

Muttonbirding Connection: Lure



The Orb → Living Cultures → Muttonbirding → Connection → Lure

Video Transcript

Buck Brown

00:00:00

I was actually sitting up the coast at Weymouth, and I actually got the smell of the mutton birds come off the ocean.

00:00:09

And that afternoon I threw my job in, the next day I was on the mutton bird island.

00:00:13

And I haven't stopped since.

Drummer

00:00:15

When I was a kid, and I moved back to Flinders with my Auntie Ruth, we'd go to the bird islands two weeks before the bird season even opened.

Jo James

00:00:24

You know, I still get that same build up, that same excitement, you know, 'Oh, only three weeks till birding, only two weeks till birding', so you're getting excited well before it starts.

Em Burgess

00:00:39

April's coming up, birding's coming up, that's where we're going to be, we're not going to be anywhere else but there.

Reen Burgess

00:00:44

So excited for it.

Em Burgess

00:00:45

And we've been lucky enough to actually manage our lives around that for the whole time we've been going.

Reen Burgess

00:00:51

Yeah, yeah.

Drummer

00:00:52

It was like, you remember the feeling you got when you were a kid and it's Christmas time, you couldn't wait for Santa Claus to come?

00:00:56

That's what it was like going muttonbirding, you just couldn't wait.

00:01:00

And you'd have your kindling cut and stacked ready for when you come back off the island, because it's going to be raining and blowing.

00:01:04

You've got that so you get the fire going quicker.

00:01:08

You planned everything.

00:01:09

You took the dog, and you took the cat, and even one time we even took some chooks.

Jo James

00:01:16

It's just, it's hard to explain, but it's very spiritual.

00:01:22

Inside here, you know.

Wendal

00:01:25

People think I'm silly sometimes, even living in Hobart I get that smell of the birds in the air when its the season, you can smell them, on the wind, and it's like, 'No, you can't smell them in Hobart', I said, 'I can, it's my spirit, I can smell that'.

00:01:44

And you can, it's just that being of the season when it's about to happen, and you know when the old birds are flying in, and yeah, it's just the presence of them being around, yeah.

Doug Mansell

00:01:55

It's just something I've loved.

00:01:58

And one thing about muttonbirding, you can do it one year, you can go back five years later and you'll never forget how to do it.

00:02:04

It's something that's there for good.

Tim Maynard

00:02:06

Yeah, the islands always draw me back all the time too, and the smell of birding.

00:02:10

Most of the people when go birding, they can't wait to start, but when birding's finished, they can't wait to leave, and then a few months later they're like, 'Oh, we can't wait till birding comes around again'.

Buck Brown

00:02:20

It's got that strong, spiritual urge to go and connect up, back up to my culture.

00:02:26

Something that I've grown up with all my life.



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Muttonbirding Connection: Spirituality



The Orb → Living Cultures → Muttonbirding → Connection → Spirituality

Video Transcript

Wendal

00:00:00

00:00:03

00:00:08

It brings me home when I go muttonbirding.

I know I don't live there, but it's like going home.

When you go muttonbirding it brings community together, it brings ancestors into the fore too, you usually can feel them, their presence as well, yep.

Doug Mansell

00:00:19

As a young bloke I can remember walking around Big Dog Island with my Mum on Sundays, which was a day off, and we'd go round and visit all the people, or they'd come, it was just a day of visiting.

00:00:32

And it was just so great.

Jo James

00:00:35

00:00:37

It's a spirituality.

Aboriginal spirituality.

00:00:38

It's about all us Aboriginal people being together.

00:00:42

You know, white fellas too, but it's about the Aboriginal people running something, being, it's theirs.

00:00:52

And through our last 230 odd years we haven't had much of a chance at being able to say that we can say that, that it's something that's ours.

Buck Brown

00:01:03

It's a cultural thing, this thing just come alive in me, it's a spiritual thing, it's a spiritual connection.

Drummer

00:01:10

It's hard to try and put it into words, because it's a feeling thing, if you know what I mean, it's in you, and it's hard to describe.



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Muttonbirding

Connection: Teaching



The Orb → Living Cultures → Muttonbirding → Connection → Teaching

Video Transcript

Reen Burgess

00:00:00

Every year we will bring at least two people that have never been.

Em Burgess

00:00:06

I have found a really good birder, I did take one this year, he's never been, he's mainland.

Wendal

00:00:10

00:00:15

There's only one of my children that like muttonbirding, that's my boy.

But he's culturally connected to it too, so, it's beautiful.

Doug Mansell

00:00:19

My younger son, Shane, I took him over, I think he'd done about 10 years with me, 15 years.

00:00:25
But he won't go anymore now.

00:00:28
For some reason he reckons I didn't teach him enough.

00:00:31
He reckons he's retired.

00:00:33
I said, 'You can't retire', I said, 'You're only young', he's only in his 20s.

Buck Brown

00:00:37

00:00:39

I've taken my young boys, Teangi and I've got other boy, Tooarn as well.

I've taken them both birding, introducing them to their culture, and they're pretty good muttonbirders.

Michelle Maynard

00:00:44

You know, went out, caught my first bird, and it was fortunate like it was still at a time where there was some of my Elders still there on the island, that I could go and sit with and go and learn from, get kicked out of the scalding shed, because I wasn't doing a good enough job.

Tim Maynard

00:01:06

People always say, 'I don't know how birding's going to be in another 20 years when there's no one coming', but it always still seems to be going on, like I've got my young fella coming up, and he's only 12, but I class myself as a gun catcher, and sometimes I've got to pull my finger out and go a bit hard too, because he's starting to beat me.

Reen Burgess

00:01:24

It can be a bit daunting, you're going down and stick your hands down holes, and you go onto a little island that you can't really get off, with a whole bunch of people you don't know, it can be quite frightening for some people.

Em Burgess

00:01:36

And we can be running sometimes, like any new people, we like to put them through the wringer a little bit, and we might just be like.

00:01:39

'Count all the mutton bird legs in the bucket for us so we know how many birds we got'.

Reen Burgess

00:01:46

There are other ways of counting out how many birds we got for the day.

00:01:50

It's all fun, and people that haven't been, we do, we're not just sticking you there and fend for yourself, like we will show you about and look after you and make you as comfortable as we can.



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The Orb → Living Cultures → Muttonbirding → Connection → Egress

Video Transcript

Jo James

00:00:00

When I ran my shed, I was very conscious of trying to get the young ones back.

Doug Mansell

00:00:06

It's sad to see that the young fellas these days are not coming into it.

Buck Brown

00:00:12

00:00:15

We're losing a lot of our culture.

Because there's not a lot of young generation coming through.

00:00:18
There's only a handful of young kids coming through these days, where, when we were children it was an everyday thing.

Reen Burgess

00:00:25

There are a few young ones, but we're really limited with people that actually know how to do it and want to come and do it.

Michelle Maynard

00:00:33

You know, they've got one or two generations now that have missed out on the practice, so there's that disintegration of the practice that's occurring in their family.

Wendal

00:00:44

00:00:53
It doesn't happen like it used to, because they're not taken to the islands as young people and experience that from the early age.

Because if you take a young fella to the island as teenagers, they're going to go, 'Hhhgh', the smell's awful, the conditions are awful.

Jo James

00:01:02

00:01:12
Unless you've been part of it for a long time, usually from when you're a kid you just don't get that connection.

That connection comes as part of that initial journey that you take.

Wendal

00:01:16

Mutton bird season, our children could take that time off because it was culturally appropriate.

00:01:21

But now education doesn't like our children taking that time off to go and learn their cultures.

Tim Maynard

00:01:27

I suppose like the old fellas that don't go birding anymore, because they don't go, they don't take their families, and that's sort of I suppose why it's not as strong as it used to be.

Jo James

00:01:36

00:01:38

Let's hope the young ones will come back.

Let's hope Vicky Nicholson starts a program back up at Big Dog.



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The Orb → Living Cultures → Muttonbirding → Connection → Connection

Video Transcript

Drummer

00:00:00

You walk down the street in Hobart, no one will look you in the face, and no one says good morning.

00:00:04

That's totally different on Flinders.

00:00:05

Mind you, you're lucky if you run into anyone in the street in Flinders, but you know, 'G'day, how are you going mate, what have you been up to?!

00:00:12

'Aww yeah, great'.

Buck Brown

00:00:13

We were born to the islands and grew up round the islands, so it's basically always sort of been in our back yard, it's part of our back yard.

00:00:22

So we've always had that connection to the island, we're always going down and doing things on the island, so you always had that connection.

Jo James

00:00:28

As soon as you're going muttonbirding, as soon as you're setting off and you're getting everything all ready, you get this sense of belonging and going home.

Doug Mansell

00:00:40

Look, I remember when I was birding over here when I was 14 years old.

00:00:44

When I was in my 20s I used to go there.

00:00:48

But to go round to the sheds where I used to work, brings back a lot of memories, and tales and stories and that.

Wendal

00:00:57

The year we went muttonbirding it was actually the year that Mum could vote, when the legislation came in.

00:01:05

And that's the year I realised I was Aboriginal, and I wasn't who I thought I was.

00:01:09

I was, my heritage belonged to Tasmania, and so did my Mum and my ancestors.

Drummer

00:01:16

You just love it, but everything of it though.

00:01:19

Even the birds, like you watch the birds come in.

00:01:22

And we'd have competitions of who'd spotted the first bird over land, and that kind of thing, and then you'd watch them leave of a morning.

00:01:31

And we still do that now.

Buck Brown

00:01:33

We actually didn't realise that it was our culture, because we just took it for granted every year.

00:01:38

It wasn't till I became a teenager and went to high school and realised that this was our culture, so I learned about it in books in schools and stuff, but like I said, it was just an everyday thing for us each season to go muttonbirding.

Wendal

00:01:51

That was a big thing for me when I came to a realisation when I used to go muttonbirding that it was part of my culture, and part of my mother's history, and the way things have been for thousands of years, yep.

Jo James

00:02:03

All your friends, all your family, all congregated together on the island, and it's just a beautiful environment, and just so nurturing.

Wendal

00:02:17

So it was a big realisation when I was about nine that, 'Okay, this is a complete different world to what I thought it was', yep.

00:02:25

And a beautiful world, culturally.



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Muttonbirding Connection: Community



The Orb → Living Cultures → Muttonbirding → Connection → Community

Video Transcript

Michelle Maynard

00:00:00

The islands and the muttonbirding islands are just so deeply connected to a lot of the core island families.

00:00:10

It is a part of our identity.

Wendal

00:00:13

All my family was there, there was uncles, there was aunties, there was the cousins that I hadn't seen for 12 months, and we'd all come together for the birding season.

Buck Brown

00:00:20

00:00:24

So it was basically more family orientated back then, yeah.

It was basically just my family and one or two other people.

Wendal

00:00:27

When my Mum was alive she'd sit and tell stories about there was a shop on Chapel Island and a shop on Babel, and there was like I think over 20 sheds at the time, and they'd have Saturday night dances and get-together's and stuff like that.

Drummer

00:00:42

Oh, I think it's just the island life, the lifestyle, the freedom, the fresh air, the scenery.

00:00:48

You know, you never get sick of the scenery on Flinders.

00:00:51

It's always changing, but it's fresh.

00:00:54

And the people, the people are good.

Jo James

00:00:56

Everybody's so jovial and friendly, and bygones are bygones, you know, anybody's got a beef with somebody else on the island they just get over it.

And you know, it's just a beautiful environment to be, real friendly and happy, lots of laughter.



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Muttonbirding

Connection: Belonging



The Orb → Living Cultures → Muttonbirding → Connection → Belonging

Video Transcript

Nathan Maynard

00:00:10

My old man was muttonbirding from a baby, and all my aunties and uncles, they owned mutton bird sheds on Treefall Island, Steep Head Island.

00:00:18

It's just not the mutton bird, the physical catching the birds, it's the stories that come along with it.

00:00:27

That's why no one comes to do one arm push ups for five weeks of the year, and work six days a week, 16 hours a week.

00:00:35

You come for the stories, the culture, the sense of belonging.

00:00:40

That's why people come birding.

00:00:45

I don't think it's any secret that we've lost a lot, and this is one of the things that we've managed to hold on to.

00:00:51

It's a big part of our identity.

00:00:54

It's culture, and it shows the world that we're still here.



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The Orb → Living Cultures → Muttonbirding → Experience → Buck Brown

Video Transcript

Buck Brown

00:00:19

This is our third week into the season.

00:00:22

At the end of this week the birds should start scratching out and start travelling.

00:00:26

So all these, a lot of these holes that we have just caught birds out of, they'll refill back up, yeah, so we'll come back and catch it again.

00:00:37

Have you counted the one I've got, this one?

Billy Mahar

00:00:40

Forty-nine.

Buck Brown

00:00:42

One to go.

00:00:45

Basically if you stick your thumb behind the back of their neck, breaks their neck.

Interviewer

00:00:57

That's the end of him.

Buck Brown

00:00:59

Painless.

unamed

00:01:05

There's a snake, big snake over here.

Buck Brown

00:01:08

Where is he?

00:01:11

In hiding?

00:01:13

You didn't see where he'd go to?

00:01:17

You see him?

Billy Mahar

00:01:19

Yeah, I've seen him.

Buck Brown

00:01:25

I just covered the hole in.

00:01:26

We'll dig him out when we come back after lunch.



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The Orb → Living Cultures → Muttonbirding → Experience → Struggle

Video Transcript

Buck Brown

00:00:00

Muttonbirding is one of the most physical jobs I've ever done in my life.

Drummer

00:00:05

Worked hard, but I don't know, there was something in it.

Buck Brown

00:00:08

When we were children it was an everyday thing, because the season went for eight weeks, that was our school holidays.

00:00:15

So we got eight weeks off during the mutton bird seasons.

00:00:18

So we had to go and work in our school holidays.

Tim Maynard

00:00:21

I know we work a lot harder and that, but I'd sooner rather be over there working every day than to be at work.

Wendal

00:00:27

I love going birding, but sometimes it gets too difficult because I'm older now.

00:00:32

But I tell lots of stories about the birding and the good times that we had, yep.

Drummer

00:00:36

No joke, your trousers that you wore, they'd be covered in grease and oil from the bird, and they'd be waterproof.

00:00:42

And you could put them over there and they'd stay there in the corner of the room.

00:00:46

They would stand up.

00:00:47

In the morning, you'd get up, you'd put on the, and they'd be that cold, and they'd just slide over you, oh.

00:00:52

[laugh].

Jo James

00:00:56

We had more laughs than anything, because if something was going to go wrong, it would go wrong for us.

00:01:02

I bought this new boat, a whizz bang boat, so I thought, and then a week into the season it sprung a leak and our boat sunk and we lost our mutton birds, you know, but we all just laughed and said, 'It's part of muttonbirding'.

Wendal

00:01:22

We didn't know what the weather was like, so you had to take everything with you, just in case if the weather blew up, so you'd be stuck.

Drummer

00:01:28

Back in those days no one had a boat either, so you went, you took your gear, and you stayed.

00:01:35

And if you got off, well, it would be a bloody luxury.

Doug Mansell

00:01:37

00:01:40

My uncle, he was a very hard worker when in came to muttonbirding.

He'd be there very early in the morning, and I'd have to go out with him, and he'd sit up in the tussocks, roll himself a cigarette, waiting for daylight, and I'd be sitting there with him as a little fella.

00:01:52

And as soon as we could see the holes then we'd start catching mutton birds.

Buck Brown

00:01:56

Tree Fall Island where we've done 3,500 birds a day, so we haven't got out of the shed till 11:30 at night time, so that's a long day.

Drummer

00:02:04

00:02:07

By 10 o'clock, mate, you would kill someone for a feed.

You'd go in, you'd have a bloody great bowl of porridge and some cold mutton bird and away you went to the bush again.

00:02:13

Come lunch time, it'd be mutton birds and a bit of damper.

00:02:17

Come dinner time, there'd be mutton birds, probably stuffed or baked or curried or stewed or fried or whatever.

Doug Mansell

00:02:24

13, 14 years old, I was carrying 50 birds on my back, and I'd have to carry them probably for a half hour carrying, falling down holes, tussocks.

00:02:35

Now, it's all machinery, all motorbikes.

Drummer

00:02:38

We used to work from dark to dark.

00:02:40

I don't think I could do that anymore, not like that.

00:02:44

It's just, nah, it's too hard.

00:02:47

We're getting too old.

00:02:49

And I've been doing it for a long time.

00:02:50

And I'll continue to do it, but not that hard.

00:02:55

And no one wants to work that hard anymore, no one in their right mind, anyway.



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Muttonbirding

Experience: Home



The Orb → Living Cultures → Muttonbirding → Experience → Home

Video Transcript

Tim Maynard

00:00:03

00:00:06

Yeah, my family's a strong birding family, all their life.

I've been going all my life, my Mum used to take me birding, and me and my sister run around the pluck house, and cut legs, your first jobs are sort of cutting off legs and brushing and laying and stuff like that.

00:00:16

Yeah, I'm a proud black man, I love birding.

Michelle Maynard

00:00:18

I've really grown up around the stories of muttonbirding from a really early age, and that being really quite a deep part of our family identity, and particularly Big Dog, Big Dog Island.

Drummer

00:00:37

I went away to WA for about 26 years, then I always was going to come home.

00:00:43

And I'm home now, and I've brought up my two boys there.

00:00:46

I come home for 16 mutton bird seasons while I was away, so that's saying something.

00:00:51

And I'm just glad to be home to be able to go and do your island stuff, you know, your island thing.

Jo James

00:00:56

My grandmother and grandfather had a mutton bird lease, and I used to go over to their shed.

00:01:03

And then later in life, much later in life for me, I bought my own shed.

Doug Mansell

00:01:10

It was a family business with us, with my Mum and my granddad, everybody else that was in the family, like my brothers, and I was only six years old.

Wendal

00:01:19

My first experience going muttonbirding from what I remember was when I was about five years old, so it's a long time ago, she used to pack us kids up, she'd take the chooks and the dogs and the cats and everything, we'd go for probably not so much six weeks, but eight weeks.

Em Burgess

00:01:35

00:01:38

My birding experience kind of happened a little bit by accident.

I ended up going to Big Dog for just a bit of a trip, just to have a look at what goes on.

00:01:45

I got there, and I was really interested, I was really keen to know and to learn, so I was straight in the shed.

Reen Burgess

00:01:51

Hearing her experience when she got home it just sounded amazing.

Buck Brown

00:01:55

My parents were muttonbirders, my grandparents were traditional muttonbirders.

00:02:00

Mutton birds are part of my blood, it's my culture, it's been my life.



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The Orb → Living Cultures → Muttonbirding → Experience → First Timer

Video Transcript

Craig

00:00:14

The rookery guys go out and catch them, and they bring them in to the pluck house, then one guy puts them through to the pluckers, and then the pluckers put them through to the cleaning room, then when they're clean they go through to the opening room, which is where I brush and lay them and put them in the cool room, and then at the end of the day that's when they open them ready for the next, to be packed in boxes.

00:00:36

And they've got to cool down and they grade them.

00:00:42

I don't know how they do that though.

00:00:47

What I do is I wash the crates so they're nice and clean so the birds don't get ruined, and then later on I cut their legs off, and then after that I brush and lay them and stack them in the cool room.

00:00:59

And that's about all I do except for get the salt water up when they need to clean them.

00:01:05

And that's it.

00:01:07

The others do the rest.



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The Orb → Living Cultures → Muttonbirding → Experience → Cooking

Video Transcript

Drummer

00:00:00

You know, if you're at home and you start talking about having a feed of birds, my mouth starts watering.

Jo James

00:00:06

Because you think about it at Christmas time, because that's when you really start thinking about birding.

00:00:11

And by then most of your birds have been eaten, so you're thinking, 'Well, we need the next season to start so as we can have a feed of birds'.

Wendal

00:00:20

We pickle them in brine, like mutton, like the sheep and lamb and stuff, that's one of the reasons why they were called mutton bird.

Drummer

00:00:29

Part of going muttonbirding was to get your year's supply of salt birds, because they're there, they don't go off, because they're salted, they're pickled, brined.

Wendal

00:00:38

And the taste, it's, mmm...

Drummer

00:00:44

One person said to me they were a cross between turkey and deer.

Wendal

00:00:48

Fish and...

Drummer

00:00:50

But I could only describe mutton birds as unique, and they're a mutton bird.

00:00:55

I mean, I can't...

Wendal

00:00:57

Wallaby?

Drummer

00:00:59

I suppose you'd say they're oily, that's the good oil.

Wendal

00:01:04

Outside with an open fire, stuck up with a stick going through it, and with the rocks, just gently baking away with the fat dripping off, it's more culturally appropriate than sticking them in a pot and boiling them up, sort of thing, with us, so yeah.

Drummer

00:01:22

You can have them curried, dizzed, fried, stuck up, bloody stewed, stuffed and baked.

Buck Brown

00:01:29

00:01:31

You know Forrest Gump and the shrimps?

Apricot, you know, you name it, you can do it with them, oh Magnificent!

Jo James

00:01:38

Seasoned and baked, I reckon, but I eat them any way.

Buck Brown

00:01:41

00:01:43

I love them.

I could probably eat them every day, because they've just got something, something about them.



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The Orb → Living Cultures → Muttonbirding → Experience → Storytelling

Video Transcript

Wendal

00:00:00

00:00:02

Last time I went muttonbirding it was on Big Dog Island.

And I treasure those memories, because there was aunties there that I'd never muttonbirded

unamed

00:00:07

with, and we sat round telling stories and yarning up about how my Mum went muttonbirding

Wendal

00:00:12

with them in the day, and then it was my turn, I was there sort of listening to what they were saying, so yeah, it was just beautiful.

Doug Mansell

00:00:18

If the old people was talking, like my Mum, my granny, my uncle, I'd always sit around and listen to what they were talking about, and then that's when I realised that we weren't the only ones that did the muttonbirding, it went back years before I even started.

00:00:34

And that's when I sort of worked it out that it wasn't just us.

00:00:39

And then of course later on in the years I've realised that it was a great culture of ours.

00:00:44

So yeah, I was a very great listener, I still am.

Drummer

00:00:47

The old uncles and that, oh, fair dinkum, they were the funniest fellas on this planet you know.

00:00:52

They were natural comedians and they didn't even know it.

00:00:54

They just were.

00:00:55

They used to have you in stitches without even trying.

00:00:57

Uncle Delton used to do this every year without fail.

00:00:59

First load, you get the birds, and we'd help him up, and he'd throw them on his shoulder, and he had one crook shoulder, so he'd just throw them across one shoulder, so that's a burden in itself.

00:01:09

And as soon as you throw them up, he'd stand there and said, 'I'll tell you a yarn'.

00:01:14

And we're just, 'Uncle Delton', why didn't you tell us a yarn before you picked the birds up?!

00:01:20

He had this big load, and start telling a yarn And he done that nearly every year.



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The Orb → Living Cultures → Muttonbirding → Experience → Endeavour

Video Transcript

Reen Burgess

00:00:00

I'd be a mess if I couldn't go birding for the year, I'd just be extremely upset.

Em Burgess

00:00:05

00:00:06

It's something I wouldn't change for the world.

As stressful as it is, and sometimes you can have bad seasons, things might not go your way, you might not make your quota, you might have some struggles, but I wouldn't have it any other way.

00:00:18

Because sometimes you have to go through those bad things to experience it, and to try and make sure that you don't do that again.

Tim Maynard

00:00:26

Like I know it's hard work, but now it's, because I've done it for so many years, it's not like hard work to me anymore.

00:00:32

Yeah, some people you see them battling and that, and I just get in and give them a bit more of a hand.

Em Burgess

00:00:36

A lot of the other shed owners over there have been doing it for a lot longer than what we have, they're much older than what we are, they might have a bit more experience in certain areas, but we're not going to let that worry us too much.

Reen Burgess

00:00:50

Just keep going and you just keep learning.

Em Burgess

00:00:52

Yeah.

Jo James

00:00:53

There's not much them two girls don't know about muttonbirding.

00:00:55

They've been going muttonbirding since they were born.

Reen Burgess

00:00:59

00:01:03

You do learn a lot off other people that have been there for a long time.

But we do try and create, without obviously taking too much away from it, we are trying to create new ways of doing things, just to make it a bit easier on people.

Tim Maynard

00:01:15

00:01:23

When I first started it was a bit stressful, and I was thinking maybe owning the shed and running it's not for me.

But it's how you deal with it yourself.

00:01:25

If you let it stress you out it will stress you.

00:01:27

But if you just kick back, and that's what I've been doing, like after the first year, I thought, 'Look, just go and do birding how you'd normally do it, get your sales and all that stuff on top of it, but just do it how you normally do it', and I'm more laid back now.

Reen Burgess

00:01:40

It's just great to be able to be feral, and not have to worry about, you just, there's really, yeah, all you're focusing is on your work that you're doing and the days that you're there, you're not really worried about anything else back home in town, or your day to day work life out here.

Em Burgess

00:01:58

Don't have enough time.

Reen Burgess

00:01:59

Just everything goes out of your head, which is really, really nice.



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Muttonbirding

Practice: Role



The Orb → Living Cultures → Muttonbirding → Practice → Role

Video Transcript

Tim Maynard

00:00:00

At high school I went out by myself and went over to Big Dog Island over Flinders way, and started birding my myself, and I went over to my Uncle Murray and he sort of, he just said one day, 'Come over, come birding', and I said, 'Alright'.

00:00:11

It was a bit daunting because I didn't know where to go and all that, so I hopped in a plane, and I pulled up at Johnny's shed, and yeah, I just said, 'I've got a job here with Uncle Murray', he said, 'Oh, he only works for us, it's not his shed'.

00:00:22

And then I went out in the rookery and I ended up catching more birds than anyone, and they said, 'Oh, you've got the job'.

Buck Brown

00:00:25

I'm what you call an all-rounder today, I catch mutton birds in the rookery, process them right through the shed, pluck them, help out cleaning out sometimes in the cleaning shed, and then in the factory of a night time when we open them and gut them.

Wendal

00:00:41

When I was a little girl, Mum used to take me down to the shed to brush and lay.

00:00:46

Anyway, she'd throw me a bird and I'd try and brush it.

00:00:48

Well, I couldn't brush it, I'd always rip it.

00:00:51

And she'd go, 'Oh, well, you'd better go up to the kitchen and peel the potatoes'.

00:00:54

So in saying that, I became a mutton bird cook.

Jo James

00:00:58

I'm that mother figure, you know, like a mother figure, people come to me every time they hurt themselves, they're in the cook house to get it all bandaged up, and cared for, and then of a night you go through everybody's injuries and fix them all up.

00:01:16

Yeah, so you do more than cook.

Doug Mansell

00:01:17

You know, like start from the rookery, right through the shed, that's what we call an experienced muttonbirder now.

00:01:24

But then you can have good rookery men, you can have a young fella that are great catchers, but they can't do much in the shed itself.

Jo James

00:01:32

When you become part of the crew, that's a great feeling, to be part of something so special.



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Muttonbirding

Practice: Rookery



The Orb → Living Cultures → Muttonbirding → Practice → Rookery

Video Transcript

Tim Maynard

00:00:04

Years ago when they first do it, the old fellas would go and sit out in the rookery, and they'd wait until daylight, and they'd be straight into them.

00:00:09

But now you sort of go and have breakfast or whatever and then go into the rookery, it's not as hard as it used to be.

Doug Mansell

00:00:20

When I started catching I'd get down on my knees and I'd put my hand down the hole, down to my elbow.

00:00:28

And my uncle was there one day and he spotted me, and he roared out to me, 'Get down on your bloody shoulder to catch them'.

00:00:35

So as soon as he said that, I got that much of a fright I went straight down to the shoulder, the whole arm in, that's how I started to catching them.

00:00:42

A lot of people said I was one of the best in the Straits, but I don't brag about the muttonbirding, I don't...

Tim Maynard

00:00:51

Before the start of the season we go out and get some tea tree and we sharpen them all up and we call them spits, so they'd be spitted up.

Reen Burgess

00:01:02

Catching, it's not a men's job.

00:01:07

Men are more common to do it, because it's probably one of the most strenuous jobs on your body, because you're crawling around every day, you're up and down, and...

Tim Maynard

00:01:18

Jacob, he just takes time on school, yeah, he really loves his birding.

00:01:23

Even when he was a little fella, yeah, you couldn't stop him going birding, he was out there flat out, and you'd get some hot days in the rookery where it's a bit snakey, but he don't worry about snakes, he's straight back out there, and he's like, 'I'll be careful' and that, but he's one muttonbirder of the year three times or something, so yeah, he's got the medals and that, he's a proud birder, he just loves his birding, yeah.

Doug Mansell

00:01:45

When I first started catching mutton birds, I'd just run round the rookery, and I'd find the mutton birds at the mouth of the hole.

00:01:54

I was too frightened to put my hand down, and I'm not catching.

00:01:56

Then I run them over to my uncle, Fred Beaton, he said to me one day, 'Look, this is how you kill them'.

00:02:02

And I was a happy little chappy then.

Buck Brown

00:02:05

It's like, I call it Aboriginal aerobics actually, because when you've rolled around in the rookery all day, you physically know about it.



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Muttonbirding

Practice: Contemporary Practice



The Orb → Living Cultures → Muttonbirding → Practice → Contemporary Practice

Video Transcript

Tim Maynard

00:00:00

This year I've just done, I think we only done like 5,000 or something, and it worked out a lot better for me, it runs smaller and there's less on trying to have to find wages, because you've got less people to pay, and there's less worry about trying to get a market, because you can normally get rid of 5,000 pretty easy.

00:00:16

So that's the way I'll be running now, and everyone's happy, and yeah, I'm happy because I don't have to worry about getting in as many sales, and yeah, the crew seems to be happier and that this year, so more relaxing sort of environment.

Em Burgess

00:00:28

Our next big project is to try crack into the restaurant businesses with our birds, that's the next big thing that we're looking at getting done.

Drummer

00:00:36

It would be alright if they were introduced, or some gourmet chef come over and have a look at them, see what they can do with them, it would be interesting.

Em Burgess

00:00:43

Just to try and get them more out there, more available for people.

Reen Burgess

00:00:47

Yeah.

Tim Maynard

00:00:48

I don't know if it seemed to – the market's actually dropped off a bit from years ago.

00:00:52

It seemed like years ago everyone was going getting 20,000 birds and there were sheds working everywhere, and now everyone's getting 10,000 birds and it's like you struggle to sell them sort of thing.

Em Burgess

00:01:01

A lot of people are looking for them, but they just don't know where to look.

00:01:06

And it's a lot of the time by chance.

00:01:09

Somebody might hear me say something about it, and then they'll, 'Oh, excuse me, did you just mention mutton birds, could I buy some?'

00:01:12

and it's like.

00:01:12

'Yes!

00:01:12

Another buyer!.

Buck Brown

00:01:17

Today I've seen a change to where we do fresh birds, because we've got factories and we've got cool rooms and that sort of stuff.

Tim Maynard

00:01:24

Years ago I've heard word that they used to export them in salt birds, they used to be all, mainly just all salt birds, so you didn't have to worry about freezing them down or anything, just all salt, and they got exported to different places around the world, so it would be good if we could open that back up again, we wouldn't have to worry about sales at all then, she'd be just go for, there'd be no tally, you'd just go for whatever you could sort of get, and people would get better wages.

Reen Burgess

00:01:45

At birding time it's great for the island, because obviously the shop's getting used, we're buying lots of fuel, so we're really putting a lot of money into the local community there, which is really good as well.



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Muttonbirding

Practice: The Shed



The Orb → Living Cultures → Muttonbirding → Practice → The Shed

Video Transcript

Tim Maynard

00:00:02

Nowadays we cart them in on motorbikes on the spits, but they used to always be carried, there was no motorbikes years ago.

00:00:09

And we'd carry them into the shed, and then they're to be gurried, so squeeze the bird from the tail, and the oil and that stuff comes out of the neck, and then throw them through into the plucking shed, and you've normally got a few experienced old fellas now in my shed that do all the plucking, and so they get plucked and all the feathers come off and they go into the cleaning shed, and that's mainly – blokes do do it, but it's mainly the women's job, they go in there and clean.

00:00:34

My father, Len Maynard, he was one of the best cleaners in the Straits, yeah, he could, I've seen a video of him, he's fast.

00:00:43

Yeah, but the women mainly do the cleaning.

Wendal

00:00:46

They're put into scalding hot water, and just dunked a little bit, and then brought out where their little feathers are brushed off.

Em Burgess

00:00:53

You're sitting beside a boiling pot of water all day, and it's very, very hot.

Reen Burgess

00:01:00

Very hot.

Em Burgess

00:01:01

There's been a couple of times where we've almost fallen off our seats.

00:01:04

Well, I know I have.

Tim Maynard

00:01:06

And then that's where we'd have like a leg cutter in that room, and that would normally be a young fella.

Buck Brown

00:01:10

That was our first job in the shed, so we used to cut the legs off, and Parks and Wildlife used to band the mutton bird's legs.

00:01:19

We used to get 25 cents a ring.

00:01:22

So that was my first wage.

Tim Maynard

00:01:23

So after that, when you clean them, they go into another room and brush and lay them, and sit them on racks to be cooled until the end of the night when you're finished and then the shed'd come in and the openers would open them up, and then you have scrapers and let them sit overnight, and they'd be packed.

00:01:38

And she is just continuous, yeah.

Buck Brown

00:01:39

Oh yeah, I love opening them of a night time, because you know when you've finished opening you know she's the end of the day.



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Muttonbirding

Practice: Learning



The Orb → Living Cultures → Muttonbirding → Practice → Learning

Video Transcript

Nathan Maynard

00:00:01

So we put this on his head, so he doesn't get tussocks in his ears; it's not a fashion statement.

00:00:12

So this is my son Clay, he's seven, this is his second time to Big Dog Island.

00:00:17

He's a muttonbirder through and through, he's a little Maynard, yeah, to the bone.

00:00:23

He comes out with me and catches, I don't know, about two or three, four birds alone, don't you?

Clay Maynard

00:00:29

Yeah.

Nathan Maynard

00:00:30

Yeah, something like that.

00:00:31

Yeah, not scared one little bit.

00:00:37

When I'm walking through with Clay in the rookery, I'm trying to find burrows, because he's only got, you know, he's only seven, his arms are not real long, if you can see mine are a lot longer than his.

00:00:47

And so I'm just trying to find burrows that might be a bit shallower for him.

00:00:51

I look for safe burrows, so burrows, it's not all the time you can tell if a snake's in a hole, but sometimes they might leave a track.

00:00:59

So I make sure there's no tracks going into that burrow.

00:01:02

And yeah, I just tell him to get down there as quick as he can, as fast as he can, and if he feels the bird, and he's got hold of a wing or anything, I try to get him to adjust his hand to bring it out by its neck.



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The Orb → Living Cultures → Muttonbirding → Practice → The Tickler

Video Transcript

Nathan Maynard

00:00:01

00:00:03

This here's what we call a tickler, so we just get a stick.

00:00:08

Some people carry a tickler around, but I lose mine, so I just grab it anywhere.

And just if a burrow's deep, that you know a bird's there, if you've touched a bird and it goes deep, what you do is you put this down, just tap him up the bum, and he gets all wild with you, and he'll come running up your arm and trying to peck you.

00:00:21

If you're sitting there tickling for ages and he's not coming up, it's most likely a small bird, because he hasn't got the energy to fight you, so you just leave him anyway, because you'll just waste your time, you can catch another five birds.

00:00:47

He had plenty of energy.



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Muttonbirding

Practice: Continuation



The Orb → Living Cultures → Muttonbirding → Practice → Continuation

Video Transcript

Michelle Maynard

00:00:00

What do we want for the future of muttonbirding and the muttonbirding islands?

Drummer

00:00:05

I think we used to do it for love.

Buck Brown

00:00:08

00:00:11

No, it's still our culture.

It's just that we've updated and use more modern things I suppose, yeah.

00:00:16

Going with the times.

Michelle Maynard

00:00:18

Seeing the old sheds that weren't used anymore, and having conversations about who used to be there, and...

Tim Maynard

00:00:26

Before they were just old tin sheds and dirt floors.

Michelle Maynard

00:00:30

I just asked, 'Well, why aren't they here anymore?'

Tim Maynard

00:00:34

Now the health standards have come in, so they've built proper health sheds, because if you're going to be putting out a product for people to eat, they want it to go through a pretty good shed.

Drummer

00:00:43

I could never ever bring myself to think that it's just commercial, you know.

Michelle Maynard

00:00:48

You know, commercial birding is a harvesting, can be seen as an exploitation of one of our own really culturally significant practices and food sources.

00:01:01

If we can explore that in an open way and not feel threatened that something else is trying to be taken away, or it's not about what's right or what's wrong.

Reen Burgess

00:01:13

That's definitely going to be the biggest issue, is just being able to sustain it, really.

00:01:17

A majority of the people that know what to do are the old people, the old guys that can't do such strenuous work every day now.

Buck Brown

00:01:26

I think that some of the kids actually need to come and spend a week or two in some of the sheds with us traditional guys and really see how it's done.

Reen Burgess

00:01:34

A lot of people just like going for the cultural aspect, and just catching up with family they haven't seen for 12 months.

00:01:42

But yeah, it's finding people that know what to do and are interested and wanting to learn, that's probably the biggest problem we're going to have in the future.

Buck Brown

00:01:51

I don't know about the community, but us traditional muttonbirders are concerned about it.

Drummer

00:01:56

The cultural side of it's starting to lose something in translation I think.

00:01:59

When it boils down to just being the power of the almighty dollar, sort of, yeah.

00:02:06

So we haven't commercially banded for so long that I don't really care to, it doesn't matter.

00:02:12

It's only bloody money, isn't it?

Michelle Maynard

00:02:14

There is interest in exploring and having the conversation around well, how do we look at and incorporate getting back to muttonbirding as a cultural practice?

Drummer

00:02:29

I think you should be stopping and thinking.

00:02:32

We need to look after this, we need to look after these birds.

00:02:36

They can be here for when my great, great, great grandchildren can come here and do the same thing, hopefully.



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