

Descriptions of Flora & Fauna

John Hunter – journal kept on board the *Sirius* during a voyage to New South Wales, May 1787 – March 1791, Manuscript DL MS 164

The Animal described in the Voyage of the Endeavour call'd Kangaroo *

[*Note in Margin - but by the Natives here, is call'd Patagerang]

we find in great Numbers, One was Shot the other day which Weigh'd 140 lbs: its tail was 40 inches long and 17 in Circumference at the root – it is very well described by C.Cook, we Eat the flesh with great relish, & think it good Mutton, altho not so delicate as that which we sometimes find in Leadenhall Market – the Strength this Animal has in its hind quarters is very great, in its endeavour to escape from us when surprised, it springs from it hind legs which are very long, and leaps at each bound about Six or Eight yard, but doesn't appear ever to lett its forefeet come near the ground, indeed they are so very short that it is not possible that the Animal can use them in running

they have vast strength also in their tail, it is no doubt a principal part of their defence, when attack'd, for they can strike with it with prodigious force, I believe sufficiently so to break the leg of a man, it is not improbable that this great power in the tail may assist them in making those astonishing springs.*

[* D] The Opossum is also very Numerous here, but it is not exactly like the American Opossum, it partakes a good deal of the Kangaroo, in the Strength of its tail & make of its fore legs which are very short in proportion to the hind ones like that animal, it has the Pouch or false Belly for the safety of its Young in times of danger, which the Kangaroo has also, & its Colour is nearly the same; there are many other Animals of a Smaller size, down as low as the field Rat which in some part or other partake of the Kangaroo & Opossum, we have Caught many Rats with this pouch for bearing off their Young when pursued – It wou'd

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It wou'd appear from the great Similarity in some part or other of the different Creatures of the Quadruped kind which we find here, that there is a promiscuous intercourse between the different Sexes of all these different Animals The same observation might be made also on the fishes of the sea, on the fowls of the air, & I may add the trees of the Forrest- it is wonderfull to see what a vast variety of fish we have caught which in some part or other partake of the sharks it is no uncommon thing to see a skates head & shoulders to the hind part of a shark, or a sharks head to the body of a large mullet, & sometimes to the flat body of a sting rae- With respect to the feather'd treble, the parrot prevails, we have shot birds with the head neck & bill of a parrot, & with the same variety of the most beautiful plumage on those parts for which this bird here is distinguish'd, and a tail and body and Body of a different Make & Colour & long Straight & delicately made legs and feet, which is the reverse of every Bird of the Parrot kind, I have also seen a Bird With the legs & feet of a Parrot, the Head & Neck made & Colour'd like the Common Sea Gull & the Wings & tail of a Hawke*

[*Note in margin - I have also seen trees bearing two diff't kinds of leaves, & frequently have found some having the same leaf & with some kind of Gum exuding from them & cover'd with bark of a very different kind -] There are a great Variety of Birds in this Country, all those which are of the Parrot kind, such as the Macaw, Cockatoo, Lory, Green Parrot, Parroquet of different kinds and sizes & the Loriqueette are Cloath'd with the most beautiful Plumage which can be conceiv'd, it would

require the Pencil of an Able Limner to give a stranger an Idea of them, for it is impossible by Words to describe them – The Common Crow is here in great numbers, but the Sound of their Voices & Manner of Croaking is very different from those in Europe, there are also vast Numbers of Hawkes of Various Sizes & Colours here are Pidgeons & Quails, with a great Variety of Smaller Birds, but have not found one with a pleasing Note

There have been several large Birds seen, since our Arrival in this Port; They were supposed by those who first saw them, to be the Ostrich, as they cou'd not fly when pursued, but ran exceedingly fast, so much so, that a very strong & fleet Greyhound cou'd not come near them; One we have lately had Shott, which gave us an opportunity of a More Close examination- Some were of Opinion that it was the Emew which I think is particularly describd by Doctor Goldsmith from Linnaeus; others imagined it to be the Cassaware, but it far exceeded that Bird in its size, it was when Standing, 7 feet 2 inches from the feet to the upper part of its head, the only difference which I cou'd perceive between this Bird & the Ostrich was in the Bill, which appear'd to one to be Narrower at the point it had three toes which I am told is not the case with the Ostrich, it had one Characteristic by which some people may know it & which we thought very extraord.y.

Extraordinary; from every quill two distinct feathers grew out- The flesh of this Bird altho Coarse was thought by us delicious Meat, it had much the appearance when Raw, of Neck beef, a party of five with me din'd on a side bone of it most Sumptuously- The Pot or the Spit receives every thing which we can Catch or Kill, the Common Crow is relish'd here, as well as the Barn door fowl in England. - Of Insects there are as great a Variety here as of other Creatures, the Scorpion, Centipede, Spider, Ants & many others, the Ants are of various Sizes from the Smallest known in Europe, to the size of near an inch in length, some are Blacks some white & others of the largest sort are Redish, this kind are really a formidable little Animal, if you tred near the Nest which is generally under ground with various little passages or outlets, and have disturbed them, they will Sally forth in

A Journal of a voyage from Portsmouth to New South Wales and China in the *Lady Penrhyn*, Merchantman William Cropton Server, Commander by Arthur Bowes Smyth, Surgeon, Jan-Feb, 1788 Manuscript Safe 1/15

Feb. 15th. A Servt. of Mr. Poulden, Lieut. of Marines, who was with his Master in the Woods shooting last Saturday stray'd away so far from him that he was lost & has not since been heard of.

This day, whilst I was in the Camp wt. Major Ross a large female Kangooroo was brot. into the Camp, &: likewise a young one wh. was found in its false belly, & appear'd not to have been long dropt --

This Animal is so well discribed, & so excellent an Engraving is given of it in Capt. Cook's Voyages that I shall not say any thing of it here. I have a young one (a male) preserv'd in Spts. I have several times tasted the flesh of this Animal cook'd different ways, & at such a place as Port Jackson, where fresh meals are a great rarity, it is thought a Luxury but I cannot be so partial as to say it equals Venison, as some Gentlemen reported, or that it is even so good as Mutton it is totally destitute of fat, & the flesh as dark colour'd as Venison.

A herd of 11 Kangooroos were this day started near the Camp by one of the Masters of the Ships. A very large Eagle alighted on the Arm of a tree close by the water's edge & directly opposite our Ship -- the Steward fired a Ball at it from a Rifle piece & cut the branch in sunder on wh. it sat but did not kill the bird.