

# UNDERSTANDING COUNTRY

When *Anangu* look at the landscape we pay close attention to landforms, soils, plants, animals, water supply and fire history. We understand the country. We know how to use plants and can read the tracks of animals. We understand the significance of weather changes. Our knowledge and our responsibility to care for the country and its wildlife come from *Tjukurpa*.

## Seasons

*'Anangu don't go by Piriropa 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.

*Piriyakutu/piriya-piriya* is when the *piriya* comes, a warm steady wind from the north and west (usually around August and September). Animals breed and food plants flower, fruit and seed. Hibernating reptiles come out. Sometimes this season is called *kalinykalinypa* when the *kalinykalinypa* (honey grevillea) flowers. *Anangu* can then make sweet drinks from the nectar of the flower.

*Mai wiyaringkupai/kulji* is the really hot time when food finishes (around December). There is *ngangkali* (storm clouds) and lightning, but little rain. *Itjanu/inuntji* is when *utawari* (overcast clouds) usually bring rain (January to March). Lots of food plants flower at this time. *Wanitjunkupai* is the beginning of cold weather when reptiles hibernate. *Tjuntalpa* clouds start around April, but usually don't bring rain. They come from the south mainly by westerly winds. *Tjuntalpa* sit low over the hills until late in the day.

*Wari* is the cold time (late May, June and July). There is *nyinnga* (frost) and *kulyarpa* (mist or dew) every morning, but little sun.

*Anangu* are teaching rangers and scientists about the animals and plants of the park, showing them where to look, telling them about animals and the kind of burrows they have, what they eat, everything.

## Habitats

*Anangu* recognise habitats in our 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. *Kanyaļa* (euro), *waru* (black-footed rock wallaby), *tjilkamaļa* (echidna) and *arutju* (fat-tailed antechinus) are all found here. Many bird species come to get water in rocky areas after rain including *ipuru* (spinifex pigeon).

**Karu** (creekline and run-off plains) - *Anangu* usually find good supplies of water here and although the creeks are normally dry, waterholes can retain water for months. People dig for water along the creek beds and collect grass seeds such as *kaltu-kaltu* (native millet) and *wanguņu* (naked wollybutt). *Anangu* also collect firewood and timber for carving tools from the *muur-muurpa* (bloodwood) and *itara* (river red gum).



**Puti** (open woodlands) - After good rain, where the ground is hard and sometimes stony, *kapi tjintjira* (freshwater claypans) are formed and animals come to drink from these. *Puti wanaḗ* is flat country where there is thick *wanaḗ* (mulga) and the ground storey can be spinifex or other grasses.

After rain lots of food plants are available and *tjaḷa* (honeyants) start making their nests. When *ninu* (bilby) were around they could be found eating lots of *maku* (witchetty grubs) and *tjaḷa* in *puti* country.

*Maḷu* (red kangaroo) come here when good feed is available whereas *kanyaḷa* (euro) use the rocky areas. There are many animals that use burrows including *pintjatana* (rabbit), *mingkiri* (mice and small dasyurids) and *tarkawara* (spinifex hopping-mouse).

**Pila** (spinifex plains) - This is the most common habitat in the park and many *kurkaḷa* (desert oak) grow in *pila*. When *tjanpi* (spinifex) is old, with a ring in the middle, *Anangu* burn it to allow new growth.

Trees and shrubs such as *kurkaḷa*, *waṯarka* (umbrella bush) and *muur-muurpa* (bloodwood) provide seeds for animals and people to eat. Many plants provide nectar and honey such as the common *kaliny-kalinypa*.

Some of the animals of the *pila* are *tarkawara* (spinifex hopping mouse), *muṯinka* (skink lizards) and *muluny-mulunypa* (striped skinks), *kuniya* (woma python), *lungkaṯa* (Centralian blue-tongued lizard), *tjakuḷa* (great desert skink), *kaḷaya* (emu), *kipara* (bustard), *tuuka* (fox) and *ngaya* (cat).

**Tali** (sand dunes) - This habitat is very fragile. Spinifex and green shrubs such as *mangaṯa* (desert quondong) and *waṯarka* grow here. Plants like *walkalpa* (emu poison bush) and *nyita* (nut bush) grow on the sand dunes.

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, the 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, with similar animals in both habitats. Animals like recently burnt areas because many food plants are plentiful such as *kampurarpa* (desert raisin) and (bush tomato), edible seed, grasses and succulents.

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

