

Bara Boodie,

the burrowing bettong



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Illustrated by Paul Ricketts



A long, long time ago, boodies lived contentedly all over Australia, in all sorts of places: from shady woodlands with grasses and shrubs, to wide sandy deserts.



Actually my friend, they lived in almost any place they fancied.

Bara Boodie and her family's home was the Australian Western Desert, in Martu people's country. They lived in a large cosy nest under a quandong tree, with many friends and neighbours nearby.



Actually my friend, boodies loved to make friends with everyone.

Bara Boodie, the burrowing bettong

To make their nests snug, Bara's dad, mum and aunties collected bundles of spinifex and grasses. Scampering on all fours, they carried their bundles with their fat, prehensile tails, back to their nests.

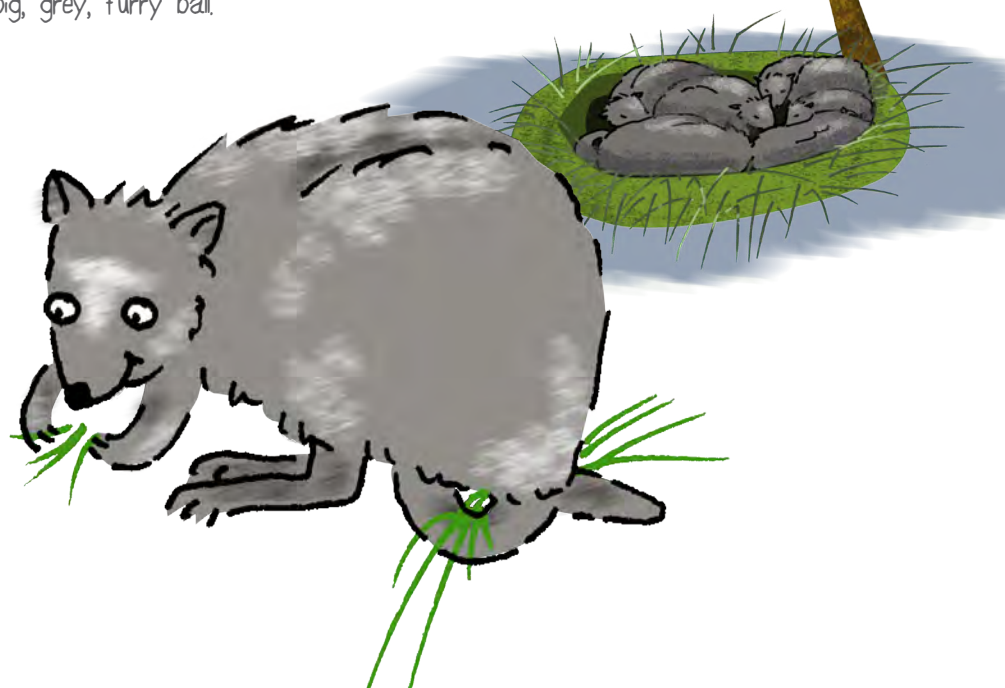


Actually my friend, they used any soft things they found.


As they were small animals, all the family fitted cosily into their nest. Bara was only about 28 centimetres long, and her two brothers weren't much more. Her mother and aunties were shorter than her father who was 40 centimetres long. At night they slept, curled up together, with their short-muzzled faces and small rounded ears tucked into their fur.



Actually my friend, they looked like one great big, grey, furry ball.



Bara Boodie, the burrowing bettong



Bara means dawn or sunrise in Martu language. Her mother gave Bara that name because she was born as the sun peeped over the horizon, and because her thick fur had a golden tinge. Dawn is also when boodies find the freshest and tastiest foods. Bara's favourites were seeds, plants, fruit and nuts - especially quandongs that dropped from their tree. Her mum also liked to eat roots, tubers and termites as well. Privately, Bara thought termites tasted erk!



Actually my friend, her greedy brothers didn't care what they ate, but gobbled up whatever they found.



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One morning, Bara was by herself foraging for food and contentedly nibbling one of her favourite foods: bush tomatoes, when the world seemed to darken. She peered skywards where she just made out a dark cloud dimming the sunlight. It wasn't like a rain cloud, and there were no other clouds in the huge blue sky.

Puzzled, she watched the cloud drawing closer. The nearer it came the more her bewilderment turned to fear. Bara scampered home making her frightened cry that sounded as though she was farting! The whole family crouched there, quivering and peering out of their nest trying to see what was happening.



Actually my friend, all other animals were in their nests, too.

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Hovering overhead, the black cloud materialised into huge birds, soaring on enormous wings. Wedge-tailed eagles, for that's what they were, descended and perched in trees surveying the surroundings. A flock covered Bara's quandong tree as her family cowered in their nest.

Then, one by one, spreading gigantic wings, the eagles took to the sky again.



Actually my friend, they circled slowly, menacingly overhead.

Suddenly Bara saw one drop like a stone, plunging onto her friend Kindilan's home. Her mother had called her Kindilan as it means happy and she wanted her daughter to be happy always. But, Bara knew she'd be anything but happy now.



Actually my friend, both Bara and Kindilan were terrified almost out of their skins.

There was a rumbustious commotion in Kindilan's nest with boodies' squeaks, hisses and grunts ringing out. Then, that demon-eagle rose clutching a squirming bundle in its claws.

Everywhere boodies cowered in their nests, watching in horror as ruthless predators carted away other bundles.



Actually my friend, Bara trembled and cried pitifully so certain was she her friend had been captured!

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That night, when boodies were usually sound asleep, a crowd of them gathered under the quandong tree. Bara squeaked with delight as she caught sight of Kindilan. She hadn't been snatched away after all!

'We must do something! Twenty of our young were stolen today,' Bara's father cried.

Another voice piped up, 'But what can we do?'

'Those demons came in the day so we need to hide then,' called a voice.

There was silence.

'Well,' Bara's father said slowly, 'they disappeared in the dark, so we'll hide in daylight and fossick for food at night when they're not around.'

'But our nests aren't safe, even at night. Where can we hide?' asked a quavering voice.

'Grass isn't long enough and bushes aren't thick enough. They'd find us easily,' said another.

'The only thing to do is dig tunnels and make burrows for our homes,' suggested Bara's father. 'They won't be able to see us there - whoever heard of a burrowing bird?'

'Yes, we must dig burrows!' chorused the boodies.



And actually my friend,
that's just what they did.



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At first, each family dug their own burrow and lined it with spinifex and grasses. Then gradually, as boodies are very social animals, they made tunnels to visit each other. Bara and Kindilan used them often. Connecting tunnels also meant they could come and go using different openings if danger was about.



Actually my friend, it often was.

As boodies love to eat, they quickly learned to fossick for food in the dark of the night. In daytime when they slept, their burrows not only protected them but also were cooler than their above-ground nests had been.



Actually my friend, they found this new arrangement to their liking.



However, boodies always remember the attack of the wedge-tailed eagles. They remain alert, and only come out of their burrows after sunset making sure to be back by sunrise.

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Over time, their sense of smell sharpened to help them find food in the dark. Their back legs grew stronger so they could bound out of harm's way, like kangaroos, instead of scampering on all fours. Their smaller front legs strengthened too, as they used them for digging.



Actually my friend, that's why boodies also became known as burrowing bettongs, the only burrowing kangaroo.



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