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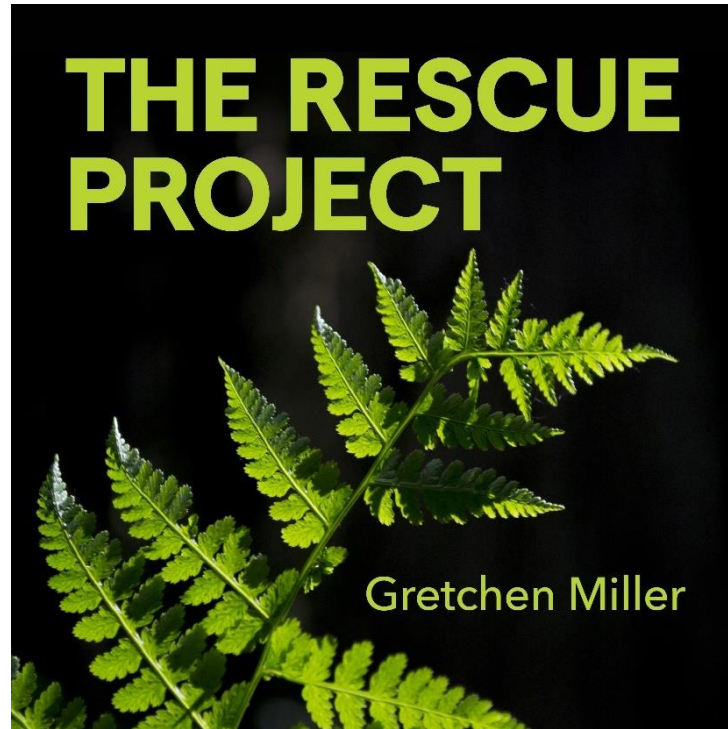
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The Rescue Project



Gretchen Miller

An exegesis in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

School of Humanities & Languages

Faculty of Arts, Design & Architecture

2021



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Abstract 350 words maximum: (PLEASE TYPE)

What is the experience of being a rescuer of damaged landscapes and broken creatures, at a time of environmental crisis in Australia? How do individuals and grassroots communities go about small acts of rescue, and how do they maintain the courage to do this work?

The Rescue Project is practice-based research. It includes a public digital storytelling site of 51 text-based rescuer story contributions, alongside a podcast of four episodes, plus an exegesis providing critical reflection and analysis of the creative practice and the resultant thematic threads. The digital site was constructed in partnership with the non-government, volunteer-based, land regeneration organisation Landcare Australia.

This practice and exegesis contribute new thinking to the scholarship of environmental communication by considering the meaning of rescue, providing insights into the affectual themes of acts of rescue, articulating rescue relations, and introducing and developing several key terms: *ecosonics*, *homeground*, and *citizen storytelling*.

The themes which emerge from this project reveal the emotional affects and effects of undertaking rescues, and suggest rescues take place within three related and iterative overarching themes. Firstly, the theme of humility that is required to begin an act of rescue. Secondly, the theme of attunement that builds resonances with both sentient figures and non-sentient features of homegrounds. Finally, the theme of courage to undertake rescue activities, and courage's iterative outcome, encouragement.

Further, this practice and exegesis contribute to environmental communication through foregrounding listening and hearing, the spoken word, community storytelling, and the ecosonics of the more-than-human world. In giving space to the methodological processes of my creative practice, this exegesis offers environmental communication practitioners new ways to go about their work. It also responds to current calls within this scholarship for a listening modality: for too long we have been deaf to the sounds of the more-than-human world.

The Rescue Project is a demonstration of how we might humbly hear these worlds speak.

To explore the digital space, please visit: <https://web.archive.org/web/20210530042604/https://landcareaustralia.org.au/rescue/>

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Abstract

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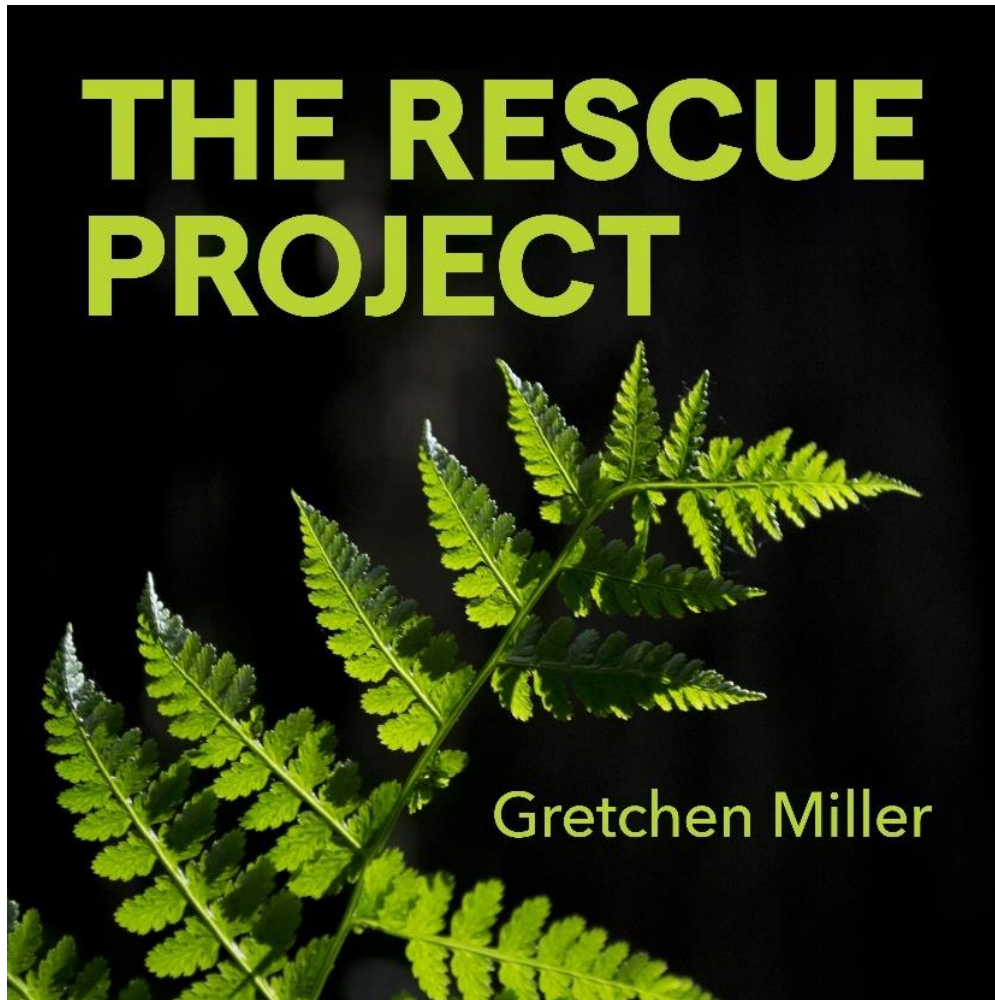
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Podcast tile art by Jo Kaupe, concept, Gretchen Miller.

Chapter 1: Introduction

There in the simmering heat of the night I made a promise...

*Unexpected things happened as a result of my promise that first hot night. Over time the frogs became welcome at my neighbours on both sides, who also created spaces for them. They became the focus of our friendship for the years to come. In restoring their landscape we also discovered a place where time slowed, the beauty that comes from a healthy landscape, and a sanctuary for ourselves. – Kate Clarke¹, Year Round Wetland, *The Rescue Project*.*

In darkness, vision retreats and other sensations rise to the fore. In the story from which I have extracted above, Kate Clarke, sitting in her garden in southwestern Australia, had heard an unnerving rustle and was so delighted to find the sound was a frog that she made a promise to create a frog habitat.

Some months prior, one night on the other side of the continent, I spoke softly to my unwell companion animal, Taffy, the elderly ginger cat. I was pondering the topic I should choose to help me undertake this research into audio storytelling in environmental communication. On this night, I wanted to know: what is the affectual² interspecies experience of environmental rescue? That is, how does rescue feel in the body, and what is its emotional affect and response?

As we rescue, what we do is make contact. With plants and the earth, humans make contact on bended knees (*the crack and creak of stiff joints after time*), the dirt pressed deep under their fingernails (*cleaning it out for days after*), rocks sharp under shins (*forgotten in the focus of the moment, bruises later*), the brittle crunch of raw earth parted to make way for new roots (*in stereo*

¹ The Rescue Project digital site comprises stories written and shared by rescuers, including Kate Clarke, as quoted. The stories, and author names, which comprise the research data, were publicly available on *The Rescue Project* digital site, as approved through the UNSW ethics committee. Thus, in this exegesis, I credit each author using the names they provided. Quotes from *The Rescue Project* contributions are presented with the punctuation and grammar with which they were contributed. Throughout the exegesis, I provide links to each story's archived webpage on first mention.

² I discuss my use of the term *affect* in Chapter 2. Here it is sufficient to understand affect as that which influences an emotion before that emotion is nameable. Affect is a visceral response that influences meaning making (Whatmore, 2006, p. 603)

perhaps, with other planters nearby). With an animal, humans make contact with their hands as they swiftly remove the creature from danger (*instinctively guessing where to grasp*), carefully hold them against themselves (*the emanating warmth of another being, the soft breath*), or place them in a container for security (*are they comfortable, are they scared?*). They listen to each other (*murmuring voices, growls of pain*). Later, hands are a means to communicate care and reassurance as rustling feathers are gently parted or the turn of a limb examined (*unfamiliar angles of bones*), feeling for the extent of the damage and, at some point, human and more-than-human may seek contact eye to eye (*the strangeness, the care*), exchanging a glance in the search for mutual comprehension (*deep and dark*). What relational worlds are these?

The storied details of these encounters matter, because from these stories comes “response-ability”, as Haraway observes (2016, p. 29). Thus, this research investigates the questions that evolved from that night:

- What themes emerge in the stories of citizens who enact modes of rescue in a time of environmental crisis?
- How might the more-than-human world inform these themes, and
- How do these themes give active rescuers courage in these critical times?

Research Description

My research site is a co-creative digital space called *The Rescue Project*. Through *The Rescue Project*, I solicited stories about rescue to elucidate the research questions above. The site includes written text, images, and a podcast of four episodes. While the stories gathered in the digital space arrived from across Australia, the podcast element of this research additionally drew on a specific geographical location: the Atherton Tablelands in northern Queensland, where I gathered interviews for one episode.

The first stage of the practice, therefore, was creating the digital site. This had three roles: to be a creative contribution to the research, to be part of the research methodology, and to act to gather data. It was built to my

specifications in partnership with a national not-for-profit organisation, Landcare Australia. The site invited the uploading of stories by Landcare volunteers and the broader public throughout Australia, with a broad theme of environmental rescue. The stories were publicly viewable from the moment of upload. The invitation to contribute and a provocation for the writing was as follows:

Have you ever rescued a riverbank? A tract of bush, an eroded beach, a waterway, some farmland, a garden or a native tree? A native animal or bird? What do you feel as you tend to tired earth, or engage with the intrinsic value of an old-growth giant, or as you look into that creature's eyes? And, in some way, do these things rescue you?

In the act of environmental rescue, we nurture a tree through drought, we restore a place, or we restore a native animal to health. But this is not a one-way encounter. In rescuing we too receive something in return. In the act of giving back, there is a quiet emotion we might feel that nourishes ourselves, and sometimes whole communities.

Write 500 words on your experience of the theme of rescue and upload it to our website (Miller, 2018b).

The second stage of the research practice was the making of a podcast containing four episodes, with content sourced from the digital site and from interviews conducted on Atherton Tablelands. The digital site and the podcast draw on my creative practice of 20 years of audio storytelling in documentary form at the national public broadcaster, ABC Radio National, alongside a parallel practice of live storytelling multi-media performance and previous undergraduate and postgraduate degrees in music composition and creative writing. *The Rescue Project* digital space and podcast is a material demonstration of my contribution to the field of environmental communication: an approach I develop and call *citizen storytelling*.

In this present exegesis, I offer the third stage of the research, the analytical and theoretical contribution: I thematically analyse the outcomes of *The Rescue Project* and, in so doing, I indicate some of the driving emotional affects and effects of ecocentric, custodial environmental engagement. These include

humility, attunement, and courage. But these affects reach further: they reciprocally influence the storying and restorying of this engagement. Mine is cross-disciplinary research, drawing from a range of scholarships, including environmental communication, virtue ethics, phenomenology, environmental humanities, and allied fields of new materialism, Australian Indigenous scholarship, narrative inquiry, community-based participatory action research, and new media and creative practice scholarship.

The Problem

This research occurs at a time of widespread cognitive dissonance and human desensitisation in the face of anthropogenic global heating and environmental crisis (Klein, 2015, p. 4). In this epoch, we might be forgiven for feeling overwhelmed. As the climate crisis tightens its grip, how, as individuals and communities, might we regain some agency and communicate the affects and effects of taking environmental action to soothe our places of custodial connection: our *homegrounds*?³ As some individuals and communities work to preserve, restore, and maintain tracts of habitat or rescue individual animals, often at significant personal, emotional, and financial expense (Miller, 2020), this exegesis explores the meanings of this custodial work through citizen storytelling and asks whether citizen storytelling around these acts might be a means to encourage others to act, both locally and democratically.

Environmental organisations, hoping to bring about change in the public sphere, have long shared distressing statistics around environmental degradation to gain public attention (Nixon, 2016, p. 27; Doyle 2007). However, the impact and efficacy of this approach in changing behaviour are now questioned by some organisations⁴ and scholars such as Lopez (2020), who calls for a redesign of

³ Please see Chapter 3 for my detailed definition and development of homeground.

⁴ According to Madelon Willemsen, then Country Director for TRAFFIC (an international non-government organisation monitoring wildlife trading) in Viet Nam: “The way we analyse the effectiveness of a campaign is how many people see it, how many signatures and how much money we get. We’re not analysing people’s behaviour. They just keep running campaigns, but not looking to change people’s behaviour by considering culture. Thinking that if you share horrifying images of rhinos without their horns in a slick-looking campaign, the end users of the product will care – they do not. All that does is reinforce their sense of power and strength.” Willemsen regards the species focus as intrinsically related to the climate crisis. (M. Willemsen, personal communication, 28 July 2017).

media pedagogy such that it fosters whole systems thinking, incorporating environmental systems into every aspect of the work (p. 1). Alongside its stablemate, climate disruption, this environmental crisis has become a matter of sociopolitical ideology for decades and is resisted by powerful vested interests (Klein, 2015). Thus, the task of encouraging popular engagement through environmental communication has become increasingly complex. Issues multiply and jostle for attention, and audiences turn away from the immensity of the problem, resulting in widespread alienation and “ecological amnesia” (Klein, 2015, p. 4; Lopez, 2020; Nixon, 2016, p. 2). The relentless destruction of habitats by mining and clear-felling, coal pollution, the constant dying of the Great Barrier Reef, the ubiquitous layer of plastic across the Earth: all this and more are a catalyst for exponential species extermination, while the late 20th-century climate crisis, too vast and complex to comprehend, trumps all. How can environmental communication counter these challenges and contribute toward restorative relationships?

Aims and Objectives

This research has two primary aims. Firstly, I aim to interpret the thematic threads that manifest through individual and community ecological rescue stories. In so doing, I consider how ecologically oriented humans make meaning from the grounded work of rescue, how the interpreted emergent themes are iteratively brought into ecocentrism through these more-than-human encounters, and how rescuers find courage in enacting rescue activity.

Secondly, in considering communication practice, I aim to demonstrate the value of public storytelling projects in online formats as another tool in the box for effective and reparative environmental communication. In my storytelling practice, I aim to satisfy what Stibbe (2021) regards as essential in the related discipline of ecolinguistics: research that is both transdisciplinary and activist, connecting “knowledge, enquiry, and practical action” (p. 84). My research practice itself is action-based, but so is the data it draws upon. Here I am not only presenting stories, but, through the iterative practices of rescue and citizen storytelling, both of which involve elements of humility, attunement, and

courage, the project also finds relationships among ideas and actions, humans and more-than-humans.

Communication is critical for bringing about ecocentric transformations. Developments in environmental activism suggest activist organisations need to directly engage and include their audience (Climate for Change, 2020; Australian Conservation Foundation, 2016)⁵, and developments in media 2.0⁶ facilitate this approach (Lopez, 2020; Hancox, 2017). Meanwhile, researchers like Yin Lo (2013) and Pratt (2016) write of the role creative arts play in catalysing community participation in environmental custodianship. Immersive journalism practices are exploring virtual reality as a means to “switch on” empathy (de la Peña et al., 2010, pp. 291-301), but an ecocentric podcast – a more affordable and accessible in-your-ear experience – can create intimate, inclusive, and affective impacts (Fargher, 2014) for powerful environmental communication, as I aim to show in this research.

Feminist theorist Karen Barad’s (2012) concerns around critique also inform my aims and objectives in this research. Rather than “subtraction, distancing and othering,” and searching for “the gap” in the scholarly literature (p. 49), I aim to affirm, add to, and build on the work of others in scholarship and practice. Critically, I also aim to affirm, add to, and centre the grounded work of the participant contributors to this research – the storytellers, the rescuers, and, last but not least, the ecosonic⁷ world itself. At the same time, I am mindful of potential appropriation and the risks of speaking and thinking for others (Puig de

⁵ The Melbourne based, not-for-profit organisation Climate for Change supports 10-person dinner parties of friends, to share factual information aimed at those who do not self-identify as “green,” and then offers practical, democratic solutions that help mitigate personal concerns that individual actions are not enough. The attendees are then encouraged to hold their own dinner parties and share the information and solutions in an ironic imitation of pyramid selling (Climate for Change, 2020). This exemplifies nascent approaches to information sharing that invite active, democratic participation, instead of passive information dissemination.

⁶ Media 2.0, related to the term web 2.0, is shorthand for a pivot towards interactive, two-way engagement between media producers and the public online. *The Rescue Project* is one such example. “Multiplatform, participatory, and digital, public media 2.0 will be an essential feature of truly democratic public life from here on in,” (Clark & Aufderheide, 2009, p. 2).

⁷ I define ecosonic in Chapter 2.

la Bella Casa, 2012, p. 208), as I discuss in Chapter 3 (in the section titled Gaia and the Networks) of the literature review.

My approach also is informed by Stibbe's (2017) call for positive discourse analysis: research that seeks meaning in "discourses which can inspire people to find well-being in ways that do not require over-consumption and treat the natural world with respect and care" (p. 276). For too long, we have been deaf to the more-than-human voices and sounds of the world. *The Rescue Project* demonstrates how we might be inspired to respectfully, carefully hear these worlds speak.

Creative and Industry Background

This present research builds on my Master of Arts thesis, *Inland and the Frenchman's Garden*⁸ (Miller, 2000), and two decades of professional practice, so I outline some background here. My practice began with a Bachelor of Music (composition major). I continued through theatre writing and production and went on to print journalism, then radio feature making, but always sustaining an interest in environmental communication. My radiophonic approach has been one of case studies and narrative inquiry. I learned much of the process on the job at RN, the Australian Broadcasting Corporation's (ABC) national network, while also bringing along my scholarly and creative background.

As the Australian public broadcaster, the ABC is funded by the Australian government of the day and offers television, radio, and online content, from essential news services to reflections of cultural practice. ABC Radio has several networks, some of which are national and some local to a state or capital city. ABC RN, formerly known as Radio National, and before that, Radio 2, is, as its name suggests, broadcast in all states and territories. Radio practitioner and scholar Virginia Madsen (2014) has published extensively on the history of the ABC. She describes the network as influenced in the 1960s and '70s by international trends, such as public service broadcasting outputs in Europe (p. 38), while still remaining committed to the "older genres and forms –

⁸ For this thesis I wrote, composed, and sound designed audio works that fictionalised historical figures who fell in love with geophysical features of the landscape.

the cultural content and mixed news/public affairs/cultural talk programming they had evolved continuously since the Second World War” (p. 38). In the 1970s, Europe and America shifted to more experimental radiophonic production, and Australian radio makers were excited by these new approaches (Madsen, 2005; Madsen, 2014, p. 38).

This evolving tradition of experimental feature-making influenced my work at ABC RN. Formats were flexible: listeners to any given program might hear collaged together a mix of outcomes of scholarly research, oral and archive-based recordings, creative non-fiction, fiction, radio drama, and, in the case of myself and some other practitioners, sometimes new music composition and sound design in such a way as to be described as “musique concrete” (Madsen, 2013, p. 135). Producers worked largely independently but often sought other producers’ advice and worked closely with sound engineers. These collaborations, with ABC engineers such as Russell Stapleton, Judy Rapley, and Stephen Tilley were vital to the outcomes.

Madsen (2014) describes the practice thus:

This programming daringly brought together in one virtual place (on the air) the world’s leaders, thinkers, scientists, revolutionaries, artists ...the legacy of these shenanigans and the willingness to co-operate by at least some within these at times philosophically separated departments was the Arts Unit, established in 1985. From this mix of creatives and more journalistically inclined producers, a new kind of lab or radio atelier emerged: The Listening Room, producing everything from sound arts and performance to documentary features and interviews (p. 144).

The external collaborations and relationships between this research and the formal academe were considerable, and they generated original knowledge. Thus, up until I moved from radio to academia in 2018, I have operated inductively in my professional practice around sociocultural relationships with the more-than-human world (Miller, 2000; 2007; 2010; 2011; 2013; 2015b) for decades.

In 2008, my colleagues Sherre DeLys and John Jacobs developed a practice of working directly with ABC radio audiences using web 2.0 approaches known at the time as “user generated content” (Van Dijck, 2009; Hutchinson, 2014). They devised and built an experimental, interactive website attached to the more formal ABC web presence: its name was ABC Pool (Hutchinson, 2014). I was part of the small team engaged in this early work, which later influenced a new, more mainstream digital site called ABC Open. ABC Pool and ABC Open each offered members of the public a space within ABC digital platforms to upload personal writing and photography, engage in comment and exchange with other contributors, and directly participate in developing creative works that resulted in on-air broadcasts. The much loved ABC had now invited the audience under its roof.

Most of my work in these spaces resulted in online projects and audio documentaries in which I had researched multispecies relationships. To me, the subject matter was critical to the times. However, it was not popular with editors of ABC RN: the national broadcaster was still attempting to provide “balanced” reporting through giving climate sceptics airtime (Bolin & Hamilton, 2018; Chubb & Nash, 2012). Documentary storytelling style had taken a turn towards the personal and away from any content that was potentially political. I was told that environmentally concerned programming was not of interest to editorial managers or listeners, although my listener feedback suggested otherwise.

My role was “producer,” a catch-all term for devising the idea, managing, and executing, project production to completion, but also nurturing and encouraging contributors, often with one-on-one assistance. My informal intention was to create a non-partisan, digital place where people could remember and story their ecocultural selves (Milstein & Castro-Sotomayor, 2020); that is, as “cultural and ecological beings” (p. xvii). But I also hoped that this practice as a whole might encourage ongoing thinking around broader environmental concerns.

My ecoculturally investigative work incorporated various qualitative research methods such as arts-based inquiry, case studies, walking and listening methodologies, case studies, and narrative inquiry, which I discuss in Chapter 2, the literature review and Chapter 4, the methodology. Each project attracted hundreds of contributions to dynamically responsive digital spaces that

participants and bystanders visited and revisited to engage with each other's work in comments, collaborative meetups, and blog posts. The topics drew on archetypal lived experiences of birds, rivers, trees, and an El Niño summer (Miller 2010; 2011; 2013; Miller 2016c).⁹ Across five such projects, more than a thousand unique stories were contributed by audience members, and some were selected for inclusion in national broadcasts with more than 120,000 listeners per project. But these were not scholarly publications with theoretical foundations – the network management evaluated these informally, focusing on their success upon broadcast (via both public feedback and listener numbers) and as an audience engagement tool.¹⁰ Thus, this professional work provides the backdrop to the current research. In conducting and examining this model of working with audiences in a scholarly setting, I hope to demonstrate the value of my approach to the discipline of environmental communication, alongside the activist, not-for-profit, and non-government sectors, where public stakeholder compassion fatigue is always of concern (Lloro-Bidart & Semenko, 2017, p. 19; Schutten, 2019).

Partnership

The practice component of this research takes place through a partnership agreement with Landcare Australia, a grassroots, bioregional not-for-profit organisation (Lynch et al., 2012). Landcare Australia supports several thousand localised Landcare groups and their volunteer members (Landcare, 2017). The partnership I forged to make a foundation for this project allowed me to reach some of these volunteers, who then became contributors to the project.

Landcare Australia provided the platform and labour for the building and hosting of the digital space, along with some promotion, but the executive team were content with my proposal and offered minimal editorial interference. I provided the concept, structure, and design of the call-out and requirements for the digital

⁹ For example, *The Trees Project*, [Birdland](#), *Hot Summer Land*. These are links to the Internet Archive and do not represent the full projects as both ABC Pool and ABC Open were discontinued. *The Trees Project* became a book of audience stories: *In Their Branches: Stories from ABC RN's Trees Project* (Miller, 2015).

¹⁰ That said, some scholarship exists around ABC Pool, for example Hutchinson (2013b, 2014).

story site, created story-based e-newsletters, moderated and communicated with contributors, and made a further series of creative choices and practices, which resulted in the four episodes of the podcast. I also worked closely with former ABC colleague Judy Rapley on the podcast episodes' sound design and engineering component. Further detail of this partnership and collaboration is discussed in the methodology chapter. The creative capacity of *The Rescue Project* partnership was mine alone, and I claim responsibility for any errors of fact or treatment.

Exegesis Preview

This exegesis is in eight chapters. Chapters 2 and 3 constitute the literature review, in which I examine the supporting scholarly literature for this project's creative research practice and thematic analysis. The first literature review chapter, *The Sounding World, the Spoken Word, and the Digital Story Space*, backgrounds the nature of, and role for, storytelling in environmental communication. I then develop and define two new terms – *citizen storytelling* and *ecosonics*. In this chapter, I also consider the field of media studies in radio, voice, and podcasting. From here, I introduce scholarship that draws connections between environmental communication and media disciplines, including scholarship around the body in place, the spoken word, and the recorded sound. In so doing, I argue that the podcast format is particularly suited to environmental communication research, specifically given calls for a listening modality coming out of the field (Lopez, 2019; Chawla, 2002, p. 205-6; Köhler et al., 2010; Krause, 1987).

Chapter 3: *Rescue in the Time of the Humans* examines literature that provides the scholarly context for the thematic analysis of *The Rescue Project* data contributions. I begin with an overview of the era of human exceptionalism, commonly known as the Anthropocene, during which many human cultures have broken their previously close relationship with the more-than-human life web. This process has led to the exploitive, instrumentalisation of planetary systems in every area of human endeavour – from religion to governance, from philosophy to food production – and is exemplified, for instance, most recently in the 21st-century expression “ecosystem services” (Spash & Aslaksen, 2015,

p. 249). I then offer a brief overview of colonial Australian environmentalism to provide an ecocultural backdrop to this research. Next, I consider the etymology of the word “rescue” in popular usage and define its application in this project more closely. Following this comes a discussion of the affectual impacts of the lived experience of climate crisis for humans, including climate grief, paralysis, and overwhelm. In a section on attunement, I discuss the notion of kinship (Rose, 2013a; Harvey, 2005), grounding it in the Australian First Nations’ ecological and cultural custodial matrix known as Country. Through a multidisciplinary lens, I also examine the field of Western scholarship known as place attachment, addressing the implied binary of the expression by defining a new term that offers a means to describe non-Indigenous care relations with place: *homeground*. In acknowledging the intrinsic, overlapping, more-than-human mutuality of kinship relations, I hone in on scholarship, which provides a means to discuss the human and animal kinship relations described by contributors to *The Rescue Project*. Finally, I discuss environmental virtue ethics and the conditions required for rescue relations that lead to attunement: humility and the iterative experience of courage. I conclude this chapter and section with the literature relevant to rescue problematics, including death, culling, and killing.

Chapter 4, titled Methods of Making, presents the project’s methodology. I begin by describing my process of data gathering, including designing a call-out and developing the partnership with Landcare Australia, and then the steps involved in citizen storytelling and podcast production. Then I outline the scholarship that supports my data gathering approach, including methods that draw on experiential knowing, community-based participatory action research, and narrative inquiry. I look at co-creative research, art practice, and attunement methodologies such as walking and listening in place. I end the section by discussing how I used coding to inform both practice and data analysis.

The analysis section of this exegesis encompasses Chapters 5 through 7 and draws on the literature review to inform my thematic analysis of *The Rescue Project*. In Chapter 5, I illustrate how coding and analysis led me to the interpretation of humility as an overarching theme for rescuers’ meaningful custodial relations with homegrounds. I interpret four kinds of ecocentric

humilities, or *ecohumilities*, present in rescuers' stories or discourse: animalcentric, custodial, affective, and geophysical. In Chapter 6, I discuss how different kinds of attunements arise out of these. These include homeground and Country attunements which occur when a body begins to feel the vibrations of place through walking, listening, and working. Many storytellers express a sense of attunement as place kinship and animal kinship. I discuss the nature of place and animal kinships, alongside attunings that cross time and space to historical actions and future legacies. Chapter 7 introduces the troubles associated with rescue relations – rescues involving both animal and human death, including accidental death and culling. In this chapter, I consider how rescuers manage the seemingly non-restorative aspects of their work in the shadow of the climate crisis and discuss local examples of landscape ruination. In the second part of the chapter, I examine the iterative nature of courage: both the courage to attend to this rescue work over time and the courage received through enacting this work. I identify several different expressions of courage in *The Rescue Project* contributions, from physical courage in the moment of acute crisis to moral courage, slow courage, community courage and, importantly, personal and community encouragement.

In the final chapter, Chapter 8, I synthesis my findings, and, based on the present research, reflect upon ways ecocultural change toward regenerative practices in more-than-human worlds is facilitated through communication practices that incorporate affirmation, empathy, humility, listening, and attuning, in an iterative relationship to the qualities of the practice of rescue itself.

Reading Instructions

This creative practice-based PhD is expressed in two elements. The first element is the creative project, comprising the citizen storytelling digital space, [The Rescue Project](https://web.archive.org/web/20200320110340/https://landcareaustralia.org.au/rescue/),¹¹ which consists of 51 online stories contributed by the

¹¹ This is the link in case hotlinks stop working at some point in the future.
<https://web.archive.org/web/20200320110340/https://landcareaustralia.org.au/rescue/>

public, and a podcast series¹² inspired by some of these stories. The second element is the present exegesis of eight chapters.

It is best to consume the creative and exegesis elements of the research in conjunction. After reading the present chapter, I recommend an initial exploration of the digital site, including reading several contributed stories of your choice. After this, I suggest listening to the four episodes of the podcast – it may be worthwhile to walk outdoors while listening.

The reader may wish to revisit the digital site as they read the literature review and methodology chapters. In the analysis chapters, I provide relevant in-document text extracts from selected contributed stories as well as hyperlinks to short audio extracts. I advise checking your browser is up to date: Figshare is compatible with Google Chrome and Firefox at the time of submission.

¹² The four episodes of the podcast consist of an hour-long audio documentary titled *On the Atherton Tablelands*, and three audio episodes that curate 10 of the individual rescuer contributions to the project into themes (approximately 20 minutes per episode). These are titled: *On History, Art and Loving a Tree*; *On Animals*; and *On Home Ground*. The audio is available from the digital site's front page,¹² and, at the time of publication, the reader can also find it available on their mobile phone podcast app – just search for *The Rescue Project*. The audio is also archived on Figshare for safekeeping and longevity.

Chapter 2: The Sounding World, the Spoken Word, and the Digital Story Space

The elements of a landscape, sentient and otherwise, compose themselves.

Crickets stridulate as the sun heats the ground, and their calls diminish in throbbing intensity as cloud shadows drift across their path. A bird calls across valleys, the rising wind sends the bird into flight, their wings whirr, and they cry out as they elevate into the airspace. The shift in the air alerts the echidna, and their scruffling digging stills as darkness passes over. Creatures respond to other creatures: the heat of the day, the scent of flowers under sunlight. Sounds can compose themselves – we pause to hear the interplay of the throb of insects and the scratch of lizards, our footstep halts on the ground, sounding different to the paced rhythm of a moment before. A final step, and then perhaps just the faint in and out of breath, and the pulsing of our heartbeat, slowing or speeding according to the slope on which we walk. The sun begins to go down, and the birds are softer now, corellas murmur to one another as they settle on branches, and the night creatures start to shift in their dens. –

Gretchen Miller, diary note, April 2018.

This literature review explores the scholarly research supporting the two elements of this PhD submission – the creative practice and its thematic analysis. The digital storytelling site forms the data and thus the backbone of the research, but the data analysis also iteratively reflects the creative process. Smith and Dean (2009) have said that the creative process involved in practice-based research “in itself is a form of research and generates detectable research outputs” (p. 5). Bolt (2007) indicates that the research element of creative practice is critical to bringing “situated and emergent knowledge ... into dialogue with existing practical and theoretical paradigms” (p. 33). That is, practice-based research must have an accompanying analytical process that incorporates existing scholarship. *The Rescue Project* digital site, podcast, and exegesis are located in this context. Thus, this inquiry’s practice and analysis elements each have a body of supporting literature, and this literature review is presented in two chapters.

In Chapter 3, *Rescue in the Time of the Humans*, I review the literature that supports my data analysis. I discuss the origins of the term *rescue* and its application in this research. I give an overview of the Anthropocene context in which the project takes place and then describe more local Australian histories of colonial conservation. I discuss scholarship around attunement, kinship, and the Indigenous matrix of Country, and I develop the term *homeground*. I conclude with an exploration of virtue ethics, with a focus on humility and courage.

This present chapter, *Telling Stories: The Sounding World, the Spoken Word, and the Digital Story Space*, supports my practice's theoretical basis. This chapter informs further discussion in the methodology, as well as elements of the analysis chapters. I begin by introducing concepts relevant to both literature review chapters and the analysis to follow. These include the multidisciplinary nature of both practice and data analysis and clarification of my use of the term *affect*. Following these discussions, I begin a review of the extant scholarship around storytelling, radio, voice, sound, and podcasting, and I outline developments of two concepts that I then develop through this exegesis: *citizen storytelling* and *ecosonics*.

Both the practice and the analysis of *The Rescue Project* are grounded in multidisciplinary traditions. The analysis of the project data is founded in the field of environmental communication, which itself draws on other humanities and social science scholarship such as phenomenology, anthropology, case studies, history, philosophy, and cultural theory (Cox & Pezzullo 2016; Comfort & Park 2018). This scholarship is reviewed in Chapter 3: *Rescue in the Time of the Humans*.

The Australian tradition of long-form audio feature making – the creative and journalistic professional practice from which I come – also has a history of drawing on various disciplines and genres. In any single work, an audio feature maker might combine the following: philosophy, literature, archive, oral history, case studies, popular culture, science, fine art, grounded interview, expert interview, fiction, drama, or music (Lindgren & McHugh, 2013, p. 103; McHugh, 2014; Madsen, 2013). This practice is lateral and creative and intends to effect emotional change. As documentary maker Bill Bunbury describes it:

I'm doing it in what I call an affective way. If you make this distinction between cognitive and affective you certainly need to know the facts but you need to hear them in a way that moves you (Bunbury, in Phillips & Lindgren, 2006, p. 89).

Bunbury here refers to *affect*. I also use the term throughout this exegesis, drawing from affect theory, a considerable body of discourse used in various humanities and social science disciplines, from psychology to media and communication studies, to new materialism. I use *affect* to describe that which influences emotion before an emotion can be named, and I briefly outline some interpretations of its meaning below.

Whatmore (2006) discusses affect theory in relation to new materialism, where affect sits between sense and sensemaking, drawing action in the world into the sensory dimension: affect is relational and visceral, with bodily outcomes that can be shared (p. 603). Wetherell (2012) describes affect similarly, as “embodied meaning-making” (p. 4), and for critical theorists, Seigworth and Gregg (2010), speaking in the context of the more-than-human, affect is also bodily, a shimmering that is “found in those intensities that pass body to body” (p. 1). Thus, affect can be transmitted across species. These are not conscious forces in the way emotion is conscious – one is affected before one can define the emotional impact in words. Blackman (2007) defines affect as “disclosed in atmospheres, fleeting fragments and traces, gut feelings and embodied reactions and in felt intensities and sensations” (p. 25) – thus, affect is hard to pin down. For Maller (2018), affect is more simply described as “the capacity or potential to affect and be affected by the world, largely through emotions and feelings” (p. 9). McHugh (2017) explains that the spoken word is particularly suited to working with the power of affect. She compares the audience response to a written account of a nurse's experiences in the Vietnam War. Even when written as poetry and using the space on the page to indicate pauses and hesitations, she describes that “nothing could approach the primal gut-punch of listening to her tortured, tearful account” (p. 109) and that her students rated the print version as having around 40% of the impact of the audio.

Each of these understandings of affect is applicable to the way I use the term in this exegesis; in particular, that of Maller (2018), who also observes that “many more creatures, critters, devices, entities, and things are perceived as affective agents, creating changes in, and being changed by, the world in ongoing ways” (p. 9). That is, the more-than-human, in their relational engagements with humans, are actively capable of creating affect and being affected. The analysis section demonstrates this affectual relationality (Chapters 5-7), but affect also appears substantially through these literature review chapters.

Because the practice-based force driving this research is a crowdsourced, digital storytelling space, in this chapter, I begin with an overview of scholarship applying to the crowdsourcing practices of citizen science and citizen journalism. I use these citizen-oriented terms to develop the descriptor, *citizen storytelling*, an approach I have taken in my professional career, and develop further through this present research. I continue by backgrounding the relatively new media platform of podcasting through a growing body of supporting literature that furthers the more established scholarship around the older traditions of radio feature¹³ and documentary practice. From here, I consider a range of related theoretical scholarship around voice, the spoken word, and the sounding world as components of communication. I then demonstrate how these cross-disciplinary fields of thinking and practice might be particularly relevant for further adoption in the transdisciplinary field of environmental communication. In so doing, I consider the apposite intersection of these scholarships with new materialism and environmental communication theories, thus also providing some intersections with the analytical precepts of the second chapter of the literature review.

Storytelling in Environmental Communication

Storytelling effects empathy between those who are otherwise different; that is, stories need both teller and listener – stories are a co-presencing with others (Saltmarshe, 2018; Spry 2011). Barry Lopez sums this up in an interview: “In

¹³ “Feature” is an industry term for audio productions that might be considered imaginative and or “literary” (Madsen, 2005). Documentary refers to more established journalistic forms.

the process of telling a story, and also of listening to a story, the teller remembers what he or she represents in a community, and the listener remembers what they want their life to mean” (Lopez, in O’Connor, 2019). An ecocultural, earthly, storied self (Milstein & Castro-Sotomayor, 2020, pp. xvii-xviii) reorientates our stories to remember, acknowledge and understand that humans are always within and a part of our ecology, rather than apart from it – even as we attempt to evade this knowledge (Milstein & Castro-Sotomayor, 2020, pp. xviii). I look more closely at ecocultural thinking in Chapter 3: Rescue in the Time of the Humans. Narration is the foundation of how humans construct ourselves and our lifeworlds – it rests at the heart of self-identity (Brockmeier & Carbaugh, 2001, p. 1; Lopez, 2021, p. 166). It is in both narration, and ecocentric self-identity, that *The Rescue Project* sits.

In this section, I outline scholarship supporting storytelling specifically in environmental/science/activist communication before refining an approach I develop in the present work that I argue has particular value for ecocultural communication: *citizen storytelling*.

Davies (2014) suggests that “embodiment, materiality, affect and place” remain largely eschewed by conventional science and scholars (p. 90).¹⁴ Yet science is full of bodies – bodies experiencing affect, Davies points out. She proposes a mobilising of public engagement needs to value experiential knowledge and rehabilitate, and attend to, emotions such as pleasure, delight, and even love, alongside their corollaries: fear, anxiety, and despair.

Supporting Davies, Hillier et al. (2016) found storytelling and narrative positively influence climate science communication. The authors found scientific articles that feature narrative are more likely to be further cited, while Milstein et al. (2011) emphasise the relationship between natural environment and storytelling, with “nature as a place for stories and stories as a way to secure

¹⁴ In the arena of environmental crisis in which this thesis is set, experts, that is, climate scientists, ecologists and so on, though holding the authority to inform the public, have only recently begun to reveal the personal affectual burden of the knowledge they carry, but this has been well received in the public sphere with projects like “Is this How you Feel” (Duggan, 2014), and my own documentary series, *Climate of Emotion* (Miller, 2016a, b), and there is an increasing volume of stories in public media on the topic.

social relations within nature” (p. 502). Polletta et al. (2021) point out that in social activist movements that storytelling has entered a “new register” of respect and connection with the listener (p. 55).

In the digital space, such as *The Rescue Project* and previous similar work at the ABC (see Chapter 1), a storytelling approach allows for “the ability to represent the world around us – using a shared infrastructure”: stories now have “multiple possibilities for transmission, retransmission, and transformation” (Couldry, 2008, p. 374). But besides their format and platform, these are still stories like any other, and they contain identifiable story functions within the narrative. Hillier et al. (2016), for example, found that effective for climate communication were the setting or the location of the story, first-person narrative perspective, and language that connects with the senses and emotions of the receiver: “After a story, everybody is functioning better” (Lopez, in O'Connor, 2019).

In his discussion of “slow violence,” Nixon (2011) calls for a new kind of storytelling to address the Anthropocene, the “dauntingly compendious and elusively abstract” (Nixon, 2016, p. 23) epoch that has brought about the climate crisis. Nixon (2011) outlines the power and impact at which these slow violences reveal and hide themselves. Slow violences include the climate crisis but also elements of the climate crisis: thawing icecaps, toxic poisoning, or the death of the Australian Great Barrier Reef. Oil spills are a slow violence, and so is deforestation and the “radioactive aftermaths of wars:” these are “long dyings” (p. 2). Sharing information about these events is critical to pressing for democratic action around them, but slow violences are invisible, and their stories do not lend themselves to the speed of the global media cycle. So, there is a challenge in maintaining widespread attention to slow violence through storytelling. Critically, for this research, the nature of the public media industry, and its constant churning of news that feeds fractured attention spans, means it has little interest in making slow violence visible: “Fast is faster than it used to be and story units have become ever shorter” (Nixon, 2011, p. 13). So how can environmental communicators tell stories of lived experience, which embrace both effect and affect in the realm of environmental action? Nixon (2011) calls

for stories that can crack the attention of fast media with images and tellings that dramatically display the attrition of this violence (p. 3).

Nixon's book was published the year after *The Slow Media Manifesto* (Köhler et al. 2010, see also: Le Masurier, 2015; Rauch, 2011) came out in Germany in 2010 – had he been aware of the manifesto, he may have found it satisfies his call in a way that is more encompassing than dramatic imagery. *The Slow Media Manifesto* proposes, amongst its 14 aims, media that: contributes to sustainability, requires its consumers' full attention and demands confidence in its appropriately earned credibility. These media are auratic, or "emanate a special aura" (Köhler et al., 2010). Slow media also: holds high standards of quality and takes time in its production, and is oriented toward building communities. Slow media practices should create a dialogue with the consumer: slow media "long for a counterpart with whom they may come in contact ... In Slow Media, listening is as important as speaking" (Köhler et al., 2010). In these aims, the manifesto describes the process and intention of *The Rescue Project* and my previous citizen storytelling projects at the ABC (Miller 2010; 2011; 2013; 2015a; 2014; 2016c).

Definition 1: Citizen Storytelling

As outlined in Chapter 1, from 2003, some producers at the ABC were adapting to web 2.0 by working collaboratively with ABC audiences.¹⁵ Along with the broader digital community, we called this work the somewhat unimaginative and uninspiring term *user generated content* (Van Dijck, 2009; Hutchinson, 2014). My development of *citizen storytelling* comes out of that work and is articulated more fully through this research. Through this term, I refine the notion of user generated content to highlight the narrative, affective purpose implied by storytelling, and I draw on the precedent of citizen science to imply a mobilisation of publics contributing to a larger perspective on a particular thematic idea. In so doing, I more closely define citizen storytelling as a tool to

¹⁵ A detailed examination of how this practice has more broadly disrupted traditional radio production and audience/producer relationships is described by Hutchinson (2014), who breaks down the details of the process as he describes similar projects that followed the lead of the early Pool producers.

reveal a meta-story about ways of being: in much of my research, this is narrowed further to meta stories around lived experiences of human earthly relations. This is a mass-engagement, scalable, attentive, co-creative, iterative, and crafted approach. It is conducted in public, and this public process determines an outcome that is predominantly publicly available.

Citizen science and citizen journalism are terms that are already part of the popular lexicon, and both involve volunteer publics in fact-finding processes (Silvertown, 2009; Chung et al., 2018). Citizen science mobilises these publics to progress large-scale scientific inquiries, such as asking individual members of the public to count the numbers of birds they find on a given day in a given location or regularly monitor local water quality (Silvertown, 2009). Citizen journalism is less clearly defined (Chung et al., 2018) and can include, for example, footage recorded by non-professionals and contributed to media organisation reporting or commentary by non-media professionals on news matters using digital platforms, while many news organisations have an open invitation to the public to submit stories they think are newsworthy (Chung et al., 2018).

A factor in engaging citizen input in both science and journalism is unpredictability:

Natural systems are recognized as dynamic and complex; those involving interactions with humanity are 'emergent', including properties of reflection and contradiction. The science appropriate to this new condition will be based on the assumptions of unpredictability, incomplete control, and a plurality of legitimate perspectives. (Funtowicz & Ravetz, 1993, p. 739)

Unpredictability is both a strength and a weakness in science, where rigour is critical (Brown & Williams, 2018; Lukyanenko et al., 2016), and in journalism, where accuracy is key and citizen involvement brings multiple perspectives (Wall, 2018). In citizen storytelling, as I employ it, stories come from storytellers otherwise not centred in public discourse, and that is part of their appeal – unpredictability here is primarily a strength.

In the early 2000s, web 2.0 changed the public relationship with the internet. Web 2.0 is described by Murugesan (2007) as an internet not only for information provision but also a space that was increasingly interactive, collaborative, and people-centric (p. 34). Gubrium and Harper (2009) write that citizen participation in formerly hard-to-access specialist arenas, like the sciences and journalism, has been vastly enabled by digital technologies. The authors detail how digital technologies provide new ways to practice participatory anthropology, where participants express their experiences in digital formats, and this work is co-creative in intent. They suggest digital facilitation of participation answers earlier feminist calls for a reinvention of access, production, and representation in anthropological processes, and also challenges the primacy of the text, opening this work up to video, interactive media, collaborative blogging, and website production (p. 2). Burgess (2006) develops this analysis by adding that stories told in this participatory, digital, public space are “in general marked by their sincerity, warmth, and humanity” (p. 209). Because they are peer-to-peer, they also allow the teller to become “real” – the relationship is one of exchange, sharing language, and connection. At the same time, “the sense of authentic self-expression they convey lowers the barriers to empathy” (Burgess, 2006, p. 211).

But citizen storytelling as a term is rarely employed in scholarship. Makagon and Neumann (2009) use citizen storytelling in the audio documentary context as “a form of collective media production that links qualitative research and activism as a mode of participation in public life” (p. 55), and they further define it quite specifically – for the authors it is a community-driven and produced audio documentary, designed, like community art practices, to empower the producers and create dialogue. Makagon and Neumann state organisations, from guerrilla journalists to national broadcasters, can facilitate citizen storytelling in any number of formats and genres and with varying degrees of production assistance and direction. The authors directly link audio documentary practice to critical ethnography (p. 56). Makagon and Neumann are the only researchers I have identified who use citizen storytelling to define a practice, and I would suggest their approach is more congruent with participatory and grassroots documentary making (Nichols, 1991) than citizen

storytelling as I define it. I use citizen storytelling to refer to a public project addressing a specific theme or construct that anticipates and welcomes the unexpected from a large base of storytellers to bring about new understandings of lived experiences.

Sundin et al. (2018) proposed a twofold impact of using storytelling or narrative to present environmental evidence. Firstly, it has an emotional affect and therefore has the power to encourage relevant action from a collective body. Secondly, working to engage publics and gather narratives holds “untapped potential” (p. 3) for increasing the possibility that a public audience will both develop trust in the storytelling organisation (p.1) to take further action in the field of science communication (Sundin et al., 2018, p. 3).

Finally, in understanding narrative as a means to construct knowledge of ourselves, *The Rescue Project* is citizen storytelling, rather than citizen science or journalism, because it engages affect via narrative. Relevant to this research, Lindren (2014) makes a similar observation in the audio context, considering a defining difference between audio storytelling and traditional journalism. She quotes a survey respondent who described their audio production style as “too emotive to be journalism, too removed to be biographic, not technical enough to be radio art. It’s telling other people’s stories” (p. 69).

Although contributors to *The Rescue Project* are generally lay voices, many have developed specialist, ecological and ecocultural knowledge through grounded experience. In the restorying of a rescue, they also reveal and invite a sharing of the affects of that experience on them, as humans in the more-than-human world.

Podcast – a New Media Era

In an ocularcentric era, demonstrated by the ubiquity of YouTube clips, memes, and on-demand television – the rise of the podcast delivery format may seem an anomaly. Much has been written about video not, in the end, killing the radio star (Kretschmer & Peukert, 2014), but the ocular remains culturally dominant (Macpherson, 2006). Video’s dominance was part of a long trajectory: In the 17th century, Descartes described sight as “the most comprehensive and

noblest” of the senses (Ben-Zvi, 2021, p. 27). It is no accident that this research is influenced by the discipline of phenomenology and its antecedents for its multi-sensory interrogation of being in the world (Bowering, 2007, p. 82). Nonetheless, the podcast, as on-demand audio, is reaching toward its third decade. Podcasting is now a global medium, wildly popular with independent makers and big business alike, due to the persistent power of its radio heritage and the enduring impact of narrative forms (McHugh, 2014; Wrather, 2019), as well as its satisfaction of public expectations of immediate media consumption that arose in the early 21st century (Tryon, 2013). An essential feature of podcasting, as Lindgren (2021) points out, is its intimacy, which draws on radiophonic performative intimacies and is “a fundamentally new form of mediated interpersonal communication” (MacDougall, 2011, p. 171).

Podcasting, first given the name in 2004 by *The Guardian* newspaper journalist Ben Hammersley (Hammersley, 2004; 2005; Berry 2006, p. 143), is still new enough to require definition in the scholarly context: literature in the field is growing, but nascent. Wrather (2019) reflects that there are challenges in researching this popular format and reflecting on its history: “Writing media history as it happens is like trying to build an airplane that’s already in the sky” (2019, p. 143). Australian audio maker and scholar Siobhan McHugh founded the online journal *RadioDoc Review* to focus on what she describes as an “under-researched field” (McHugh, 2014, p. 23), and the journal’s dual focus on radio/podcasting illustrates the relationship between the forms. Podcasting is relatively new in its distribution, audience relationships, and formats, but it evolved from a long history of “amateur radio, community radio, and other manifestations of the citizen voice” (Madsen and Potts, 2010, p. 42).¹⁶ Podcasting differs from radio in being “on-demand:” a time-shifted, digital listening experience, actively accessed by the individual. This is democratic access – no longer dependent on a network schedule and programs unidirectionally broadcast at particular times to an audience that might well be passively listening (Geiger & Lampinen, 2014, pp. 333-334; Krause, 2020, p. 6).

¹⁶ The term *citizen* here appositely echoes *The Rescue Project* as a citizen storytelling exercise, and what exactly constitutes *voice* in the contexts of audio formats is relevant to this research, and will be discussed later in this chapter.

Formats range from conversation, monologue, documentary, drama – familiar to radio listeners – but podcasting also invites a most unradio-like informality, including the use of slang, swearing, and the abandonment of deliberate structures. Radio scholars Madsen and Potts (2010) describe podcasting in this way:

The related explosions of democratic dialogues occurs through the Internet's deterritorialization of mainstream media, its activation of a dialogic two-way "citizen voice," and through time-shifting capacities enabled within Internet media communications (p. 39).

This then is an iteration of audio sharing with the potential that Bertolt Brecht saw, back in 1932, when he expressed his disappointment that radio became the indiscriminating, one-to-many model – that is, the voice of authority (Raymond, 2020): broadcast, rather than narrowcast.¹⁷

Radio is one-sided when it should be two. It is purely an apparatus for distribution, for mere sharing out ... So here is a positive suggestion: change this apparatus over from distribution to communication. The radio would be the finest possible communication apparatus in public life, a vast network of pipes. That is to say, it would be if it knew how to receive as well as transmit, how to let the listener speak as well as hear, how to bring him into a relationship instead of isolating him. Radio should step out of the supply business and organise its listeners as suppliers. (Brecht, 1932, cited in Everett & Caldwell, 2003, p. 29-30)

Thus, podcasting is regarded as a democratic format, removing global barriers to making, distributing, and receiving – anyone with a mobile phone can make one, and the format offers opportunities to hear voices previously unheard (Berry, 2006; Llinares et al., p. 24). This makes podcasting relationally useful to citizen storytelling. As such, I suggest the form is well suited to what Mathews

¹⁷ "Narrowcast" is defined by Priestman (2004) as "the best word we have at the moment to describe the near opposite of broadcasting" (p. 3). He goes on to explain it is "somewhere between the single-source, indiscriminate, one-to-millions transmissions of Reith's BBC and the multiple-source telephone-like characteristics of Internet streaming" (p. 3).

calls an ecocentric consciousness (1996, p. 66), a consciousness open to hearing voices not frequently heard, including those that are more-than-human, as I discuss shortly in this chapter and elaborate further in the methodology and analysis chapters to come.

Pertinent to the focus of this research from several perspectives, Llinares et al. (2018) describe podcasting as “more culturally urgent” than broadcasting, but also possessing a distribution power that can be useful for reaching out to more diverse audiences than radio (p. 2). The environmental crisis is about as culturally urgent as humans can get, and this crisis includes a communication crisis – how to meet widespread distribution of earth-centred communication around a wicked problem (Maibach et al., 2011). Also pertinent is how a podcast, as McHugh (2013) puts it, uses “the intimacy of the medium to transcend logic and cognition and go further, to gut feeling. As invited eavesdroppers, we feel part of the lives of those we are hearing, and we care deeply about them” (para. 2) here exemplifying how podcasts might be a particularly effective medium for communicating personal environmental engagements.

Thus, the emergence and rise of the podcast format brings renewed emphasis to oral storytelling, coincidentally called for by the philosopher David Abram (Abram et al., 2020), whose work explores ecocentric ecocultural identity. But whose stories are being told here? The value of a podcast in this context is to allow us to hear not only human voices but also the more-than-human.

Embracing sound worlds in podcasting practice is an act of paying attention and attunement. In a definition of a new term, *ecosonics*, later in this chapter, I discuss the intimacy generated by engaging with (or attuning to) podcast audio through headphones, taking sound into our bodies. Using podcasting as part of my methodology allows me as researcher, and the podcast audience, to become intimate with this creative research material, literally as well as figuratively hearing storytellers and more-than-human voices speak. Thus, in the following section considering sonic attunement, I draw into the definition of voice the more-than-human sounds that are the declarations of geology, geography, geophysical forces, and living beings who inhabit and move through all of our worlds.

Attunement

In this section, I explore the concept of attunement as a more-than-just-listening – it is hearing and *vibrating with* – related to mimesis.¹⁸ I foreground and acknowledge the sonic and musical etymology of attunement, implying, as it does, vibrational harmony (Wallrup, 2016, p. 25). This musical etymology influences its broader linguistic use, inferring receptivity, affect, and awareness (Volgsten, 2012, p. 212), again supporting an argument for using audio formats in the practice of restorative environmental communication.

Neumark (2017), drawing on Despret, regards human and more-than-human relationships as an attuning between relevant bodies (pp. 7, 36, 39) – these begin to shift their vibrational modes of being in the world to obtain a sympathetic resonance with the other. Here she also draws attention to Idhe's point that "the things of the world have voices" (Idhe, in Neumark, 2017, p. 3). A rock, hit by another, will ring in a particular way if it is from Sturt's Stony Desert – they sound a little like ceramic, and I have recorded these rocks, both in situ and in an audio studio. But a sandstone rock from the Sydney basin will thud, and there may be a tiny slight rustle as a crumble of sand grains falls to the ground. For over two decades, I have recorded sounds such as these, alongside the creak of bamboo and the high singing of a tightened wire fence through outback paddocks and thousands of others: this world is a sounding one.

Brigstocke and Noorani (2016) also draw on the sonic inferences of modes of attunement toward relationality with "more-than-human voices, temporalities, and material processes," and thus their approach is framed as a means to hear the conventionally unheard: the concept of attunement "speaks to subtle, affective modulations" (p. 2). I discuss attunement further in its broader definition in the following chapter. But here I suggest that as those unaccustomed to listening come to attune to geophysical, biological, and anthropogenic sounds, they might start to hear and conceptualise these sounds

¹⁸ Hurlbut (1997) writes of the foundation of mimesis as *Einfühlung*, the linguistic origin of empathy (p. 14), translated as "feeling-in-the-other" (Korhonen & Ruonakoski, 2017, p. 40). This allows us to create a parallel with the other – not a copy but a 'sympathetic magic' (Taussig, 2017, p. xiv).

as a part of their extended self – a constantly changing soundtrack to their movement through the lifeworld. And I ask, what means do we have to understand sounding as a kind of story with meaning to impart?

To answer that question, I first turn to the field of soundscape ecology. This research brings together all the sounds – biophony, geophony, and anthrophony – of any landscape and indicates how an ecological community of species and sounding objects sonically interact (Pijanowski et al., 2011, p. 204). For example, Ficken et al. (1974) investigate whether birds of different species make space for one another in the rhythm of their calls and ask what might influence species to make this temporal space for one another.

Musician and soundscape ecologist Bernard Krause (1987) noted that listening in various habitats to the way “one vocal creature ceased to reproduce sounds [and] it would soon be replaced by yet another in the same part of the audio spectrum, thus appearing to keep intact the special ambient sound key of that habitat” (p. 15). Krause, who began his work in 1968, intended to archive and promulgate the soundscape of the more-than-human world and feels he is desperately racing against the clock of environmental degradation to understand a “unified chorus of biological voices” before the sound of man takes over entirely (p. 17).

Soundscape ecologists approach the stories of the sounding world from a scientific perspective, and their discipline measures and quantifies the way sounds indicate engagement among species, how soundscapes affect humans, and how humans affect soundscapes (Pijanowski et al., 2011 p. 208/209). But while soundscape ecology gives a nod to the value of a sounding and ensounded world, it does not consider sound a meaningful, meaning-containing storytelling element. In the context of this research, soundscape ecology offers an entry point into notions of interspecies sonic attunements. Shortly I will discuss this further in the context of a new term: *ecosonics*.

Space for Sounds to Tell Stories

For too long industrialised human cultures have refused to listen to and to hear the more-than-human sounds of the world. But why should only human words

describe what speaks for itself so eloquently? The sounds of the world have a role in and of themselves, but if we don't listen to and acknowledge these, we run the risk of being complicit in their silencing, "leaving the ineffable not only unspoken but unimportant, and setting up the non-human world in opposition to the human instead of as interactant" (Milstein et al., 2019, p. 106).

Listening to actually hear the world's sounding counters the human/nature binary (Chawla, 2002, p. 205-6), while Lopez makes a clear argument for listening first:

I would say the first rule in connecting with nature is to pay attention, and part of paying attention is choosing to listen instead of speaking. The most difficult part of being outside one's comfort zone is understanding how much you're being taught by not talking. In my experience traveling with indigenous people, nobody says much of anything while they're on the move. Because language collapses experience into meaning, and if you do it too soon, you've lost all the other meaning that would've been there (Lopez, in O'Connor, 2019).

A soundscape is one representation of a landscape – the way wind moves water, for example, how certain trees grow in certain places and bring certain animals to them at certain times of the day. Recording a soundscape offers a technology-mediated reflection of place. Cronon (1992) describes a co-authoring of stories with nature (p. 1373), ensuring stories make ecological sense. Ecocentric audio storytelling takes that proposal further, allowing humans to hear the world speak, offering a place to compose narrative with sound, and encouraging imaginative attention to same: while the podcast platform is a democratic space to share this work.

So, what language do we use to speak about this work? In this exegesis, I redefine the word ecosonics as an intuitive description for recording, coding, listening, and employing sounding worlds in environmental communication practice.

Definition 2: Ecosonics – Words for Paying Attention to the Sound of the World

As humans, we practice auditory selective attention – sounds flow around the whorl of our ears directionally, affected by both the tilt of the head and the register of our attention. In crowded spaces, we turn toward our conversation partners, tuning out other voices, cutlery clattering, traffic, restaurant sounds, barking dogs, or geophysical phenomena like rain or thunder, predominantly favouring the “vocal emission that reveals singular bodies to one another” (Cavarero, 2012, p. 71). But as soon as I put on a pair of headphones and begin recording, I am listening differently – attentive and attuned to a broader sound spectrum.

Headphones capture what the microphone picks up by way of a diaphragm and electrical impulses. The microphone cannot choose to focus on the human voice over the white noise of the ocean or the clattering cutlery. As they return to their studio, the new recordist discovers this to find what their ear had tuned out the microphone had collected in equal measure to the desired sound. The nature of the technical process works against our biologically determined, culturally shaped, listening selves – technology brings the sound recordist to active listening to all the surrounding sounds. Purdy et al. (2017) write of active listening as a relinquishing of agency (p. 3), and I submit willingly for the pleasure of attuning to the world in unexpected ways. Close, attentive listening is “listening as presencing” to a lifeworld (p. 3), Purdy et al. write. While they refer to human-to-human engagements, I extend this to emphasise active listening as being present to hear as much of the more-than-human world as my ears will allow.

These sounds are fundamental expressions of *lively ground*, a term I introduce here and use throughout this exegesis to describe ecologically healthy, vibrant, relational places. Biophony (Krause, 2002) is the sound of the creatures in the landscape, the “living organisms that relate to one another in symbiotic ways” (p. 3), and I use “lively ground” as a nod to Krause’s biophony, but emplacing it: giving it place. I have over a thousand stored recordings of living creatures on lively ground. This is a way of embracing what Feld (1996) called acoustemology – being emplaced, through knowing and being, in the world by

way of sound: as places make sense, senses make place”¹⁹ (p. 91). Geophony is the sound of the non-biological world (Krause, 2002) – I hold 98 recordings of wind, for example, each one with a pitch and timbre of its own – for example, wind recorded flowing over the vastness of Lake Eyre, buffeting across Sturt’s Stony Desert, whistling through the fine pine needles of a Casuarina, or gusting along south NSW coast and carrying with it a swell of wave sounds from the shore. Thus, my development of *ecosonics*²⁰ is as a term to describe the geophonic, biophonic world, emplaced in lively grounds. But it also applies to the attending to, coding, and recruitment of the sound of the world in environmental communication matters.

As a journalist, I have come to ecosonic practices from two perspectives – one is in the practical service of deciding whether an interviewee can be heard clearly enough to meet broadcast standards. But as a graduate of music composition studies, I’m influenced by the *musique concrète* composers of the mid-20th century, such as Pierre Schaeffer and later R. Murray Schafer (1993), who worked with sound as music, first coined the term “soundscape” and became concerned with how sound affects human behaviour (Schafer, 1993; Hodgkinson, 1987). I employ ecosonics in my creative work as a reminder of human co-presencing in the world with the more-than-human. I value the extra-human sounds I hear, and I hear them compositionally. Thus, I am not aesthetically or ethically opposed to creative interpretations of a sound world in my work, for example, using extra recordings from the location to heighten the sense of the essence of place for the listener, as I discuss in Chapter 6, in the section titled Attuning in Restorying. My attentive listening focuses on all sounds, human and more-than-human. But I am also interested in sounds

¹⁹ Feld (1996) described a way to talk about how sound sits with knowledge of the world in the context of the Bosavi rainforest dwellers, and how the Bosavi knew their world without visual cues, based on the sounds around them. Drawing on relational oncology, he went on to distinguish acoustemology from an anthropology “of” sound to anthropology “in” sound (Feld, 2015).

²⁰ This is not a new term: ecosonics appears loosely used in sound studies to describe either a combination of music improvisation with recorded natural sound, or in applied acoustic studies – as the analysis of sound quality metrics – loudness, brightness, roughness in relation to machine learning analysis of environmental sound. The Acoustic Ecology Lab uses ecosonics to describe its work on environmental sound quality metrics (<https://acousticecologylab.org/ecosonic/>).

indicating the presence of humans in challenging and ambivalent eco-spaces. With a nod to Plumwood's shadow places (2008), these sounds have been woven through my storytelling as shadow sounds – sound-things left behind – the wheel crunch on gravel of a single car on a dirt road, the spinning drifts of metal and water of an abandoned bore water pump, of a paddock with its hills hoist washing line, moved by a wind that should not be there – a wind invited in by the degradation of ecologies at human hands.

In Chapter 4, the methodology of this exegesis, I further expand on the practical compositional and gathering aspects of this practice of attentive ecosonics. For now, I return to the human voice, as the word, written and spoken, remains the primary way humans come to understand their world and is primarily the mechanism by which I answer my first research question. But here, too, if we listen, we find revealed something of the more-than-human environments in which the human voice speaks.

Voice, Breath and the Body

A powerful moment today: my morning walk to work, listening to the podcast S-Town (Reed, 2017)²¹. The plot took a twist. I stopped, I laughed. I walked on a few paces; the plot twisted once more; I gasped this time, stopped again. I leaned against an old, corrugated, iron fence for some moments. When I walked once more, my pace was slower, more thoughtful, my living world vibrating all the more vibrantly, just as the main character of the podcast was extinguished from his. Our worlds, our times, the colours of my life, and the sudden grey of a remarkable man's death, distant in time and place, colliding. I was attuned, and everything about that voice: the southern American drawl, the tone, and inflection, ripe with the pain of the speaker's body and psyche, and where I stood as I connected with it, is lodged in my own body's memory.

Gretchen Miller, diary note, November 2017.

As a storytelling medium, podcasting, like radio, is dominated by the human

²¹ *S-Town* (or *Shit-Town*) told the story of John B. Mclemore, and his hometown of Woodstock, Alabama. The podcast had 10 million downloads in the first four days after release (McHugh, 2017). *S-Town* is credited with reshaping audio creative non-fiction and introducing a new format, the "audio non-fiction novel" (Waldman, 2020).

voice, with sound and music playing supporting roles or not present at all. Even so, there is much to hear beyond the meaning of the spoken word. Theories of radio and voice are useful when reflecting on what podcasting and radio offer communication beyond the dominance of the written word, and what it might therefore mean for storytelling in the environmental context, and, in particular, in the context of rescue and the accompanying theme of attunement. In the analysis of *On the Atherton Tablelands*, one episode of *The Rescue Project* podcast (see chapter 6), I discuss the physical impact of place on the production of words spoken by the interviewees. Therefore, in the context of this literature review, I here provide scholarship to support my choice of the sound and spoken word medium for my creative practice.

Voice, writes Neumark (2017), “works intersubjectively, relationally, affectively, and emotionally – transmitting and moving through us and between us and others” (p. 7). Voice is also, however, more than just the sounds of words or the utterances of animals – bioacoustically, voice is driven by breath, as Neumark et al. (2010) point out. Breath is the “ground zero of voice ... a constant and physical reminder of the ephemerality, intimacy, and alterity of the voice” (p. xxiv). Breath, like voice, Neumark writes, is shaped by affect, and it “starts in one body, and then connects to – communicates with – another” (p. xxiv).

The breath, which keeps beings alive and connected, supports and drives the voice, and thus voice becomes a direct expression of the physical and emotional state of the body. Connor (2008) describes the process:

The breath is drawn as a bow is drawn, by applying a force against the resistance of the diaphragm and intercostal muscles. The power of the voice is the release of the kinetic energy stored in these muscles as they return to their resting positions ... Where the breath simply escapes, there can be no voice” (p. 298).

Ingold (2010) draws this voice/body/breath relationship to further earthly relationality, where the body is both “on-the-ground” and “in-the-air”: “Earth and sky, then... are rather regions of the body’s very existence, without which no knowing or remembering would be possible at all” (p. S122). Accordingly, the

body is vibrantly co-presencing with both ground and air. Without this bodily relationship, Ingold argues, there would be no knowing the world at all.

Though it may not exactly melt into air, the body certainly walks, breathes, feels, and knows in it. Thus is knowledge formed along paths of movement in the weather-world. The ground from which knowledge grows is indeed the very same ground that – like the children on their bear hunt – we all walk in our everyday excursions, through calm and storm, swishing grass and root-riddled woods, sun-baked mud and rain-sodden ooze” (Ingold, 2010, p. S136).

In being spoken, then, words are propelled by the breath, driven itself by the diaphragm, which is in turn impacted by the body’s physical engagement as it moves through and as part of place. Abram has another relational perspective:

We are all of us interbreathing with one another – continuously exchanging breath. As we were saying before, what all us animals breathe out is precisely what all the green and growing plants are breathing in, and what these grasses and trees breathe out is what all us animals need for our own metabolism. So what we breathe out, they breathe in; what they breathe out, we breathe in. Talk about reciprocity! (Abram et al., 2020, p. 18)

Thus, as it inhabits and moves through place, particularly special places or homeground, the body is an embedded part of homeground and speaks of and from homeground. Reflexively, as a homeground affects voice production, it speaks through the body and its voice. This body and its voice, “tense and braced with a kind of life” (Connor, 2008 p. 298), and this life force, with its physical, bodily history, is what informs the creative communication practice and analysis of *The Rescue Project*.

I have shown voice, here, both human and more-than-human, to be more than just speech. Voice carries with it the body of the utterer, affected by place, and it creates mimetic responses in the receiver, the listener. So, we have a body and a voice in a state of affected eco-relationality, which in audio storytelling is recorded and able to be time-shifted to reach the listener. Madsen and Potts (2010) call this time-shifted voice “acousmatic” (p. 33) – that which you hear

without observing the body, but that regardless carries traces of the body with it. These recorded voices “become their own ‘voice-bodies’ – set adrift in space and now also in time” (Madsen & Potts, 2010, p. 33). And a spoken word, particularly one delivered into the body of a listener via earbuds, “fills the psychic space of the listener” (Madsen & Potts 2010, p 44).

This is an intimate space, psychically affected by the grain, that is, the physical texture of the spoken voice. Barthes’ (1977) writing around the “grain of the voice” is a concept resonating through my audio practice for over 30 years. Writing in 1962 about opera singing and the aesthetics of recording technology, he said: “The grain is the body in the voice as it sings, the hand as it writes, the limb as it performs...” (p. 188). His call was for the sound of the body not to be edited from the recording of the opera singer's voice; that is, it should not be processed (in the way of the times) by the performer seeking a disembodied perfection through extreme vocal control. In contemporary times, with different recording technologies entirely, Barthes’ advocating for the presence of the sound of the body could be interpreted as rejecting today’s sophisticated digital post-production techniques, with their capacity to smooth rough edges, autotune questionable notes, and erase hesitations and extraneous sounds of the throat.

Barthes’ “grain” is, in my interpretation, the quality of the voice as the uttering body audibly impacts upon it – the way the tongue moves against the palate, the catch in the throat, the pitch variation caused by the tightening of the throat and the larynx, and these are, in turn, impacted upon by pre-emotion affects – the pauses as the speaker captures the words to express these elusive affects, and the words hesitate in the throat. All these appear as a mark on the voice that I call a *gutterance*. Neumark et al. (2010) describe this as the “broken” voice where physiology intrudes – a cough, a stutter, a hesitation, drawing on the Heideggerian argument that “tools reveal their being, which is normally masked, when they are broken” (p. xxvi).

Thus, along with breath, audio recordings of interviews capture not only words but the affect state of the body producing the words – as the body recalls a stressful event and the words are formed, the tightness of the throat makes itself known. A joyful recollection might warm the voice as it is accompanied by

a gesture, a smile, a turn of the head. Further, our shared ecological environments affect the body as it produces sound: a space with which the speaker has a rescue or care relationship might deepen the voice as the body relaxes or make it crack as concern takes hold. And this is why the location of recording matters in conversations about environmental rescue. Later, the listener's interior speech and their affect begins to oscillate with the heard voice, creating threads of relational connection (Douglas, 2013) to the emplaced body, and this corresponding oscillation is another attunement. Podcasting is a verb implying both the making and the listening – the podcasted voices of human and more-than-human accompanies us anywhere and embeds in our listening body memory (p. 31).

The Affective Power of Sound

Sound, for Abram, is an expression of “a much deeper, much older oral animistic sensibility that knows that everything is alive, awake, and aware” (Abram et al., 2020, p. 14), while words are “things, like stones. A spoken word has a texture and a taste in your mouth and as you roll it over your tongue” (Abram et al., 2020, p.13). As listeners, we are attuned to the rhythm and music of words, but also the sounds of things and the sounding-things themselves: these affect us.

Thus, from the speaker and the sounding objects in the previous sections to the affected listener: the voice, propelled by breath, leaps back into the air – and right into the body of the listener. Douglas (2013) has written that sound transmitted over the radio “envelopes us, pouring into us, whether we want it to or not, including us, involving us” (p. 30).

Drawing from the work of neurobiologist Mark Trama, Douglas (2013) observes that when humans listen, their imaginations can generate visuals of their own. By way of example, he reminds us how this happens when we hear strange noises at night (p. 28). A podcast takes this level of engagement further. In actively electing to listen to a podcast, as discussed earlier, we are already curious about the audio we will hear, and we are emotionally pre-primed. This emotional attunement is matched physically by the proximity of the sound and breath of the uttering body to the listening body via earbuds inserted into the ear

canal²² – without even the mediating factor of air between them.

There are multiple modes of thinking about sound, with their own histories and epistemologies (Sterne, 2012, p. 8). Sound studies is an established scholarly field of some complexity. While this is not the space to provide a detailed review, worth noting is that communication scholar Jonathan Sterne critiques binaries born of a modernist elevation of the visual and the othering of the auditory, as well as the consequent reflexive push back – responses that dismiss sight as being of the intellect and therefore othering, and casting audio as affective and immersive. Both these binaries run the risk of, for example, framing Western, ocularcentric modernity as superior to “primitive” oral cultures, while suggestions that not hearing, not listening, are “deaf” are stigmatising (Sterne, 2012, p. 10). Nonetheless, sight has dominated Western epistemologies, and this cannot be overlooked, so to speak (Macpherson, 2006).

In the New Materialist call for “situated knowledge” (Haraway 1988, Sutherland & Acord, 2007, discussed further in the methodology), I suggest sound offers one means to situate. Other senses do so also, but while touch situates us, it is constantly in the present. Sound, like touch, also situates us in the presence of others – including the more-than-human other, even when the listener is at a distance of time and space. I discuss copresencing entanglements further in Chapter 3, in the context of critical thinking around multispecies relations (Haraway 2016) but expand briefly here to argue for attention to listening in the pantheon of multisensorial reconsiderations.

Peters (1999) described digital media as “the art of reaching across the intervening spirits to touch another body” (pp. 224–225). Psychologist Anne Fernald (2007) connects both touch and sound, describing in a Radiolab podcast (in Abumrad & Krulwich, 2007) how soundwaves – in her research, in the form of a mother’s voice speaking to a baby across the room – act like “touch at a distance.” Sound as touch allows beings a connection to other beings that is vibratory and physical, close and powerful, and thus offers a

²² According to one podcast host (see [Buzzsprout usage statistics](#)) 89% of podcasts are listened to on a mobile device, implying the vast majority are heard via headphones.

profoundly affective engagement with ways of being in the world, even when we are not sharing time or space – that is, even when received via time-shifted recording. Ecosonics are critical elements of effective and affective attunement, and so, in attuning through recorded sound, we create an echo of the processes of forming place attachments (discussed further in Chapter 3). Thus, touch, sound, and embodiment – physical and affectual, human and more-than-human, are brought together into attunement and care.²³ Listening to voice, and sound, are shown here as one means to move humans beyond what Lakoff and Johnson (2008) call objectivist and subjectivist myths (p. 229) toward experientiality.

Synthesis

In this chapter, in support of my research practice, I have considered the scholarship around sound, the spoken word, and storytelling practices, placing these in the context of environmental communication, as it broadly calls for a new hearing of the voices of the more-than-human world. After a discussion on the relevance of human storytelling, both in practice and in scholarship, I developed the term citizen storytelling: a public project that addresses a specific topic or construct, which anticipates and welcomes the unexpected from a large base of storytellers, to bring about new understandings of lived experiences. *The Rescue Project* is one example of such work with the public.

I also provided an introduction to the 21st century's new media platform and format of podcasting. I suggested that podcasting, with its democratic access to both making and listening, its cultural urgency that mirrors the climate crisis, and its ability to convey the sounds of places not necessarily known to the listener, is an intriguing and effective tool for sharing environmental communication.

I then discussed listening as a phenomenological, ontological, and embodied storytelling experience that offers to date, an under-explored concept in environmental communication scholarship, and I described a response to the

²³ Feld calls such a sonic understanding of self in the world "acoustemology" (Feld 1996) "sound as a capacity to know and as a habit of knowing".

sounding of the world that is both personal and a set of principles to live and work by. I defined a new term, ecosonics, to provide the language needed to speak about the sound of the more-than-human world and its lively ground.

Finally, I discussed how the sound of the human voice provides elements of connectivity between the speaker and listener, but also between the listener and the locus of storytelling, as place manifests through the affectual grain of the spoken word, produced by the emplaced body. This emplacement is one way that ecosonics affectively conveys a sense of place to the listening body.

The concept of the digital site aligns with the themes emerging from the research questions: a majority of humans inhabit an anthropocentric milieu in which instrumentalist cultures²⁴ continue to objectify and silence the more-than-human world. But, to act custodially and humbly care, this group needs to relearn to attend, listen (Lopez, 2019, p. 194), and listen in order to genuinely hear. Therefore, this practice, the topic of this practice, and the analysis of both practice and topic are iterative: listening is an element of attunement – and listening is also literally required for making and consuming a digital site and podcast. Thus, the citizen storytelling digital space provides content for thematic analysis, and its podcast allows for the performance of these themes, putting theory into practice: humbly listening, fully ecologically attuned, to the affectual impacts of the lived rescue experience.

In the second and final chapter of this literature review, I discuss the affectual entanglements that provide the ecocultural context for rescue in the time of the humans and introduce the themes into which my analysis of these stories fits.

²⁴ By instrumentalist cultures I mean anthropocentric cultural groups that consider nature primarily through an exploitive, economic lens, that is, valuable in a market sense for its usefulness to sustaining human life (Chan et al., 2012; Raymond & Kenter, 2016). This can be recognised in overtly extractive and exploitative practices like industrial farming (Bos et al., 2018), or more insidiously in the concept of “ecosystems services” (Chan et al., 2012; Raymond & Kenter, 2016). This includes non-industrial cultures that exploit the more-than-human as a resource for other means, including as traditional medicine, such as the wholesale robbing of forests of pangolin for their scales in remote villages in Vietnam by subsistence farmers (Miller & Trevithick, 2017a; Cheng et al., 2017), or for pleasure, as in the stripping of songbirds from forests to meet the demand for keeping birds in Indonesian homes (Miller & Trevithick, 2017b; Rentschlar et al., 2018).

Chapter 3: Rescue in the Time of the Humans

Having reviewed the literature supporting the practice element of *The Rescue Project* in the previous chapter, I turn now to the literature that assists in the analysis of the resulting data to answer my research questions: What themes emerge in the stories of people who enact modes of rescue in a time of environmental crisis? How might the more-than-human world inform these themes, and how do these themes give active rescuers courage in these critical times?

While some human cultures have never relinquished their relationality with the more-than-human world, many more are embedded in aggressively instrumentalist cultures, which demand the abstraction of humans from nature in every facet of expression, from economy to philosophy. In the process, these ecocultural approaches have turned the Earth into a provider of ecosystems services (Spash & Aslaksen, 2015). Yet, there is a relational shift occurring – and my research materially demonstrates some of the ways that returning to custodial, more-than-human copresencing are being experienced and storied. This is nuanced, grounded, and iterative relationality, and citizens doing this work do not articulate it using scholarly terms such as relational, instrumentalist, or ecocultural. But the field of environmental communication reminds us that the ecological self and the cultural self are not opposing binaries (Milstein & Castro-Sotomayor, 2020, p. xvii). As with other terms emerging from various branches of cultural studies, such as the *sociocultural* and *sociopolitical* (Wertsch, 1985), the environmental communication framework of *ecocultural* identity (Milstein & Castro-Sotomayor, 2020) reminds us that we, as humans, are always relationally shaped by the more-than-human world. The term ecocultural offers ways to articulate and describe what *The Rescue Project* data demonstrates. An ecocentric ecocultural identity decentres the human and understands that the environment, including our environmental selves, is inextricably related to “the economic, political, historical, and cultural” (p. xviii). An ecocentric ecocultural identity also acknowledges the resulting interdependence, “empathy, understanding, nuance, interconnectedness, and common recognition” that being a part of the “ecological webs of life” (p. xvii) allows. This is an emerging framework but is increasingly critical in both the academy and

the broader public sphere if humans and more-than-human are to thrive and survive through climate crisis times. It is within this environmental communication framework and ecocultural relationality that this research takes place.

I begin this chapter with a section titled *Histories*, in which I give a brief overview of the context of the Anthropocene: the notion of a time in which exploitive, instrumentalist human cultures have so dominated the Earth it is expressed in the geological strata (Lewis & Maslin, 2015). In continuing to discuss the evolution of early colonial environmentalism and action-based human engagements with landscapes, flora, and fauna in the Australian context, I set the groundwork for identifying the affects informing acts of individual and community²⁵ rescue in a time of climate crisis. I then consider the term *rescue* to support its use as a story-generating provocation to the wildlife rehabilitation and landcare communities.

In Chapter 2, I described my application of the term *affect*. In the present chapter, in the section titled *Affects*, I look more closely at affectual influences contributing to Australian ecocultural relations. Firstly, I provide an overview of the context in which this work sits: the unease of the global hyperobject and wicked problem of the climate crisis. Secondly, I look at how this hyperobject manifests affectually, in terms of human expressions of paralysis, in the face of climate grief.

Next, I draw into the scholarly mix certain key ethical precepts that form the scaffolding under which the research data sits: humility, attunement, and courage. I first turn my attention to theories of attunement. I look at some of the significant scholarly thinking from a broad perspective, including some of the terms for our earth-networked relations, and I offer a rationale for distinguishing more-than-human kinship attunements into broadly animal- and place-based relations. I introduce a new term, *place-kin*, and relate it to both particular

²⁵ Mention of *community* throughout this thesis, unless otherwise indicated, refers to rescue communities, and is defined along broad axes of commonalities of care for more-than-human worlds. Locational geography is secondary, although it may facilitate individuals coming together for acts of rescue. Community may also imply an ecological community that is more-than-human. See Chapter 8 for discussion of the porous nature of these communities.

ecocultural relationships to Country, from Australian Indigenous perspectives, and to how non-Indigenous Australians might approach caring, custodial relations with place, remaining open to Indigenous governance and ways of knowing, being, and doing (Martin & Mirrabooa, 2003), while remaining mindful not to further colonise Indigenous culture and spaces. Here I define a new term that is important to my research analysis: *homeground*. I then move on to scholarship that underpins the notion of animal-kinships, integrating the way environmental communication scholarship describes these various relations and acts of care.

Finally, I turn to the field of environmental virtue ethics, which provides the two scaffolds of humility and courage that bookend the rescue experience. It is humility that opens a human to consubstantial relations with more-than-human Earth-others, it is courage that allows for staying the distance, and it is the resulting copresencing, relationality, and kinships that lead, iteratively, to encouragement.

Histories

What is the historical context of acts of rescue, and what are rescuers rescuing *from*? A broadly manifested, dominant cultural milieu of human exceptionalism across the globe has put the more-than-human at risk. Therefore, those who undertake acts of rescue in Australia are pushing back against a deeply ingrained practice of earth exploitation that has its antecedents in global sociopolitical, economic, colonial, and cultural histories. I discuss the broader context of the Anthropocene before narrowing in on some Australian colonial attempts to resist this instrumentalist focus before proposing a definition of the term rescue in this context.

Anthropocene to Humilicene

Tsing (2012) suggests that human exceptionalism began in the Near East, with the widespread adaptation of cultivation when our species abandoned the nourishing riches of “multispecies landscapes” for control over, and familiarity with, a limited range of particular crops (p. 145). In so doing, most human cultures broke their close relations with the complex life web. A related

development in the West in the early 20th century has been a broad cultural shift in, amongst other fields, philosophy, religion, politics, economics, science, and history, bringing about a dismissal of subjective experiences and seeking and prioritising what we now understand as a fictional objectivity (Abram, 1996, pp. 32-33). This fictional objectivity has resulted in disciplines like science excluding, to their detriment, “embodiment, materiality, affect and place” (Davies, 2014, p. 90), that is, acknowledged experience of being a functional part of the living Earth.

But without exploitive. instrumentalist cultures coming to recognise that they are not the masters and controllers, but one part of the mesh-like life support system of planet Earth – and acting accordingly – all species will find it increasingly impossible to survive (Haraway, 2016). An intention of this research is to propose a practical means to enable Earth-others (Rose, 2008a), or the more-than-human worlds (Abram, 1996, pp. 6-8), to literally, and figuratively, be heard, as called for by scholars in the ecoculturally concerned field of environmental communication. Alongside many others (Plumwood, 2008; Abram, 2010; Tsing, 2012; Puig de la Bellacasa, 2012; Haraway, 2016; Milstein, 2020), I challenge human exceptionalism and anthropocentrism.

An increasingly expansive literature describes the complexities of these understandings, and it is not possible to do more than touch on it lightly in this limited space. But an overview is necessary, as a move beyond anthropocentrism underpins the work *The Rescue Project* contributors undertake.

The term the Anthropocene was coined in 2000 by Crutzen and Stoermer in the Global Change Newsletter (2000). At the time of writing, the designation was in the process of being formally recognised as a new Earth epoch by the Anthropocene Working Group of the International Commission on Stratigraphy (Subramanian, 2019). “Anthropocene” acknowledges the profound impact the latter part of the human era has made on the planet: it is marked geologically in the deposits of plastics, radionuclides, aluminium, and various pollutants, as well as through biological indicators (Zalasiewicz et al., 2016). “The Anthropocene” is widely used in popular media but is contested in a variety of ways: Ellis et al. (2016) call for sociologists to be included in formalising the

term. They question the date of its inception and argue that formalisation should consider the history of human influence, which would date it back to the start of hunting or cultivation. This first phase of the Anthropocene is sometimes referred to as the Paleoanthropocene. This was followed by a second phase, that of the Industrial Revolution, and the third phase, the “Great Acceleration,” refers to post WW2, when human populations rapidly expanded, equally rapidly consuming resources and accordingly emitting pollution (Gillings & Paulsen, 2014; Corlett, 2015; Goudie & Viles, 2016).

Not all humans are equally responsible for the Anthropocene – nor is it a matter of human essentialism, but of cultural practices – and Ellis et al. (2016) describe the current process for formalisation as a “Eurocentric, elite and technocratic narrative of human engagement with our environment” (p. 192). Regardless of scholarly debate, the term has been adopted widely across public discourse.

Other terms for the period in which we find ourselves include the Capitalocene (Malm, 2009, in Haraway, 2015; Moore, 2016) to indicate the damage wrought by capitalism, and more hopeful, future-facing terms, like the Humilicene (Abram et al., 2020, p. 5), which implies the humility with which humans should turn back to the more-than-human (as discussed later in this chapter), and Chthulucene, which Haraway (2016) uses as a “fierce reply” to anthropocentrism, summoning, as it does the “beings of the earth, both ancient and up-to-the-minute” (p. 2).

Whatever term we use to demarcate eras past and future, human groups have frequently cast themselves in opposition to “nature” since the days of Gilgamesh (Harrison, 2009); have accelerated the impact of this binary during the Enlightenment (Plumwood, 2007; Abram, 1996); and hammered it home via the Industrial Revolution, in the post-WW2 West (Walker & Daryanomeh, 2020). It was also during the rise of the human that the monotheistic religions placed humankind at the centre of a moral universe, in which acting for and thinking for the natural world is believing in a God-given right to control it as a resource (Tsing, 2012, p. 144). Even when secularity increased during the modern age and the West lost God (Rose, 2008b, p. 162), instrumentalist cultures abandoned their homegrounds further: Rose, drawing on Weber, points out the disenchantment that emerged, sapping the natural worlds, including the human

element within, of their sacredness. Reason has led most of us into “a feedback loop of increasing disconnection” (p. 162).

Protect, Defend, Conserve

Operating in parallel to this age of destructive anthropocentrism, some humans, even within exploitive cultures, work to protect, defend and conserve spaces for biodiverse ecologies to survive. The contributions to this project’s digital site were frequently offered by individuals associated loosely, or more formally, with grassroots and not-for-profit environmental organisations. Some contributors attuned consciously to their historical groundings and future legacies. While a detailed history of conservation in post-invasion/colonial Australia is not the remit of this exegesis, the cultural history backdrop is relevant to formal and informal environmental action. It is also relevant to the development of place-kinships, a theme expressed in every landcare-oriented story contribution. Libby Robin is an Australian environmental historian, and it is her work I outline below.

Developing early in post-colonial Australia, and at the same time as the rapacious acquisition of land, was a public desire to conserve and actively protect Australian landscapes. This was a precursor to the emergence of contemporary ecology in the 1950s, which became central to the new discipline of conservation science in Australia (Robin, 1994).

Robin (1994) writes that key to understanding the origins of the conservation movement is a primary intention to “save” (with resonances of the rescue trope to be discussed shortly), or protect an existing environment from the “vandalism” of unsuitable agricultural development, whether it was pristine, remnant, exemplary in its biodiversity, or of value for recreation (p. 2).

Language developed around this intent. First came “ecology,” a term “increasingly used in field naturalist circles in the context of arguments for the conservation of the balance of nature, the web of life, and a little later, the preservation of ‘habitat’” (p. 53). For example, in the 1950s, landscaper Edna Walling was outspoken about ecology’s role in both conservation and landscape design, thus indicating its application in popular as well as political discourse – and the study of the relationship between living organisms was, at that time,

playing an active role in assisting decisions around conservation: itself a kind of saving or rescuing of vulnerable environments for the future (p. 123).

In the 1960s, contemporary environmentalism began to emerge in Australia, and the story of the Little Desert conflict of 1969 is significant to that development, as Robin (1994) describes.²⁶ Located in the state of Victoria in the Wimmera region, the Little Desert is the Country of the Wotjobaluk people. Nearly 400 kilometres from Melbourne and Adelaide, it consists of thick heathland with scattered waterholes and has an arid climate. The region was crown land, and in 1969 the Victorian Minister for Lands, Sir William McDonald, targeted it for farming development. The resulting Little Desert dispute marked a moment when ecological consciousness²⁷ developed into political awareness. This ecological consciousness is vital for the broader implications of my exegesis, as it asks how citizen storytelling helps ecologically concerned Australians care about, and for the habitat around them, during the global warming crisis.

Equal to the value of ecology-as-science, however, was an emerging cry that the public had a right to have a place where they could wind down, escape from the metropolis, and which would remain a legacy for children. Finding these

²⁶ Four years prior to the Little Desert campaign, conservation was first in the air. In 1964 the Australian Conservation Foundation (commonly known as the ACF) was started. It had been an idea for an Australian branch to raise funds for the African needs of the World Wildlife Fund that brought Murray Tyrrell, Secretary to the Governor General, together with Francis Ratcliffe. Mosley (1996) writes that Ratcliffe identified a number of key concerns about Australia's approach to its wilderness areas. That "the "big country" mystique" risked Australians feeling the country was large enough to make ecological mistakes; that patriotism was fostered around mining and development such that being environmentally concerned was "unrealistic"; that because environmental degradation was slow, the population could not see it in action (which accords with Nixon's theory of slow violence (2011), explored later in this chapter) and that there was no governmental mechanism to address conservation. Ratcliffe's experience of the imperceptible nature of environmental degradation now seems almost quaint as the climate crisis visibly suffocates locations all around the globe, and scientists, economists, environmentalists, and farmers attempt to prepare for massive change, even as some political classes do not. But in the 1960s the ACF was new in its national focus and its intention of "promoting scientific management of the natural environment" (Robin, n.d.).

²⁷ *Ecological* is both a scientific and philosophical term, and "consciousness" is a combination of "individual, collective and political" (Robin, 1994, p. 3). At this point in time, conservation was a term used in two almost opposing senses. Politically it was about water and soil and related productivity in the agricultural sense; in the eyes of the Minister of Lands and for Conservation, Sir William "Jack" McDonald resources were conserved for and through land development (Robin, 1994, pp.10-11).

places, and returning to them, is part of the development of Earth relations, discussed later in this chapter. It was conservationists who wanted to keep the Little Desert as a last remnant of what was then described as “wilderness,” and for tourism and biodiversity. At the time, of course, Australians were innocent of the expansion of coal mining or the related juggernaut of global warming looming in the near future.

In the decades following, the term conservationist developed a negative politicised connotation, and Robin writes of a “siege mentality” (p. 107) coming to bear as environmentalism emerged. Conservationists became more confrontational and less inclined to negotiate than they had been in the 1950s and 1960s, and they had garnered some political power. Green issues, such as nuclear destruction, and wilderness preservation, were now political. As Robin tells it, geographer Tim O’Riordan wrote a book called *Environmentalism* (1981), and that was a marker of the radicalisation of the term. The Little Desert moment was perhaps the first in Australia where city dwellers mobilised over locations remote from themselves. Thus the movement represented an expansion of environmental concerns, if not nationally, certainly at that point, state-wide. Activists for this relatively remote desert were the first to reach across a “global/local frontier” (p.33), followed by the Lake Pedder and Franklin Dam protests in Tasmania. The abstract idea of “rights” to have National Parks was regarded as equivalent to rights to clear air, water, and beauty. Australians were beginning to reconnect with the intrinsic value of the more-than-human.

It is interesting to note that a significant driver present in most environmental activism and thinking is place relationality. As Robin puts it:

... environmental concerns are built around conceptions of *place* [emphasis added]; the land, the air, the sea, the built environment, the planet as a whole. They may be about a location with a personal or nostalgic association – or about a principle, a democratic right. (Robin, 1994, p. 4).

Melbourne University’s Professor of Botany, John Turner, supports this perception:

It's no good taking people out to save the countryside and telling them you've got to save it because conservationists tell you. You've got to *know it* [emphasis added] to save it, to do any real good... I'm absolutely certain that when [ecologist] Dave Ashton takes his students out for a whole week to do ecology in some remote part of the countryside and they camp there and they work there all day long... it sinks into them that this is something that is interesting, delightful. And they see the countryside and they *fall in love with parts of it* [emphasis added] and they... are quite interested in doing something about it. But to teach it... like teaching them how to calculate or something, it doesn't work (Turner, in Robin, 1994, p. 56).

Thus, knowing a place contributes to potential efforts toward conservation. But Australia is a sizable island, where the population was, and remains, city centred. Sites of environmental concern are often located far from population centres, but, even so, these places of ecocultural value are nonetheless regularly defended by those living elsewhere: several stories from non-Indigenous contributors to the research indicate a sense of place attachment to sites distant from their homes. Clearly, the political and social power of remote concern is of significant relevance to this research. Thus, when physical presence at the location isn't possible, I argue a role for recorded sound comes into play in practices of public environmental communication. Audio allows for an immersive listening experience and offers a sonic essence of a place worth caring for. As Lopez (2019) writes in his book *Horizon*, listening and being attentive to other humans is important (p. 194), but so, I would add, is keeping an ear out for the places themselves. Lopez concludes with a sonic reference to other places and their voices: they call us, and that call "arrives as a cantus, tying the faraway place to the thing living deep inside us" (p. 512).

What did Lopez mean by the thing living deep inside us? My interpretation is that he was writing about affect, care, the emotional, spiritual relationships that bind us to all others, human, more-than-human, and geography too (p. 25). Later in the chapter, I look more closely at notions of earthly place relations for their relevance to the thematic analysis of this research, and I define a new

term, *hometown*. In the next section, I consider the term *rescue*, its etymology, its historical and literary antecedents, and the Australian contexts to which it is already applied. I also develop rescue more closely in relation to this project as a theme for considering active environmental care.

Definition 3: Rescue – History, Problematics, and a New Term for Active Care

The term *rescue* is complicated. In the context of environmental humanities scholarship *rescue* is rarely described, but it has long been engaged with in feminist critiques of patriarchal constructs of the heroic, with its passive female roles and individualistic male heroes (Millett, 2016). Rescue has a 2000-year history in Abrahamic religions with foundational stories of saving souls and sinners (Pascoe, 1990; Zdanowski, 2018). But rescue pre-dates the Abrahamic religions in the archetypal stories of ancient Greece, where rescues occur in all directions amongst men, women, and gods (Calasso, 1994). In these orthodox and culturally formative contexts, a critical element in enacting rescues is bravery: courage in the face of physical and social challenges (Yearly, 1990).

Appropriately, rescue is action-based and courageous. Its origin is in middle English – *rescouen* or *rescuen* – and its definition encompasses "to save or deliver," while the Latin underpinnings of its Anglo-French origins are a physical movement – deriving from *re-* + *escure*, or "to shake off" (Merriam-Webster.com 2018). Rescue is also frequently heroic – a dangerous physical action by an individual (Calasso, 1994; Ekroth, 2007). Rescue's antonym is to endanger, to hazard, or to imperil, and rescues in various cultural mythologies, from Greek to Hindu, from the ancient to the contemporary, are also traditionally understood as undertaken at personal risk in dangerous conditions.²⁸

²⁸ Similar expressions of rescue appear in most human cultures, from subcontinental Hinduism to Canadian and American First Nations' ancient mythologies: rescue appears in the first known human writing in the story of Gilgamesh, written on a stone tablet and discovered in Mosul, Iraq (Russell-Jones, 2017). Across time and cultures, three thousand years later, rescue has been a sub-trope through colonial histories as colonists (acculturated by the missionary church) "free" or rescue First Nations traditional owners from savagery (Savage, 1997, pp. 201-221; Breckenridge, 1993). Further, in contemporarily global political debate, the perpetual media cycle obsessively features the term rescue and its perpetual corollary, "abandonment", in news narratives and despairing social debate around asylum seekers (Leach, 2003).

Environmentally speaking, the term rescue appears directly in Australian non-government organisational names: such as WIRES – Wildlife Information, Rescue, and Education Service. Formed in 1985, WIRES intended to create a national network of volunteers trained to step in to rescue and rehabilitate injured native wildlife. Climate-related natural disasters frequently lead to swift interventions to save humans and more-than-human lives, and the public is familiar with these acts being described as rescues, as related in the mainstream press (Deacon, 2018). The dramatic direct actions of environmental groups like Greenpeace (Zelko, 2004) and the Sea Shepherd (Bondaroff, 2020) also fit into an interventionist, activist-hero model, with rescue an overt framing²⁹. The environmental activist-hero is a popular meme in the mainstream media, where articles titled “50 people who could save the planet” from *The Guardian* (Vidal et al., 2008) and “Heroes of the Environment” from *Time Magazine* (Walsh, 2007) are not uncommon.

But it is important to note that rescue does not always imply restoration to a former “wilderness” state. Significant scholarship challenges a previous “fundamental tenet – indeed, a passion – of the environmental movement” (Cronon, 1996, p. 7), the notion of a landscape untouched by human foot, referred to as wilderness. Associated with the temporally frozen sublime,³⁰ the cultural construction of wilderness is a product of the mid-19th century (p. 9) – prior to that, in Western philosophy, wilderness implied abandoned, desolate spaces (p. 8), and similarly, in Australian Indigenous belief systems, the “wild” is country that has not been cared for – sites of erosion and desolation, as Daly Pulkara describes to Rose (2004, p. 4). Thus, I intend the notion of rescue to describe a means of, however imperfectly, moving to heal more-than-human relations, as I discuss toward the end of this chapter and further in the analysis chapters.

²⁹ For example, the headline, *The bold new plan to rescue the world’s oceans, explained*, on a Greenpeace.org webpage lobbying for support for new protected marine areas.

³⁰ The sublime is discussed in more detail later in this chapter, in the section titled: Describing our quiet relations.

In any case, just like the Greek pantheon of gods, contemporary humans act in a cyclical and iterative role of both destroyer and liberator of fellow humans, landscapes, and other living creatures (Haraway, 2016, p.3). Humans are responsible for the imperilment of planetary ecosystems through relentless urban development, destructive farming practices, logging, mining, roads, and highways (Hamilton et al., 2015), and thus it is humans who need to enact an urgent deliverance *from* ourselves and *of* ourselves as part of the more-than-human world, or risk being shaken off by the planet itself. The amassing of ecological catastrophes is a critical state of play, which has brought me to a particular interest in how some humans enact forms of environmental rescue and maintain the courage to do so.

Given the global disaster of the climate crisis, with the requirement for human action to address it, and given that rescue is such an ancient and tenaciously recurring trope in human mythology and storytelling, this exegesis suggests *rescue* merits consideration in environmental scholarship. But however grand they may be, heroic rescue gestures as populated in patriarchal mythologies or even activist rescue framings are not the focus of this research. Instead, I am concerned here with small, individual, or community acts of courage with modest yet meaningful outcomes, such as Milstein's student carefully moving imperilled earthworms off the footpath each time it rains (2020, p. 26). This outcome helps individual worms escape potential disaster, but it also soothes the student's anxiety about the survival of these living beings, giving her the courage to continue. These less dramatically performed but more consistent notions of conservation, care, restoration, reclamation, rehabilitation, regeneration, and defending/protecting/saving are commonplace in popular environmental discourse. Each is demonstrably related to rescue. But from either actual or potential degradation, rescue acts are also acts of humility, hope, and courage, as worthy of narrative expression as Greek mythology or books of God. In examining these related themes and their applications, I aim to interpret an under-considered context for the notion of rescue.

Affects

Many of *The Rescue Project* contributions reflected anxiety about the broader issue of climate disruption. In considering this ecological crisis, a number of images from public media may flash across the mind's eye: a lonely penguin, a stumbling, starving polar bear; roaring forest fires; the swirling waters of major floods; dry farmland and skinny cattle; annual news reports of ever-diminishing numbers of birds; a map of the Gulf Stream ocean current stalled; or more locally, the spring flowers which arrived a month early. These events are bedded in time and disparate places and are hard to conceive of as a single phenomenon. They are *part* of a phenomenon, but they also cause individual responses – the burden of knowledge of the destruction underway can lead to ecological grief (Cunsolo & Ellis, 2018) and paralysis in the face of the futility of individual action (Landry et al., 2018; Milfont & Schultz, 2016).

The Shadow, a Wicked Problem, the Hyperobject – too Big to Imagine but Something Feels Wrong

From personal experiences of bushfire conflagration to a news story of flooding of a village down the road: not personally witnessed but is felt by the broader community, then further, to an abstract magazine report about melting glaciers on the other side of the world, these fragments are part of what Morton (2010) would call the hyperobject of the climate crisis, or global warming as he deliberately re-names it. This is a "wicked problem" (Maibach et al., 2011): it lies beyond any single individual, community, organisation, or nation's ability to solve, with ongoing global disagreement about how to do so.

Morton's theory of the hyperobject is both artistic and transdisciplinary (Boulton, 2016). It might be a literal object such as a star or a planet, or a concept, defined by its incomprehensibility. Exploitive, instrumentalist cultures know hyperobjects exist, but any one of them is too large to take in as a whole at any given time. Carson (2002) similarly described environmental crises as a "shadow," calling the global ubiquity of toxic chemical presence "no less ominous because it is formless and obscure, no less frightening because it is simply impossible to predict the effects of lifetime exposure..." (p. 188). A hyperobject is fundamentally "nonlocal," and the element any one being

encounters can never represent the entirety of the thing (Morton, 2013, p. 1). Hyperobjects are hard to prove. If each element exists as a complete thing in and of itself – heatwave, fire, drought, cyclone, flood – and we cannot metaphysically conceive of the whole, how can we know it exists? This is a situation in which we are intimately connected and, at the same time, uncannily or unnervingly, disconnected (p. 130). As previously discussed, rescue's opposite is to endanger, to hazard, or to imperil – and the hyperobjects of ecological crisis and the various ammunitions of the Anthropocene combine to threaten imperilment from every direction. So how should we relate to the hyperobject, given that we, as ecocultural beings, are not outside it but a part of it? Morton uses object-oriented ontology to observe a profound level of connectivity between objects in the world, such that no material thing is separate from another, and this interconnectivity he calls the "mesh" (p. 30). But still, we cannot touch, smell, taste, or imagine global warming as an entire entity. As Morton (2013) writes: "stop the tape of evolution anywhere, and you won't see it. Stand under a rain cloud, and it's not global warming you'll feel ... Nowhere in the long list of catastrophic weather events...will you find global warming. But global warming is as real as this sentence" (p. 48).

Paralysis and Grief

In accepting the notion of shadow, or hyperobject, as a useful expression of the size of the problem, there is a corresponding affect of overwhelm. Ecologically concerned humans are "spectators to future ruin," and Morton (2010) asks: "How do we begin? Where do we go from here?" (p. 2). One answer lies in reframing ourselves as ecocultural beings, and *The Rescue Project*, as a repository of ecological stories, provides one option for provoking and stimulating this thinking. Small gestures, made slowly through using slow media and slow storytelling, encourage awakening and action, both individual and democratic.

The "world of wounds," or burden of knowledge that Leopold (1953) ascribed to ecological learning, is called "ecological grief" by Cunsolo and Ellis (2018) in the context of the weather event-triggered distress relating to the global environmental crisis. Cunsolo and Ellis describe three different kinds of

ecological grief: grief over physical environmental destruction, alongside grief over "loss of grounded experience and understanding, and grief over the losses to come in the future" (p. 276).

The difficult losses of individual animals, and the challenges when an ecosystem fails to thrive, are an inevitable part of the experience of being ecoculturally aware and active.³¹ However, the burden of knowledge, of the larger picture of the ecological impact of the climate crisis, is also despair-inducing. Some scientists have described profound grief at the larger picture when they come to realise their work makes no difference at all:

I cried, I cried, I went: "no, I wasn't told." I worked it out for myself, and the horror I felt was unspeakable. I had this lonely realisation that our oceans were on the way out. (Sara Arthur, in Miller, 2016).

Psychological, psychosocial paralysis, in response to the hyperobject, is directly addressed by Landry et al. (2018), who, along with Milfont and Schultz (2016), demonstrate that while the majority of people around the globe are concerned for the environment, only two-thirds of these take any sort of action. Landry et al. consider whether learned helplessness, defined as neglecting to avoid negative stimuli even when there are options to do so – in other words, a paralysis – is partly responsible for the lack of action. "Doing nothing" is particularly prevalent when the likelihood of personal action having a genuine impact is considered low, especially when the problems are complex and require more significant, democratic changes via government social and economic reform (2018, p. 19). Significantly, for this research, Landry et al. found that amongst individuals who are concerned about the environment, the most common associated emotional response is helplessness. Clayton et al. (2017) acknowledge such feelings arise from an "inability to feel like they are making a difference in stopping climate change" (p.21). Pelletier et al. (1999) describe this global phenomenon as "global helplessness beliefs" (p. 2485).

³¹ Farmers report loss of confidence in the predictability of the seasons, even within Australia's already somewhat unpredictable weather patterns. Their anxiety is paralleled on the other side of the world, where deep understanding of melt times and melt behaviour of sea ice over long distances is crucial for plotting travel routes and Inuit elders are keenly mourning the new unreliability of their longstanding history of traditional knowledge (Cunsolo & Ellis, 2018).

Climate fiction (cli-fi) Australian novelist and commentator James Bradley reflects thus:

In my dark moments, yes, my mind thinks that part of me won't believe it, and I'm never quite sure when I think about it whether that's about denial or whether it's about just the need to keep hoping – or whether it's just that, I just, at some level, can't believe what's going on. I think it's very difficult to get your head around what's going on. I guess it's like lots of these things; it's a series of shocks. You think you understand it, and then it's another piece of awful, awful news (Bradley, in Miller, 2016b).

Relevant to this discussion and expanded upon in Chapter 7, in the context of civic courage, the relationship between individual ability to act and sociostructural change is demonstrably connected. Individual action on environmental matters (such as composting and recycling) is more challenging when no societal structures support it, and paralysis can set in. Bouman and Steg (2019) argue that the perception that others do not care prevents individuals from instigating action themselves. They suggest that the way to encourage widespread individual care is to demonstrate it through political and organisational leadership, fostering a bedrock from which individuals can take their own action, which inspires others (pp. 29-30). Meanwhile, Fritze et al. (2008) observe the mental health implications of the climate crisis for individuals and communities, particularly disadvantaged populations. But it also demonstrates that understanding the connections between the climate crisis and mental health could be a means to kickstart transformational actions from the individual to community and society. These transformations might go “beyond technical fixes and cost-benefit analyses” to new, sustainable societal relationships (Fritze et al., 2008, no page numbers).

The Rescue Project contributions demonstrate a wide variety of grief experiences. Randall (2009), in the context of the climate crisis, draws on Worden's grief research to use the experience of grief to reframe identity during the irrevocable changes occurring during this crisis. Worden challenged the popularly embraced notion of stages of grief which move on a linear trajectory from grief to recovery. Instead, Worden observed that grief responses are

varied and at any point might return to any other stage. A sense of life's meaning can be restored or lost once again. In the climate context, Randall writes, denial and apathy are just one point in the experience of grief, alongside anger and resentment, guilt and shame, yearning, cynicism, and reinvestment of emotional energy (p. 122). To this list, I would also add Albrecht's (2005) notion of solastalgia, that is, the melancholia induced by watching one's loved places being irrevocably destroyed (p. 46-47). But while an environmental actor might not always be proactive, nor will they always be stuck in their grief: grief responses can be fluid and should not be judged negatively (Randall, 2009, p. 123). In this, "positive valuations of the natural world can give them strength in making choices that involve loss" (p. 124). I further explore this thinking toward the end of this chapter as I discuss the environmental virtue ethic, courage as it pertains to the continued efforts of *The Rescue Project's* contributors.

Other responses can complicate this grieving. As a subtheme of both the hyperobject and place relationality, the term *ruination* is of Jamaican origin (Cliff, 2003) – thus, we are already spectators to Morton's ruin.

Ruininate, the adjective, and ruination, the noun, are Jamaican inventions. Each word signifies the reclamation of land, the disruption of cultivation, civilization by the uncontrolled, uncontrollable forest. When a landscape becomes ruininate, carefully designed aisles of cane are envined, strangled, the order of empire is replaced by the chaotic forest" (Cliff, 2003, p. 157).

Ruination can make a narrative both complex and seductive – as who can resist ruination in an archaeological sense (Harrison, 2013, p. 45), even as it inspires melancholy reflection? *Ruinenlust* was a fashionable pursuit of the 18th Century (Desilvey & Edensor 2013, p. 466), as relatively small and local ruined sites, such as castles and hermitages, became of fascination in German and English art and literature. "Ruin-gazing" was a pastime of the demonstratively sensitive of spirit. This affectual element dates back to 146 BC (Hell, 2010), when the Roman General, Scipio's glorying at his successful destruction of Carthage inspired both thoughts of the mighty (anthropocentric) past, along with tears of anxiety about the vulnerability of humans and their fateful endeavours (p. 170). Ruination can be fast, as with natural or man-made disasters, or slow, through

economic transition or gradual abandonment (Desilvey & Edensor, 2013, p. 466). Still, the term is not widely embraced across environmental literature, despite its reasonable outing across archaeology, and despite continual global ruination, such as evidenced across Australia, as monocropping, mining, forestry, and pollution lay waste to tracts of Country. Cherry (2014) describes most landscape changes during the Holocene period as "artifacts of human action" (p. 205). Therefore, as human creations, landscapes should be assigned similar anthropological and archaeological discussions as cultural biography receives – that is, observing ruination in process, as an act of "landscape biography" (p. 205). Desilvey and Edensor (2013) suggest ruination is generally considered a visual spectacle, and the affect of ruination, not to mention the sound and lived experience of it, is less overtly considered. However, in *The Rescue Project*, both aesthetics and affect are present in contributions that observe types of ruination, and as I have already indicated, ruination is not only a Western meme but appears in the Australian First Nationals conceptual framework of the "wild" (Rose, 2004).

Haraway (2016) considers ecological grief from another perspective. She calls the cause of this unease "trouble" (p. 1), from the 13th-century verb meaning to stir up, make cloudy and disturb.³² These are stirred-up times, and her response is to stay with or sit with this trouble. That is not to acquiesce and make peace with the trouble but rather to engage with it closely. Haraway (2016) writes that humans are in the habit of fixing and improving (p. 3). But if we cannot do this, we tend to turn away. Thus, the size of the shadow we have created also intimidates our ability to solve it – the sixth great extinction is understandably so horrific that "gale-force winds of feeling" (p.4) might overwhelm us, and she acknowledges, too, that scholars, including scientists, carry a heavy burden of knowledge (p. 4). This notion has been explored directly with Australian scientists in the "Is this how you feel project" (Duggan, 2014) which invited scientists to hand-write letters describing their emotional responses to the

³² Haraway (2016) places this in the context of the "thick present" – a complex present which is connected vertically and horizontally, layered with time and meaning, response, engagement and trouble-making (2016, p. 1, p. 55).

expert knowledge of the climate crisis they hold. Haraway is not unsympathetic, given the horrific realisation that the world's human population will likely exceed 11 billion within the next 60 years (p. 102). But she also writes that: "staying with the trouble is both more serious, and more lively... requires making oddkin; that is we require each other in unexpected collaborations and combinations, in hot compost piles," interpreted here to mean when we are close and tight and stay engaged rather than turning away, we might produce fertile soil – we might transform dramatically, and in a way which is of the Earth. And, she writes, we are "situated, someplace and not noplac, entangled and worldly." If we attempt to isolate ourselves as a species, then we "succumb to despair or to hope, and neither is a sensible attitude" (p. 4). My unnerved emotions are captured and comforted by this perspective, and Haraway's writing finds resonances in *The Rescue Project* contributors, who are all opting to stay with the trouble.

Later, I explore Haraway in more depth as I look at her work concerning multispecies ethnography. For now, I want to consider the multiples of "someplace" where we might find ourselves closely entangled – where we observe the local impact of the hyperobject of global warming, how we come to notice the changes occurring, and where that intimacy that Morton describes, might be found.

Attunements

In this section, I discuss variations on a theme of multispecies relations, or attunements, expanding the framework beyond the initial sonic application of the word previewed in the previous chapter, and I draw on various scholarships to support a series of categories of attunement arising out of the analysis of *The Rescue Project* data. Various scholars have considered attunement in the environmental context, from Nagatomo (1992), who writes of attunement broadly as a means to overcome the mind-body dichotomy, to Despret (2013), who identifies attunement as a reciprocal "undoing and redoing" with another (p. 57). Brigstocke and Noorani (2016) call attunements an embodiment, that is, "embodied ways of tracking emotions or affects," a "radical interconnectedness" (p. 3). They make the point that attunement requires attending to places of interconnection. Still, care should be taken not simply to regard attunement

purely as harmonious relations: attunement should decentre the human and respond to and acknowledge difference, without attempting to absorb the other into homogeneity (p. 5).

As part of building a framework specifically to support the data analysis, I focus on understandings of more-than-human copresencing in Australian Indigenous belief systems. Australian First Peoples' cosmology (Rose, 2004; Gay'wu Group of Women et al., 2019; Pascoe, 2014; Yunkaporta, 2019) is deeply complex, enmeshed, and encompassing. While I provide a brief overview in this chapter, it is not possible to give that cosmology its due in any one piece of research, especially in research by a non-Indigenous scholar such as myself. While lacking my own Indigenous worldview but still able to learn from others', I consider how non-Indigenous environmental communicators might frame a re-emplacing amongst Earth-others through deep, attuning resonances. In this section, I also introduce a new term for emplaced, earthly relations: *homeground*.

Gaia and the Network – Kinships

Part of close relations with particular places is in the relationality formed between constituent elements of that place. As Lovelock indicated, “the entire surface of the earth is a self-regulating entity,” which he called *Gaia* (Lovelock, 2000, p. ix). He reminds his readers that the living microorganisms that form the basis of that entity are responsible for everything, from the existence of the ocean to the dirt or soil in which we live, right down to our own bodies. These are the networks in which we are all players or actors (Latour, 1996), and these networks are brought powerfully to bear in the cascade of climate crisis consequences playing out globally (Latour, 2017), as much as in our individual lives.

Latour's Actor Network Theory describes the relationships amongst all things as an interconnected, multidimensional networks and their actor components – whether human or more-than-human (Latour, 1996). Networks are “fibrous, thread-like, wiry, stringy, ropy, capillary” (Latour, 1996, p. 370) – organic adjectives that imply strength in unity, even if individual strands might be weak. Related theorists of new materialism, such as Haraway (2016), and

environmental communication, such as Abram (1996), urge a return to acknowledging the human locus as a constituent part of the more-than-human world. They acknowledge these networks and defy the mind-body split of the enlightenment (Plumwood, 2008), and with it, the human-centredness of the Anthropocene. This is a rational, materialist response (Braidotti, 2016), drawing on theories of “situated knowledge” (Harding, 2016; Haraway, 1988). This is materialist as opposed to materialism – celebrating not material goods, but rather, the physicality of earth, or *zoe*. Derived from the Greek word for life (Oxford English Dictionary), *zoe*, here, is the power of the life force surging through the world, including humans within the world, and it acts as a counterforce to the instrumentalist matrix of advanced capitalism (Braidotti, 2016, p. 686). New materialists are not only returning to the material, earthly world but also re-becoming earth and its constant process of renewal and decay – or “composting” (Haraway, 2016), situating themselves from the viewpoint of that which is less known than the self. This figure of composting is both horizontal and vertical, layered and deep-remembering. As Lovelock’s Gaia reminds us, human matter comprises the same substance as all other organic and inorganic compounds. Over time, we enact our transformations out of, amongst, and back into the earth.

Thus, Milstein and Kroløkke (2012), drawing on Cramer and Foss, write of “intersubjectivity as a strategy” to open the human experience to “mystery and possibility” (p. 86). Cramer and Foss (2009) suggest “the suspension of solely human will,” where humans partner with the earth in understanding and grounded action (p. 300). This then situates our composting, earthly relations in a moment in time, rich with potential for a kind of magic. Milstein (2011) has also called this partnership “consubstantiality” (p. 10) – with a potential for empathetic anthropomorphism or “animalcentric anthropomorphism” (de Waal, 2001), of, in which a human attempts to position themselves in an animal’s perspective, rather than project human intention onto an animal being. Haraway (2016) asks if, instead of thinking for, we should think as, or perhaps think with, pressing forward, taking up the baton, enacting curiosity, fabulating even, to induce transformations in us that allow the world to be in its “ongoingness” (p.

132). Here we can see how storytelling and restorying, in their inventiveness and ability to conjure and evoke, has a significant role to play.

It is worth bearing in mind that relations with the more-than-human need not be only with the sentient, as Tsing (2012) writes. Mushrooms, for example, are also a companion species, which model a relationship that is both domestic and wild. The mushrooms we eat from the supermarket are no different from those growing in the wild and are neither subjected to the extremes of “domestic control” or ennobled through gene bank preservation. But, even as we farm and eat them, their original “multi-species landscapes are destroyed” (p. 144). These are “oddkin” (Haraway, 2016, p. 4) but kin nonetheless.

So, how do these reconnected, more considerate, and more spiritual earthly relations unfold, and how should we nurture and value them? In the next section, I consider environmental communication scholarship around multispecies relationships, kinships, and consubstantiality. I also consider how an inherent human tendency toward otherwise uncomfortable anthropomorphism (projection of human characteristics onto animals) might become animalcentric, or indeed plant- or place-centric, and offer a means to further grow our healthy multispecies engagements.

Because most of *The Rescue Project* contributions relate to either a landcare rescue or animal rescue with its subsequent relationality, I also make this distinction in the following sections. Here I consider, in two separate categories, earth-centred kinships that are primarily with place, and earth-centred kinships that are primarily with sentient beings, while also acknowledging their intrinsic, overlapping, more-than-human mutuality.

Place-kin

The ecological self, while reaching out to the cosmos, is grounded in particular places (Rose, 2002). We are emplaced through developing multisensory relations with loved sites over time: and through this process, particular places become a part of our body memory. Multispecies ethnographer Deborah Bird Rose and others refer to this affect as consubstantiality (Rose, 2002, p. 312; Milstein, 2011). In *The Rescue Project*, I call these relationships *place-kin*.

Place attachment scholarship addresses this concept through various frameworks.

The term *place attachment* is referenced in almost all branches of the social sciences but lacks coherence across disciplines (Lewicka 2011; Heise, 2008). The concept is problematic for perpetuating the mind/body binary, implying the place as an object and the passive receiver of human attachment. Still, the scholarship remains useful, particularly to draw into consideration care and its relationship to rescue. As Pratt (2016) observes: “Matters of care are a means of tending to the attachments and commitments that are a necessary part of relating” (p. 13) and so addressing the scholarship of place attachment adds nuance to notions of care.

Place attachment has a role in the broad, Western discipline of phenomenology and is found in, amongst others, the work of Heise, Lewicka, and Seamon. Similar, the Australian First Nations’ cultural matrix known as Country philosophically describes complex place relations, in a body of scholarship by Gay’wu Group of Women et al. (2019), Rose (1999, 2002, 2004, 2008), Pascoe (2007, 2014, 2018), Birch (2020), Barwick (1989) and Marett (2005). Further, place relations or place-kinships have clear relevance for the more-than-human, alongside a grounding in the multisensory. Van Dooren (2014) is part of an academic development that emphasises more-than-human places of meaning: “these other living beings constitute their worlds as places richly meaningful, historical, and storied” (2014, p. 67). Animals such as little penguins, for example, are philopatric, meaning they return to particular sites (OED). Riley (1992) points out that “ethology is rich with description of spatial patterns amongst animals” (p. 22) and this becomes important for later discussions around multispecies relations. Meanwhile, Yong (2018) tells the story of how translocated animals struggle to migrate – they do not understand the ancestral journeying patterns of their forebears. Noske (1989) states that animal (her term) constructions of their place in the world may well be different from that of humans but are “no less real” (pp. 157-158). This scholarship, and more, raises a fundamental concern around phenomenology’s historical inclination to focus on human consciousness (Lestelle et al., 2014, pp. 134; 138).

In this present exegesis, I focus on relations-in-place resulting from earth-centred custodial actions, whether collective or individual. In Australia, this is expressed most profoundly through First Peoples' cultural practices of at least 65,000 years (Clarkson et al., 2017). This connection to place is elemental. The term Country is reflected across Australian First Peoples language groups, as described by Rose (2004), who learned while walking through Jessie Wirrpa's Country. Place relations are deeply embedded in threads of understanding that flowed to and from landscape to human-in-landscape: "the world was always talking about itself, and Jessie was a skilled listener and observer" (p. 97). Rose writes that for Jessie and others of the Ngaliwurru and Nungali Nations of the Victoria River District in the Northern Territory living in a complex network of obligation: "life is an ever emergent becoming, embodied in the ephemeral beings whose work is to keep life happening": the spiritual relationship is expressed through "the everyday work of the world" (p. 97).

But these earthly relations have been and remain brutally disrupted by British colonists. Possession and dispossession were the invaders' tools, as they forced themselves onto Australian Indigenous people and Country (Birch, 2020). The early colonial white explorers reflected "the ambition of every British man in the colony" to grab land. This land was regarded as passive, waiting to be possessed and made use of (Pascoe, 2018, p. 204/205). There can be no kinship entanglement with land, and Earth-others regarded instrumentally, and believed to be owned. Thus, Indigenous scholars such as Birch (2020) press non-Indigenous people to move urgently (p. 149) to reconsider the more-than-human world as more than an instrumental possession. The colonial abuse of Country and First Nations people is now regularly included in scholarly reflection of Australian histories, although this is an ongoing project (Rolls, 1984; Plumwood, 2002; Sinclair, 2013; Gay'wu Group of Women et al., 2019; Birch, 2020).

Meanwhile, the complex and devastating consequences of these abuses continue to play out, as evidenced in every facet of contemporary Australian sociopolitical contracts. Is it possible, or appropriate then, to reflect, in a general way, on the nature of place commitment in an invaded and colonised continent? But Birch (2020) has issued the invitation.

To take up this invitation, I have to consider various risks, aside from the ever-present dangers of cultural appropriation (Puig de la Bella Casa, 2012). Plumwood, for example, warns that elevating a particular attachment to one place can result in an emphasis of self and one's beloved space above other "shadow places" – the abused, exploited and destitute places, such as mining grounds, which support the lifestyles of instrumentalist cultures (Plumwood, 2008; Weir, 2017; 2019). In addition, a recurring symptom of the rise of the far-right in response to current global crises (Forchtner, 2019) is essentialism, leading to nationalism (Heise, 2008; Harvey, 1996; Gaard, 2011). Shamai (1991) provides a complex arrangement to measure sense of place. He suggests three types of increasing strengths of sense of place, which increase from place belonging through place attachment, to place commitment – this last can take an extreme form, where the place attached individual is willing to die for place (p. 349). Lewicka (2011) describes other categories of place connectivity: physical – founded in location – social, and psychological – such as the connectedness memory elicits (p. 222). These arguments are complex, and the detail lies beyond the scope of this research, but are acknowledged here to support how a discussion in Chapter 8 on how the rescuers in my data resist such framings and inhabit their beloved places in porous ways.

In amongst various related environment and climate traumas perpetrated around the globe, some Western scholars have wrestled with the place attachment problem. They argue for a change in thinking, which includes an understanding and adaptation of Indigenous knowing, being, and doing, sometimes called traditional ecological knowledges (Plumwood, 2010; Haraway, 2016; Abram, 1996). Traditional ecological knowledge approaches open "the door to a world in which we can begin to negotiate life membership of an ecological community of kindred beings" (Plumwood, 2010, p. 121). In *The Rescue Project*, grounded experiences reflect individuals driven to make the changes Plumwood describes: here is evidence that consubstantiality is, in some quarters, a desired and lived experience.

Within these complex framings, convict and colonial Australians and their descendants also developed and expressed place affections. For example, a shifting aesthetic positioning to Australian landscapes is revealed throughout

colonisation through art and writing and in the previously described development of ecological consciousness (Robin, 1994). Bonyhady (2003) described the early settlers' valuing of the landscape as being demonstrated in their desire to preserve it, and an aesthetic of care was articulated by Turner, president of the Save the Dandenongs League in Victoria in the 1950s and 1960s. Turner used a radio broadcast to urge citizens to "encourage your local shire to take more interest in things like Beethoven's sonatas, Shakespeare's plays or a grove of Manna gums with Greenhood orchids" (in Robin, 1994, p. 54). As discussed earlier, Turner describes how time in the bush causes humans to "fall in love with parts of it" (p. 56). Thus, a sense of place-kin can grow through visitation as much as by dwelling there. As discussed, it was the "force of the urban push" (p. 14) nearly 400 kilometres away, which activated the Little Desert campaign, and this provides supporting evidence that restorying of place commitment and care can prove resonant for those far from the physical locus of the space, as we will later see for some of *The Rescue Project* contributors. Besides spatial proximity, time spans of continued commitment help build relations-in-place, both for individuals and communities (Low & Altman, 1992, p. 7). These histories matter to future earthly custodial relations.

Place-kin relationality has a corollary in the psychological impacts of place destruction and place dislocation or detachment.³³ Place – in the form of homelands, monuments, and sacred sites can be an anchorage, as Kearney (2016) writes. Thus, destroying landscapes is an act of psychological violence which brings about a state of chaos, "for place is one part of the creative expression of life and meaning, revealing the relational universe in which human life exists and holds strong" (p. 4). While Kearney focuses on the human here, the more-than-human also suffers the trauma of place destruction and dislocation. The intergenerational impact of this damage resonates through more-than-human ecologies, Indigenous and non-Indigenous generations in

³³ Place detachment or dislocation is common globally – many people do not inhabit their traditional lands, whether by choice, by dislocation or through generational movement (Snyder, 2013, p. 44-45). The place-detached include seasonal migrants, retirees who live between homes (in Australia often referred to as grey nomads), and inveterate travellers (Lewicka, 2011).

Australia, with just one of many examples being Maralinga, Pitjantjatjara Country, and the site of atomic bomb testing during 1956-63 (Boylan et al., 2015).

Critically, as I attempt in this research to listen to the voice of the world, McAuley (2006) reminds me that place is not a passive receiver of attention but has its own role to play. Writing in the context of location-based performance, she states:

space can no longer be taken for granted as simply the background to, or neutral container for, actions, events and experiences but has to be seen as a dynamic player, requiring detailed analysis of its role in the complex weave linking society, culture and history (p. 15).

For Heise (2008), these contradictions have become somewhat of a stalemate between a:

conceptualization of national identity as either an oppressive hegemonic discourse or a tool for resistance to global imperialism, and of local identity as either an essentialist myth or a promising site of struggle against both national and global domination" (p. 7).

Heise suggests that a unifying theory is unachievable, and the only way to proceed is to consider each instance case by case. In this context, storytelling can assist, and Van Dooren points out that place-making is partly done through the telling of stories. It is storytelling, inherently case by case, "in which places are interwoven with and embedded in broader histories and systems of meaning" and thus creates place attachment, or "place-making" (Van Dooren, 2014, p. 67). *The Rescue Project* is an experiment in a case-by-case analysis of place-commitment, place-making, and relations-in-place.

Relationships to Country and Defining Homeground

How should we refer to the more-than-human world, and how do we name our relationality in this custodial interdependency? Puig de la Bellacasa calls this "thinking with care" (2012, p. 208). Naming and describing our relationality remains an interesting point of communication, as scholars navigate a return to

thinking with care, rejecting binary thinking and therefore rejecting colonising instrumentality (Puig de la Bellacasa, 2012). This relationality is a theme that continues through the remainder of this chapter in a variety of expressions and reappears in the analysis chapters, so there is value in exploring the language to represent it.

Rigby (2006) has elegantly unpacked various trends to rename that which instrumentally-oriented humans are part of but have culturally and consciously separated themselves from: what has been called nature, environment, ecology, and natureculture (Latour, 1993, p. 7), amongst other terms. Rigby examines the various meanings and intentions of the word “nature,” tracing the way humans have distinguished themselves from the other-than-human all the way back to the Mesopotamians as they described the salination of their farming land, and noted, in their poetry, the boundaries of town, cultivated land, and the wild (para. 12).

I will shortly define *hometown*, a term I use to refer to a particular kind of place-relation. *Hometown* is home to the human and the more-than-human; ground is that which we all walk upon and that which grounds us in and on a place. But first, I need to reflect, through consideration of a number of Indigenous scholars and allies, that Australian First Nations language groups already have a term for that belonging to the land.

There were two primary interview subjects on the Atherton Tablelands research site who did identify as Indigenous, but the majority of participants in *The Rescue Project* did not self-identify as such, and nor do I, as researcher. However, I turn now to Indigenous frames to support and engage with the worldview of the Indigenous participants. I also turn to Indigenous frames to acknowledge the critical relevance they bear concerning the ecocentric thinking that all humans should embrace, to have a hope of staying with the trouble of the climate crisis. Finally, despite, and perhaps because of, not having Indigeneity myself, I hold that it is not appropriate, or indeed possible, to write or speak of relationality with the more-than-human in Australia without paying meaningful respect to the vitality, in the broadest sense, of Australian First Nations ways of knowing, being and doing. These bring this land into existence and maintain it. This relationality is called Country.

Country is written either capitalised or in lower case – and I follow the Narragunnawali terminology guide and the Reconciliation Australia guide in capitalising the word, although Rose (2004) does not. Country is written without a definite article, and Troy suggests it derives from an Irish use of the term that reflects not a nation but an ecology or landscape to which you might belong (Troy, personal communication, May 26, 2020).

Australia holds over 500 Indigenous nations, and for each, Country encompasses many things (Horton, in AIATSIS, 1996). Country is more than the land walked upon; it is every element of existence. Language, culture, and Country are living, interconnected things, and song and storying are integral for knowing Country:

many peoples, many languages, many Aboriginal nations. To talk of Country means not just land, but also the waters, the people, the winds, animals, plants, stories, songs and feelings, everything that becomes together to make up place. (Gay'wu Group of Women et al., p. x, 2019)

The first written documentation that begins to hint at the four-dimensional nature of the First Nations matrix of Country appeared in 1834. Arthur (1996) quotes an unknown source drawn from the respected Tasmanian historian Norman Plomley:

The gum trees they claim as theirs and call them countrymen. The stringybark trees the Brune call theirs, as being the countrymen, the peppermint the Cape Portland call theirs, and the Swanport claim the honeysuckle. Thus, if the natives of Oyster Bay spear the trees of another native they are much annoyed and go and pull them out (recounted in Arthur, 1996, p. 122).

Rose (2004) describes Country as a matrix (p. 153) for Australian First Peoples. Country is both one and many across the continent, with different language and clan groups each having their own Country for which they hold custodial responsibility: “In country there is no nature/culture divide; one could say that it is all culture, but that misses the more fundamental point that country is primarily a system of pattern, connection and action” (Rose, 2013b).

Yunkaporta (2019), writing from the Apalech Clan of Western Cape York, illuminates how Country and humans connect. Humans are a custodial species with one responsibility: “This is why we’re here. We look after things on the earth and in the sky and the places in between” (p. 109). Country is interwoven in every aspect of contemporary First Peoples’ life – including, essentially for this research, storytelling, the means by which these relations are understood and communicated (Rose, 2004; Yunkaporta, 2019; Gay’wu Group of Women et al., 2019). For the Yolŋu, and the authors that make up the Gay’wu Group of Women, this is articulated, reciprocal belonging as songspirals: “We sing to the land, sing about the land. We are that land. It sings to us” (Gay’wu Group of Women et al., p. xvi, 2019).

Different Countries belonging to different groups have relationships to one another, and there is reciprocity and porosity, an essential reflection in light of Western hard territorial borders. Country is both time and space, with time folding, overlapping, and doubling back on itself and spaces connected through time to themselves (Rose, 2004; Yunkaporta, 2019; Pascoe, 2014). Country relations are not monolithic: Indigenous Australian nations each have unique and profound custodial relations that are tens of thousands of years old. These cannot be replicated by one from another culture, particularly from colonising, instrumentalist cultures. But Indigenous relational knowing, being, and doing is critical during climate crises for non-Indigenous people to embrace and learn from (Milgin et al., 2020; Birch, 2020).

Further, the responsibility of restorative custodial care cannot be demanded solely of Indigenous Australians. Senior Wangan and Jagalingou elder Adrian Burragubba has called for a collaborative approach (Burragubba, in Birch 2018). Thus, I feel there is a need for a term for the subject of a custodial relationship that does not claim Indigeneity; that is, a term that acknowledges significantly less integrated relations with deep time and practice, but relations nonetheless founded in humble (Abram et al., 2020) care and sense of place. What is the term for places non-Indigenous Australians and global citizens have loving, caring relationships with, that we feel part of and responsible to, that we listen to and hear? The term I settled on is *homeground*.

Definition 4: Homeground

To describe and acknowledge more-than-human relationships between humans who have no claim to the matrix of Indigenous Country but still feel custodial care for place, I propose the term *homeground*. *Homeground* is intended to de-binary the human/more-than-human through returning the individual to their custodial earth and acknowledge relational, caring attention and labour. While I apply homeground in the case of this present Australian research, homeground relations can be found globally.

In popular terminology and academic literature, homeground is most regularly used in a sporting context across English-speaking countries as the description of the local playing fields of a sports team (Brown et al., 2002). In a brief survey of academic literature, I found the words “home ground” used sporadically and colloquially, but it has not been defined by a particular discipline. Lopez and Gwartney (2011) use the term as the title for a book collecting American terms for landscape features formed over time by geological or biological processes. In the collection, Lopez and Gwartney document many, rarely used, terms for landscape which call attention to place in a way they suggest is not recognised by scholars so much as by poets who “recognise something emotive abides in the land” (Lopez & Gwartney, 2011, p. xviii). They invoke listening/hearing as one way of coming to know place, scent, also, and they refer to that moment in time when a feeling coalesces that the place we know is no longer outside us but a part of us, and we of it (p. xviii). What Lopez and Gwartney do not do is define the term “homeground” itself.

In this exegesis, I define and use homeground as a means to describe and acknowledge an earthly relationality – a feeling of custodial care for and rootedness into particular more-than-human ecosystems, with associated obligations and entangled connections. I provide it for those who do not already possess an intrinsic belonging to Country in an Australian First Peoples sense. I consider this term for the separate implications of each word: ground is for grounding – to be grounded, to walk on the ground, to be rooted in the ground. Home – to feel embraced by place, belong to it, and feel comforted and secure in a particular location on the Earth (Eliade, 1959; Bachelard, 1994). The feeling

of belonging provides the boundaries – although what belonging feels like can change. The busy village down the street might still be homeground, but of a different kind to the garden behind your house, or the small park with the particular eucalyptus tree full of birds, just around the corner.

To have bodily embeddedness in place: to have feet which automatically know to step over that tree root; to have eyes that instinctively glance to the left or right to check in with the resident echidna; to greet the local flock of corellas as they fly through just before dusk – these are acts of being on homeground. This place-kinship affects physicality and psychology. Rose (2002), drawing on Bakhtin's thinking around the grotesque body, writes: "The emplaced ecological self is permeable: place penetrates the body, and the body slips into place" (p. 312). We share ourselves with the earthly world, too, our skin flakes, hair, sweat, our excreta. We are consumed by microbes even as we live (Abram et al., 2020, p. 6): together, we are a holobiont.³⁴ We live in the earth rather than on it (Abram, 2010, pp. 109-110). We are entangled with it (Haraway, 2016).

But there can be cross-generational challenges to homegrounds. In Ethiopia, for example, as younger generations come to see more-than-human others as economic resources, even as Gedeo elders practice their agroforestry in balance with the ecosystem (Regassa Debelo et al., 2017), and homegrounds are being fragmented in Oman, as village communities transition from mutual relations to dualistic ones (Alhinai & Milstein, 2019).

But even as exploitive relationships might be ambiguous, for example, with land that is assaulted for industrial farming purposes, there can still be a homeground connection that reflects embodied place attachment and emplacement (Rose, 2002). This kinship is permeable. "The country "gets under the skin" or "gets into the blood"; people become "married to" their country" (p. 313), and an exchange of substances takes place – sweat, urine, blood, dust – but also stories, handed down through generations and told again and again as

³⁴ There are some 200g of microbial cells in the average 70 kilogram human body, according to Sender et al. (2016, p. 11), but the numbers of microbes to human cells are approximately equal, and these are contained mostly in the colon, and the skin. These assemblages of interdwelling living beings, hosts and their microbial populations, are called a holobiont.

feet walk familiar ground. Bodies and ground are rubbed together and through one another. Descartes' (1999) mind/body binary split decomposes into the soil.

Animal-kin, Plant-kin

The Rescue Project contributors expressed no anxiety at this daily mutuality with the dirt and bodily fluids encountered in caring work, as I discuss further in the analysis chapters to come. They demonstrate that, as individuals, humans are far from impermeable, bounded structures (Alaimo, 2008; Milstein, 2008, p. 5): as land rehabilitators, soil and microbes enter our bodies and as animal carers, they are down and dirty with the creatures and all their excretions. Rather, their work is a kind of active copresencing, or ways of being with others, according to Greenhough and Roe (2010). This active copresencing opens awareness to those who do not speak the same language, cultivating sensitivity through physical and somatic presence (p. 44). Smuts' work with intersubjectivity (2001) refines this attunement, as she writes of animal-human relations that manifest at different intensities of feeling (or affect). These levels are derived from her longstanding research in which she develops relationships with individual baboons and chimpanzees, and experiences remarkable copresencing encounters. At the highest levels, she describes, there is a sense of "‘someone home’, someone so like ourselves in their essence that we can co-create a shared reality as equals" (p. 308). These differing levels of cross-species relations Smuts calls intersubjectivity – indicative of agency from both parties without coercion – whereby the sense of two separate beings dissolves, and the idea of relationship becomes paradoxical at the closest, most intense level, given the mutuality and merging of consciousness. While I hesitate to join Smuts in assigning a numerical value to these differing levels of intensity and would suggest that participants might fall in and out of these levels according to context, this is a description of intersubjective relations that applies to the contributions to *The Rescue Project*, and those to whom it applies, I call *animal-kin*.

However, as scholars seek to examine and crack open the human/more-than-human divide (Alaimo, 2009; Haraway, 2016; Milstein, 2011; Sowards, 2006; Tsing, 2012), I find myself fretful. As the beneficiary of a recently colonised and

unceded continent, I am acutely conscious of the human tendency for colonisation and appropriation of all kinds – socially, culturally, as well as in terms of homegrounds. I feel concerned to speak up for human, and more-than-human, others whose lives I cannot imagine inhabiting (Puig de la Bellacasa, 2012, p. 208/209). But I worry about entangling to the point of projecting my human emotions onto my animal companions, thus further colonising that which is different to me (Nimmo, 2015, pp. 14-15). Abram (1996) reminds us “we cannot as humans, precisely experience the living sensations of another form” (p. 14). So how could I presume to enter Von Uexküll’s *Umwelt*, the perceived and surrounding world (Schroer, 2021, p. 132) of another sentient being, and how could I assume that *Umwelt* is the same as mine, projecting my feelings onto my animal companions? Perhaps this resistance is limiting, but it is also deeply ingrained. Anthropocentric anthropomorphism might, without appropriate observance, slip from “thinking from” into “thinking for”: another form of colonisation (Puig de la Bellacasa, 2012, p. 208). Could calls for thinking with, or from, the more-than-human demand engagement the more-than-human do not desire? Puig de la Bellacasa (2012) warns against the fetishizing of those on the margins; warns of the risks of appropriating those for whom we care, and advises orientating ourselves according to the care required rather than the care we wish to provide (pp. 208/209).

On the other hand, proscribing anthropomorphism as “a disparaging accusation of intellectual naivety, self-indulgence, superstition or infantilism... to be scrupulously avoided by anyone who considered themselves rational and sensible” (Nimmo, 2016, p. 15) was made use of during the scientific revolution to centre the human and remove any possibility of consciousness from animal beings. Thus, using reason to ease their objectification and consequent instrumentalisation. This, I now realise, is the rationale that informed my hesitancy.

But is there a role for empathetic anthropomorphism (Arnold et al., 2021, p. 135): for respectfully communicating the intrinsic worth of the more-than-human to those who might not otherwise ascribe it? Arnold et al. describe Indigenous Yuin man, Uncle Max Dulumunmun Harrison, who sees trees as his family. Uncle Max articulates an epistemology that regards trees and humans as

reciprocally related, no different to human relations (p. 135).

Further, anthropomorphism has played a critical role in creative and popular arts from the ancient Greeks to Disney (de Waal, 1999). Thinking from a more-than-human standpoint is difficult, for Westernised humans, without making some kind of assumptive projection. But Abram offers reassurance – he suggests our interior world, which we habitually project onto animals, comes from the planet in the first place. This inner world was “originally borrowed from the moody, capricious earth itself,” borrowed from our “ancestral, animal experience” (Abram, 2011, p. 153). Is anthropomorphising an iterative, reflexive practice after all? The answer may lie in considering childhood relationships with the more-than-human.

Childhood embraces a more-than-human orientation with unselfconscious ease when our sympathies and games align us with animals and plants over the mysteries of adulthood (Shepherd, 1997; Miller, 2011; 2013). For children, this is a mimetic connection. Plant and animal beings have magical power and meaning in most human cultures during this time, and this connectivity is a precursor to the development of the understanding of metaphor, and through that, poetry (Shepherd, 1997). The human child intrinsically knows that other animals understand them and their feelings, that trees embrace and hold them. These beliefs do not entirely depart post-adolescence, even in instrumentalist cultures, but they may retreat to the shadows (Shepard, 1997; Miller 2011; 2013). Thus, in adulthood, animal-centred anthropomorphism is one way individuals in such cultures might maintain a connection with their more deeply held childhood experiences of the more-than-human.³⁵

Puig de la Bellacasa (2012), drawing on Harding and Hartsock, gives me permission to think in an animalcentric way, through standpoint theory: “thinking from marginalised experiences could be *better* knowledge and help cultivate

³⁵ Critical to developing a recognition of human interconnectedness with the more-than-human is enabling children to build relationships with animals, to play alongside, to imitate, to become them – and like Wordsworth (Chawla 2002) it was inherent memories of pre-adult relations with the non-human world that I drew upon in previous citizen storytelling projects *Birdland* (Miller 2011) and *Trees I’ve Loved* (Miller 2013).

alternative epistemologies that blur dominant dualisms” (p. 208). Locating this research amongst these positions, I feel encouraged to think laterally across disciplines and human earthly relations and to locate myself in my research as proactively concerned with storytelling around acts of care and rescue. It is critical to be part of the action.

This attunement (again), this sympathetic magic, is related to animism (Plumwood, 2010). Harvey (2005) describes it this way: “the world is full of persons, only some of whom are human, and that life is always lived in relationship with others” (p. xi), and animists recognise their mutuality with the other-than-human. This mutuality is nowhere more evident in Australia than in an overarching First Peoples’ notion of custodial kinship – the obligation which rests on every being and object in the landscape because they are related (Rose, 2013a, 2013b): through blood, time, various incarnations and transubstantial transformations – and through songline (Gay’wu Group of Women et al., 2019).

Rose (1999) describes this deep connectedness in the world of Jessie Wirrpa – whose way of moving through her Country was “an ethic of intersubjective attention in a sentient world...” (p. 100). Living things paying attention to one another enables life to continue:

Mutual care is neither infinitely obligatory, nor is it diffuse and undifferentiated. The structure of mutual care is local and bounded; Dreaming tracks cross-cut and overlap each other, countries are replicated and care is recursive (p. 100).

As Rose observes here, walking, observing, being with, and *telling stories about*, actually manifests the beings – human and more-than-human into the world. Here is a space-making that is not grandly architectural but rather humble, care-full, and custodial.

Words for Describing our Quiet Relations

So, how can we recognise, refine, and better refer to the “substantial interconnections between human corporeality and the more-than-human world”? Alaimo (2009, p. 23). Milstein (2011) writes of co-presencing, and inter-

subjectivity as tourists and tourism operators engage with orcas: the grand, awe-inspiring black and white oceanic mammals – her own quickening pulse as the animals materialised, and of the deliberate quiet as operators allowed tourists to sit with their presence (Milstein, in Milstein & Kroløkke, 2012, p. 88). Milstein acknowledges the intensity of the moment – its parallel with the religious sublime – albeit marketed in a thoroughly 21st century way (p. 85). The sublime of the encounter is not dissimilar to the long history of the American sublime movement in art and writing, inspired by the intimidating, god-like ocularcentric power of the enormity of mountains, deserts, and the overarching sky. This movement was captured by artists like William Faulkner and Ansel Adams, who placed their subjects' lives in the shadow of these landscapes (Bloom, 2015, Allen & Handley, 2018), although less frequently told is the alteration of the scene to fit the formula, as when the artist Eadweard Muybridge cut down trees to achieve the best aspect for his photography (Oravec, 2014, p. 60). The sublime here is sentimental, constructed, static in its suspension outside time and change (Alaimo, 2008, p. 239). It is frequently used in environmental “preservationist” causes that are nonetheless exploitive and apolitical (Oravec, 2014, pp. 70-71). Oravec suggests the sublime implies a power of nature that cannot be damaged by human activity (p. 72) but also a nature that is held at a visual distance.

Importantly, however, the sublime also conjures an affect of insignificance (Milstein, 2011, p. 499) and inspires humility in the immensity and complexity of the ecological world. Abram (1996, 2011) also makes use of a personal expression of the intimate impact of the natural sublime – his mystical articulation of consubstantiation with this world evokes archetypal human and more-than-human entwinings, reminiscent of Greek mythology and pre-monotheistic spiritualities. I suggest *The Rescue Project* contributors express at times a similar sublime in an acknowledgment of both awe and gratitude, along with a quiet honouring. The sublime experience of these worlds does not, in their case, lead to a singular, grandiose, and temporally static expression but can be close and small, as the contributed stories indicate. This more earthly sublime might be useful for its rebuttal of anthropocentrism, and for returning humans to more proportional relations.

New Materialist scholar Stacy Alaimo (2008) calls this inseparability “trans-corporeality” (p. 237) – in which there is no separation of human “fleshiness” (p. 238) from the more-than-human world. Trans-corporeality is both a time and space mode of being with the world and a theoretical positioning in which there is no stasis and many productive possibilities. If the human body is always ecocultural, that is, culturally always in relations within the more-than-human world; if it is trans-corporeal rather than just corporeal, then nature can no longer be regarded as purely a sublime and instrumentalist backdrop on which human action is played out (p 238). Trans-corporeality addresses a critical problem – but this is a complicated space: as Alaimo observes, feminist scholarship and environmental scholarship, both focused on the body but in different ways, have only recently come together (p. 237). That both women and the natural world are each viewed instrumentally in patriarchal cultures is not a coincidence. Understanding that women will disproportionately suffer as a result of the environmental crisis (Ergas & York, 2012) is one part of the reason it is critical to challenge a global disconnect from the trans-corporeal fact of our existence. Hypermasculine instrumentalism consumes and obliterates nature, which has been framed as female across both time and cultures. But historically, it has been risky for feminist scholars to draw direct connection between the body of women and the body of nature – to be released from patriarchal knots, the body of woman has had to be considered a-biologically (Alaimo, 2008, p. 237). Nature has been “feminism’s abject,” Alaimo writes, drawing on Kristeva: “That which, by being expelled from the “I,” serves to define the “I” (Alaimo, 2008, p. 237). Rejection of this essentialism in feminist scholarship has been key to women’s emancipation. Meanwhile, current and historic cultural, economic, religious, patriarchal frameworks will see an exponential increase in vulnerability for both the female body and the naturesite across every facet of existence in any pairing of the two spheres. An alliance is therefore complicated and potentially dangerous: but perhaps it is also empowering. Alaimo’s notion of the trans-corporeal allows for and indeed acknowledges vulnerability across the spectrum of humanity, opening up space for a feminist-environmental ethic. The prefix “trans” implies movement, and Alaimo is focusing on epistemologies, moving around and through and joining

together corporeal, feminist and ecological scholarly thinking for political, cultural, philosophical, and ethical reasons.

There is trans-corporeality in the multiple scholarly influences within this exegesis, but there is also material and affectual trans-corporeality in the lives of those in *The Rescue Project*, as I explore in the analysis chapters. Here, demonstrably, “‘nature’ is as close as one’s own skin” (Alaimo, 2008, p. 238), and the idea and fact of this proximity raise the profound problematics of exploitive approaches to the more-than-human world. Through the trans-corporeal lens, we discover we have been exploiting our very selves. Thus, we have to reposition ourselves as Haraway (1996) urges: “The point is to make a difference in the world, to cast our lot for some ways of life and not others. To do that, one must be in the action, be finite and dirty, not transcendent and clean” (p. 36). We must become dirty with the trans-corporeal connections we make with the more-than-human.

Care for the Kin

In this section, I consider aspects of theories of care for place and animal kin to add nuance to considerations of rescue practice. The act of paying attention is one of the ways we can take up our “participation in living systems” according to Rose (1999, p. 99), but she also draws on Levinas, to remind us that care brings about our own consciousness: “subjectivity arrives, so to speak, in the form of a responsibility toward an Other” (Levinas in Rose, 1999, p. 100). As Rose (2004) observes, this is a two-way relationship in that nature “organises relationships” by bringing about change in those who care for it – this is a reciprocal process. The labour is reverential (p. 208).

Kin relationality is intricately linked with acts of care. Rather than the static sublime of a human/wilderness binary, an expression of this link can be found in the Australian First Nations worldview as Rose (1999) describes it, where: “The life of the world is continuously coming into being, and the happening life of the world carries on from generation to generation because living things are connected with and amongst each other, and because they take care of each other” (p. 99). These are Indigenous ways of knowing, being, and doing: and this care for landscape, and things in the landscape, is a continuous

conversation with the more-than-human. The conversation takes the form of walking through landscape, managing its health through acts such as cultural burning, but also through cultural acts like story, song, and calling out to Country. As is the case for Puig de la Bellacasa (2011), for whom caring is “an affective state, a material vital doing, and an ethico-political obligation” (p. 90), Rose (1999) describes these as deliberate acts: “they work within the broader communicative system of country, and they intend to be noticed” (p. 99).

This “vital doing” means exertion is key – contributing actively to the making of the world and is both ethical and political. But Puig de la Bellacasa (2011) makes clear that this does not mean an anthropocentric “being in charge” (p. 98). Instead, a proactive curiosity takes precedence, one in which we refuse to objectify our partner in vital doing (p. 98). In this way, we become entangled with those beings for whom we curiously care. This entanglement applies in grounded practice and scholarly research, across which arenas this research straddles: amongst acts of rescue, storytelling, and scholarly analysis. In all three, personal commitment to genuine, open engagement is essential between individuals and the broader more-than-human world. As an affective, intimate engagement, this storytelling and its analysis, like these acts of rescue, have:

a specific value that shouldn't be dismissed as accessory. It is part of the representation of a matter of care. Troubling the critical distance typical of scholarly work transforms the affective charge of things, challenging our relationship with the 'objects' of research (Puig de la Bellacasa, 2011, p. 98).

But these are challenging times – no less than mass extinction times. As human populations explode and more-than-human populations implode, humans must stay with and fully attend to this moment, here and now. Haraway (2016) calls care in these times an act of the present: we cannot reasonably afford to succumb to forecasting the future or give in to “sublime despair and its politics of sublime indifference” (p. 4). Nonetheless, a part of this care and mode of being is also “making a fuss” – a feminist gesture and one that women are still disparaged for making (p. 131).

But where, and what is the nature of the space in which we enact this care, given the relentless drive of exploitive cultures seeking to profit from the earth? Van Dooren writes of holding space open “for other living beings” (2014, p. 5). He means this figuratively and perhaps literally. As several story contributors do, replanting trees is an act of holding physical space open in this ravaged, troubled land, hoping to fill that space with a simulacrum of habitat satisfactory enough that more-than-human dwellers might return and hopefully, find nourishment.

Haraway makes a point to resist participation in restoration practices per se if the aim of restoration is posited as a return to a former state:

In the face of unrelenting historically specific surplus suffering in companion species knottings, I am not interested in reconciliation or restoration, but I am deeply committed to the more modest possibilities of partial recuperation and getting on together (Haraway, 2016, p. 10).

This is staying with the trouble – walking alongside, being enmeshed, and attempting to aid in some kind of recuperation. Considering the previously mentioned artifice of the notion of a sublime environment that remains preserved in temporal stasis and does not account for the fluidity of ecological ebbs and flows, Haraway’s suspicions bring her instead to something new, something “even beautiful” (p. 10), and at the same time, still is engaged in attentive, nurturing relations.

Humility and Environmental Virtue Ethics

What inclines a human to be open to such consubstantiality? Abram offers an alternative to the Anthropocene (Abram et al. 2020, pp. 8-9). He suggests the Humilicene: a term for our epoch that implies regeneration, empathy, and the mesh of relationality. *The Rescue Project* analysis reveals that the Humilicene is manifested by the contributors in grounded ways. Each rescuer opens their hands in service, to make or grow or to heal, to put aside their anthropocentrism, and humbly extend their thinking and actions to the needs of the rescued. In the analysis chapters, I identify four kinds of ecocentric

humilities, or *ecohumilities* – affective, custodial, geophysical, and animalcentric, but there will be others. In this present section, I discuss supporting literature behind these notions of ecohumility.

In environmental virtue ethics, humility is one framework for ethical approaches in earthly, multispecies relations. Assessing virtue, or vice, in the larger field of virtue ethics has to do with what constitutes the proper responsiveness to enact, or not, the best possible thing at any given moment, that is, to act “in excellent ways” (Sandler, 2013, p. 3). Virtue language is found readily throughout discourses about ecological relations (Wensveen, 2000, p. 5), and Plumwood (1993) calls for the revitalisation of moral concepts and virtue-based ethics that have previously been dismissed as feminine, subjective, and emotional (p. 173). Carson (2011) saw humility and wonder as emotions that preclude any “lust for destruction” (p. 94). Scholars from the relatively new field of environmental virtue ethics suggest that the more-than-human be included in the pursuit of eudaimonia, or human flourishing (Swanton, 2013; Sandler, 2013; Kwall, 2018).

But the dualism of virtue/vice has me concerned and can quickly be called into complexity. One example is the ongoing debate over the culling/killing of introduced species, like the brumbies (feral horses) that cause significant ecological damage across the fragile ecosystem of Australia’s Snowy Mountains. Regarded by some as a cultural icon to be fiercely protected, others see them as a destructive pest species that wipes out indigenous ecosystems.

There is no easy determination as to what constitutes custodial virtue (Menzies, 2019). Implied notions of essential character or disposition (Swanton, 2013; Sandler, 2013) can be problematic for a variety of reasons, including misogynist Judeo-Christian/Abrahamic patriarchal frameworks (Millett, 2016, Chapter 2), which weaponise virtue against women. Thus, in this research, humility, and humbleness are applied to action rather than inherent personal characteristics. In any case, environmental humility merits consideration here since it proves to be so aligned with new materialist approaches to earthly relationships as described above and so significantly present in the current.

Abram (Abram et al., 2020) challenges the term Anthropocene to describe our current era. The human-centric nature of the term reaffirms itself. It is self-fulfilling, successfully indicating unilateral human dominance as clearly revealed through geology. It also leaves no room to consider the more-than-human or look into potentially less exceptionalist ways of being. As such, *Anthropocene* “undermines any gesture of humility” (p. 8). Abram instead proposes that humankind should feel humiliated by what it has done and approach the earth in renewed ways, that is, humility. Thus, Abram’s proposed term for our epoch: Humilicene, or a term he takes from Dougald Hine: “The Humbling” (Abram et al., 2020, p. 9). This new term encases the sensitivity, vulnerability, and reciprocity that comes with being humbled (Abram et al., 2020, p. 10).

The word humbled, or brought down to earth, refers to the consubstantial word humus – of the earth (Pianalto, 2013, p. 137; Abram et al., 2020, p. 9). As Abram points out: “After all, the word ‘human’ is closely cognate with the word ‘humility,’ since both are derived from ‘humus,’ which names the Earth underfoot, the soil” (Abram et al., 2020, p. 9). Contemplating the more-than-human (in particular, in the context of the sublimity of the natural world previously discussed) can serve as a reminder of the relatively small size and relevance of the individual, “one person in an enormous world” (Pianalto, 2013, p. 132). The humble person finds this comforting rather than undermining, frightening, or inspiring anxiety or anger (p. 139-140). Abram (Abram et al., 2020) points out that humility is an appropriate response to the facts of human destruction (p. 9). To humility, I add the further qualifier, ecocentrism. Ecocentrism provides an alternative focus and ecocultural identity to anthropocentrism. It acknowledges the intrinsic value of nature, including humanity (Kortenkamp & Moore, 2001). Ecocentric humility, which I call ecohumility (also implying ecological humility), leads us to ecological consciousness, where we attune through more than the distancing gaze: we do so consubstantially and multisensorially.

Courage

A homeground is a place we know best, and, as we move through it, we might witness a local expression of Puig de la Bellacasa’s (2011) planetary

wounding³⁶, and in doing so, experience Albrecht's solastalgia (2010). Thus, our care manifests in places we feel particularly connected to, and we are therefore particularly affected by grief at its wounding. Earlier in this chapter, I discussed scholarship around learned helplessness in the face of the size of such wicked problems. To act then, to attend to the wound, takes significant courage.

There is little analytical writing around courage in the field of environmental communication – the term is mentioned in passing, and assumed to be understood, and left undefined. In brief, courage is defined as “to be afraid, and to take action all the same” (Moore, 2016, p. 303) and as an energising, motivating emotion (Walker, 2004). Courage is open, questioning, and inviting of change (Plumwood, 2010, p. 32), and “climate courage” is informed by love (Moore, 2016, p. 304). Moore (2016) also regards climate courage as closely related to citizenship – it exponentially increases as citizens form communities and “get started” on the act of care (p. 308).

Courage, like humility, is considered more analytically in the field of virtue ethics and the newer field of environmental virtue ethics, and here again, as with humility, primarily by two scholars, Pianalto and Fredericks, who suggest courage is a neglected virtue in this field (Fredericks, 2014, p. 340).

Pianalto (2012) frames courage in two ways – moral and physical. Courage requires “facing” a challenge, be it an object or a subject. Physical courage involves physical risk – that which is faced is an object or an obstacle, like a wall or a mountain.³⁷ But facing another being is a defining component in moral courage: the subjectivity of the other being recognised and acknowledged. Here courage lies in “facing other persons while upholding some morally motivated cause” (p. 165) – such as actions that risk social punishment or ostracism (Pianalto, 2012; Fredericks, 2014). Milstein (2020) also describes how environmental acts of transgression (or courage) in the face of dominant

³⁶ “Our beautiful planet is sore, and bearable living conditions continue to be inaccessible to many” (Puig de la Bellacasa, 2011, p. 86).

³⁷ According to Pianalto there is no subjectivity in a wall or mountain. New materialist thinkers might take issue with that positioning, and argue that a mountain has, if not subjectivity, rights.

anthropocentric norms lead to the strengthening of ecocentric identity, collectives, and realms (2020, pp. 26-27). The courage of our convictions sustains us against the odds. Fredericks (2014) describes courage as “crucial to the development of an adequate environmental virtue ethics” (p. 340) and, as she suggests, social disapproval increases the risk factor, and therefore the intensity, of ethical acts of environmental courage to a further degree (p. 344). She calls for the demilitarization of courage, and a reframing in the environmental virtue sense, as “nurturing, loving, and humble” (p. 339), and my research supports this reframing (see Chapter 7).

Prompted by *The Rescue Project* data analysis, I wonder how courage might intersect with humility: does humility preclude ethical courage when courage is generally defined as requiring conflict with another (Fredericks, 2014; Pianalto, 2012)? Pianalto (2013) describes being morally courageous as humbling oneself “to an ideal – the value of that ideal justifies the personal risk” (p.144). But courage can be reframed in terms of what a person proactively struggles toward, not only what they struggle against (Rorty, 1986; Pianalto, 2012; Fredericks, 2014): courage that is motivated by working toward a goal³⁸ rather than against a foe, can coexist with humility, be ethically and morally motivated and be more than a simple “evaluation of the action or agent” (Fredericks, 2014, p. 345). Thus, a person in the act of environmental protest is both ethically and physically courageous (Fredericks, 2014), as is the person in the act of environmental rescue.

It's not all Plain Sailing – the Problematics of Courageous Rescue

Courageous rescue in Australia frequently also means the courage to make choices around killing and culling, as I have already mentioned. As custodial rescuers, weighing up life and death is part of reparative, if imperfect care. “We cannot possibly care for everything, not everything can count in a world, not everything is relevant in a world – there is no life without some kind of death,” de la Bellacasa writes (2012, p. 204). If rescuers approach each action with

³⁸ Or, conversely, against dominant destructive practices, towards a more-than-human framework (Milstein Pers. Comms August 4, 2021)

care in mind, they can fully consider the consequences of these relations and act “in excellent ways” (Sandler, 2013, p. 3). So how might this unfold when making a decision that involves the terminating of the life of another Earth-other?

By way of example, the Australian island continent is particularly vulnerable to introduced predator species, given it has so few of its own. Introduced by colonists at various times are numerous animal species: the first being dingoes who arrived 4,000 years ago from Sulawesi (Fillios & Taçon, 2016) and, with European invasion in the late 1700s, came around 3,000 others including dogs, cats, pigs, foxes, rabbits, various farm animals, donkeys, horses, cane toads, as well as plant species: lantana, roses, liquid amber trees, and wheat – to name just four of approximately 27,000 (Caley et al., 2008).

Given the ambivalent nature of rescue's sociocultural and mythological origins discussed earlier, I have to acknowledge that Haraway's staying with the trouble while working toward recuperation can involve difficult choices. To facilitate the fundamental survival of several species native to an ecological community means other members of that community may need to be culled or contained. Haraway (2013) has defended intelligent feral pigs and beloved cats their right to live, despite their damage to human farming environments. But what happens when human-introduced species risk the eradication of whole ecosystems? Environmental rescue in Australia frequently implies weighing up some uncomfortable killing. Long-established lore amongst landcarers I have known, for example, (J. King and S. King, personal communication, 1988-2002) is that if instant eradication of the invasive, vigorously choking, Central/South American lantana bush occurs, those small birds who use the plant to seek shelter from predator species immediately lose that protection (Crome et al., 1994). Careful and gradual removal is the current approach. Thus, even in the wrong biosphere, introduced lantana is on a sliding scale of pest-iness, if you like, depending on its local function.

One of Australia's most controversial acts of rescue is of the fragile alpine ecosystems of the Snowy Mountains, as previously mentioned. Here populations of brumbies boom and bust in Country that did not evolve for their presence. In boom years, when there is feed aplenty, their grazing and hard

hooves cause widespread destruction of various ecosystems, including rare bog communities, water courses, and peatlands, along with their millions of more-than-human inhabitants. In bust years the dry, drought-stricken landscape is even more vulnerable to destruction by hoof. The horses, taking refuge in remote parts of the country and too hard to rescue, die slowly of starvation and thirst. But the culling of the feral horses is always accompanied by community grief and political fury that erupts all over mainstream and local presses as well as social media (Becker et al., 2020). Objections to aerial culling are countered on welfare and cultural grounds by copious scientific evidence of the destruction of vulnerable and rare ecologies – both plant and animal. But the story of the Australian brumby is embedded in Australian settler folklore: the same folklore that fuels certain nationalist sentiments (Albeck-Ripka, 2020). So, each boom is accompanied by public discussion, alternative ‘facts’ (including placing responsibility for habitat degradation at the hooves of feral deer and pigs), and considerable distress.

Van Dooren (2015) calls ecologically-based killing “‘violent care’ that operates with reference to two key criteria: rarity and nativity” (p. 2), and he asks what other criteria might be put in place around conservation decisions. Van Dooren points out that most ecosystems on Earth are now part of cultural landscapes in which conservation must be managed, and social, political, economic, and ecological considerations are so entangled that managers must now engage with all these interconnections to make decisions (pp. 6-7). Through a story of his encounters with researchers of the ‘*alalā*’ or Hawaiian crow, and the competing needs of feral pigs, a local food source, and yet destructive of forest habitat, Van Dooren considers the frictions, ebbs and flows between competing needs. Also exploring such “friction” Tsing (2005) writes that the physics of friction is both disruptive and preventative of smooth travel, but it also gets us where we want to go, in “sticky engagements” (p. 6). The friction of counteracting needs and demands makes conservation a sticky place.

There are frictional (Tsing, 2005) resonances to be found too, with Australian First Nations’ approaches toward feral and native animal killing, where the killing is preferably also purposed toward community nutrition. Rose has long written about “multispecies kin groups” (for example, see 2008, p. 56) based on

her life in Northern Territory communities of Yarralin and Lingara. But what of invasive species – those which are exotic or introduced? Invasive species in Australia have an extra layer of complexity – they threaten Indigenous animal and plant species in many ways yet are still living beings. Clark (2015) asks about the moral status of such animals and plants – should be they stripped of the right to ethical and humane dispatch by virtue of their classification? In some Australian First Nations worldviews, the answer is no. Camp dogs in the Warlpiri nation, amongst others, have found a role in the dreaming (Hayes, 2019), while Rose (2008a) writes that, although imported animals are not embedded in the various Dreaming tracks and stories and do not have sacred sites of their own, these animals remain part of the land, they have worked for the land, and on it, and are part of a larger Creation. Feral donkeys, neither visually signifying a romantic past like the brumbies, nor functional, like sheep, are seen by western farmers as feral, largely because they take the food from another import – cattle. But, for some First Peoples on Country, the donkeys, along with other ferals such as buffalo, now belong to the land: “we can’t push them out any of them” (Rose, 2008a, p. 59). Further, killing without using the meat was wasteful and, so, irresponsible to Country (p. 60). Meanwhile, some First Nations communities see even brumbies as guardians of Country, watching over it and keeping it from going wild (p. 60), in the sense Daly Pulkara implies (Rose, 2004, p. 4).

Synthesis

In this chapter, I have created several pathways through various contexts and themes arising from and supporting my research for *The Rescue Project*. Historical colonial precedents have brought today’s rescuers, working in the human exceptionalist times of the Anthropocene, to a variety of individual and community-led, volunteer rescue practices, from protests to art-making, from homeground care to the volunteer Landcare networks, as well as animal rescue organisations such as WIRES. I have defined rescue, a tenacious cultural trope, in the context of environmental action, as an act of individual or community courage with modest yet meaningful wellbeing outcomes for both rescuer and rescued. But rescuers are individuals and communities working in the face of the tidal waves of the climate crisis and its accompanying paralysis and grief,

and I described manifestations of this grief and its scholarship through a variety of lenses, including paralysis and staying with the trouble. In the second half of this chapter, I moved on to themes that engage with rescue experience. I looked at how rescuers tread that tightrope of knowing dominant human cultural groups are a species out of whack with the rest of the more-than-human world, making a mess, yet also trying to make amends. I considered the theme of attunement with scholarship that describes the interconnected mesh of the more-than-human world. When the tightrope is a mesh of delicate, compost-y web (Haraway; de la Bellacasa), humans might hope to adjust their balance by placing tentative feet on different strands: “for life to be liveable, it needs being fostered. This means care is somehow unavoidable” (Puig de la Bellacasa, 2012, p. 198). I have closely examined attunement as a powerful means to create animal and place kinships and open spaces to care. To that attunement, I added humility as both a theme and an environmental virtue ethic that opens humans to potential consubstantial relations, with all senses attuned. Finally, I discussed the manifestation of courage and what it entails and the complications that make courage so hard to hold in the milieu of the climate and environmental global crises.

Chapter 4: Methods of making

Look at that – four stories mixed in the studio today. I have been from the Capertee forests to Bullio, to Kangaroo Valley, and the country near Tumut. I have listened to wombats snuffling, munching, digging, and scratching. To a call of a southern giant petrel, which Judy Rapley and I hope we can pretend are several original recordings, not just one, repeated. To all manner of forest birds, to digging in the dirt and the voices of planters across a field. To walking on loved ground ... and the soft and intimate voices of storytellers, giving it their all. It's now 4.45 pm in the real world, and my calendar is pinging with things I had planned to do through the day for a break and completely forgot. The sun is sinking. Without realising, my day disappeared into painting with the sounds of the world, much as [Michael Fitzjames](#) painted without, at first realising, the drought. Gretchen Miller, Facebook post, July 9, 2019

This research was conducted under the supervision of members of the Environment and Society Group in the School of Humanities and Languages, Faculty of Arts, Design, and Architecture, at the University of New South Wales. My primary supervisor was Associate Professor Tema Milstein, with Associate Professor Paul Brown as co-supervisor. Professor Judy Motion supervised the early stages of the research. My practice was guided by tenets of community-based participatory action research (Chen et al., 2012): it comprises, firstly, a citizen storytelling digital site and an associated four-episode podcast and, secondly, my close coded interpretations of the themes emerging from the rescuers' communication in their stories and the podcast. The present chapter, Chapter 4, presents the methodologies I adopted for both practice and analysis.

In the first section of this chapter, Citizen Storytelling from the Ground Up, I describe the practicalities of the creative process, including how I developed an industry partnership and invited contributions to the citizen storytelling site and the processes of making the podcast series. The second section, Gathering Methodologies – Theoretical Approaches to Fieldwork, outlines the methodologies supporting arts-based fieldwork research and my interpretation of this practice. These methods are founded on subjective and interactive relationships between listener, producer, contributor, and resulting art objects,

attending to what Barrett (2013) calls experiential knowing. Following a discussion of experiential knowing, I outline three methodologies I employed during the making of *The Rescue Project*: community-based practice action research, narrative inquiry, and co-creative research. Attunement is also a feature of this approach and is achieved through walking and listening methodologies. Finally, I discuss the iterative coding processes initiated during the creative process of data gathering and restorying and completed in the post-production data analysis. All these approaches are made use of to reach the outcomes of the analysis Chapters 5 through 7.

As with the digital space and podcast, my analysis method is multidisciplinary and borrows from the above qualitative research modes of thinking, broadly summed up as “making connections” by Roller and Lavrakas (2013, p. 4). Qualitative methodologies prioritise the importance of context and meaning, research as an instrument, and the absence of absolute truth (p. 4). Where participants are involved, Roller and Lavrakas depict the participant-researcher relationship as working together and sharing the research space. The necessary skill set includes rapport-building and active listening, the flexibility of research design, and “messy analysis” from the “inside out” while also making use of online and mobile technologies (Roller & Lavrakas, 2013, p. 4). Techniques include community-based participatory action research (CBPAR), case studies, narrative inquiry through an inductive lens, and listening and walking methodologies.

Citizen Storytelling from the Ground Up

The following table intends to clearly outline the production process and its timeline to enable a clear review of the process for those looking to conduct a similar project. I follow with a detailed discussion of this process.

Action	Description	Date
Concept design	Decide on call-out topic and wording.	Feb 2018

Search for partner and agree on partnership with Landcare Australia	Approach various organisations with environmentally concerned publics: newspapers, activist NGOs, Landcare Australia.	March-May 2018
Design and build digital site	Discussions with Landcare Australia and supervisors on editorial issues. Liaise with Landcare Australia on digital site function and presentation. Build by Landcare Australia.	Jul-Aug 2018
Seek publics and promote project	Create email list from Landcare websites, organise promotion in Landcare publications and approach other rescue organisations such as WIRES and F.A.W.N.A. Scattergun promotion on various environmentally concerned social media groups. Arrange promotion schedule on Landcare Australia's social media. Write a monthly newsletter to keep contributors updated on new entries and create a sense of community.	Nov 2018-Mar 2019
Pre-moderate incoming stories	Check incoming stories and approve for the page. Encourage contributors with comments and feedback.	Nov 2018-Mar 2019
Curation begins	Code incoming stories, decide on thematics for each of three episodes titled – On Animals; On History, Art and Loving a Tree; and On Homeground.	Dec 2018-Mar 2019
Seek research location for documentary on whole community acts of rescue	Documentary interview and soundscape gathering.	Feb - Apr 2019
Begin audio production of short stories	Request story readings from selected stories for production by their writers. Liaise with writers and provide feedback on the reading and any fixes.	Mar-Jun 2019
Gather story readings and set to sound	Use my archive of recordings and some recordings sourced online to supplement readings.	Apr 2019
Begin coding of Atherton Tablelands material	Transcribe all interviews and select quotes to create the narrative for the fourth podcast episode: On the Atherton	Jun 2019

	Tablelands. Write scripts. Do a paper edit outlining the structure. Record, edit and place scripts.	
Work with sound engineer Judy Rapley to refine sound design of all podcast episodes	Detailed discussion of all edits and sound placements.	Jul 2019
Upload each episode to the selected podcast host. Provide audio for Landcare Australia to share on <i>The Rescue Project</i> digital site	Podcast initially hosted with Whooshka, an Australian podcast host site, and later moved to Omny for budget reasons.	Aug 2019
Offer the podcast series to various radio stations for broadcast	Offer accepted The Science Show on ABC RN, ABC Far North Queensland, Central NSW ABC, and Main.FM. See Chapter 8 for more details.	Aug-Oct 2019

Table 1: Production outline and timeline, *The Rescue Project* digital site and podcast

Designing a Call-out

A co-creative public call-out for citizen storytelling content should offer a provocation of ideas to inspire and invite would-be contributors. In this research, the call-out intends to create a space for the connection, affirmation and scalable amplification of ecocentric identities. It is also designed and composed to invite a reflective depth into the contributions, as well as clarifying a unifying topic throughout the project. In so doing, this research, and my previous professional practice at the ABC, already answers Milstein's (2020) several suggested means of speaking out and transforming our ecocultural identities towards the ecocentric: being vulnerable, acknowledging knowledge, flipping the script, and changing alongside others (pp. 45-48).

During my ABC work, I developed several criteria for a successful call-out result – success in the public broadcast space being defined by a meaningful quantum of engagement from various publics and a functional number of contributions that would provide an interesting audience experience and would progress to broadcast outcomes. My criteria were that a provocation should be archetypal in scope – that is, the call-out might appeal to a wide range of

potential contributors. However, the call-out should also invite unique, personal responses: it should be intriguing and suggestive but open to creative interpretation, the wording should be informal and approachable, and the proposed word limit should be short (in this case, 500 words) to encourage thoughtful writing. This word limit also works well for audio storytelling as 500 words yield approximately four minutes of recording. I adopted these criteria in *The Rescue Project* call-out copied below:

Have you ever rescued a riverbank? A tract of bush, an eroded beach, a waterway, some farmland, a garden or a native tree? A native animal or bird? What do you feel as you tend to tired earth, or engage with the intrinsic value of an old-growth giant, or as you look into that creature's eyes? And, in some way, do these things rescue you?

In the act of environmental rescue, we nurture a tree through drought, we restore a place, or we restore a native animal to health. But this is not a one-way encounter. In rescuing, we, too, receive something in return. In the act of giving back, there is a quiet emotion we might feel that nourishes ourselves, and sometimes whole communities.

Write 500 words on your experience of the theme of rescue and upload it to our website (Miller, 2018b).

Finding a Resonant Partner and Navigating the Terms

In my professional practice of effectively organisation public citizen storytelling projects, the first step was to decide upon and then gain access to an appropriate group of people who might be interested in the topic and therefore participate in the activity. The ABC had a large, invested, and committed audience to which the producers at ABC Pool and ABC Open targeted their work. Working independently, I felt that a partnership with an organisation with many stakeholders was another way to achieve such access. In the case of *The Rescue Project*, I sought an environmentally concerned partner with a proactive public, a partner that would host and build a specially designed, public-facing digital space for the incoming stories. I approached a range of potential

organisations with my concept. A news organisation was interested but wanted only to present the winning contributions, which would not have accorded with my participatory action research framing: I wanted to build an online community through storytelling, not run a competition. Several activist groups stalled at the last moment due to a preferred focus on campaign-style projects seeking signatures on petitions and public donations, over-complex and time-consuming stakeholder engagements. Through the social media business website LinkedIn, I approached and received an enthusiastic response from James Link, manager of the corporate partnerships program at Landcare Australia. Link was familiar with my previous work at the ABC³⁹ and immediately attuned to the creative possibilities of the project. Landcare Australia satisfied all my criteria as a grassroots, non-government organisation. Thousands of people volunteer on land restoration projects around the country, thus offering access to a public already oriented toward the rescue topic. Landcare Australia was happy to make the project open to non-Landcare members, but some issues required resolution: Landcare is focused on land restoration and rehabilitation. I wanted to receive stories from Australian native animal rehabilitators as well. There was some nervousness from the executive about potentially being flooded by animal care stories from externally affiliated organisations, but I offered to keep an eye on this, and Landcare Australia generously agreed to share the site with external contributors. I was able to reach out directly to various community animal care organisations, inviting contributions from Wildlife Information, Rescue and Education Service (WIRES) and For Australian Wildlife Needing Aid (FAWNA), and as it turned out, outcomes remained balanced.

Link became my contact for navigating the practicalities, including the digital site's functionality, constructed, to my brief, by Rohan Antao, who was Project Manager at Landcare Australia at the time. Antao and I were able to resolve usability issues together, and his contribution, problem-solving, and suggestions made the site easy to use as well as attractive on the page.

³⁹ Link's partner had bought him my book *In their Branches: stories from ABC RN's Trees Project* (Miller, 2015), which had come out of a citizen storytelling process. Had he not read that book and observed the citizen storytelling outcomes, it is possible the project would not have gone ahead (J. Link, personal communication, March, 2018).

Link was enthusiastic about the concept and framing of rescue. I felt that having a personal contact in the organisation who understood the aesthetic and community intent, and saw social capital value in the outcomes, was critical to its success and Link's facilitation of and support was also deeply appreciated by me as a producer/director – it allowed me to feel creatively confident, which has its own constructive benefits.

While there had previously been land rehabilitation-related initiatives in Victoria and NSW, Landcare Australia began in 1989. It was a grassroots collection of actions out of a collaboration between the Australian Conservation Foundation and the National Farmers Federation. There are in excess of 5,500 groups and 140,000 volunteers involved in Landcare across Australia (KPMG, 2020). Given the sheer numbers, there was not, as I had imagined, a centralised email database for all the Landcare volunteers, nor a central command to coordinate projects such as the present one, although there were plenty of less formal relationships that proved useful for contacts and connections. As a work-around, I manufactured my own email list of around 380 people through searching web pages of key sections of the various Landcare communities, but the list was far from comprehensive, and I was unable to reach as many potential contributors as I would have liked. To seed the project and ensure there was some content on the page for new visitors to see, I directly invited contributions from six people who had contributed to ABC citizen storytelling projects, and I directly approached some Landcare volunteers recommended to me by the organisation. Then to my newly formed email list, I regularly sent newsletters in an attractive format (see Appendix A), and these highlighted incoming stories, using images and quotes to celebrate the contribution and encourage more. In all, I sent 11 such newsletters during the promotion phase from November 23rd, 2018, to February 1st, 2019. Many of the recipients were leaders of local Landcare groups, and I asked them to share the newsletters with their members. Recruitment commenced on arrival at *The Rescue Project* digital site front page. Here potential contributors were able to read the invitation to contribute and fill in the participant information and consent form, also available at any time for viewing via a link on each page of the digital site. During the newsletter period, 51 story contributions were posted to the digital

site. When I stopped the newsletters after the submission deadline, the contributions stopped arriving, indicating the newsletters were an effective recruitment strategy. There was also an occasional article about the project in Landcare Australia online publications and some social media posts from the organisation. When we reached our closing date for consideration for the podcast, I believed, along with my supervisors, that 51 contributions were more than sufficient for the creative project and for the exegesis analysis stage that followed.

A Purpose-Built Page vs. Social Media

While call-outs from media organisations on social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter are common, the tone of contributions in social media spaces is casual and characterised by a speedy response and superficial content, as television comedy series *That Mitchell and Webb Look* mockingly demonstrated.⁴⁰ These popular media call-outs are the opposite of slow media (see Chapter 2 and the definition of citizen storytelling). At ABC Pool and ABC Open, producers sought a more considered and creative response, and our experience from these sites was that a specially designed website or page provided the appropriate framework. The notion of an “architecture of happiness” (de Botton, 2008) applies as much to virtual spaces as it does to physical ones: in providing an attractive, carefully conceived platform, each contribution looks valued, and this, in turn, encourages careful writing as opposed to rapid-fire, social media-style responses. Vadiveloo (in Haviland, 2017, pp. 100-101) also argues that having high production values both affects the way others receive community stories and changes the way participants view themselves and their contribution to their community. Production values lie in the realm of user experience, a field of psychology encompassing aesthetic experience alongside ease of use and operational effectiveness in the digital sphere, which lies outside the scope of this research to describe further, although work by Norman (2004) and Sutcliffe (2009) provides a good introduction.

⁴⁰ British Broadcasting Corporation, 2008.

Co-creative sites in the web 2.0 era (Murugesan, 2007) can now be more than just repositories: they can and should build communities, according to Haviland (2017, p. 17) and Dovey et al. (2016, p. 81). To encourage the development of a rescue community on the digital site, we created a contributor comment capability. Attentive, engaged, respectful commenting fosters information sharing and support amongst contributors in such a way, the whole project becomes greater than the sum of its parts (Hutchinson, 2013b, p. 142). I have previously observed this function productively on the ABC Pool site and, to a lesser extent, on ABC Open projects, with 400 contributors engaged. I encouraged commenting by regularly commenting to thank the contributor and ask a follow-up question. While there was some return comment engagement,⁴¹ there was not the critical mass of contributors to generate an active community of multiple engagements amongst participants.

Podcast Story Curation

There were two stages to the creative project – the digital space and its story contribution gathering, then a podcast series evolving from that space. Contributors were aware their stories might be chosen for production. There are four episodes in *The Rescue Project* podcast series in two formats. The first audio format covers three episodes, each containing three or four contributed stories (10 in total), curated from the written submissions to *The Rescue Project*. The selection criteria here were straightforward. I wanted to represent a balance of animal and land rescue stories, so this was a preliminary deciding factor, and I selected three stories in each of these two categories.

I chose a shortlist of contributed stories within these subject restrictions then selected from these for the broadest expressions of lived experience. Secondary considerations included clarity and affective impact of the writing, levels of insight into the ontological experience, complying (with some flexibility) with the word limit, and the presence of a clear narrative arc. Thinking inductively, for a third category, I then selected four pieces that represented

⁴¹ There were 87 comments in all, 46 of which were from contributors and 41 from myself in the role of producer and site moderator.

unexpected perspectives, and I called this episode On History, Art and Loving a Tree. In each of these podcast episodes, I presented these stories with linking scripts. As I discuss in the second part of this chapter, Gathering Methodologies, this indicates the responsive and iterative nature of the process.

The second audio format in the podcast, an episode titled *On the Atherton Tablelands*, is long-form documentary, making use of subject interviews in place, and undertaken with a view to my own presence in the documentary as conversation partner and host. The process was part of the gathering of research data, and the reasoning behind it is outlined in more detail later in this chapter, in the section titled Gathering for a Documentary. First, I describe the development of the first three episodes.

Recording the Spoken Word and Sounds of the World

It was important, for reasons of authenticity and embodiment, that each of the 10 selected contributions be spoken by its author. Thus, part of the process of production involved visiting some of the writers on their homeground, so I could make these recordings (where distance would allow). I recorded Kathryn Read and Michael Fitzjames in Sydney and visited Lyn Obern in Kangaroo Valley, in the NSW Southern Highlands. Other recordings were made by contributors using their mobile phone voice recorders, under my instruction. In June LePla's case, I negotiated for her to go into the local ABC Radio station at Coffs Harbour and offered, in exchange, the finished story for broadcast. In Susan Doran's case, a friend of mine with professional equipment lived in the nearby village of Braidwood and was able to visit and make the recording.

Each contributor recorded several versions, and I offered feedback on reading style, speed, and location to, for example, reduce the impact of intrusive sounds such as cars passing. I then edited these readings. In one four-minute story, I made 82 edits from three separate recordings, taking this time to honour the reader's effort and create the best version possible. Using my extensive collection of sounds recorded around Australia, I then matched and illustrated each reading with a sound design sympathetic to the subject.

Mudsey was a wombat featured in Lyn Obern's story, [Mudsey's rescue and happy ending](#). Lyn had written about the traumatic discovery of Mudsey as a tiny wombat in her mother's pouch – Mudsey's mother had died of a head injury from a horse kick. Visiting Lyn to record her was also an opportunity to gather recordings of wombats, as I have none in my personal collection. Wombats are not particularly vocal. They grunt, squeal or click, but not frequently. I recorded the sound of the care wombats' furious grass chewing and equally energetic scratching. These actions the wombats did in a rhythmic pattern: chew chew chew chew – stop. Chew chew chew chew – stop. Scratch scratch scratch scratch – stop. They run in a similar rush-stop-rush action.

[Listen: Wombat scratching and eating](#)

The sound of these wombats, combined with Lyn's reading, illustrates to the listener their entangled ecocultural co-presencing (Milstein, 2020), and enriches Lyn's telling of their story. This is of significance to my personal podcasting practice – just as scholars are realising it is inappropriate to speak about another culture without collaborating with those of that culture (Smith, 2013), I consider it inappropriate to speak of creatures or lively ground without representing voices and sounds from that space wherever possible, although I acknowledge the creatures of various grounds cannot consent to my recording of them as a human might.

During this production process, I also sought a recording of the southern giant petrel for June LePla's contribution, Dodo's story. I found just one available online, sending it by email to June LePla to confirm I had the right bird call. The sound engineer for *The Rescue Project*, my friend and former ABC colleague Judy Rapley, and I repeated that single recording multiple times but with different audio backgrounds to create Dodo's own presence in this story. I discuss my working relationship with Judy in more detail shortly. I illustrated other stories with sounds from my extensive collection over decades of recording around Australia. Some were specific recordings made on the location of the story in question. Others were more generic (digging, for example, walking on stony ground, or distant voices of tree planters at work) and these were composed into the readings to create an immersive listening experience.

Gathering for a Documentary: On the Atherton Tablelands

The fourth episode of the podcast is different in form and content from the first three – it consists of a 59-minute audio documentary. The intention was to creatively explore a more detailed and multi-layered engagement with the topic of rescue by interviewing rescuers addressing interrelated rescues in one location. The process for choosing the documentary subject area was related to the contributions on the digital site in that it sought to explore the emerging themes around rescue. While I had hoped the contributed stories would provide the potential for a documentary, on assessment, I felt none had the complexity that would sustain audience interest over a longer duration. Instead, Landcare Australia reached out to several state and territory heads with a brief of the requirements I provided (see Appendix B).

I chose to work with the Queensland Water and Land Carers (QWaLC), which came forward with a proposal to interview around several rescue actions in the various bioregions of the 11,293 km² of the Atherton Tablelands in far north Queensland. Wet Tropics representative at QWaLC, Rhonda Sorenson, became my liaison. We discussed a series of rescue activities via phone and email that would become threads of stories weaving through the documentary. I wanted to cover a balance of animal, forest, invasive species, farming, and conservation actions in this recorded sound and spoken word exploration of this community, situated in a unique World Heritage-listed area. I also wanted to reflect how individuals intersected with and nurtured their homeland, and Rhonda and I selected the interviewees for their knowledge and experience.

I visited the Atherton Tablelands for five days in April 2019, interviewing 11 people for 90-120 minutes each. I also gathered ecosonic recordings from various locations on the homelands of the interviewees.

Participants in the documentary included: The director of the Tree Roo Rescue and Conservation Centre, Dr. Karen Coombes; traditional owner and countryman of the tree kangaroo, Uncle Ernie Raymont; microbiologist and the wet tropics representative for the Queensland Water and Land Carers, Rhonda Sorensen; farmer, Elizabeth Carcary; leader of the Djabugai ranger training program Jimmy Richards; Djabugai ranger Toby Graham; the first Yellow Crazy

Ant Community Taskforce Coordinator in Kuranda, Mikaela Jacoby; Adjunct professor of Earth and Environmental science at James Cook University, Peter Valentine; president of the Trees for the Evelyn and Atherton Tablelands Nursery, Angela McCaffrey; project coordinator for Kuranda Envirocare, Sylvia Conway, and seed collector, Helen McConnell.

Prior to arrival at the research site, I constructed a series of questions for each interviewee. I drew on issues iteratively emerging from the contributions of *The Rescue Project*, the literature review I was concurrently writing, background conversation with my interview facilitator, Rhonda Sorensen, and in pre-visit informal conversations with the interviewees. I also considered my questions in view of climate and environment understandings emerging from my professional practice. I designed question briefs for the specific experience of each interviewee but included what I call *pivot points* – that is, questions asked of two or more interviewees that in the editing process would allow me to shift focus from one speaker to another as the narrative unfolded.

I printed these questions out, and so attended the recorded conversation with up to 20 questions in hand – questions structured to unfold in a certain way, usually journeying from practical details to more personal questions of affectual experience. “We’re diving in deep!” said farmer Elizabeth Carcary as we arrived at these questions within 10 minutes of beginning the interview. The engagement had taken an unexpected turn led by her answers and provided an opportunity early on to ask my critical question: how do you feel when you have your fingers in the soil?

This increasingly ragged collection of paper pages was a starting framework for a conversation, an “aide-memoire” (Zhang & Wildemuth, 2014, p. 240), and it too developed its own life as I used it to scribble quick notes for later interviews. Thus, each conversation influenced the next as themes became apparent, coalesced, and at the same time became more complex and thickened with meaning. The interviews were also organic, unfolding responsively and intuitively. Each moment interpretively generated broad themes, which were then brought back to different subjects/interviewees in an iterative and inductive process. Thus, thematic coding began early on in the research, before the content gathering was complete.

But it was not just the human voices I recorded. The wet tropics landscape had its own sound. I recorded interviews while it rained, and as rain set in when out walking. I recorded myself and the interviewees walking and talking up hills and through various kinds of leaf litter, mud, grass, and brushing past trees. I recorded in sight of significant places, which influenced both content and tone of voice, in buffeting wind so strong we took refuge in the car. I recorded sitting down under verandas and driving between locations. I recorded where insects were abundant, and silent, and where birds flew in and out of our recording space. I recorded while young men played the radio and where families and friends enjoyed the waterhole nearby. The ecosonic world was always present in the audio, sometimes obscuring the voice and making it unusable in the final edit, but in large part, ecosonics became a participant in the narrative, in ways both physical and affectual.

Audio Editing Choices

In this iterative process, thematic coding began during curation for the podcast and continued while conducting interviews. Once recorded, with more than 14 hours of interview to cut back to an hour of produced documentary, decisions had to be made about what to include and leave out. Decision-making is a fluid, “multimethod restorying framework,” involving “a complex set of analytic processes” (Nasheeda et al., 2019). Editing decisions were prioritised according to a narrative that revealed itself in the process of both interviewing and coding the material. This is the start of the documentary restorying process: analysing a story or series of stories and then combining and retelling those stories in new ways and formats (Ollerenshaw & Creswell, 2002, p. 330). On return to the home studio, I created written transcriptions, combing through each interview, highlighting significant quotes and organising them into themes, each also with the potential to be part of a list of larger themes for analysis across the entire project. These were attended to in this creative context with the audio narrative taking precedence, always asking: What does it sound like? What is the affectual impact of this sound?

Thus, the opening sounds and words were important. I scripted the opening sequence based on a compelling piece of audio that I hoped would immediately

emplace the listener – the sound of a tree kangaroo breathing. With this came deictic descriptions from myself and Karen Coombes, the kangaroo’s rehabilitator – reflecting a common human cultural practice Milstein (2011) identifies and terms “pointing and naming,” during which people identify (and at times identify with) other species and elements of the more-than-human world through categorisation and coming to mutual understandings. This kangaroo sound actuality and the description together demonstrate Karen’s attunement, which became a research theme. Thus, in flagging ecosonics from the start, the human narrative was foregrounded by the sound of the more-than-human, and from there, sound continued to influence the narrative. Following the opening sequence, I decided to work a way through the landscape via tree kangaroos – beginning with this ecosonic, phenomenological experience of the animals, then grounding the interviewees and the listener on location in the Atherton Tablelands with a broad sweeping description from Rhonda Sorensen,⁴² before returning to the tree kangaroos and the labour of their rescue and care, and on to flora care: exploring interviewees’ drive to seed gather and plant trees. At this point in the narrative, I returned to geology and the sound of place then changed perspective from landscape to a tiny yet unwelcome interloper: the yellow crazy ant. Here I considered killing, and how the yellow crazy ant was being eradicated by a coalition of locals working together. The yellow crazy ant element of the story also allowed me to illustrate Ngadjonji Traditional Owners custodianship of this place. A part of this narrative was the complex re-acculturation and reconnection to Country forcibly distanced by European colonisation from its Indigenous custodians (Gilmore, 2005). I returned the narrative to the kangaroos again, this time from the perspective of the First Nations Mumu-Ngadjonji Traditional Owner Uncle Ernie Raymont, to whom the tree kangaroo is a Countryman. Then, a narrative twist (Miall, 2004) – the mystery of kangaroo blindness, which may result from climactic changes. The documentary concludes with words from all participants about the affectual rewards of their custodial works.

⁴² At this point in the documentary Rhonda Sorensen effectively and beautifully, if inadvertently, describes Abram’s “interbreathing” (Abram et al., 2020) as she relates her sense of the air which connects her and her landscape to the sea.

I enact the edit. I intend the design and planning of all these sounds and voices to create a constant flux in geography and perspective, a slipping back and forth from human to more-than-human, from deeply personal to global perspectives, from grand to local scales, from practicalities to phenomenologies, providing, through a kind of flex and flow of sonic brushstrokes, a multidimensional portrait of a place.

Once I made the narrative decisions, I cut the audio accordingly and refined the sound design – a coding of a different kind. This process is long and minutely attentive, working between considerations of the intended impact of any given sound moment and the illustrative matching of sound with the spoken word. Back in my Sydney studio, I was again immersed in place, though now at a distance of time and space. I am attuned to the nuance of every intake of breath, every hesitation, every impact of foot on the ground as it manifests in both the crunch of leaves and the texture of vocal quality. I replayed sounds over and again, fine-tuned the removal of an ‘um,’ and created a pause in between words to contain a bird call within it. I trimmed interview pauses to allow for the essence of the hesitation but to mitigate its real-time length: once the moment is removed from both time and its surrounding embodiments of flesh and place, it will feel over-long to the listener. I adjusted initial edit selections to allow for intonations that are different in the ear to how they look on the page and interwove atmosphere recordings made at the time of the interview or shortly after. But I also use recordings made by others. At the time of visiting, Atherton had had an abundance of rain, which meant its birds called less frequently. But birds are an indicator of the three-dimensional nature of space and are a critical sound effect in my practice. Asking around, my network of sound-oriented friends told me about Xeno Canto⁴³, an online, creative-commons-licensed global website and collaborative project, which offers high-quality bird call recordings shared by researchers and bird enthusiasts. Searching geographically, I fortuitously found an abundance of recordings from the exact locations I had visited myself. To enrich the sense of place, I requested and obtained permission from several people to use their bird

⁴³ <https://www.xeno-canto.org/>

recordings in my project, thus deepening the sense of this homeground. I chose these bird calls according to how they manifested – as a spot effect or an underpinning melody – to reflect both the place, but also the tone of the human conversation taking place. Conceivably, this is a kind of needlework with sound. After an initial draft, I then worked closely with Judy Rapley. We worked over several days to refine the edits and the sound design. We placed sounds in judicious spaces: footfalls, bird calls, the sound of the wind changing, a car shifting gear, to give agency to the place and to hear its voice. Rapley has her own aesthetic developed over 40 years of engineering during the heyday of ABC Audio Arts – and spends hours removing, for example, saliva noises out of “respect for the speaker and the listener” (J. Rapley, personal communication, July 2019). In the hour of resulting audio documentary in *The Rescue Project* podcast, for example, together, we made more than 4,000 edits across 14 hours of raw recordings. Once all the podcast episodes were complete, Landcare Australia uploaded them on its digital site, and I uploaded them to a podcast app hosting body. From then on, they were available to the public. They were also broadcast, as mentioned above, on several ABC stations (further details in Chapter 8).

Having described my creative process, I turn to discuss the scholarship supporting my creative and analytical methodologies, through which I came to understand the key themes present in acts of rescue. As well as the process of coding for restorying described above, these methods include listening and walking methodologies, community-based practice action research, co-creative research, narrative inquiry, and further to complete the field text analysis which I describe in Chapters 5 through 7.

Gathering Methodologies: Theoretical Approaches to Fieldwork

Long linked to both activism and education, arts-based research is a form of enquiry in its own right. Artistic approaches aid environmental communication, as they capture the nuance and ambiguity of lived experience and help discover better ways to live with the more-than-human (Takach, 2016, 2017). *The Rescue Project* fulfils the brief of arts-based research. Initial analyses of my research materials took place early in the creative process, as I designed the

call-out and digital space and curated and produced story contributions for the podcast series. Narrative inquiry scholars Clandinin and Connolly (2000) describe restorying as a retelling of lived experience, as well as a methodology for understanding lived experience. Thus, *The Rescue Project* digital site and the associated podcast series function reciprocally and iteratively as a creative outcome, method, and data to investigate how and why we rescue and how we story these actions. This process acknowledges the process of narrative telling and analysis and considers the receiving public (Clandinin & Connolly, 2000, p. 154). The process of restorying is one of a holistic⁴⁴ re-reading of and re-listening to the research material which lies at its heart. Following comes analysis, reorganising, and rewriting. Thus, restorying is expressed through documentary making in much the same way as it is in thematic data analysis, and these processes are entangled together. These processes have always been an inherent part of making an audio documentary. Still, as I proceed, there is also an effect on myself as the researcher – I become highly attuned to not just the words themselves but also the emotional state of the interviewee. This state is indicated through pauses, sighs, stutters, hesitations, the tightening of the throat, or the changing of vocal tone. In the audio editing and then the analysis process, I endeavour to maintain the essence of these extralinguistic affects. This research approach resonates strongly with that of Lopez' (2014) scholarship on ecomedia, which calls for media practices to “recognize media’s phenomenological influence on the perception of time, space, place, and cognition” (p. 30). It also fulfils Lopez’ call for media to function as an analytical method that enables the exploration of the symbolic, material, phenomenological, and ideological character of ecomedia objects (Lopez, 2020, p. 149).

⁴⁴ Holistic approaches have come to mean using a range of different disciplines for analytic purposes (Mortimer-Sandilands, 2008) to find and connect threads of similar hue from different interview narratives (Beal, 2013). So holistic approaches reflect my practice as a documentary maker and researcher in this work, but also the subject matter: the nature of the mesh, and multispecies relations (Morton, 2010; Haraway, 2016). Thus analysis becomes entwined with story, and storytelling becomes an iterative, interwoven process with analysis.

Authenticity: Experiential Knowing as Groundwork for Creative Construction

In both audio storytelling and textual analysis of *The Rescue Project*, I prioritise experiential knowledge (Fazey et al., 2006), gathering primarily from a human public that has self-selected as land and/or animal rescuers. Drawing on Kristeva, Barrett (2013) acknowledges that the modernist projects of objectivity and scientific knowledge repress the subjective body as an expressive and valuable site of research. Barrett contrasts this positioning with research processes founded on art practice – a different kind of knowledge transfer. Considering Sutherland and Acord, Barrett draws attention to the interactivity amongst viewers, the art object, and social context as “experiential knowing” – a fluid response to the art that ruptures the fixity of science (p. 67). I would add further layers of interactivity: the body of the researcher/producer/artist, the bodies of those represented in or participating in the artwork, plus the conceptual substrate of the artwork, providing an extended definition of experiential knowing. Experiential fieldwork approaches in which all these bodies interact occur both in *The Rescue Project* digital space and on the homeground of participants in the Atherton Tablelands documentary episode of the associated podcast. Experiential knowledge is partiality, not objectivity, based on situated, embodied knowledges where the research subjects are not instrumental resources but actors and agents (Haraway, 1988, p. 592). The art practice makes space for and folds in the unexpected connections that occur as a result of those knowledges.

In the production process, this prioritising of experiential knowledge stands in contrast to, for example, the popular American podcast approach, which prioritises the cult of presenter/host personality (McHugh, 2013), in which presenters artfully summarise and speak the stories of their interviewees. Short extracts of interviews are offered for texture and a gesture toward authenticity but with little room to be expansively heard. Mine is more in line with Australian and European approaches. I regard my restorying role primarily as foil and prompt for the interviewees and as a proxy listener for those who will hear it later. This is conducive to carefully attending to more-than-human voices as well. Later, as I script and then perform as narrator/host, my voice provides links

and context for the listeners to move the narrative along and act as a kind of guide. My professional experience allows me to play this role right from the start, in the interview itself, picking up on and folding potential narrative drivers into questions on the fly. But as interviewer and narrator, while I am research-informed, certainly invested in, and ethically responsible for and caring for my interviewees and their life experiences, I do not claim expertise in this place, in their homeground. Thus, I defer to and prioritise the interviewees' voices – their experiences, expressed in their own words. I keep my script-writing succinct and in the active tense to reduce speaking time and maximise interviewee presence. As Baker puts it: “personally, I don’t warm to podcast hosts whose egos demand they constantly be injected into the story. I still believe in the “less is more” rule. I believe the use of subjective writing and scripting can have immense power and impact if used with discretion and care” (Baker, in McHugh, 2019).

As discussed in the section Voice, Breath and the Body of Chapter 2, the sound of the body, “tense and braced with a kind of life” (Connor, 2008 p. 298), is critical to authentic sharing (Neumark et al., 2010). However, I also have an intellectual and emotional investment in the bigger picture of the environmental crisis within which this podcast sits, and I do not disguise this from either listener or interviewee. My spoken scripts indicate my learned experiences and my point of view. Here audio feature making, whether for podcast or broadcast, is approached very differently to traditional journalism, where perceived objectivity is the preferred presentation. Instead, the presenter becomes a character in the storytelling (McHugh, 2019), walking alongside and yet slightly separate from the interviewee. I intend to be present in this authentic way, such that both interviewee and listener develop trust in this process. Though I am conversing with strangers, holding a microphone, with all its implied listening publics, paradoxically often leads to intimate revelations and generous acts of emotional sharing by the interviewee (Spry, 2011, p. 502). In return, I offer a respectful ear and a deep interest in, and engagement with, what matters to my guest – I am listening. This reciprocity identifies my approach as community-based participatory action research (Maiter et al., 2008).

Community-Based Participatory Action Research

Definitions of community-based participatory action research (CBPAR) vary. Strictly speaking, according to Stoecker (2008), this kind of research is instigated and driven by the community concerned, with the researcher already an active part of said community (p. 110). Honing in on environmental communication and the environmental justice movement, one intention is to have ecologically disenfranchised communities heard through the act of collaboration and storytelling (Chen et al., 2012). Sagor (2000) defines CBPAR as being “*by and for* those taking the action” – emphasizing improvement and refinement (Sagor, 2000, p. 3). However, this definition generally excludes academic research, so academic interpretations of participatory research accept the external position of the researcher but acknowledge the researcher's intentions to make active changes on behalf of the community concerned (Stoecker, 2008; Gaventa, 1991).

The Rescue Project falls under these definitions of CBPAR due to its intention to acknowledge, elevate and storify activity that might otherwise go unnoticed and unremarked. Maguire (1987) suggests participatory research is investigative with an intention to transform (p.3) and offer solidarity – which I would prefer to call empathy and encouragement – and *The Rescue Project* has a secondary ambition: that in sharing such stories, others might also resonate, and feel encouraged to take action in transformative ways. I also intend this work to act with, rather than for, the contributing practitioners (p. 29). Many such public storytelling events are framed as competitions, where stories are submitted privately to a judging panel, and the outcome is a winning entry. Other entries are not seen. But my primary intention in *The Rescue Project* was transparency and visibility from the outset, sharing experiences through crafted storytelling. All contributions were public once uploaded. Rewards, however, can be useful tools. *The Rescue Project* rewards were, in the spirit of CBPAR, more along the lines of reciprocity (Maiter et al., 2008): they offer increased social capital and opportunity for capacity building in being elevated and uplifted, well presented and shareable (Maiter et al., p. 307). Personal stories are effective in attracting notice and influencing funding decisions (see Chapter 2, Storytelling in Environmental Communication, and the work of Hillier et al.,

2016). Thus, being publicly present in this space could be literally and figuratively valuable for the ongoing, grounded work of the story contributors. Contributor support also included being highlighted in the email newsletters and promotion potential through selection for the podcast.

Narrative Inquiry

In entering the individual's homeland, I walk with them to record elements of their lives described in a storied way (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2019, p. 230). This is constructivist, subjective research into communicating the situated knowledges of those developing deep and rich understandings of their world (Weik, 2007) through actively seeking knowledge. Humans are a storied species (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006), that is, we understand ourselves through the stories we tell ourselves and others, and we understand others through the stories they tell us. Story is how we "enter the world" (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006, p. 477) but also how we bring the world inside ourselves. In *The Rescue Project*, I enable storytelling and use "story talk" (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2019, p. 228) to analyse emerging themes.

Narrative inquiry is a growing field, incorporating phenomenology, experience expressed as narrative, and the relationship between researcher and subject in "multilayered contexts" (Trainor & Graue, 2013, p. 165). Clandinin and various research partners, including Connelly, have begun a critical analysis of what narrative inquiry might look like as a methodology, but the area is still relatively new to qualitative methods. Their approach, as discussed across their various publications, has guided this process (2000, 2006, 2013, 2019). Clandinin regularly uses several terms and phrases which might be applied to my approach both generally and specifically to this project, including being relational, responsive to the community, and holding an ethics of care (Clandinin, 2019).

Narrative inquiry works iteratively between the gathered field text and its interpretation in the act of editing and further storying. The process is a "continual reformulation of an inquiry," rather than a problem to be solved (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p.124). Clandinin and Connelly examine field texts through three prisms – temporality, sociality, and place. These are useful across

my lifetime of research in this area: in terms of temporality, I acknowledge the time involved in forming homegrounds and caring for Country by custodial rescuers. Sociality, in my work, applies beyond human relations to include animal-human, animal-place, and place-human relations. Finally, place is central to narrative inquiry and thus to my work, in its affectual impact on the study participants and the stories they tell on and about homegrounds. Also critical to narrative inquiry practice is an ethical relationship between researcher and participant. When the researcher/participant story is entwined, but one is observing the other, narrative inquiry advises researchers to begin by telling their own place and role in the inquiry – thus positioning themselves within the research rather than on the outside of it. I have done this in this exegesis and also when engaging with the participants.

Co-creative Research – Storytelling Engagements in Place

In her arts-based collaborative anthropology, Haviland (2017) uses co-creative research and production to tell human stories and make records of local cultures and practices (p. 10). These are vertical relationships, which rely on quantitatively complex ephemera such as trust, commitment, and shared objectives, developed over time. These deep processes result in texts and artworks that are co-owned. But Haviland notes the relative invisibility of community arts practice in anthropological scholarship, despite its increasing complexity in public practice (p. 10). *The Rescue Project* research site, counter to academic practices of de-identification, deliberately acknowledges authorship and the intellectual property of the contributions as part of its gesture toward co-creativity.

Co-creation is a term increasingly used across various communities and disciplines, including commercial and organisational structures, academic contexts, and creative and digital communities. It implies outcomes achieved with meaningful levels of collaboration and relates to practices embraced across digital media environments engaging user generated content (Banks & Humphreys, 2008; Stoecker 2008; Madsen & Potts, 2010; Haviland, 2017, p. 11). Digital storytelling, according to Klaebe and Burgess (2008), is “explicitly concerned with cultural participation through the remediation of ordinary

expression, or “vernacular creativity” (p. 34) and *The Rescue Project* deliberately sought the voices of those otherwise unrepresented in the academy or mainstream media.

In *The Rescue Project*, I regard my position as initiator and collaborator as well as an editor. I proactively guided the contributors to particular ways of thinking and shaped the meta-narrative. An editor is an active participant, different from a facilitator and observer of a process, as Haviland (2017) discusses with Breunlin (pp. 70-81). Breunlin describes the process of encouraging free writing to provide the research material for pattern analysis and to see “where the power and strength of people’s experiences and ideas are located” (Breunlin, in Haviland, 2017, p. 79), and this then provides the themes that influence the structure of the creative outcome. As with *The Rescue Project*, Breunlin and Haviland are describing an actively engaged, grounded theory.

As Haviland (2017) and Chen and Gorski (2015) observe, the skill set here is iterative communication, and the project cannot take shape, progress, and complete without that driving force. Breunlin describes the role thus: “I am editing with prose in mind – to get the concrete details to make something last over a longer project that also has beautiful language. That’s my editorial project” (in Haviland, 2017, p. 79). Breunlin differentiates between an anthropologist attempting to avoid an agenda and an editor who deliberately pushes the contributors: ‘If... I don’t push them about it then I’m doing them a disservice. I’m going to be true to the wider audience and say, “this needs one more round”’ (Haviland, 2017, p. 80)⁴⁵. At the same time, *The Rescue Project* could not have developed without significant intentional investment from the collaborators – the contributors and the Landcare Australia executive team. Each significant step of the process was checked with the relevant contributor,

⁴⁵ Co-creative participatory media requires facilitation, according to Spurgeon et al. (2009) – it is not simply a matter of providing digital platforms such as Facebook or Instagram. It is planned, structured, moderated, and refined. That said, I did not “push” my writers in the way Breunlin describes. Rather, I framed questions and provided a visually attractive digital platform that encouraged careful expression from the outset, and in interview gently questioned in as non-tokenistic and meaningful level as I felt appropriate for each interviewee, while avoiding pressure or conflict (Haviland, 2017, p. 82).

and any aspect of the final work that drew upon the community expertise (such as the narration I wrote and performed as presenter) cross-checked with the appropriate person for accuracy and intent. The contributor agreement allowed myself and Landcare Australia free use in non-commercial settings, and the podcast content being jointly held as a co-created outcome. But the project did not follow academic research practices of deidentification. Instead, it acknowledged the intellectual copyright that remained with the writers and gave each contributor full credit.

Attunement: Walking and Listening

I have already broadly backgrounded attunement as a framework of attention in relation to podcasting as a tool for environmental communication (Chapter 2, *Space for Sounds to Tell Stories*). I have also foregrounded it as a theme for analysis in Chapter 3, as I discussed kinships (see section titled *Attunements*). It will reappear more directly in the analysis chapters as I interpret the stories and interviews.

Attunement, however, also has relevance to this methodology. Interviewing requires attuning, that is, listening diplomatically and attentively to situations that might involve various kinds of conflict or ambiguity (Forester, 2006, p. 126). Seamon (2013) describes “bringing deeper empathic attention to the research process” as “an essential methodological component for gaining accurate, explicit accounts of place attachment” (p. 13). Audio researchers and restoryers learn to still their own voices when recording ecosonics and when listening to the spoken word stories of others. As I can attest, they quickly learn that interrupting an interviewee means the words become entangled on the recording and cannot be untied. Speak too soon and the beginning of a bird’s song cannot be retrieved. As makers of recordings, we are obviously present and do not seek to disguise this, but we also learn to hold space for others. Ways of attuning: listening (Field, 1998; Bennett et al., 2015) and walking (Kusenbach, 2003; Evans & Jones, 2011) are both regarded as scholarly, grounded methodologies, and in this research, they cut across both acts of research and acts of rescue. They apply to the way active rescuers engage with

and attune to their homeground. They also apply to how I record stories of this work, making the methodology of this PhD a tangled and reflexive process.

[Listen: walking in a forest](#)

To come to know or attune to a place, we walk. Ingold (2010) writes of ambulatory knowing (p. S122). He connects the acts of taking to the ground, walking, and being en-winded in the act of breathing. He describes how these three acts become a path for knowledge formation. When I interview about place, I often try to do so while walking – to feel the place as my subject feels it, listening attentively to them, in the heightened way the act of recording engenders, as we walk. I note how the ground impacts their walking, which impacts their speaking of that ground. Their speaking then reflexively impacts their walking and how they move through homeground. According to Kusenbach (2003), walking methodologies can reveal biographies, social relationships, and environmental understandings. Walking, and stopping, immerses us amongst the various triggering stimulations of place as we interview (Evans & Jones, 2011), and the two actions also provide rhythm – as we move through space, we are influenced by what we see, hear, smell, and feel. Our responses punctuate our conversation as we pause in the walking, then move on as our conversation develops and resolves. This methodology draws on interpretive sociology and phenomenology in employing the go-along, “a tool particularly suited to explore two key aspects of everyday lived experience: the constitutive role and the transcendent meaning of the physical environment” (Kusenbach, 2003, p. 458). Kusenbach specifically identifies lived experience, grounded in place, as both transcendent and reflexive. She considers that “phenomenological structures of lived experience are legitimate objects of empirical, particularly ethnographic, inquiry,” positing the “go-along,” where the researcher travels with the subject through their space, as a means to combine both observation and interviewing (p. 458).

Quantitatively, Evans and Jones (2011) conducted a useful analysis of the differences of approach that sedentary and walking interviews elicit in interviews specifically about place, in research coincidentally called “The Rescue Geography project: testing the walking interview.” The research was set in a community in which a comprehensive redevelopment would demolish familiar

landmarks. The researchers found that seated interviews were more likely to feature human-related stories, but walking interviews emphasised place and location (p. 856), and here, again, “pointing and naming” comes into play (Milstein, 2011). Thus, walking interviews are critical to a documentary which includes place as an actualising, ever materialising, and active participant in the interview itself.

Coding for Research Analysis

On completion of the podcast production, I turned to complete the textual analysis phase of this PhD to answer my research questions.

As previously indicated, the texts I coded here come from three sources – the 51 stories uploaded to *The Rescue Project* digital site (text-based), the 10 audio recordings of a selection of these written stories, and the 11 interviews conducted with animal and land carers on the Atherton Tablelands in Far North Queensland.

I approached these field texts using a combination of inductive coding (Guest et al., 2011) and thematic open and focussed coding (Clandinin & Caine, 2013, p. 166). My goal was to produce a “coherent, focused analysis of some aspect of the social life that has been observed and recorded” (Emerson et al., 2011). As previously mentioned, I had begun coding in order to create the podcast episode narratives. I then moved to another full reading of all the texts listed above. Following Emerson et al. (2011), I used a digital equivalent of Post-it Note coding. I interrogated each piece of writing, attending to the experiences described, observing interconnected concerns and affects, and highlighted moments in the storytelling, compiling a long text document. I then began to sort the extracted sentences and quotes, starting from the first quote and interpreting its draft thematic category, which I named. Some codes emerging from this initial open coding stage were, for example, emotional response to caring, mystery, connections, community, rewards, experiential, walking, childhood, paying attention, death. As I read, each quote might raise a new theme or be attached to a previous theme. Subthemes emerged, and some quotes were placed under more than one thematic code.

I then made another pass through these texts and refined the codes, writing notes to be written up in “integrative memos” (Emerson et al., 2011, pp. 123-126). This was a primarily inductive process; however, there is, of necessity, an element of deduction – acknowledging that both the research questions and the initiating public call-out set the tone of what was to come. That said, most critical was the ethical necessity to be open to content and thematic possibilities that were lateral to my expectations.

My initial coding manifested a set of themes which reflexively engaged with the methodological approaches (such as walking, listening, and attunement). The sorting became clearer with a second stage of closer coding, during which I interpreted a number of subthemes. The final result was three major, or mother, themes – humility, attunement, and courage. I assign one of the following three chapters to each of these themes and their subthemes.

Linking these two themes is a third, which is also an action: attunement of various kinds – attunement to homeground and Country, to kin, to history, to the sound of the more-than-human world and to the body in place, and to the haunting problematics of the shadows: killing and culling.

Synthesis

In climate crisis times, how we tell stories matters. Scholarly research indicates that storytelling, including personal storytelling, can catalyse change. This chapter, *Methods of Making* has two sections. Firstly, *Citizen Storytelling From the Ground Up*, in which I comprehensively described the process of undertaking a citizen storytelling digital space and podcast series, with a focus on acts of environmental rescue by concerned publics. I first outlined the various elements of this process so that other potential producers might use it as a guide for their own projects. This included the process of creating an industry partnership, navigating the design and content of the digital space, and curation of the podcast episodes. I then described the process of gathering story recordings and recording interviews, alongside a description of my approach to sound design.

In the second part of this methodology chapter, Gathering Methodologies, I described a range of methodological approaches that informed both the practice and the analysis of the resulting data analysis. I drew on a number of grounded research practices, including arts-based research enquiry, with its focus on navigating ways to capture the ambiguities of lived experience, and narrative enquiry, which does similarly, through the framework of experiential knowing. Community-based action participatory research was also a guiding force in this project. Within the gathering process, I was supported by scholarship on walking and listening methodologies, and I began coding the gathered data in the iterative process of creating the artistic space and podcasts, and finished this work through a close examination of all the materials.

Preview of the following three analysis chapters

The following three chapters constitute my analysis and describe the results of my coding of the research data: the stories and the interviews that make up *The Rescue Project*.⁴⁶ In so doing, I address my research questions:

- What themes emerge in the stories of citizens who enact modes of rescue in a time of environmental crisis?
- How might the more-than-human world inform these themes, and
- How do these themes give active rescuers courage in these critical times?

From this data, I have identified three overarching affective themes in which the themes sit: these are humility, attunement, and courage. Each theme is assigned a chapter, and apparent through these three chapters is the copresence of the more-than-human – actors in the stories in and of their own rights, informing and influencing both rescue action and rescue affect. Thus, the second of my questions is answered implicitly and iteratively in the back-and-

⁴⁶ As indicated in this chapter, the data for analysis includes: 51 written stories uploaded to *The Rescue Project* digital site, 10 audio recordings of a selection of these written stories, and 11 interviews conducted with animal and landcarers on the Atherton Tablelands in Far North Queensland.

forth reflexivity of these interpretations. The third question is attended to through the final analysis chapter on courage.

In the first analysis chapter, Chapter 5: Ecohumility – “They represented an equal being,” I observe that for an act of rescue to occur, there must be the presence of the grace, ethical construct, and emotional affect of ecocentric humility, or *ecohumility*. This ecohumility is expressed in unique ways as the contributors tell of going about their custodial work with the more-than-human. I identify four thematic shades of ecohumility – custodial, animalcentric, geophysical, and affective. I here acknowledge my own genuine humility – deep gratitude for the generous sharing of intimate, personal responses to *The Rescue Project* invitation. In return for these stories, I offered little more than the chance to speak and the chance of being read or heard, so I am humbled by the generosity of strangers participating in this environmental storytelling project.

In the second analysis chapter, Chapter 6: “To do the job really well you need to tune in to nature,” I unfold sub-themes related to attunement, which emerge through and as a part of the process of humbly building copresencing relationships with the more-than-human. Expressions of attunement were also apparent in every contribution, in a variety of thematic shades, that are both expressions of attunement and descriptions of how attunement is achieved. I have refined these attunements thus: ecosonic attunements, home ground and Country attunements, walking as a means of attuning, the body as it attunes to place, kinship attunements, both sentient and otherwise, and temporal attunements to both histories and futures.

In the third chapter of this analysis section, “Uneasy shadows” and the Courage of the Long Game, I answer the third research question: how do these themes give active rescuers courage at this time of environmental crisis? I start with another significant set of related themes that are not always overtly present in the rescue stories. These are attendant, darker themes to the brighter themes within humility and attunement. They include the uneasy shadows of climate anxiety and grief, mindful killing, culling, and death of the human and more-than-human. Thus, for an act of rescue to not falter, particularly in the face of loss, there must be a companion ethical construct and emotional affect – that of

courage. Courage as a theme also manifests in each story, blooming out of all these affectual processes and intersecting with the previous themes. Thus, as the reader approaches the first two chapters, I suggest they remain mindful of various types of courage I have interpreted in my analysis in advance of more detailed consideration in the final analysis chapter, Chapter 7. There is the courage it takes for an individual or community to observe and acknowledge their local manifestation of the global environmental crisis; how courage can be employed and nurtured through humble acts of rescue. There is slow courage; unfolding over the time spent enacting rehabilitation; courage in interspecies interaction and custodianship; and courage to listen, to hear, and to adapt. Through approaching and committing to a situation in need of environmental rescue, rescuers demonstrate courage, act courageously but are also encouraged: that is, filled with courage. Courage here is a philosophical virtue, a trait, an adverb, and affect resulting from the engagements at hand: courage itself is iterative, operating through a complex set of copresencing relationships.

A Note on Citation

As previously mentioned in this chapter, this research acknowledges the personal and intimate nature of the stories and the researcher/contributor relationship, along with the intellectual copyright of the data which is held by the contributors. Therefore, in the following analysis chapters, quotes drawn from the data are attributed to their authors in the first instance using the full name and thereafter using the first name where these have been given. All quotes come from the present research data unless indicated via APA-style citation. I present all quotes as contributed on the digital site.

Chapter 5: Humility – “They represented an equal being”⁴⁷

*The rescue where I got to be a hero will always be my favourite and like all sea-salted stories it improves with each re-telling. A dark, cloudless night, the moon yet to rise, two families holidaying, walking along a beach after dinner. Sand glowing in the dark, children grasping shells, seaweed, sticks. Running forwards, coming back, staying close. Their different personalities shining in the dark. We turn around after a while to go home. Clambering over a rocky point in the darkness, we arrive at a small beach to turn into the quiet streets of the hamlet where we are staying. Our eyes are caught by something thrashing on the sand near the water ... It is a shark and I know to fear them – Sara Arthur, [Rescue](#), *The Rescue Project*.*

Humble approaches to the more-than-human, to our homegrounds, and to Country allow humans to develop and experience a commitment to particular places of resonance and, as contributor Natasha Milne observes in her piece [Remembering the Little Guys](#), see that our engagements are with equal beings. The definition of ecocentric humility is to look beyond the self, understanding and coming to know and care for the more-than-human with sensitivity, vulnerability, and reciprocity in mind (Milstein, 2020, p. 10). Humility is, according to Kawall (2018), an “environmentally justified virtue” that is addressed in the field of environmental virtue ethics and is an ingredient in positive, ecocentric relationships that recognise the value of the more-than-human world (p. 663). In being ecocentrically and ecologically humble, humans begin to attune to place and find copresencing connections that are sublime in reframing the sense of self as no longer centred but a constituent part of the broader ecological mesh. I call this framing *ecohumility*, and there are several potential types of *ecohumility* that I interpret from *The Rescue Project* contributions: animalcentric, geophysical, custodial, and affectual.

⁴⁷ Natasha Milne.

Animalcentric ecohumility: “That night I saw the miracle of the shark’s life”⁴⁸

Sara Arthur: Now when a mammal is born into the air and we hear the miraculous first breath then wail, we witness our evolution in a microsecond. This is a creature of the water, nurtured in a fluid-filled, warm womb which becomes an air-breathing land animal in an instant. That night I saw the miracle of the shark’s life, the reverse of mammals. The moment the water washed over its gills, it gave two mighty wriggles and disappeared into the breakers. It left the air for the sea, as we leave the water for the air.

It takes a certain considerate frame of mind to attune yourself to, and then help a feared predator: “many teeth, cold eyes, nothing lovely,” as Sara Arthur describes in her contribution, [Rescue](#). And that’s what happened on a warm holiday evening as, feeling the sand beneath her bare feet, Sara entangled herself with a two-meter long, beached shark and physically wrestled them back into their ocean habitat. As this creature re-entered its habitat, her reflection and observation of this moment is full of wonder and ecohumility.

Sara writes she still thinks about this shark and attempts, in a moment of animal-centred anthropomorphism (deWaal, 2001), to put herself in their place, asking: “how its shark-mind processed its visit to land,” and she ponders her own role as “physically weak with no teeth, armour or claws, nonetheless capable of so much destruction, but capable of care.” Even Sara’s rueful irony as she observes her human tendency to exaggeration, but also her determination to be of service, reflects her ecohumility: “I am human, I am custodian, I am rescuer.” There are several shades of ecohumility evident, including affective ecohumility, which I discuss shortly, but this one, in which the animal becomes the focus and driving force for her action, I am calling animalcentric ecohumility, after DeWaal’s animalcentric anthropomorphism, which de Waal (2001) describes as placing oneself in the position of the other

⁴⁸ Sara Arthur.

being, rather than projecting human intention (see the section titled Animal Kin in Chapter 3).

Not all animalcentric acts of humility need be relate to awe-inspiring or iconic species. In [Remembering the Little Guys](#), Natasha Milne writes about the decidedly uncharismatic cockroaches, rats, and ants which she helps:

To most people these were creatures filled with disease and general ickiness, but for me, they represented, and still do, an equal being on this borrowed planet of ours, each with their own purpose and reasons for being here.

Natatsha flips cockroaches back onto their feet, moves worms out of the way of passers-by, and, for the ants that visit her kitchen, makes “vinegar barriers to help guide this motley crew back toward where I think their home base might be.” These creatures stand for “the magic of this beautiful planet,” and she has influenced her husband in a shift from being swift with the insecticide to speaking to the ants and “asking them to move along with surprising success.” Natasha’s story encapsulates the meta-argument of this exegesis – that in communicating our personal experiences of connection with homegrounds, we can change the behaviours of others to become more humble.

Susie Sarah also tells of a close mutuality and deep humility as she takes animals in and nurtures them with her own body in [My emotional rescue](#). “Joeys⁴⁹ of all description thrived and possums slept in pouches on my bounteous chest,” she writes. But this level of nurturing care can find humility being imposed in the form of humiliation. The act of humbly warming a vulnerable more-than-human creature on one’s human chest has been mocked by some in the broader conservation sector, as I describe in the following anecdote.

During the course of this research, I made two series for a podcast called *Wildlife Heroes* (Miller 2020, 2021) for the non-government organisation, the Foundation for National Parks and Wildlife. The podcast draws on expertise and information from wildlife carers and associated professionals. The second

⁴⁹ A “joey” is an infant marsupial mammal. Species include kangaroo and wallaby.

series draws on new research from the NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service and focuses on data collected that, for the first time in Australia, quantitatively demonstrates the significant role wildlife rehabilitators play in the conservation of threatened and endangered species (Haering et al., 2020). It had been held for years that saving one animal at a time does not make a meaningful contribution to overall population survival, as the research coordinator, Peter Stathis (Manager of the Biodiversity and Wildlife Team, NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service), describes:

Wildlife carers are usually dismissed by the broader conservation industry as “little old ladies who just want to put joeys up their jumpers.” But NPWS has undertaken the first detailed analysis in this country of the wildlife rehabilitation sector, and we now know these pejorative views are misplaced (P. Stathis, personal communication, July 27, 2021).

While it is not within the remit of this research to do a detailed gender analysis of the contributors and their stories,⁵⁰ I note the gendered and ageist dismissal of animal rescue, which across the state of NSW saw rescued:

104,000 animals each year over the last four years, often in difficult and stressful circumstances. Service providers annually receive over 180,000 calls for assistance and help educate and inform the community about ways to prevent future harm to wildlife (Department of Planning, Industry & Environment, 2020).

The rescuers carry on. A part of this care and mode of being here and now is also “making a fuss” – a feminist gesture and one that women are still disparaged for making (Haraway, 2016, p. 131). Of note, alongside Susie

⁵⁰ Although this analysis is primarily qualitative and thematic, and did not centre gender as a primary research consideration, it is interesting to note that the 34 out of 53 stories contributed to *The Rescue Project* digital site call-out were by contributors with female names. Two of these each contributed three stories. Of the 19 attributed with male names, one submitted two stories, and another submitted three. Thus, there were 29 contributors with female names, and 14 with male names. The majority of animal care stories were from contributors with female names, 17 to seven. But landcare stories were almost equally contributed to with 14 from women, and 10 from men, while three stories from women equally engaged with both animals and landcare. There were three men and eight women interviewed on the Atherton Tablelands.

Sarah's brief mention above, two stories from *The Rescue Project* that directly referenced kangaroos being humbly carried within clothing came from contributors of both genders. As I discuss further in Chapter 7, Karen Coombes' daily intimacy with her tree kangaroos allowed her to discover a disease afflicting the animals in the area. Smith also carried a kangaroo joey in his jumper, and his self-description in [Roo tales](#) does not fit the derogatory cliché Peter Stathis describes above:

Smith: Oh well, bugger it. Joey goes up my jumper. It is frigid ... I usually make an effort to look presentable when I go to Town, but I haven't thought about that until, wild-haired and unshaven, wearing crocs and trakky dacks Les Murray⁵¹ would be envious of, I step into a full waiting room at the clinic. They all shrink away from me, clutching up their labradoodles. All eyes are on the crazy homeless person as I front the counter ... When I ease the furry, gangly bundle out into my arms there's a chorus of sighs.

Smith demonstrates a lack of concern about social norms that I discuss in Chapter 3 in the section titled Courage, and chapter 7, in the sections on physical and moral courage. But here, he also demonstrates the humility it takes to enfold another being into your body, and share with them your warmth, as Susie Sarah and Karen Coombes frequently do.

Custodial ecohumility: "There's always a way you get around it"⁵²

Contributor Brian McWilliam was not confident to write his story down, so he recounted it to me in conversation after a Landcare coordinator in the Northern Territory had told him of *The Rescue Project* and told me of Brian and his work. Half a century ago, Brian was distressed at the human mistreatment of his homeland: McMinn's Lagoon at the back of his block of land in the city of Darwin's suburbs. The landscape was denuded and barren, and shooting animals was a popular pastime around the lake. Over the telephone, I asked

⁵¹ A notoriously shabbily dressed Australian poet.

⁵² Brian McWilliam.

Brian some straightforward questions about the lagoon and what he had led other volunteers to do there. I wrote down what he told me verbatim, edited it for length, confirmed he was happy with the written version, and posted [McMinns Lagoon](#) to *The Rescue Project*.

Although Brian describes himself in the story as “never an environmentalist,” he felt intrinsically that the lagoon was not being honoured as it should. He was humbled by the thoughts of what the lagoon had been and could be, and he felt responsible for bringing about change. Back in the mid-1970s, Brian mobilised some of his neighbours, and they became the first group to join Landcare in the Northern Territory. They fenced first to protect fragile soils from feral and introduced animal damage; then, over the following decades, they researched the endemic species and planted thousands of trees. Knowing their botanical names wasn’t important to Brian, he points out, but the act of planting them was meaningful. Now in a mobility chair, which he still takes for a spin around the lake, Brian has watched this shared homeground transform over 45 years of effort, and in parallel, has observed his own transformations, his hubris diminish, and his ecohumility grow. Since then, he makes his way around a tree instead of knocking it over to achieve his goal. This is a reciprocal, custodial relationship: Brian made it clear that his actions were about his relations with a place that provided him a home and which he wanted to nurture. He is at pains to make clear his actions did not initiate from what he described as an “environmentalist” ideology. Attuning to it as his homeground, the place itself changed his thinking and led him to different ways.

Brian McWilliam: I was never an environmentalist. Before, I would have just bulldozed the tree down, but now, I look at it a different way. I still know that things have got to change, but there’s always a way you get around it, by going three feet to the side of a tree, by moving things around it. Now if we’ve got to cut a tree down, we’ll plant three to replace it.

Environmental virtue ethicist Kawall (2018) writes that humility, opposite to “arrogance or egoism,” is an environmentally responsive virtue in which humans are open to the more-than-human realm and recognise its intrinsic value (p. 662). Here humility, in meaning, is closer to being humbled than being

humiliated (Pianalto, 2013). It takes humility, or humbleness, to understand our relations and connectivity to others – human or more-than-human: “the humble person looks beyond the self” (Pianalto, 2013, p. 137) and in doing so encourages beneficial environmental relationships (Kawall, 2018, p. 662). So, Brian humbly works his way through and amongst his world, rather than anthropocentrically over and above it, but his courage is flagging: he worries that there is no one to take custodial care of the lagoon now that he is older and frail. Brian’s work is an example of what I’m calling “custodial ecohumility” – humility based on an extended temporal desire, with both a history and a future, to be of service to homeground.

Affective ecohumility: “It’s like a calling”⁵³

The interviews I conducted on the Atherton Tablelands also revealed a variety of affective positions of humility. Helen McConnell, a seed collector, propagator, and member of the larger Tablelands replanting rainforest rescue community, has spent much of her life coming to understand the lives of the flora around her, the centre of her lifeworld activity. Self-taught during countless nights poring over botany books and specimens gathered from her homeground, she has an intimate understanding of the propagation needs of around 700 species. Helen has become a human directly involved in replanting some hundreds of thousands of trees in the region. Helen’s eye, and more than that, her entire affectual and bodily awareness, is attuned to the homeground she moves through overtime, and she doesn’t blink when I ask her what “speaks” to her about seeds:

[Listen: Helen McConnell⁵⁴](#)

Well, I guess I know what the outcome is; it’s a new tree. I think we just should be planting more trees. And the seed is where you start ... it wasn’t just a job, it was, it became a way of life. It’s like a calling.

⁵³ Helen McConnell.

⁵⁴ Note: links to listening extracts are supplied particularly when hearing sound is relevant to the analysis. Further, while all story contributions informed my coding, not all these contributions were recorded.

It is not possible to capture the subtleties of Helen's communication of her feelings in transcription; the tone of astonishment in her voice when she says, "it's a new tree." However, I can attempt to describe my understanding of her affective state. Along with custodial ecohumility, Helen's intonation (heard in the extract linked above) demonstrates *affective ecohumility* through a response of astonishment, observant thinking "with" (Puig de la Bellacasa, 2012) at the level of mimesis or Taussig's "sympathetic magic" (2017, p. xiv), and her consequent passionate drive to be of service to tree beings facilitates the returning forest.

This kind of affective ecohumility and pleasure in place was also expressed by Luise Manning in her contribution [Landcare Rescue – Restore a Creek & Create a Koala Corridor](#). Luise was doing hard physical labour over time to create habitat for an animal population. Still, she celebrated an existential awareness in which the physical bounds of her body expanded to take in the geological features of her surroundings, the community of humans working together – and the whole, human, landscape, animal, cohabitating. Her writing exemplifies how humans are part of nature: they live in and amongst the world with which we share our breath, our oxygen, and our excreta, and we are physically "entwined with the soils" (Abram, 2010, pp. 109-110) and Luise's affective joy embraces ecohumility:

The sun gradually warmed our bodies as a chorus of voices trailed up the bank along with the odd laugh or two. Strangers [who] had come from all over our district to help restore this small section of creek now worked side by side like long lost friends. I was happy as I tenderly placed my tree into the earth and prayed that these trees would survive long enough to provide food and habitat for our native animals. The cool breeze swept through the existing shady trees and I thought this is what it should be like, nature cohabiting and thriving together.

Geophysical ecohumility: “It’s becoming really moody, isn’t it here”⁵⁵[Listen: Rain](#)

Rain is always present in the Atherton Tablelands, where I conducted the research interviews and made my recordings. The rain stops and starts throughout the recordings and is an Earth process that is a force within our conversations. It is vital in both lively and essential senses. My interview guests and I attend to the rain together, glancing up as rain interrupts our conversations like a child might, without hesitation or regret. While, as talkers and walkers on location and in real time, we might momentarily forget its gentle trickle (if not its thunderous downpour), a recording, the non-selective nature of a microphone⁵⁶ serves to remind me, in post-production, of the powerful sounds of the living earth. This dripping, trickling, or downpouring rain is an identifying geophysical phenomenon of the place known as the Atherton Tablelands, homeground to so many custodial keepers. It is experienced on several sensory levels from sound to touch and psychosocially, too. Farmer and replanter Elizabeth Carcary also notes the rain and speaks to both me, as the interviewer, and the future listening audience: “It’s actually raining at the moment. I’m sure you can hear that.”

[Listen: Helen McConnell](#)

Helen McConnell’s voice is full of wonder as she describes her response on the recording, which listeners can hear in the extract above. “Oh, it’s becoming really moody, isn’t it here? This mood, see this is beautiful. The feeling of this rain coming in...” As the wind picks up, the rain starts to splatter the leaves, the lake, and the fluffy grey windjammer I use to mediate the impact of the wind on the microphone’s diaphragm. The movement of wind articulates the shape of the landform to which we listen attentively. Rain is heard for itself, but also in other embodiments – the gentle lappings of the rainwater-fed Lake Eacham, in the damp rustlings of leaves that are deep green with rainwater and chlorophyll, or in the wet slip of decomposing leaf matter underfoot. Helen also notes the

⁵⁵ Helen McConnell.

⁵⁶ See Chapter 2.

rain's effect on the geography of the place in the way the accompanying wind changes the wash of the lake as the water presses against the shore. She attunes to the change in air pressure the rain brings and its effect on her body. Helen describes this attention as a "tune in to nature" and to the seasons of the place. The rain on the Atherton Tablelands is humbly beloved, admired, and further, it is accepted and worked with by the Atherton Tablelands dwellers with whom I spoke. Here is an example of an expression of the sublime as a quiet honouring, as I describe it in Chapter 3, and the section titled Words for Describing our Quiet Relations.

Also demonstrating geophysical humility are tree planters, like the large community written of in [On Planting a Forest](#), by contributor Kathryn Read. She and her young son have travelled twice a year since 2008 from Sydney across the Blue Mountains to the Capertee Valley of NSW. Here they regenerate habitat, paddock by paddock, hoping that this work will attract populations of the endangered and peripatetic Regent Honeyeater (Greyling & Bennett, 2010) and provide them a rest spot. Over time, the intimacy of digging into soil with her hands and being a part of this annual planting of 6,000 trees has given Kathryn intimate knowledge of the place. She knows the soil well in its capriciousness – and the soil, the geology of the place, is an actor in this relationship, with its own agency, and she is humble in the face of this:

[Listen: Kathryn Read](#)

Some years the soil is kind to us, crumbling and forming easily under fingers to accommodate each tree. These years we finish by early afternoon and strut back to the cottages for wine and cheese, cocky with success. Other years, the soil is heavy and clayey, rocks so hard the mattock bounces back. Those years, planting feels like unfounded hope, and it is only when the cliffs are casting long shadows that the most stalwart planters head home.

These humble acknowledgements of geophysical forces are multisensory, as another interviewee, Rhonda Sorensen, also describes. Rhonda is a microbiologist and a community facilitator for the Queensland Water and Land Carers (QWaLC), the representative body for landcare groups in Queensland.

When I interview her, we are looking down over a lake, across the escarpment to the far distant Coral Sea. Rhonda remarks on a geophysical sensory feature, the geophony of the whistling and buffeting wind, as we sit in the car as a practical measure – the ecosonics are so loud and powerful that they would distort my recordings, and the power of the wind would blow us away. Rhonda describes the scene:

[Listen: Rhonda Sorensen](#)

So just where we are now, we're looking over this beautiful swamp, over the rolling green hills of the pasture lands, to the farm mountains to Mount Bartle Frere, or Chooreechillum. And then over those to the coast and the Great Barrier Reef through to thousands of kilometres of Pacific Ocean. And that's where the forest is breathing that fresh air in, and then breathing it out for us, and you feel it, as soon as you get halfway up the mountain to the Tablelands you just go [Rhonda inhales and exhales]. And we get to sit here in its magnificence, and it's so fresh, and so beautiful, and so cool. And it's home.

This is a sublime that is trans-corporeal (Aliamon 2008). Abram (Abram et al. 2020) calls this “interbreathing:” a continual exchange of breath (p. 18). This conversational exchange is both an acknowledged experience and an ongoing relationship with the air she breathes and we, Rhonda and I, and our future listeners, can hear gusting around the car. The sweeping nature of this encompassing wind inspires her thoughts and infuses her voice with astonished and celebratory breathiness and, in the next chapter, I consider how the ecosonics of this interview are captured and made use of in the process of attuning to the story and the place.

We are talking on the Atherton Tableland itself, but 80 kilometres northwards, the little town of Kuranda is on the Mareeba Tableland, and the altitude drops 400 meters. I am to drive there the next day. Crossing the “jump up” (escarpment) between the two, geography plays with meteorology. Rhonda tells me that as the forest changes texture, the rain stops at the same point that it starts up again on your return. And I find she is right.

Rhonda's heightened awareness of her intersubjectivity in this beloved, geophysically present homeground is a clearly expressed consubstantiality that could not be achieved without the ecohumility to acknowledge and admire its power.

Here is how humility expresses itself amongst all the Atherton Tablelands interviewees: there is pride and wonder in the manifestation of the rain, not irritation or frustration. The interviews, their location and timing work around the coming and going of the rain, not against it, and this cooperation is directed by the interviewees who know the place and its behaviour. Geophysical ecohumility's opposite might be found, for example, in industrial-scale farming, with its attempts to geoengineer against the natural forces of any given ecology: like the storage of water on a grand scale in country that regularly experiences drought, in order to grow cotton. But the rain, the wind, the weather of the place are the geophysical phenomena to which the rescuers willingly adapt and attune.

Synthesis

Forms of the environmental virtue ethic, humility, which I call ecocentric humility, or ecohumility, were a dominant framework in *The Rescue Project*, present in each interview and each contributed story. Thus ecohumility is one of the themes I interpreted from the research data, and it answers the first of my research questions: What themes emerge in the stories of people who enact modes of rescue in a time of environmental crisis? The second question: How might the more-than-human world inform these themes is answered in the humble way the Atherton Tablelands interviewees related to, acknowledged and collaborated with more-than-human sentient and geophysical presences on their homegrounds.

I have identified four types of ecohumility, but there would be others identifiable from this data and other environmental communication work that, due to practical constraints, are beyond the scope of this exegesis. Those I name include affective ecohumility, whereby the rescuer is open to the affective impact of place, articulating gratitude for their opportunity to be of service to its care, and acknowledging the personal value of this affect. I also identified

custodial ecohumility, whereby the rescuer humbly accepts their custodial role, understanding and acknowledging their position as a temporary caretaker adapting their practice according to the needs of the place, privileging this role over a purely exploitative or instrumentalist ecocultural approach. I identified animalcentric ecohumility, where the rescuer humbly submits to the needs of a sentient being in order to care for it mindfully. Finally, I identified geophysical ecohumility, where the rescuer acknowledges the power of a geophysical force and accepts and adapts to it in their role as rescuer, not seeking to geoengineer for their own purposes. Each of these ecohumilities opens the way for a new, trans-corporeal experience of the sublime, that de-binaries more-than-human relationships.

As I have begun to indicate, humility and attunement are themes that are iteratively connected. Rhonda Sorensen and Helen McConnell, for example, are humbly attuned, in the senses of listening and vibrating with, to the more-than-human realm. Themes of humble attunements can be perceived in various thematic expressions in each piece of the gathered data. The following chapter, *Attunements*: “To do the job really well you need to tune in to nature,”⁵⁷ establishes attunement as a major factor in practices of rescue. It breaks these attunements down into themes that are both expressions of attunement but also ways the rescuers attune. These include ecosonics, Country and homeground attunements, walking as a mode of attuning, kinship attunements and temporal attunements to the past and future acts of rescue.

⁵⁷ Helen McConnell

Chapter 6: Attunements – “To do the job really well you need to tune in to nature”⁵⁸

First Nations Australians Indigenous custodial carers have relations to Country, as previously outlined throughout Chapter 3. In the same chapter, I defined homeground: a term for custodial place-relations for non-Indigenous humans who experience consubstantiality in place (Milstein, 2011) and express an embodied place attachment (Rose, 2002, p. 313). These are the places that open the door to Plumwood’s (2010) “world in which we can begin to negotiate life membership of an ecological community of kindred beings” (p. 121).

In humbly and closely attending to homeground, the rescuers in the project move to attune to both sentient figures and non-sentient features. Like humility and dependent upon its presence, a related theme that emerged from my interpretation of the research data is that of attunement. Attunement, defined earlier in this exegesis as being made harmonious with, receptive and aware, or vibrating with, is a sound-related term and emphasises both the practice and theoretical aspects of this research. Accordingly, I foreground sound in this chapter so that the notion can continue to resonate through themes that follow.

Attunement is also a term adopted by New Materialist scholarship (Despret, 2013, Brigstocke & Noorani, 2016, amongst others), as the framework challenges and allows for a rethinking of the culture/nature binary and makes space for more-than-human copresencing. In the context of this research, attunement is an extensive theme, with multiple multisensorial expressions, as I discuss and refine in this chapter. I begin with ecosonic attunements: describing how *The Rescue Project* contributors refer to their sounding worlds, and this leads to a subtheme of the use of ecosonics in my creative practice. I discuss processes of attunement to landscape through the lens of Country, homeground, and place-kin, and I consider various ways rescuers attain this attunement as they attend to these sites. I then examine how bodies attune through physically walking through place and how this is conveyed, in restorying, through the voice and sounds of the more-than-human. Kinships are

⁵⁸ Helen McConnell

another expression of attunement, and in the section titled More-than-human Kinship, I reveal ways in which the research contributors attune with their more-than-human kin: sentient and otherwise. Finally, attunement does not happen in temporal isolation, and I interpret several contributed stories where rescuers demonstrate the theme of historical and legacy attunements, to times past and future. I acknowledge that some of the affectual complexities of attunement are darker and less straightforward – and note these are discussed in more detail in Chapter 7, where I map the relationships amongst attunement, humility, and the challenges of environmental rescue, and the development of the environmental virtue ethic of courage and encouragement.

Ecosonics: “We missed hearing their eerie calls on moonlit nights”⁵⁹

Being humbly attuned to and listening closely to ecosonics is notable in several of the stories contributed to *The Rescue Project*. Kate Clarke, in her contribution [Year Round Wetland](#) attunes to a rustling sound in her garden one night and has an anxious moment as she tries to work out what it is – could it be a dangerous snake? This sound is the beginning of an increasing attunement over the next few months amongst herself, the animals of her garden, and her human neighbours. She creates a new frog-friendly habitat, which draws human and amphibian closer together. Thus, Kate begins her journey of acoustemology (Feld, 1996, as discussed in Chapter 2 and the definition of ecosonics), that is, a way of knowing and being in the world through sound. Meanwhile, when Dodo, the southern right petrel, began to vocalise, his rescuer, June LePla ([Dodo's story](#)), was attuned enough to take the sounds as an indicator it was time to release him – their brief relationship had come to its natural end.

[Listen: Bush stone-curlews](#)

The sound you hear linked above is a much-loved sound in my personal collection of recordings. The bird inhabits woodlands and open grassy plains, and I have used it in my documentary work to represent the esoteric and spiritual relationships some Australians have with their landscapes. This

⁵⁹ Judy Crocker.

haunting (to some) sound was also dear to the heart of the residents of Mid-Loddon of Victoria as Judy Crocker described in her contribution [The Night Cry of the Bush Stone-Curlew](#): it was attunement to the call indicating the presence of the community's last, elderly pair of curlews that kept residents awake at night. But they were kept awake not when the curlews called, but when that sound disappeared from their homeground. Thus, a whole community is emplaced in its homeground through sound, that is, acoustemology (Feld, 1996).

Although the local community had protested a proposed, government-approved fuel reduction burn of a local forest for fire prevention, the burn went ahead, destroying one of the few remaining curlew strongholds in the area. The cries that had been common for decades, now represented by that last, aging pair, stopped altogether. This sonic absence affected the community with a collective anxiety. The presence of the calls of the last pair had already triggered a renewed effort to restore the curlew habitat and begin a captive breeding program, and the community had fretted that the juvenile release would not happen before the last wild curlews had died: "...none of us can imagine allowing moonlit nights bereft of the much loved eerie curlew calls to become the only legacy of the passing into history of yet another of our precious wildlife species," Judy writes. When the calls resumed indicating the pair had finally returned to their territory, the ecosonics of the community included the ringing of telephones as neighbours called each other to report and celebrate the animals' return.

Attuning in Restorying

Attunement is an iterative theme. It is both present in an act of rescue but also a process in the narrative restorying of rescue acts. As I worked to restory the interviews made on the Atherton Tablelands, ecosonics were also present. After the interview with Rhonda Sorensen, as described at the end of the previous chapter, I stood behind the car, out of the direct buffeting impact of the wind, and recorded the whistling and blowing which had prompted Rhonda's thoughts. I offer Rhonda the headphones, and we both delight in this whistling and a certain relinquishing of agency (Purdy et al., (2017).

Later, in the production process with the sound engineer, Judy Rapley, as we finessed the audio, we augmented the interview with this extra recording, along with another wind recording of similar pitch and energy but from another time and location. This is a kind of composing through sound, a subtle *musique concrete* (see Chapter 2, in the section, Definition 2: Ecosonics).

In our creative use of the wind recorded elsewhere, I decide we are not just representing the sound of the wind at that place and time but also sonically illustrating Rhonda's explanation of her affectual response to her unique position within the geophysical expressions of the more-than-human realm.

This creative practice includes asking how ecosonics should be employed in the process of storytelling for a listener, that they might attune to the story told. But questions of ecosonics in restorying are also raised by the contributors, as in John Bennett's [The Kookaburra rescue](#). John inadvertently brings to the fore present and perennial debates around ecosonic aesthetic and ethical decisions held amongst audio documentary producers and sound engineers around the globe.

As John points out: "Kookaburras are used as aural exotica by the rest of the world. They are shorthand for the wild and uncanny" – sound here is manipulated in media production, in particular, film. Heard in a range of locations that are most certainly not Australia, John lists:

You hear them in the Amazon rainforest (Raiders of the Lost Ark); East Indies (the Swiss Family Robinson wrecked on their way to Sydney, filmed on Tobago, West Indies); in the Himalayas near Darjeeling (Black Narcissus); on the Borgo pass, Transylvania (Jesus Franco's Count Dracula); and the cannibal infested South Seas (Black Adder, 'Potato'). As Berger wrote about animals in general, animals are being replaced by their signs.

No animals are directly hurt in this opposite of attuning, this *detuning*, misrepresentation of their calls, but in displacing them out of time and space, using them for our own ends, humans confuse our own place-based knowledges and exploit and colonise the more-than-human yet again.

In the process of restorying, I bring to this project my professional approach that addresses these decisions according to context. What is essential to me is that the sound of the world is a contributor to this storytelling and not side-lined or misrepresented in the way John Bennett describes. As I attempt, in this research work, to listen with authenticity to the voice of the world, McAuley (2006) reminds me that place is not a passive receiver of this action but has its own role to play, even if that is a shadow place (Plumwood, 2008). Yet as soon as a storyteller begins to write or edit, in the process of restorying, they remove a story and its sounds from their place and time and create new shapes through the artistic process. Thus humility, respect, care, and courage should be present in the process of telling, just as they need to be present in rescue relations.

Thinking ecosonically and determining to give sonic space to the more-than-human, I decided to begin the podcast episode about the Atherton Tablelands with a sound – and an exhortation to listen and imagine what is heard. What does the listener attune to, as they hear this sound, and hear the name of the creature that makes it? Kangaroos are not traditionally known to climb trees, so it is hard to imagine what a tree kangaroo might look like. Instead, the listener is offered the opportunity to attune to the essence and character of this animal through its sound: not a cute call, a purr, a whine, or a growl – the sound of breathing, sniffing, air travelling in and out of the lungs, as she goes about her business. The sound of breathing is, as we have already read, an intimate reciprocity (Abram et al., 2020). When humans enact a rescue in the presence of the other, as they interact with the creature or the place, on a molecular level, they exchange breath which “crosses, divides and blurs boundaries” (Neumark, 2017, p. 10). The sound of a tree kangaroo breathing helps the listener emplace themselves with the tree kangaroo and her rescuer and attune to and attain some of this intimate exchange. After this ecosonic introduction I add a clip of Karen Coombes describing the physical and psychological nature of the kangaroo:

[Listen: about tree kangaroos](#)

So, their front arms are musclier than a normal kangaroo, and normal kangaroos have got very tiny little skinny arms – I call them

Tyrannosaurus Rex arms – and these guys have big muscly arms with huge claws...They need to be with you, and they need to have that body touch. And they're getting your heartbeat and your warmth, and they can just feel safe. And tree kangaroos yearn for that all the time.

However, what the text cannot convey here, is how the sound of Karen's voice, thickly imbued with affection, even love, and imbued too with the transcorporeal (Alaimo, 2008) exchange of air she shares with the kangaroos she rescues.

Listeners hear this, and as I reveal in the discussion chapter at the end of this exegesis, hearing the voice of another you might not ordinarily agree with can sometimes genuinely bridge differences. I further discuss the expressive, attuned voice later in this chapter in the section titled *The Body and its Voice: Expressions of Attunement*.

Attunements and Consubstantiation: "It's part of me, and I'm part of it"⁶⁰

In this section, I discuss how contributors to the research express their consubstantiation to Country, homeland, and place-kin through interpretations of the data gathered from story contributions and interviews.

Country is a term which describes Australian Indigenous embeddedness in place, built over continuous occupation over millennia, and that has meaning across all 500+ First Nations on the continent of Australia (Rose, 2008, pp. 55-56. Also see Chapter 3, in particular, the section titled Attunements). Country relations are another theme emerging from my coding process. On the Atherton Tablelands, I interviewed Jimmy Richards, an Ewamian man from the Gulf Country in northern Australia, who knows and custodially cares for his adopted Country around the town of Kuranda. Jimmy trains young First Nations rangers up, securing the obligations of custodial care across generations and across geographies: he is teaching the rangers to speak about and for their Country to other environmental groups up and down the coast. Thus together, they

⁶⁰ Uncle Ernie Raymont.

increase the breadth of the net of knowledge and strengthen bonds of communication and understanding.

Jimmy Richards: That's where the young Rangers, where the pride has come out because they're helping to get rid of something on their own traditional Country. And, you know, they want to get out and do this work. The hard yakka they did, just cleaning this area here and other areas itself, you know, like that's hard work. You know, I think they're proud to see what they've achieved in our own country. They're actually encouraging their traditional Country to recover.

This text is rich with multiple informations about iterative custodial care, where the act of care for place reciprocally builds the confidence and courage of the rangers. Readers will find further discussion of Jimmy and the young rangers in this context in the final analysis chapter: "Uneasy Shadows and the Courage of the Long Game".

Uncle Ernie Raymont is a Mumu-Ngadjon elder, also living in Kuranda, on the Atherton Tablelands, and I interviewed him about his custodial relations to this place as we walked through the rain forest:

[Listen: Uncle Ernie Raymont](#)

We class ourselves as rainforest people. I'm gonna say the rainforest is part of us, and you know, and we're part of the rainforest. You can't separate us. Our people, you know, lived in the rainforest, everything that Mother Nature provides for our people. And so, our people respected the rainforest. It's part of me, and I'm part of it because we are rainforest people.

Uncle Ernie tells me about how he attunes to those he calls his Countrymen (see Arthur, 1996, p. 122), the *muppi*, or Lumholtz's tree kangaroo, with whom he has an ancestral blood connection. Later in this chapter, I discuss animal-kinship attuning specifically, but Uncle Ernie does not separate the relationship with the tree kangaroo from his relations with Country: he attunes to the rainforest and its inhabitants as entangled entities (Gay'wu Group of Women et al., p. x, 2019).

But there is also a complexity, a loss in this attuning. Uncle Ernie can't speak directly with those he calls his Countrymen in his native tongue because informal and formal assimilation policies that remained until the 1970s (Nicholls, 2005) instituted cross-generational cultural blackouts that forbade the use and teaching of any Aboriginal language. This nationwide policy was enthusiastically and brutally enforced, including in Uncle Ernie's community, and he recalls hearing his elders whispering in language, then stopping in his presence. As he described it to me:

[Listen: Uncle Ernie Raymont](#)

Them old people can communicate, talk that language to them, so he understands – I can't do that. I don't know the language, how to speak to a Muppi. But I just say, "hello Countryman, how you doing," and that's it... keep on moving. But I think they know me. Animal, you know, their sense is, you know, extraordinary. Put it that way... I respect them and sing out to them, and that's it.

In the extract above, Uncle Ernie has clearly described his epistemology and his ecocentric heritage, represented in these deep and thick more-than-human attunements, custodianship of country and animal-kin.

Several contributors to *The Rescue Project* do not live on the sites of their acts of ongoing rescues – so these places cannot be described as homegrounds. Yet this connection which is not-dwelling is nonetheless identifiable as the intimacy of place attachment through attunement. This ability to care for places rescuers do not live in or near has important implications for broader comings to care and earthly relationships that can be brought to bear through environmental communication. I am reminded of how city dwellers in 1969 mobilised in defence of the Little Desert, despite living far away (Robin, 1994). These places are place-kin (see Chapter 3 and the section of that title), and these relationships result from continuity of earth-centred experiences, whether collective or individual (Chawla, 1999, p. 19).

Like Kathryn Read, who we heard from in the previous chapter, David Bell describes an ongoing attunement to a distant (and, in his case, unremarkable) tract of land in his contribution, [Scottsdale Story](#). It's "just a bit of clapped-out

old sheep country,” he writes, but still, he regularly travels there, with his wife and other volunteers, to aid regeneration efforts. He trusts in the organisation he is volunteering for that the land is “worth investing time, money and people” and reminds readers that “conservation is not just about the fabulous pristine areas deep in the remote interior of Australia,” and in this David is following the tradition of developing affection, and custodially caring, for distant places as Turner describes (in Robin, 1994, p. 54. See Chapter 3, in the section titled Protect, Defend, Conserve). David makes it clear his commitment projects into his future. He exemplifies how non-parochial land caring occurs across Australia: ranging from the very local (homeground); through shared communal land (community); to travel to other sites (place-kin connections) chosen as sites of importance by a larger cohort of stakeholders, including community groups and levels of government.

Further, a form of attunement as a precursor to making homeground can occur even when the place itself has never been experienced. Angela McCaffrey is president of Trees for the Evelyn and Atherton Tablelands. This 40-year old local community group distributes the propagated plants resulting from the seeds Helen McConnell and others have gathered and propagated. In our interview, Angela described her place relationality as beginning in her English childhood, when she became obsessed with rainforest just by looking at photographs of tropical forests from around the world. So, when she arrived in the wet tropics of the Atherton Tablelands, on a holiday, she felt she had arrived home. “It was a real connection. Love at first sight of the forest,” she told me, laughing. This intimacy with the place that began far away imbues her life with a passion for protecting it, and her observations of restorational change over time have rooted her to this soil. Angela, therefore, positions herself within the mesh of the more-than-human and for her, and, as with Helen McConnell, this attunement is custodial. Her custodial attunement is not an externalised power relationship but relations-in-place. Angela describes her experience of this attunement:

[Listen: Angela McCaffrey](#)

You just think, “I’m planting trees.” But so many things change. You know, the suite of birds that you have changes over time, from the

generalists to the rainforest specialists coming in, and the insects and everything. The fungi and everything, it all finds its own way in. And you constantly see these changes. And even things that you absolutely love, you know, there might be a fabulous tree that you love, and it falls down, and, you know, you think "oh, that's so sad," but it's all just part of the way the forest works. It's my reason for existence, is the gorgeous forest that I'm a part of, really. We're just guardians of it and, you know, if anything, the Indigenous people, it's their land really. Once upon a time, this was all forested, and rainforest people lived here and sustained it and lived off it without damaging it, and we're just trying to put it back.

This is an expression of feeling "as if" or thinking with, according to Despret (2013, p. 71). "Empathy is not, in this case, experiencing with one's own body what the other experiences: it is creating the possibilities of an embodied communication...We are not thinking as, we are thinking as if, or thinking "with" (Despret, 2013, p. 71) – and this is a creative act. As rescuers, we tell ourselves stories of how a creature of a plant might be affected. We are also able to restory these moments of attunement for others so they too might empathically respond similarly.

Despret is writing about other sentient beings in this instance, but where might the line of thinking "as if" get drawn? When I bring a new plant into my garden, I introduce them to their pot in the new position for a week or two and observe how they responds to the light and shade. As I dig the hole and make the transfer from pot to ground, I question, without words, whether the soil of the ground here makes a good match for the soil in the pot – what if I intermingle the soils, so the tree has an easier time of the transfer, and its roots are not shocked by the new environment? I think, without articulating: "Here, I'll give you a drink of this sustaining substance – worm wee, seaweed extract – in the hope I might strengthen you after the shock of moving." I bear in mind knowledge gleaned from strangers on social media about what particular species need to thrive, and I watch these new plants over the next few weeks, worrying over droop and delighting over new growth – my track record at keeping things alive is patchy. The plant and I, we reciprocally undo and redo

each other. I hope my plants will like my tiny garden – my plants tell me whether they do or not, with a reward of new growth, flowers, or thriving – or pausing and slowly fading. When I observe them, I feel with them. I am not pretending to be them however, I am travelling beside them. Helen, Angela and Elizabeth from the Atherton Tablelands each do similarly. “Empathy, in this case, is not feeling what the other feels, it is rather making the body available for the response of another being,” writes Despret (2013, p. 70). Empathy here is a scientific tool, “a tool that attunes bodies” (Despret, 2013, p. 71).

Traversing Homeground: “As I walk”⁶¹

But how does empathic attunement to Country and homeground come to bear? Walking – immersing one's body and psyche in place, but also through time, is an act of positioning which comes from a place of humility and offers opportunities for attunement. Walking is restorative: it improves directed-attention abilities (Berman et al., 2008) and increases creative thinking (Oppezzo & Schwartz, 2014), both of which are conducive to attunement with Country and homeground. In this section, I look at the ways rescuers move through place, as a humble attuning, as rescuer steps cause bodies to gently vibrate with the geology of homeground.

These are situated knowledges in both time and space, “the view from a body” (Haraway, 1988, p. 589). Situated knowledge opens up the more-than-human worlds that lie before and around us: “Situated knowledges are about communities, not about isolated individuals” (Haraway, 1988, p. 590).

That bipedal rescuer feet carry them through homeground and Country, moving temporally, not in straight lines but in swoops and arcs, with stops and starts, is a theme that recurs throughout much of the research data. The word “walk” in these stories frequently accompanies implications of a state of coming to attunement and knowledge – always coming to know but never claiming full knowledge. Because walking – and over larger distances, driving – was an inherent part of the gathering of research conversations at Atherton, I chose to

⁶¹ Jill Baur.

use walking/driving as a recurring scripting and sonic device in that podcast episode. I acknowledged this movement as a means for a distant audience to also come to attune to this place and used it as a device to move them through both the narrative.

Over the years, Atherton tree kangaroo rescuer Karen Coombes has worn a track between her home and the tree kangaroo enclosures. Or, more accurately, Karen and the tree kangaroos she carries in arms have worn a track between the enclosures, where Karen spends a lot of her time, and her home – because the tree kangaroos are as welcome there as they are anywhere. Dwelling here is cross-species. Sentient beings of all kinds live here and make tracks. There is an invisible net of tracks and journeys through both time and the nearby forests, too, as Karen progressively releases kangaroos back into the wider more-than-human realm. The back and forth between different types of dwelling increases her attunement on both an affectual and a research level, which I outline further in the section on dying and killing in the following chapter.

Walking occurs in relation to another creature that is part of my research data, this one less welcome. *Anoplolepis gracilipes*, or the yellow crazy ant, comes from the tropical lowlands of Southeast Asia but has found a foothold in pockets of northern Queensland. Only the careful observation allowed by slow walking can allow the human dwellers here to seek out and destroy an ant infestation that would silence the forest if it survived and thrived. Here, walkers are attuning to understand the behaviour of their foe: teams of rangers – both First Nations and non-Indigenous, specialists and residents – have formed out of the local community to become the Yellow Crazy Ant Taskforce. The taskforce fans through the dense bush to locate and eradicate the tiny ant. Ewamian man Jimmy Richards is head of the Kuranda Bulmba Rangers training program, which has been monitoring and destroying the ants:

I think they've pretty much knocked him on the head here, but they have been finding them in a couple of other places. But it's always still monitored as I said before, last year, we walked that whole side [of the North Johnstone River]. In another month or two, we'll walk this whole side. And we'll see what we can find. We found nothing

when we walked that, so we're hoping we can find nothing on this side.

Walking is the only way to discover colonies of this tiny ant, the only way to set traps for them, and walking is also the means by which you will know the forest has been de-attuned, or detuned and silenced by the ants.

Walking is how rescuers attune to a healthy landscape, and when it is under threat. *Not* walking was a problem story contributor Brian McWilliam of McMinn's Lagoon identified: "People had bulldozed the land so they could see the lagoon from their verandas, instead of getting off their backsides and going for a walk." Not walking, not bothering to get to the lake on foot, not bothering to attune to the place and value the lake as homeground were interconnected reasons residents felt detuned from the landscape to the extent that they would choose to bulldoze the trees for a view of a denuded lagoon. As I have already discussed, it was through custodial humility Brian himself stopped cutting down trees that were in his way and began to walk his way around them.

Jill Bauer, in her contribution, [Whacking Weeds Rescues Creek!](#), writes evocatively of walking and attuning with joy:

[Listen: Jill Bauer](#)

As I walk, I breathe in smells of the bush. The perfume of honey as the ironbark trees blossomed in the summer, and the black wattle trees that became alive with splashes of yellow worms in winter. The delicate and colourful bursts of grevillea spikes and the specks of tiny red brushes dripping from the bottle brush trees. Suddenly they erupt with a chorus of lorikeets, their wings painting the sky in colour.

Sydney painter Michael Fitzjames, whose act of rescue is not physical but of bearing witness through art practice, also regularly walks. His homeground is the Bullio landscape in the NSW Southern Highlands (see his story contribution, [Bullio](#)). This is terrain with vast skies and deep valleys – remote land, and wild in that way farmed land interspersed with bush can be. In his contribution, Michael returns to his artist studio and begins to paint what he has seen from his walking pace attunement with this country, and the act of painting affirms his

connection. Thus walking – a relatively slow means of traversing a landscape – allows rescuers to see, helps them attune, and creates the relationality of homeground and Country. In the next section, I'll reflect more closely on how the expression of the physical body through the voice and how the voice as a tool of communication might demonstrate these affectual homeground attunements.

The Body and its Voice: Expressions of Attunement

How we move our bodies through space affects how we express our bodies through the spoken word – these are audible articulations of attunement found in *The Rescue Project* data. Helen Macdonald's voice has a particular quality. Her homeground, for more than thirty years, has been the territory around the perfect circle of Lake Eacham. This is volcanic soil, and the lake is a maar – a volcanic vent filled only by rainwater and emptying only with evaporation. The rich volcanic soil and the mesophyll rainforest are vibrating with life as we walk and talk, and Helen's voice also vibrates with the life of the place as she points out tiny details of the biodiversity that a visitor might not notice. She's taking mental notes as we go along and spots the flowers of the *Flindersia acuminata* fallen on the ground. These indicate that in several months there will be seeds to follow the flowering. Then she continues:

[Listen: Helen McConnell](#)

When I walk through here, I just feel the throb of life, you know, the little birds, I hear the wind coming in and sprinkling through the trees, and I look over there, and you can see a colifloris plant that's coming up, you can see that it's got buds on the trunk?

Helen is in a state of profoundly attentive attunement, but this is entangled and iterative with her affective humility here, and her words are hesitant and interrupted as she walks. On the page, I can, to a degree, notate the rhythm of her speech through punctuation conventions, but I cannot demonstrate exactly how long Helen pauses for. But in hearing her speak in the podcast, there is as much conveyed by the spaces between her words as the words themselves. The hesitations are of different lengths, formed partly from her walking

movement and partly by emotional affect, and marked by glottal sounds: cracks in the voice, extra-linguistic phonemes – these sounds convey meaning despite making no linguistic sense (Carter, 1992).

As an interviewer, in professional practice, I've learned over time to attune to my interviewees and allow space for the bodily, spoken voice as it hesitates and stutters. While social convention inclines me to speak to fill the gap, I actively temper myself not to interrupt these pauses (not always successfully) and to focus on listening more closely. A listener can hear something of both the essence of Helen's bodily being (the jolt of feet on uneven ground travelling up and impacting diaphragm movement and voice production) as she is attuned to her homeground, and the homeground itself: the wind through trees, the birds calling through the spaces between words. As an editor hearing the recordings multiple times in the restorying, I vibrate with and attune to Helen, and in her pauses, I hear what she hears and actively, humbly listens to. Helen's world is a multisensory one, and her voice mediates the emotional response to place (Neumark, 2017, p. 7). The change in the energy of the lively ground impacts her physically and emotionally; her vocal quality changes as the weather changes, and both our voices rise in pitch as we laugh together and decide whether to run or take shelter under rainforest leaves. Helen acknowledges the materiality of the recorder and its sensitivity to water should the rain really set in. And in turn, I choose to include this recording that references the process of story-making into the final documentary as an invitation to the listener to more fully attune to and be a part of the restorying process we inhabit together. It may well also be that as people listen to the sounds of the world recorded, they will hear sentient beings that are on a track to extinction. In facilitating the dispersal of these sounds, I am facilitating a greater bearing witness, conscious or otherwise. This is the body, the voice, and the breath relationally emplaced: attuned to and affected by place, and in turn affecting the listener (Neumark, 2017, p. 10). Thus, the research practice and its analysis sit in a reflexive relationship.

Karen Coombes' voice when we speak is shaking with her bodily exhaustion. Caring for Lumholtz's tree kangaroos is a 24 hour a day process, and Karen's body is frequently physically entwined with that of a tree kangaroo. She carries

them, nurses them, and sleeps with them in her bed. Carrying and holding an animal affects her breathing and the way she speaks, and her fatigue is expressed through the different tones of voice she adopts as she switches between speaking with me and speaking to the kangaroo in her arms. To the kangaroo, she croons, and her body relaxes, to me, she projects, her tone is brighter. Later, as we talk on her veranda without a kangaroo in sight, her voice takes a tighter quality as she fights off tears, recalling moments when her charges die. The listener can hear these indicators of her bodily entwining with the kangaroos, and her psychic entwining, attuning and copresencing with their essence of being, as her voice breaks and she swallows. Letting them go, whether in death or release after recovery, means a disentangling: an intense and iterative species-based attunement to individual animals' needs in order to begin the process of deliberate distancing.

[Listen: Karen Coombes](#)

GM: When you farewell a tree kangaroo, then how do you let go?

KC: That's a tough question. The letting go part's very, very difficult. But once the animals reach a certain age, they can be quite aggressive. Basically, they're telling you they're ready to go, and it is extremely difficult. It's so hard to ... I almost compare it to ... you would be taking your teenager into a city and going "see you later, you're on your own." It feels like a big chunk of my heart goes with them, and I worry about them for a very long time.

GM: Do you cry?

KC: Oh yeah. 'Course I do. I wouldn't be a human if I didn't.

Our voices tell stories in words other humans can grasp, and with non-verbal sounds conveying emotions with which other humans might resonate, while the more-than-human world speaks for itself if we are attuned enough to hear it. Used together in audio restorying, these sounds are a powerful mode of communication.

More-than-human Kinship: “Remembering the little guys”⁶²

Intimate attunements with animals were a significant theme that emerged through *The Rescue Project*, expressing deep kinship with sentient beings in a transcorporeal sense (Alaimo, 2009), or with more deliberate intention, as “active copresencing” (Greenhough & Roe, 2010, p. 44), as Natasha Milne expressed in her relations with cockroaches and ants, in [Remembering the Little Guys](#). But intimate attunements were also expressed toward non-sentient figures. With resonances of De Waal’s animal-centric anthropomorphism (1999), several interviewees and storytellers recounted rescue relations with plants using familial language more traditionally associated with the human species. So, while the scholarly term more-than-human implies a mesh of interconnectedness between sentient and non-sentient, most of the contributions to the project either focussed the stories of their attention and care on close relationships with specific creatures, or with plants/broader landscapes. There were some exceptions where caring for populations of animals or plants involved intimacy with entire ecosystems. Still, these did not then relate the depth of specific sentient intimacy described by anthropologist Barbara Smuts (2001, see Chapter 3). In this section, I therefore distinguish between animal-kin and plant-kin modes of more-than-human kinship, as expressed by the contributors.

Animal-kin Attuning

As I have described in the previous chapter, contributor Susie Sarah’s body, particularly the part of her body most associated with nurturing by mammals, the breast, has been a refuge for all kinds of more-than-human new-borns. Here is trust and attunement between carer and animal, that provides respite, in a way that Smuts might rank as level four copresencing: “At the fourth level, an animal recognizes that I am a social being like them, and that communication back and forth is possible” (2001, p. 306, see Chapter 3, section Animal-kin, Plant-kin). These levels are based around Smut’s research with chimpanzees, baboons, and companion animals, including her dog, Safi. Level one, she

⁶² Natasha Milne.

writes, is distanced and instinctual and might be represented by an animal fleeing at first sight of a human. At level two, an animal becomes curious to learn, from a distance, about the human. At level three, animals distinguish one being from another – for example, a regularly present human. Susie’s more-than-human patients, at level four, are not yet at the stage where both participants might make an active choice to continue the relationship or reciprocally benefit from it (Smuts’ level five), partly because of the animal’s maturity, partly because of the needs of their ill-health. But some of the descriptions of attuning to animal-kin in the story contributions do extend beyond this fourth level to the fifth, to level six, where play or grooming might occur between species. At level seven, affection and “mutuality” (Smuts, 2001, p. 307) occur, and this is the same deep level of attunement as can be experienced between humans and companion animals.

Lyn Obern poignantly described transitions in degrees of copresencing with individuals of the wombat species in [Mudseys rescue and happy ending](#):

[Listen: Lyn Obern](#)

When wombats are very young and taken into care, they fight you, knowing life is different from being with their mum. For around two weeks they growl, attempt to bite, lunge and fight you all the way when trying to feed them. But after two weeks, it’s like a switch. The fighting stops, they look straight into your eyes, and you can feel them scrutinising you, then this look in their eyes that says, ‘oh so you’re my mum now’, and after this they feed, snuggle up and are so committed to you with their love, wanting to be with you at whatever cost. The transition of love is very visible.

This relationship, confidently described by Lyn as love, is reciprocal, affectual in the sense that Seigworth and Gregg (2010) describe, where pre-emotion affects are passed across species from body to body. Sitting with the care wombats as they eat grass brings peace. “I often sit when troubled, or upset, and find they give me strength,” Lyn writes. And she describes how she is not alone – that her human assistants, “all from different walks of life,” also find a restfulness in sitting with the wombats.

As June LePla describes it, there was no question that the outstretched wings the southern right petrel, Dodo, offered her as he approached was a greeting, and he chose not to bite her fingers with his large and powerful beak. This engagement is a level five or six in Smut's reckoning of communication encounters, but it was their quickly forged bond, and the presence of his "intelligence," that allowed June to understand that when he did eventually make vocal utterances, he was ready to reverse the attachment and return to his home on the ocean.

June LePla: The thing with those big guys is they don't know any fear of humans because they haven't had the bad luck of experiencing what humans normally do. So, once they've settled down after a couple of days the trust is there. He could have taken my fingers off, but he never did. He would come over with his wings up to greet me. The intelligence of them is the thing that amazes me.

June has no hesitation in naming Dodo's presence as intelligence and acknowledging their interchanges as being between two intelligent beings understanding each other. In expressing the value of the experience she chooses preferences ecological comparisons, while also making an economic point:

[Listen: June LePla](#)

I won't forget Dodo. Making eye contact with him was just wonderful. It's just like when I plant some seeds and then a tree grows and suddenly, I get this burst of beautiful flowers – it's that same inner contentment that you can't buy and no one can give to you.

Forming copresencing relationships with animal-kin occurs not only on a one-to-one basis but sometimes involves working in the service of a population of animals by caring for, maintaining, and restoring functionality to their habitat. In the history of human relations with animals and their homegrounds, conquering, mastering, domesticating/civilising, exploiting, and/or destroying the threatening unknown has been a repeated trope (Sinclair, 2001; Rolls, 1984; Rose, 2004; Alaimo, 2008; 2009). But the unknown was not confronting for Eleanor Lang, in her story [Turtles on our farm](#), set amid grasslands agriculture, in Victoria. It had

taken some time for Eleanor to realise she had not seen baby turtles amongst the resident population for some years. So, she began to survey her property, not for profit or to assist her farming practice but for the sake of the creatures themselves.

Eleanor Lang: There is a creek line joining two important dams but there are many others not connected to that which also have strong but aging populations, so the movement of our turtles through the seasons is still a mystery to us.

Through spending this time to attune with the animals, Eleanor discovered foxes predated most turtle nests across the broader area, and her own local populations were close to extinction. Eleanor had found many intact nests, and then came a single terrible night in which foxes raided 70 nests, which revealed the extent of the situation. She decided to take action on her property. It took time to understand the turtle's needs for a healthy hatch – weather, vegetation, timing all needed to be aligned. Over the following two years, she and her family worked to begin fox control, protect the turtle nests and revegetate the dams so baby turtles would have protection. But the turtles entered into her psyche as well, and, at the time of writing, her connection to the hatchlings was so strong she regularly dreamed of helping them to water. Now Eleanor is engaging her human family in her rescue mission and is setting out to educate the farming community to give the turtles a better chance across the surrounding district. Hers is practical rescue in action – and the dwelling with, attending to, and copresencing with the turtles has, in turn, brought her family to a different kind of farming, one which considers biodiversity and more-than-human needs.

Eleanor Lang: There was something really poignant and deeply moving about realising this 'ubiquitous' creature that we were all fond of was suffering under our noses, and then having the literal capacity to enact change in our backyard.

A deep sense of kinship drives photographer and contributor Gokay Gul, who shared [For the love of birds](#). As a child growing up in Turkey, he had accidentally killed a much-loved pet bird, and he continues to feel he must atone. His kinship drives him to regularly visit his local park and take

photographs of the birds, sharing them on social media so others can see the intimacy of their daily lives (Miller, 2018a). On occasion, he has witnessed interspecies killing, which he describes in his contribution, and he intervenes:

Some people say we would be better not to interfere with nature, but I completely disagree. This kingfisher chick was simply at the wrong place, at the wrong time and he deserved a second chance. The balance is out of whack in the cities. So, I might as well help this rarely seen creature. I want to believe that he made it. And I am still happy knowing I did what I could ... each time I rescue a bird I feel less guilty. So, I will always help the birds when they need it.

Not all encounters between injured animal and human rescuer articulate this level of affective intimacy. Smith, in [Roo tales](#), puts himself intersubjectively in the place of kangaroos widely regarded by the community as “naive, blundering idiots” for their inability to get out of the way of cars at night. There is no sentiment or anthropomorphism in his story as he, with laconic style and dry wit, outlines his pragmatic compassion for animal beings in describing his own experiences as a bike rider:

But I know the truth, having myself been subject to the retina-frying beams of the locals’ driving lights or the haw, haw horseplay of the fox-shooting hoons, with their battery of photon cannons across the top of the cab. Blinded, disoriented, all you can do is stop and grope helplessly to what you hope is the left-hand shoulder.

Smith shares the feeling the kangaroos have and feels “with” (Despret, 2013), rather than for, the kangaroos. Later, he speaks to one kangaroo mother as he would any sentient being, as he, unsure of her prospects for survival and mothering, rescues her joey: “Good luck, Missus, I hope you can have more joeys.” This is attuned intersubjectivity of a pragmatic kind.

Considering, resisting, and fretting over his own lack of intersubjectivity is John Bennett. In [The Kookaburra rescue](#), John, a keen wildlife photographer, philosopher, and poet whose output focuses almost entirely on his homeland of Valla and the Jagun Nature Reserve on the NSW mid-north coast, refuses both human exceptionalism and the intimacy of an intersubjective bond. He

cares: enough to spend time thinking, at length and deeply, on these relationships. But he still wants to keep his affective distance from a kookaburra he rescues from the dangers of the road late at night.

Next morning I look at our bird. Nothing seems to have changed. It stares back, unreadable, anonymous, genderless. Those brown eyes are well acquainted with death in our garden stabbing countless worms, crickets, skinks, snakes (one).

This close entanglement with the bird, he writes next, is unnerving. “I’m suddenly concerned about the stability of life, the state of the glue that holds these words together, the distance this text has to travel and how art cannot compete with living things.” There is space between the human and the other-than-human unknown, and John wants to maintain this space and let the other-than-human keep their autonomy.

While John is troubled by intimacy, he still desires wellbeing for the kookaburra. But not every human desires rescue relations or understands the drive to attune. Sara Arthur’s shark rescue, previously described, is conducted “to the shouts, laughs and unhelpful commentary of my family and friends,” and in [The Hidden Life of a Bat Rescuer](#), bat rehabilitator Vanessa Barrett describes, with sarcastic humour, her irritation at not being heard or understood, as she withstood a verbal attack from “a bat-hating aunty-in-law”:

“They are disease carriers”

“They eat my peaches”

“They smell”

“They wake me up at night”

“There are too many of them”

“They shit on the car”

And the most absurd: “Why don’t you just have kids?”

For Vanessa, for whom care is a vocation, this refusal to attune in the gentle, intelligent presence of a juvenile bat is no more than an irritation, with her own interspecies relationships and copresencing being the reward for the work.

Further complications to animal-kin attunement arise: while June LePla, as mentioned earlier, will not forget Dodo, forgetting is a part of the process of copresencing for another bat carer, Megan Davidson, who contributed [Eddie's story](#). Megan describes the stages by which she cares for bats and, in this case, Eddie, starting with the moment of rescue, when she found baby Eddie alone but undamaged, perhaps after falling from her mother on a hunting expedition:

Little Eddie was inconsolable and cried incessantly for her lost mother. Neither of us got much sleep that night. The next morning Eddie started to think I might be acceptable as a foster mum and our daily routine was established.

They were copresencing and attuned, but only temporarily. According to the mandated procedure for bat caring, another rescue bat was introduced to keep the bats bat-oriented.

As they grow, the human-bat interaction diminishes until they are ready to learn to fly. As Megan tells it:

Eddie by this stage has forgotten me completely, which is just as it should be ... After 6 weeks, they are fully integrated into the bat community. They are wild bats. They are free. And I am ready to take another batch of babies when baby bat season rolls around again next November.

Finally, In her contribution, [Why we don't have Mondays anymore](#), Dodie describes an intergenerational obligation to care for living things: "waifs, strays and those on their last legs," that spanned from her parents who "simply could not abandon any living thing while they had the will to live," through to herself, and now her own children. This relational kinship attunement united the family in grief and joy: "We have grieved over those that have died despite our best efforts and shared the joy of saving some that would have otherwise perished." Learning to manage the grief of hand raising a rescue animal, only to have them taken by disease or dogs, is a useful one, Dodie writes, to instil both compassion and responsibility in human children, who grow up to be adults. These stories indicate the levels of relationality and copresencing that humans can achieve with undomesticated animals, and all the expressions of

anthropomorphism mentioned here are examples of De Waal's (2001) notion of animalcentric anthropomorphism (see Chapter 3, and the section Gaia and the Network – Kinships). In the next chapter, I return to the story of Dodie and her family care in the context of courage, but I turn now to plant-kin and the ways plants, too, are described as family in *The Rescue Project* contributions.

Attunements to Plant-kin

Although her children have grown and moved away, familial care relations have continued for cattle farmer Elizabeth Carcary, living at Millaa Millaa on the Atherton Tablelands. Secreted in one of her cattle paddocks, invisible to visitors until they are almost upon it, is a volcanic-soil gully in which she has regeneratively planted a forest. As we approach during our interview, it appears, at first, as a dip in the ground with some light vegetation. The depth of the gully and the height of the trees within only becomes apparent as we walk to its lip. When Elizabeth and her husband bought it, the property was degraded – she describes it as “unloved.” But they are restoring it to functioning farmland, as well as assisting it to regenerate with rainforest. Elizabeth describes her rainforest saplings as her children, and the landscape in which she nurtures her trees is her home and theirs. Here, she plays a maternal role. Having already raised human children to adulthood, she clambers by herself 25 metres down the almost perpendicular sides of the gully, holding a bucket containing her tools and a few seedlings recommended by the local community tree planting group Trees for the Evelyn and Atherton Tablelands. Elizabeth laughs that her human children tease her for being a “closet greenie” with her plans to revegetate valley after valley, but she dismisses this. There is reciprocity in these earthly relations, this attunement. The plants of the gully are companion species (Tsing, 2012) and “odd-kin” (Haraway, 2016, p. 4).

[Listen: Elizabeth Carcary](#)

EC: Well, my children think I'm a closet greenie, but I have stumbled upon the joys of watching trees grow ...

GM: when you say that you've discovered in your later life the joys of growing trees. What do you mean?

EC: Well, I've always been a bit of a gardener, but only for flowers and perhaps the odd fruit tree. But now I've discovered the joys of the rainforest tree and how important they are. I look upon them as my children. So, I can watch them grow. Because my actual children that I gave birth to have grown up and left home long ago. So, I now have my other children that I can care for and fuss over.

Elizabeth Carcary uses terms more usually found in human relationships to describe her connection with homeground. Similarly, for Helen McConnell, it is both close attention to the botany she employs to understand her seed's requirements for growth, and her intimately corporeal suggestion of seed birthing or midwifery, that indicates the closeness of her attunement to her homeground. Nursing the seeds to life as "baby" trees, she is aware of the implied continuation of her legacy to this place in the same way children are an adult's legacy. Helen told me how many trees she has planted around the area on which we stand:

[Listen: Helen McConnell](#)

Oh, thousands and thousands, hundreds of thousands maybe. Yeah, now I look at plantings that I know that I collected all those seeds for, and sort of they're my babies! My babies, look at all my babies growing up. And now they're being used by all sorts of creatures. You know, they're going to be there a lot longer than me. I feel like it's a privilege that I've been able to do this, you know, that, it's like nature looks after me, because of it.

Helen McConnell's consequent attunement is comparable to a generational, familial one to a longstanding home. The rainforest is her place-kin (see Chapter 3 and the section of that title). Just like any human-to-human relationship which deepens over time with shared experiences and shared gestures, this daily attentional and attuned work is a literal building of "place relations," a living example of how place attachment can become homeground.

Sue McIntyre mirrors the systematic and determined rescue attunement of these women with her own proactive engagement with the Blue Devil plant in her contribution [It isn't easy being blue](#). Sue's homeground had been sheep

country for 100 years, and “over two hundred species of native plants have survived a century of sheep grazing where we live.” But her focus has been on a single plant, the Blue Devil – fascinating to her for the colour changes it undergoes, from pale green leaves to a bright metallic blue flower spike in late spring. Sue wants to re-establish a population of Blue Devils in the native grassland on her property. Attuning carefully, she observes their progress over time:

They did well from seed in small cultivated and weeded patches, growing slowly but steadily, with some watering to get them through the 2006 drought. The first flowers were celebrated 18 months after sowing.

However, both native kangaroos as well as the post-colonially imported sheep like to graze the plants down to the roots, and they cannot recover. Sue intervenes with mesh cages for individual plants, and a larger area fenced off, which she calls “The Devils’ Playground.” The fencing interventions are an attempt to establish a population too large to be destroyed by grazing animals, and she hopes they are temporary. Elizabeth is championing the Devils’ survival, aligning herself with them, but not against the grazing animals. She is actively intervening in the plants’ lives, attempting to redress a balance that has many factors acting against it.

This ambition is being challenged by drought, warming, and kangaroo numbers. Moreover, we cannot restore the soil condition or recreate the fire and grazing patterns that might be ideal for their survival. But for the short time that I can, I will be the Devils’ friend, cheering them on while seeding, weeding and willing them to thrive.

As their friend then, and in speaking to, wishing for, and enabling the best for a family of Blue Devils, Sue sees the Blue Devil as plant-kin. In acting to restore and rescue those plants and their shared place attachment, she is in the constant act of constructing her homeground, building relations-in-place over time (Low & Altman, 1992).

One of *The Rescue Project’s* contributions indicates a connection that extends beyond rescue and care to *collaboration* with plant-kin on homeground. Louise

Freckelton is a farmer in the foothills of the Snowy Mountains in NSW, and her property, Highfield Farm and Woodland, includes a conservation covenant over a tract of bush ([Carex and the Ducklings](#)). The bounds of this property are Louise's homegrounds, and Louise actively works counter to local farming practices to sustain the Carex grasslands covering the aptly named Home Valley. The Carex Louise writes about is native to the area but increasingly rare in the surrounding region. When an agronomist told Louise to destroy their Carex grass, it was in no uncertain terms: "‘nuke it,’ he said, ‘burn it then spray it then burn it again, that’ll get rid of it’... ‘it’s rubbish, your sheep won’t eat it,’” Louise writes. But Louise liked that the Carex was native to the area. In ignoring this advice, she soon found Carex had a significant role in the farm's biodiversity, even as the land provided homeground for the introduced species of sheep, dogs, and humans. In Louise's story, the Carex is a valued actor. This is a practical expression of Alaimo's (2008) notion of trans-corporeality (p. 237). Louise considers the grass a collaborator in care – it provides protection to all sorts of living beings, from the native birds to the introduced sheep who bed their lambs down behind it for protection from wind and predators, and through its shady presence and root system, it also reduces erosion and keeps water in the soil for longer. Louise and her partner David, their dogs, and the Carex are kin, working together to farm the domestic sheep and simultaneously provide habitat for the wild more-than-human.

These interspecies, familial relations with plants have resonance, again, with notions of De Waal's animalcentric anthropomorphism. For Elizabeth, Helen, and Louise Freckelton, these plants are family, or plant-kin, with whom they dwell and closely attune. Thomas writes that fostering communication and relationships with plants has the power to allow people to experience a "sacred bond" (Thomas 2019, p. 193), and this bond is apparent in Helen's seed gathering and distribution, Louise's facilitating of Carex presence and Elizabeth's tender care for plants as they progress from tube stock to seedlings on her veranda to planting in the rainforest gully. These are the kinds of families you hang out with without talking terribly much. This restoration is a private, personal, and decidedly unheroic act: lacking in public gesture. But Elizabeth has replanted a significant tract of land into a lush Eden in this slow, quiet way.

Her voice is almost shy as she says: “I’m quite pleased to show it to you, actually. I’m generally the only one that sees it.”

Histories and Legacies: “Standing on the shoulders of others”⁶³

It is a tradition in many forms of restorying, from journalism to feature films and fairy tales, to pause to consider our history and how we reach ourselves in the lived moment. So, this exegesis also notes the thematic presence and importance of attunement to homeground and Country, not just of the now, but of the acknowledged past and of mindful futures. In the contributed collection, there were several reflections on the continuity of past actions, the grounding and courage-generating nature of this history, and a sense of an ever-evolving attuned and attentive responses to place. Country and homegrounds cannot simply be “fixed” and left: the custodial works are ongoing, and potential futures are increasingly, in fact, place-led, as Brian McWilliam’s contribution in the previous chapter exemplifies. For places to lead, humans must adopt a stance of attunement, and not only to the present circumstances. Several contributed stories focussed particularly on acknowledging, attuning to, and learning from past acts of care of a particular subject. These become intergenerational processes of attuning to and “staying with the trouble” (Haraway, 2016). This sense of a community of kin, attuned together in positions of ecohumility to learning from previous communities’ custodial practices over time, is reflected in various ways in other stories I explore in this part of the analysis. These are contemporary, living histories entwined with the temporal: Sylvia Conway from Kuranda in the Atherton Tablelands, for example, speaks warmly of “standing on the shoulders of others.”

June LePla, who cared for Dodo, the southern right petrel, is sustained by her memories of her father as a bushman and of her travels with him into the bush to look for particular aspects of the landscape that interested him – spiders, native flowers, and animals. Together they would return home with injured animals and care for them – the beginning of her own life commitment to animal rescue. June is attuned to that history and her memories of how her father

⁶³ Sylvia Conway.

taught her to observe the more-than-human realm, and their familial love was bound by the larger attunement which they shared: “He learned that’s where peace is. And I have the same philosophy. That is where the peace is.” From a childhood holding her father’s hand, through a lifetime of rescuing, to herself now a woman older than he was when they began their adventures, June’s father provides a similar grounding to that which Sylvia Conway describes, as June stands now on his shoulders.

Kathryn Read, who contributed [On Planting a Forest](#), is also building a generational, family-centred relationship. Rather than looking back, she is creating a sense of legacy into the future for her son. This work is a deliberate construction of earthly relations, as the site of her care is far from her home. The Capertee Valley is reached in a five-hour car trip west from Sydney over the Blue Mountains, and it is slowly being rehabilitated through a volunteer project by people from all over the state. These volunteers have stayed with this particular trouble, meeting twice a year over decades, to gradually build up habitat for the endangered Regent honeyeater. Here is a personal history of returning over and over again that creates intimacy over time and builds attunement with a particular location, or place-kin. Kathryn is in a constant flux of attunement as she projects herself back into the past and forwards into the future at the same time – she imagines the stories her young son will tell when he continues the family tradition and takes his children and grandchildren to visit the trees they have planted for endangered birds not yet born, “the flashes of bright yellow, black and grey of honeyeaters ducking and dipping amongst foliage.”

Susan Doran’s story is more deliberately observed as a history than the previous examples. Her contribution is a story of her community activist group, [Friends of the Mongarlowe River is 33 years old, and](#) it sums up the actions taken over three decades to conserve the river’s status and protect it from exploitive destruction. Susan attunes the reader and listener to the history through an almost incantatory list of names of those who have participated in various rescue actions. These are human beings associated with fights against cycles of different threats to the river, from historic mining to new mining proposals and dredging for gold, which would stir up mercury from similar

historic activities in the river. There had been the planned dumping of toxic waste on the river's catchment, yet more proposed gold mining plans would bring cyanide to the river's waters, and activists resist logging in an ongoing way. Attuning to their own interconnected histories – the deep time and the human time of the place and being bodily prepared to stand up and speak to its defence – forms part of the activist group's identity. The activists employed science, but also poetry, philosophy, psychology, and politics to combat these forces – the work of poet Judith Wright in the 1950s, and philosopher Val Plumwood, in the 1970s being two examples. When the forest was finally declared protected as a national park, restoration and research were new activities the humans of this place used to further attune to their homeground and its needs. The cyclical nature of these struggles that draw history into the present is made apparent, as Susan illustrates, with new threats for new community members to resist – as gold allures once more and there is a proposal for a new exploration licence, while logging of greater glider habitat threatens.

Rob Youl, too, draws on the historical record for his contribution in [Saving Chains of Ponds](#). Being curious, Rob noticed early surveys of his region in Victoria before it became farming and mining land regularly included a notation: "chain of ponds." He attuned to what these might look like: "Doubtless, dense or very mature riparian vegetation lined their banks, and debris-laden floods scoured out the holes, keeping them deep and more or less permanent," he writes. Rob contributed three stories describing this process or reconstruction drawn from past records, but also tied this history together with recollections of practices of his youth, more than fifty years prior, when rivers were bulldozed to allow the water to run through the country as fast as it could, rather than meander and soak into the soil. While using Google Earth to attend and attune to an aerial view of the larger surrounding landscape, Rob noticed a neighbour's property with what could also be described as a chain of ponds, or *gilgai*, from the Kamilaroi and Wiradjuri Indigenous languages. Having attuned to the past and drawn it into the present, Rob decided to create his own gilgai, and thirty-five years later now has over 100 such ponds on his property. The most recent he wrote about was cut into the soil in 2016 as he describes: "Aaron Watts,

earthmoving contractor, and farmer from Coonooer Bridge, was working on the property. In 2-3 hours, he scooped out eleven ponds with his excavator.” It was with delight Rob and his wife watched every pool fill with water when it rained that night. They revegetated around the pools, and plants also self-germinated. Geoengineering to return to a variation of the natural process of the past “has been immensely satisfying.”

Synthesis

To attune is to vibrate with, to listen in order to hear, to be receptive and aware in multisensorial ways, and it is a temporal process. In this chapter, I have considered a selection of themes that manifested as a part of an attuning with the rescue site or being, and thus answer my first two research questions: What themes emerge in the stories of people who enact modes of rescue in a time of environmental crisis? And how might the more-than-human world inform these themes?

These attunements are sonic and expressive – including attuning to the sound of the more-than-human and the affective quality of the voice – physically connective and affective through the body’s immersion in place, temporal and spatial – through walking in place and spending time observing and being actively involved.

The Rescue Project reveals that rescuers attune through a variety of mechanisms. Rescuers attune to ecosonics, listening to Country and homeground in order to know and understand it better, and they describe ecosonics – the rustle of a frog in bushes or the call of a curlew. In *The Rescue Project* podcast, ecosonics are apparent throughout the interviews and form part of the data to be considered, analysed, and used creatively so listeners might also become attuned to distant places. Attunements to homeground and Country lead rescuers to better understand the needs of place as a player in the act of care, such as the young Indigenous rangers from Kuranda gaining self-confidence in speaking up for their Country as they learn about it. On homeground, rescuers like Helen McConnell, Angela McCaffrey, and Elizabeth Carcary attune to the more-than-human inhabitants as elements of place and come to know the whole, including the trees, birds, and fungi that respond to

their work, through this “thinking with” (Despret, 2013, p. 71).

I have identified modes of attuning, including walking, and considered how the human body responds to this attuning, reveals it through the spoken word. And I discussed animal-kin and plant-kin attunements and how these are articulated through familial expressions. But I also discussed “detuning,” or the attunement to knowing when to loosen the bonds and release an animal, whether it be to death or back into the wider more-than-human realm. Finally, I have argued that attuning can manifest as acknowledgement of the past and mindfulness of the future, as rescuers project themselves both backward and forward in time, such as longstanding acts of cross-generational love and protest on the Mongarlowe River.

I turn now, in the final chapter of this analysis, to the darker themes that emerge through acts of rescue. From climate grief to wrenching loss, from the futility of rescue to the frustration of social rejection, from the darkness of mercy killing to the culling of one group of sentient beings for the survival of another, these challenging experiences are all stories told in *The Rescue Project*. But they also contribute to the affect of courage, along with the iterative experience of encouragement, and these, too, are considered in the following chapter, “Uneasy shadows,” and the Courage of the Long Game.

Chapter 7: “Uneasy shadows,”⁶⁴ and the Courage of the Long Game

Culling and killing, antagonism from other humans, rescue failures, death and loss and grief, as it strikes: these are the darker themes considered in this chapter, that answers my question: How do these themes give active rescuers courage at this time of environmental crisis?

Courage is a framework that I interpreted from *The Rescue Project* data, but it also arrives iteratively in the form of encouragement.

In the following sections, I explore how rescuers describe the courage with which they address the challenges of their work. I then continue to discuss the complexities of finding and maintaining their courage through the longer-term practice of rescuing.

I begin by considering some of the complications of rescuing as expressed in the research data, including rescue in the context of the bigger picture: the wicked problem of the climate crisis, foregrounded in Chapter 3 (see the section titled *The Shadow, a Wicked Problem, the Hyperobject – too Big to Imagine but Something Feels Wrong*). Then I consider more personal and unique losses, including the sense of failure when a rescue animal dies and the consequent, destabilising experiences of grief and anxiety. In the second half of this chapter, I consider what is present for rescuers that keeps them doing their work: how the themes already explored in my analysis give rescuers active courage in this milieu. I consider that which is traditionally regarded as courageous: the physically challenging rescue, but then look at how the environmental virtue ethic of moral courage plays out across *The Rescue Project* contributions. Through various examples, I look at some of the thematic iterations of courage, including slow courage, courage in the community, civic and democratic expressions of courage. Finally, I demonstrate the iterative nature of courage: how acts of courageous rescue give back – rescuing as generative of courage, that is, encouraging.

⁶⁴ Sara Arthur.

The Wicked Problem, the Hyperobject: “A terrible beauty”⁶⁵

Manifested in various ways is a deep unease in the storyteller upon bearing witness to the impacts of human-induced global heating on homegrounds of care. The affects of the wicked problem of global environmental disaster, of overwhelm as a response to environmental disaster, and the spectacle and silence of environmental ruination form one of the themes which became apparent in the collection of citizen stories contributed to *The Rescue Project*.

Ruination is a term typically associated with the slow degradation of human-made buildings, a not unappealing proposition which was celebrated for its aesthetic qualities, but also acknowledged as mournfully appealing to the psyche in the European *Ruinenlust* of the 19th century (Desilvey & Edensor 2013, p. 466. See Chapter 3, and the discussion titled Paralysis and Grief). But in Australia, where First Nations ancient artwork and structures are often hidden from mainstream view, ruination is more visible in the natural environment. It, too, is not always unattractive. Rebecca Farley makes that point in a somewhat self-reflexive and ironic way in her contribution [This is it](#). Rebecca and her family had visited a park to play with friends, but they find it full of discarded plastic rubbish, as she describes:

Our eyes fly past plastic bottles and yoghurt bags to a gentle slope shimmering with tinsel. The long strands, clear and iridescent, lift and wave like seagrass in the breeze, tumbling away to colonise more parkland. It is beautiful – and deadly.

The “it” of Rebecca’s title could be read in two ways: as a representation in miniature of the enormous, wicked problem of plastic waste – impossible to imagine in its total and impossible too, to control.

“Wow,” says my eleven-year-old. “It can feed the birds in the park. Then all the wildlife in the creeks, and then whatever’s left will wash out to sea to feed the fish and turtles and seabirds. Forever, because

⁶⁵ Michael Fitzjames.

plastic never breaks down. Whoever did this has done a REALLY great job!”

But “it” might also be the taking of action on a local scale, and Rebecca and her family set to picking up the rubbish in an act of courage I revisit in the second part of this chapter.

What John Bennett observes in one moment, in [The Kookaburra rescue](#), brings unbidden visions of human-born apocalypses. As he rescues a kookaburra from a roadside accident and looks out from his home in the evening light, the mist and a single swan remind him of “Lorenzetti’s nightmare fires on the walls of Sienna’s Palazzo Pubblico, or the foul air now rising above Western Mosul.” These are devastating ruinations conjured by the liminal time between day and night. The larger picture of human alienation from the more-than-human realm in a time of climate catastrophe is brought to him unbidden, by this kookaburra rescue. His flat statement that it is all “a reminder of how distanced we have become from the natural” is borne of this discomfort, as well as his unease at being copresent with the anonymous, inscrutable bird, with distaste for the way kookaburra calls have been exploited as exotica, and dissatisfaction with what he refers to later as “this failed rescue” (the only implication in the text that the bird no longer lives). As a reader, I am left without resolution, the narrative left hanging. There is no happy ending here, and something sinister remains in the shadows. The misuse of the sound of the kookaburra to evoke the exotic, in popular culture, is a symptom of the casual disregard by humans of ecosonic integrity. The implication that humans do not care that a kookaburra might be silenced on their own Country, while at the same time egregiously displacing their sound and condemning them to, at best, being misunderstood in a location in which they are a stranger, and at worst, death for want of appropriate dwelling, is an indication of how ecosonics matter in environmental communication. John’s concerns for ecosonics are laterally shared by Mikhaila Jacoby, hunter of yellow crazy ants in the Atherton Tablelands, who describes how the ecosonics of a location is eradicated in the destructive wake of a yellow crazy ant invasion, as discussed in the previous chapter. “So, there’s reports of where you could walk into a rainforest environment and not see one lizard or one frog, not hear one bird; it’s just really, eerily silent.”

[Listen: Mikhaila Jacoby](#)

Thus, rescue and restoration are not just about keeping animals alive and growing trees. They are also, in this instance, about killing. And the killing needs to be absolute. Not an ant can be left behind: their small size and their propensity to form super colonies makes them an impossible guest, and particularly in flood-prone areas like the wet tropics where water can carry the ants to new colonies. So, poison pellets are distributed by humans and taken back by worker ants to the queen. And that means sacrifices have to be made – other insects might also take the bait. Mikhaila tells me that there are no options: “It’s either you get rid of the yellow crazy ants in a way that you know is effective, or you allow them to kill everything else. So, there wouldn’t be any other native ants left, there wouldn’t be any insects and invertebrates left in our soils, if we would let those ants get out of hand. So, what we were hoping was that with a decline in yellow crazy ant numbers that they would recolonize back, and I can really happily say that we’re actually seeing that now.”

Local, environmental ruination and the potential for a spiralling destruction is outlined by Jill Bauer in [Whacking weeds rescues creek!](#) Jill describes watching the slow takeover of her local bush by weeds after piles of grass clippings were dumped on a roadside sloping down to a creek. This is a miniature “shadow place” (Plumwood 2008), disregarded by local authorities, and here is the hyperobject (Morton, 2010, see Chapter 3, and the section titled The Shadow, a Wicked Problem, the Hyperobject) of the climate crisis made local – a slow-moving, ruinous threat. It reveals itself to Jill through her regular and close homeground observation over more than a year:

[Listen: Jill Bauer](#)

Over the summer the large heaps of grass clippings began to grow and grow. The season of weekly lawn mowing had finished causing the heaps to topple over. The grass and weeds spread further down the slope, just as cyclone season had begun. The slow meandering creek had changed into wild brown force sharing the seeds of summer downstream. The following year, the weeds had multiplied and gradually began to take over the sunlit patch of grass where the

swamp wallabies would graze in the late afternoon. The small wattles had slowly become strangled by corky passion vine and were withering away before they could yield flowers for the brush tail possums, birds and insects.

Jill acted democratically, contacting her local government council for help. Still, nothing was done, and over the next 12 months, slowly and inexorably, “the corky passion vine had started curling it’s thin strands around the ironbarks.” In the next section, I discuss Jill’s contacting of officials as a marker of her civic courage, and her dogged mobilising of her neighbourhood to help is also community courage. But the almost banal nature of the slow takeover of her environment is hard not to read figuratively as a metaphor for creeping global environmental catastrophe.

Across Australia, when the rain doesn’t fall to encourage an all-consuming weedy growth as in the previous contribution, the droughts arrive instead. Ruination is not always a linear narrative: the droughts ease then return ever more intense, then there is rain and recovery before once again another drought comes hard on the heels of the last. During much of the writing of this PhD, many parts of eastern Australia not accustomed to drought experienced water shortages. Rural cities like Tamworth had mere months’ worth of water left in their dams (Wade & Bagshaw, 2019). Artist and contributor Michael Fitzjames, in his contribution [Bullio](#), was bearing witness to the ruin of drought impact as he walked and worked in the NSW Southern Highlands. Paying attention, communicating environmentally, as art can, is defined as an act of both crisis and care, and so painting too can be regarded as an act of rescue.

[Listen: Michael Fitzjames](#)

Michael Fitzjames: I stayed in a remote place called Bullio and drew and photographed and walked the land. When I started painting back in the studio I slowly began to realize that I was painting, not the wonderful country in my mind but the effects of drought.

So, as Michael tells it, after the walk and in reflecting on the country through the act of painting, was when he grimly realised the insidious nature of this particular drought on this beloved country. His art practice had shown the true

state of this ground, the painting revealing “the land looks worse than ever. Exhausted, dying.” The extent and severity of this drought in Bullio is a result of global warming, Michael observes, and he concludes by referencing the hyperobject and its outcome directly: “At the end of days there will be a terrible beauty.”

The statement is gutting both on the page and in the ear, and so, as with all wicked problems, I can only glance at a part of it before needing to look away.

Death and Loss: “And then one Monday morning it was dead”⁶⁶

The experience of imperfect rescues, of failure to bring an animal or plant to thrive, offers a chance for humble reflection. As I have previously discussed, complete restoration is never possible, and attempts to do so are problematised – we can only live with Haraway’s “trouble” (2016). Sometimes killing is necessary to allow for a success story; other times, the experiences of a multitude of deaths for *The Rescue Project* contributors serve to emphasise the fragility of life and engender humility and care in the face of this. This theme is the last I explore before moving to the next section, on courage, and I place it penultimately for good reason – to constantly rescue is to dwell in and intervene in the liminal edge of life and death, which requires courage and generates it.

Puig de la Bellacasa (2012) notes, “we cannot possibly care for everything, not everything can count in a world, not everything is relevant in a world – there is no life without some kind of death” (p. 205). We have already observed how intense a commitment acts of rescue can be, involving hard labour over time, as rescuers like Sue McIntyre spend years learning how to raise and support their plant kin, and the Kuranda Bulmba Rangers walk through dense bush to seek out a tiny foe – the Yellow Crazy Ant. Sara Arthur, in her story of shark rescue, writes of her own experiences:

There have been other failures: trees cut down while Council ignored my calls. Small birds in boxes fed by droppers, slowly dying. Failures linger in the mind like uneasy shadows.

⁶⁶ Dodie Henderson.

But taking action can also mean making decisions that impact on the very survival of the rescued. The psychological impact of being present for undesired deaths as part rescue and rehabilitation has been recognised by the non-government organisation The Foundation for National Parks and Wildlife. The organisation has published psychological support materials via a website called Wildlife Heroes and a podcast of the same name about how to cope with these pressures (Miller 2020). Reflections on these pressures and on the difficult decision whether to cull an animal or to keep providing care when death is a likely outcome appeared in various contributions to *The Rescue Project*. In this section, I illustrate how the contributions reflect the lived experience of these events and how these acts occur in modes of humility.

Dodie Henderson's story describes a cascade of losses, each more impactful than the last. How do we differentiate between a human death and a non-human one? Should we? A search of the literature could not locate scholarship that considers why we think differently about human death and animal death, but reading Smuts (2001), I surmise it may have something to do with the depth of kinship, which she defines in seven levels (see Chapter 3). Her category of level seven of copresencing with more-than-human creatures involves moments where the individual subject disappears into the relationship, such is the level of the bond, like the intimacies that humans have with one another – parental or sexual partnerships. Smuts is ambivalent about a numbering system, and I join her in this ambivalence: numbers imply a stratum of values. But numbers are a convenient means to indicate degrees of relationship, and the value of engagement at any of these levels is contextual. For example, bat carers cannot and should not aim for level 7 copresencing for fear of endangering an appropriate reintegration (V. Barrett, personal communication, November 23, 2020). Certainly, some humans grieve the loss of companion animals to a similar degree to human companions (Margolies, 1999; Harriden et al., 2020), and ritual grieving of animals has a long history (DeMello, 2016).

Dodie's measured and deeply moving contribution, [Why we don't have Mondays anymore](#), encompasses animal rescue and related kinship, rescue-related survival, and death, including a human death. Dodie's 19-year-old daughter Alexandra died in a farming accident a week after rescuing a joey from

their dead mother's pouch. The last text message Dodie received from her daughter was to request Dodie tend to the kangaroo's feeding needs while Alexandra was at work. In the weeks that followed, the presence of the young animal obliged the family to maintain its connection with the basic simplicities of caring for another.

[Listen: Dodie Henderson](#)

Dodie Henderson: It made us think about the basics of life. Fresh milk. Lukewarm water. And when the time came for us to say goodbye to Ally and celebrate her life with her many friends, there was a posse of grieving youngsters who took on the role of joey care ... freeing us to care for those who were caring for us.

The joey stayed with the family, "long enough for the guests to go, and the house to return to some form of normality. And then one Monday morning it was dead. Curled up in its pouch, looking happy, but cold and lifeless." The loss of this joey, which had maintained the family's sense of connection to Alexandra in the days after her death, compounded the community's grief, so much so that Dodie describes how she and her family and friends then rewrote time, removing Mondays from the days of the week from thereon.

This human care, this animal care, this human loss, this animal loss – the experiences are described by Dodie in such a way as to reflect two parallel and yet absolutely entwined stories of human and animal kin. How does this experience relate to the larger themes of ecohumility and courage? There is no lesson to be learned here, no easy takeaway message. Dodie is staying with the trouble (Haraway, 2016): demonstrated in her prose's direct nature and the unfolding narrative. It is the slow accumulation of description that helps to reveal the trouble and find the comfort. Life always results in death, just sometimes not in the way we expect. I wrote to Dodie after receiving that contribution to acknowledge the story and thank her, and given its personal nature, reiterate that she might remove it at any time from the public site. In the correspondence that followed, she wrote: "I am doing a Masters in Sustainable Development and next year will be working on a dissertation on journalism and reporting of climate change, so similar fields. We have so much work to do!" (D. Henderson,

personal communication, December 11, 2018). Thus, Dodie confirmed she, too, takes the value of environmental communication as critical. In willingly sharing her devastating story, she demonstrates a strikingly humble acceptance of one of the greatest losses: that of a child by a parent.

Alexandra's was the only human death told of in the story contributions. More commonly described were situations in which a human grapples with the moral obligation to kill, whether that be an animal that will not survive but is suffering or an animal which does not belong, and whose death will be for the betterment of the broader more-than-human community that shares the homeground.

Cane toads (*Bufo marinus*) are an Australian example of an animal with no defenders in Australia. Lacking the beauty of the iconic, celebrated, but similarly problematic feral horses known as brumbies, cane toads are widely despised. Should an unlikely Australia-wide eradication ever come about, the mourners would be few, if any (Simpson, 2014). There is no ambivalence about cane toad killing in Australia, but also a considerable amount of unnecessary suburban brutality – when I first arrived in Brisbane in 1980, my teenage, Australian cousin took my young brothers and I out into the garden at night to demonstrate various cane toad murder techniques, including kicking them around the garden and decapitating them with a spade. Yet killing is necessary because the toads have already eradicated large numbers of native animals (Shine, 2010) and have considerably damaged the unique and fragile Australian ecology. Gillian Egan demonstrates no regret in her storytelling of eradication in the service of restoring space in the habitat for native animals to flourish. In her story [The Dam](#), Gillian “declared war” and set about knowing her enemy from tadpole (which she dubs “toadpole”) to adult.

I researched lifecycles and read everything I could get my hands on.
I Googled cane toad control methods and grilled local experts on humane disposal. I contacted the university and constructed my first “toadpole trap.”

Gillian was a ruthless warrior and a humorous writer, but her humour does not undermine the daunting size of the task:

For two years my fridge held bottles of torpid toadpoles, and the freezers overflowed with arctic amphibians, much to the displeasure

of my husband. On more than one occasion he went on the hunt for a quick microwave snack only to return sour-faced with a Bufo-baggie.⁶⁷

Gillian describes the toad-hunting routine with gusto, but also her attention to detail, sorting desired inhabitants by hand to keep them safe: rare tadpoles, snails, water scorpions, and tiny yabbies. Then she would empty the trap and re-bait it, using toad glands from her frozen storage collection of previous victims. Eventually, the reward for all this killing is simple – a restoration of balance in the biodiversity:

There's nary a toad in sight, and the bulrushes ringing the dam are alive with a chorus of sedge frogs, rocket frogs, and even the odd striped marsh frog joining in. A little pied cormorant thinks it's a pretty good place to come fishing and a pair of wood ducks has decided to move in and call this place home. They reckon it's good. And we agree.

But how do carers cope with losses? There were a range of stories which explored this inevitable experience. Natasha Milne doesn't want to "toughen up," as she was advised by one vet as he euthanized a bird. "I still shed a tear each time I am witness to the end of a mortal existence," she writes, and, in fact, bearing witness to their passing is a "great privilege."

In [Roo tales](#), Smith observes his apparent lack of scientific logic in rescuing a single baby joey: kangaroos are so prolific that they considered a pest species by the rural community. Their status, as he describes, is "f**k'n millions of the bastards out there." Nonetheless, he rescues regardless, including pre-emptive rescue, in moving roadkill carcasses to the side of the road to prevent further deaths of the consequent carrion feeders. These are "sticky environments" (Tsing, 2005, see Chapter 3 of this research, and the section titled *It's not all Plain Sailing – the Problematics of Courageous Rescue*). Smith enacts a series of in-the-moment rescues to preserve animal life but carries the burden of his

⁶⁷ A "Bufo-baggie" is an example of playful Australian slang. It describes a sealed sandwich/freezer bag with a cane toad in it.

decisions with some ambivalence, writing of weighing up and bearing the karmic burden of no longer being able to mercy-kill joeys too tiny to survive. In the framework of environmental virtue ethics, this is an example of the limitations of dualistic thinking around virtue and vice, even with the assisting assessment criteria of responding “in excellent ways” (Sandler, 2013, p. 3, see Chapter 3, and the section titled Humility and Virtue Ethics). What constitutes an excellent response here? Deciding this is complex and takes time, during which a dying moment may occur even before a decision is made.

Meanwhile, despite the aforementioned conservation status of the kangaroo, Smith continues to rescue individuals and ponder the nature of life and death, with humour and pathos expertly mixed in the restorying. In his contribution, a mother kangaroo, injured by her entanglement with a wire fence, is eventually shot after Smith takes her joey to the vet. In the telling, Smith is circumspect. There are no neat endings to this story and no certainty for the joey’s survival. Their mother’s outcome is only implied through mention of the visit by Jason the grader driver.

I don’t know how life ultimately went for young joey. Prognosis was good. But after first seeming to mend, his mother languished. I kept track of her up in the scrub for a couple of days but she was moving a shorter distance each day. Not grazing nor going down to the dam.

Jason the grader driver came by with his firearm on the weekend.

It is in death that Karen Coombes’ beloved Lumholtz’s tree kangaroos are able to help her investigate a critical experience threatening the Atherton Tablelands tree kangaroo population. By Smuts’ categorisation, Karen has a level seven attunement and intersubjectivity with her care kangaroos, and it is her 24-hour-a-day, on-call, copresencing with the animals that brought her to understand the threat. Knowing their body language and movement so intimately has led Karen to the realisation that the animals are going blind. This is supported anecdotally by farmer and rainforest gully planter Elizabeth Carcary who found one in one of her paddocks.

We could see it bumping into things and it would sit on the lawn, and look around. Well, move its head around. As if to say, well it had no

idea where it was going, which direction to travel in.

Blindness is not compatible with survival outside of a rescue centre, so this threatens the survival of the local population. Karen Coombes says she would not have noticed the blindness at first:

I nearly did miss it. I was rescuing for a long time before I realized that I thought they were blind, and it was just by accident because this particular one I decided to keep him for a few days longer ... But he started bumping into things and so that's how we found that out.

Karen Coombes' levels of intimacy with her Tree Kangaroos operate, for some of the other tree kangaroo researchers on the Tablelands, outside accepted animal/carer boundaries. In personal communication with some of these researchers, I became aware of a disjuncture between different camps of research. Researchers who were not present of the Tablelands at the time of my visit and thus were not available for inclusion in the podcast suggested that Karen was projecting human needs onto the animals, that tree kangaroos are inclined to act confused and questioned Karen's presumption that the tree kangaroos were blind at all. The task of assessing the opposing viewpoints is beyond the scope of this research, but Karen confirmed her suspicions of blindness by conducting, for her, as a woman deeply attuned to her animals, the "really horrible" task of removing brain and eye samples, to send for analysis to Associate Professor Andrew Peters in Wildlife Health and Pathology at Charles Sturt University in Wagga in NSW.

I telephoned Andrew Peters to ask him about what the analysis of the samples was showing. He told me that the blindness is occurring deep inside the eye cannot be superficial damage. It is likely to come from a viral infection that he and Karen posit due to a climate-changing landscape. He told me: "There are plenty of diseases including viruses that happen with landscape change, increased temperature, dryness, these changes could certainly lead to a viral infection like that we're seeing emerging" (A. Peters, personal communication, May 8, 2019). The Queensland wet tropics, including the Atherton Tablelands, are bearing the brunt of emerging diseases in wildlife in response, and it was the controversial level of Karen's intimacy with the individual kangaroos that

revealed the problem, Andrew said:

And that's fascinating because in those animals, on face value, they don't look as if there's something wrong. Karen, with her enormous experience, knows there is something wrong. And she has these observations of what she's seeing in the broader landscape.

Karen points out that the traditional position amongst scientists is that population conservation should be the focus, and "individuals aren't important." But her individual care is what has taught her so much about the kangaroos: "we learn so much from each and every one of them."

Andrew Peters highlighted the value of this obsessive, unorthodox rescue practice by rehabilitators like Karen:

They're really at the coalface of interacting with wild animals that professional expertise doesn't fully accept or understand. The reality is her experience and time, and her face-to-face hands-on time with wildlife has given her a wisdom and knowledge that might be hard to capture in our paradigms.

Karen's affectual response to landscape mirrors the affectual response that has driven our scientific, investigative desire to understand the world, Andrew tells me. "Our pioneers, it was that emotional response which drove [their] investigation." Karen agrees:

[Listen: Karen Coombes](#)

You can't, you can't do this and not get emotionally affected, or what's the word I'm thinking of? You know, to be, just, you're just, totally, I say dedicated, you're 100% in there. And you know that if you don't put that 100% toward saving these animals, then it just isn't enough.

And it is in sound, as in the extract here, and in the previous chapter, that Karen Coombes demonstrates what tremendous determination and courage feel like in the body: the quaver of her voice, as she describes an exhausted yet tireless response to the urgency of tree kangaroo vulnerability in a changing environment.

So, how might rescuers like Karen Coombes and Natasha Milne continue to do their work, maintaining humility and attunement, but also keeping courage in view, as they bear witness to the “terrible beauty” of Michael Fitzjames’ “end of days?” The contributors to *The Rescue Project*, it might be reasonably assumed, self-select as active rescuers, so “doing nothing” (Landry et al., 2018, p. 19, see Chapter 3) is unlikely to be a long-lasting option. For some contributors, observing homeground as a first step, and from there, making choices to take action, appears as a thread throughout the stories. For others, bearing witness provides a means to find ways to move courageously through their discomfort and distress. As Michael Fitzjames does in his art practice, Rose (1999) tells us the act of paying attention is one of the ways we can take up our “participation in living systems” (p. 99), but also, drawing on Levinas and Newton, care brings about our own consciousness: “Subjectivity arrives, so to speak, in the form of a responsibility toward an other ...” (Newton, in Rose, 1999, p. 100), and it is this responsibility that compels Michael Fitzjames to paint, and, in enacting this responsibility, gives Brian McWilliam of McMinn’s Lagoon daily pleasure. As he says: “I went around this morning, a drive around in my mobility chair, and I still thought to myself: ‘this is a fantastic place.’”

In this section, I have outlined some of the significant, and profoundly moving challenges of being a rescuer. Next, I examine manifestations of the environmental virtue ethic courage that I interpreted in *The Rescue Project data*.

Courage in the Long Game

We have already met story contributor Sara Arthur in Chapter 5, in the discussion on animalcentric ecohumility. When Sara acted to attune herself to a shark drowning on dry land, she centred the creature’s suffering and enacted the rescue of a sentient being that would not thank her and could well cause her harm. In doing so, she exhibited several kinds of courage, and at the forefront of these was courage of the classic, heroic kind – unplanned, unprepared for and, physically challenging.

This section draws substantially from the literature review, Chapter 3, and the section titled Courage, and I will cite relevant scholarship where appropriate.

While popular definitions and usage see the affect and the virtue of courage used to describe physically heroic actions in a dramatic moment (Pianalto, 2012: See Chapter 3 and the section titled Courage), resulting in a quick fix (McLauchlan, 2019), or planned physical actions involving bodily risk by activist groups such as Greenpeace (Zelko, 2004) and Sea Shepherd (Bondaroff, 2020), Sara's is the only example of physical bravery in the face of personal risk, in *The Rescue Project* contributions – but as she says, it makes for great storytelling. However, Sara's story demonstrates other kinds of courage, which I describe in this section, as I address the last of my research questions: How do these themes give active rescuers courage?

I note here that contributors to *The Rescue Project* did not use the word courage in their contributions or interviews, instead using descriptions of actions that show measures of courage and encouragement. Randall (2009) points out that “positive valuations of the natural world can give them strength in making choices” (p. 124), and I illustrate his observation through this section, considering some of the different expressions of courage articulated in the interviews and the story contributions. I begin with two types of courage already under recent discussion in environmental virtue ethics: physical courage and acting in the moment, and moral courage, which accounts for the subjectivity of others. I then move on to new kinds of courage found in the data that sit under what I describe as *slow courage: community courage* and *civic courage*, both of which are enacted over time, the first at a grassroots level of community organisation, another which begins the process of enacting courage through democratic processes. Finally, I consider *restorative courage*, or encouragement – the process by which a courageous environmental response further engenders courage within the rescuers.

Physical Courage: “I got to be a hero”⁶⁸

There were two families were walking along the beach on a sultry holiday evening, as we have already heard, from Sara Arthur, when “we see a small shark, perhaps 2 metres long – or bigger, the next time I tell the story.” The

⁶⁸ Sara Arthur.

shark is facing the land, and needs to be turned around, which Sara carefully manages, using a stick, her hand, her bare foot, leaping back and forth to avoid their teeth. Eventually, the animal is too exhausted to fight her, and Sara is able to push them back into the shallows. As she recounts the physical struggle, her surroundings recede into the distance – the sense of the houses beyond the rocky point, the children running, the seaweed, the collected shells, the laughter and “unhelpful commentary” of her adult companions. Sara attunes to the shark. The narrative perspective zooms in through the darkness to centre Sara and the creature together: the work at hand, the physical, affectual relationships between one body, a beast of the wild sea, and the other, a human turned custodian.

This is straightforward physical courage displayed by a person without training for handling marine animals. It is adrenaline-fueled, like the courageous acts of mythological heroes or environmental activists, but Sara’s action in the moment also displayed other complexities of courage. This, for example, was just one action of many she has engaged in over time, as she describes in her story, and for Sara, these actions require a base level of psychological bravery in that they are a response to a place of deep climate anxiety (Sara Arthur, in Miller, 2016⁶⁹). I call that long-standing level of fundamental bravery, *slow courage*, to be discussed later in this section. Slow courage and *civic courage*, or courage concerned for the broader community, which Sara also displays, are subthemes of a foundational courage Sara exhibits – moral courage. Pianalto (2012) and Fredericks (2014) define moral courage as stemming from a recognition of and desire to act according to the subjectivity of others. This might be for another, such as the shark, or against another, as Sara does, risking, however lightly, the social approbation of her companions.

⁶⁹ I interviewed Sara Arthur for ABC Radio National in a documentary called *Climate of Emotion: Grief*.

Moral Courage as a Theme: “Keep loving”⁷⁰

As well as physical and slow courage, Sara Arthur’s choice to attune in order to act for another subjective being, and her refusal to follow her companions in ignoring the life and death struggle unfolding on the beach, are each an indication of her morally-derived courage (Pianalto, 2012, p. 165). Emerging as it does out of humility, moral courage, in accounting for the subjectivity of both sentient and non-sentient entities (Hursthouse, 2007), aligns with New Materialist thinking in that it orients toward intersubjective, multispecies entanglements. Here, again, are rescuers facing and acknowledging others as ethical subjects, and either acting and speaking in the human context on their behalf or taking a stand against other humans threatening the more-than-human realm. In one way or another, all of *The Rescue Project* stories can be interpreted as demonstrating courage which fits into a framework of moral courage, and I illustrate some examples of overt moral courage from the data throughout this section.

A subset of moral courage is further defined by social risk, that is, decisions made for another’s subjectivity against the prevailing social practice, thereby risking ostracisation (as discussed in Chapter 3, via Pianalto, 2012; Fredericks, 2014; Milstein, 2020). Bat carer Vanessa Barrett, in [The Hidden Life of a Bat Rescuer](#), recounts a general social pressure against her rescue work, as represented by a relative who makes disparaging comments about it. Vanessa’s moral courage lies in her defiant acts of personal resistance to such pressure. Courage is required here in the face of widespread and casual ignorance of and distaste toward the animals she rescues: community dislike of flying foxes is a cultural trope on the east coast of Australia that requires constant re-education (Lunney et al., 2002), and Vanessa, in the face of this pressure, none-the-less continues to advocate for bats in her writing and rescue work (V. Barrett, personal communication, November 23, 2020). In Vanessa’s contribution, she makes her point clear with a mix of humour, frustration, and ecological

⁷⁰ Vanessa Barrett.

statements of fact and observes the inconsistencies in the casual dismissals of an entire species by her human community:

I am fascinated by the way our culture demonises some animals and worships others – for example, miscarriage-causing toxoplasmosis and the toll on native wildlife have no effect on the status of cats in our society because we love them unconditionally.

Vanessa closes with a statement of determination and courage sustained by her decision to attune and her understanding of the ecological and personal ecocultural value of the creatures: “So, I will keep loving baby fruit bats for all the rewards they bring to me, and to the wild.”

Like Vanessa, NSW farmer Louise Freckelton chooses to act for the tough, native *Carex* sedge grass in her piece [Carex and the Ducklings](#), as described in the previous chapter. It takes courage to choose to transgress community norms, as the grass “isn’t loved around here,” and in Louise’s case, these norms are the choices and advice of the broader farming community, represented by the agronomist who wanted to “nuke” the grasses. Louise attunes to the needs of her homeground, and, in prioritising place and the more-than-human over social pressure, her story embodies the definition of moral courage: again, making choices that risk her ostracisation by the community.

Dodie Henderson, whom we have already met, belongs to a family of rescuers who have demonstrated moral courage over human and more-than-human generations. In [Why we don’t have Mondays anymore](#), she describes her parents as animal people moved to keep rescuing, despite creatures often being “on their last legs.” She, her parents, and her children have mourned the losses of “those that have died despite our best efforts and shared the joy of saving some that would have otherwise perished.” It takes time to care for an animal, often requiring feeding every two hours through the night – time and courage, particularly for children to cope with losing them “to pneumonia, or botulism, or dogs.” Experience of these losses, however, “cements in children the qualities of compassion and responsibility” – the losses have value in that they promote the development of moral courage in her children. But courage born of loss can be tested further: the death of Dodie’s daughter, the joey that

nevertheless needed care, the community that stepped in: a generous act of care in almost unfathomable circumstances that is both moral and community courage writ large. Later in this chapter, I discuss how this opportunity to enact rescue at a time of great grief gave the family and its wider community courage in return.

Slow Courage: “In all seasons”⁷¹

Louise Freckelton’s courage is expressed over time, as she writes, “in all seasons.” Over a decade of regenerative farming, Louise has watched her Home Valley, lying below their self-built house, recover from intensive farming (L. Freckelton, personal communication, October 6, 2020). That time has included several years of drought and bushfire. So, Louise’s courage is both enacted over time and iterative over time, sustaining and morphing through her acts of copresencing. I call this *slow courage*, with a nod to the slow movement (Parkins, 2004).

Slow courage can manifest not only through a single earthly relationship with an animal or homeland but through a number of unrelated actions over time. The following stories express a variety of slow courage, including the patience and hard manual work in the service of a single location or community of sentient beings, like Gillian Egan, who one by one eliminates the cane toads on her property. And they include numerous acts building to a lifetime’s practice of courage, like shark rescuer, Sara Arthur. Sara drew on a long personal history of choosing action over stasis; each action another brick in a somewhat fragile wall of personal encouragement (Miller, 2016b), and she is buoyed by a variety of successes she lists in her contribution:

Like pulling plastic from the sea during snorkelling expeditions, marine lives saved by a simple gesture. Like small birds and possums, found at the bottom of trees and delivered to wildlife rescuers. Like the time I stood next to a boy of 10 or so, him mindlessly whacking a tree with a stick so that the bark came away.

⁷¹ Louise Freckelton.

Instead of angrily telling him to stop, I gently pointed out to this stranger's son that in front of him stood a miracle, tonnes of wood and leaves held in the air by evolution's engineering, turning his waste carbon dioxide into life-giving oxygen. The precious part of trunk that carried the tree's blood like his arteries and veins, lay just under the bark that he was destroying. He stopped whacking the tree.

For the contributor known as "Hill Farmer" in their piece [Grassing the hills](#), their measure of success is in the improving state of their homestead as they restore it over five years. Wrangling a difficult former owner, still a neighbour, who had run the property down, they saw the potential in this damaged landscape: "What idiot would look to buy this over-cleared, steep, rocky, poor land that had been overgrazed for 30 years with massive weeds, rabbits?" The patient, slow courage to transform it, alongside pride, excitement, and joy, imbues the writing. The vibrant energy of these affects builds in the writing via a quasi-list format – short sentences one after the other indicating both landscape changes, and new more-than-human relationships developing:

After only five years of this regime the block was looking superb. The kangaroo grass was increasing in cover. The gullies run clear water all year. The eucalypt regrowth was 4-6 metres high. The wattles and other shrubs were slowly extending their numbers and range. The hills were going from bare, with few trees to small areas of open woodland. The cover has meant more birds and we get excited when new bird species appear on the place and can be added to the list. The resident red bellied black snake is now considered a friend after we learnt they like to eat brown snakes, and the wrens keep us notified of where 'she' is in the garden.

Similarly, Gillian Egan, on her tract of land described in [The Dam](#), decided to tackle a subjective presence that has caused immense environmental damage, despite the collective efforts of various environmental actors, from researchers to pest controllers to land carers and individual citizens across northern Australia. Here the toxic, invasive cane toad has become an ineradicable pest. Determinedly, closely engaging with an animal considered repulsive by most, over two years, Gillian manually removed every toad and toad tadpole. Hers

was slow courage in action: viscerally unpleasant and backbreaking work requiring physical stamina and physical courage, but also the courage to accept there may be failure, given the size of the challenge and the ongoing maintenance required. Her celebrated reward was the elimination of the pest on her property, at least for now, and the flourishing return of native animals.

In [On Planting a Forest](#), Kathryn Read demonstrates slow courage built over years of work which started in 2008, when her son was three (K. Read, personal communication, 16 September 2020). This work is also an expression of courage of scale – when the volunteers are flagging, a busload of helpers from Taronga Zoo arrives, and they “take up their places alongside us, sending a ripple of renewed energy through the early planters.” A variety of slow courage is that which is engendered by broader community engagement, that is, communities of people and more-than-human communities of creatures and inhabitants of Country and homeland.

Community Courage: “Beside other hands”⁷²

As Kathryn Read’s story illustrates, courage in the individual enables courage in the citizenry – it scales upwards exponentially increases as citizens form communities and “get started” (Moore, 2016, p. 308) on the act of care. In *The Rescue Project*, *community courage*, in which individuals work together and encourage one another, is found in the collective replanting work described by various subjects, including Kathryn Read, Luise Manning, David Manning, David Bell, Brian McWilliam, and Jill Bauer. The following stories reveal this as a journey that travels from individual action to the rallying of a group. Speaking up to inspire a community is not easy. To persist long enough to succeed in mobilising community action takes both courage and personal commitment, as these stories demonstrate.

Luise Manning began picking up marine rubbish from a kayak with her husband on Springfield Lake in Brisbane, Queensland. In [Landcare Rescue – A rescue project that turns the tide on litter](#), she describes the process of mobilising a

⁷² Kathryn Read.

group as daunting to begin with, but with a speedy response, Luise found her courage and pressed on with many more new activities:

I'd felt overwhelmed about setting up a new group but with the help of my husband and like-minded residents it wasn't a chore, it was fun and exciting. It gave me a new purpose and direction. I found a whole new group of people who were also interested in the environment. Our group actively participates in litter clean ups and in 2018 we had 200 helpers and collected 9 cubic metres of builder's waste.

That was the beginning of several community actions – then followed the publishing of a children's book, a social media campaign and a brand-new Landcare group.

Also picking up rubbish in the community space was Rebecca Farley and her family. For Rebecca, looking for recreation with her family on a visit to a park and finding only the abandoned and scattered debris of the fun of others, this turns out to be a teachable moment. Instead of ignoring it or becoming dispirited in the face of the hubris it takes for humans to scatter their rubbish so wilfully, this rescuing family acts domestically and tenaciously to collect it. As they do so, they discuss consumerism, environmental regulation, the nature of plastic, the failure of the recycling industry, the animals they are helping by picking up the rubbish, and more. The nature of this conversation, and taking action, brings tangible relief: "I think, this is it. We are doing it. Learning. Making the world better." Courage is articulated in the uncomplicated words: "We'll be alright, if we just keep doing this."

The story of the inception of the Yellow Crazy Ant Taskforce in Kuranda on the Atherton Tablelands also marks a progression of individual to community action. Yellow crazy ants are a daunting prospect. A pest species in Australia, they are tiny and voracious, and the rainforest scrub they like as habitat is dense and immensely difficult to navigate. Mikhaila Jacoby's horror at their discovery at the top of her driveway in Kuranda drove her to rally her neighbours and swiftly form a collaboration with the Djabugay Bulmba Ranger training program led by Jimmy Richards. Very quickly, the whole community was involved. "We had about 100 volunteers sign up within a few weeks," she told me. It took calm,

perseverance, and determination – but against the odds, there was success. Walking through thick rainforest regrowth, Jimmy Richards and his group were still searching for signs of the ants when I spoke to them in 2019. He told me: “We found nothing when we walked that side [of the river], so we’re hoping we can find nothing on this side. But with all of the rain, it’s washed a lot of things down, so we’re more concentrating on down the bottom of the Barron River.” The job will be ongoing and will take continued community vigilance and, in the face of those relentless demands, courage to stay on top of a threat that may never be fully eradicated.

The first Landcare group in the Northern Territory was begun by Brian McWilliam ([McMinns Lagoon](#)). Brian mobilised his local community in the 1970s, and now that community has extended internationally, with visitors coming from all around the world to see the Lagoon’s birdlife. Such was the community’s success, the Federal Government’s environmental employment program, The Green Army, was involved in an annual bird count until the program ceased in 2018. So Brian worries for the future of the lagoon, with local engagement waning. Community courage is not always consistent. When I spoke to Brian, despite his decades of success, he reflected Worden’s disorderly stages of grief (in Randall, 2009, see Chapter 3, section Paralysis and Grief), where a state of encouragement is not linearly incremental. He was feeling anxiety for future custodianship: “we’re just in a stalemate right now. I can’t get hold of volunteers, even the people who are in the group, they are very busy with work and kids and sports.”

Jill Bauer was undeterred when her council did not respond to her requests for help to deal with the slow-moving weed infestation of her local creek in Brisbane, Queensland. As Randall (2009) suggests occurs in the processes of environmental grief, after an initial sense of loss, a reinvestment of emotional energy saw Jill, in [Whacking weeds rescues creek!](#) gather up other Landcare members and “armed with my gardening clothes, hat and gloves” begin disentangling the corky passion vines, pulling up non-native Mexican Yucca and Brazilian Red Hots, and bringing home a South African Bird of Paradise plant to put in her garden, where it could cause no ecological damage. She found “a tiny, graceful tree frog curled up inside the plant’s leaves. I took that as a sign

that it would like living in my garden next to a creek” – her assembling a community was rewarded with a native companion for her own homeground.

Jill was not the only one in *The Rescue Project* who attempted to turn her individual concern into civic action by calling on her local government. Although *civic courage* was not a large theme through the research data, it is worth consideration as indicative of another level of courage performed through taking action.

Civic Courage: Their legacy empowers us”⁷³

Jill Bauer’s local council may not have stepped up to play its part despite her repeated pleas, but even so, Jill felt requesting and expecting action from the civic and democratic sphere was appropriate. Within *The Rescue Project*, a small number of contributions outline making use or attempting to make use of civic structures and civic-oriented activism to effect environmental change. For example, Sara Arthur overtly articulates that her array of rescue actions includes democratic action, or *civic courage*, with the inclusion of: “Successes like: letters written to governments, emails to ministers.” I outline further examples below. These, too, take time and fall under the definition of slow courage.

Luise Manning, introduced earlier in this chapter, focuses some of her efforts on asking civic structures to fund her rescue projects and describes the challenges and rewards of attempting to mobilise communities to take direct action in litter gathering. In looking to non-government organisations, as well as governments, for support she demonstrates an expectation that these bodies play a part in, and take some responsibility for, assisting the work. She also has civic expectations of her community – she is frustrated by segments of the community who continue to drop litter. She makes efforts to address these by approaching community representatives, like managers of building sites where some tradesmen are particular offenders and asking for behaviour change.

⁷³ Susan Doran.

These are a small sample of stories about democratic action contributed as gestures of rescue, but civic courage in the environmental context is an area be suited for further qualitative and quantitative research – for example, inquiry into how environmental rescuers prioritise their voting choices.

Despite the indications of courage here, the literature suggests those who do engage on this civic level with the intention of changing the course of the future of an environmental site or species frequently report fatigue and burnout (Maslach & Leiter, 2005; Chen & Gorski, 2015). Progress can be slow with frequent setbacks. So how do rescuers maintain their courage? In the following and final section, I reflect on ways courage is iterative: how the experience of rescuing generates courage, encouraging the rescuers.

En-couragement: “Restorative magic”⁷⁴

Courage in the heroic sense requires a burst of adrenaline and some quick-thinking action, completed in a short time frame. So how do rescuers maintain their courage over the long game and build on that courage, remaining encouraged, or inspired with courage, made strong or heartened (from the French word, *cour*)?⁷⁵ As mentioned previously, courage in the contributed stories of rescuers is iterative – the results of courageous acts further encourage the actor. Thus, humility and courage engender encouragement. Nairn (2019) points out that young climate activists working together in New Zealand in 2016 reported that they counter discouragement by collectivising both their hope and their despair. In this way, the sense of carrying an individual burden was diminished (p. 447). In her contribution [Friends of the Mongarlowe River is 33 years old](#) Susan Doran lists generations of activists taking action over cycles of attempted assault on the Mongarlowe River in the NSW Southern Highlands, including mining and logging and waste dumping.

[Listen: Susan Doran](#)

⁷⁴ Kathryn Read.

⁷⁵ Oxford English Dictionary

These activists have been participants in democratic struggle – their protest was aimed not just at stopping the work but also at gaining government attention. They called on government bodies to both refuse approvals for destructive work and to change legislation to protect the site into the future. But the history of these actions offers encouragement to the current crop of activists: “Their legacy empowers us,” Susan writes.

Kathryn Read, replanting at Capertee Valley, gathers encouragement from both the collective process and her individual experience. Here she writes directly of the reward of hope which Finfgeld (1999) describes as a factor for courage:

[Listen: Kathryn Read](#)

The restorative nature of replanting the birds’ habitat works its own restorative magic on me. There’s an inter-connectedness and a hopefulness to planting trees ... tree planting gives you that mad hope.

So, what might Kathryn mean by the “mad” part of this hope? When I recorded Kathryn’s reading, she told me of her climate despair and her fear that humans have left it too late to fix the wicked problem, the hyperobject of an already heating planet. Kathryn is active on many environmental fronts. Her facial expressions and words display her anxiety and a sense of hopelessness that none of this work will make a difference. The planting gives her *restorative courage*, yet the hope she feels when in the bush, planting, lacks grounding in scientific data, and she knows this: thus, to her, the hope is an expression of madness.

While the word “encourage” was not used directly by contributors, it was often implied by other words or phrases. Luise Manning started with personal rubbish collection in her kayak, built up to a community Clean Up Australia event (Van Rooy, 2016), then a social media campaign, a new Landcare group, and even the writing of a children’s book. The encouragement came from her community becoming inspired enough to join her, collaborations with other environment groups, a nomination for the Healthy Land and Water Environmental Guardian Award and winning the Volunteer of the Year award. Luise describes how this “made me feel like the entire three years of voluntary work was worthwhile.”

Despair at the relentless influx of rubbish had turned to pride in her work, with each success prompting further activities.

However, the iterative nature of encouragement for rescuers in the contributed stories was mostly found grounded in ecocentric reward rather than awards or even further community response and action. Gillian Egan's very physical solo work tackling cane toads took two years, but eventually, the more-than-human response gave her courage. Again, her encouragement is not directly stated, but her light use of certain words such as "nary," "even," and "pretty good," and that the Wood Ducks "call this place home" is an indication of her relief and enthusiasm for the result:

There's nary a toad in sight ... A little pied cormorant thinks it's a pretty good place to come fishing and a pair of wood ducks has decided to move in and call this place home. They reckon it's good. And we agree.

Jimmy Richards, the Ewamian man from the Gulf Country in northern Australia, describes a similar blossoming due to the caring for Country that his young First Nations rangers of the Djabugay Bulmba Ranger program experience. This attuning work, discussed in the previous chapter, has given the rangers the courage to speak on their own behalf and on behalf of Country:

[Listen: Jimmy Richards](#)

The young rangers are helping themselves ... And about three weeks ago we had ranger groups from all over Queensland come up for a conference ... And you couldn't get boo out of (our) rangers before that ... so the first time they spoke in public, and, and they spoke with confidence.

Here is evident pride in the Country itself, pride in the connection to and work for that Country, with all of these affects generating confidence and encouragement where there had been little, previously there.

Angela McCaffrey, replanting trees on the Atherton Tablelands, also reflected how observing the slow evolution of the replanted area is a kind of comfort. The bird species dwelling in her homeground enact the successful restoration of

habitat. She watches the birds change from “generalists to the rainforest specialists.” As the forest trees grow, establish, age, and fall, Angela is saddened, but accompanying that sadness is her encouragement, expressed as no less than being given a deeply profound reason for being on the planet: “It’s my reason for existence, is the gorgeous forest that I’m a part of, really.”

Acting courageously for the undesired members of the more-than-human community is one of the ways Louise Freckelton soothes herself in the face of a heating world. Thus, proactively preserving the *Carex* grass of her homeground is a source of pride, comfort, and encouragement (L. Freckelton, personal communication, October 6, 2020). Positive feedback from the rescued environment itself, in the increasing numbers of ducklings each year, is further encouraging of her work. She writes: “Each year, the numbers of Wood Ducks increase in the Home Valley – we are very glad they like the *Carex* as much as we do.”

Elizabeth Carcary explains to me, with a quiet confidence that still contains questioning, that when her rainforest gully replanting feels too daunting, she thinks about it just one section at a time to regain her courage: “if we just start off in little, little bursts I think it seems a little easier, doesn’t it?”

[Listen: Elizabeth Carcary](#)

Through this slow, bit-by-bit approach, Elizabeth sees herself as an “environmental warrior in my own little way” and adds “I think we all should be, and we probably all are at heart.” I can remember the tone of her voice which, as a researcher, fills me, too, with courage – her careful, understated certainty.

Restorative encouragement is found in other, less obvious ways than those described here, so to conclude this section, I consider how the story contributions suggest that presencing and copresencing are important to finding consolation, strength, courage, and restoration.

Ecosonics can provide restoration. The loud munching sounds of wombats grazing is a source of encouragement as Lyn Obern relates in [Mudsey’s rescue and happy ending](#):

[Listen: Lyn Obern](#)

In quiet moments, especially when the care wombats are all gathered around together chomping and munching on grass, it is amazingly soothing, just the steady noise, and their contentment brings enormous peace. I often sit when troubled, or upset, and find they give me strength. I have three helpers, all from different walks of life, a nurse, a designer and a housewife, aged from 50 to 70 and all say they love to sit with them and listen to them eating, and how restful it makes them feel.

Vera Yee reflects a similar experience in [Peace Park – Waverton](#): “When I’m working there I stop thinking and just listen and feel. It’s a place of peace and harmony away from the distressing other world realities.” And it was the life of one lonely pair of curlews – represented by the presence of their distinctive night cry across the paddocks – that encouraged a full decade of work from Judy Crocker’s community, as I have previously discussed, and she described in her contribution [The night cry of the bush stone-curlew](#).

The encouragement and comfort offered through such animal-kin attunements was literally a reciprocal matter of life and death for Dodie Henderson. The physical presence of a joey provided the ultimate encouragement to keep going after Dodie’s teenage daughter Alexandra was killed, as Dodie describes in [Why we don’t have Mondays anymore](#). Both the physical needs of Alexandra’s care joey – feeding, cleaning, keeping warm – and also the bodily physical copresencing “kept us sane when the world was crazy.” The joey was a link between those in the living world and the child waiting in the liminal space between life and death. Rescuing has provided the encouragement Dodie needed to study sustainability, as mentioned earlier in this chapter (D. Henderson, personal communication, May 23, 2019). A lifetime of rescue can provide encouragement in the most unexpected and devastating moments.

To conclude this section, here is a reflection from one of the contributors, Natasha Milne. In [Remembering the Little Guys](#), Natasha’s ‘little guys’ are the invertebrates: the unloved insects, the worms, the cicadas. Given to small, regular acts of rescue like flipping upside-down cockroaches back on their feet

and constructing vinegar mazes to guide wayward ants from the kitchen bench back outside, in this contribution, Natasha thought about what a life of such rescue has returned to her. Having been a member of a volunteer animal rescue organisation, Natasha first reflected on how often the volunteers appeared “rescued” by the creatures they worked with:

... these animals are truly their lifeline. Often, these people are loners, have difficulty with this species called human and suffer with knowledge of the cruelty inflicted by many human beings upon those who do not have a voice. Rescuing animals gives them a reason to keep going.

New state-run programs back up Natasha’s observations. These programs assist wildlife volunteers by recognising the considerable mental health toll of the work and offering mental health advice – as well as confirming the value of this work in formal conservation efforts (Miller, 2020). Natasha’s thoughts about the impact of her rescuing mindset on her wellbeing are an appropriate place to end this chapter about courage. They indicate a human critically aware in daily, practical ways of her responsibilities as she dwells in the more-than-human world, but also a human critically aware of the exponential effect of foregrounding earthly relations in her daily life and the lives of those she shares:

While I don’t really feel as though all these creatures have ‘rescued’ me, they have certainly taught me a thing or two – not just about making spider webs and pollinating plants, but about observation, the value of ingenuity, and teamwork, resilience, and determination. They have shown me the magic of this beautiful planet, made me believe in the sentience of all beings, and gifted me the desire to support their own rights to exist. Wonderfully, by rescuing them, I have helped other people see the value in caring about our mother earth companions, and that might be the biggest gift of all.

Synthesis

The darker affects experienced by rescuers result from the wicked problem of global heating, from the hyperobject of plastic that coats our planet, and also

the destabilising effects of each death or culling event. In order to answer my question: how do these themes give active rescuers courage at this time of the environmental crisis? I have interpreted stories that demonstrate how death, failure, and grief, despite their ubiquity, are experienced in rich and unique ways: from the prettiness of plastic litter, the painted and terrible beauty of the drought, the sorrow of the loss of a joey, to the profound impact of the loss of a human child. But rescuers and rehabilitators are also attuned to the personal value of the experience of grief. Natasha Milne does not want to “toughen up” – she prefers copresencing at difficult times and regards the moments of observing a transition of a rescued animal through the liminal zone of life/death as a “great privilege.”

I have also discussed rescuer ambivalence at killing an animal who will otherwise die slowly and in pain, and the grim work of dissecting individual animals one has loved, to better understand an affliction affecting the whole species. But these acts of loving copresencing across species and landscapes are also courageous, and further, they are generative of courage. In the second part of this chapter, I described, through several examples from the data, how humbly attuning to rescue relations exemplifies various kinds of moral courage. These subthemes of courage might co-present in any one rescue engagement. They are the courage required for long, slow projects, such as eliminating the invasive, toxic cane toad on homeground; community-related acts of courage, like replanting tracts of land for populations of endangered birds with other volunteers; the courage to step up and ask government bodies to assist or to demand political action through lobbying and protest. Finally, these types of courage are generative: they manifest encouragement, and I described how rescuers found such encouragement, “mad hope,” and satisfaction in their work and how that makes the work restorative of the self.

This is the final analysis chapter of *The Rescue Project*. In the following and final chapter, *Storied, Sounding Futures*, I discuss some of the implications of these interpretations. I propose further qualitative research into the nature of environmentally proactive rescue communities and suggest cultures of rescue may prove to be a useful counter to increasing risks of essentialism and nationalism. And I bring together the findings of the analysis of the research

with its methodology to argue that environmental communication should move to embrace the podcast format and further engender widespread ecocentric ecocultural change.

Chapter 8: Storied, Sounding Futures

In this concluding chapter, I begin by restating my research questions, providing a brief overview of the scope of the exegesis in answering each one, and I describe my contributions to environmental communication scholarship. Following this, to illustrate the impact of this research, I share a response to the creative practice part of this PhD project from my digital site partner, Landcare Australia, and further responses from the project participants, with whom I conducted a short survey. I also indicate relevant publications associated with this research. I then discuss the limitations of the project, including some of the challenges involved in the creative research process, and I make suggestions for fine-tuning the process for future research and practice. I continue by discussing potential future research in the area of environmental communication. Before drawing final conclusions, I discuss the broader implications of the present research, positing the significant role citizen storytelling and podcasting might play in environmental communication scholarship and practice.

The Rescue Project Research Questions Answered

In *The Rescue Project*, I set out to understand the affectual experience of environmental land and interspecies rescue; that is, how acts of rescue physically and psychically feel to the rescuers themselves; and how these affectual experiences can be communicated. I devised my research site from this thinking: a co-creative, publicly accessible digital space inviting stories of ecologically-focused rescue from a broad public. The research site drew stories from across Australia and included recordings conducted in person on the Atherton Tablelands in the Queensland wet tropics. Between these sites, I gathered content for a four-episode podcast and for my data analysis. I iteratively devised the following research questions during this process:

- What themes emerge in the stories of people who enact modes of rescue in a time of environmental crisis?
- How might the more-than-human world inform these themes, and

- How do these themes give active rescuers courage in these critical times?

The citizen storytelling digital site, including the podcast, became fertile ground for answering these questions. In all, 51 story submissions and 11 interviews provided intriguing, personal, and evocative descriptions of lived rescue experiences. I developed and defined four terms that offer a means to discuss my data and, more broadly, contribute novel themes to the field of environmental communication.

These are:

Ecosonics – attending to the sounds of the more-than-human in practice and scholarship.

Citizen storytelling – co-creatively mobilising large publics to contribute to and gain a thematic understanding of lived ecocultural experience.

Rescue – small, individual, or community acts of environmental custodianship with modest yet meaningful outcomes: acts of humility, hope, and courage.

Homeground – a means to describe and acknowledge places of more-than-human kinship, a feeling of connection to, and care obligation of place, for someone who does not belong to Country in a First Peoples' sense.

I also highlighted the practice, analysis and potential of podcasting as a means to amplify the voices of the more-than-human world, as I will discuss in more detail in my concluding comments.

In addressing the first question: What themes emerge in the stories of people who enact modes of rescue in a time of environmental crisis? I identified three overarching themes in the research data: humility, attunement, and courage. The themes offered a means to identify, attend to, and articulate the subthemes which sat within their embrace, and I outline them below.

Firstly, I identified four iterations of the theme of ecocentric humility or ecohumility. For instance, Sara Arthur put aside her fear and took a calculated risk to push a beached shark back into the water, thus acting with *animalcentric ecohumility*. Brian McWilliam shifted the ecocultural status quo from casual

environmental destruction to community care, thus acting with *custodial ecohumility*. Helen McConnell attended to her seed collecting and propagating with deep emotional attachment, thus acting with *affectual ecohumility*. Finally, in Australia's wet tropics, for example, the dwellers of the Atherton Tablelands acted with *geophysical ecohumility* as they attuned themselves to the ever-present rain.

The second theme is attunement, and this is an iterative theme: attunement-related subthemes applied to both acts of rescue and methods of storytelling and restorying such rescues. Attunement is a process of humbly copresencing with and hearing more-than-human worlds. For example, Uncle Ernie Raymont described the rainforest as being “part of me, and I’m part of it.” I described how ecosonics manifested in rescue experiences and how ecosonics assist attunement. Ecosonics, like the sound of a tree kangaroo breathing, can also be used in restorying such experiences – ecosonic restorying can encourage audiences not directly engaged with a particular rescue activity or site to make resonant connections. Attunements can be expressed through the body, and the speaking body, in the process of restorying, as Rhonda Sorensen breathily explained when describing the wind on the Tablelands. Attunements in the act of rescue can be temporal, manifested through time spent traversing homeground and caring for sentient beings, and plant-kin as Helen McConnell, Louise Freckelton, and many others demonstrated. Finally, attunement to a homeground can manifest through acknowledging acts of historical and potential rescue by others, as did Susan Doran, describing a history of activism around a particular homeground, and Kathryn Read expressed in her hopes for her son’s rescue futures.

The final theme I identified is ecocentrically oriented courage. I described the more commonly recognised *physical courage* displayed by Sara Arthur and the manifestation of *ethical courage*, or the decision to act for another subjective being or non-sentient entity. Every contribution to *The Rescue Project* was an act of ethical courage, and, again, often these acts were taken over time, illustrating what I called *slow courage*: unfolding over time spent enacting rehabilitation. Slow courage also encompassed community acts of courage: an iterative process amongst individuals, as can be observed in group acts of

restoration, such as the community of Kuranda gathering to eliminate the pest species, the crazy yellow ant. Slow courage also encompassed examples of civic courage, where rescuers engage in democratic processes to bolster their efforts, as Luise Manning demonstrated with her community building and lobbying around the rubbish gathering.

To answer the second question: How might the more-than-human world inform these themes? I identified the affecting presence of the more-than-human world across the data and incorporated these relations throughout my analysis. It is this copresencing relationality, this attending between and amongst the more-than-human, that iteratively brings about expressions of humility, attunement, and courage. Thus, ecocentrically-oriented humans engaged in acts of rescue are humbly oriented to, and informed and encouraged by, the more-than-human through processes of attunement, as Helen McConnell shows in her nurturing attentiveness to the various needs of rainforest seeds. The presence of the more-than-human was also observed in the community concerns around the bush stone-curlew for Judy Crocker's community, as it attuned to the birds' distinctive call. And, as a researcher and restorying practitioner, the more-than-human informs my sense of ecosonics that is critical to my communication work, such that they might, in their own voices, inform us all.

In addressing the third question: how do these themes give active rescuers courage at this time of environmental crisis? I showed how *The Rescue Project* contributions demonstrate an iterative *encouragement* through processes of rescuing. The result of these courageous acts is further heartening or encouragement of the actor, instilling confidence and a sense of personal restoration. Such strengthening was observed in Dodie Henderson's story of continuing to advocate for sustainable living despite her family tragedy, and in the return of native wildlife to Gillian Egan's farm, after her work. Through my data, I found that individual, community, and family rescuing can provide affective sustenance, offering what Kathryn Read called a "restorative magic" grounded in ecological reward, which encourages and comforts us during the most devastating times.

Responses to The Rescue Project

Landcare Australia project facilitator and head of corporate partnerships, James Link, said he was delighted with the public outcome:

Why do I love it? A few reasons.

- it captures the essence of Landcare so well
- the rich stories are told by community Landcarers and community leaders in their own actual voice
- it doesn't just state the benefits of Landcaring beyond the obvious, it proves them
- the way you capture the Indigenous perspectives, benefits of getting involved for Indigenous people and the quality mutually beneficial interaction between the Indigenous community and other Landcarers (J. Link, personal communication, August 5, 2019. See Appendix C for the full email).

A complete analysis of the effectiveness of this present research in motivating change is beyond the scope of this exegesis. After the podcast was released, however, I created a short survey asking story-telling participants five questions about their experience of the project. This does not form part of the research materials. Still, it does offer a preliminary indication of the value to the contributors of citizen storytelling and the use of ecosonics in podcasting for environmental communication.

There were 12 respondents to each of the five questions (see Appendix D for all questions and responses). Survey respondents described contributing their story to *The Rescue Project* digital space as: "a rare opportunity to share something that is important to me," "I could share my passion with others and educate at the same time," and that it "made my small effort feel so much more important," thus demonstrating that feeling heard through public storytelling to broad audiences should be a significant element of environmental communication practice. Respondents described the value of sharing their own experience of "mutual healing...[being] healed by the care of an orphaned

animal," writing that "In the end we cannot rescue nature without rescuing ourselves," thus directly addressing one element of my call-out questions. Particularly relevant to the storying aspect of the project was a comment that the act of writing helped clarify their actions as a rescuer and made a "never ending process tangible." These responses lend support to assertions that "people's positive valuations of the natural world can give them strength in making [ecocentric] choices that involve loss," such as losses resulting from the climate crisis (Randall, 2009, p. 124).

Survey responses confirmed that encouragement was not relegated to outcomes of the process of rescuing only, but also an outcome of telling their own stories and reading and hearing other people's stories. Responders said they were inspired and felt "encouraged that other people are trying to help wildlife too." Another wrote: "Often I cry, because there is so much that needs to be done and because when people are good they can be so good. It is inspiring and makes me determined to do my bit." One responder was "uplifted," even while "exhausted by the effort... and yet we do it." Another felt both "deep shame and pride in our species."

Respondents also supported the concept of ecosonics in restorying. Being able to hear stories they wrote, "allows for greater empathic engagement" and "the stories really had an impact on me; hearing the depth of feeling in people's voices was quite and [sic] emotional experience" while "the background sounds are what makes it so powerful" and "brought the stories to life." One respondent went to a quiet, dark place to listen to the sound again. Listening to places respondents had not previously visited made them want to go there themselves, and one writer said they "felt a sort of camaraderie; a connectedness and a curiosity for more."

All these responses are salient to environmental communication scholarship. They demonstrate a sense of mutual support and encouragement to those who feel othered in their more-than-human relationality (Milstein, 2020, Chapter 2) and thus affirm the foundational environmental and ecocultural communication premises of this exegesis.

One respondent indicated the participants mirrored the call-out's framing of self-rescue and summed up their engagement with *The Rescue Project* this way:

It was good to be part of a wider project that recognised such a diversity of roles, all valued and appreciated. I enjoyed the thought that this variety of opportunities to contribute locally could be shared and might inspire others to extend their own talents and passions into local action wherever they live. I love the idea that many different people contribute and that it is great for our society that we all become better acquainted with the many folk in our midst who do great things but are poorly known. I suppose I find myself much in agreement with the philosophy of the project. In the end, life is lived at the local scale and that is where actions are most important. That is also where we can all best find our own links to nature and nurture our connections, the things that will heal us and sustain us. In the end we cannot rescue nature without rescuing ourselves.

Project Limitations

The Rescue Project had its limitations. Finding a partnership was not straightforward: several organisations I approached that showed initial interest were limited by editorial approaches and could not be flexible enough for the levels of transparency and audience collaboration I required. Although I then found a successful and supportive partnership with Landcare Australia, the fragmented nature of the grassroots-originated organisation meant I could not reach as many volunteers as I had imagined was possible. A second partnership with a large, animal-centred rescue organisation would have further bolstered contributions but also required further negotiation of shared goals.

As a practice of slow media, it takes time and commitment to run a citizen storytelling site, particularly in the setup. Self-generating momentum requires access to large publics: a certain traffic volume will allow the project to sustain over time, but fresh stimulations and calls for action should occur regularly. I recommend incentives of some kind as an acknowledgement of the contributions. While these need not be financial or material – they can involve affirmation such as inclusion in a curated section, a publication, or a podcast –

these can offer a gentle motivation for timely submission. I also recommend personal engagement from a site curator to build a sense of community. Without these time-intensive engagements, such sites will dwindle in engagement over the longer term. My suggestion is that organisations instigate such projects from within for maximum engagement and buy-in.

Research Outcomes

The Rescue Project has been archived on the National Archives of Australia Trove digital repository and The Internet Archive.⁷⁶ The podcasts and citizen storytelling site also are publicly available at the time of submission.

[The Science Show](#) on ABC RN (August 10, 2019) and Central NSW ABC (August 14, 2019) broadcast elements of the podcast. ABC Far North Queensland (October 23, 2019), and Main.FM broadcast the episode titled On the Atherton Tablelands. *The Rescue Project* podcast was also distributed nationally by the Community Broadcast Association of Australia, making it freely available to community radio stations (take-up is undocumented by the CBAA). Climactic.FM, a network of climate-concerned podcasts, also hosts the podcast. Several Landcare Australia publications and newsletters featured stories about the project.

Across the period of this research, I also undertook a number of professional commissions, and I applied the broader concepts of citizen storytelling and ecosonics to several of these environmental podcast projects. These commissions tell stories of how communities and individuals relate to the more-than-human in grounded ways, and they demonstrate my approach's public applicability beyond the academy.

Wildlife Heroes (Miller, 2020, 2021) for the Foundation for National Parks and Wildlife is a two-part series of five episodes per part. The first series focussed

⁷⁶ "The Internet Archive, a 501(c)(3) non-profit, is building a digital library of Internet sites and other cultural artifacts in digital form. Like a paper library, we provide free access to researchers, historians, scholars, the print disabled, and the general public. Our mission is to provide Universal Access to All Knowledge" (<https://archive.org/about/>, August 2021).

on the mental health aspects of wildlife rehabilitation work. In each episode, I interviewed a wildlife carer with a psychologist, and I interviewed both guests about individual experiences and broader psychological advice. Themes included climate grief, coping with catastrophic events, community conflict, self-care, and how to help others. In the second series, I documented new data from NSW NPWS demonstrating wildlife care, now rebranded wildlife rehabilitation⁷⁷, and its meaningful role in supporting endangered species conservation and grounded research (State of NSW and Office of Environment and Heritage, 2019). In this series, I spoke with both wildlife rehabilitators and conservation researchers. These interviews took place in the presence of the rescue animals: at a raptor rescue centre, the home of a koala rescuer, a wildlife vet clinic, and a bat rehabilitation centre. The sound engineer, Judy Rapley, and I worked to incorporate the sounds of the more-than-human beings into the final product.

Climate Resilience was a podcast I made for a local council organisation called Local Government NSW,⁷⁸ in which I recorded on location, thus incorporating the sounds of place, alongside discussions around community relationships with geophysical issues resulting from the climate crisis. There were two series: the first took place in Tamworth and Walcha in central west NSW, where I spoke with council staff about the impact of extreme drought on the arteries and lifeblood of rural communities: the gravel road network and town water supplies. In the second series, I went to the Shoalhaven district on the NSW south coast to discuss water-sensitive urban design with council staff and consultants.

Another series around environmental and climate issues I created during the time of the present research was less grounded in ecosonics, partly for reasons

⁷⁷ Ron Haering, a senior project officer in the NSW NPWS told me: "The term wildlife rehabilitator embraces the end to end process these people have with injured sick and orphaned wildlife which is to rescue, rehabilitate and release and where necessary provide humane euthanasia. It better connects and gives the sector a legitimate place in other natural resource management processes such as conservation and species management. Wildlife carer invokes a singular nurturing role of individual animals which is only part of what they actually do." (R. Haering, personal communication, June 4, 2021).

⁷⁸ From their website: "Local Government NSW is an independent organisation that exists to serve the interests of New South Wales general and special purpose councils. Importantly, we're not a government department or agency. Instead, we support and advocate on behalf of our member councils to help strengthen and protect an effective, democratic system of local government across NSW."

of Covid 19 travel restrictions. Still, it addressed broader issues of human and more-than-human relationships. In *At Risk in the Climate Crisis* (for the Seed Box, a Mistra Formas Environmental Humanities Collaboratory, the ARC Center of Excellence in Synthetic Biology, and the Institute for Culture and Society at Western Sydney University), I took the opportunity to add in ecosonics of homegrounds relevant to the discussion topics and make the point that the environment in question should be heard as part of the conversation.

In *Reimagine STEM* (for the Australian National University College of Engineering and Computer Science), the executive producers and I ensured that the climate crisis centrally informed all four episodes on engineering education, engineering for social benefit, diversity in STEM and First Nations engineering for Country.

Finally, On Mic is a chapter I wrote while doing the present research in which I focused on ecosonics, attunement, and the process of recording audio for environmental communication. This is published in *Living with the Anthropocene: Love, Loss and Hope in the Face of Environmental Crisis*, edited by Cameron Muir, Kirsten Wehner, and Jenny Newell (2020).

Rescue Future Research

In this section, I briefly discuss the potential for new research in the subject area of rescue and, by way of denouement, indicate some of the forward-looking initiatives taken by participants in *The Rescue Project*. I have already indicated that there is scope to investigate more closely whether individuals and communities engaged in acts of rescue have an expansive and porous, or soft-boundaried, sense of their homeground. Such investigation would be valuable during a time when governments are firmly enforcing borders, and citizens are retreating to known territory in a way unseen for some generations, particularly in the context of the outbreak of the global respiratory pandemic, Covid-19 (Woods et al., 2020). Such shutdowns and retreats are likely to intensify as the climate crisis deepens.

Participants in *The Rescue Project* are themselves moving forward in this regard. In the podcast episode, On the Atherton Tablelands, First Nations

ranger Jimmy Richards demonstrated this more porous mindset. Jimmy points out that he and the rangers are regularly communicating with other First Nations ranger groups in far north Queensland and beyond. This networking is also apparent in other contributions to *The Rescue Project*: knowledge sharing stretches beyond the bounds of Country and homeground. Further, a rescue mindset appears from this data to neutralise the risk of place attachments going bad and expressing the converse of humility: parochialism, essentialism, and nationalism (Heise, 2008; Harvey, 1996; Plumwood, 2008). Thus, these rescue communities are porous and fluid, both physically and intellectually. Contributors David Bell and Kathryn Read describe, for example, travelling significant distances to meet with volunteers equally far-travelled to care for country they will likely never live with or near. Meanwhile, Brian McWilliam recounted to me, with pride in his voice, that international visitors come to count birds at McMinn's reserve in suburban Darwin each year:

We've got over 150 different varieties of birds – we've done bird surveys here, every year they do a bird survey – the Green Army comes and does it, and they now know what is here, and over 20 odd years there's more and more birds – it's really popular with bird watchers from all over the world, Germany, everywhere.

Mikhaila Jacoby and the Yellow Crazy Ant Community Task Force Kuranda continue to receive and share research on yellow crazy ants with experts up and down the coast. Sylvia Conway, who followed Mikhaila as YCA taskforce coordinator, recalled a weekend gathering where people had come from all over northern Queensland, generously sharing knowledge as they inspected each other's nurseries and asked questions on rainforest planting. As Sylvia described it: "There's no, like, fences saying 'this is our information' ... Someone's already done steps one, two and three, and then you can take, often just do four five six. You know, we stand on the shoulders of those who have done the hard work and have committed themselves beforehand." Meanwhile, Karen Coombes of the Tree Roo Rescue and Conservation Centre is regularly communicating with vet researchers around the country to better understand this little-known animal and the climate-related blindness she believes afflicts them. In the engagement survey, a comment from one

contributor who had disagreed with another on care practices for the tree kangaroo wrote: “And even if I might not agree with all the views I could better appreciate the words from each person as they were spoken by them.” The spoken word can open mindsets, travelling across porous territories to encourage genuine change.

Other areas of new research could include studying the affects of hearing and reading stories generated via the citizen storytelling process and whether this work in the long run results in civic courage – that is, democratic choices that centre thriving, more-than-human futures. Also, environmental communication scholars interested in ecosonics might investigate new natural sciences research from Williams et al. (2021), which, for example, employs the sound of snapping shrimp recorded in kelp forests to create “highways of sound” (p. 1) that will attract “lost and lonely oyster larvae” (S. Connell, personal communication, September 29, 2021). The hope is these will settle and repopulate restoration sites located off the South Coast of Australia. Here is one way to deploy the intimacy of ecosonics to assist the “more-than-human” in rescuing themselves into new communities.

Storied Futures: Conclusion

The Earth is in crisis. Industrialised, exploitive and instrumentalist human cultures now dominate the planet and have cast themselves in opposition to the more-than-human for at least four thousand years (Harrison, 2009). Within the exponential dominant industrialist discourse, the acceleration of this human/nature binary and related anthropocentrism has led to an intensification of disenchantment and a loss of mystery, sapping more-than-human relations of their sacredness (Rose, 2008b). The culmination is the commodification of the planet’s rich complexity (p. 162), valued only, within the behemoth of the global economy, as “ecosystems services” (Spash & Aslaksen, 2015). As a result, the planet is heating, and we are all living amid a great extermination (Abram, 2020, p. 9).

There is not much time left to turn these cultures to ecocentric orientations. In 2018, the United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) warned humanity had 12 years to reduce global emissions sufficient to keep

planetary warming under 1.5C (IPCC, 2018). Three years later, UN Secretary-General António Guterres described the 2021 IPCC Sixth Assessment Report as a warning that humanity had reached a “code red” (McGrath, 2021): humans are unlikely to make deep enough cuts to fossil fuel use to meet global emissions reduction imperatives. I write from within the decade in which those responsible must urgently redress the balance and heal, however imperfectly, that which they have broken. But the very same cultures that conjured the all-encompassing shadow of climate crisis now anxiously turn away. There is an inability in these populations to come to grips with the wounding and, thus, the means to heal. A broad psychosocial paralysis has set in (Morton, 2013; Cunsolo and Ellis, 2018).

The cultural changes I have identified, as illustrated through *The Rescue Project*, are not widespread enough to meet IPCC targets, let alone restore ecological balance. Broader change is required.

Firstly, exploitive cultures and governments can better understand how to progress toward more-than-human custodial relations through listening to, learning from and honouring First Nations’ relationality. There are invitations for participation and collaboration as Burragubba (in Birch, 2020, p. 268) and Birch (2020) have issued:

For genuine social and political change to occur in Australia, change that will value and protect country, innovative relationships need to be forged between Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities. Such relationships must privilege genuinely restorative measures that compensate for past acts of dispossession (p. 254).

The innovative relationships Birch (2020) proposes could be forged, I suggest, in collective efforts to custodially care with humility, attuning, and courage to “alleviate the suffering experienced by country itself” (p. 254). Storytelling work that resists centring heroic acts and grand gestures, instead elevating everyday engagements with Country and homeground is one way to contribute to this shift.

And there is a growing group of non-Indigenous rescuers working toward an ecocentric re-evaluation. As my research demonstrates, even individuals and

communities living within instrumentalist cultural frameworks are finding ways to turn toward more-than-human relationality, rekindling meaningful kinships with homegrounds and their living inhabitants.

During the global novel Coronavirus pandemic, Latour (in Watts, 2020, para. 4) proposed that if a virus can travel “from one mouth to another”, so can we, from mouth to mouth, question every segment of the process of and reason for production, to examine how and why instrumentalist practices exploit the planet. Thus, courage is one implication for an oral, viral transmission of ideas such that “knowledge can re-empower us” (para. 4). Humans can find courage in actively making our worlds, both on the ground and in storytelling and sense-making. Further, storytelling and acts of rescue alike can be “*thinking* as well as *making* practices,” that is, participating in being of the world (Haraway 2016 p. 14). In 2020, after a storytelling performance/installation titled *Phonocene*, by Despret,⁷⁹ Haraway participated in a public conversation⁸⁰ around the notion of the Phonocene, or hearing the more-than-human. During Covid lockdown times, human quietude had allowed the two philosophers to consider the value of attending to ecosonics. Their Phonocene framing has started to elevate ecosonic thinking to wider environmental communication scholarship.

Broader public constituencies can also be encouraged to turn to humble, more-than-human relationality, further developing restorative rescue engagements through citizen storytelling and ecosonics in environmental communication scholarship and praxis (see survey responses discussed above and Appendix D). Incorporating and attending to sounds of the more-than-human world, including the ecologically attuned and immersed human body as it speaks of more-than-human relations, can generate new and empathic responses from such a listenership. The emergence of the relatively new medium of podcasting, with its democratic access and distribution, converges with ecoculturally emerging awareness of broad relationality, offering a means to amplify ecocentric modes of thinking. Ecosonics in citizen storytelling helps to reveal what matters and bring us back to the material Earth. This storying is a powerful

⁷⁹ <https://melaniecourtinat.com/Phonocene>

⁸⁰ <https://www.cccb.org/en/multimedia/videos/donna-haraway-and-vinciane-despret/234895>

counter-response to grief-stricken climate anxiety and paralysis. A groundswell of these stories can potentially change national and even global futures (Sharpe & Lenton, 2020).

Thus, *The Rescue Project* steps up to answer the call of environmental communication scholarship to respond in ethical ways as a crisis discipline, that is to take action and intervene (Cox, 2007, pp. 6-7), and to connect “knowledge, enquiry, and practical action” (Stibbe, 2021, p. 84) in transdisciplinary and creative ways. By providing a space for vulnerability, acknowledging diverse knowledges, publicly articulating one’s ecocentric positioning, and “changing with others” (Milstein, 2020, pp. 45-48), this project contributes to and nurtures transformational, ecocentric relations.

In my ongoing citizen storytelling and podcasting practice, as reflected in this research, I intend to create spaces in which communities can further connect, be affirmed, and amplify stories of their ecocentric identities. I hope to demonstrate that, while each rescue is unique, each rescue also has commonalities with which many humans can resonate – humility, attunement, and courage. These acts contribute to broader restorative transformations.

These communications are my contribution to the global and multi-faceted rescue effort (“*Here,*” I say, “*listen*”). I humbly offer up the sounds of the world I’ve recorded (*the morning breeze in the Tanami desert, the distant cry of the black cockatoo before rain*). Maybe others who feel uncertain might cast an ear to the ether, that they hear a whisper that reminds them of something buried deep (*bark pressing into skin in a tree’s embrace, this moment of Earthly intimacy*). In recalling those moments of kinship, they might make new decisions to act on behalf of other, more-than-human figures in personal and democratic ways (*the last bush stone-curlews, the drought-scorched landscape, a waterway clogged with human waste*). And perhaps they might garner, alongside myself and the story contributors here, if not hope, then courage.

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Appendix A: Rescue e-newsletter #8—writing tips and tricks.

11 January, 2019.

Well 2019 has started and no doubt you all have some resolutions - I hope one might be to tell your story on the *Rescue project*, which is taking off! In this *newsletter* I'll be talking about the craft of environmental storytelling - next week, back to highlighting another beautiful story - we've had quite a few new ones come in of late, so check out the website!



Why tell personal stories? Many people are reluctant to tell their own story. They feel they have nothing in particular to offer, or they feel embarrassed to draw attention to themselves. Many of us were raised on the notion that the most important message is an 'objective fact'. Of course the facts are important too - critically so. But if you want people to really remember what you say send an arrow straight to their heart - make them feel connected to the place or the creature.

Tips and tricks:

Paint a picture - be descriptive. What can you hear? What does it smell like? What does it feel like? What can you see in front of you when you're with the subject? How has it changed over time? Luise Manning **writes:**

-The sun gradually warmed our bodies as a chorus of voices trailed up the bank

along with the odd laugh or too.

Helen Carpenter **writes:**

-They were like green jewels in a sea of red.

These are lovely, simple but evocative sentences.

If we appeal to certain universal constants - which stories throughout time demonstrate tell us are around love, death, struggle, passion - we are bound to connect in our storytelling with a large audience.

A beautiful example can be found in Lyn Obern's piece about [Mudsey the wombat](#):

- Weakened from her head injury she frantically tried to get to the entrance but kept slipping down into the clay, finally digging herself under the mud and, exhausted, ceased trying.

Something it's useful to keep in mind is that short uncomplicated sentences can really pack a punch. You don't have to pile on the adjectives. Try reading something aloud if you're not sure, and if you find you're getting tangled, try breaking a long, complicated sentence into several shorter ones.

Tip:

Don't be afraid of humour. Smithy's work always makes me laugh... just before he breaks my heart:

- I usually make an effort to look presentable when I go to Town but I haven't thought about that until, wild-haired and unshaven, wearing Crocs and trakky-dacks Les Murray would be envious of, I step into a full waiting room at the clinic.

They all shrink away from me, clutching up their labradoodles. All eyes are on the crazy homeless person as I front the counter. An assistant comes out with a calico pouch around her neck. When I ease the furry, gangly bundle out into my arms there's a chorus of sighs. Icy stares melt into compassionate puddles.

You don't have to spell everything out. Let's finish on Smithy's final sentence, and the moment where the reader has to catch her breath...

- Jason the grader driver came by with his firearm on the weekend.

You'll just have to read the beautifully crafted Roo Tales [here](#) to find out what it was about.

So as we all start to get back into gear for another new year, please consider writing us a story - share us with your friends and extended ^{Landcare} and ^{rescue} groups - we'd much appreciate it!

And do feel free to get in touch - happy to chat on the phone or by email, and even write for you if you don't feel confident - just reach out and I'll step up to help.

- Gretchen Miller

[The Rescue Project](#)

(Photo is of my beautiful flowering gum which brings lorikeets to my city garden...)

Appendix B: Documentary briefing to James Link, Landcare Australia.

Feb 1, 2019

Subject: Brief for documentary

Hi James,

here's an outline of what I'd like to do:

As some of you may know I've been working on a citizen storytelling project with Landcare Australia. We're approaching the second stage of the project, which is the production of a podcast series.

One element of the series will be a documentary which will allow a group of Landcarers to tell their story. It will be about 50 minutes long and involve travel and recordings on site - including environment recordings - it will be rich with sound.

My criteria for this would be a group which has most of the following experiences:

significant challenge

good progress

interesting characters willing to talk

located somewhere 'special'... ie has flora, fauna or landscape which is notable.

Ideally involves some indigenous engagement.

has relevance/learnings/is a good model for other sites in Australia

I guess it doesn't have to be a 'group'... could be an individual farmer - in which case all of the above is important - but there still needs to be a few people to talk with about what is being done and why it's significant.

Looking forward to our meeting,

Cheers

Gretchen

Appendix C: Feedback email from James Link, Landcare Australia.

August 5, 2019

Hi Gretchen,

I felt compelled to write to you after listening to the amazing Atherton Tablelands piece. I love it! Why do I love it? A few reasons.

- it captures the essence of Landcare so well
- the rich stories are told by community Landcarers and community leaders in their own actual voice
- it doesn't just state the benefits of Landcaring beyond the obvious, it proves them
- the way you capture the Indigenous perspectives, benefits of getting involved for Indigenous people and the quality mutually beneficial interaction between the Indigenous community and other Landcarers
- it covers pest management, revegetation, habitat preservation and enhancement, threatened species, wildlife rescue, community engagement, farmer perspectives, scientific research - a fantastic cross section of what Landcare is all about
- it sounds amazing - love the bird calls and flapping wings in amongst the local voices
- Gretchen, your poignant questions and crafty editing to bring it all together into a complete narrative with such diverse material
- the way you've brought climate destruction to the conversation with science, community perspectives, on ground observations, calls to action and messages of hope
- and of course bringing it all back to how this kind of work makes the Landcarer feel
- there are more but I'm rambling!

I'm so glad you reached out to Landcare Australia when you were starting out on this Rescue journey.

I really hope we can get this to many ears and that we can find a way to do more of these in other communities around Australia. I'm very jealous of your week chatting with the environmental leaders of the Atherton Tablelands but I'm glad you've been able to capture the stories to inspire us all.

Obviously a huge thankyou to Darryl at QWaLC for suggesting Rhonda and the Tablelands and of course Rhonda herself as well as all the contributors in the region who were so generous with their time and words.

I look forward to discussing with you and the team how we can get this out there and what comes next.

Thanks again Gretchen - this is really great stuff!!

Cheers,

James

P.S. The audio is being uploaded to our website as we speak so we should have a sharable link very soon...

James Link, head Corporate Partnerships, Landcare Australia.

Appendix D: The Rescue Project Participation Survey Results⁸¹

Question 1: What did telling your story on the Rescue Landcare website mean for you as a land and/or animal carer?

Unknown contact said:

"It meant i could share my passion with others and educate at the same time."

Unknown contact said:

"Rare opportunity to share something that is important to me"

Unknown contact said:

"It was very nice to revisit the little habitat I created for my frogs. It also motivated me to build a big pond in my new back garden here in the UK. A project I hope to complete this year."

Unknown contact said:

"As ours was a story of collective action over time, telling it helped to publicly acknowledge the long chains and agents of inspiration and learning."

Unknown contact said:

"It allowed me to share our own experience of mutual healing, where we were healed by the care of an orphaned animal. In effect, telling the story was part of a healing process for me, and it allowed me to honour the life of a joey, and a daughter...neither are with us now but I like to think they are sharing space somewhere. They certainly share space in my heart! By telling this story I was hoping to encourage others to appreciate the role animals play in our lives. "

Unknown contact said:

"It was good to be part of a wider project that recognised such a diversity of roles, all valued and appreciated. I enjoyed the thought that this variety of opportunities to contribute locally could be shared and might inspire others to extend their own talents and passions into local action where ever they live. I love the idea that many different people contribute and that it is great for our society that we all become better acquainted with the many folk in our midst who do great things but are poorly known. I suppose I find myself much in agreement with the philosophy of the project. In the end life is lived at the local scale and that is where actions are most important. That is also where we can all best find our own links to nature and nurture our connections, the

⁸¹ Grammatical and spelling errors remain as written.

things that will heal us and sustain us. In the end we cannot rescue nature without rescuing ourselves."

Unknown contact said:

"Committing to write helped me focus on what I'm doing here. We try each day , sometimes in small ways, sometimes in bigger ways to make our place better, more resilient, more diverse, but sometimes you forget to reflect on that, to put it into words. Being asked to write something helps to make our project (s) clearer. In a strange way it helps to make a never ending process tangible."

Unknown contact said:

"Made my small effort feel so much more important."

Unknown contact said:

"Telling stories helps make sense of who we are and what we do, of our successes and our failures"

Unknown contact said:

"I hoped it would give the general populace an understanding of how valuable our wildlife are and that we must show compassion to those that are harmed. Also that the role of wildlife cares might ValueAdd!"

Unknown contact said:

"It was a surreal experience that I really treasure and the opportunity to promote such a magnificent bird"

Unknown contact said:

"Being able to promote and raise awareness to the diversity of natural native species living in harmony on our farm."

Question 2: When you read other people's stories, how does that affect you?

Unknown contact said:

"I am inspired "

Unknown contact said:

"I feel encouraged that other people are trying to help wildlife too"

Unknown contact said:

"Often I cry, because there is so much that needs to be done and because when people are good they can be so good. It is inspiring and makes me determined to do my bit."

Unknown contact said:

"Quite often I cry! Or I am motivated to go and plant more trees..."

Unknown contact said:

"I am delighted to discover the great variety and passion of so many different people and their support for nature. I love to hear how some people found a path to nature whatever their backgrounds. It is uplifting to find that people from all walks of life and in many different circumstances have found a connection to nature that uplifts them and supports life on earth."

Unknown contact said:

"Sad, happy, tired, all that. I'm sad that we need to do these things, happy that others are doing it, exhausted by the effort and ultimate fruitlessness. We might have tiny little victories where we work but in the end climate change makes everything we do pointless... and yet we do it..."

Unknown contact said:

"The other people's stories inspired me. It was great to see so many people doing their bit for landcare."

Unknown contact said:

"It shows the vast variety of situations people find themselves in and how they relate to their environment"

Unknown contact said:

"I loved the collection of describing the various and different ways people have cared for the environment - very heartening."

Unknown contact said:

"Reinforces what we do."

Unknown contact said:

"It binds us all together and gives me hope that we are all making a difference"

Unknown contact said:

"I found them interesting and thought provoking and some inspiring as to actions we could take on our farm."

Question 3: If you listened to the rescue project stories and/or the Atherton Tablelands documentary, how did hearing people's voices affect you?

Unknown contact said:

"It was raw and real and nice to hear voices of some people i know"

Unknown contact said:

"Listening is my favourite way to hear stories, it is evocative and memorable"

Unknown contact said:

"I'm far from home so often it made me feel homesick. Then I would compare those Australian voices and stories to those I listen to and watch on the BBC in the UK. The approaches are and need to be, so different. The history of the landscape for the past 1,000 years and the relationship with man are so dramatically different. As are the

climates, distances and is the impact of climate change. This causes me to feel deep shame and pride in our species. Drives me to seek a genuine solution and better way than capitalism. I feel hope and despair. It is such a big immediate problem that part of me wants to hide from it. These stories draw me back in."

Unknown contact said:

"Listening to stories allows for greater empathic engagement. Perhaps that's due to rich ecological soundscape accompanying the subtleties of vocal intonation; like a musical composition. "

Unknown contact said:

"The stories really had an impact on me; hearing the depth of feeling in people's voices was quite and emotional experience."

Unknown contact said:

"Even though I knew most of the people speaking (on the Atherton Tablelands documentary), I loved to hear their voices and listen to their own explanations of what they felt and thought. And even if I might not agree with all the views I could better appreciate the words from each person as they were spoken by them. Each story provided its own insight into our collective way of life. I feel that our wider society needs more emphasis on this sense of empathy with others if we are to sustain a shared future. When people speak from the heart there is a great sense of truth and validity that can bring us together as a society. This is rare today in a world made glib by commerce and its tools, especially in the mainstream media. It would be great to have a collation of stories that tell in their own voices what brought people to their passion for nature. How is it that some people are completely turned on to nature while others live in fear? "

Unknown contact said:

"It's always good to hear the real voices of those doing this work, because it makes them more real. You can also hear the diversity of people engaged in these projects. Better than an actor."

Unknown contact said:

"Made it more real and believable."

Unknown contact said:

"Well for me the sounds of the roo that began was impressive, and the environment was as important for me as the voices. I was interested because I have seen Bennett's TK up in Cape York, but missed the Lumholtz. A great episode I didn't know about the yellow ant problem. "

Unknown contact said:

"Didn't know about it."

Unknown contact said:

"The Atherton Tablelands is an area that I have visited for a long time and I am aware of the massive efforts that have and are evolving to restore crucial habitat and the passion to save so many unique species. It is spine tingling to actually hear these people promote their achievements and positives for the future"

Unknown contact said:

"It gave the stories a personal touch with emotion and feeling making the story more authentic "

Question 4: If you listened to the stories did you notice the sounds of the places talked about in the recording? (such as birds, animals, rain or wind, human sounds)

Unknown contact said:

"Yes it felt like home and gave a sense of belonging"

Unknown contact said:

"Definitely, the background sounds are what makes it so powerful"

Unknown contact said:

"Yes. I'm always entranced by the way Gretchen Miller weaves an entire soundscape and collects me up into it. There are always sounds that trigger a direct connection between me, my meanings and the stories being told. I'm very lucky as I have had the privilege of watching her work with Judy Rapley in post recording production. There is no other way I can describe it, than weaving as they place sound to align perfectly above, below, beside, behind or ahead of voices. Creating spaces that allow you to reflect, pick up on subtle ideas and immerse yourself in another's world."

Unknown contact said:

"Most certainly. As a listener I felt cocooned in the depth and diversity of the moment."

Unknown contact said:

"yes. The sounds were wonderful and brought the stories to life."

Unknown contact said:

"The sounds of nature are particularly enjoyable to me and I appreciated the background as well as foreground sounds. Listening to rain on a roof must be an almost universal human delight in many dimensions. I also love the changing intensity of nature from dawn to dark. Even as hearing diminishes with age, much remains to enjoy. Our usual mainstream media sounds are simply noise and highly annoying and distracting. For most people I suspect the mute button is a wondrous invention if we are forced to watch TV. But in nature the sounds are exciting and uplifting; they contribute

to our well-being and to our joy of life. Of course there are some human sounds that are enjoyable also - and may bring peace and healing, some music for instance. The idea of a nature sound library appeals. "

Unknown contact said:

"Yes"

Unknown contact said:

"Yes."

Unknown contact said:

"Yes - very much - see above"

Unknown contact said:

"Again I was not made aware if the podcasts."

Unknown contact said:

"Yes absolutely amazing, I felt that I was actually there"

Unknown contact said:

"Yes, in some cases I re listened to pick up the back ground sounds or listened to them in a dark quiet place so that I could picture the story fully"

Question 5: How did hearing about places you haven't been before make you feel about those places?

Unknown contact said:

"Connected"

Unknown contact said:

"Like I am transported to that place. Inspires me to want to visit "

Unknown contact said:

"I wanted to visit them all. I cared about them and what was happening. "

Unknown contact said:

"I felt a sort of camaraderie; a connectedness and a curiosity for more."

Unknown contact said:

"I wanted to visit them all!!"

Unknown contact said:

"I enjoy discovery of new places by being in the landscape; by walking in or engaging with the local nature personally. I also love reading about places, especially by local writers who have stories and insights. I did not feel that the various stories revealed much about the places except in passing and perhaps a different approach might be necessary to bring out the range of sentiments and values of each place. There is a thought that each person might see or experience their own environment/place quite differently despite shared geography. The place-based

program was obviously more revealing about the environment (Atherton Tableland) versus the story based podcasts. "

Unknown contact said:

"The affection generated was not so much about the places but the people. "

Unknown contact said:

"I don't think it affected me that much, it was more about the story for me."

Unknown contact said:

"Well in these COVID lockdown times it made me feel one day I'll explore more, hopefully."

Unknown contact said:

"I like the thought that so many people are doing good in "their patch." Even when I focus on "my patch" I am content in knowing it is part of a larger project of people doing inspiring environmental work."

Unknown contact said:

"Made me wish I wasn't locked in to my current situation because there are wildlife needing help 365 days every year."

Unknown contact said:

"Dust off the tent, sleeping bag, grab my reference books on birds, mammals, reptiles , plants and camera and hit the road"

Unknown contact said:

"Interested and a want to explore and learn more about them."