

Understanding country



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When Anangu look at the landscape, they pay close attention to landforms, soils, plants, animals, water supply and fire history. They understand the country.

Seasons

'Anangu don't go by piranpa dates, we only go by our own seasons... we know which fruits and foods we get during our seasons – that's what is important to us.'
– Traditional Owner.

The time when many animals breed and hibernating reptiles come out is called piriya-piriya or piriyakutu. This is when the piriya comes, a warm steady wind from the north and west (usually around August and September). Sometimes we describe this season by saying it is when the kaliny-kalinypa (honey grevillea) flowers.

After that is mai wiyaringkupai, or kulji – the time when food becomes scarce and it is really hot. At this time there are ngangkali (storm clouds) and lightning, but little rain.

The country becomes itjanu or inuntji (fresh and green or full of blossoms) when utuwarri (overcast clouds) bring rain (usually January to March). Lots of food plants fruit and flower at this time.

Wanitjunkupai is the beginning of cold weather when reptiles hibernate. Tjuntalpa – clouds that don't have any rain – come from the south and west.

Wari is the cold time (late May, June and July). There is nyiyinga (frost) most mornings.

Habitats

Anangu recognise habitats in their own way.

We understand the relationships between the land, plants and animals. We know when and where to find particular foods.

Pulji (rocky areas, gorges, stony slopes) – Plants that can survive in shallow, barren soils are found here and Anangu burn around pulji to protect it from wildfires. Many animals come to drink or shelter here but return to other habitats to graze and breed.

Kanyala (a sedentary euro marsupial), waru (black-footed rock wallaby), tjilkamata (echidna) and arutju (fat tailed antechinus) are all found here.

Aṅangu know how to use plants, read animal tracks and they understand the significance of weather changes. Their knowledge and their responsibility to care for the country and its wildlife, come from Tjukurpa law



Thorny devil



Karu (creekline and run-off plains) – Aṅangu usually find good supplies of water here and although the creeks are normally dry, waterholes can retain water for months. In traditional times, people dug for water along the creek beds and collected grass seeds such as kalṯu-kalṯu (native millet) and wanguṅu (naked woollybutt).

Puṯi (open woodlands) – These are common near the Cultural Centre and Uluru, where they are dominated by wanaṛi (mulga). After good rain, where the ground is hard and sometimes stony, kapi t̄jintjira (freshwater claypans) are formed and animals come to drink from these.

When ninu (bilby) were around, they lived in puṯi country. Maḷu (red kangaroo) come here when good feed is available and there are many animals that use burrows including mingkiṛi (mice and small dasyurids) and tarkawaṛa (spinifex hopping-mouse).

Pila (spinifex plains) – This is the most common habitat in the park and many kurkaṛa (desert oak) grow in pila. Trees and shrubs such as kurkaṛa, waṭarka (umbrella bush) and muur-muurpa (bloodwood) provide seeds for animals and people to eat.

Some of the animals of the pila are muṯinka (skink lizards) and muluny-mulunypa (striped skinkss), kuniya (woma python), lungkaṭa (Centralian blue-tongued lizard), tjakuṛa (great desert skink), kaḷaya (emu), kipaṛa (bustard), tuuka (fox) and ngaya (cat).

Tali (sand dunes) – This habitat is very fragile. Spinifex and green shrubs such as mangaka (desert quondong) grow here. In the mornings you can see networks of tracks on the sand dunes. Many of the animals of the tali protect themselves by burrowing into the sand.

Generally, small mammals that live in pila are also found in tali. Itjaritjari (marsupial mole) is likely to come to the surface after rain.

Some reptiles, particularly some of the muṯinka (small skinks) live specifically on the sand dunes and frogs lie buried on the moist side of the dunes, emerging only after rain.

Nyaru (recently burnt areas) – Pila and tali become nyaru after they are burnt. Animals like recently burnt areas because many food plants are plentiful such as kampurarpa (desert raisin), edible seed, grasses and succulents.

Animals such as tarkawaṛa prefer these areas for foraging while others such as t̄jantjalka (military dragon) move away until the spinifex cover comes back.

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