

EXPLORING NATIVE AND INDIGENOUS COMPANION ANIMALS WITHIN TRADITIONAL SOCIETY AND IN EARLY EURO-AUSTRALIAN SETTLEMENTS: A NARRATIVE AND VISUAL HISTORY.

Ms Justine Philip¹, A/Prof Don Garden²

¹ University of New England, ² University of Melbourne

Human–animal studies is an emerging interdisciplinary area of research, spanning natural sciences, humanities and historical studies. This project is part of my PhD in environmental science, collating historical narrative and photographic records of positive interactions between native and indigenous Australian animals, and human communities.

The research looks at the benefits of these interspecies interactions for both human and non-human communities, providing an opportunity to extend existing knowledge, appreciation and management of native and indigenous animals in the contemporary environment, and to elucidate on this shared heritage.

The project compiles photographic and narrative histories, exploring a range of different species and geographical locations. My PhD research focuses on the *Canis lupus dingo*, but this report is inclusive of many other species and traditions of care. This includes accounts of raising cassowaries, cockatoos that spoke in Aboriginal language, pet brushtail possums that travelled on the heads of their young human companions, raising the young of emu, jabiru, kangaroo, and of the brolga - the graceful native crane originally called the 'Native Companion' after their habit of accompanying the aboriginal people on walkabout.

The report examines the reasons why these reciprocal relationships were mostly of a temporary nature, resulting in the lack of paedomorphic changes to morphology and physiology of these animals, changes which commonly exhibit in other species exposed to levels of domestication. It looks at how the animals often return to the wild on maturity, retaining their autonomy and independence, while still maintaining a level of connection and alliance with their human companions.

Exploring these relationships helps to understand the place of the dingo and these other animals in a cultural and historical context, and is an opportunity to look at the importance of these transient companionships with wild animals in remote environments.