petting and interspecies communication. A range of medical benefits are attributed to positive Human–animal interactions (HAI). These are listed by Beetz, et. al., (2012 p. 374) as a result of “activation of the oxytocin system”:

... well-documented effects of HAI in humans of different ages, with and without special medical, or mental health conditions are benefits for: social attention, social behavior, interpersonal interactions, and mood; stress-related parameters such as cortisol, heart rate, and blood pressure; self-reported fear and anxiety; and mental and physical health, especially cardiovascular diseases. Limited evidence exists for positive effects of HAI on: reduction of stress-related parameters such as epinephrine and norepinephrine; improvement of immune system functioning and pain management; increased trustworthiness of and trust toward other persons; reduced aggression; enhanced empathy and improved learning.

The negative affect of close co-habitation with canines was not recorded as a concern in early medical accounts. As Alfred Crosby wrote in *ECOLOGICAL IMPERIALISM: THE BIOLOGICAL EXPANSION OF EUROPE, 900-1900* “Humans may only have been part of a wave of invading species, including parasites and pathogens” (1986, p. 16), many of the known zoonotic diseases affecting canines today arrived post-colonization.

It is difficult to establish what level of exposure the Aboriginal community had to

zoonotic diseases from such close contact with the dingoes pre-colonization. Early records of general health and vitality of the human communities before Euro-Australian impact suggest that disease was not prevalent. Breckwold wrote that it was possible that “the dingoes in pre-European days carried few diseases” (1988, p. 67), noting that natural selection for disease resistance may have played a role in ‘dingo society’, and the lack of confinement also would have prevented transmission of disease organisms.

Contemporary Aboriginal communities, in contrast, suffer from extensive zoonotic diseases as a result of contact with the domestic dog. These include intestinal parasites (hookworm, roundworm, whipworm, hydatid tapeworm, threadworm, tapeworm, heartworm), scabies and streptococcal infections. Dogs are reservoirs for diarrhoeal diseases (Salmonella, Giardia, Cryptosporidium), and harbor and transmit “common human protozoal, bacterial and viral intestinal infections” (Phelan, 2007, p. 66) “*What disease haven’t I got?*” reads the caption for a photo of an Aboriginal companion dog, illustrating their poor physical condition in Phelans veterinary manual (p. 55). The link between human health and dog health in remote communities is well established, but veterinary services are poorly funded and reliant on volunteer organizations like AMRRIC to address many of these issues.

Dingoes had adapted to the Australian environment, and were well suited to Aboriginal cultural and social systems. Dingoes survive well in arid conditions (Corbett, 1995), and have the added advantage that they self-regulate their own populations, as explained by Phelan (2007, p. 5):

The ecological differences between dogs and dingoes also contribute to the problems of over population witnessed in community settings today. Dingoes have a particularly tight pack structure. They only breed once a year, having litters of three to five pups. It is usually only the dominant male and female that will breed. If a subordinate female does become pregnant, the dominant female will usually kill the pups. The result is only three to five live pups per year from a pack of 10-15 dingoes. This is the breeding structure that Aboriginal cultural systems relating to dogs were created around.

## 7.4 PART TWO: Mornington Island

The following provides insight into the role of the dingo in Aboriginal society as revealed through historical accounts and ethnographic records, and first hand accounts of the Lardil people of Mornington Island, northern Australia. Dingoes were important figures in the cultural traditions and mythology of the Lardil people, going back in oral history for over 6,000 years (Roughsey, 1971). These traditions were extinguished within just three decades of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, in a well- recorded and concentrated period of missionary activity on the island from 1914 to 1946 (Memmott, 1979; Roughsey, 1971; Roughsey et al., 1988). The loss of the dingo was perhaps a double tragedy for the Aboriginal women, impacting on their health and welfare, along with a great loss in status and cultural knowledge. These areas of HAI will be examined in the following chapter, and I have endeavored to reconstruct the function of the dingo within Mornington society, and to reveal the possible impacts resulting from their forced removal.

Mornington Island is the largest in the Wellesley Island group, outliers on the Arnhem Land plateau within the Gulf of Carpentaria. It rests on the Sahul Shelf that submerged beneath sea level, forming the archipelago around 6,000 to 8,000 years ago (*Explore Sahul Time*, 2007). The historical records I examined were recorded by Elsie Roughsey (1923–2000), and Dick Roughsey (1920–1985). They were Lardil people – saltwater people – whose tribal history reaches back over 10,000 years in the region. They were both born on Mornington Island, and educated in English, as members of the first generation of ‘dormitory inmates’ in the Mornington Mission station (Horton, 1994).

During World War Two the Mornington mission station was closed for three years, and the Aboriginal youth were told to return to their traditional families until the war ended, enabling them to experience their cultural heritage first hand (Roughsey, 1971). The Mission was re-instated in 1946, the year that Elsie and Dick were married. Two decades later the Roughsey’s started to document the history and mythology of the Lardil people for publication, resulting in a rare first hand account of their tangible and intangible cultural heritage, including providing an insight into the place of the dingo in their community. Dick Roughsey wrote in his autobiography (1971, p. 53):

*Wadhoon* the dingo has a big story on Mornington...Old people say that the first dingo came to Mornington Island when it was still a peninsular

of the mainland...The dingo was very important in hunting and I have seen many sacred paintings of dingo in secret caves in Cape York. In one of the caves, the dingo can be seen to be tracking a kangaroo, which had been wounded by a spear.

Dick Roughsey (1973) wrote of the travels of the mythological dingoes, a male and a female, digging up saltpans, carving rivers and waterholes, and transforming into stone monuments on the peninsula. The male dingo metamorphosed into a statue in the area that became Forsyth Island when sea levels rose 6,000 or more years ago (the stone was removed in the 20<sup>th</sup> century by missionaries and misplaced).

The female dingo travelled on and dug up the saltpans at Charlie Bush Bay (*Dimareah*) before giving birth to pups at the site. The area is considered sacred, the site of the dog story place (Roughsey, 1971, p. 211):

Today the dog story places are commonly associated with love magic. The dingoes allegedly deposited stones and red ochre at these places. These substances are said to have the power to be used for the seduction of a sexual partner. However some who have attempted to remove stones from the Forsythe Island dog story place in mission times, are said to have mysteriously lost all memory of their actions, and to have returned to their companions without their clothes.

This mythology provides a *specific* historical time frame, within the context of known geological events, placing the dingo within the Australia environment 6,000 to 8,000 years ago. This timeframe is consistent with the findings of DNA studies (Oskarsson et al., 2011) but much greater than evident from archeological studies, with the earliest radiocarbon dating being  $3450 \pm 95$  years BP (Flood, 2006) – see Appendix 3 for notes on the oldest complete dingo skeleton dated  $3,170 \pm 90$  BP (Jackson & Groves 2015).

The mythological creation story *The Giant Devil Dingo* (Roughsey, 1973), tells of the formation of regional landmarks, and the creation of the first dingoes. In the legend, two young men hunted down a dangerous giant canine, tracking it along the coast of the Gulf of Carpentaria and out to the peninsula which now forms the Wellesley Islands. After successfully killing the animal, *Woodbarl* (the white cloud), a medicine man, then made a male and female dingo from the remains of the giant canine. He made the dingoes to be companions and assistants to the people, to help the people hunt for food (Roughsey, 1973).

In the belief system of the Lardil people of Mornington Island, the Rainbow Serpent, *Thurwathu*, and the dingo, *Nyaranbi*, laid down the customary laws and gave the people their “totems, kinship system, and land and sea story places” (Mirndiyan Gununa 2015). This included ceremonies and laws governing the stewardship of natural resources, governing conduct towards one another, and the treatment of ‘land and sea country’.

Outside influences did not impact greatly on the Lardil way of life and belief systems until the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Cawte, 1972; Memmott, 1979). Geographical isolation had spared them from the first wave of colonization, and the brutality and spread of disease that had decimated nearby mainland tribes throughout the 1800s.

In 1901, the 55-foot-long government yacht, the *Melbidir*, dropped anchor at Mornington, in what was the first contact that initiated a period of rapid and catastrophic change for the Lardil people. Medical Doctor Walter E. Roth disembarked, along with the assistant colonial botanist, J. M. Bailey (Roth, 1901). They proceeded to distribute free blankets, food supplies, tobacco and pipes to the Aborigines. Roth recorded that both dingoes and kangaroos were found on the island at this time.

The *Melbidir* visited the island a number of times over the next decade, transporting Roth’s successor, R.B. Howard, in 1908 (Aboriginal Protector in the region from 1905–1912). Howard’s description of the people is revealing during that time: they were free from disease, well fed, and remarkably strong and agile (Howard, 1943). He was outspoken against the government plans to put a mission station on the island, claiming (p. 29):

It was "in the interests of ethnology" to leave the people alone save for an officer to "chase off white molesters" and to look after goats and fruit trees.

Despite his opposition, in 1914 a permanent mission was established under the command of Superintendent Rev R. Hall. In the following three years, whooping cough, influenza and pneumonia claimed the lives of 29 Lardil people, from the population of around 400 (Roughsey, 1971). Hall was murdered in an altercation over tobacco rations, on 19 October 1917. The mission was then handed over to the administration of Presbyterian Pastor and superintendent Mr. Robert Wilson, with his

wife in charge of the mission school from 1918 to 1942.



Figure 7-1 Mornington Islander suckles dingo pups. Photo: J. W. Bleakley 1916. Source: Fryer Library, University of Queensland.

In 1916, John William Bleakley (then Chief Protector of Aborigines) travelled to Mornington Island with his photographic equipment to document the lives of the islanders. The Queensland Museum director, Ronald Hamlyn-Harris, recorded his findings and published Bleakley's account, along with a photograph (Figure 7:1) in the *Memoirs of the Queensland Museum Vol. VI* (1918, p. 5):

It has been quite a common practice for the blacks of North Queensland, not only to admit dogs to the freedom of their beds, but for the women to suckle pups, and I am fortunate in being able to illustrate a concrete instance of an act which may almost seem incredible, unless supported by well-authenticated and graphic testimony ... [Bleakley] was fortunate enough to surprise a woman in the act, but as soon as he was observed, the (innate) shyness of the race manifested itself and the woman tried to hide the puppies—which were about a week old—under her legs, and it was only with great persuasion that she was induced to allow the animals to continue their feeding undisturbed. This enabled Mr Bleakley to obtain the accompanying photograph, to whom I am indebted for its loan.

Rev. R Wilson and his wife took over the running of Mornington Island Mission in 1918. They concentrated their attention on the Aboriginal youth, as they believed the adults were 'beyond Christianizing' (Memmott, 1979). Education and segregated accommodation was enforced on the children from 1921, separating them from their

parents after the age of 8. The children became ‘dormitory inmates’ on the island and only allowed limited contact with their families; this was restricted to Sunday mass for the girls, and two evening visits per week for the boys – as a consequence, “the transmission of culture was arrested for a whole generation, particularly the females” (Memmott, 1979, p. 271).

Before the mission opened, dingoes were important to the Mornington Island community, and played an important role in community life (Roughsey 1971). General observations of dingoes in Aboriginal camps from Northern and Southern regions of Australia provide similar records, and despite the differences in cultural traditions across Australia, common customs relating to the dingo were recalled (Thomson 1985, Mountford, 1948): the pups raised in the camps were adopted into human society, given skin names (family names based on complex kinship structures) and status, and fully included in community life – with the expectation that when mature (at one to two years of age) they would return to the wild to breed (Thomson, 1985). Anthropologist Charles Mountford recorded his accounts from the desert region of South Australia (1948, p. 183):

I had been impressed by the close companionship between the aboriginal and his dog which is, of course, the wild dog (or dingo) he has tamed for hunting. The creature lives as much in the life of the family as do the children; it sits around the same tiny fire, and at night lies close to the man or the woman, I had often seen Jabiaba asleep with his dog on his arm. Even the newly born baby at Ernabella had to share the fire with the dog belonging to the mother.

The company of tame dingoes was believed to ensure protection against human and non-human intruders, poisonous creatures and wild dingoes, and importantly, provided protection against malevolent spirits. Only the *karadji* (lawmen) and the dingoes were believed to have been able to see spirit beings (Berndt & Berndt, 1964). The tame dingoes were also great hunters, affectionate companions, and living blankets. This sharing of the camp life and fireside was recorded in numerous ethnographic accounts (see Chapter 5: FIRE) Baldwin Spencer wrote in central Australia (Spencer & Gillen, 1899, p. 18) – [note that ‘dogs’ can refer to dingoes or to domestic dogs in these accounts]:

If, now, the reader can imagine himself transported to the side of some waterhole in the centre of Australia, he would probably find amongst the

scrub and gum-trees surrounding it a small camp of natives. Each family, consisting of a man and one or more wives and children, accompanied always by dogs.

The rapid decline in health of the Aboriginal communities post-colonization has been attributed to human conflicts, displacement and exposure to novel pathogens (Crosby, 1986). The extermination of the dingo, I argue, also played a significant role in the community's loss of independence and self-sufficiency, and promoted the rapid spread of disease. As Balme & O'Connor outline, the influence of the dingo in the re-organization of gender roles and economy after their arrival some 4600 years ago was significant (2016, p. 775):

We conclude that dingoes were an important technology for Aboriginal people and that their rapid incorporation into Aboriginal societies re-organized gender roles in economic life after the mid-Holocene in Australia.

The implication is that the removal of the dingo would also have had substantial impact, and would have been no less transformative to Aboriginal lives.

To appreciate the function of the dingo within the family unit, I first examined descriptions of how the children, once removed from their parents and their traditional camp environment on Mornington Island, survived as dormitory inmates also deprived of their dingo guardians. These accounts are from the 1930s. Dick Roughsey (1971, p. 39) wrote:

It was a hard life. We were turned out of bed, a blanket on the floor, at about 6 o'clock every morning. A bucket of cold water served as an alarm clock. We then had to carry more water and wash out the dormitory. This was necessary as small bush boys are used to just chucking out their water as they sleep. We then hung our blankets out to dry in the sun and lined up to be given our breakfast jobs.

And Elsie also gave her own account (Roughsey, 1984, p. 14):

In the nights, when I had to be locked with padlock on to the door by the lady in the dormitory, I had to be put in bed with someone. Well, it was so dark at nights. No lights were anywhere. The place looked so dark. To move around the place, all we had to feel where we were going. Just imagine, we were like blinded person. That's how we had to face the

darkness.

The children would have nightmares and wake up screaming with fright, setting off screams from the other dormitories (Roughsey, 1984, p. 14):

... [The boys], they would scream too. Because in those times the Adults told us too many stories of devil or spirits ...

Having a companion in the dingo had provided both comfort and protection. Records suggest that they also played an important role in maintaining camp sanitation. This can be determined through analysis of accounts of dingo-human co-habitation; they were acknowledged for their self cleaning, thermal 'blanket function', and as a camp scavenger - cleaning up human waste and bones etc. from the immediate environment (Breckwoldt, 1988). The dingoes improved the mobility of the people, as described previously, providing protection against spiritual and physical dangers (Memmott, 1979). Once old enough, in the traditional camp site the Lardil people had been free to go outside the border of the camp to defecate and urinate at day and night, "well away from the camp and the beach" (Memmott, 1979, p. 153), having the company of dingoes would have afforded added freedom of movement. This mobility helped in keeping the camp environment clean, dry and would have prevented the build-up and spread of pathogens. Having a living blanket function in the dingo would have been particularly beneficial for children. In traditional camps, if the environment became wet during the night, the animals could quickly dry off – unlike woolen blankets, that when sodden became a health hazard and aided in the rapid spread of diseases including influenza, bronchitis and pneumonia (Flood, 2006). The dingoes would have also provided a buffer between the children and the fireside and other wildlife or environmental dangers. For the children in the mission dormitories, there was evidently no barrier between them and the cold and the damp, no protection, and no emotional comfort.

Growing up within the dormitory environment, in the absence of dingoes/dogs on Mornington Island, the children experienced the rapid spread of fatal diseases through the population. It was not until 1936 that the missionaries put in any sanitation system for the children. The local communities had traditionally moved camp regularly to avoid contamination. Memmott (1979, p. 271) recorded:

However, the mission camp was permanent and must have grown filthy since it was not the custom of the Aborigines to collect and dispose of

their waste. Apparently Wilson did not attempt to rectify this situation, nor did he install any Western-type toilet facilities. The camp must have been a potential health hazard. This is supported by the mortality figures as influenza, whooping cough, malaria and other epidemics took their victims.

Maintaining safe boundaries, with the help of guard dogs and by the use of ceremonies (e.g. warding off evil spirits) played an important part in traditional life (Memmott, 1979, p. 17). As such, the dingo provided a multi-layered system of maintaining camp safety and sanitation. They also marked out territory, depositing scats, scent marking and scratching around territory perimeters as is customary dingo behavior (Wallach, et al., 2009), suggesting that dingoes would have provided an invisible barrier at the camp boundaries, signaling to wild animals that the territory was occupied.

In 1930, Rev. Wilson undertook a clean up of Mornington Island's dingo population, years before addressing the sanitation problem. He distributed the yearly blanket supply to the Aboriginal community, arranging the trade of one dog per blanket. This is captured in Figure 7-2, a photo published in the Queensland news. (*On Mornington Island*, 1930 p. 43):

The picture shows only 22 of those that were shot at one session. The camp dogs are mainly dingoes: the litters are found in the bush and the puppies are taken and reared by the native women.



Figure 7-2 "Mr Wilson put the price of a dog on each blanket", 2 January 1930. Source: The Queenslander/ National Library of Australia p. 32-33

[Note, the blankets were Government rations for the Aboriginal people, so no barter was legally required]. The dingoes and dogs were eventually eradicated from the island shortly after World War II. I have not found any current data about dingoes or dogs on the island, however the area was still dingo/dog free in 1972 when medical doctor John Cawte visited, commenting (1972, p. 20):

The level of physical health of Mornington Island, while inferior to that in Australian towns and cities, is superior to that found in Aboriginal settlements in less favored parts. Initial impressions of the village are of reasonable cleanliness and order despite the poverty... An uncharacteristic feature and one that contributes to hygiene is the absence of dogs... Every Aboriginal camp is alive with them; they help in the hunting by day and warm the children by night. Elimination from the island was accomplished by the then superintendent, though not without resistance.

By the 1940s, both domestic dogs and dingoes had been included in the Aboriginal communities on the Island, and all dingo/dogs targeted for eradication. Cawte (1972, p. 20) reported on the altercation that had caused severe disruption in the community in 1946:

Accounts of the incident in the village contain rationalization as well as reason. For example it is said that the dogs were destroyed so that their barking would not attract the enemy Japanese to the village. Gully Peters, an elder of acknowledged charm and integrity who was influential in the immigration of Kaiadilt to Mornington, declined to permit the shooting of an old white terrier that had been presented to him by a previous missionary. A police constable from the mainland was introduced into the impasse and a melee took place in which Gully, passively resisting, was handcuffed, locked up, and removed to Palm Island for a year. His friend, Paddy Marmies, who tried to protect Gully, was beaten. Serious tension seems to have been engendered between mission and village, but dogs were banished and a stride towards Western standards of hygiene taken.

## 7.5 Dingoes and Children

Writer/philosopher Raimond Gaita wrote of growing up in country Victoria in 1952, where his only carer, his father, was working nightshift. Gaita was left alone overnight

in the farmhouse, without electricity or running water. He wrote (1998, p. 29-30):

I was six years old, and the nearest house was half a kilometer away. Naturally I was frightened...it was not hard for a child to imagine all kinds of creatures coming from the swamp, their path to the house lit by the moonlight shining silver on the grass. And when it was really windy the house creaked in tones that would excite a fearful imagination in almost anyone...

I listened to the radio until I fell asleep and took the dogs to bed with me. Years later I heard someone speak contemptuously of how Aborigines slept with their dogs for comfort and warmth. I remembered how I had done the same thing, and was amused at the speaker's stupid contempt. I doubt I would have coped without the dogs.

While I have found no records of concerns about the safety of Aboriginal children with camp dingoes, the safety of the children and wild dingoes was taken very seriously. There were legends warning of the dangers. Constable, 2014, wrote: "When kadaitcha men sing up bad dingoes to hurt us, our dingoes kept us safe". Parker (2006, *p.iii*) also noted:

A pragmatic Dreaming Dingo teaches humans to live harmoniously and cautiously in an environment which is both nurturing and dangerous.

It was not until 1980 that a dingo was charged with taking a human life, and since that time, two well-recorded events made world headlines. Both the Azaria Chamberlain case in 1980 (where a 9 week old baby was taken by a dingo, but the body never recovered) and the case of Clinton Gage (a 9 year old boy killed by a dingo on Frazer Island in 2001), were met with incredulity by the Australian public. This is, I believe, a reflection of the nature-culture divide that persists in western society. The pervasive Judeo-Christian belief that "humans have dominion over all other forms of life" (Genesis 1:26) and the Aristotelian concept that animals exist for the sake of humanity, appear entrenched. Despite scientific revelations of the continuous link between humans and other species, with Charles Darwin's *Origin of the Species* in 1859, human-wildlife conflicts and particularly fatal events hold great fascination in the public mind, but have little real basis for such emotive reactions to what are surprisingly rare events (see Hytten & Burns, 2012).

There has been a body of work written already on this topic, see Appendix 4 for an

account from 1916, that indicates community concern over the safety of children in the outback. What appears evident is a surprising amount of constraint exercised on the part of the dingoes.

## 7.6 Conclusion

In summary, the motivations for keeping dingoes were multifaceted – relating to health and welfare, protection, affection, utilitarian functions, and ceremonial processes. This demonstrates the cultural keystone status of the dingo within Aboriginal society, as evidenced through their representation in social systems, and within aspects of the contextual foundations of Aboriginal ceremonial life.

Technological innovations enabled the safe use (and commercialization) of artificial feeding for mammalian young since the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. This had a profound impact on women's lives, even in places where the technology was not available. The traditional wet nurse was largely extinct by the second decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in the Western World. Gaard describes these changes in the context of the first-world environment (2013, p. 615):

...where mothers are more likely to have access to bottle sanitization, purified water, economic or food aid, and infant formula—coupled with the pressure to earn income shortly after childbirth, and the heteropatriarchal sexualization of women's breasts as toys for adult men rather than as functional sustenance for infants.

Commodification of the traditionally female enterprise of infant feeding transformed this area of female enterprise. Technology has improved greatly since these early days, facilitating the bottle-feeding of infant young of many species with success (including dingo young, Figure 7-3), however, it is important to be aware that this is a recent development in human evolution. Until 150 years ago, the only reliable way of ensuring the survival of an orphaned mammal (human or non-human), was to find a surrogate mother.

After artificial feeding became commonplace and safe, the mention of human–animal suckling starts to be portrayed by the scientific community as a moral issue, such as the indignation expressed in Hamlyn-Harris's account of the Mornington Island photo 1916 (Figure 2:15:1). Gaard wrote (2013, p. 604):

In a colonial world, indigenous people are pressured to share the viewpoint of the colonizer, to believe themselves inferior, and to adopt the ways of the colonizer in order to “improve”.

What was previously considered an appropriate and compassionate response to the young of other species, and was a valued custom in many human societies (outlined in Chapter 6), became socially unacceptable behavior. The suckling of young mammals, was distorted in the gaze of the colonists, and the Aboriginal women were made to feel that these traditional practices were inappropriate and even shameful.

Sociologist Norbert Elias conducted detailed investigations into concepts of shame and embarrassment with regard to ‘bodily propriety’ in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Elias was interested in the sense of cultural superiority that had arisen from European notions of a ‘civilized’ people. In 1939 he published *The Civilizing Process*, tracing changes in social etiquette and propriety. Linklater & Mennell (2010, p. 386) describe the scope of Elias work as concerning:

...the sociology of the body and in the management of the emotions... the ways in which such dimensions of human life have been affected by patterns of state-formation, lengthening webs of interconnectedness, pressures to become better attuned to the interests of others over greater distances, and so forth ... [the framework] was invented to track movements in emotions such as embarrassment and shame. The focus encompassed the evolution of the desire to conceal nakedness, growing embarrassment when faced with the dying and with death ...

Elias’s study outlines societies processes in action that, in this case, successfully alienated the dingo pup from their place in Aboriginal society, and led to the rapid discontinuation of the traditions and rituals associated with nursing dingo pups and adopting them into the human community.

The technology is available today for the raising of orphaned or abandoned young and is reasonably accessible to the Australian community, however there is very little published on the adoption of young dingoes, or their development. They appear briefly in the writing of ethologist, Konrad Lorenz, in 1950 after he adopted a young pup from Vienna Zoo (Lorenz, 1954) – see pp. 169-70. American scientist Devra Kleiman adopted a dingo pup in the 1960s, that inspired her lifetime career in conservation biology (Kleiman, 1967). Many were brought up in zoos around the world. A common

thread from these accounts, is that the young dingo will bond with individual human carers or families, and remain affectionate for life, but always retain their instinctive prey drive and disdain for confinement, (personal observation). This makes them ill suited to a conventional domestic life (see London Zoo dingoes, Rachel Reckitt pp. 171-72).



Figure 7-3 Bottle feeding Frieda, a 12 day old dingo pup, Melbourne Victoria, May 2004. Photo J. Philip

Many other animals were raised in the Aboriginal camps, including a wide range of marsupials, birds and reptiles – emu, cassowary, brolga, possum, kangaroo and lizards. This ‘multi-species’ environment is explored further in Chapter 8, illustrating the similarities between the transient dingo-human encounters, to other human-wildlife encounters with native species in the environment (Philip & Garden, 2016). However, many of these interactions may have been largely opportunistic in contrast to the purposeful raising of the dingo.