

Grounding Story

Swamphen Collective

Swamphen emerges from the air, lands and seas that form the stories of the First Nation peoples of Australia and Aotearoa/New Zealand. We attend to these communities' narratives as a first principle. We acknowledge the unceded territories on which we have worked, to produce this issue of *Swamphen*, and we pay our respects to those territories' Elders, past, present and emerging. This respect is imbued in our namesake, swamphen, a bird active in this region's ground, skies and waters.

As volume seven, this issue of *Swamphen* forms part of its predecessor journal, the *Australasian Journal of Ecocriticism and Cultural Ecology*. We are indebted to CA Cranston and her team who founded the ASLEC-ANZ journal. The theme of this issue, *Grounding Story*, has its origins in the 2019 ASLEC-ANZ conference and the writings we have gathered continue the conversations had there, about the importance of grounded story-telling in a time of crisis.

Swamphen opens with a keynote essay from Te Arawa ethnographer Paora Tapsell. Tapsell lyrically speaks to 'the repeating patterns, codes and algorithms' gifted by his ancestors, illustrating how it might be possible to '(re)structure, transition, contextualise and translate one knowledge system into another'. It is *Swamphen's* work, as the voice of an academic association embedded in the environmental humanities, to turn this invitation into a requirement.

The necessity of this scholarly shift has gained mainstream clarity in recent times. In early 2020, Australia's bushfires sent a clear message that our region must attend to the Indigenous cultural knowledges that have been largely ignored since white invasion. And as we write, a global pandemic is opening up new social landscapes that show such structural shifts are not only possible, but deeply necessary.

With our hope for change foremost, we dedicate this issue to the work of Deborah Bird Rose, an exceptional settler scholar shaped by the Indigenous stories she was gifted over her lifetime. ASLEC-ANZ has established a biennial Deborah Bird Rose Early Career Prize and the winning essay will be edited and published in the next issue of *Swamphen*. During the *Grounding Story* conference, scholars who worked directly with Rose discussed a key concept or practice from her work that meant a lot to them. We are grateful that these stories have been formalised for a memorial section in this issue of *Swamphen*.

Thom van Doreen describes Rose's intellectual contribution as follows:

Trained as an anthropologist, over the course of her career Debbie made major contributions in a range of fields, from the environmental humanities, and the anthropology of Indigenous Australia, to extinction studies, animal and multispecies studies, and philosophies of ethics, justice, religion, temporality, and place. Across all of this work she consistently explored the way in which processes of colonisation, modernisation, and development produce ramifying patterns of unequal loss, destruction, disavowal, and death. Debbie published many widely read, cited, and often reprinted books, including: *Hidden Histories* (1991), *Dingo Makes Us Human* (1992), *Nourishing Terrains* (1996), *Country of the Heart* (2002), *Reports from a Wild Country* (2004), and *Wild Dog Dreaming* (2011). At the time of her death she had just completed work on a final book, *Shimmer*, which explores the entangled lives and deaths of humans and flying-foxes in Australia.

Our memorial section begins with van Dooren's story of being taught the art of the scholarly narrative by Rose. Emily O'Gorman then describes how Rose's theorisation of colonising destruction enabled her story of settler damage to the Murray-Darling Basin. Kate Wright tells of the connectivity that comes with stories passed on with the care emblematic of Rose. Michael Adams honours Rose's focus on stories from the 'edges', those disruptive tales that interrupt relations of harm. Jennifer Hamilton tests what it is to work in/gratitude, when a loved voice like that of Rose no longer speaks back in freshly written words. In the final contribution to this section, Kim Satchell describes the impact of Rose's affirmative philosophy on his lifeways.

Our five peer reviewed essays exemplify the grounded ethical storytelling discernible in Rose's close engagement with the human and more than human narratives of the world.

Stuart Cooke's 'Ecological Poetics' reads Indigenous storytelling, led by Rose's scholarship. He writes, 'through place we encounter rhythmic, musical expression, or *poetry*' and this 'irregular topography' of poetry is defined, with Rose, as including place and dance. In 'How Mangroves Story', Kate Judith engages with the biosemiotics of 'mangrove movements' that implicate, attract, repel and change humans, as she evokes the mangrove's work to tangle with humans, as it does with all other creatures in its reach.

Deborah Wardle's 'Thinking with Groundwater' brings the terrain of fiction into dialogue with scholarship around unseen yet attentive artesian waters. As Wardle writes, 'Water wants to balance the concentrations on both sides of the membrane. Water wants.'

In ‘Responsive Topologies’ Stephen Dickie reads the novels of Melissa Lucashenko and Alexis Wright. As a settler reader, he finds these works make ‘legible’ the ‘implications’ of Indigenous knowledges in the way that stories do best.

Michael Chew describes a ‘photo-story project’ that brings together the environmental concerns of Naarm/Melbourne, Dhaka and Beijing. These ‘flashpoints of connection’ show how new stories might be told in these challenging times.

Our review section makes clear how poetics can create the stories needed for a world crying out for humans to act more generously. This section begins with Rowena Lennox’s reading of Joshua Lobb’s cross-genre *The Flight of Birds: A Novel in Twelve Stories*. She beautifully renders Lobb’s work with the grief of disconnection that ‘is sensory and made strange with language’. Marion May Campbell eloquently positions the ‘eco-ethical inflection’ in Astrida Neimanis’ *Bodies of Water: Posthuman Ecofeminist Phenomenology*. She then innovatively performs her own ‘collective work in elaboration’ in response to this work. Hayley Singer engages with Emily Potter’s *Writing Belonging at the Millennium: Notes from the Field on Settler-Colonial*, viscerally responding to Potter’s request that white settlers pause, and think about how ‘stories sit right here, in the ground’.

Wiradjuri writer, Jeanine Leane completes *Swamphen* with her compelling reading of Charmaine Papertalk Green and John Kinsella’s *False Claims of Colonial Thieves*. Leane commends this ‘radical intervention in publishing’ as part of the ‘yarning’ needed to build the ‘respectful relationships’ desperately needed between white settlers and First Nations people. This is, as Leane puts it, ‘the most important conversation of our time’ (Leane’s emphasis).

Swamphen takes the need for this conversation to heart. We offer this issue as an attempt to learn from First Nation knowledges in ways that inspire repatriation. We hope our readers may be similarly moved.

With many thanks from our collective:

- Sue Hall Pyke (General Editor), University of Melbourne, working on Tyacooort Woorrong Country and Wurudjeri Country;
- Alanna Myers (Book Review Editor) University of Melbourne, working on Wurudjeri Country;
- Christine Howe, University of Wollongong, working on Dharawal Country;
- Kate Middleton, Australian Catholic University and University of Wollongong, working on Gadigal Country;
- Robyn Maree Pickens, University of Otago/Te Whare Wānanga o Otāgo; and
- Hayley Singer, University of Melbourne, working on Bunurong/Boonwurrung Country.