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In the margins of some Australian dictionaries: exploring the etymology of *berigora*

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1. Birds with Australian names¹

There are just three birds whose scientific (Linnæan) name draws on a word of an Australian language. The first and last described are *Ninox boobook* (Latham 1801) Southern Boobook owl, and *Petroica (Muscicapa) boodang* (Lesson 1837) Scarlet Robin. Although neither the type descriptions nor Fraser & Gray (2013: 151, 256) specify the source language, from earlier records we can be confident that both species' names are from the Sydney Language (also known as Eora or Dharug, not spoken as a first language since the 19th century). *Boobook*, as can be seen from the common name, has survived in Australian English,

¹ The role of sound laws in revealing cognates among Australian languages was championed by Hercus (1979), whose title encouraged lexical comparison as an adjunct to lexicography, and Koch & Hercus (2013) who drew attention to disguised cognates. An earlier version of this chapter was posted to the Endangered Languages & Cultures blog on 20 January 2014, <http://www.paradisec.org.au/blog/2014/01/berigora-a-word-that-clawed-on-from-where/>. I am grateful for ornithological assistance to Barbara and Penny Paton, Ian Fraser, Fiona Walsh, Gareth Catt and to Jonny Schoenjahn for drawing my attention to *Boor*"=*ga*. I also acknowledge two anonymous reviewers, Jim Smith, and Harold Koch, for generously guiding me to various sources, and the Australian National Dictionary Centre staff for checking the Centre's files. I have made appreciative use of Jeremy Steele's Bayala Australian Languages databases <http://bayaladatabases.blogspot.com.au>, and of the February 2013 version of the Pama–Nyungan etymological database <http://anggarrgoon.wordpress.com/2014/01/13/plain-english-description-of-australian-comparative-database/> funded by NSF grant 0844550 'Pama–Nyungan and Australian Prehistory' awarded to Claire Bower. From January 2014 to March 2015 I used online databases Zoonomen Zoological Nomenclature Resource <http://www.zoonomen.net>, the Catalogue of Life <http://www.catalogueoflife.org>, and the Australian Faunal Directory <http://www.environment.gov.au/biodiversity/abrs/online-resources/fauna/afd/home>. Words in **bold** are reconstituted forms.

presumably assisted by its onomatopœia; it was first recorded as *Bōkbōk* ‘An owl’ in the vocabulary noted by Lieutenant William Dawes in 1790-91, the early English colony at Sydney (Dawes & Anonymous 2009: Notebook b, 3). The word behind the species of *P. boodang* was first recorded in the caption ‘Crimson-breasted Warbler, native name Bood-dang’ (Port Jackson Painter [between 1788 and 1797]).

The third bird, and the second described, is Brown Falcon, *Falco berigora* Vigers & Horsfield (1827) Falconinae, which is the subject of this note.

We can set aside the suggestion in Higgins & Peter (2002: 308) that the species name of the bird *Gerygone mouki* Mathews, Western Gerygone, could be from an Australian language. The type specimen of *G. laevigaster mouki* is from Cairns (Mathews 1912: 310). Mathews (1912: 427) also named *Zonaeginthus (Taeniopygia) castanotis mouki* Mathews, a no longer recognised subspecies of Zebra Finch from Rockhampton. No equivalent bird name has been found in any Australian language. Gregory Mathews (who, by the way, was the son of the prolific language recorder R.H. Mathews) did not comment on the origin of *mouki*, none of the many other names he bestowed were from an Australian language word, and he was known for commemorating local collectors in this way (Kendall 1912), marked by the Latin Genitive *-i*. His application of it in two distinct genera also indicates that *mouki* is unlikely to have been a word for a kind of bird, so I do not follow the suggestion that *mouki* originates from an Australian language, and I speculate that Mathews commemorated someone with the uncommon personal name *Mouk*.

2. The challenge

Falco berigora is one of Australia’s most widespread birds. Fraser & Gray (2013: 80) summarised the published information on this species name:

berigora [is] stated in many places to be the name for the bird in an indigenous language, though nobody appears willing to nominate a particular language. The original namers, Vigers & Horsfield (1827), simply said: ‘The native name of this bird, which we have adopted as its specific name, is Berigora’. Gould (1848) mentioned ‘Aborigines of New South Wales’ against the word, and Morris (1898), in his *Dictionary of Austral English*, claimed it is made up of *beri*, claw, and *gora*, long. The word does not appear in a glossary of the languages spoken by indigenous people of the Sydney region as the time of early white settlement (Troy 1994), though many other bird names do, and the bird was certainly to be found there. Are the claws longer than those of other falcons? Perhaps not, and indeed, the toes, according to Debus (2012: 131), are shorter.

The word *berigora* has managed to survive in this ornithological niche, and is now guaranteed as much as longevity as science can offer. Despite the gap encountered by Fraser & Gray (2013: 80), can we give due credit to the language which provided it?

3. A stoop at it

The best match I have found in vocabularies of Australian languages is *biyaagaarr* (Ash et al. 2003: 42) ‘Brown falcon’ in the Yuwaalayaay and Yuwaalaraay pair of languages, the same word (as *beeargah* ‘hawk’) for a character in legends taken down by Catherine (Katie) Langloh Parker (later Stow) in the late 19th century (Parker 1896: 64 etc).² The tales of *Beeargah* include that ‘his vigilance was unceasing’ (Parker 1896: 28), he was a cousin of Mullyan, the eaglehawk (Parker 1896: 32) and in other tales *Beeargah* was a wife of Goomlegubbon the bustard and mother of Ouyan the curlew (Parker 1896: 65, 70). As an aside, it is intriguing what ecological knowledge might be encoded in these legendary associations: perhaps that these species have proportionally long legs, or that the three other species are not preyed upon by the Brown Falcon (Marchant & Higgins 1993: 240-242).

I turn now to the form of the word. Inferring backwards from *biyaagaarr* (*beeargah*) by inverting the intervocalic PCNSW (Proto Central NSW) **r > PY y* component of the historical sound change established by Austin (1997: 27), **biraagaarr* would be the expected form in PGY (Proto Gamilaraay-Yuwaalayaay), and the most closely related language Gamilaraay (Kamilaroi). Going back a further step, inverting the established rule PCNSW **ngg > PGY g* predicts **biraanggaarr* in other languages of the Central NSW subgroup. The prediction is borne out by an obscure record, Wiradjuri *birangga* ‘brownhawk’ (Mathews n.d.: 27, 31). The same two changes derive Yuwaalayaay *buyuga* from PCNSW **burungga* ‘bull ant’ (Austin 1997: 29).

Further, we might expect cognates of **biraanggaarr* in other subgroups of Pama-Nyungan. To see Vigers and Horsfield’s *berigora* as a cognate of **biraanggaarr* does require positing another parallel change of medial **ngg > g* in whichever subgroup the language of *berigora* belongs. (Future investigation might be able to use this change to help identify the subgroup.)

If the putative correspondence with Yuwaalayaay is accepted, then we can narrow down the range of possible pronunciations meant to be captured when the word was written down as *berigora*. Helpfully, the value of the two rhotic sounds in *berigora* (= *biraagaarr(a)*) is determined: the first is a glide like English *r*, and the second an apical flap or trill (like Scottish *r*) often written as *rr* in modern Australian orthographies. We cannot tell though whether the final *a* of *berigora* represents a final vowel in the original word, or simply a representation of a word final flap or trill rhotic. Further, the third vowel can be pinned down to *a* (or *aa*), rather than *u* (or possibly *awu*) which otherwise could match the *o* of the old spelling. Note however that the (high) second vowel of *berigora* does not match the (low) second vowel of *biyaagaarr*; this discrepancy is not of great concern if the second syllable was unstressed, where an English-speaking hearer is not used to distinguishing vowel quality.

² Note that Parker spelled the language name Euahlayi which modern orthography spells Yuwaalayaay.

That *berigora* was noted with a final vowel is to be expected, as no recorded words of the Sydney Language end in *rr* (the apical flap or trill), nor for that matter in *r* (the glide) (Steele 2005: 152-3); and final *rr* is rare in its western neighbour Gandangara (Gundungurra) (Besold 2004: 30). The possibility can be discounted that the final vowel of *berigora* was added by the taxonomists as a Latin inflexion, not only because they say *Berigora* was the ‘native name’, but also because the genus *Falco* is masculine with which a feminine form *berigora* would clash; *berigora* was meant as a noun in apposition.

We can also look to the evidence from where the word *berigora* was recorded. The type specimen was collected by George Caley (Webb 1995: 140) and is kept at the UK Natural History Museum’s Sub-department of Ornithology, Tring, Hertfordshire³ with the location recorded simply as ‘New Holland (New South Wales)’. Unfortunately, ‘[t]here are no original labels attached to the specimen’ (pers. com. 2014-06-17 from Hein van Grouw, Curator, Bird Group, Department of Life Sciences, The Natural History Museum).

The native name of this bird, which we have adopted as its specific name, is *Berigora*. It is called by the settlers *Orange-speckled Hawk*. Mr. Caley informs us, that the orange marks in the plumage of this species are considerably stronger in recent specimens than in those of the Society’s collection, which are much faded. (Vigors & Horsfield 1827: 185)

The circumstantial evidence for Caley being the source of *berigora* is fairly strong. Vigors & Horsfield (1827: 176) acknowledge Caley ‘kindly allowed us to make use of his original notes on these birds, written during his residence in the colony’. Caley did record a score of other bird names in Aboriginal languages in ‘Caley’s Bird Notes’ (Caley & Currey 1966: 212-220) though *berigora* is not among those (while the same form is in his botanical notes, as discussed in the next section). Caley ‘had never published any of his notes on the natural history of New South Wales, and ... the only time any of his notes appeared in print was in this Vigors and Horsfield article on Australian birds’ (Webb 1995: 140). Vigors and Horsfield did not visit Australia, and in their introduction acknowledge they ‘are indebted for much of this valuable information to Mr Caley, who collected the greater part of the New Holland birds belonging to the Society; and who has kindly allowed us to make use of his original notes on these birds’ (Vigors & Horsfield 1827: 176); the only other acknowledgement is to Robert Brown, and there is no record linking him with *Falco berigora*.

If *berigora* was not due to Caley, then we have no idea where Vigors and Horsfield got the word from. If, as I surmise, the source was Caley, then we have some clues how he would have obtained it. Caley lived at Parramatta (about 20km west of Sydney Cove) in the decade 1800-1810, and though he explored the Sydney basin he didn’t make it west of the Great Dividing Range, and while

³ See <http://www.nhm.ac.uk/research-curation/scientific-resources/collections/zoological-collections/bird-type-specimens/detail.dsm1> [accessed 13 April 2015], registration no. 1863.7.7.5a.

he did go to Newcastle (by ship) and collected around there, those specimens are labelled Hunter River (Ian Fraser pers. com.). So most likely Caley learnt the word *berigora* in the Sydney region, and most likely through his long-time guide, Daniel Moowattin (Smith 2005). Of the twenty or so bird words Caley recorded, almost half can be matched with another record of the Sydney Language, and the remainder of Caley's bird words are for species for which there is no other recorded word in the region.

Fraser & Gray (2013: 80) say there is no word meaning 'Brown Falcon' (or similar) otherwise recorded in the Sydney Language or in vocabularies of neighbouring languages: Darkinyung, Gandangara, Dharawal and South Coast Languages (Besold 2013), and so on. My own searches confirm this, with one exception: *Boorrawa*, presumably in Gandangara, which I take to be a different word (see Section 5). Nor is a form similar to *berigora* recorded in these languages, not with a meaning that can be plausibly matched with a kind of bird, and so there is no near regional corroboration of Vigers and Horsfield's *Berigora*: all we have is Yuwaalayaay *biyaagaarr* and Wiradjuri 'birrangga' from distant inland NSW. Hence I conclude that **birVgaarra** (where **V** is **i** or **a**) was a word used around Sydney or its hinterland for *Falco berigora*, and that a note probably by Caley was the only primary record made of the word in that form.

4. Up some gum trees

Caley's main interest was botany, and he recorded some similar gum tree names, one with the same spelling as the Brown Falcon word:

Baril'gora, *E. hemiphloia* (now *E. moluccana* Roxb.), the common box.

Berig'ora, *E. hemiphloia*, Berigora Box, this species grows on the tops of high hills such as Prospect, the Devil's Back and those at the Cow Pastures. Most probably the colonists confound it with the common one.

[and other Eucalypts] **Bargar'gro**, **Burrar'gro**, **Berryer'gro** ...
Caley & Currey (1966: 224), reprinted by Webb (1995: 175) (NB: the ' symbol possibly marked stress but it is not defined).

However further evidence points to the first of Caley's spellings (and the one on his label) being the most accurate, with the first vowel being **a**, not **i** as in the reconstituted word for 'Brown Falcon':

Part VI, No. 21: *Eucalyptus hemiphloia* ... Many years afterwards the late Sir William Macarthur, who did good service in collecting the aboriginal names for our vegetation, gave the name 'Barroul Gourrah' to the 'True or Yellow Box of Camden.' The similarity of this name to those of Caley's is evident. ... Sir William Macarthur's catalogue notice is 'Names in Cumberland and Camden, Bastard Box and Barroul Gourrah (aboriginal)...' (Maiden 1902-1917: 131-2).

Another Caley spelling for Berigora Box is *Berijora* (Caley & Currey 1966: 224). This could be a misreading of a written *g* as *j*; alternatively, following Jeremy Steele, if its form is indicated to be something like *baridyara* (not *barigara*), then the gum tree word is even more different from the ‘Brown Falcon’ word.

5. Aside on *boorrawa*

In this section I gather some further records of words similar in form and meaning to *berigora*, to show that they have been considered, and to allow for the possibility that subsequent research will find them useful, even though I have decided for now that they are not directly relevant to *berigora*.

The only record from the Blue Mountains area or the environs of Sydney of a word for what we can assume is the Brown Falcon is *Boorrawa* ‘Brown Hawk’, recorded by A.L. Bennett (c1914) from William Russell of the Burratorang Valley. A similar obscure record with less definite sense is *bourokung* ‘A hawk’, apparently from the Camden district (Bowman c.1824-46: 19). Further west, in the CNSW subgroup, is Ngiyampaa *purawarr* ‘kittyhawk’ (Donaldson 1997: 74) (and earlier equivalent record ‘Ngeumba’ *burrawar* ‘Brown hawk’, Mathews 1904: 228). This word has sufficient similarity with *Berigora* to suggest the two could be related; however there are a couple of impediments to this. First, the first vowel: the high back vowel in *boorrawa* and the high front vowel in *berigora*. Second, the putative correspondence of intervocalic *g/k = w* implicates a development of medial **g > w*, a change not justified here though known in languages of a separate subgroup to the north (PCNSW **g > PGY w / a,u*, i.e. **g* descends as PGY *w* adjacent to **a* or **u*, Austin 1997: 26).

Note too that the above words are also to be distinguished from another word differing in the first vowel and denoting a rather different bird species: Gamilaraay and Yuwaalaraay *barawaa* ‘plains turkey, bustard’ (Ash et al. 2003: 34) and early record *burrowar* ‘plain turkey’ (Bucknell, Gwyder River, no. 181 in Curr 1887: 133). Another similar form is Wiradjuri **buragi** ‘Australian bustard, scrub turkey, plains turkey’ (Grant & Rudder 2010).

Similarly, the placename *Burratorang*, a locality and valley on the south of the Blue Mountains, despite superficial similarity, is unlikely to contain *berigora* as a stem. The name, first written in 1823 (Barrett 1995: 17,19), and also as *Borogorang* in an 1829 letter (Jervis 1934: 172), has been said to be based on *burru* ‘kangaroo’ (Russell 1991 [1914]: 13-15).

6. Etymological discussion of *berigora*

We turn now to the composition of *berigora* itself. First we need to address Morris’ (1898) analysis of it into *beri* ‘claw’, and *gora* ‘long’ (language unspecified). While this was probably speculative, we can in turn speculate what Morris’ basis may have been. Gaimard’s *berenou* ‘ongles’ (French for ‘nails’) recorded at Jervis Bay in 1826 would have been available to Morris; based partly on that record Besold (2013: B,244) reconstituted **biranung**

‘fingernail, toenail, claw, fingers’ in the South Coast Language of NSW.⁴ Morris might also have had an eye to words matching *beri* that occur in 19th century Nyungar wordlists (*bere*, *beree* ‘nails’, Bindon & Chadwick 1992), whereas the PCNSW word is **yulu* ‘fingernail’). And *gora* matches Gamilaraay *gurarr*, Wangaaybuwan *gurraarr*, PCNSW **gurarr* ‘long’ (Austin 1997: 28). (Or possibly Morris’ guess was built on a swapped version of the two Wiradjuri words, published in Günther (1892: 72, 90) as *Bári* ‘long, tall’, and *Gurung* ‘the claw of animals, as of the lobster’.) However, the Brown Falcon is not distinguished by long claws, as Fraser & Gray (2013: 80) point out, and Marchant & Higgins (1993: 251) state: ‘Toes quite short’.



Figure 1: Brown Falcon ©2013 Richard Waring www.richardwaring.com.au.

⁴ This word is probably analysable as **birV=nhung** where **=nhung** is the Dharawal 3rd person bound possessive pronoun, Besold (2013: A,292). For this stem in another NSW language, see HRLM (Hunter River and Lake Macquarie Language) **piriyal** (*beriel*) ‘toes’ (Lissarrague 2006: 133). That language also has *-kuriyaN* ‘Privative’ (based on *korien*, *korean*) (Lissarrague 2006: 61–62); so HLRM ‘without toe’ would be ***piriyal-kuriyaN**. However, like other raptors, the Brown Falcon has four toes (and claws) (Marchant & Higgins 1993: 251, and see photograph); and is not known to be described as ‘claw-less’ or ‘toe-less’ in any Australian language.

Ash et al. (2003: 42) report that *biyaagaarr* is onomatopœic: ‘Said to come from the bird’s cackling call.’ In other parts of Australia the Brown Falcon is known by widespread words like *karrkany* (Marra, Ritharngu, Gumatj, Nyungar), **kirrk* (Proto-Nyulnyulan), *girrgurda* (Wajarri), *kirrkirlanji* or *kirrkirlardi* (Warlpiri), with initial velar stop (as well as medially). This fits with renditions by ornithologists of its various calls: ‘cackle or chuckle’, *kar-kar-kar*, *kuck-kuck*, *kit-kit-kit*, *kuka-kuka* or *choka-choka*, *kree-arka*, *kar-kirk*, *kark*, *whee-whee-whee*, *peep* (Marchant & Higgins 1993: 245–7). The repetition of the velar stop could be part of the motivation for the variant *biyaagaarrgaarr* (Ash et al. 2003: 42). Note also Yuwaalayaay *biya* ‘whistling kite’ (Ash et al. 2003: 42), so another possibility (modulo the length of the second vowel) is that *biyaagaarr(gaarr)* is a kind of compound: ‘the *kaarr(kaarr)* raptor’.

Another possible basis could be worth mentioning. A word like *biri* ‘chest’ occurs in a number of NSW languages: Gamilaraay *biri* (and Yuwaalayaay/Yuwaalaraay *bii*), PCNSW **biring* (Austin 1997: 28); Darkinyung **biring** ‘chest, breast’ (Jones 2008: 151), Gathang *biring* ‘breast’ (Lissarrague 2010: 186). For its use in a bird name, note Gamilaraay-Yuwaalayaay *birribangga* ‘little pied cormorant’ from ‘white-chest’ (Ash et al. 2003: 41).

Also notable is the word ‘*Boor*’=*ga* Aborigines of Moore’s river, in the interior’, a unique record of an Australian language name for the similar but rare Grey Falcon (*Falco hypoleucos* Falconinae Gould 1841), noted by John Gilbert, the collector of the type specimen, c1839 (Schoenjahn 2010: 112). This word is attributed to the Nyungar language of southwest Western Australia, *boorh-ga* (Bindon & Chadwick 1992) and could also be onomatopœic in origin.

7. Further survival of *berigora*

A racehorse called *Berigora* (1981–2005), and then *Berigora Boy* in the 1990s,⁵ would have spread the word for some of the population. Subsequently the word *berigora* took on extra life in a further two scientific (Linnæan) names. Tendeiro (1988: 97–98) named *Colpocephalum berigorae*, a chewing lice (classified with Mallophaga: Menoponidae) parasitic on *Falco berigora*; hence the species name is the Latin Genitive of *berigora* (now parsed as a feminine noun). The prolific entomologist Günther Theischinger (1994: 15–16) named the crane fly *Molophilus berigora* Curtis, for the reason that ‘Berigora is an Australian Aboriginal word for “orange-speckled hawk”; it refers to the colouration’. The containing subfamily Limoniidae ‘with some 10,500 described species worldwide, is one of the largest families of Diptera’ (Oosterbroek et al. 2007), and it is said that over a thousand new species of Diptera (flies) are being described (and named) each year⁶ so the entomologists are keen for fresh words to use. Theischinger appears to have mined old vocabularies as one source, and, for *berigora*, most likely Morris (1898).

⁵ <http://www.racingaustralia.horse/> [accessed 2015-04-15]

⁶ See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Insect#Distribution_and_diversity [accessed 2015-07-30]

8. Etymology in dictionaries of Australian languages

Published dictionaries of minority languages usually do not include etymological information. As Goddard & Thieberger (1997: 180n6) note:

In general, published Aboriginal language dictionaries tend not to include any great detail on etymologies (cf. Koch 1983), sociolinguistic variation or auxiliary languages. Reasons for this include doubts about the practical relevance to Aboriginal users, the partial or speculative nature of the information and the extra costs involved. Hopefully, in future such information may be made available at least in electronic data files, if not published ‘hard copy’ dictionaries.

As Koch (1983: 155) observed, some dictionaries do indicate if a word has been recognised as a loanword, almost always from English or other non-Australian language. Alpher (1991) and to some extent Heath (1982) remain the only dictionaries which includes etymologies in regular entries. An additional reason for their absence is that etymologies are better presented across a family or subgroup as a whole: see Alpher’s (2004) compilation of Pama-Nyungan etyma (published on a CD-ROM supplement as Goddard & Thieberger (1997) envisioned) and references there to lexical reconstructions of various subgroups.

9. Conclusion

Historical linguistic analysis has allowed the linking of the species name of *Falco berigora* with a ‘hawk’ character in Aboriginal legendary tales recorded in the 19th century. The word can be traced to the Sydney hinterland, but not to a particular language, most likely of the form **birVgaarra** or **birVgaarr** (where **V** is **i** or **a**).

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