

NGANIN NGANITJ BAAP LAKORRA MURRKAL DJA

Bat-Led Pathways to protect Lakorra Murrkal Dja | Dark Sky Country

Acknowledgement of Country & Traditional Custodians

Lola Budj-yea-bengadak Whadjuk Nyoongar Dja. Matnyu Beng-ordi-dhanang Whadjuk Nyoongar Dja.

We are here on Whadjuk Nyoongar Country, this is Whadjuk Nyoongar Country.

We honour and pay deep respect to this place, Walyalup, and to Whadjuk Nyoongar people.

We pay our respects to Ancestors, Elders past and those who continue to guide us, and all custodians/guardians of Country.

We acknowledge their continued connection and care for Lakorra Murrkal Dja, today, tomorrow and beyond the horizon.

Cultural Protocol & Cultural Sensitivity Considerations Disclaimer

Balyang, Wadawurrung Creation Being exists as Flying Fox in spirit form. Nganin Nganitj means *Bat in animal form. Balyang is recognised within some Kulin Nation communities as a gendered totemic species. I am currently guided by cultural protocol and the cultural authority of First Nations **men who are senior cultural knowledge holders/Elders in their respective communities. I am also guided by Wadawurrung male citizens who currently advise me on what I can share, including what I can hear, see, speak, and know about Balyang in a cultural context. As I go deeper and progress this research further, I will continue to be guided by Wadawurrung male citizens and my immediate family. I invite other First Nation people from Victorian communities to represent, lead, inform, and guide certain cultural aspects of this research. My wish is to respectfully walk alongside and support First Nations People to protect intangible cultural heritage, all bat species and, most importantly, the protection of our Dark Skies.



Image: Nganin Nganitj baap Lakorra Murrkal Dja Kelly Ann Blake, 2025

1. Balyang law/lore keeper and protector of the Night Sky

Balyang (Grey headed Flying Fox-Pteropus poliocephalus) is brother to great creator being, Bunjil | Wedge-tailed Eagle. Bunjil created Wadawurrung Dja | Country, including Warre | sea, Yaluks/Baluks | rivers/waterways, Barre | mountains, animal/plant kin and people. Bunjil handed down cultural laws/lores, protocol and responsibilities on how to care for Country.

In Wadawurrung teachings it was Balyang who created the first Wadawurrung woman. He flapped his great wings to beat up clay from a riverbed. Balyang formed the clay to create the first Wadawurrung woman who was a Waa | crow woman. Waa woman was created for the first Wadawurrung man, a Bunjil | Eagle man and in doing so, crow and eagle moieties were formed. Balyang carried responsibility to protect Dark Sky Country and all waterways and rivers of Wadawurrung Country. Balyang protected and maintained law over both sky and water, as they are mirrors of each other.

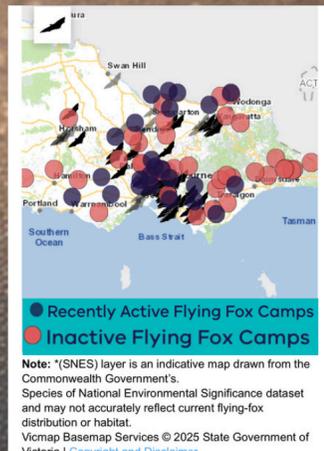
Balyang is related to Waa, (Australian Black Raven) who is law/lore keeper of the low skies. Bunjil is our great creator being, creator of all. Eagle in animal form is known as Lok Lok, he is the protector of the high skies, and it is Balyang who protects and cares for Wadawurrung dark or night skies, Lakorra Murrkal Dja | Dark Sky Country. Balyang is represented as the star Alpha Scorpii (Antares).



Grey-headed Flying-foxes roosting at Yarra Bend, Wurundjeri Country. Photo: Doug Gimesy

Right: Vicmap Image Source: www.Wildlife.vic.gov.au

Accessed: October, 2025



Note: (SNES) layer is an indicative map drawn from the Commonwealth Government's Species of National Environmental Significance dataset and may not accurately reflect current flying-fox distribution or habitat. Vicmap Basemap Services © 2025 State Government of Victoria | www.wildlife.vic.gov.au/our-wildlife/flying-foxes/victoria-flying-fox-camps

3. Archaeological Science and Perspectives

Archaeological evidence can help us understand how orientation of sites/memory places may reflect observation of stars, celestial cycles, significance of horizons and sky views both during the day and night. This evidence should also recognise tangible, intangible and living cultural heritage values.

By combining archaeological evidence and perspectives with Indigenous ontologies, together they can identify, and analyse elements of Sky Country, including Bat and animal connections. Interweaving these sciences can deepen understandings and cultural connections between sky and land, and identify culturally significant memory places connected with Dark Sky knowledge and cultural values.

By identifying sky-related sites (ceremonial sites, stone arrangements, and mounds) we can further understand Sky Country knowledge more broadly and in Wadawurrung language and other First Nations living languages to further synthesise contextual understandings of Lakorra Murrkal Dja | Dark Sky Country.

2. Traditional Ecological Knowledge/Biocultural Values

- Country is our teacher and everything is Country. Nganin Nganitj | Bat reminds us that protecting living skiescapes and knowledge is just as important as protecting our living landscapes and knowledge. Sky is a mirror of land and sea.
- Since colonisation some of our sky knowledge has become disjointed, and now it is time for us to look up, gaze into the mirror above us, to re-connect 'the dots' or rather the stars and sky knowledge. Just as sky knowledge has been impacted, so have our view of skies, our horizons, and in particular, Dark Sky Country, which has been central to our ways of knowing, doing and being.
- Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK) represents both cultural, biodiversity ecological knowledge and values. We can embed TEK to read, observe seasonal indicators both during day, and night. Nganin Nganitj | Bat, as a teacher, can guide us on how animal connections/Traditional Ecological Knowledge/biocultural values can protect Dark Sky Country when interwoven with western archaeological evidence.



Image: Dja Dja Wurrung Country, Kelly Ann Blake, 2025

4. Protection of Lakorra Murrkal Dja | Dark Sky Country

- Through two-way learning and seeing using First Nation's traditional ecological knowledge and perspectives, complemented by western archaeological evidence and perspectives, there are opportunities to act now to protect Dark Sky Country.
- By understanding the cultural significance of Balyang, Nganin Nganitj | Bat and Wadawurrung relationships with and to Dark Sky Country, together we can build strong awareness around biocultural, tangible, intangible, and living cultural heritage values and associations to protect Dark Sky Country, including horizons, skylines, and memory places.
- First Nations knowledge, archaeology, cultural astronomy values, associations, and teachings provide insights into how to look after, heal, care for, respect, and protect Wadawurrung Sky Country. By Koling Wada Ngitj | Walking Together, to undertake research which creates awareness of the negative impacts of light pollution. This research will demonstrate the need for sustainable lighting considerations and the development of stronger artificial lighting policies across local, state and national government to minimise impacts on Dark Sky Country and nocturnal life.
- Dark Sky Country needs protection and wider recognition as being a living skyscape for the sake of animal/plant kin, all people and all future generations. Through the teachings of Balyang and Nganin Nganitj, under a blanket of stars, we look up and appreciate how lucky we are to experience deep connection with Dark Sky Country in our lifetime.

ICIP Note: The information in this poster in no way represents views, values, or knowledge of the wider Wadawurrung community, and or Wadawurrung Traditional Owners Aboriginal Corporation or other Aboriginal Corporations or communities and should not be interpreted as the collective Wadawurrung voice nor Wadawurrung Traditional Owners Aboriginal Corporation voice. Information and views contained in this poster which are not in the public domain are my own or are shared amongst my immediate family members. I do not speak for other Wadawurrung people or any other Aboriginal person or their mob, including communities who are part of the Kulin Nation. As a Wadawurrung woman, I journey through this research project guided by my immediate family, several senior knowledge holders/Elders who have cultural authority to ensure on my own using my cultural lens that is unique to me and my interpretations and perspectives. Kelly Ann Blake, 2025

Kelly Ann Blake, Wadawurrung Woman, Dingo Spirit, Independent Researcher | Honorary Research Fellow, La Trobe University; Anie Skinner, Wadawurrung Person, Language & Cultural Wisdom Carrier

*Bat in general context
**Men includes First Nations people who identify as male