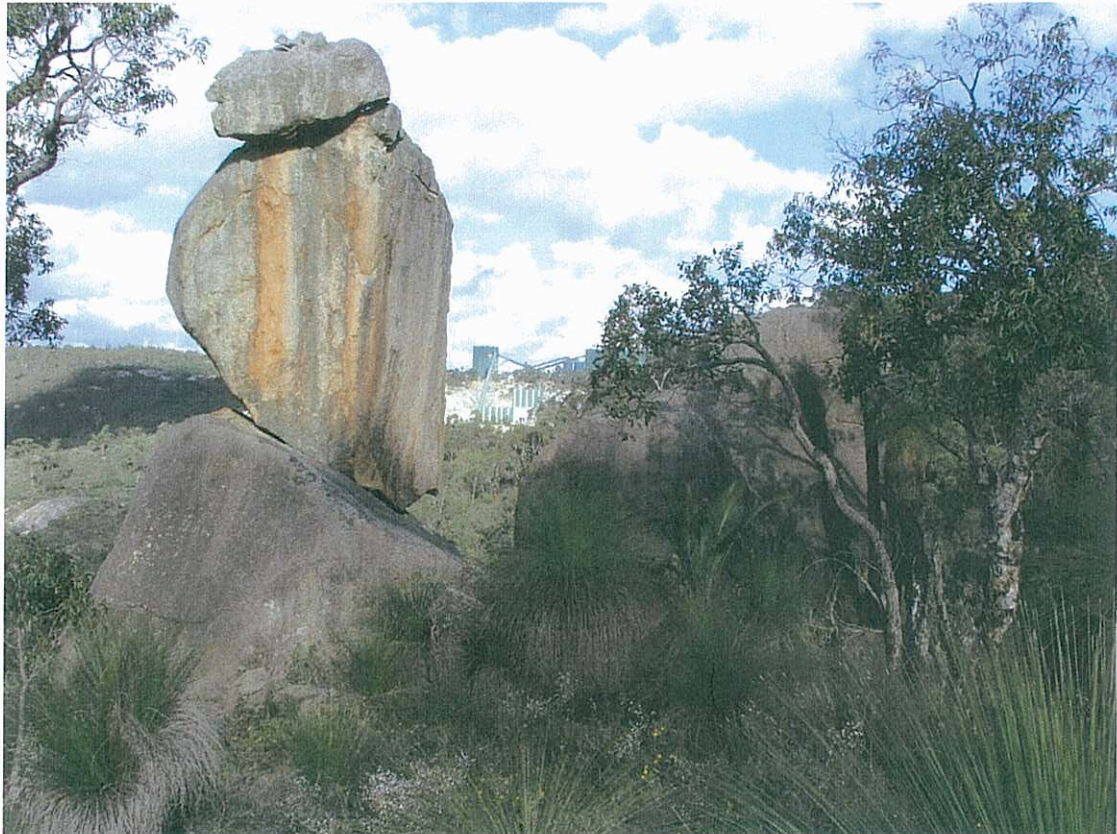


**REPORT ON ABORIGINAL CONSULTATIONS AND SITE INVESTIGATION  
OF THE “OWL STONE” AT HANSON’S RED HILL QUARRY, LOT 11,  
TOODYAY ROAD,  
CITY OF SWAN**



**PREPARED FOR  
THE COMBINED SWAN RIVER AND SWAN COASTAL PLAINS AND  
DARLING RANGES NYUNGAR ELDERS, NATIVE TITLE HOLDERS AND  
TRADITIONAL OWNERS**

**ON BEHALF OF ALL NYUNGAR AND ABORIGINAL PEOPLE**

**BY**

**KEN MACINTYRE & DR BARBARA DOBSON  
CONSULTING ANTHROPOLOGISTS**

**MARCH 2009**

## **DISCLAIMER**

The purpose of this survey was to investigate and record the prominent standing stone located at Hanson's Red Hill Quarry, Lot 11, Toodyay Road. The Nyungar Elders and Traditional Owners who recorded the "owl stone" (*Boyay Gogomat*) reported it to be a site of high spiritual and cultural significance to them.

As Aboriginal perceptions of sites and their boundaries are dynamic and variable, dimensions and degrees of significance may vary from person to person, from group to group and from one occasion to another according to time, circumstance and other independent variables.

The authors of this report are not responsible for any omissions or contradictions which may come about as a result of (i) a change in individual or community opinion or attitudes or (ii) new information that was not available at the time of this research.

**REPORT ON ABORIGINAL CONSULTATIONS AND SITE VISIT TO  
THE “OWL STONE” AT HANSON’S RED HILL QUARRY, LOT 11, TOODYAY  
ROAD, CITY OF SWAN**

**ABSTRACT**

Consulting anthropologists Ken Macintyre and Dr Barbara Dobson were invited by members of the Combined Swan River and Swan Coastal Plains and Darling Ranges Nyungar Elders, Native Title Holders and Traditional Owners (CSR & SCP) to investigate and record a prominent standing stone (“owl stone”) on Hanson’s Lot 11 as the Elders were concerned that this was of cultural significance to them and had not been recorded at the Department of Indigenous Affairs (DIA). The Elders asked the anthropologists Ken Macintyre and Dr Barbara Dobson to assist them to record the ‘standing stone’ site to ensure its protection under the Aboriginal Heritage Act 1972.

This site investigation was undertaken on 16<sup>th</sup> October 2008 in the company of senior Elders Albert Corunna, Greg Garlett and Bella Bropho (on behalf of Robert Bropho). Richard Wilkes, who was unable to attend the site visit, was consulted by telephone. Others present at the site investigation were Arpad Kalotas (Regional Officer, DIA, Midland); Margaret Jeffery (Recorder for the Swan Valley Nyungah Community); Cliff Kelly (Red Hill Quarry Manager) and Hans Georgi (Quarry Foreman) from Hanson Construction Materials Pty Ltd (referred to as “Hanson’s” in this paper) and consulting anthropologists Ken Macintyre and Dr Barbara Dobson.

It should be highlighted that neither the anthropologists nor the Nyungar Elders and Traditional Owners received any remuneration for their services either from the company (Hanson Construction Materials Pty Ltd.) or from any other source. The site visit and recording was conducted voluntarily in order to ensure that the site was properly recorded and protected from quarrying and blasting activities.

The investigation conducted by Macintyre and Dobson in the company of the Nyungar Elders and Traditional Owners was not an ethnographic field survey *per se* but rather a visitation to a specific site on Lot 11 comprising a prominent standing stone (“owl stone” which featured three remarkably balanced stones), which the senior Elders wanted recorded as a place of cultural significance.

As a result of these consultations, site visit and archival research, it was concluded that the prominent “owl stone” at Hanson’s Lot 11, Toodyay Road, known to the Elders as *Boyay Gogomat*, was of high cultural and spiritual significance to them.

The standing stone was perceived to be a symbolic representation of the ancestral hawk owl, probably the Southern Boobook Owl (*Ninox novaeseelandiae*). The Nyungar Elders and Traditional Owners believed that this ancient “owl stone” was a culturally important, spiritual and totemic site which must be respected and protected at all times, or else it could be dangerous. (See under 5.0 Conclusion and 6.0 Recommendations).

It should be highlighted that *only* the standing stone (“owl stone”) was investigated by the anthropologists. No other sites were visited or investigated. It is possible that other sites of potential Aboriginal significance may be located within Hanson’s Lot 11.

The anthropologists strongly recommend that a thorough Aboriginal heritage survey be conducted over the entire area of Lot 11 to ensure that if any other sites of significance exist, that these are recorded in accordance with the Act.

*For information on the significance of owls and other night birds in traditional and contemporary Nyungar culture, see Appendix 9.8. This research paper provides an overall context and insight into the nature and complexity of Nyungar views on owls and may help the reader to better understand the occurrence and significance of “owl stones” in Nyungar culture.*

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## PROLOGUE

*‘Aboriginal culture and tradition is inseparable from the land. When land and its natural features are destroyed, a large part of Aboriginal history and culture is destroyed. The reality is that not only are Aboriginal people losing their physical space but they are losing the physical manifestations of their history, culture and identity - and they have no voice. Who can they appeal to?’ (Macintyre and Dobson 1999).*

### **CONTEMPORARY NYUNGAR VIEWS ON THE “OWL STONE”**

**(Based on consultations with Nyungar Elders/ Traditional Owners in Oct-Nov 2008)**

The Elders views are presented here verbatim in order to convey their true feelings and concerns about the “owl stone” site at Red Hill which they wanted recorded and registered at the Department of Indigenous Affairs as a site of spiritual and cultural significance to them.

*‘Why is it that the wadjela [white man] wants us to prove that our Ancestors lived on this land, had ceremonies and made this land live for thousands of years. We know their story – it’s written all over this land. You wadjelas can’t see it ‘cause all you can see is the money you’re going to make from our Spiritual Dreaming.’*

*‘It’s such a spiritual place to us. We don’t know how to explain it whitefella way, you just feel it all over your body and you know that ‘the old people’ are here.’*

*‘We knew before we saw it that there was something waiting for us. We could feel it.’*

*‘The Standing Stone has been there since the beginning of time.’*

*‘I am part of the Spiritual Dreaming when it begun.’*

*‘This place is important to us. You can feel it all around. We knew it was here because we saw the engravings over there at Boral’s. They were pointing over here. We knew it was pointing to something really important.’*

*‘There will be other “pointers” all up the valley to mark the way for the ‘old fellas’ coming down from the east. All along the old trails there would be markers for this one and other places of importance along the way.’*

*'When I first saw the stones, it felt like I had found something which had been lost. It was like I had found a piece of a jigsaw that had been missing. You know the feeling you get when you find something that once belonged to you.'*

*'This is a very important site to our ancestors here. You can feel 'the old people' walking around here.'*

*'It's like an older brother, this stone. It will not harm you but will protect you from danger as long as you respect him. I feel really calm here.'*

*'These old sites are not lost. They're being looked after by 'the old people' [ancestors] who have been waiting for us to come and take over from them. If I close my eyes, I can see 'the old people' sitting down smiling at us, happy that we're here.'*

*'You gotta record this place for the Nyungar people. It's a big place for heritage and culture.'*

*'That old owl is sitting there watching everything. That bird can see a long way and knows everything that happens.'*

*'That owl has been there for thousands of years and now it's just sitting there everyday watching the quarry getting closer and closer.'*

*'If there is blasting or machine movements anywhere near there the vibrations of that Ground could unsettle what Nature has allowed to stand there all these years since the Beginning of Time.'*

*'The underground vibrations of when they started blasting could unsettle the Stone standing there. It could fall and be destroyed forever.'*

*'The standing stone is not like a seed of a plant or a tree that you could replant. It must be protected.'*

*'Our sacred sites have been there forever. What gives a white man the right to destroy something so old and sacred.'*

*'That old owl is a living stone to us. We can feel its spirit giving life.'*

*'Can't you feel the sacredness of that stone. You don't need to touch it; just being near it is enough.'*

*'That stone is so spiritual that it talks to me in my sleep.'*

*'Whitefellas have destroyed our Bible and now they want to crush the last stone of our cathedral.'*



## **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

### **1.1 Background to site visit**

Consulting anthropologists Ken Macintyre and Dr Barbara Dobson were invited by members of the Combined Swan River and Swan Coastal Plains and Darling Ranges Nyungar Elders, Native Title Holders and Traditional Owners (referred to subsequently in this report as “the Nyungar Elders and Traditional Owners” or for brevity purposes simply abbreviated to “the Elders”) to accompany them to investigate and record the remarkable standing stone at Hanson’s Red Hill quarry project area (Lot 11, Toodyay Road, City of Swan) which they believed to be of cultural significance to them, and which had not been previously recorded.

This site investigation of the standing stone was undertaken by anthropologists Macintyre and Dobson on 16<sup>th</sup> October 2008 in the company of Nyungar Elders and Traditional Owners for the Perth and Darling Range region; together with a Department of Indigenous Affairs (DIA) representative Arpard Kalotas, and Hanson’s Red Hill Quarry representatives Mr Cliff Kelly (Quarry Manager) and Hans Georgi (Quarry foreman).

It should be highlighted that neither the anthropologists nor the Nyungar Elders and Traditional Owners received any remuneration for their services either from the company (Hanson) or from any other source. The site visit and recording was conducted voluntarily in order to ensure that the standing stone site was properly recorded and protected from quarrying and blasting activities. No other sites within Lot 11 were visited or recorded by Macintyre and Dobson owing to the fact that this was not an ethnographic field survey *per se* but rather a visitation to a specific site comprising a prominent standing stone (“owl stone”) which the Elders wanted recorded as a place of cultural and spiritual significance to them.

For some years the Elders had been corresponding with the DIA, City of Swan and other authorities requesting that they be involved in a proper Aboriginal heritage survey of Hanson’s current and proposed quarry expansion areas to ensure that no sites of

significance to them are impacted by the quarrying and blasting activities. However, despite the Elders continued efforts, no ethnographic survey was arranged, so out of concern for the site, they asked anthropologists Macintyre and Dobson to assist them to record the prominent balancing stone known to them as *Boyay Gogomat* or “owl stone.”

## **1.2 Acknowledgements**

We would like to acknowledge the assistance of Hanson Construction Materials Pty Ltd representatives, Mr Cliff Kelly (Quarry Manager, Red Hill) and Hans Georgi (Quarry Foreman, Red Hill) for accompanying and guiding the site investigation team to the “owl stone” to enable it to be photographed and recorded.

We would like to acknowledge the assistance provided by the following members of the Combined Swan River and Swan Coastal Plains and Darling Ranges Nyungar Elders and Native Title Holders and Traditional Owners (CSR & SCP), namely, senior Elders Albert Corunna, Greg Garlett, Bella Bropho and Richard Wilkes for showing the researchers the “owl stone” site and sharing their personal views on the significance of owls and “owl stones” in Nyungar culture.

Finally, we would like to thank Birds Australia for the photographic images of birds provided by arrangement with Birds Australia Western Australia. A special thanks to the photographers Rod Smith, Tony Brown, Victoria Bilney and Debbie Walker, members of Birds Australia, for their photos of boobook owls and tawny frogmouths used to illustrate our text.

## **1.3 Methodology**

The site investigation and recording process involved seven phases:

- (i) A pre-site meeting at Hanson’s office (Red Hill quarry) with Nyungar Elders, Native Title Holders and Traditional Owners for the Perth and Darling Range

area in the presence of Arpad Kalotas (Regional Officer, Department of Indigenous Affairs, Midland); two representatives from Hanson Construction Materials Pty Ltd, Cliff Kelly (Quarry Manager) and Hans Georgi (Quarry Foreman), and consulting anthropologists Ken Macintyre and Dr Barbara Dobson from Macintyre Dobson and Associates Pty Ltd.

- (ii) site visit and investigation of ‘the standing stone’
- (iii) a post-site meeting at Hanson’s office to inspect Company maps in order to precisely locate ‘the standing stone’ in relation to current and proposed works;
- (iv) historical research relating to the upper Susannah Brook area
- (v) ethnohistorical research on the significance of owls in Nyungar culture,
- (vi) subsequent consultations with the Nyungar Elders to collect further information on owls and owl stones in Nyungar culture,
- (vii) recording the site in accordance with the requirements of the Aboriginal Heritage Act 1972.

The site recording forms complete with photos and attachments were lodged by anthropologists Macintyre and Dobson with the Department of Indigenous Affairs on 3rd December 2008. The site was officially listed on the DIA sites register on 4<sup>th</sup> December 2008 as site ID 26057 known as the Ancestral Owl Stone (Ceremonial, Mythological).

However, on 23<sup>rd</sup> December 2008 the (internal) DIA Site Assessment Group for some reason determined that the status of the “ancestral owl stone” site was IR meaning “insufficient information”, despite 10 pages of text and photos provided to DIA together with the “owl stone” site recording form. According to recent advice from the DIA, this IR classification means that the status of the site is “in limbo”, meaning that it is not currently recognised as a site, nor is it ‘not a site’, nor is it recommended to the ACMC that this site be listed on the permanent register (PR).

For what reason the Site Assessment Group has assigned this important site to the status of IR (Insufficient Information), and not to the PR (Permanent Register) in view of its mythological, ceremonial, totemic and spiritual significance to Nyungar Elders is unclear. It is also unclear why the DIA did not notify the anthropologists Macintyre and Dobson or the Nyungar Elders who assisted in the site recording to (i) advise them about the site's "Insufficient Information" classification, or (ii) to ask for further information about the site. It was made clear in the site recording papers that a full report was being prepared by Macintyre and Dobson for the Nyungar Elders on the cultural significance of this "owl stone" site.

According to the Aboriginal Heritage Inquiry System:

"Sites lodged with the Department are assessed under the direction of the Registrar of Aboriginal Sites. These are not to be considered the final assessment. Final assessment will be determined by the Aboriginal Cultural Material Committee (ACMC)."

The IR status of the Owl Stone Site is of great concern to the Nyungar Elders and Traditional Owners to whom this site holds a deep spiritual significance. In view of the site's vulnerable location within Hanson's proposed hard rock quarrying and blasting project area, it is hoped that this report provides "sufficient information" for the site to be added to the permanent register at DIA.

## **2.0 “OWL STONE” (RED HILL/ UPPER SUSANNAH BROOK)**

### **2.1. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND**

There appears to be scant historical documentation relating to (what was once considered to be) the upper reaches of the Susannah Brook and the surrounding hill country in which the “owl stone” is located (see Figure 1 and Plate 4). Most historical information that is available on the river focuses on the lower reaches, extending from the base of the Darling Scarp to its confluence with the Swan River, where the rich alluvial soils were highly prized by the early settlers for agriculture and were among the first land grants taken up in the Swan River colony.

Archival research shows that the Susannah Brook first appeared as the “Susannah River” in an “eye sketch” map by J.S. Roe (Surveyor-general) in 1829 when the Swan River Colony was first founded.<sup>1</sup> As early as 1827 Captain James Stirling and the New South Wales colonial botanist Charles Fraser explored the lower reaches of this river near to its confluence with the Swan River (Statham 2003: 76). Owing to the fact that the Susannah River was located mostly on Colonel Latour’s property (Swan Location 6), its alternative name in the 1830’s was Latour’s Brook.<sup>2</sup>

Moore refers to Latour’s Brook as transecting his own grant at Swan Location 5a. He notes: ‘I find that the brook called Latour’s brook or Susannah river crosses my grant twice.’ (Moore 16<sup>th</sup> April 1833 in Cameron 2006: 221).

Moore (1832) describes his disappointment on discovering that the valley from which the Susannah river issues from the hills does not appear to fall within his grant:

‘I cleared with my own hands (and a good American axe) eleven hundred yards of a vista through the bush to my lower boundary line. I was in great hopes that a valley from which the Susannah river (Latour’s brook) issues from the hills was in my share but, on getting a view through the vista, fear that it is not. However, as the brook traverses my grant twice, it makes the whole land valuable. A sketch of it to shew situation and localities.’ (Moore 9<sup>th</sup> August 1832 in Cameron 2006: 138).]

Moore (3<sup>rd</sup> May 1832) describes his first walk into the Susannah river valley as follows:

‘Went direct to the hills behind my place to the opening of a valley which I had heard of where Col Latour’s brook (as it is called) issues from the hills. It is a beautiful picturesque valley or glen of no great extent. We traced it up about 3 miles when it spread into different branches or rather several branches united there. No one branch appeared to be of any great extent so we turned back without exploring further, but in this we may be mistaken. These vallies frequently contract in some places & expand again in others more than you would expect; so I shall make another exploration at some other time. In some places the sides were very precipitous, formed of great masses and fragments of granite and whinstone – water in pools in some places but I do not think there would be water throughout the summer in any place I saw, though the water is running now in some places. ... We saw the old huts of several natives, 11 in one place, 7 in another – bones, feathers and fur strewed all about.’ (Moore 1832 in Cameron 2006: 113)

Moore’s work provides the earliest historical reference to Aboriginal habitation in the upper reaches of the Susannah River valley. This is relevant as, to our knowledge, it is the only documented evidence. From Moore’s description, the large number of huts observed would suggest that some important social and/or ceremonial activities had taken place prior to his arrival. If this were the case, an area in close proximity to this habitation must necessarily have had some mythological significance and for such ceremonial occasions to take place, there must have been a plentiful supply of food and fresh water to sustain the large group (or groups) at this time of the year.

There is no reference in the general ethno-historical or anthropological literature to the Nyungar name for what is now known as the Susannah Brook. However, recently acquired information by Macintyre and Dobson (2008) reveals an interesting discovery - that the original Nyungar name for the head of Susannah Brook (that is, the ‘head’ as located in 1836) and the surrounding hill country was *Goolgoil* - which based on our research may be translated as ‘owl.’<sup>3</sup> (see Appendix 9.1).

Drummond’s (1836, 1839) *goolgoil* may be viewed as a different phonetic rendering of Moore’s (1835, 1836) *gogo* (or *gurgur*, *goorgoor*) which is the Nyungar onomatopoeic name for the owl, most probably the Southern Boobook (*Ninox novaeseelandiae*).<sup>4</sup> The question of whether the upper part of the brook and surrounding hill country which is

traditionally known as *Goolgoil* traditionally derived its name from its association with *Gogomat*, the powerful ancestral owl who is believed to have metamorphosed into stone at *Boyay Gogomat* on the hillside overlooking the Susannah Brook, can only be conjectured.

The whole extent of the Susannah Brook watercourse, *excluding* its tributaries, is a registered Aboriginal heritage site (ID 640) with mythological and cultural significance. It is listed on the permanent sites register at the Department of Indigenous Affairs. However, during post-survey consultations regarding the “owl stone” the senior most Elder pointed out to Macintyre and Dobson that the tributaries of the Susannah Brook are also of cultural significance to Nyungars. He stated:

*‘All the feeders into the brook are part of the river system and the Waugal was the one who created them all. I can’t understand how the Sites Department can make that brook a site but not its feeders. Without the feeders there would be no brook. The Waugal visits all of them – that’s his run’*

McDonald Hales and Associates (1990) recorded a site known as ‘the Susannah Brook Waugal’ (site ID 3656) which is a pool located in the Susannah Brook, said to be located just outside and west of Lot 11. However, for some unknown reason the details of this site (including the site coordinates, site boundaries and associated map) are classified by the Department of Indigenous Affairs (DIA) as “closed,” hence the information is restricted and cannot be accessed without permission from the original recorders.

Without access to these site coordinates and further field investigations with the Nyungar Elders and Traditional Owners, it is impossible to ascertain whether this Waugal pool site (ID 3656) is one of the ‘fine springs of water at the foot of the hills at *Goolgoil...*’ referred to by Drummond (1836) (see Appendix 9.1) and/or whether ID 3656 is one of the pools referred to by Moore (1832 in Cameron 2006: 113) when he walked about 3 miles up the Susannah Brook Valley to what he thought were the headwaters.

Drummond (1839) refers to the “watering place” known as *Goolgoil* as being located to the west of the hill through which the (old) Toodyay Road passes. When this information is added to his 1836 description of *Goolgoil* as being located at the head of the Susannah Brook (including the adjacent hill country) and Moore’s observation of pools when he journeyed 3 miles journey upriver to what he considered to be the headwaters of the brook, this would appear to locate Goolgoil within or in close proximity to Hanson’s Lot 11. It should be pointed out that as with many traditional Nyungar place names these often denoted a locale consisting of several related topographic features rather than a single specific feature. This helps to explain why adjacent hills, ridges and water sources sometimes were known by the same name. It may be conjectured that the powerful “owl stone” which marks an important site along the “track” (*mat*) of *Gogomat*, the Ancestral Owl Being, gave its name to the locale.

It is possible that the Susannah Brook Waugal site (ID 3656) is one of the pools referred to by Moore (1832) and/or one of the springs referred to by Drummond (1836) and may fall within the stretch of the upper Susannah Brook Valley known traditionally as *Goolgoil* which included a known “watering place” (1839) to Aborigines. These sites may also have been connected to the “owl stone” site overlooking the Susannah Brook.

Macintyre and Dobson (1993, field notes relating to the Pinjarra-Murray region) recorded part of a myth from a Nyungar Elder who stated that there is a close relationship between the mopoke (what he called *Gambigur*) and the carpet snake (*Wakaal*). The story, according to the informant, related to the custom of sharing meat, for the *Wakaal* and the owl were like brothers. They both hunted at night and would share their meat with one another. However, one night the mopoke was unsuccessful and did not catch anything, so he went to the carpet snake’s camp and saw him finishing off the last of the meat (*dadja*) which he had caught. The mopoke became very angry at the *Wakaal* for not sharing his food and attacked him with his club. They fought all night until daybreak. The mopoke became blinded by the sunlight and at this time the *Wakaal* escaped into the river and sank to the bottom creating a large pool. The mopoke flew onto a large tree overlooking the pool, waiting for the *Wakaal* to come out. However, the *Wakaal* never



came out but made tributaries up and down the river to enable it to move around in search of meat.

The Nyungar informant only knew this small fragment of the story and did not know which part of the country the story originated from. He said he had heard ‘old people’ talking when he was a child.

During post survey consultations to review the draft report, we were informed by the Nyungar Elders that this myth of the owl and the Waugal was known to them and could have application to the Red Hill area as it does to other parts of Nyungar country. They stated that such stories did not necessarily apply only to one place but were a recurring theme in southwestern Australia.

Interestingly, Bates (in White 1985: 219) identifies “the owl or mopoke” together with the *Woggal* and the eaglehawk as the three most supreme, almost deity-like, mythological Ancestral Beings in Nyungar religion. She states:

‘The Perth natives believed that the mopoke had power to punish them if they broke certain native laws. He was said to have changed the eaglehawk, the crow, the white cockatoo and the emu into men and women.’

These powers attributed to the ancestral owl are indeed significant. They not only help to explain the significance of the “owl stone” at Red Hill as symbolizing a highly significant totemic being in Nyungar religion, but they may also help to explain why the Owl/*Waugal* story is said by contemporary Nyungar Elders to recur throughout the south west region. The owl is an iconic totemic being which features strongly, not only in Nyungar culture, but also in the foundation myths of other Aboriginal cultures.<sup>9,10</sup>

Just as the Waugal “can be controlled by certain medicine men” (Bates in White 1985: 219), so too can the owl or mopoke, which, as shown in this report, is often associated with the powerful *bulya* men (sorcerers) as their “assistant totems” (see Appendix 9.84).

Thus, the *Waugal* and the *mopoke* not only represent the highest echelons of Nyungar totemic mythology, but both are powerful creators, healers and destroyers, and it is for this reason that their ancestral and “living” spirit beings must be protected at all times. They are both arbiters of life and death, and mete out punishment to those who violate customary law.

Both are associated with sacred *winnaitch* areas which require the performance of certain ritual ceremonies (such as the strewing of rushes in accordance with tradition) to avoid harmful consequences to those passing by. Bates collected numerous anecdotes relating to this ritual, most notably in places associated with the mythical *Waugal*:

‘the power of the sacred snake to punish those who transgress its rules at various places. In consequence these places were either strictly avoided or a special propitiatory offering was made by those who camped or hunted nearby (in White 1985: 220).

Similar ritual propitiations applied to the owl stone (*Gogomat*). George Fletcher Moore (1835) observed his Aboriginal guides conducting with utmost seriousness and ceremony the respectful ritual of strewing *Xanthorrhoea* leaves around the base of the stone at *Boyay Gogomat* in the Lower Chittering. Similar rituals were (and still are) carried out by contemporary senior Nyungar Elders and Traditional Owners when visiting the “owl stone” at Red Hill in keeping with how they carry out customary rituals associated with such sacred places.

Both the *Waugal* and the Owl (*Gogomat*) were important guardian spirits associated with *winnaitch* areas. Is it a coincidence that both of these supreme Totemic Beings are to be found in close proximity to one another at Red Hill?

According to O’Connor, Bodney and Little (1985: 106) the whole of the Red Hill area is considered *winnaitch*:

‘The entire Red Hill region is a *winnaitch* area: avoided in traditional times because of the existence there of *Wurdaatji* [also *Wudjaardi*], spirits who live in the jarrah forests and who assume a small human-like form and can be dangerous to humans if aroused. Although Aboriginal woodcutters worked right through the area in historical times, they were people of the coastal plains and earned their living under constant fear of the

Wurdaatji...[these fears] are understandable and very real. The researchers were told by a number of sometime-woodcutters of humans and dogs being subjected to constant surveillance by Wurdaatji; of dogs being killed at night; and of woodcutters' camps being subjected to barrages of abuse, stones and even large rocks at night.'

The stories related here by O'Connor, Bodney and Little (1985) which regard the whole of the Red Hill area as *winnaitch* and perceived to be associated with *woodatji* (or *woodarchi*, *wurdaatji*) and other malevolent spirits is indeed significant from an anthropological viewpoint. It was not uncommon for Aboriginal groups who had resources and/or sacred totemic places to protect, to generate stories and symbols to keep outsiders away.

Even natural symbols such as the owl stone would have generated fear to those who did not understand the local rituals and ceremonies for the place. In this context, the term *winnaitch* does not only refer to the dread of *woodarchi* and dangerous spirits, but in traditional times also indicated a place of high totemic significance and sacredness - an area to be avoided by outsiders and the uninitiated. The *woodarchi* and other malevolent spirits were indeed protectors of such places and served to keep strangers out.

The term *winnaitch*, as applied to the Red Hill area, has in some contexts been misinterpreted by anthropologists to mean total avoidance, implying that people avoided the place out of fear of malevolent supernatural agents. This may have indeed been the case for the coastal lowlanders who, when travelling or working in the area, viewed it with the utmost fear (as noted above by O'Connor et al. 1985). However, to those people who owned, belonged to and inhabited the hill country (referred to by the coastal lowlanders as *Boyangoorra* which literally means "stone camps" or "Hill people" (see Tommy Bimbar 1916), the *woodarchi* and *winnaitch* constituted an effective social and territorial control mechanism to keep intruders away from their sacred sites (totemic, ceremonial, ritual and mythological) as well as their habitational, stone and ochre quarry places.

It was believed that people who did not respect these *winnaitch* areas, and who did not perform the proper rituals when passing, could die. It was for this reason that Moore's Aboriginal informants performed the special ritual at *Boyay Gogomat* in order to propitiate and respect the spirit guardian of the place, as this was a known *winnaitch* place.

It would be wrong to suggest that because the Red Hill region was regarded as *winnaitch* that it was totally avoided or uninhabited by Nyungar people. The idea of *terra nullius* does not apply. There is in fact archaeological evidence to suggest Aboriginal habitation and activity in the Darling Range, including such evidence in the general vicinity of the "owl stone" at Red Hill, where together with the presence of permanent and ephemeral sources of water (see O'Connor et al 1985: 108) and an obvious abundance of indigenous foods, and source materials for stone artefacts and ochre quarries, this could potentially be viewed as constituting a site complex at Red Hill/ Susannah Brook.

## **2.2 SITE LOCATION**

The prominent standing stone (referred to throughout this paper as the "owl stone") was visited and recorded by anthropologists Ken Macintyre and Dr Barbara Dobson in the company of Native Title Holders for the Perth Metropolitan and Darling Range region on 16<sup>th</sup> October 2008. The standing stone is located at Hanson's Red Hill Quarry Project Area within Lot 11, Toodyay Road, City of Swan.

To access the site, the recorders were met at Hanson's Site Office, Lot 11 Toodyay Road by the Red Hill Quarry Manager, Cliff Kelly and Quarry Foreman, Hans Georgi. From the site office the recorders proceeded in a convoy of 4 WD vehicles to a high ridge on the north-western edge of the pit. From here the team proceeded by foot downhill into the steep valley (of the Susannah Brook) and walked for some distance (approximately 250 metres?) to the standing stone. Although the stone structure was visible from a second ridge further down the hill, it was not identifiable as an "owl stone" at that point owing to the angle of viewing, direction and distance remaining to the stone.

The standing stone is located at MGA coordinates 412740mE 6478860mN (GDA datum 94) and is approximately 180 metres above sea level (see Figure 1 and Plates 1 & 4). According to Hanson's Red Hill Quarry Manager, the standing stone is situated approximately 170 metres north east of Control 5 (which is at 412501E 6478601N) and is located at RL 191.10 on Lot 11.

The anthropologists are still awaiting the arrival of a map from Hanson's Construction Materials Pty Ltd which will show the exact location of the site in relation to the current and proposed quarry pit extensions. This map will be forwarded to the Department of Indigenous Affairs and the Native Title Holders as soon as it is received. For the interim period, the location of the "owl stone" in relation to Hanson's quarry is shown on a satellite map downloaded from Google Earth (see Figure 1).

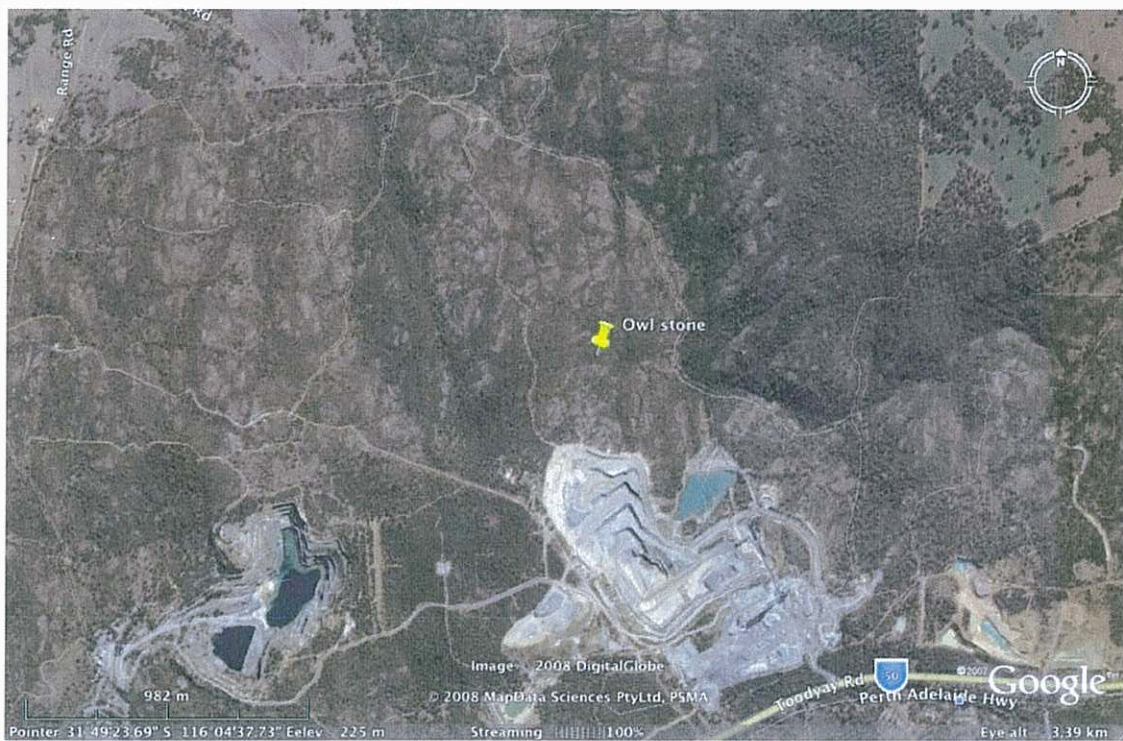


Figure 1 showing the approximate location of the "Owl Stone" in relation to the quarry (December 2008).

According to advice from one of the Elders, who was speaking to Hanson's quarry manager in late January 2009, the pit is currently only 280 metres from the "owl stone". This is of great concern to the Elders who have requested that a 250 metre boundary be established around the site. Originally a 200 metre boundary was proposed at the time of site registration; however, since then the Nyungar Elders and Traditional Owners have recommended a 250 metre boundary to protect the cultural integrity of the site, as there may be associated sites in the vicinity which have not yet been recorded. Until the Nyungar Elders and Traditional Owners have participated in a thorough Aboriginal heritage survey of Lot 11, and have been reassured that all potential sites of significance to them have been recorded, (and depending on the outcome of these surveys), the 250 metre radius boundary should be respected.

Although the Nyungar Elders who recorded the "owl stone" have bestowed upon it the name *Boyay Gogomat*, this name must not be confused with the *Boyay Gogomat* standing stone site visited and recorded by Moore in 1835 in the Lower Chittering area (see Appendix 9.2). None of the Nyungar Elders believed that Moore had visited this particular "owl stone" at Red Hill.

### **2.3 SITE DESCRIPTION**

The site consists of a prominent standing stone which is a natural feature composed of weathered granite, made up of three large, remarkably balanced stones (see Plates 1-4).

When viewed from a particular angle the standing stone is in the unmistakable shape of an owl (probably a Southern Boobook Owl, *Ninox novaeseelandia*) resting on a stone perch (see Plates 1-4). The owl appears to be facing north-north-west, although the basal stone is oriented in a north-east/south-west aspect (which according to the Quarry Foreman is the same alignment as the surrounding geological seams).

The "owl stone" is approximately 10 metres high and is resting at an angle (see Plate 2) atop a large basal stone which is also approximately 10 metres high (depending on the



angle from which the standing stone is viewed). In totality the standing stone is approximately 20 metres high (when viewed from the downhill eastern or south-eastern side) and has a commanding presence overlooking the Susannah Brook (see Plate 4) which is a registered site of Aboriginal significance (Site ID 640).

Underneath the standing stone is a small cavern with a blackened roof (possibly due to smoke) in which several pieces of charcoal and a shell were visible on the floor. One of the Elders observed shell fragments on the floor of a small rock shelter on the eastern side of the standing stone. He believed that these charcoal and shell materials may be of cultural significance. The shell and charcoal materials could not be assessed by the anthropologists as this is outside their scope of expertise, and should have been assessed by an archaeologist.

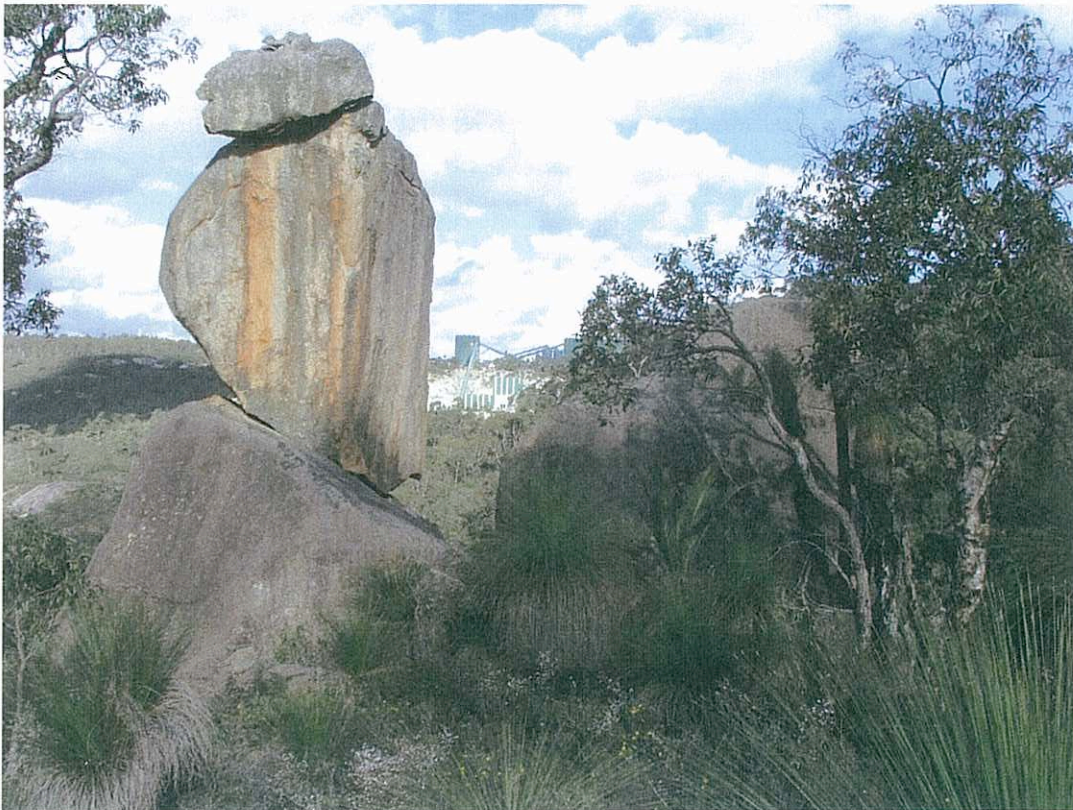


Plate 1: “Guardian Owl Stone” showing Hanson’s Red Hill quarry in background



Native vegetation observed in the immediate vicinity of the “owl stone” includes two prominent (and possibly quite old) *Kingia australis* (grass trees) which stand almost sentinel to the “owl stone” with *Xanthorrhoea preissii* (*balga*), *Macrozamia fraseri* (*djiridgee*), *Corymbia calophylla* (*marri*), *Banksia grandis* (*boolgalla*) which is a favoured source of *mungite*, nectar, *Haemodorum* sp. (with *bohn*-like edible roots) and *Thelymitra* sp. (sun orchids, with tubers known as *djubak*) nearby. All of these plants are regarded as providing food and/or medicine (or other resource materials) to Nyungar people.

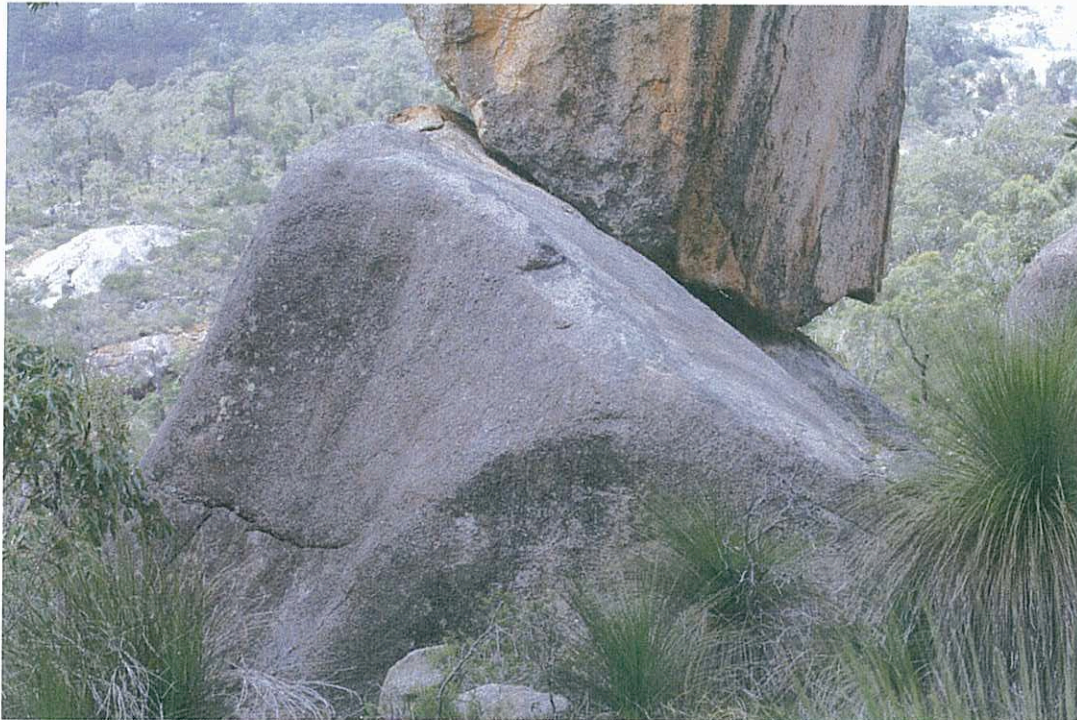


Plate 2: Standing Stone showing angle of balance of “owl stone” on basal stone (perch)



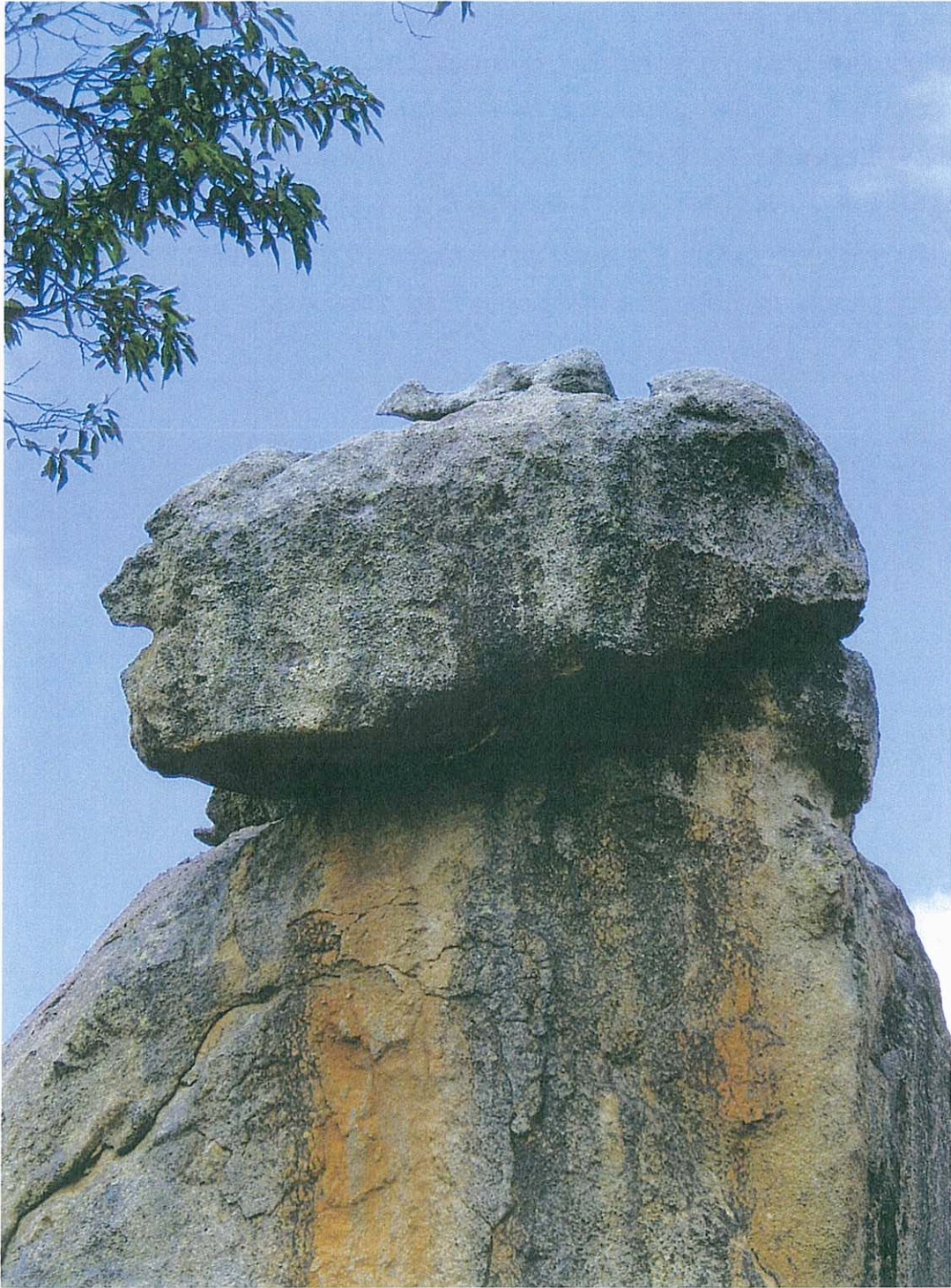


Plate 3: "Head" of "Owl Stone"





Plate 4: The “Guardian Owl Stone” with the Susannah Brook (site ID 640) in background

The “owl stone” is situated on the eastern side of the hill. It is located within the fork of an ephemeral tributary which drains into the Susannah Brook. This tributary (like all other tributaries of the Susannah Brook) is considered by the Nyungar Elders to be part of the previously recorded Susannah Brook (Waugal) site ID 640.



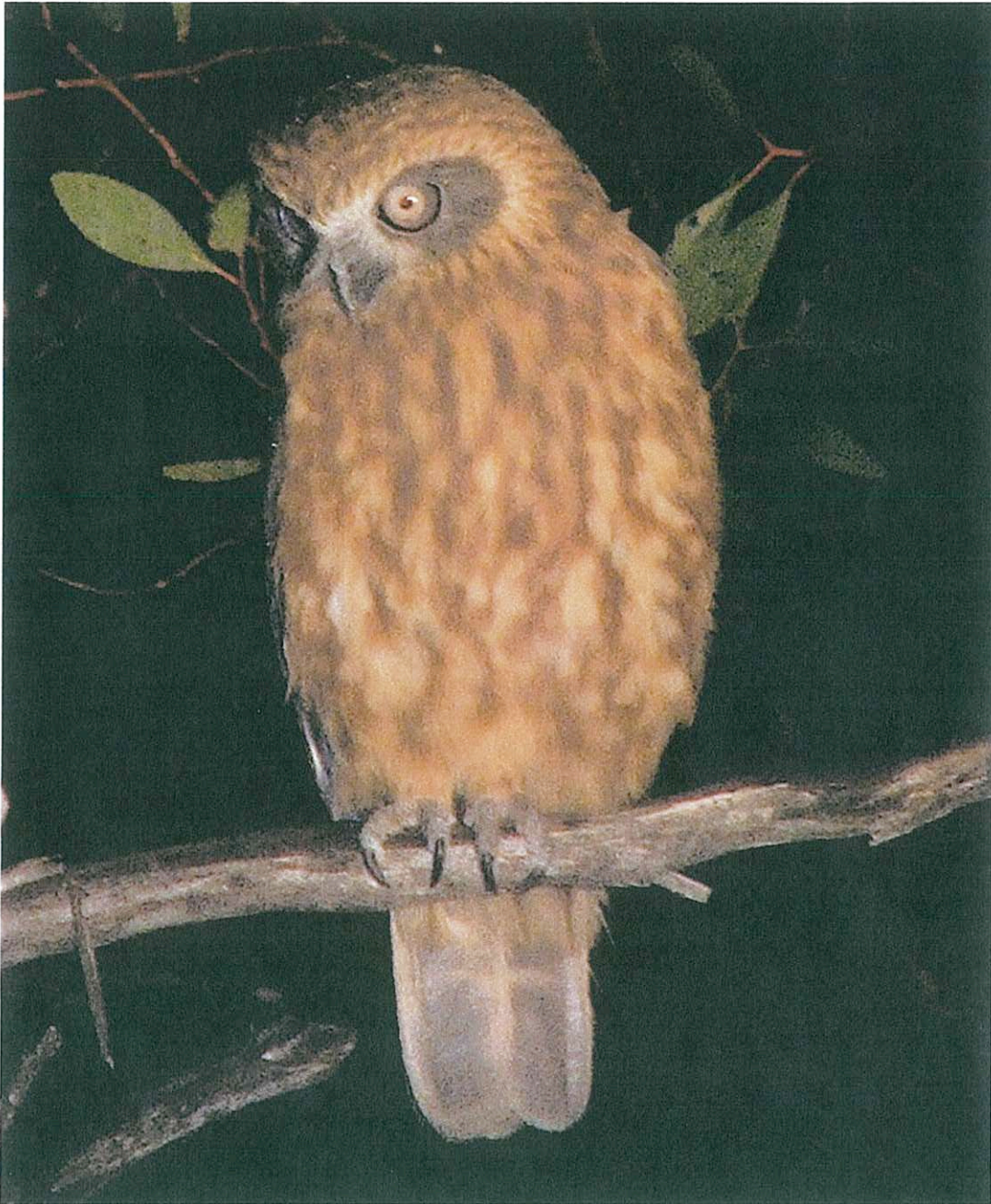


Plate 5: Southern Boobook Owl (*Ninox novaeseelandiae*). Photo by Victoria Bilney, member of Birds Australia.

## 2.4 SPIRITUAL SIGNIFICANCE

### 2.41 Contemporary Nyungar views

Some of the views expressed by the Elders with regards to the “owl stone” are recorded here verbatim:

*‘When I first saw the stones, it felt like I had found something which had been lost. It was like I had found a piece of a jigsaw that had been missing. You know the feeling you get when you find something that once belonged to you’.*

*‘This is a very important site to our ancestors here. You can feel ‘the old people’ walking around here.’*

*‘If I close my eyes, I can see ‘the old people’ sitting down smiling at us, happy that we’re here.’*

*‘You gotta record this place for the Nyungar people. It’s a big place for heritage and culture.’*

*‘Our sacred sites have been there forever. What gives a white man the right to destroy something so old and sacred.’*

*‘It’s such a spiritual place to us. We don’t know how to explain it whitefella way, you just feel it all over your body and you know that ‘the old people’ are here.’*

*‘We knew before we saw it that there was something waiting for us. We could feel it.’*

*‘The Standing Stone has been there since the beginning of time.’*

*‘I am part of the Spiritual Dreaming when it begun.’*

*‘You put up fences to keep us out but you did not take away our Dreaming. It is still there in the land waiting for us to come.’*

*‘This place is important to us. You can feel it all around. We knew it was here because we saw the engravings over there at Boral’s. They were pointing over here. We knew it was pointing to something really important.’*

While standing beside the “owl stone” one of the Elders pointed in an easterly direction across the Susannah Brook valley towards Boral’s [Midland Brick?] whose quarry could be seen in the distance. The Elder explained how when he had visited the rock

engravings “over there” [at Boral Resources] that they were pointing at something significant “in this direction” [Red Hill]. He was now convinced that they were pointing to this particular standing stone site. He notes:

*‘There will be other “pointers” all up the valley to mark the way for the ‘old fellas’ coming down from the east. All along the old trails there would be markers for this one and other places of importance along the way.’*

*‘The old owl is a living stone to us. We can feel its spirit giving life.’*

*‘Can’t you feel the sacredness of that stone. You don’t need to touch it; just being near it is enough.’*

*‘That stone is so spiritual that it talks to me in my sleep.’*

**For further views, see Robert Bropho’s statements of significance (Appendix 9.4).**

#### **2.42 Ceremonial Rituals of Respect**

*‘In Nyungar culture the googoo or boobook owl is a frightening messenger of death. The owl stones are very dangerous if not approached with caution and respect.’*

While visiting the “owl stone”, the anthropologists Macintyre and Dobson observed the reverential respect given to the site by the Elders, who carried out the ritual of carefully placing *Xanthorrhoea* fronds around the base of the stone, in accordance with how they carry out the customary ritual and respect paid to an important spiritual place such as this. (See Appendices 9.2 & 9.3 for reference to this ritual as described by George Fletcher Moore 1835 in relation to the owl stone at Lower Chittering).

The Elders emphasized that when visiting the ‘owl stone’ everyone must respect it and ensure that the proper ritual is performed in a culturally appropriate manner. They commented that if people respected the site, it would not be dangerous to anybody who visited it, whether male or female.

### 2.43 Spiritual Reconnections

The ritual of placing the Xanthorrhoea leaves not only shows a deep sense of respect to the Ancestors but also enables a re-energising or reconnecting in a spiritually respectful way with their ancestral past. As one of the Elders stated: *'being close to the stone gave me a feeling of exhilaration and purpose.'*

Some of the Elders expressed views after visiting the "owl stone" that they had experienced a sense of spiritual and psychological uplifting. They said they had felt *"spiritually stronger"* and *"joined up"* to their ancestral past. Another Elder reported that when he visited the stone, he felt as though time had momentarily stopped still.

The male Elders confided that they had experienced dreams either prior to, or after, visiting the "owl stone." One Elder who did not attend but who had visited the "owl stone" on a previous occasion, told how he had experienced a vivid and revelatory dream associated with the owl. Another Elder told how he had experienced an impacting dream involving the visitation of an owl to his house. He said that when he had the dream interpreted by an elderly Aboriginal woman from the Busselton region she told him that a powerful totem spirit was visiting him to connect him to the Spiritual Dreaming. For privacy reasons the contents of the Elders' dreams cannot be published in this report.

All of these unexplainable psychological phenomena could be interpreted under the rubric of religious experience, or as one Elder put it *"connecting with the ancestors."*

When visiting old places which they believe to be of significance, Elders often speak of *"seeing"* 'the old people' walking through the area collecting food, camping and performing rituals. When the Elders speak, it is never in the past tense but is as if they are witnessing it in the here and now. In some cases, and this was illustrated by their visit to the "owl stone," they describe 'the old people' (ancestors) as "happy" to see them and "very welcoming".

On a number of occasions Nyungar Elders have tried to explain to us that even though they have long been dispossessed from their land (and sacred sites), the spirits of the Dreaming are ‘still there’ in the land’ “*waiting*” to spiritually reconnect with them. As one Elder expressed it:

*‘These old sites are not lost. They’re being looked after by ‘the old people’ [ancestors] who have been waiting for us to come and take over from them.’*

Although such a view may be difficult to comprehend from a non-indigenous viewpoint, from a Nyungar viewpoint it is a culturally relevant, valid and legitimate means of recognising a place of cultural significance.

It is difficult for white anthropologists to describe, far less quantify, the powerful ethno-psychology involved in indigenous people’s own (as yet) unexplained ability to locate places of spiritual and cultural significance to their people. It is surely time to rethink the conventional criteria employed in indigenous site assessment and to adopt a broader, less Eurocentric-based approach which indeed recognises indigenous means of site identification.

McDonald, Hale and Associates (1998: 22) also acknowledge the distinctive ways that Nyungars use to identify sites. They refer to this as “feeling the country”:

‘Many Nyungars also report that they are able to feel the presence of spirits and/or ‘sacred’ (eg mythological) sites .... It is not uncommon, however, for individual Nyungars to report the presence of sites on the basis of **feelings** or other types of apparent **extrasensory perceptions** (i.e. hearing voices, feeling an unusual wind, experiencing body tremors and so on).... The ability to feel or perceive the presence of spiritual matters is often highlighted by Nyungars as an important difference between themselves and non-Aborigines’

The above quote merely reinforces our argument that Aboriginal people have the innate ability to intuitively experience or “tune in” to places that are of cultural significance to them. As one Elder commented in relation to the “owl stone” *‘these places are the important Spiritual Dreaming places of our ancestors and we are part of that.’* The

Elders had no doubt that their Nyungar ancestors had performed ceremonies and known the deep mythology for the place. This mythology would have explained how the totemic (ancestral owl) being came to be associated with the area. Such information would have been secret-sacred and not revealed to outsiders or the uninitiated.

Salvado (1850 in Stormon 1977: 125) emphasizes that Aboriginal people were highly protective of their religion and that 'either through cunning or traditional secrecy' they carefully hid their 'special habits and beliefs from strangers'.

The Nyungar Elders and Traditional Owners perceive the "owl stone" ("Boyay Gogomat") at Red Hill as an important symbol of their "Spiritual Dreaming" of which they are a part. They believe that the quintessential spirit of the Ancestral Owl is "still there in the landscape" and that it becomes incorporated and inter-linked with a much larger and dynamic totemic landscape. It is for this reason that the Elders do not perceive this stone as an isolated feature but rather as part of a story or mythological Dreaming Track which links to a network of Ancestral Beings who are "waiting" (in contemporary Nyungar terms) to be reconnected to their contemporary Nyungar families.

This idea of the spirits of the Dreaming "waiting" to be discovered or to reveal themselves to humans may not be such a strange idea. As noted by Mircea Eliade, a historian of religion:

"In actual fact, the place is never 'chosen' by man...It is merely discovered by him...The sacred place in some way or another reveals itself to him...The notion that holy ground chooses rather than is chosen constitutes the core of innumerable spiritual traditions across the planet." (Eliade cited in McLuhan 1996:6).



### 3.0 ANTHROPOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF THE TOTEMIC AND MYTHOLOGICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF THE “OWL STONE”

**For information on the significance of owls and other night birds in traditional and contemporary Nyungar culture, see Appendix 9.8. This research paper provides an overall context and insight into the nature and complexity of Nyungar views on owls and may help the reader to better understand the occurrence and significance of “owl stones” in Nyungar culture.**

To understand the cultural significance of the “owl stone” within the context of the Red Hill area requires an understanding of the concepts of *winnaitch*, totemism and what contemporary Nyungars refer to as their “Spiritual Dreaming”. (For information on the Nyungar notion of *winnaitch*, see Appendix 9.3). The notions of ‘Spiritual Dreaming’ and totemism are explained below.

#### 3.1 The Spiritual Dreaming

*‘Our Spiritual Dreaming is in the land.’*

*‘You put up fences to keep us out but you did not take away our Dreaming. It is still there in the land waiting for us to come.’*

In an attempt to understand the Nyungar concept of “Spiritual Dreaming” it is useful to consider Elkin’s (1943:171) notion of ‘the eternal dream-time’ and Berndt’s (1968, 1973) definition of ‘The Dreaming’. Elkin (1943: 187) points out that the ‘eternal dream-time’ incorporates ‘past, present and future, [which] are, in a sense, co-existent – they are aspects of the one reality.’ “The Dreaming” according to Berndt (1973: 31) is:

*‘... a synthesizing concept, uniting human beings and natural species, the land, the sky and the waters, and all within or associated with them: and that relationship is cemented or made irrevocable by spiritual linkages with or through mythic or spirit beings.’ (Berndt 1973: 31)*

It is well documented in the anthropological literature that the traditional animistic and totemistic religion of the Australian Aborigines was nature-based and commonly focused

on “natural” features of the environment, including rock features, especially those which stood out or resembled aspects of the surrounding bird, plant or animal life. Such places were often considered sacred as they formed an important part of the traditional totemic mythology of the landscape. Elkin (1943: 136-137) refers to the “inextricable” connection between mythology and totemism:

‘It is fundamentally the mythology which records the travels and actions of the tribal heroes in its subdivision of the tribal territory. The country of each local group is crossed by the paths or tracks of these heroes along which there are a number of special sites where the hero performed some action which is recorded in myth; it may have been only an ordinary everyday act, or it may have been the institution or performance of a rite. A site with its heap of stones, standing stone [emphasis added here], waterhole or some other natural feature, may mark the spot where he rested or went out of sight temporarily. Another may mark the final stopping place where his body was transformed into stone and his spirit was freed to watch everything which should happen afterwards [emphasis added] or, possibly it may be the “home” where his spirit awaits incarnation. In some cases too, such a hero is believed to have left the pre-existent children in the spirit-centres, in the same way as by his rite and actions and the virtue inherent in him, he caused certain places to be the life-centres or spirit-centres of natural species’ (Elkin 1943: 136-137).

Although Elkin’s work primarily relates to South Australia, Central Australia, Northern Australia and north Western Australia, his structural analysis of totemic sites and mythological “paths” may also be applied to the ancestral landscape of south-western Australia. However, owing to the absence of any ethno-historical or ethnographic information having been recorded for the “owl stone” at Red Hill, one can only speculate as to which of Elkin’s explanations may apply here.

The “owl stone” may potentially represent the “final stopping place” where the body of the Ancestral Owl Being became metamorphosed into stone and his spirit released “to watch everything which should happen afterwards.” This idea is reflected by Elders’ comments:

*‘That old owl is sitting there watching everything. That bird can see a long way and knows everything that happens.’*

*'That owl has been there for thousands of years and now it's just sitting there everyday watching the quarry getting closer and closer.'*

These ideas are difficult for non-indigenous people to grasp and can only be comprehended by understanding the indigenous context from which they come.

Elkin (1943: 177-178) attempts to understand the significance of totemic stone in Aboriginal culture when he writes:

*'But whatever be our philosophical, sacramental and symbolic interpretation, we realize that the sacred stone or heap is not, for them, just stone or earth. It is in a sense animated: life can go forth from it.'*

This same idea is illustrated by one of the Nyungar Elder's statements about the "owl stone": *'That old owl is a living stone to us. We can feel its spirit giving life.'*

Thus the "owl stone" is not only viewed as tangible evidence of the mythic past but is also viewed and valued by contemporary Nyungar people as a "living" ancestral guardian spirit being which signifies the past, present and future merged into one reality, that of the "Spiritual Dreaming". This spiritual consciousness expressed by the Nyungar Elders is indeed a "reality" to them. In an attempt to understand this "reality" of indigenous spiritual experience in relation to totemic stones, it may be useful to consider Mircea Eliade's (1957) notion of 'supernatural reality' and, in particular, his statement about the perceived powers of sacred stones and how these powers manifest themselves in "pre-modern" societies (see Appendix 9.5).

The following quote from Berndt (1992:137) provides some insight into the powers associated with natural features and the "continuing" spiritual significance and influence of totemic mythological ancestral beings:

*"The great mythic beings of the Dreamtime established the foundations of human socio-cultural existence. They also attended to that environment, and in many cases were responsible for forming it. They created human and other natural species and set them down, as it were, in specific stretches of country. They are associated with territories and*

with mythic tracks, and in many cases were themselves transformed into sites where their spirits remain; or they left sites which commemorated their wanderings - in which case, part of their spiritual substance remains there. So, all the land was (and is) full of signs. And what they did and what they left is regarded as having a crucial significance for the present day. But more than this, they are considered to be just as much alive, spiritually, as they were in the past. They are eternal, and their material expressions within the land were believed to be eternal and inviolable too.'

### 3.2 Totemism

*'It's like an older brother, this stone. It will not harm you but will protect you from danger as long as you respect him. I feel really calm here.'*

'A totem is an object toward which members of a kinship unit have a special mystical relationship, and with which the unit's name is associated. The object may be animal, plant or mineral...In totemism, the totem animal cannot be killed or eaten except under very special circumstances. The totem will be treated both in life and death like a fellow tribesman...The totem's essence or religious power is often linked to the clan's emblem and is often a sacred object.' (Winick 1966: 542).

The anthropological notion of the totem as a "sacred object" is important. In the case of the "owl stone" the object of reverence is a standing stone which is believed by Nungar Elders to be endowed with the living essence of the totemic ancestral owl (*Gogomat*) who once moved through the country creating significant aspects of the geology and geography.

It is not uncommon for natural features of the landscape (such as standing stones, ridges, hills, rivers, lakes and rock holes) to be viewed as part of the Spiritual Dreaming and to have totemic cultural significance. As noted by Berndt (1965: 230):

'Totems are often associated with places marked by striking or unusual physical features. A hill, a rocky outcrop, a deep pool, or something of the kind, is accepted too as a sign left by the mythical participants in a marvel supposed to have occurred there. Such places are to be approached and treated with a formality ranging from respect to reverence. In certain cases they may be made the scenes of "rites of increase." These are rites to maintain and renew, or conserve and produce the totem.'

A totem is a bird, plant, animal or other object recognised as being ancestrally related to an individual or group. It links humans, non-humans and the land. When Berndt (1973: 33) refers to 'spiritual linkages with or through mythic or spirit beings' which serve to connect humans to their natural environment and the Dreaming, he is referring to what anthropologists commonly call totemism, a kind of spiritual kinship which unites humans with their physical and social environment. Berndt (1973:33) comments that within this environment: 'certain aspects were selected to serve as material representations of the spiritual (and mythic) activators, who were believed to have breathed life into it.'

Although Berndt (1973: 32) illustrates this concept using the kangaroo as an example, the same could be said about the owl (*Gogomat*):

'in the creative era, a particular mythic being was shape-changing, either animal or human in appearance, with the power to 'turn' or change shape, becoming say a kangaroo as a result of a particular event or incident that occurred in the myth: or creating a kangaroo. Because of this, all kangaroos today have a spiritual connection with their progenitor or creator, and the mythic being himself (or herself) is manifested through *all of them*. Also, that particular mythic being is responsible for human beings – *some* human beings: all those born or conceived at, or otherwise associated with, the actual place where the mythic event took place (where the mythic being 'turned' himself or performed the act of creation) are spiritually linked with him: they are one of his manifestations -just as kangaroos are. A spiritual affinity binds them together, underlining their interdependence; all have something in common.' (Berndt 1973: 32)

The equivalent notion for totem in the Nyungar language is *kobong* (Grey 1840) or its variants *coubourne* or *cubine* (Hassell 1934, 1936, 1975). These terms refer to the same concept which Grey (1840: 64) describes as follows:

'*ko-bong* - a friend, a protector.-This name is generally applied to some animal or vegetable which has for a series of years been the friend or sign of the family, and this sign is handed down from father to son, a certain mysterious connection existing between a family and its ko-bong, so that a member of the family will never kill an animal of the species to which his ko-bong belongs, should he find it asleep; indeed he always does it reluctantly, and never without affording it a chance of escape. This arises from the family belief that some one individual of the species is their nearest friend, to kill whom would be a great crime, and is to be carefully avoided.'

This is similar to Elkin's (1943: 129) view of a totem as an "assistant", "guardian" or "mate" or symbol of the social group to which the individual belongs. Elkin (1943) emphasizes the importance of the 'bonds of mutual life giving' between humans and their kin totems. Other key aspects of the totemic relationship include obligations of mutual caring, respect and protection.

### 3.3 The Mopoke as a Totem

Ethel Hassell was the first to record the totemic significance of the mopoke (or what she called "mopoak") in Nyungar culture. While collecting ethnographic information from the Wheelman people in the southern part of Western Australia as early as the 1870's at Jerramongup she notes the totemic significance of the mopoak (sic) as follows:

'*cube* - the mopoak [sic.] (a night hawk), a species of owl which flies silently and has a note like the howling of the dingo. A *totem*.' (Hassell in Davidson 1934:277)

The fact that Hassell records *cube* for mopoak (sic) suggests that she was in fact recording (probably without realising it) the Nyungar word for 'totem' (*cube*) rather than the Nyungar name for 'mopoke'. She also records *coubourne* (a variant of *cube*) as meaning totem (1936: 684) and notes that 'Every native had one or more totems which he was not allowed to eat or destroy.' She highlights the fact that totems were assigned importance depending on their position within a hierarchy with those "of the highest degree" being the flying birds (1936: 684). She records the mopoke as being at the top of this hierarchy.

Hassell (1975: 212) not only records the mopoke as a totem bird but also records an "owl stone" in both the mythology - and in the actual landscape at Cape Riche/ Bremer Bay. This owl stone is noted by Hassell as one of a number of totemic rock features which she observed along the south coast of Western Australia:

'There are many curious rocks all along the south east coast which assume most peculiar shapes. Some have legends and doubtless they all had, but many have been forgotten. In

Albany the Dog's Head Rock is well known....Near Cape Riche there is one strongly resembling an owl which has a legend...(See Appendix 9.6 for details of this "owl stone" mythology).

Hassell (1975: 180) describes this owl stone, which she personally observed, as '...a large stone, the shape which looks like a mopoke and has two dints making the eyes.' When camping with her husband and children in a rocky cove at Bremer Bay in the vicinity of the owl stone, she further remarks:

'There were several natives there, two of which belonged to Cape Riche, and they seemed quite delighted to think I had noticed the mopoke or cubine rock. There was a good deal of talk about the story of the rock and the reef which seemed to be fairly well known by our natives [the Wheelman at Jerramongup]. Indeed they supplied the first part of the story while Cape Riche natives finished it.' (Hassell 1975: 181)

Further to Hassell's work on totemic owls and owl stones, Mathews (1904: 51) writing at the turn of the century, similarly notes that the mopoke was an important totem which was associated with families in traditional Nyungar society. He points out that the mopoke totemic group was a subdivision of the *Wortungmat* (crow) phratry.<sup>6</sup> Like in many other Aboriginal groups throughout Australia, Nyungar society was traditionally divided into two halves, or what Bates and Mathews refer to as primary phratries (moieties), which are described as follows:

'These divisions are called Wordungmat and Manitchmat (or Manaitchmat) respectively and mean Crow stock (wordung-crow, mat or maat -leg, family, stock), and White Cockatoo Stock (manitch or manaitch-white cockatoo).' (Bates in White 1985: 192)

The association of the mopoke group with the *Wortungmat* (crow) phratry is indeed culturally logical in view of Bates' assertion (in Bridge 1992) that the *Wordungmat* (crow) subdivision represents the "dark" side (and *Munitchmat*, white cockatoo, the "light" side) of the Nyungar moiety system. The mopoke with its nocturnal habits and its perceived associations with the supernatural logically symbolises the 'dark' side.<sup>7</sup>

### 3.4 Ancestral Owl Dreaming Track – *Boyay Gogomat*

It should be highlighted that the “owl stone” (known as *Boyay Gogomat*) at Red Hill is *not* the same *Boyay Gogomat* (standing stone) visited and recorded by Moore in 1835 in the Lower Chittering area. None of the Elders believed that Moore had visited the “owl stone” at Red Hill overlooking the Susannah Brook valley. As one Elder stated:

*‘We don’t think Moore came to this place. He might have gone to another place with the same name. There are other owl stones in different places because that owl ancestor moved around, like the Waugal did and the other ancestors. Those “old people” would have called it by the same name wherever it went, as a mark of respect, but everywhere it went it had a different story. We don’t know these stories because ‘the old people’ kept them secret, and they wouldn’t have told Moore because this is winnaitch [forbidden, taboo, sacred, secret].’*

This view of *Boyay Gogomat* as a cultural manifestation of Moore’s *Boyay Gogomat* - but in a different location - is highly significant. The Elders describe the ancestral owl (*Gogomat*) as travelling around the country at the beginning of time helping to create the topography and then, as with many of the other Ancestral Beings, becoming metamorphosed into the land at different places along the Ancestral Track to become “sites” which remain to this day as prominent features of the landscape. Linguistic and anthropological evidence tends to support this idea of the ancestral, totemic and mythological importance of *Boyay Gogomat* (as the following analysis shows).

Our linguistic research shows that *Boyay Gogomat* literally translates as ‘Stone Ancestral Owl’ (*Boyay*, stone + *Gogomat*, Ancestral Owl). This meaning derives from the work of Bates (1985) and Douglas (1976) who note that ‘*mat*,’ or ‘*maat*’ literally means ‘leg,’ but can also mean “family”, “lineage” or “stock”, hence *Gogomat* may also denote owl family/ group/ stock. Bates popularises the term ‘*mat*’ in her classic reference to the *Wordungmat* and *Mannitchmat* moieties - the two halves of Nyungar society which interestingly possess bird names. The ‘*mat*’ in *Gogomat* may be viewed as a totemic reference denoting “family,” “stock ”or “group” (Douglas 1976).



As previously noted the 'owl group' (*gogo*, owl + *mat*, group) may be viewed as one of a number of sub-groups of the *Wordungmat* moiety, or what Mathews (1904) refers to as the mopoke family group. In this context the affix '*mat*' may be viewed as an indigenous body part metaphor which denotes a kin grouping or ancestral descent line from a common totemic ancestor (the Ancestral Owl).

Douglas (1976), a specialist in Nyungar linguistics, provides further support for the indigenous view of *Gogomat* as signifying or belonging to the Ancestral Owl Dreaming. He notes that '*mat*' not only means leg but is also a metonym for 'way' or 'path' and "refers also to a particular sacred or totemic '*path*' or 'group'". Douglas (1976) gives the example of '*wetjamat*' (*wetj*, emu + *mat*, group) which he translates as 'belonging to the emu group/path/mob'. By substituting *Gogomat* for *wetjamat*, the meaning becomes 'belonging to the owl group/path/mob and refers to "a particular sacred or totemic '*path*' or 'group.'"

Nind (1831 in Green 1979: 52) also records the body part "*maat*" as meaning "path". Thus both Nind and Douglas provide linguistic support for the Nyungar view of the "owl stone" as marking an important "place" or site on the mythological track ('*mat*') of the Totemic Ancestral Owl Being (*Gogomat*).

Elkin (1943) and Berndt (1973) in their anthropological analyses of the structure of Aboriginal myth refer to the importance of "turning" points and the "final stopping place" of the Ancestral Beings. These are relevant to an understanding of the totemic significance of "owl stones" in Nyungar mythology. For example, Berndt (1973: 79) refers to "the actual place where the mythic event took place (where the mythic being 'turned' himself...)' as follows:

'The most dramatic incident in a story may be the last of all, when the characters are transformed into something else, and die physically in order to achieve some other state of life.' (Berndt 1973: 79)

This is the same as Elkin's (1943: 136) notion of 'the final stopping place' of the Ancestral Being. However, whether *Boyay Gogomat* at Red Hill represents the "turning" or "final stopping place" of *Gogomat*, the Ancestral Totemic Owl, is not known as there are no specific recorded mythological details.

However, there is an "owl stone" which features in the Nyungar mythology of the South Coast region of Western Australia, which was in fact visited by Hassell in the 1880's. The traditional version of this myth was recorded by Hassell (1935, 1975) and a more contemporary version was collected by Macintyre (1975) (see Appendix 9.6). These myths and beliefs appear to conform to Elkin and Berndt's structural model in that the "owl stone" represents the end part (or crux) of the story whereby the owl dies and becomes immortalised in stone on the side of the hill overlooking the ocean, continuing to watch everything that's going on. The owl/ *norn* (tiger snake) story which relates to the Nyungar mythology of the Jerramongup to Bremer Bay region may provide some insight into the owl/ *Waugal* theme found in other parts of the south-west region.

Like other metamorphosed remains of Ancestral Beings located throughout the country, "sites" such as *Boyay Gogomat* (at Red Hill and Lower Chittering) remain to this day as prominent features of the totemic geography and living history of the Ancestor's presence in the land.

As noted by Berndt (1964: 187-188) referring to the concept of the Aboriginal Dreamtime:

'Briefly, this concept means that the beings said to have been present at the beginning of things still continue to exist. In a spiritual, or non-material fashion, they and all that is associated with them are as much alive today, and will be in the indefinite future, as they were.'

Berndt (1964: 188) further expands on this as follows:

'The mythological era, then, is regarded as setting a precedent for all human behaviour from that time on. It was the past, the sacred past; but it was not the past in the sense of

something that is over and done with. The creative beings who lived on the earth at that time did perform certain actions then, and will not repeat them: but their influence is still present (emphasis added) and can be drawn on by people who repeat those actions in the appropriate way, or perform others about which they left instructions. This attitude is summarised in the expression ‘the Eternal Dreamtime’, which underlines the belief that the mythological past is vital and relevant in the present, and in the future. In one sense, the past is still here, in the present, and is part of the future as well (emphasis added). In another but relevant context, the spirits of deceased human beings are still alive and indestructible. The mythical characters themselves are not dead... Their physical human shape was simply one of a number of manifestations...’

‘In the formative period, the various species had not finally adopted the shapes in which we see them today. Their physical manifestations were a little more fluid than they are today. Many mythical beings, all through Aboriginal Australia, were either more or less than human according to the way in which we look at it. The life force which they embodied was not limited to a human manifestation, but could find expression also in the shape of some other species. A goanna ancestor may have looked like an ordinary human being, but at the same time he was potentially capable of changing his shape and taking the form of a goanna. This identification in the mythological past has continuing consequences today. Because of it, there is said to be a special relationship between certain human beings and, for instance, that particular kind of goanna.’

If ‘owl’ is substituted for ‘goanna’ here, the same logic applied to Nyungar totemic mythology. As one of the Elders pointed out, when the head of the owl (“owl stone”) at Red Hill is viewed from a particular angle, it resembles the outline of a human face (see Plate 3). He said that this was significant as *“those old ancestors could change from being birds and animals to humans like the old bulya men.”*

Berndt (1989: 406) comments on the shape-changing powers of Ancestral Beings:

‘One of the characteristics is that the mythic personages have magical and supernatural powers. They are able to change their shape, transform themselves and perform remarkable feats that are beyond the ability of ordinary human beings.’

Furthermore, it is well-recognised in the anthropological literature, and indeed in stories relating to ‘the Spiritual Dreaming’, that the totemic Ancestral Beings not only have the personalities and behaviour of humans but it is in fact often difficult to ascertain (at any particular time during the story telling) whether they are referring to humans or animals. This human/animal duality becomes so blurred that it is difficult to separate the human

from the non-human. As one Elder commented: *'There is no separation or duality between humans and animals. Ancestral Beings says it all.'*

An interesting aspect of this duality is found in Aboriginal sites where the totemic ancestors' dismembered body parts are sometimes represented in the physiography of the land. These body parts, especially in the case of phallic symbols, resemble the human anatomy, even though they are attributed to the ancestral animal or bird. This simultaneous duality of human and non-human form is often (but not always) demonstrated or 'evidenced' in the metamorphosed totemic features in which the human aspect may form a major or, in the case of the "owl stone" at Red Hill, a minor aspect (see Plate 3).

In establishing the importance of the totemic ancestral "owl stone" at Red Hill, one may ask is it a coincidence that some of the traditional Nyungar place names in the Susannah Brook, Avon River and *Boyay Gogomat* locations at Lower Chittering and Red Hill translate as 'owl'? There may also be present in these areas other "owl stones" or sites associated with the *Gogomat* Dreaming which have not yet been located.

What should be highlighted here is the fact that the traditional Nyungar name for the Avon River (or part of it) is *Gogulger* (Lyon 1833 in Green 1979: 179). This is remarkably similar, if not the same traditional name as *Goolgoil* which refers to the upper part of the Susannah Brook (see Drummond 1836, Appendix 9.1). Both may translate as owl, or in the case of *Gogulger*, 'owl people'.<sup>8</sup>

One could speculate that the term *Gogulger* refers to a group of people belonging to a particular geographic location or territory, whose 'district totem' was the owl or mopoke. According to Bates (in White 1985: 193): 'The district totem belongs to all the members born in such district'. She gives as examples of 'district totems' the black swan (Gingin) and the banksia (Swan District). A district totem may be viewed as a strong organisational emblem which signifies and unites a district descent group or local territorial group.

It is possible that *Gogomat* fits into Elkin's (1943) concept of 'clan totem' or 'local totem' (the difference being that 'clan totemism' is descent- based whereas 'local totemism' depends principally on locality rather than descent). 'Local totemism' is associated with the local group (or local subdivision of the tribe) which Elkin (1943: 39) defines as:

'normally both territorial and genealogical. That is, a definite part of the tribal territory belongs to, or is associated with, a group of tribes folk who are mutually related in some genealogical way.'

Elkin (1943) points out that the *totemic* aspect of the local group is primarily involved with 'the sacred and ceremonial life':

'members belong to the local group because their spirits belong to its country, and to definite "homes" along the path of some great culture-hero and ancestor in that country. In many tribes, each local group is also a distinct totemic clan.' (Elkin 1943: 73)

The question of whether *Gogomat* once represented what Bates refers to as a 'district totem' or 'local group totem', or what Elkin refers to as a 'clan totem' or 'local totem' is purely speculative. It is our view that *Gogomat* was possibly a territorial totem which linked individuals and their groups to a "home" country with which they had strong religio-mythic affiliations.

What is significant, however, is the contemporary Nyungar view that *Boyay Gogomat* marks an important site, or sites, along the Ancestral Owl Spiritual Dreaming Track. This makes sense when viewed within the broader geographic context of the Avon River and the upper Susannah Brook and surrounding hill country, together with the sacred "owl stones" (or *Boyay Gogomat*) sites at Red Hill and Lower Chittering, all of which have indigenous names which when translated indicate owl totemism and symbolism.

### 3.5 Owl Dreaming, Totemism and Symbolism in other parts of Aboriginal Australia

There are numerous references in the archaeological and ethnographic literature to owl dreaming, symbolism and totemism in other parts of Aboriginal Australia, including the Kimberly region of Western Australia, the Northern Territory, Queensland and New South Wales.<sup>9</sup> Like the ancestral owl *Gogomat* who was perceived as an almost deity-like being with the power to transform birds into humans (and vice versa) and to create harmony out of chaos in human society, ancestral owl beings in other parts of Aboriginal Australia also reigned supreme in the creation myths, and in the imparting of Law and knowledge to humankind.<sup>10</sup>

Interestingly, McCarthy (1940: 184) distinguishes several different categories of “stone arrangements” in Aboriginal Australia. Under the heading of “monoliths” he refers to a natural stone feature located in Worora country in the West Kimberley representing the ancestral boobook owl. He describes this as follows:

‘Another set of four elongate stones set up on a hill overlooking an arm of the sea are said by the same tribe [Worora] to indicate the spot where a boobook owl stopped the sea from flooding the land. As the tide rose the owl seated itself on this hill and when it heard the owl’s fearful cry and saw its big eyes, the sea drew back.’ (p. 185)

See Mowaljarlai’s (1993) reference to the boobook owl in the foundation myth of Worora and Ngarinyin society.<sup>10</sup>

McCarthy (1940: 185) further notes that: ‘Numerous instances may be quoted of monoliths, natural and artificial, forming totem-centres in north-west Australia.’ He further comments:

‘This brings us to the important distinction to be drawn between structures believed to have been made by the mythological beings who lived in the ancient dreamtime world and those made by the living aborigines. The former group comprises natural sites, totem-centres, initiation grounds, fish-traps, and places associated with culture heroes and magic. The sites which commemorate an event in the journeyings of the mythological beings are more commonly artificial structures in northern Australia and Cape York than

in other parts of the continent; at them the episodes they commemorate are re-enacted in the historical rites.' (p. 188)

The "owl stone" at Red Hill is a "natural site," similar to the boobook owl stone monolith in the Kimberley. Both structures are 'believed to have been made by the mythological beings who lived in the ancient dreamtime world' and have spiritual and cultural significance to the Nyungar and Worora people, respectively.

Most importantly, McCarthy (1940:189) advocates that:

'Stone arrangements in any part of Australia should be reported to the State museums and every effort made by local people to preserve them.'

#### 4.0 RESPONSIBILITY OF SITE PROTECTION

*'In Nyungar culture the googoo or boobook owl is a frightening messenger of death. The owl stones are very dangerous if not approached with caution and respect.'*

*'Now that we've found the site, we're responsible for its protection.'*

*'Many of these old sacred places were forgotten when 'the old people' died but when we found them it is our responsibility to protect them and to make sure that people will protect them. It really scares us when mining companies or developers want to destroy our old places. They are like whitefella's cathedrals. Very sacred. We are very scared that something will happen to us if they are destroyed and we do not do everything in our power to protect them.'*

*'It will be very dangerous if this site is destroyed. Nyungars could get sick or even die.'*

*'We are not only afraid that Nyungars might get sick if it is destroyed but some bad accident might happen at the quarry.'*

These comments by the Elders illustrate how the responsibility of protecting sites is incumbent upon those who take on the responsibility to speak for the site and who assume the role of site custodians and protectors. When important sites such as the "owl stone" are recorded and "reclaimed," there is a heavy responsibility and anxiety placed on the Elders to ensure that the site is fully protected. Indeed there is an ever-constant fear that if the site is destroyed, that they or their families may suffer some unknown consequence, such as sickness or death, if their task as site protectors is not seen to be properly fulfilled.

*'That owl has been there for thousands of years and now it's just sitting there everyday watching the quarry getting closer and closer.'*

The Elders expressed grave concerns about the effects of quarrying, blasting and the impact of vibrations on the "owl stone" which had survived there on the hillside overlooking Susannah Brook for many thousands of years. They commented:

*'If there is blasting or machine movements anywhere near there the vibrations of that Ground could unsettle what Nature has allowed to stand there all these years since the Beginning of Time.'*



*'The underground vibrations of when they started blasting could unsettle the Stone standing there. It could fall and be destroyed forever.'*

*'The standing stone is not like a seed of a plant or a tree that you could replant. It must be protected.'*

## 5.0 CONCLUSION

The conclusion reached as a result of a site visit and consultations in October and November 2008 with members of the Combined Swan River and Swan Coastal Plains and Darling Ranges Nyungar Elders, Native Title Holders and Traditional Owners (CSR & SCP) is that the prominent, and remarkably balanced standing stone, known as the “owl stone” (or *Boyay Gogomat*) located at Hanson’s Red Hill quarry project area within Lot 11 has strong spiritual, ceremonial and totemic cultural significance to them.

Some of the key points made by the Native Title Holders with respect to the cultural significance of this “owl stone” are summarised here:

- This is *not* the same “owl stone” visited by George Fletcher Moore in 1835 but may be another manifestation of Moore’s *Boyay Gogomat* in a different location.
- The “owl stone” is a spiritually significant site which has to be respected and protected, otherwise it could be dangerous.
- The standing stone is believed to be endowed with the spiritual essence of the Ancestral Owl Being who forms part of the “Spiritual Dreaming” for the area and is believed to be “still there in the land”.
- Certain markings (rock engravings) located on the other side of the Susannah Brook Valley are said to be traditional indicators pointing to the location of the “owl stone”.
- The “owl stone” is considered an important, symbolic and tangible representation of the Ancestral Boobook Owl and provides a spiritual and cultural linkage between contemporary Nyungar society and their Ancestral past.
- Serious concerns were expressed by the Elders about the impact of current and future quarry blasting and vibrations on the cultural integrity of the site.
- It was recommended that a 250 metre radius boundary be established around the remarkably balanced “standing stone” to ensure its protection.

In view of the fact that the traditional Nyungar name of the “head” of the Susannah Brook and surrounding hill country was *Goolgoil* (which may be translated as “owl”), it may be conjectured that the Ancestral Owl immortalised in stone overlooking the Susannah Brook gave its name to this area and the surrounding country.

Also, the Nyungar name for the Avon River (or part of it) is *Gogulger* (Lyon 1833 in Green 1979: 179) which may refer to 'owl people'.

It should be highlighted that the cultural significance of these places may change over time, especially when the white dominant political force restricts access to traditional lands and sacred sites. As can be seen from the comments of the Nyungar Elders, the passing of time has not diminished the significance of the "owl stone" site which continues to provide Nyungar people with a strong symbolic, spiritual and tangible connection to their ancestral past.

The "owl stone" at Red Hill is indeed a remarkable geological feature. The weathered granite of which these remarkably "balanced stones" are comprised is undoubtedly hundreds of thousands (if not potentially millions) of years old. That the "owl stone" has been there since the beginning of time (*Nyitting*) and is viewed by contemporary Nyungars as an important part of their 'Spiritual Dreaming' makes it one of the oldest ornithomorphosed "owl stones" in the world.<sup>11</sup>

***Given the magnitude of the standing stone and its symbolic "owl-like" representation, together with the comments and strong spiritual feelings expressed by the senior Native Title Holders regarding this particular standing stone, and the traditional indigenous belief that ancestral and totemic beings metamorphosed into natural features of the landscape, especially those represented in stone, it is the view of anthropologists Macintyre and Dobson that this natural standing stone feature may constitute an important mythological, ceremonial and spiritual place of significance under Sections 5 (a) and (b) and Section 39 of the Aboriginal Heritage Act 1972. (see Appendix 9.7 for excerpt from AHA Act).***

Nyungar Elders have only recently been able to "reconnect" with this site owing to the fact that it is on private property (owned by Hanson's Construction Materials Pty Ltd). Although the site is not generally known about by the wider Nyungar community, this does not detract from its potential significance as a site of importance to contemporary and future generations of Nyungar people. The anthropologists believe that once this site becomes more widely known about, it will no doubt attain a high cultural significance to a large percentage of the Aboriginal population.

This report provides linguistic and anthropological cultural evidence to support the views expressed by the Nyungar Elders and Traditional Owners that the ancestral owl (*Gogomat*) travelled around the country at the beginning of time helping to create the totemic landscape. There is no doubt that in traditional times the odyssey of this ancestral bird would have formed an important part of the totemic mythology or “Spiritual Dreaming”. As with many of the other Ancestral Beings, the owl “turned” or became metamorphosed into the landscape at different places along the Ancestral Track and “sites” such as the “owl stone” remain to this day as prominent features of the ancestral totemic geography and “living” history of the area.

It has been highlighted in this report that both the *Waugal* (carpet snake) and the mopoke (*Gogomat*) represent the highest echelons of Nyungar totemic mythology; both are powerful creators, healers and destroyers, and it is for this reason that their ancestral and “living” spirit beings must be protected at all times. They are both arbiters of life and death, and mete out punishment to those who do not respect them.

## 6.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

It is our view that in assessing the significance of sites, such as the “owl stone” at Red Hill, that the indigenous psychic-corporeal experiences and feelings of spiritual connection and reconnection to these ancestral places should be recognised as culturally appropriate and important determinants of contemporary Nyungar recognition of their own sites.

It is important to note that Susannah Brook, excluding its tributaries, is previously recorded at the Department of Indigenous Affairs as a site of Aboriginal significance (site ID 640) together with another site, which is a pool within the Susannah Brook known as the Susannah Brook Waugal (ID 3656). Whether these registered sites are connected to the *Boyay Gogomat* “owl stone” site overlooking Susannah Brook has not yet been fully ascertained. For the purpose of this report only the standing stone (“owl stone”) was investigated and recorded by Macintyre and Dobson to ensure its protection. No other sites were investigated. It is possible that other sites of potential Aboriginal significance (which have not yet been located or recorded in the company of Aboriginal heritage spokespersons) may exist within Hanson’s Lot 11, Toodyay Road. For this reason it is recommended that a thorough ethnographic survey be conducted over the entire Lot 11 to ensure that if any other sites of significance exist, that these are recorded.

Further to this, Robert Bropho (see Appendix 9.4) has recommended that a full Aboriginal heritage survey be conducted over the entire area encompassing Lot 11 and the Susannah Brook Valley to ensure that all existing sites (including those which may not have yet been located or recorded) are recorded and registered in accordance with the Aboriginal Heritage Act 1972 to ensure their protection.

The “owl stone” is believed by members of the Combined Swan River and Swan Coastal Plains and Darling Ranges Nyungar Elders, Native Title Holders and Traditional Owners to be an important part of their “Spiritual Dreaming.” It is believed to represent cultural evidence of the presence (and living essence) in the landscape of the totemic Ancestral

Owl Being who travelled around the country during the Dreaming performing heroic deeds until he eventually became metamorphosed into stone on the hillside overlooking Susannah Brook. This prominent standing stone is believed to have totemic, mythological, ceremonial, spiritual and cultural significance to the senior Nyungar Elders who recorded the site.

**These Elders recommended that a 250 metre radius boundary be established around the “owl stone” site to ensure its protection from quarrying and blasting activities. Special protective measures must be negotiated by the Elders with the Department of Indigenous Affairs and the Hanson Quarry operators as the site is very vulnerable.**

The Elders also requested that when this site is discussed by the Aboriginal Cultural Materials Committee (ACMC) that the **ACMC personnel must first visit the site guided by the Nyungar Elders**, and that **the Elders be notified of any DIA/ACMC meetings** to discuss the ‘owl stone’ so that they will be able to witness the proceedings and present their case for the site’s protection. (This request for the Elders’ involvement in ACMC meetings to discuss the “owl stone” site was noted in the original site recording papers lodged by Macintyre and Dobson with the Department of Indigenous Affairs on 3rd December 2008).

**It is our anthropological opinion that the “owl stone” at Susannah Brook is an important Aboriginal site under Sections 5 and 39 of the Aboriginal Heritage Act 1972 (see Appendix 9.7).**

It should be pointed out that the Aboriginal Heritage Act 1972 (“the Act”) protects all Aboriginal sites in Western Australia whether they are known to the Department of Indigenous Affairs (“DIA”) or not.

*This report was prepared for the Combined Swan River and Swan Coastal Plains and Darling Ranges Nyungar Elders, Native Title Holders and Traditional Owners for the protection of a Nyungar site on behalf of all Nyungar and all Aboriginal peoples.*

It should be pointed out that human interference to Aboriginal sites is an offence, unless authorised under the Act, as outlined in Section 17 of the Aboriginal Heritage Act, 1972.

*Section 17 states that a person who (a) excavated, destroys, damages, conceals or any way alters any Aboriginal sites; or (b) in any way alters, damages, conceals, or who deals with in a manner not sanctioned by relevant custom, or assumes the possession, custody or control of, any object on or under an Aboriginal site, commits an offence unless he is acting with the authorisation of the Registrar under Section 16 or the consent of the Minister under Section 18.*



## 7.0 ENDNOTES

1. Exploration Plan 134 (Roe's "Eye Sketch"). It has been suggested that the name of the brook derives from Susanna, the wife of Richard Wells' who arrived in the colony in August 1829 aboard the '*Calista*' as the overseer appointed by Colonel Latour (absentee landlord) to manage his properties on the Swan. (Source: Department of Land Administration (now known as Landgate) files).

2. Moore (1832-1834 in Cameron 2006) points out that the Susannah river (p. 138, 221) was also known as Col Latour's Brook (p.113), Lautours Brook (p. 138) or Latour's Brook (pp. 165, 336, 369). This was no doubt due to the fact that most of the country through which the Susannah River flowed to its confluence with the Swan River was granted to Colonel Peter A. Latour (a wealthy English absentee investor) who was assigned 5000 acres at Swan Location 6 on 29/9/1829. Sometime after 1831 Latour's grant was transferred to J.W. Wright (Cameron 2006:17).

Early 1830's maps show the Susannah River flowing through Swan Locations 5a and 6, those being the lands assigned to William Lamb, George Fletcher Moore and J.W. Wright (whose grant formerly belonged to Colonel Latour).

The Susannah River was shown as "Susannah Brook" during surveys of the area by George Smythe in 1836 (Historical Plan 29) and Alfred Hillman in 1849 (FB 10, p.11)' (Landgate files). In the early 1830's George Smythe was Assistant-Surveyor to the Surveyor General John Septimus Roe.

3. Drummond refers to *Goolgoil* in an article published in the *Perth Gazette* in 1836 in which he describes an easier cart access route from Northam to Perth (see Appendix 9.1). It should be pointed out that *Googloil* was the traditional Nyungar name for the "head" of the Susannah Brook and surrounding hill country (as mapped at that time). It would seem that *Goolgoil* referred to a locale which included a water source and adjacent hills. This in keeping with traditional Nyungar place names which generally denoted several co-existing topographic features rather than a single isolated feature.

In a later publication, Drummond (1839) refers to "the watering place called Goolgoil by the natives" which he notes is located about a mile west of where the (old) Toodyay Road, crosses a hill. On the west side of this hill Drummond found *Hovea grandiflora* which he states is "the only habitat I know for this plant". Although Drummond does not name the hill, his statement that *Goolgoil* lies about a mile to the west of a hill transected by (the old) Toodyay Road and his earlier referent to *Goolgoil* as the traditional name of the "head" of the Susannah Brook and surrounding hill country (as explored in 1836), would suggest that the locale known as *Goolgoil* is within or in close proximity to Lot 11.

4 What the early Anglo-European recorders heard, or thought they heard, and how they attempted to record these totally unfamiliar sounds using their own familiar linguistic and orthographic conventions helps to explain the varied Nyungar assemblage of terms collected, some of which although appearing different in fact refer to the same "thing". For example, different terms recorded for owl include *Gogomat*, *gogoomit*, *googoomit*, *gugumit* and *gurgurda* all of which derive from the same core term "gogo" which is the Nyungar onomatopoeic name for owl.

It should be noted that in the Nyungar language “u” and “oo” (sometimes rendered “o”) represent the same sound and are thus interchangeable (e.g. Nyungar, Nyoongar), also “p” and “b” are interchangeable, “t” and “d” are interchangeable, and “k” and “g” are interchangeable. With this in mind, the phonetic variations between Drummond’s *goolgoil* and Moore’s (1935) *gogo*, or Armstrong’s (1836) *gogoo*, or Grey’s (1840) *goo-goo* or Moore’s (1842) *gurgur* or *gugu*, may simply be viewed as different ways of rendering the same core onomatopoeic term for owl.

Interestingly, Grey (1840) hesitates to call the regional variations in the Nyungar language as “dialects”. He notes (1840: xvii) referring to the oral tradition and scattered population of Aborigines in southwestern Australia that ‘it will be not be thought extraordinary that in a wide range of country I sometimes found many variations in the expression of the same word, which could not perhaps be fairly considered as amounting to a difference of dialect.’ He further points out that the forms of speech are ‘so nearly coincident that the native inhabitants of Perth and King George’s Sound are able to converse freely after being a few hours together.’ (1840: v-vi). He states: ‘I have no hesitation in affirming that as far as any tribes have been met and conversed with by the colonists, namely, from one hundred miles east of King George’s Sound up to two hundred miles north of Fremantle, comprising a space of above six hundred miles of coast, the language is radically and essentially the same’ (1840: x-xi).

Moore (1842: viii) makes a similar observation. In the preface to his *Descriptive Vocabulary of Aboriginal terms in southwestern Australia*, he states that ‘The words contained in this Vocabulary are those in most common use in the vicinity of the Swan River and the adjacent districts; some of which may be found to be localized, but most of them are used under some form or modification by all the aborigines residing within the limits of Moore River to the north, the Avon to the east, the sea to the west, and King George’s Sound to the south.’

It should of course be pointed out here that the different cultural-linguistic backgrounds of the early recorders (e.g. Spanish, German, Scottish, English, Irish and Dutch) necessarily influenced their individual attempts at rendering the totally unfamiliar Nyungar terms (into English). This explains why their renditions of the same words were often highly variant.

5. Mathews’ (1900, 1904, 1909) ethnographic information on Nyungar culture derives from Mr Thomas Muir, J.P. of Deeside Station [Bridgetown]. ‘He has known the country between Perth and Esperance Bay since 1844, and has constantly employed some of the aborigines to work for him during that period.’ (Mathews 1907: 340).

6. Bates, in her newspaper articles, uses the terms phratry and moiety interchangeably. These two anthropological notions are defined below; however, moiety is the term most commonly accepted as referring to the two exogamous “halves” of traditional Nyungar society: the *Wordungmat* (crow) and *Manitchmat* (white cockatoo).

(i) Phratry may be defined as: ‘A generally exogamous unilinear subdivision of a tribe, itself often divided into sibs. (q.v.) A phratry is usually a union of two clans. It may be matrilineal or patrilineal. Kinship is an important element, along with a belief in an ultimate common ancestor. The phratry stems from an expansion of the clan’ (Winick 1966: 412).]

(ii) Moiety may be defined as: ‘A primary social division in which the tribe is made up of two groups. Each moiety often includes one or more interrelated clans, sibs, or phratries, and moiety exogamy is common...’ (Winick 1966: 364).

7. According to Von Brandenstein (1979: 14) the Nyungar term *maurnqaarlaung* (which derives from *maurn* meaning black or dark) means ‘one of the dark ones’ and refers to any of the sub-groups of the *Waardang-maatt* (Raven-member) [which is the same as Mathews’ Wortungmat and Daisy Bates Wardungmat] or what Von Brandenstein refers to as “the passive moiety”. According to Bates, these moiety subdivisions or subgroups do not interfere with the binding laws of moiety exogamy.

8. Based on terms and place names collected by Bates (1912) and Nyungar terms collected by Hope from Tommy Bimbar (1916) (an Aboriginal informant from the Mandurah area), it would seem that the affix ‘gur’ (or ‘ger’) when added to terms often indicates persons or people.

9. David (2006: 61) refers to the Owl Dreaming at *Gordol-ya* which is an important rockshelter located south-west of Katherine in Wardaman country in the Northern Territory. This rockshelter which is “the largest rock of the sandstone outcrop” at the western end of Wardaman country is known as ‘*Gordol-ya*’ meaning “at the Owl”. David states that the rockshelter ‘contains a culturally significant landmark in the form of a balancing rock placed above the rockshelter by *gordol*, the Owl, in the Dreaming.’ The shelter also contains numerous paintings which are dominated by a large yellow and red striped figure, identified by one of the Elders as *gordol*.

Rose (2003: 45) refers to boobook owl totemism in an Aboriginal group of New South Wales. She notes that the “spotted owl” [boobook] is the totem of the Wadthi-Wadthi (southern group).

10. Both Mowaljarlai (1993: 49) and Jebb (2006: 702) refer to the foundation myth of the Worora and Ngarinyin people of the West Kimberley which involved two powerful owls (which are also referred to as nightjar owls, owl men or nightjar men). Mowaljarlai describes these as Wodoi, the spotted owl [boobook] and Djingun, a small owl of brown-grey colour. ‘They made the law for men and women’ (p. 49). These two owls were responsible for “the great Wunnan, the Sharing System, and the Marriage Law.’

Mowaljarlai (1993: 200) further highlights the association between owls and Wandjina spirits, noting that Wodoi and Djingun were ‘first generation Ancestor Wandjina.’ He notes: ‘Big Spirit Wandjina have large eyes, never have a mouth or ears as such.’

Jebb (2006: 702) also refers to the foundation myth of the Worora and Ngarinyin people which acknowledges the creative supernatural powers associated with the “nightjar owls”:

‘For Ngarinyin and Wororra people, the nightjars are manifestations of Wandjina spirits, who created and remain responsible for dividing the society into Jungun and Wodoya moieties – the two halves of life, between which everyone marries.’ (Jebb 2006: 702)

11. Ornithomorphosed, ornithomorphic –having or representing bird forms or gods of bird form (Greek *ornis*, *ornith*, bird + *morphe* ‘form’), compare zoomorphosed, zoomorphic (zoo, meaning of animals + *morphe* ‘form’).

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## APPENDIX 9.1 DRUMMOND (*GOOLGOIL*)

The following article by James Drummond, published in the Perth Gazette on 18<sup>th</sup> June 1836, contains references to Goolgoil as the Aboriginal name for the head of Latour's Brook (now known as the Susannah Brook) and surrounding hills. The reference to 'fine springs of water at the foot of the hills at Goolgoil...' would appear to refer to freshwater springs or pools in or close to the Susannah brook.

### CORRESPONDENCE

To the Editor of "The Perth Gazette"

Sir,

'Since I sent you an account of our efforts to find a nearer road to Northam, one of my sons, with a party of natives, has crossed to the Goodmich, from the hills behind Mr Brockman's farm by a nearer and better line of road, inasmuch as the ascent to the hills is easier; and they crossed the Wabiera higher up, where it is easier to cross it with the carts. Mr Scott, of Guildford, and Craggie, who may be considered good judges of what will make a good road for carts, have returned from the Goodmich by the same route, and speak favourably of it. They report the distances to be, from the Goodmich to the Wabiera, four miles; from Wabeira to Goolgoil, three miles (Goolgoil is supposed to be the head of Colonel Latour's brook), from Goolgoil to Guildford, seven miles. They found fine springs of water at the foot of the hills at Goolgoil, Wabeira, and several other places. The direction of Guildford from the Goodmich, Mr. Scott found to be exactly west by south.'

I remain your obedient servant,

JAMES DRUMMOND

## APPENDIX: 9.2

### “OWL STONE” (LOWER CHITTERING)

#### BOYAY GOGOMAT – G. F. MOORE

Moore makes historical references to an “owl stone” known as *Boyay Gogomat* which he visited in the Lower Chittering -Bullsbrook area in 1835. He documents his visit to this ‘standing stone’ site as follows:

‘Proceeding for some miles in a SW direction, we came to a tall standing stone, where our guides made a halt, and plucking the tops of the grass tree, strewed them with great gravity on the ground around it. They were of a more taciturn disposition than our old friend Gear, & we had some difficulty in getting any explanation of this strange observance. What is this? - This is "Boyay Gogomat". That is, I believe, the owl or hawk stone. But what do you strew the leaves for? – "Weenait", which means something connected with the dead, was all the answer we could obtain. So whether it was an offering to a good spirit, or a propitiation to an evil spirit we could not ascertain. They seemed to lay much stress on the ceremony. I have since been informed that if those who pass by omit thus to make a bed for the stone, they will shortly die; that on one occasion two men passed it by with neglect, & they shortly atoned with their lives for their temerity. (1)

In 1836 when visiting the same neighbourhood but not the site itself, Moore comments on having observed previously ‘*a remarkable standing stone called 'Boyay Gogomat', to which the natives had attributed marvellous powers...*’ On this second occasion he attempted to elicit some further information on the site and its significance but was, once again, totally unsuccessful (Moore 1837: 7-8).

It is our anthropological opinion that the term “*gogomat*” used by Moore’s Aboriginal informant, and recorded by Moore in 1835, was a respectful and generalized term for the Ancestral Totemic Owl or mopoke. By using this generic reference to the Owl Ancestor the Aboriginal informant did not reveal any specific secret-sacred information about the stone and its ceremonial significance but simply referred to the name of the Mythological Being that it represented.

When Moore (1835) stated ‘That is, I believe, the owl or hawk stone’, he was right in that *gogomat* (the Southern Boobook) is indeed a hawk owl which belongs to the genus *Ninox*.

As to why Moore did not visit the site on this second occasion (1836) is not explained by him. However, we conjecture that because it was a powerful “male only” site, possibly associated with male fertility rituals, it would have been *winnaitch* (taboo) and dangerous for Toodyeep (a young female, the wife of Coondebung) who was in their company to go anywhere near the place.

For some unknown reason Moore did not describe the physical attributes of the stone nor provide any illustrations of it in his journal, which he used to do when encountering unusual or interesting topographical and/or cultural features. Last, but not least, why did Moore not plot this important landmark site on any of his maps as was his usual practice to show the routes of his historical expeditions?

Daisy Bates (in Bridge 1992:17-18) writing in 1912 refers to the “standing stone” visited by Moore ‘which his native guides called “*Boyay Gogomat*,” and to which they attached marvelous powers.’ However, there is no evidence to suggest that Bates ever located Moore’s *Boyay Gogomat*.

### APPENDIX 9.3 *Winnaitch* Places

Moore's reference to *Boyay gogomat* as *weenait* is significant in that *weenait* (or *wannitch*, *winnaitch*, *winytch*) means taboo, secret or forbidden, and may imply the penalty of death if the appropriate rituals are not performed in accordance with tradition. The terms *weenait* (*winnaitch* or *wannitch*) literally derive from *winna*, death (and *wanni*, to die.) This refers to the fact that trespassers or unauthorized persons who visit sacred places such as *Boyay Gogomat* without permission and who do not perform the correct rituals are likely to die. The fear of death is a very effective means of keeping strangers away from one's territory.

The suggestion here is that the totemic owl (*gogomat*) would alert its "human kin" to the approach of outsiders, and would take revenge on any offenders who failed to perform the appropriate ritual. These rituals were most probably only known by the totemic kin-related group for that territory.

It is our anthropological contention that the traditional knowledge, mythology and ceremonial significance of the "owl stone" recorded by Moore (1835) at Lower Chittering was traditionally the preserve of initiated senior male members from the local territory. Under the fear of death would they have passed on their secret-sacred information to a white man or the uninitiated. This is in keeping with the view often expressed by contemporary Nyungar Elders that:

*'The old people' never told strangers the stories of these sacred places, especially wadjelas [white people].'*

We conjecture that Moore's *Boyay Gogomat* was an important ceremonial and mythological site to traditional Aboriginal people, as well as an important landmark and reference point. In 1834 Weenat (one of Moore's Aboriginal guides) lists this site as a reference point in describing a short-cut route from the Upper Swan to Toodyay (Weenat 1834).



When indigenous people were dispossessed from their traditional lands, beginning in 1829 when the colony was first founded (and escalating in the 1830's onwards), Nyungar Elders could no longer access their sacred sites. As a direct result of this, their ceremonies which were usually site-specific could no longer be practiced and the mythological knowledge relating to these specific sites and ceremonies was forcibly lost through a combination of dispossession, dislocation, disease and death.

The indigenous notion of *winyitch* (or *winnaitch*) and how it applied to their sacred sites, is described by Bates as follows:

“In various parts of the south there were certain winytch, or sacred places, so to speak the dwelling places of certain *Janga*, or *Kaanya*. These *winytch* places might be only trees, or rocks, a sandbank, a hill, etc. Whatever they were, the natives in passing them were always careful to strew rushes or boughs near them, thereby propitiating the spirits dwelling there. Any native neglecting this ceremony was sure to die.” (Bates 1905-1906 in Montagu 1937: 181-182)

After analyzing Bates' descriptions of *winytch* areas as being the domains of *janga* or *kaanya*, Montagu (1937: 182) concludes that ‘the *winytch* are certainly totem places in which reside the Kaanya or spirits of the dead. Each *winytch* is chiefly, however, the abode of a particular totem ancestor’ [emphasis added]

Montagu's (1937) analysis helps to explain the reluctance of Moore's Aboriginal guides to impart any secret-sacred information, or in fact any ethnographic information at all, with regards to the ancestral and totemic owl spirit known as *Boyay Gogomat*.

This may explain the reasons as to why, but for Moore's scant record of *Boyay Gogomat*, there was no further information collected on either of the “owl stones” known as *Boyay Gogomat*.

## Contemporary Nyungar Feelings associated with “Winnaitch” sites

When contemporary Elders were asked how they knew whether a place was *winnaitch* or not, some of their comments included:

*‘You feel like you know you shouldn’t be there. It’s a warra feeling, a very bad feeling.’*

*‘It is hard to describe in words but we Nyungars feel it in our body.’*

*‘If a place is winnaitch, you feel desperate, cold and frightened, and you just want to get away from the place. You know in your heart that you shouldn’t be there. It’s a very bad feeling.’*

When asked to describe a non-winnaitch place, one of the Elders stated:

*‘It is a wonderful feeling. You feel content as if ‘the old people’ are welcoming you and have been waiting for you to come there.’*

Although the concept of “winnaitch” is understandable, as is the behaviour associated with the conscious entry into a known *winnaitch* place; however, what is incomprehensible are the psycho-corporeal experiences generated when a person *unknowingly* enters a *winnaitch* place. There seems to be in the individual psyche an inherent ability to tune into some negative vibrational field that generates a feeling of dread and anxiety which drives them to avoid such places.

## APPENDIX 9.4: STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE OF SITE

### (ROBERT BROPHO'S STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE OF THE "OWL STONE" AT SUSANNAH BROOK/ RED HILL

SusannahVSacredness15.10.08

SWAN VALLEY NYUNGAH COMMUNITY  
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Kambarang  
15 October, 2008

#### SUSANNAH VALLEY

The whole Susannah Valley is a Site. It is Sacred to the Nyungah People.

Susannah Valley is believed to be the Site of a massacre (*Nyungah Land* - Bevan Carter, 2006), and there are signs of this there still.

Our People before us lived in Susannah Valley. Our People who've lived near here lately had little Spirit Beings coming to them from this Valley but we have never been allowed in till lately.

There is artefacts everywhere there. There's markings. There's our Tucker, Gathering areas and our Ancestors' bits and pieces left here and there. There's Rock Shelters, and many things that belong to us the Descendents. The entire Valley is full of our presence, the Nyungah People, if you know what to look for.

The Standing Stone has been there since the Beginning of Time.

We know through our Spiritual Dreaming, especially the Old People.

I am the Senior Elder and I haven't altered my concerns or my Beliefs.

I am part of the Spiritual Dreaming when it begun.

The Proof of the Standing Rock is it is standing there.

The Markings that point to it are further up the Valley, made by our Ancestral People.

The Footprints of where our Ancestors went and the Spiritual Dreaming is within our bodies and in the Land.

The Standing Stone is the same as the Starting and the Running of the Creek and the Rising of the Sun.

It is a Site because it is Sacred to us. It is our Belief. It has meaning to us, a ceremonial place for our People, a Worship Place.

The underground vibrations of when they started blasting could unsettle the Stone standing there. It could fall and be destroyed for ever.

If there is blasting or machine movements anywhere near there the vibrations of that Ground could unsettle what Nature has allowed to Stand there all these years since the Beginning of Time. »

This Standing Stone is not like a seed of a Plant or a Tree that you could replant. It must be protected.

Robert C. Bropho

## APPENDIX 9.5

Eliade (1959: 11) in his book *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion*, under the heading ‘*When the Sacred Manifests Itself*,’ notes:

‘Man becomes aware of the sacred because it manifests itself, shows itself, as something wholly different from the profane. To designate the *act of manifestation* of the sacred, we have proposed the term *hierophany*. It is a fitting term ...[which means] that *something sacred shows itself to us*. It could be said that the history of religions – from the most primitive to the most highly developed – is constituted by a great number of hierophanies, by manifestations of sacred realities. From the most elementary hierophany – e.g. manifestation of the sacred in some ordinary object, a stone or a tree – to the supreme hierophany (which, for a Christian, is the incarnation of God in Jesus Christ) there is no solution of continuity. In each case we are confronted by the same mysterious act – the manifestation of something of a wholly different order, a reality that does not belong to our world, in objects that are an integral part of our natural “profane” world.

The modern Occidental experiences a certain uneasiness before many manifestations of the sacred. He finds it difficult to accept the fact that, for many human beings, the sacred can be manifested in stone or trees, for example. But as we shall soon see, what is involved is not a veneration of the stone in itself, a cult of the tree in itself. The sacred tree, the sacred stone are not adored as stone or tree; they are worshipped precisely because they are *hierophanies*, because they show something that is no longer stone or tree but the *sacred*... By manifesting the sacred, any object becomes something else, yet it continues to remain itself, for it continues to participate in its surrounding milieu. A sacred stone remains a stone; apparently (or, more precisely from the profane point of view), nothing distinguishes it from all other stone. But for those to whom a stone reveals itself as sacred, its immediate reality is transmuted into a supernatural reality.’

Eliade (1959:12) also notes that:

‘...for the man of all pre-modern societies, the *sacred* is equivalent to a *power*, and, in the last analysis, to *reality*. The sacred is saturated with *being*... It should be said at once that the *completely* profane worlds, the wholly desacralized cosmos, is a recent discovery in the history of the human spirit... For our purpose it is enough to observe that desacralization pervades the entire experience of the nonreligious man of modern societies and that, in consequence, he finds it increasingly difficult to rediscover the existential dimensions of religious man in the archaic societies.’

## APPENDIX 9.6 “OWL STONES” IN MYTHOLOGY

Two mythological narratives, potentially referring to the same “owl stone” located on the south coast of Western Australia, are presented below. The mythology was first recorded by Ethel Hassell (circa 1880’s) and the “owl stone” was personally viewed by her when visiting the Cape Riche/ Bremer Bay area with her family at this time. Macintyre (1975) collected a different version of (what would appear to be) the same story from a senior Nyungar man living at Norseman in the 1970’s.

### 8.71 Owl stone in mythology (Hassell 1934, 1935, 1975)

Hassell (1934, 1935 and 1975) describes an “owl stone” which is referred to in Nyungar mythology. According to the myth this metamorphosed owl is located on the south coast of Western Australia. In a story titled ‘Norm and Cubine (Black Snake and Mopok sic.)’ there are three main characters – the mopoke, crow and tiger snake. [Hassell’s work edited by Davidson (1935) refers to the tiger snake as *Norm*, however, we have used *Norn* here in keeping with the standard accepted Nyungar term for this venomous snake, and to be consistent with Hassell’s earlier writings where she uses *norn* or *nornnt*].

It should be pointed out that the mopoke and crow are both iconic totem birds which belong to the “dark” moiety known as *Wordungmat* (crow). Hassell (1934, 1935, 1975) describes how towards the end of the myth these two birds are acting together to protect the coastline from the *norn* (tiger snake); however, the *norn* by deception bites the owl, causing it to die. The owl being a totemic Ancestral Being becomes immortalised in stone on the side of a hill overlooking the sea.

In the final section of the story as recorded by Hassell, reference is made to the mobbing behaviour of the mopokes:

‘The mopoaks [sic.] flew down to pick at him and kill him [tiger snake] but they are slow in their movements, and Norm sprang up and bit one of them. Directly the mopoak knew that he was bitten he flew on to the side of the hill and sat down to die. The hawks,

however, quickly chased Norm back into the sea and he was so tired and cold that he died where the sea is shallow near the land. By degrees the salt and sand washed over Norm and formed the reef that is now there, while the mopoke sat on the hill and died. The hawks dropped some stone round the mopoak and that kept him upright. After a time he became a stone and there he sits keeping watch that the Norm below shall not land.' (Hassell in Davidson 1935:125).

The crux of this myth involves the prime Ancestral Beings becoming immortalised as geological features of the landscape (and seascape) where they are perceived to represent the continuing embodiments of the Ancestor's spiritual energy or essence. According to Berndt (1973: 79), it is the final act of death in which the characters are transformed into another state of being that immortalises them forever in the Dreaming.

### **8.72 Owl stone in mythology (Macintyre 1975)**

A different version of this mythology of the 'owl stone' was collected by Ken Macintyre in 1975 at Norseman from a senior Nyungar man who told how the hawk and the owl once chased the *norne* (*norn*, tiger snake) from his camp because he stole the dugite women who were related to the chicken hawk.

The chicken hawk's uncle (mother's brother) was the mopoke, and the tiger snake was the "wrong" marriage for the dugite woman because they were like sisters to him.

When the chicken hawk told his uncle, the owl, who was much older and wiser and "very clever," that they must get rid of and kill the tiger snake because he had broken the law, he and his uncle sharpened their spears and chased after the tiger snake.

The tiger snake understood that the chicken hawk and his uncle were much stronger fighters than he and he left for the coast to get away from them. When the chicken hawk and owl finally caught up with the tiger snake and chased him into the sea, they would not then let him land. He just kept swimming around and around unable to return to the land. The owl stood guard while the chicken hawk went out to hunt.

## **APPENDIX 9.7 ABORIGINAL HERITAGE ACT 1972**

The decision as to whether a place may or may not constitute a "site" under Sections 5 and 39 of the W.A. Aboriginal Heritage Act 1972 is made by the Aboriginal Cultural Material Committee (ACMC) with the final authority resting with the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs. Section 4 of the W.A. *Aboriginal Heritage Act* 1972 defines the meaning of "Aboriginal Site" as a place to which this Act applies by the operation of Section 5, which is defined as follows:

### **Section 5 of the Act states:**

5 (a) Any place of importance and significance where persons of Aboriginal descent have, or appear to have, left any object, natural or artificial, used for, or made for or adapted for use for, any purpose connected with the traditional cultural life of the Aboriginal people, past or present;

5(b) Any sacred, ritual or ceremonial site, which is of importance and special significance to persons of Aboriginal descent.

5(c) Any place which, in the opinion of the Committee is or was associated with the Aboriginal people and which is of historical, anthropological, archaeological or ethnographical interest and should be preserved because of its importance and significance to the cultural heritage of the state;

5(d) Any place where objects to this Act applies are traditionally stored, or to which, under the provisions of this Act, such objects have been taken or removed.

### **Section 39 (2) of the Act states:**

'...in evaluating the importance of places and objects the Committee [Aboriginal Cultural Material Committee] shall have regard to –

- (a) any existing use or significance attributed under relevant Aboriginal custom;
- (b) any former or reputed use or significance which may be attributed upon the basis of tradition, historical association or Aboriginal sentiment;
- (c) any potential anthropological, archaeological or ethnographical interest; and
- (d) aesthetic values.'

### **Section 39 (3) of the Act states:**

'Associated sacred beliefs, and ritual or ceremonial usage, in so far as such matters can be ascertained, shall be regarded as the primary considerations to be taken into account in the evaluation of any place or object for the purposes of this Act.'

## **17. Offences relating to Aboriginal sites**

A person who: (a) excavates, destroys, damages, conceals or in any way alters any Aboriginal site; (b) in any way alters, damages, removes, destroys, conceals, or who deals with in a manner not sanctioned by relevant custom, or assumes the possession, custody or control of, any object on or under an Aboriginal site, commits an offence unless he is acting with the authorisation of the Registrar under section 16 or the consent of the Minister under section 18.

## APPENDIX 9.8

### **OWLS IN NYUNGAR CULTURE:**

**RESEARCH PAPER IN PROGRESS – (March 2009)**

*This paper has been prepared by research anthropologists Ken Macintyre and Dr Barbara Dobson in order to provide insight into the nature and complexity of Nyungar views on owls, tawny frogmouths and other night birds in traditional and contemporary times with a view to better understanding the occurrence and significance of “owl stones” in Nyungar culture, in particular, the “owl stone” at Red Hill.*

*Macintyre and Dobson wish to acknowledge and thank members of the Combined Swan River and Swan Coastal Plains and Darling Ranges Nyungar Elders, Native Title Holders and Traditional Owners who have assisted in the production of this paper by sharing their views and stories on owls and night birds in Nyungar culture for the benefit and understanding of all Nyungar and non-Nyungar people.*

#### **9.81 Nyungar Terms for the Boobook Owl**

The Southern Boobook Owl (*Ninox novaeseelandiae*) is the smallest native owl and one of the most common in Australia. It belongs to the genus known as the ‘hawk owls’ (*Ninox*) owing to its hawk-like features, especially its sharp-hooked beak and predatory behaviour. It is widespread throughout southwestern Australia where it is popularly referred to as the boobook or mopoke (see Plate 5). Both these names seem to be commonly accepted as indigenous onomatopoeic representations of the bird’s familiar two-tonal call. Boobook (also *bubuk*) is said to derive from the traditional Aboriginal language of the Sydney region (Troy 1994: 69) and according to other sources, from the Wiradjuri language of Victoria. Sometimes it is rendered as *buc-buc*. Given its onomatopoeic origins, it could originate from more than one Aboriginal group.

The boobook is sometimes referred to as the little brown owl, owing to its mottled brown plumage (see Plate 6). The Nyungar name for this owl derives from the root word *gogo*



(*gurgur, goorgoor*) which is an onomatopoeic representation of the bird's nocturnal cuckoo-like call. The earliest Nyungar terms recorded for this owl are *gogomat* (Moore 1835), *gugumit*, (Armstrong 1836, Moore 1842:30), *googoomit* (Grey 1840:43) and *gurgurda* (Moore 1842: 33). These terms are described below:

'The night bird, which the settlers call the cuckoo, (and the natives "gogoomit" or "woroongul," (Armstrong 1836 in Green 1979: 188)

'goo-goo-mit – a species of bird, the note of which resembles that of a cuckoo' (Grey 1840: 43)

'gugumit – A small brown owl, the note of which resembles the cuckoo when heard at a distance.' (Moore 1842: 30)

'gurgurda – Strix. Little brown or cuckoo owl.' (Moore 1842: 33)

'gurgurda - boobook owl' (Serventy & Whittell 1948 in Bindon & Chadwick 1992:66)

It may be seen that these terms, including Drummond's reference to *goolgoil* (owl), all derive from the same root word *gogo* (variously rendered as *googoo, gurgur and goorgoor*) which is onomatopoeic, representing an imitation of the bird's own call. As one Elder commented: '*We say that the bird calls its own name*'.

The name "*gogo*" (and its various renditions) is remarkably similar to the names recorded in other parts of Aboriginal Australia for the boobook or mopoke, which include *kokok* in the Keramin and Yorta Yorta languages of Victoria, and *kwerrkwerrke* 'named for its call' in the Eastern Arrente, Alice Springs (Thieberger and McGregor 1994; Brough Smyth 1878).

In recognizing the different phonetic renderings of the various Nyungar terms (and their derivatives) collected by the different recorders, it is worth noting that Drummond's attempted pronunciation and spelling of Nyungar terms was undoubtedly heavily influenced by Scottish linguistic convention, just as the other language recorders were heavily constrained by their respective ethno-linguistic backgrounds and orthographic traditions (see Macintyre and Dobson 2008).

## 9.82 Owls and the supernatural

### Ethno-historical records

Early ethno-historical references by Armstrong (1836) and Bunbury (1836) confirm that owls were greatly feared and were believed to be associated with malevolent spirits.

In 1836 Armstrong, the official Native Interpreter (cited in Green 1979: 188) makes a special reference to the owl as an agent of sickness and fear in Nyungar culture:

‘The night bird, which the settlers call the cuckoo, (and the natives “gogoomit” or “woroongul,”) is regarded by the latter as the cause of all boils and eruptions on their bodies, which they believe it to produce by piercing them with its beak, in the night-time, while they are asleep.’

Likewise Ogle (1839: 60) notes that the Aborigines of the Perth and surrounding area ‘consider that the cry of the night-cuckoo portends death.’

Our research shows that the affix ‘*mit*’ means ‘agent’, hence *gogoomit* (“*gogoo*”, owl + “*mit*”, agent) may be translated as the owl as an ‘agent’ of sickness and death. It could also be interpreted that the owl may be an ‘agent’ of some other malign supernatural or human entity, such as a *jannock*, or as one contemporary Elder suggested ‘*a powerful bulya enforcing the old law and justice*’

Bunbury (1930) expresses a similar view to that of Armstrong when travelling between the Murray River and the Vasse in 1836. He describes Nyungar beliefs about predatory night birds as follows:

‘They [Aborigines] would not dare, it is true, under any circumstances to move at night without a firestick, except on a very clear moon-light night, for fear of the ‘Granga’ or evil spirits, or Ghosts, and also of the ‘Wow’, a bird of the genus *Podargus*, or Hawk Goatsucker, which flies by night uttering a note extremely like our Cuckoo and of which

the Natives stand in great awe, ascribing to his malice any pains they may suffer at night, cramps, boils, or tumours. When they hear him they cover themselves as well as they can with their cloaks and crouch close to the fire, which they will on no account leave whilst their enemy is in the neighbourhood; but they will not for a moment scruple [hesitate] to eat him if they catch him by day.’ (Bunbury 1930: 76)

It is unclear whether Bunbury is referring here to the tawny frogmouth (*Podargus strigoides*) or the Southern Boobook (*Ninox novaeseelandiae*). His reference to the cuckoo-like call of the bird would suggest that he is confusing the tawny frogmouth (*Podargus*) with the Southern Boobook (*Ninox*) which was sometimes referred to by early recorders as the “cuckoo owl” owing to its note resembling that of the English cuckoo (Moore 1842: 33). To the non-specialist ornithologist the calls of the boobook are often attributed to either or both birds as they are familiar night sounds.

It is often difficult to establish which species or genus of night birds the early settlers were recording because they were not trained ornithologists and the common names which they used (such as cuckoo owl, night cuckoo, night hawk, hawk goatsucker and mopoke) often lacked specificity. For this reason terms such as owl and mopoke are used ‘flexibly’ in this paper to accommodate those contexts, both ethno-historical and contemporary where there is a lack of clarification between the different night birds being referred to.

### **Confusion between the Southern Boobook Owl and the Tawny Frogmouth**

Not only did the early European settlers sometimes record night birds as simply ‘cuckoo’, “night cuckoo”, “cuckoo owl” or ‘hawk goatsucker’ without specifying which species or genus of night bird they were referring to, some added to the confusion by using the term “mopoke” without specifying whether they were referring to the boobook owl (*Ninox novaeseelandiae*) (see Plate 6) or the tawny frogmouth (*Podargus strigoides*) (see Plates 7 & 8) or other night bird. Although the term mopoke generally refers to the boobook owl, the term is also sometimes used to refer to the tawny frogmouth (which does not even belong to the owl family). This makes it problematic when trying to determine which particular species of night bird is being referred.



Plate 6: Southern Boobook Owl (*Ninox novaeseelandiae*). Photo by Tony Brown, member of Birds Australia. (Photo taken in Kings Park, Perth)



The origin of the term mopoke, and whether it derives from an Aboriginal or non-Aboriginal language, is uncertain. Interestingly, Von Brandenstein (1979: 15), who specializes in the Nyungar language, translates mopoke (or what he records as ‘*maup-puaqq*’ or *mawp*, skin + *poaak*, cloak) as literally “bark-cloak”, “skin-cloak” or “cloak skin”, thus implying a Nyungar origin for the term (*mawp-poaak*).



Plate 7: Two Tawny Frogmouths (*Podargus strigoides*) illustrating their cryptic “bark-cloak” or tree limb camouflage. Photo by Debbie Walker, member of Birds Australia.

Although von Brandenstein applies this ‘bark-cloak’ descriptor to the Southern Boobook owl (*Ninox boobook* Latham 1801), it would also aptly describe the remarkable bark-like or tree limb-like camouflage of the tawny frogmouth (see Plates 7 and 8).





Plate 8: Three Tawny Frogmouths (*Podargus strigoides*). Male (left), female (top right) and an immature bird (bottom right). Photo by Rod Smith, member of Birds Australia.

Von Brandenstein's (1979) 'bark-cloak' translation could possibly call into question the popular notion of mopoke as an onomatopoeic term, if indeed it is a Nyungar term. Whatever its origins, it would seem that the term 'mopoke' may be a collective rather than a species-specific reference, especially among non-ornithological trained persons (some of whom) apply the term to one or both night birds on the basis of a perceived resemblance in their "mopoke" or "more-pork" like calls.

If the term is Nyungar-derived, it could denote a generic reference to both the boobook and the tawny frogmouth (and potentially other nocturnal predatory birds, such as the nightjars and owlet-nightjars) which share the same bark-like camouflage abilities so important to their survival.

In fact, if we consider ornitho-taxonomy (how birds are classified) from an indigenous perspective (rather than from a Linnaean taxonomical perspective), it becomes apparent that the Nyungar system reflects a greater emphasis on practical relevance and sometimes

cultural and mythological considerations as well. In the case of night birds, it may well be that the similarities of their attributes and behaviour, and the culturally perceived consequences of these, are of greater importance in indigenous ornitho-classification than the criteria of physiological or biological resemblance of species. From a Nyungar viewpoint, these former aspects may be considered more culturally appropriate determinants of classification than the degree of biological relatedness (Macintyre and Dobson 2009). Thus the Western-based Linnaean system may be of limited usefulness when trying to understand ornitho-taxonomy from an indigenous viewpoint.

From this perspective it may be seen that the Southern Boobook Owl and Tawny Frogmouth have a number of attributes and behaviours in common. These include their size and shape, silent flight, powerful night vision, much feared status as agents of the supernatural, agents of sickness and death, and their reputed (and disputed) similarities of calls, especially their alarm and distress calls. Although the typical calls of these birds are quite distinct (for example, the familiar “oom-oom-oom” sound of the tawny frogmouth is distinctive from the *goo-goo* of the boobook owl), both birds nevertheless have a repertoire of vocal sounds, some of which may be perceived as having a degree of resemblance.

Even to this day there is considerable confusion in contemporary Nyungar society when individuals recount stories and incidents involving these much-feared night birds. It is often hard to distinguish in the stories whether it is an owl or a tawny frogmouth (or possibly even an owlet-nightjar or nightjar) that is being referred to. What is most noticeable in the stories, however, is the common dread of the nocturnal calls of these birds and their often foreboding consequences.

It is our contention that owls, tawny frogmouths and other related night birds (such as nightjars and owlet-nightjars) were traditionally probably all categorized into one group as *winnaitch* night birds (spirit birds or “*warra* birds”). This taxonomic classification was most probably based on their similar nocturnal (and in some cases, crepuscular, meaning dawn and dusk) behaviour, together with a deep mythological association of

these birds with dangerous supernatural beings.

The avoidance of revealing the totemic names of such feared night birds would explain why the actual names were not collected by researchers, such as Hassell (1935) who recorded *cubine* (meaning totem) for mopoke, *youanitch* (meaning ghost, forbidden, dangerous) and *buitch* (meaning stone) for tawny frogmouth (1880's notes). However, these terms may be viewed as emic descriptors rather than denoting the names of species (or genus) of different night birds. The real totemic names would have been kept secret (*youanitch*) and only used by the senior initiated custodians of that totem. These names would have been used at special rituals and ceremonies involving increase rites and totemic propitiations. Even if the name was known, it would not have been uttered outside of the ceremonial context for fear that it may call forth, or offend in some way, the totem spirit and thus bring a negative effect upon the individual or group.

### **9.83 The Fear of Owls in Nyungar Culture**

#### **Contemporary Accounts**

*'In Nyungah Culture the Googoo or Boobook Owl is a frightening messenger of death.'*

When the Nyungar Elders were asked by anthropologists Macintyre and Dobson in 2008 and 2009 if they knew of any stories or myths about owls, they recounted a number of stories told to them in their childhood by parents and other relatives. Their verbatim accounts, presented here, illustrate their culturally deep-seated fear of owls or mopokes.

*'We Nyungars have always been frightened of owls because they are night birds and are associated with evil spirits. When camping in the bush as kids, our parents were always terrified if they heard an owl at night. The old people would want to kill it because they said if you don't kill it first before it kills you, someone will die. They were very scared.'*

*'I remember the "old people" telling us when we were kids that on still nights when they were sitting around the campfire, they would freeze in terror at the sound of the mopoke because that bird could see you, could hear you and could fly without making a sound. They believed that it was like a spirit in the night and could do bad things to you.'*



*“The old people” called them night hawks because you could hear the squeals of the mice as they swooped on them and scooped them up in their claws. These night sounds really scared them.*

*“The old fellas” used to respect the owl and teach young children not to misbehave or go walking around at night-time. They used to tell scary stories.’  
‘When we were kids we were so scared at night, we didn’t look around, we just hid under the blanket and didn’t move a muscle.’*

*‘I remember my parents telling me the worse thing that can happen is to hear the call of an owl because that was a sign that someone would die, unless you found that bird and killed it before it killed you.’*

*‘We were always told to watch out and to hide and be still if you ever heard the mopoke cry out, because this was a spirit bird which could see you in the night. Even in the day time my parents told me never to harm an owl.... they were dangerous.’*

*‘I remember an old story that my father told me that boylya men [witchdoctors, sorcerers] would turn into owls at night time and chase after a person they had a grudge for and when they found them they’d put a magic curse on them while they were asleep and they would die the next day.’*

*‘The old people would tell stories that if you did anything wrong at night the owl would see you and would tell a boylya who could speak owl language and he would come after you and punish you. You think that people can’t see you in the dark, but the owl people can see you.’*

*‘There’s an old story that my grandmother used to tell me that certain boylya men can turn into owls and if someone broke the law or did something bad, the owl would come and get you at night while you were sleeping, and put a yumpa [magic curse] on you.’*

*‘It’s a winnaitch bird, You can’t hurt them or kill them. If you try to do this you might stir up bad spirits.’*

*‘If you see an owl in the day time, you don’t need to be frightened because it’s only in the night time when it gets its power. Don’t get me wrong, owls are not all bad. If you know the rituals and the stories for the place, they [the owl] will help you, like all our other ancestors supplying us with food, water and shelter.’*

*‘The one bird that Nyungahs fear is the goombagarri [mopoke]. It’s a warra [bad] bird. When you hear that bird at night, it is an omen. You must find it, kill it and burn it, but it’s hard to find because it is the same colour as the bark of the tree. If that bird can sing and get away with it, it’s a death omen, it means someone will die.’*

Although there are certain inconsistencies in the above sentiments (for example, whether to kill the omen bird or to leave it alone for fear of reprisal), this is not uncommon when collecting oral narratives in any culture. In fact such contradictions typically constitute the raw fabric of ethnographic analysis.

These contrary views as to whether to kill the owl or not, may stem from a possible confusion between the different night birds being referred to or more likely (in our view) the views may simply represent two different indigenous ways of resolving the same problem – by either avoiding or killing the manifest agent of their fear.

What these views have in common is that they reflect the culturally ingrained and deep-seated fears held (even to this day) by senior Nyungar Elders relating to the destructive powers attributed to owls (or mopokes) in Nyungar culture. This fear of owls and their assumed destructive powers is widespread throughout many cultures of the world.

*'It was like a spirit in the night and could do bad (warra) things to you.'*

It is interesting to note that the contemporary Nyungar views of the owl, mopoke and frogmouth as *'winnaitch'*, *'wanitch'* or *'warra'* (bad) are consistent with the traditional Nyungar views of these birds as *'youanitch'* (Hassell 1890's).

As previously pointed out, descriptors were often recorded rather than the actual name of a particular bird or bird species. This is demonstrated in Hassell's (1890's) recording of *youanitch* as the name of the tawny frogmouth. What she was in fact recording (most probably without realising it) was an emic descriptor rather than the name of the actual bird. *Youanitch* can mean ghost, death, evil spirit, forbidden, taboo or danger. Likewise, Gray (1987 in Bindon 1992) records *youaintch* (sic.) as the name for owl.

Based on early ethno-historical accounts it would seem that the owl and the tawny frogmouth (and possibly other night birds as well) were considered *youanitch*, (also rendered as *wannaitch*, *winnaitch*, *wynitch*, *weinitch*) and to this day (in many cases) are

still considered *winnaitch* by contemporary Nyungars (See Appendix 9.3: *Winnaitch* Places).

#### 9.84 Winged Familiars – ‘Assistant Totemism’

It is not uncommon to hear stories of how certain *bulya* or ‘clever’ men were believed to have the ability to transform themselves into a night bird such as the owl or mopoke and under this guise were able to watch over and ‘police’ campsites at night time to ensure that the inhabitants were safe from intruders, and also to act as a deterrent against young men becoming involved in sexual transgressions prior to initiation, or breaking the incest taboo. Culturally, the owl may be viewed as an agent of social control in that it is able to fly silently throughout the night, and aided by its powerful, penetrating night vision, is able to watch over people’s night time activities and then report back to the ‘clever man’ to whom it is considered a type of “familiar spirit” (Macintyre 1990 unpublished field notes).

The notion of the owl as a winged “familiar” is important in Nyungar culture. It fits neatly into Elkin’s category of “assistant totemism” which he distinguishes as follows:

‘In most parts of Australia, the medicine man stands in a special relation to one natural species, usually an animal or reptile which acts as his assistant, going forth either to work his will either for good or ill on the patient or victim, or to gather information from a distance. This variety of totemism, which is individual in form, is most strongly developed in eastern Australia, but the possession of similar “familiars” is also characteristic of the medicine-men of north-western Australia. Such totems and “familiars” are both within and without the individual. They are like a second self or spirit, and yet they are also externalized in the species, and may be exhibited in a tamed member of it. The lace lizards and certain snakes are the commonest varieties of assistant totems.

This totem is usually given by medicine-men and generally only to persons who are destined, or desire, to be magical practitioners....In southeastern Australia, at least, assistant totemism is akin to social totemism; the totemite does not eat his totem; indeed an injury to the latter will entail injury to him; and for its part, the totem assists and guards the individual. It should also be noticed that the social totem and the dream totem are often believed to guard and warn the totemite and even to help him to recover from illness. But the element of positive assistance in the performance of one’s work or

calling is not present; this seems to be limited to the profession of medicine-men and the workers of magic, and so requires a subdivision for itself, namely, assistant totemism. ‘ (Elkin 1948: 148-149)

Macintyre (1975) in his unpublished field notes relating to the north-eastern Goldfields records a *mabanjarra* (‘clever man’) having a ‘spirit familiar’ located in his abdomen. This was said to be in the form of a snake and was referred to in kinship terms as ‘father’.

In southwestern Australia certain birds such as the mopoke and the crow (both of which belonged to the ‘dark’ side of the Nyungar moiety system) were the winged familiars of the *boylya* (also *bulya*, medicine men, ‘clever men’, sorcerers). The noiseless flight of the owl (made possible by a specialized aerodynamic wing feather structure which functions as an important evolutionary, nocturnal hunting device) no doubt appealed to these ‘clever men’ as it enabled them to find an agent or vehicle by which they could spy upon or surprise their victims while they were sleeping. By adorning themselves with the soft primary wing feathers of the mopoke, it was believed that this enabled them to acquire the powerful qualities of this top predator bird including its strong, penetrating night vision and swiftness of flight and agility in catching victims unaware.

One Nyungar Elder recounted a story (told to him when he was much younger) about an old Nyungar *boylya* man who lived in the Wheatbelt region, east of Perth:

*‘He was a great doctor and could fix everyone but they were all terrified of him because he seemed to know everything they were doing and they believed that he turned into an owl at night and flew around to all the camps watching everything and making sure that no one broke the law.’*

In this story the ‘clever man’ was perceived as having the supernatural powers to transform himself between human and bird. This duality is a common theme portrayed in Nyungar myths.

Another story which was told to us alluded to the same transformational powers of a ‘clever man’ and the mopoke as his ‘agent’. However, this story was different. It

depicted the “mopoke” as a healing agent (rather than a destructive force) thus symbolizing, what can only be described here as, the miraculous healing powers of the *boylya* (or *buylya*, *bulya*) in the guise of a mopoke.

This story was recounted by a Nyungar Elder who described a true story which he had heard about a young Nyungar boy who had been involved in an accident with a horse-and-cart. For some unknown reason the cart ran over the boy and as a result he was seriously injured. He was taken to hospital but the doctors said that there was nothing they could do to help him and that his parents should take him home to die. However, his mother’s Elder sister knew of a “clever man” (*boylya* man) who lived in another district. Through a relative they contacted this man who told them not to worry and he said that he would visit the young boy just after midnight (that same night) in the guise of a mopoke. He said he would call a number of times and then fly away.

The next morning the young boy regained consciousness and began to talk and asked for some food. No one in the camp doubted that the *boylya* man had visited the boy during the night. Even to the time of his death (only ten years ago) this man had the scars on his face and body to prove his close encounter with death.

The *boylya* man was perceived as transferring his magical healing powers through the mopoke. This is an example of ‘good’ sorcery, whereas in most of the stories reported to us, the owl or mopoke was perceived as a destructive force or evil ‘spirit familiar’ of the sorcerer. Interestingly, there are cultural parallels found outside Aboriginal Australia where owls are similarly associated with indigenous shamans or sorcerers. For example, Werness et al (2001: 306) points out:

‘Among many Native North Americans, the owl was especially closely tied to the shaman. Eskimo masks depict owl spirits; possibly the *inua* (animal other) of the shaman.’ (Werness et al 2001: 306).

The association of owls with the supernatural is also found throughout the world, most notably in Asia.

## 9.85 Owl totemism and the supernatural

Hassell's (1934, 1935, 1936, 1975) work demonstrates how totemism involving the mopoke was not only restricted to the human realm but also existed among supernatural ghosts and demons, known as *jannock* or *janga*. These *jannock* were sometimes believed to have totems which were "familiar" in nature and which gave the spirit (at least in the case of *Gnolum* as described by Hassell) enhanced nocturnal powers for seeking out those young males who dared to wander away from their campfires at night.

Hassell (1975) describes a nocturnal *jannock* (demon spirit) known as *Gnolum* who frequents the forests in the lower southern part of Western Australia. It is clear from her description that this spirit is indeed the predatory 'mopok' (sic.) which is described as:

'a very tall, thin spirit or *jannock* with a long thin beard. A member of the *cubine* [mopoke] totem. Wears no clothing except *cubine* feathers stuck all over the head.' (in Davidson 1935:277)

In a separate publication Hassell (1975: 65) describes *gnolum* as a "man":

'the form of a very tall, very thin man...[who] wore no garments of any kind but has his totem feathers stuck all over his head and they are those of the mopoke.'

It seems clear from Hassell's description that this spirit (or man) known as *Gnolum* is attempting to emulate the nocturnal behaviour of his totem, the mopoke. *Gnolum* is said to lure young boys by enticing them with the sweet-tasting root of the *mungah* (reported to be *Nuytsia floribunda*) or sometimes the *bardi* (Hassell 1975).

It is difficult to ascertain whether Hassell misunderstood her informants' use of metaphor in trying to convey to her that *Gnolum's* totem was a "familiar" or "assistant" which gave him enhanced powers of strong vision, acute hearing and noiseless flight in the night – attributes which are associated with his totem.

It would seem that *Gnolum* was an awesome “boogey man (or spirit)” who in anthropological terms may be seen as performing an important social control function prohibiting young boys from getting into mischief at night time.

Interestingly, Douglas (1976: 66-67) refers to a ‘night hawk’ known as *nyurlam* (possibly similar to Hassell’s *gnolum*) which he describes as a ‘devil woman’ or ‘female ghost’. This may be the female equivalent of *gnolum* as both perform frightening functions and may be viewed as agents of social control. According to Douglas (1976: 67), the fear of *nyurlam*, is used to prevent children from eating the sticky gum and climbing the brittle branches of the *Nuytsia floribunda* (Christmas tree).

