

## Noongar seasons



The local Noongar Aboriginal people lived in harmony with the land. They travelled according to their six seasons, which brought a change of weather, food sources and lifestyle. The wetlands bear special significance for their animal and plant communities, but also for the Noongar spiritual connection to Boodja (Earth Mother). Water and wetlands are precious to this community, both past and present, have important cultural heritage and need to be protected. The six Aboriginal seasons are as follows:

### **BIRAK** (December–January)

In December and January, the weather was hot and dry, with easterly winds during the day and sea breezes in the later afternoon. The lighting of controlled local fires served two purposes: to force kangaroos, wallabies and reptiles into the open so they could be speared more easily, and to reduce undergrowth and ensure the lush growth of grasses and young plants in Djilba (late winter, early spring). Bronzewing pigeons were also caught for food.

An abundance of food sources existed including mammals, birds, reptiles, grubs, frogs, kangaroo, wallabies, bandicoots and lizards.

### **BUNURU** (February–March)

During February and March, the dry conditions and hot northerly winds meant that Noongars moved to the coast and estuaries, as the mainland suffered from a shortage of fresh, clean water.

Fish, mussels and crabs made up a large portion of the diet, as they moved from the ocean to the lake system. Fish such as tailor and mullet were trapped in shallow water and easily caught, and marron, gilgies, kooyal and tortoises were collected from wetlands.

Other foods during this season were djilki, koonac, yams, reeds, lizards and possums. *Haemodorum spicatum* (a bulb) was collected and roasted for use as a spice. Wattle, banksia blossom and various roots were also collected.

### **DJERAN** (April–May)

This intermediate season linked to Bunuru and Makuru and was used to build and repair mia-mias (tents) for protection, during the cooler weather and south-westerly winds in April and May.

Family groups began to travel inland to avoid heavy coastal rains and damp conditions, and group fishing occurred at inland lakes, estuaries and wetlands, with cobbler and mullet being speared in the river.

Hunting was focused on kangaroos, and kangaroo skins and coats were prepared for winter.

The Djeran diet also comprised grubs, frogs and quenda (short-nosed/southern brown bandicoot).

### **MAKURU** (June–July)

Fire was very important during this season throughout June and July, and travelling groups rarely went anywhere without a smouldering branch of bull banksia held beneath their booka (kangaroo-skin cloaks).

Fire was made using the slender flower stems from grasstrees. Fire was perhaps the Noongar people's most useful and precious resource, with many uses: tool and artefact production, food preparation and cooking, hunting and driving game, warmth and signalling. The camp fire provided comfort and company.

Makuru was a time to dig and eat djida pink tuber roots. Swans moulted in June and were easy prey as they were unable to fly. Women and children would drive the swimming birds across a lake or river to the men, who waited to catch the birds.

### **DJILBA** (August–September)

During the winter period of Djilba, the local people sheltered in the woodlands and ranges of the Darling Escarpment, from the fierce winter storms coming from the Southern Ocean.

Noongars were able to move to inland hunting areas once the rains had replenished water sources, and when water supplies in the dry areas of their territory were thought to be reliable.

Family groups merged for collective hunting and gathering. Hunting occurred inland, especially as wildlife returned to rivers and lakes to drink.

Yonga (kangaroo), quenda (bandicoot) and waitch (emu) were hunted, and koormul (possum) were driven from tree hollows with smoke.

Snakes and lizards were hunted when they came out to warm themselves towards the end of Djilba. Birds' eggs and young parrots in nests also provided food.

The tubers of native potatoes (*Platysace cirrosa*) were dug from beneath the wandoo (timber) during this season, and meen and djakat (roots) were collected.

### **KAMBARANG** (October–November)

Meaning 'rains decreasing', this season from October to November was signalled by the vibrant flowering of the Western Australian Christmas Tree (*moodjar* or *Nuytsia floribunda*).

Kambarang was a season of plenty, with an abundance of food available such as fruit, yams and birds' eggs. Kooyal (frogs), yaarkin (tortoises) and gilgie (freshwater crayfish) were delicacies enjoyed in this season; these were caught by hand in swamps and wetlands.

The season also brought a natural increase in game. Pits and traps were used to collect possums and kangaroos.

Supplies of gum from wattle trees were collected, and yams (*Dioscorea hastifolia*) were dug up by women using long wanna (digging sticks). The shoots and tips of the yams were thrown back into the holes they were dug from, to ensure a new crop would grow the following year.