

Book Review

Australia's first naturalists: Indigenous peoples' contribution to early zoology

**PENNY OLSEN AND LYNETTE RUSSELL,
2019**

NLA Publishing, Canberra, \$44.99

Hardback, 228 pages

Numerous illustrations

For those of us who love nature as much as 'birders' generally do, you may enjoy the opportunity to consider the land that surrounds our adored birdlife in a very different light. Olsen and Russell highlight some of the intrinsic connections shared between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to their country, flora and fauna as noted by Australia's early explorers.

Explorers took advantage of the intimate understanding that the Aboriginal and Torres Strait peoples had of the flora and fauna to capture specimens, create their scientific journals, write history books and to embed themselves as prominent names forevermore in Australian colonial history.

Bird lovers will enjoy the narrative on the first encounters with unique Australian bird species such as the Superb Lyrebird, *Menura novaehollandiae*, Magnificent Riflebird, *Ptiloris magnificus*, and Mutton Birds (Short-tailed Shearwaters), *Ardenna tenuirostris*. The Aboriginal people, named in the book as the first naturalists, shared their amazing ability to understand the day to day activity of all birdlife and their lifelike bird calls.



Gould himself was one who benefited greatly as he shared in a letter to his wife Elizabeth: *"Tell Lady Franklin I have her little page with me, (referring to an Aboriginal orphan he was transporting to Lady Franklin's care), he is a most interesting little fellow, throws the spear waddy with the utmost dexterity and extremely useful to me in the bush, an eye like a hawk, discovers birds' nests and eggs in a most astonishing manner"*

Although there is not a great deal of bird content mentioned throughout the book, there is a lot to be gained from a greater understanding of what the term 'Connection to Country' is actually referring to. This book presents an excellent opportunity for everyone to enjoy the stories of Australia's true 'first naturalists' through the eyes of the first explorers.

Lou Jayleigh