

Aboriginal

CROCODILE LEGENDS AND MYTHS

The salt water crocodile is a very important animal in Aboriginal culture.

There are Aboriginal dances and stories about crocodiles, the ancestry of which may lie many thousands of years in the past.

There are songs about crocodiles, some of which only the old people still sing.

There are beliefs that the spirits of dead people are contained within the bodies of some large crocodiles – hence there may be widespread mourning if a particular large crocodile is killed.

Crocodiles are also a dominant theme in both rock and bark paintings.

Stones from the stomachs of some dead crocodiles have particular significance in some ceremonies.

There are various legends and stories about how the crocodile came about:

One legend from Arnhem Land in the Northern Territory tells how the crocodile was formed. A group of people arrived at the King River, and since there was only one canoe, had to ferry themselves across in small groups. One man kept asking to cross but was refused each time. He became angry and decided to become a crocodile (gunbiribiri). He swam upstream where he heated ironwood roots over a fire and pounded them until they were like wax. He placed these on his nose, making it like a crocodile's jaws. When he jumped into the water he became a real crocodile. As the canoe continued to ferry people across the river he capsized it and ate the passengers. He then emerged from the water, saying to everyone that he would kill and eat any other people that he caught.

Thus the behaviour of the Saltwater Crocodile which is sometimes harmful to man, is traced back to a grudge or grievance.