

Indigenous people in wildlife tourism 2005

Denise Lawungkurr Goodfellow

**I dedicate this to the
old lady who first dreamed
of the project. my sister,
Mrs. Nganjmirra.**

**Mrs. Nganjmirra died on 24th June
2004.**

Warning: some deceased people are shown

**Indigenous people should
play an
integral role in wildlife
tourism.**

**This is not just for their
good, but for the
sake of the Australian
tourism industry.**

Australia relies on mass/sightseeing tourism. Yet, numbers can fluctuate drastically in response to changes in exchange rate, perceived dangers such as terrorism or disease, or changes in fashion.

A way to protect tourism is to develop diversity, and to encourage visitors to build relationships with the country and with locals.

For instance in the late 1960s parts of the Adriatic coast lost over 60% of their tourists in one year.

This was blamed on a red tide. But research found the reasons were that the destinations were over-standardised, over-commercialised, over-developed,

Those visitors that did return were the ones who had “made friends” with local people eg by staying in locally-run accommodation and taking locally-owned trips.

I use the Kunwinjku people of Baby Dreaming, western Arnhem Land
as an example.

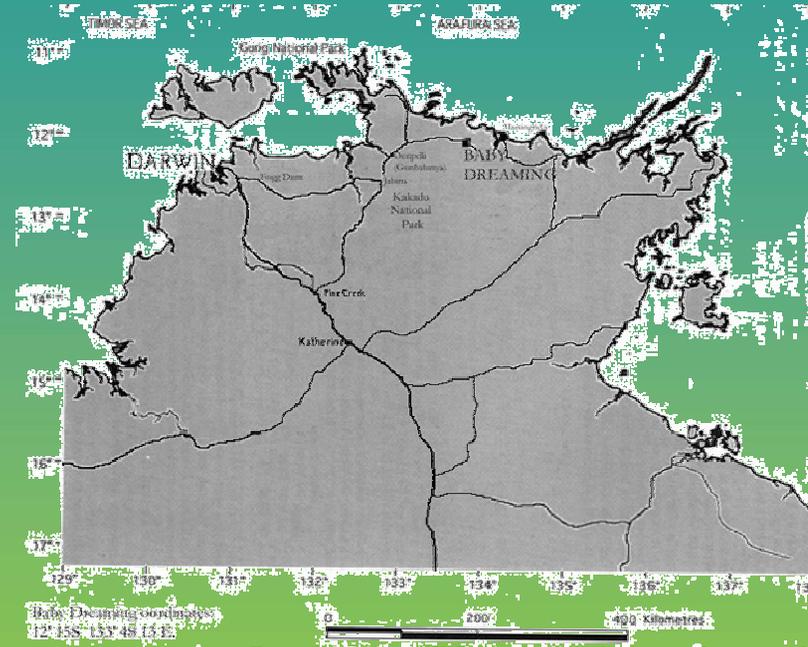
I am related to these people.

BABY DREAMING COUNTRY

Baby Dreaming
(Gudjekbinj is 400
kms. NE of Darwin.

It is the country of the
Ngaranbali clan.) of the
Kunwinjku, “freshwater
people”.

They refer to themselves
as *Bininj* (meaning “the
people”).



From *Birds of Australia's
Top End* by D.L. Goodfellow

They know their country
and its flora and fauna.



Barkibong

birds of wetlands

Kolariwikwik/
Black-winged Stilt

Dalgerowgen/
Crimson Finch

Bierwuj/Green
Pygmy-Goose

Djagana/Black-necked
Stork

Bird photos by Hilary Thompson
Paintings from *Birds of Australia's
Top End* by DL Goodfellow

Generic name for ducks
-Garhgirala

Djilikyubi/Djurra (little
duck)/Wandering
Whistling-Duck

FAUNA & FLORA

Durrbu/Merten's Water
Monitor
Varanus mertensis

Gedjebe/Arafura
File Snake
Acrochordus arafurae

Pogonolobis
reticulatus
Used for colour

Commelina ensifolia
Yam

Fauna and flora of sandstone

Djiladdjilad
Curcuma australisica

Knob-tailed Gecko
Nephrurus sheai
courtesy of Greg Miles

Oedura gemmata
Endemic to
western Arnhem Land.
Photo by Paul Horner

these geckoes are called *Belerrk*.

Banded
Fruit-Dove
/Lumbuk

FAUNA OF OPEN FOREST

Buluwirdwird/
Northern Rosella

Black-tailed Treecreeper
Climacteris melanura

Kundamen/Frilled Lizard
Chlamdosaurus kingii
Old people's tucker!

Bunjdjing/Wall
Skink
*Cryptoblepharus
plagiocephalus*

Barndol/Black-headed Python
Aspidites melanocephalus

Vigna vexillatus
yam

Djodmut
Grewia retusifolia
Edible fruit
Medicine plant

Mandubang/
Cooktown Ironwood
Erythrophleum
chlorostachys

Dominant tree in open forest.
Highly poisonous - used
at funerals..

Mandjalem/
Woollybutt
Eucalyptus
miniata
Edible seed
Bark used for
medicine

Patersonia macrantha
Endemic to Top End.
Used for colour

Western conservation practices make wildlife untouchable. So few Australians know anything of their plants and animals (Only 1% of the plants in Australian gardens are native).

Bininj take a different approach.

For them the relationship to wildlife and country is intimate and considered mutualistic.

CONSERVATION IS CONSIDERED TO BE THE ROLE OF EVERY ONE.

**Wildlife are an integral part of
Bininj life in the following ways:**

- 1. Specific wildlife are hunted and eaten.**
- 2. Conservation of wildlife and their habitats.**
- 3. spiritual relationships with wildlife and country.**

All are inextricably related.

WILDLIFE

Some animals can only be eaten
by initiated or “old” people.

Others can be eaten by
everyone (Gould’s Goanna).

Still others can only be eaten at certain
times, or when they are in good
condition.

Varanus panoptes
Only to be eaten by
“ceremonial” people.

Kundamen/Frilled Lizard
Chlamdosaurus kingii
Old people’s tucker!

Djilikyubi/Djurra (little
duck)/Wandering
Whistling-Duck

Plants are also utilised

Long Yam/Garrbarda
Dioscorea transversa

Painting with
Manyilk
Cyperus reed.

**As cheap as sustaining
the nearest reedbed!**

Esther digging up long yams (she was
76 years old when this picture was taken!)

Photo courtesy of Richard I' Anson,
Lonely Planet Publications

Pilates for elders!

MORE USES OF PLANTS

Mulbek *Pandanus spiralis*

Mat by Djedje Louise

Esther weaving
Photo courtesy of Amber Goodfellow

Nuts in pandanus
fruit are edible.

Base is edible but burns throat.

Grate into
water and drink!

Mrs. Nganjmirra's drink holder

Photo courtesy of Prof. Jim Spickard.

PLANTS CAN ALSO BE SACRED



Manjorrgo flowers feed native bees and flying-foxes. Both honey (sugar bag) and flying-foxes are eaten by Bininj.

Near Yirrkakak Esther shows a visitor a native bee's nest in Manjorrgo, *Eucalyptus tectifera*.

Mother Palm/Mandjandad
Livistona inermis, a small
sandstone palm.

The fronds are made into
brushes to apply ceremonial
paint.

Photo courtesy of Prospero
Productions.

The spiritual dimension

Mankabo - the river of life meaning what has ever been or will ever be in that place - animals, plants, earth, rocks, water, air, spirits.

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Barkibong

Baby spirits are believed to inhabit some streams.

They emerge from the water when grown, leaving toddler footprints in the white sand, and turn into dragonflies in the Dry Season.

One patch of pandanus is called Lost Baby Dreaming. It is for Baby spirits that haven't found mothers.

Manbulbul/Paperbark

Melaleuca sp.

Paperbark is used for cooking,
for bush mats and shelters,
and occasionally (now) for rafts.

*After we killed this pig, we
put it in a hole and filled it
with hot coals and the
leaves of a paperbark.*

*Then Esther stripped a
tree of its bark, to place
over the cooking pig. As
she did so she sang a
song.*

*For this place was a Baby
Dreaming site - she sang
to explain to the spirits
why she was damaging
the tree.*

Wildlife, landscape and humans
are related through dreamings

*My dreaming is Yawk Yawk
(meaning “fish with a human face” or mermaid).*

**People must look
after the country of
their dreaming.**

**I also have Saltwater
Crocodile Dreaming,
White-bellied Sea-
Eagle Dreaming
etc.etc..**

*People who have only one
dreaming are gossiped
about.*

Yawk Yawk Spirits Dreaming
by Luke Nganjmirra
John W. Kluge Commission,
Charlottesville, Virginia USA

My children all have Python Dreaming

To kill a Dreaming animal
would be murder, to eat it,
cannibalism.



All my children
have Python Dreaming

*Rowan aged five, cried over a dying python.
To him the snake was a close relative.*

INDIGENOUS VS. NON-INDIGENOUS GUIDES (TOP END)

Guides in Kakadu for instance, may have little knowledge of Top End flora and fauna.

They are often recruited from down south and have as little as week's training before going out with visitors.

Consequently guides rely on a few easy-to-identify animals and plants.

As the NT has only focussed on the backpacker/sightseeing markets there has been little pressure to improve guides' knowledge.

Ignorance, the need to compete in a highly competitive, highly elastic market, the desire to please thrill-seekers lead guides to ill treat wildlife.

For instance, many guides catch pythons and other reptiles.

A few years ago it was “common practice” for guides on boats to ram crocodiles to “give visitors a thrill”.

The Mirrar people of Kakadu were horrified. Elders said that it was better “the tourists go, and the crocodiles stay”.

Some guides feed crocodiles, goannas and birds of prey. This has resulted in animals becoming a threat to visitors.

Some have been removed. Others, namely crocodiles have been shot.

SAFETY

Neither do all guides have the knowledge or maturity to keep visitors safe.

Sometimes the desire to compete or to please has led guides to put their clients at risk.

For instance under pressure from visitors feeling the tropical heat, some guides have given permission for groups to swim in areas frequented by crocodiles.

Bininj learn as children to look after others

For instance, my son Rowan was made *ngaba*, “Little Daddy” before he was four.



This is how Bininj children learn to become competent parents and responsible members of society.



Wherever this child went,
Rosemary had a protective
hand on her.

This duty of care
applies to adults,
even me.

My sister will not let me, an
ex-buffalo shooter, camp
alone.



Esther and Mrs. Nganjmirra (now deceased). Photo courtesy of Prospero Productions

If a visitor is hurt, lost or dies on one's country,
then gossip occurs. This is
possibly the most feared punishment of all.

Difference in attitudes

A few years ago after the death of a German tourist by crocodile, the Mirrar people wished to stop people swimming in Kakadu, and riding on air mattresses to Twin Falls.

They were fearful another person would die.

Many in the Top End accused the Mirrar of being 'greedy', wanting to keep the country all to themselves, and wanting 'more money'.

WORKING TOGETHER

By Ngalkangila (Yvonne Margarula) & Ngangaridj (Peterson Nganjmirra)

Binninj Karridjarrdurmirre. Kore Kadberre. Gudjekbinj, Kunbarllanjnja, Jabiru Kunred, Karriyoh, Konda. Manberrek, Kahbal, Manlabbal, Mankaboh, Nginjme, Kore Mayh Kabongan dja ngad.Warridji. Kirringun dja Karribohnond

Bu Balanda Karrih yarrikah kore Kunred. Karridjare bulkidji Kunnakka

Karridjarrikre Karrinahnarren dja Ngarribannanhna mungyh. Kore balle yarrikkah Kaberrihre.

Mankaboh mankimuk makkah wanjh Kayoh Kinga. Nabang.

Minj ngarridjare bu Karriyimire.Kangda Karridowan Kunniyh Kunred. Kahbarre rowk.

Binninj nawu Nakukenni ni Kunred nakka Bankimanggi naye Namudd birridjirringunni Manme dja mayh dja djenj. Birrinahnarrini Kore birridjaryoh.

We are working together. Here, we own our country. Gudjekbinj, Gunbalunya, Jabiru are where we live. Swamps, billabongs, rivers, springs. There, all animals and us, drinking and eating together for always.

When white visitors come we are surprised at what they do (sightseeing for instance). But we all want to be good people. To do the right thing we need to look after everyone, ourselves and visitors. They're only here for a little while.

We're all in the same place (black or white) and we need to look after each other. It has to be possible to take care of all including visitors.

Large rivers (East Alligator, Twin Falls, Goomadeer), those places have something really dangerous and wild, like crocodile. We don't want visitors to come here and die.

Binninj are living in a rich country with fish and other animals. We, the traditional people invite relatives to share food with us, and we try to treat visitors from the other side of the world properly too. In traditional way we Binninj look after each other. We are all bound together. We all have to care.

THE BABY DREAMING PROJECT

Twelve years ago the senior custodians of Baby Dreaming began to discuss tourism as a way of keeping people on the country. In 2002 they decided to go ahead.

But they were nervous and distrustful of white people. They worried their country would end up over-run with thousands of anonymous visitors, like Kakadu.

My relatives also thought that visitors would think they were “primitive”, and not be interested in their knowledge.

*Many reasons for this thinking are to be found
in the type of tourism
practised in the Top End.*

INDIGENOUS VS. TRADITIONAL TOURISM APPROACHES

The approach adopted by tourism bodies towards indigenous tourism has been traditional.

Traditional

Indigenous

formal training (see next table). Emphasis on accreditation.	informal training. Emphasis on knowledge and responsibility.
Reactive approach to bad/dangerous practices.	Preventative traditional barriers against dangers.
large numbers of visitors	individuals, couples and small groups
occupational hierarchy	No hierarchy. All equal.
sightseeing experience generally controlled by guide (usually a young man).	Interactive experience controlled by tradition and multi-generational group
Expensive infrastructure	No expensive infrastructure

Western education

Bininj education

Formal, taking place in a dedicated place.	Informal, taking place anywhere.
Trained, accredited teachers, all adults,	Various relatives of all ages. All learn by teaching others
Lessons may have little “immediate application”.	Students learn skills that are relevant to everyday life.
Lessons are compacted into a relatively short time, and a largely verbal.	lessons may take years, and are continually reinforced. Learning is by “doing and observing”.
School is separate from the rest of life.	Learning is part of everyday life.
Sudents are mostly unigenerational (in tourism, usually young men).	Multi-generational classes.

TRAINING

In towns, most Bininj students failed their courses.

Causes:

students were taught in western ways to work for western-styled businesses and on country not their own.

They learned to tell visitors about rock art, spear-throwing and other male pursuits.. Traditional knowledge of wildlife, women's knowledge and anything else not considered relevant to sightseeing tourism, was largely ignored.

Relatives could not impose group control.

Instead students were often more influenced by others drinking or sniffing petrol , breaking social mores and committing crimes.

Several tour guides are drinking, sniffing petrol. Some are now very ill and a few have died.

Tour operators had to enter Arnhem Land early to pick up guides before they began drinking. Police returned drunken guides to communities such as Baby Dreaming, where they would be safe.

The Baby Dreaming project had to be controlled by the Bininj, and run on their country.

My relatives already knew their flora, fauna and country.

But they needed other information, for instance:-

- English/Kunwinjku bird names
- *Balanda* (white people) etiquette.
- How to “say no”.
- How to ensure visitors behave properly.
- Literacy skills
- Business, office and computer skills

To train we used western and traditional methods of education.

Courses were funded by the
Dept of Business, Industry
& Resource Development.

Most of my relatives lacked confidence

*and wanted a teacher they
felt comfortable with*

Djedje Jeremiah was 'frightened' of teachers and of computers. He thought he was 'stupid'. Rowan convinced him to try.

Rowan aged 19 never finished high school. But he was able to help Jeremiah learn how to use a computer.

Jeremiah learned more quickly than anyone else

Jeremiah can read and write. But not having finished high school he thinks he cannot teach his children - he is not 'qualified'.

So his children don't even know the alphabet.

**We also taught the little kids so they could teach
the adults.**

Multi-generational teaching

Our first aid course included everyone, and took place in the eating area.

VISITORS

Colin Turnbull, famous anthropologist wrote,

**“For the hunter in his tiny close-knit society, kindness, generosity, consideration, affection, honesty...
are not virtues.**

**They are necessities for survival
(*The Mountain People*).**

***We targetted visitors that we thought
would ‘fit in’ - kind, thoughtful people who were concerned about
others and the environment.***

Birdwatching

In 1996-97 53 million American birdwatchers (27% of the adult population) spent \$US31 billion on that activity.

Re wildlife-watching ,70 million spent \$104 billion.

This resulted in \$3 billion in state and federal tax revenue (1.4% of the national economy) and supporting 766,000 jobs (US National Survey of Fishing, Hunting and Wildlife-associated Recreation).

That year \$81 billion was spent on new cars.

Most birdwatchers are older people, namely women (52% of American birdwatchers).

And birdwatchers/natural history enthusiasts visit remote areas where they often meet indigenous people (Central and South America; Africa).

These people also wish to visit Australia? Why?

Because Australian fauna is unique.

AUSTRALIA'S BIRDS



Many visitors wish to meet indigenous people. But they don't see them as cultural curiosities.

Rather these visitors wish to know them as fellow human beings.

Other suitable visitors are:

academics/tertiary students

families

older people/children

Many of these visitors drive themselves.

QUESTIONS for discussion

have you been involved in trying to facilitate indigenous involvement in tourism?

Have you considered including, or tried to include indigenous people or content into your tourism products?

If so what sort of challenges did you face? How can they be overcome?

Are there ways in which tourism can be changed to facilitate the entry of indigenous people?

How would you build trust with indigenous people?