

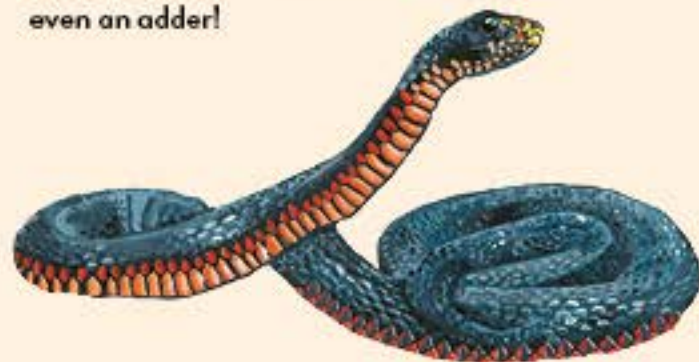
WELCOME TO THE WORLD OF

I spent my childhood running barefoot across the fields of Wiradjuri Country and Yuin Country, clambering over rocky Dharawal Country, and exploring the red sands of Kamilaroi Country and Kurna Country, all while looking for the ultimate animal – the reptile! Whether it was a lizard, snake or turtle, I was on it.

Growing up, I learned the European names for reptiles. But as a proud Kamilaroi man I wanted to know what these reptiles were *really* called. What did my people call them before white man came here and gave them new names that often didn't properly reflect their characteristics or the roles they play on Country?

For this book, I worked with the support and permission of Elders and Traditional Owners to use the First Nations names for all 68 reptiles included here. Perhaps you might like to ask the Elders, or the Aboriginal officer at your school, what the local names are for the animals where you live?

So why are traditional names important? Well, sometimes the English names for reptiles are **misnomers**. Take a brown snake, for example. They're not always brown! Or what about a tiger snake? They don't always have stripes! Or what about a northern death adder? They aren't even an adder!



But it's about more than that. There were originally over 250 different First Nations language groups across this land that is now called Australia, with 800 different dialects. But **colonisation** tried to destroy our cultures and our languages, so that many are **endangered**, and some languages no longer have any speakers and are considered 'sleeping'. There are now only around 123 languages still spoken and, according to Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS), 14 languages are strong, while the remaining languages are endangered.

For some of these Nations, this book has been part of **language revitalisation**. Each mob has their own name for these animals and some groups have multiple names for the same **species**, for example depending on the age or sex. However, for this book we explore 20 language groups and use their names for the reptiles that live on their Country.

DEADLY REPTILES!

I worked with Elders like Uncle Ted Fields to find the Gamilaraay name of the western sawshelled turtle – Ngaaybaay. This is the first time this name has been published – how cool is that? I also worked with Yuin Elder Uncle Warren Foster to create a name for the endangered broad-headed snake – Yuga-maga. Deadly, right?

First Nations languages are now being taught in classrooms, and dictionaries are being developed. Videos on YouTube share Language in the same way our ancestors probably did around the fire. This book is part of that journey. By making these reptiles' names more widely known, we can strengthen the link to thousands of years of knowledge. And we can use the lessons of the past to better protect our species for the future.

For over 65,000 years, First Nations peoples have cared for our animals, just like they have cared for Country. More than ever – when we are dealing with climate change and **invasive species** – we need this knowledge to help protect our reptiles. Then future generations will be able to enjoy them, just like our ancestors did.

This book contains **DEADLY** reptiles – but that's not me telling you they are dangerous (even though some of them definitely are!). You see, 'deadly' for us Blakfellas is how we describe something that's cool or awesome. And every reptile in this book is totally deadly!

Spotted a coloured word? Check out what it means in the **GLOSSARY** at the end of the book!

For some mobs, these reptiles may also have a much deeper meaning. An individual or family has their own totem animal or plant, and must care for them on Country. Totems are inherited from the clan or family group, and are often respected as ancestors. My family totem is the Bigibila (echidna) so me and my family care for it on Country. We don't ever eat Bigibila and we help protect it when it's in danger.

It's about time that reptiles shared the limelight with other animals that get more attention for being 'cuter' and cuddlier. I happen to think reptiles are super cute, and I hope that through this book you will fall in love with them too.

When I was a young man, I dreamed of writing a book like this, and showing everyone how amazing reptiles are. The fact that you are now holding it in your hands proves that anything is possible when you put your mind to it.

So, what are you waiting for? Let this book inspire the deadly scientist in you to go and find your favourite reptile and chase your dreams, whatever they may be.



DAWOOL/THOOWERNDEMANBEL

English name

Black-headed python

Measurements

Average length 1.7m,
maximum 3.5m

What does it look like?

Dawool is one of the prettiest snakes in the world. It has a light to dark brown body with darker bands and a slender tail. Its sides are usually paler, making the markings on the top of the snake more visible. Its head and neck are glossy black.

What makes it DEADLY?

Dawool is mainly **nocturnal**, coming out at night to hunt. But to get enough energy to do that, during the mornings and afternoons, it sticks its black head and neck out of its burrow for a few hours to generate energy from the sun. This works just like a solar panel!

Favourite feeds

Dawool eats other snakes, lizards, small **mammals**, birds and **carion**. Like other pythons, Dawool is a constrictor. It coils around its prey, squeezing tight until the heart stops beating, and then slowly swallows the animal whole. Dawool also uses its forked tongue to smell and find eggs to eat.

Predators and prey

Dawool is eaten by dingos, and occasionally by Traditional Owners. Baby Dawool are eaten by larger snakes and birds of prey. Unfortunately, due to their black head, humans often don't spot Dawool sunning themselves on roads and accidentally drive over them.

WHAT'S IN A NAME?

You might be wondering why this animal has two names in its traditional Language. This is because there's a gendered difference! Gija women call this animal Dawool, while Gija men call it Thoowerndemanbel.

How does it breed?

Dawool breeds in July to September with males fighting over females. Mating lasts a long time, sometimes up to 8 hours! Females lay up to 14 eggs which are sticky from a special coating developed inside the mum. This helps keep them together so none are lost. The females stay coiled around the eggs for 90 to 120 days. After hatching the babies stay in their egg casing for a day or two, eating the remaining egg yolk as their first meal.



LEAST CONCERN

JARLOONGOORRBARNDEGJI

English name

Ringed brown snake

Measurements

Average length 50cm,
maximum 60cm

What does it look like?

Jarloongoorrbarndegji is pale grey, brown or reddish brown with a black head and a cream neck band. It has orange eyes, and 4 to 7 distinctive black bands on its body.

What makes it DEADLY?

Jarloongoorrbarndegji lives across Australia, except in Victoria and Tasmania. Despite being venomous, the only recorded bite was of a young girl in 1987, and she only had mild symptoms. Its venom is not as potent as other brown snake **species**. Jarloongoorrbarndegji often hides in spinifex grass to ambush its prey and escape the extreme desert heat.

Favourite feeds

Jarloongoorrbarndegji feeds on lizards like skinks and geckos, and small dragons. Occasionally it also eats **mammals** like small mice.

Predators and prey

Like many smaller snakes, Jarloongoorrbarndegji is often preyed on by larger reptiles like monitor lizards, **elapids** like king brown snakes, and other large snakes like black-headed pythons. **Feral** cats and foxes also eat Jarloongoorrbarndegji.



LEAST CONCERN

VENOMOUS

How does it breed?

Not much is known about this species and how they breed. However, we do know that Jarloongoorrbarndegji starts mating around early October, and females lay a **clutch** of up to 6 eggs. Babies hatch around 60 days later.

Conservation

Jarloongoorrbarndegji is considered of least concern, however in New South Wales it is **endangered** and will likely become **extinct** if nothing is done to protect it. Livestock are destroying its habitat, and the feral species that like to eat this snake have greatly impacted its numbers.

WARU

English name
Green sea turtle

Measurements

Average shell length 95cm,
maximum 153cm

What does it look like?

Waru has yellow and green markings with a brown shell, a serrated beak and strong, paddle-like flippers.

What makes it DEADLY?

Waru always returns to the same beach where it was born, and can weigh up to a massive 395kg – that's the weight of a grand piano! Waru is a good sleeper and can doze on the ocean floor for 4 to 7 hours at a time.

Favourite feeds

When Waru is young it eats fish, but as the turtle grows, its jaws change to suit eating algae and sea grasses and it becomes a vegetarian. Its serrated beak allows it to snap off pieces of algae that grow on rocks and ocean buoys. Waru's ability to completely change its diet with age is absolutely deadly!

Predators and prey

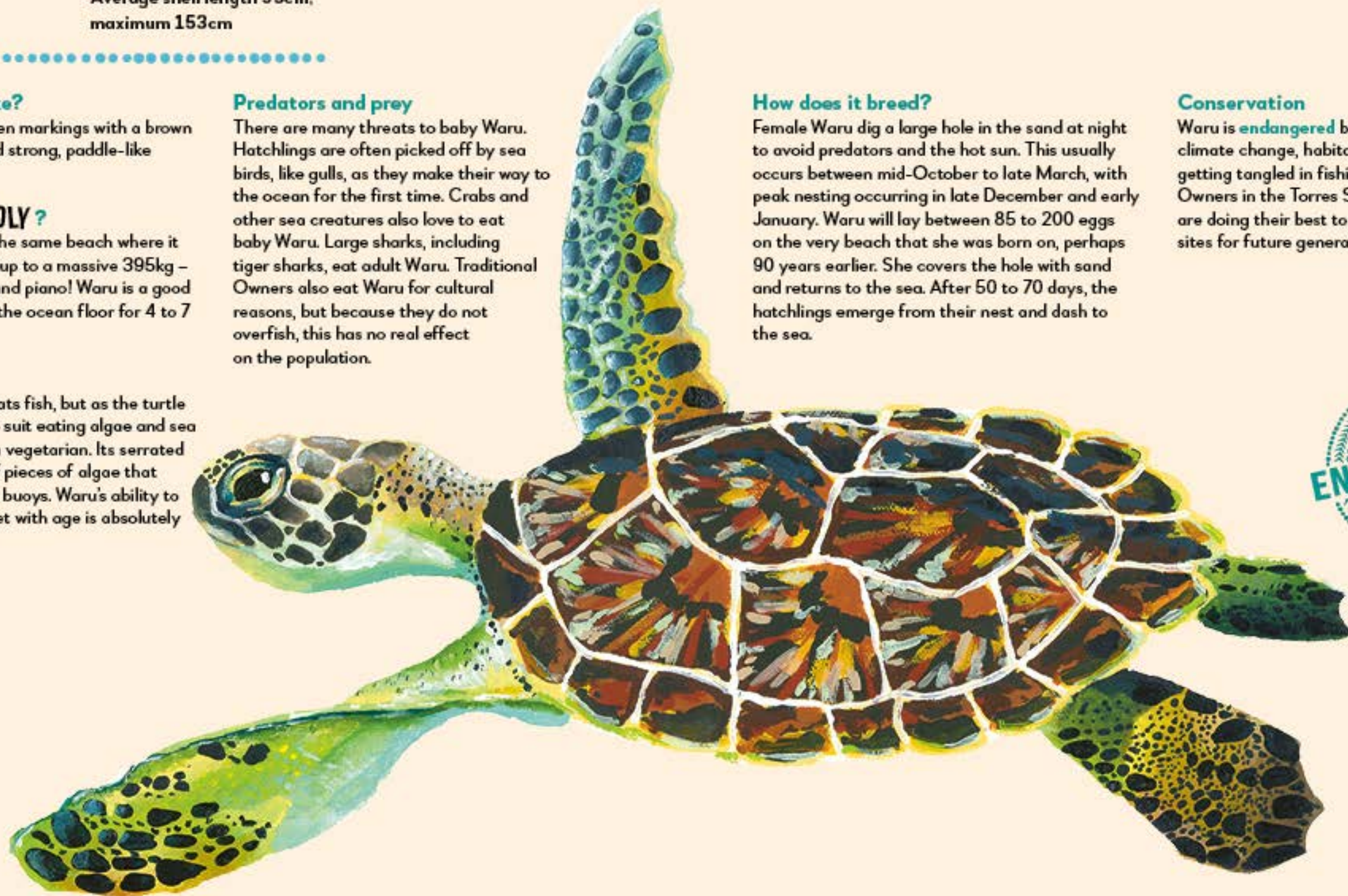
There are many threats to baby Waru. Hatchlings are often picked off by sea birds, like gulls, as they make their way to the ocean for the first time. Crabs and other sea creatures also love to eat baby Waru. Large sharks, including tiger sharks, eat adult Waru. Traditional Owners also eat Waru for cultural reasons, but because they do not overfish, this has no real effect on the population.

How does it breed?

Female Waru dig a large hole in the sand at night to avoid predators and the hot sun. This usually occurs between mid-October to late March, with peak nesting occurring in late December and early January. Waru will lay between 85 to 200 eggs on the very beach that she was born on, perhaps 90 years earlier. She covers the hole with sand and returns to the sea. After 50 to 70 days, the hatchlings emerge from their nest and dash to the sea.

Conservation

Waru is **endangered** because of eating plastic, climate change, habitat loss, ocean pollution and getting tangled in fishing nets. The Traditional Owners in the Torres Strait and northern Australia are doing their best to protect Waru and its nesting sites for future generations.



DIRANGKA

English name

Spotted tree monitor

Measurements

Average length 50cm,
maximum 61cm

What does it look like?

This lizard is grey to brown with pale flecks and spots. In the far north, Dirangka are black with white and cream bands and dark-centred spots. Because they live mostly in trees, its colours vary to match the tree trunks of its Country. It has a white belly and long cylindrical tail. In the western part of Australia, it has a shiny yellow to orange throat that helps it become camouflaged with the colour of the tree branches.

What makes it DEADLY?

Dirangka is pretty much a ninja! It can climb as high as 4 metres and jump on its prey from a great distance, much to the surprise of unsuspecting birds or reptiles.

Favourite feeds

Being smaller than other monitor lizards, Dirangka's prey is different to the larger **species**. Favourite feeds include insects like grasshoppers, moths and cockroaches, and **vertebrates** like mice, geckos, small skinks and birds. Because Dirangka is an expert tree-climber it is also an expert nest raider, eating both bird and reptile eggs. Occasionally Dirangka eats **carrion**.

Predators and prey

A variety of animals like to feast on Dirangka, including birds of prey, large snakes and larger monitor species.

How does it breed?

Dirangka breeds early in the dry season; and 6 weeks after mating, the female lays multiple **clutches** of up to 10 eggs in dry soil. Hatchlings emerge 90 to 100 days later.



YANGKAMARNINDANGWA

English name

Northern brown snake

Measurements

Average length 1.3m,
maximum 1.8m

What does it look like?

Yangkamarnindangwa comes in many shades and has a black mouth like the black mamba in sub-Saharan Africa. It can be brown, with or without bands, or orange with a cream to orange belly that sometimes also has pink blotches. It has a black mouth and tongue. Its head and neck is usually darker than its body, and its snout and nostrils may be paler than the rest of the head.

What makes it DEADLY?

Yangkamarnindangwa can produce a big amount of dangerous venom, but its fangs are quite small so most people who are bitten experience a painless bite. Having said that, even with minimal pain and no noticeable fang marks, any contact with Yangkamarnindangwa needs medical attention. Yangkamarnindangwa is also not the most toxic in the brown snake family, so it uses both constriction and venom to overpower its prey.

Favourite feeds

Yangkamarnindangwa is **carnivorous** and loves to eat lizards and small **mammals** like **rodents**. Occasionally Yangkamarnindangwa will prey upon its own kind.



Predators and prey

Yangkamarnindangwa is eaten by large monitor lizards, dingos and **feral** cats. Young snakes are eaten by birds of prey and other larger snakes.

How does it breed?

During the months of September to November, males fight to win the right to mate with females. Females search for hollows and shelters to lay up to 14 eggs, which hatch around 60 days later.

Conservation

Yangkamarnindangwa is generally considered of least concern, but not enough research has been done to truly know its status.

YUGA-MAGA

English name

Broad-headed snake

Measurements

Average length 60cm,
maximum 90cm

What does it look like?

Yuga-maga is black with yellow scales, and irregular bands and blotches in unique patterns. Its belly is grey to black, and its head is broad. Because of its colouring and shape it's often confused with a baby diamond python.

What makes it DEADLY?

Yuga-maga has unique markings – stripes, patches, dots, thin lines – with no two snakes being the same.

Favourite feeds

Yuga-maga feeds mainly on velvet geckos, and occasionally on frogs, small **mammals** and **invertebrates**. It hides under rocky sandstone outcrops to wait for its prey, then strikes with lightning speed, using both venom and constriction to kill its prey.

Predators and prey

Yuga-maga's predators have been poorly recorded because of its low numbers.

How does it breed?

Yuga-maga starts to breed around March through to May. Females give birth to up to 8 live young in November to January, around 90 to 120 days after mating. Females only breed every second year. We don't know why this is, but it could be because some years conditions are unsuitable.

WHAT'S IN A NAME?

The Yuin name for this snake was only recently developed with Uncle Warren Foster because the original Yuin name was lost after **colonisation**. Yuga-maga means 'I don't know, is it a python?' because this snake looks like a diamond python.

Conservation

Yuga-maga is **endangered**, with the greatest threat coming from habitat destruction. The removal of bush rock and sandstone for building development has destroyed the population that was once found across Gadigal Country, including along Warrang's (Sydney) Darling Harbour foreshore. Scientists tracking Yuga-maga take photos to identify individuals. This helps them understand how many of these snakes are out there.

