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Singing Songs of Country: practical pathways and confidence building for Higher Learning

Last week, the North Australian Indigenous Land and Sea Management Alliance Ltd (NAILSMA) partnered with Yuendumu School Bilingual Resources Development Unit (BRDU) and the Yuendumu and Nyirripi Rangers to deliver an on-country workshop recording songs, stories and photographs of birds for the Warlpiri Bird Dictionary. The trip involved Yuendumu School students, traditional knowledge holders, Warlpiri language specialist Wendy Baarda, and PhD candidate and bird whiz Micha Jackson.

We camped under Wardikipirri pirli (a Warlpiri Jukurrpa site marked by hills) in the Newhaven Wildlife Sanctuary, where we were welcomed by Newhaven caretakers Joe and Danae. Old people, students and Rangers got together out bush, singing songs of country and telling stories of birds. Travelling from place to place, visiting sites, talking and singing - the country was prolific with birdlife. We went from the hills of Yarripilangu to waterholes near Napanangka-jarra, out to Yajarlu, the clay pans at Kapuka on the Nyirripi road, and then on to the spring at Yankanjini (Lake Bennett). All together we added precious knowledge, finding a total of 34 bird species during the week and recording Warlpiri names and knowledge about many birds not described in the existing dictionary, *Jurlpu kuja karlipa nyanyi Yurntumu-wana* (Warlpiri Bird Dictionary; Yuendumu BRDU and Central Land Council).



One young person said 'old people know too many stories'. The delight of students coming to know the names of locally familiar birds is enhanced by the onomatopoeic character of Warlpiri bird names. There were thousands of Jiyiki (Zebra Finch) who say, 'ji-yiki ji-yiki'; and at night Kurrul-kurrulpa (Tawny Frogmouth) who says 'kurrul-kurrul'; Kaarka (Crow) who says 'kaa-kaa'; Jintirr-jintirpa (Willy Wagtail); and Pinparlajarra (Masked Wood

Swallow, (a nomadic bird that appeared in thousands at Kapuka), not to mention Mani rirripi-rirripi the Red-Capped Robin, putting on his red paint to look handsome.

These bush trips focus on bringing together old and young people on country to share knowledge. Local knowledge held by senior community members and Rangers promotes understanding of the work and cultural responsibilities community members have for look after country and kin. These experiences and collected materials will be composed into a variety of useful learning tools that reinforce this knowledge into the future. For example, photo dictionaries, work books, habitat posters, audio/visual material for iPad's and I-Tracker applications (for use by students and Rangers) are all being explored as a result of this trip.

This is one of a number of projects that NAILSMA is facilitating through the Charles Darwin University led Higher Education Participation and Partnerships Projects (HEPPP) Whole of Community Engagement (WCE) - an initiative of the Australian Government. NAILSMA helps identify and facilitate opportunities for remote Indigenous students and adult learners to participate in higher learning. NAILSMA works alongside local community leaders to run project that will reinforce local and traditional knowledge (linguistic, cultural, site specific) and build confidence for engaging effectively in mainstream education and training, with a practical focus on sustainable benefits from natural and cultural resource management on land and sea country.

For more information on NAILSMA's HEPPP-WCE projects please contact NAILSMA Senior Project Coordinator, Erica McCreedy, Erica.mccreedy@nailsma.org.au



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