

**"THE BURNING OF THE CROWS,"  
OR WHY CROWS' FEATHERS  
ARE NOW BLACK**

**A Native Legend from Arkaba**

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Australian native folklore abounds in legends relating to the Crow (*Corvus ceciliae*), and an interesting example which tells why Crows are now black is described by Robert Bruce in his "Reminiscences of an Old Squatter."

Bruce, who took great interest in the Australian Aborigines, saw much station life on Willochra, Wonoka, Wilpena and Arkaba in the early days, and it was while residing on the latter station that he learned the legend of the "Burning of the Crows."

Ages and ages ago, all Crows were white—just like Younganna, the "Lake Hope Cockatoo" (?—*Kakatoe sanguinea*). They were also just as badly behaved as they are now and a nuisance to all, but by crowding together they protected one another and so always escaped punishment. They even annoyed Wildoo, the Big Eagle; for, watching till he killed his food, they would all attack him at once and so force him to give it up.

And when he wished to rest, they would even perch above his head and insult him in the worst possible manner. Then Wildoo ground his beak with rage, and after much deep thinking resolved on an idea with which to beat them.

On Howieandina Run, in a big black ironstone hill, there is a great cave, which Wildoo now entered, carrying with him a fine heap of dry sticks. And so when Buccola, the Big Frost, came, Wildoo tempted his persecutors into the cave at a time when they had not yet grown their new feathers.

"See," he said, to the poor shivering Crows whose very bills chattered with the cold, "just come into this nice warm stone cave and you will all be as happy as the 'Possum in his hole in the tree. My feathers have all grown, so I do not mind the frost, but I am sorry for you, so go straight in."

So all the Crows went in and soon fell asleep on the nice dry sticks which Wildoo had made into a bed for them. Then Wildoo waited till Peera the Moon gave him plenty of light to see by, and taking his Firestick he set fire to the Crows' bed and so burnt off all their remaining feathers. And when the feathers grew again, they were all black and so remain until this day.