

## EUNGEDUP: A WETLAND SUMMER DIARY GILES WATSON

### ABOUT THE BOOK

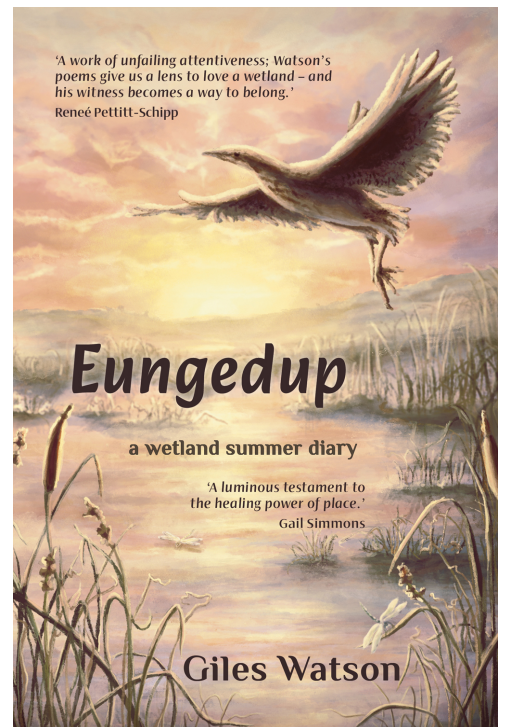
*Eungedup* is a poetic memoir of Giles Watson's growing relationship with a freshwater wetland that lies between Albany and Denmark in Western Australia's Great Southern region. Teeming with life, the precious wetland is under threat of development, so the community rallies to purchase it. As one of the donors, Watson is permitted to visit and seeks solace from his own chronic illness in the heart of the wetlands. In prose, prose-poetry, and free and lyric verse, he documents observations of birds, insects, reptiles, amphibians, and even the microscopic infusoria in the water, and his growing obsession becomes a deep-seated love for place. The diary traces these changes through the Noongar seasons of Kambarang, Birak, Bunuru and Djeran, as Watson's longing for better health converges with the wetland's need for replenishment.

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Giles Watson migrated from the UK to Australia at the age of one, grew up in Canberra, and returned to live in Britain for eighteen years. There, he became fascinated with ancient landscapes, writing prolifically in response. In 2013, he returned to Australia, settling in Kinjarling (Albany), Western Australia. He has a long-standing interest in natural history, mediaeval texts, folklore and mythology, and has worked as a volunteer in wildlife rehabilitation, specialising in orphaned and injured owls. Giles is the author of a large body of poetic work, both self-published and in literary journals, a book of essays on the folklore of natural history, *A Witch's Natural History* (Troy Books), and is the editor of *Ten Poems About Butterflies* (Candlestick Press), and has written songs with singer-songwriter Simone Keane. He teaches English, literature and drama, and lives in Kinjarling.

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Where and what is Eungedup?
2. Why do you think that this author is drawn to Eungedup at this time in his life?
3. What are the benefits of stopping and observing the natural world?
4. What difference does it make to visit the same place across time, rather than many different places?
5. What is eco-poetics?
6. What is the role of an eco-poet? What do you see as the value of their work to others?
7. Do you have your own version of Eungedup? What makes that place so special to you? In what ways is it under threat? What could you or your community do to protect it?
8. Where is Noongar boodjar (Noongar country)? What are the six seasons in the Noongar calendar?
9. What are the names of the seasons in the Great Southern, where this author resides?
10. Why do you think it is so important for the author to sight the Australasian bittern? What is the outcome of his quest?
11. Wetness and dryness, drought and replenishment, are both literal concerns of the author, and also metaphors for illness and the things that give us reason to carry on. What natural metaphors would you choose to represent the things that matter in your own life?



12. How do the different forms of writing in *Eungedup* help to communicate the writer's experiences and feelings about wilderness, illness, ecological grief and ecological joy?
13. Poetry is language which is carefully constructed to give words their own music. Find and discuss passages in *Eungedup* where you feel most aware of this music.

## CREATIVE WRITING EXERCISES

1. Dedicate some time (e.g. half an hour a day) to immersing yourself in a natural environment, and recording what you observe while you are there. You could do this by writing in a notebook, or by dictating to a voice or video recorder. Use all your senses when recording this experience. Repeat this exercise weekly. If you are good at drawing (or even if you don't think you are) try sketching what you see, training your eye to notice the smaller details.
2. Then write one poem from each separate 'sitting'. Concentrate on using a form that enhances content.
3. Next, write the poem in one of the styles used by Giles Watson.
4. Use stepped verse to describe a sequence of natural events that are unfolding moment by moment. Experiment with looser narrative verse styles and also with more tightly constructed poems with rhythmic structures and rhyming schemes. Try using pararhymes or soft rhymes to increase the subtlety of the sound patterns in your work. Try matching words to specific sounds that you hear in the natural world.
5. Other genres may be applied to the above exercise, e.g. photo essays, short memoir pieces, flash fiction or non-fiction.
6. Try drawing maps or looking at aerial photographs (or drone footage) of a place you love. Do some of your own experimental writing about what it is like to write about a place from a different perspective from that of a person on the ground. Or acquire a canoe or kayak, and try exploring and writing about a body of water that you have never before experienced from that perspective.
7. Write about a place you have lost. Explore in writing what it is like to have deep-seated attachments severed by destruction or personal dislocation.
8. Write about discovering a new place and falling in love with it.
9. Write about the symptoms of an illness or disability in a way that encourages your reader to empathise with the experience. Be open to the possibility that some of the symptoms, horrible as they are, may be pathways to new insights. Try confronting the pain with beauty or humour.
10. Find out about the seasons identified by the Traditional Custodians of the land on which you live. Discuss these insights with your local elders, and write with an open heart about how this wisdom helps you to understand the seasonal changes of the land on which you live.
11. Become obsessed with a particular species – the more rare, mysterious or elusive, the better. Seek it out wherever you can. Write about your hopes and fears for it, and about any encounters you are lucky enough to have with it. Alternatively, pay close attention to an extremely common species. Watch this species for half an hour each day for a week, and keep a journal. See where it leads.
12. Write about your dreams. Experiment with different ways of writing about them. What happens when you try imposing a rigid verse form on the narrative of a dream? What happens when you use a freer one?
13. Read the passages about tiger snakes in *Eungedup*. Then, deliberately seek out safe encounters with an animal that you fear or do not like. Observe it carefully. Look for beauty. Write about your experience.
14. Find something very, very small to write about. Use a magnifying glass or a microscope. Or find something very distant to write about and use a telescope.
15. Experiment with writing about a topic that fascinates you while merging two very distinct and different forms; e.g. interpretive essay and free-verse poem.
16. Find a person who has deep knowledge of an aspect of the natural world. Walk and talk with this person. Write a portrait which includes what this person does, what they tell you, and what they are like.
17. If you are in a group, you may wish to share your writings / observations with other participants.

## INTERVIEW WITH THE AUTHOR

### ***Who are your favourite nature writers / eco-poets and how do they influence you?***

I have had a fascination with nature writing since I was a very young child. *Watership Down* by Richard Adams was a book that I wore to pieces as I was growing up, and I think it permanently shaped my world-view so that I am always inclined to imagine a rabbit's-eye view of the world, or a bandicoot's – or a beetle's. I think that the challenge for modern writers about animals is to reflect animal intelligence without resorting to anthropomorphism as Richard Adams did, but his writing was visionary.

My father had a jaw-droppingly beautiful collection of eighteenth and nineteenth century natural history textbooks which I also read as a child, and among these was an illustrated copy of that great early classic of nature writing, Gilbert White's *The Natural History of Selborne*. So, from the beginning, I have been trained through my reading to derive joy from close observation, and not to disregard even the smallest of creatures. There is a passage in *Eungedup: A Wetland Summer Diary*, where I look at a drop of water from the wetland under a microscope; it was these very old texts, and my father's scientific influence, that taught me to do that.

As far as nature writing is concerned, I am probably most deeply influenced by John Clare, Emily Dickinson, J.A. Baker and Amy Liptrot. I have written about these in further detail on the Fremantle Press website: [fremantlepress.com.au/2026/01/05/giles-watson-on-the-nature-writers-who-inspired-his-new-book-eungedup/](https://fremantlepress.com.au/2026/01/05/giles-watson-on-the-nature-writers-who-inspired-his-new-book-eungedup/)

Here is a list of some other texts which are both dear to my heart and close to the spirit of *Eungedup*:

**John Anderson**, *the forest set out like the night*, Black Pepper, 1995  
**Phil Barnett**, *Birds Knit My Ribs Together*, Arachne Press, 2024  
**Nandi Chinna**, *Swamp: Walking the Wetlands of the Swan Coastal Plain*, Fremantle Press, 2014  
**Nandi Chinna and Anne Poelina**, *Tossed Up by the Beak of a Cormorant*, Fremantle Press, 2024  
**Isabel Galleymore**, *Significant Other*, Carcanet, 2019  
**Charmaine Papertalk Green and John Kinsella**, *False Claims of Colonial Thieves*, Magabala Books, 2018  
**Reneé Pettitt-Schipp**, *The Sky Runs Right Through Us*, UWAP, 2019  
**Gail Simmons**, *Between the Chalk and the Sea*, Headline, 2023  
**Barbara Temperton**, *Ghost Nets*, WA Poets, 2022.  
**Judith Wright**, *Birds*, Angus and Robertson, 1968

Just a few of the poems which relate to my own growth as a poet include:

**Elizabeth Bishop**, 'The Sandpiper'  
**John Clare**, 'The Landrail'  
**Emily Dickinson**, 'A bird, came down the walk' and 'I felt a funeral in my brain'  
**Seamus Heaney**, 'The Yellow Bittern'

### ***What do you think this regionally specific book has to offer readers from elsewhere?***

As well as being a book about the joy of spending time in wilderness, *Eungedup* explores how engagement with the natural world has given me strength and solace as I negotiate life with chronic illness. It is not a 'nature cure' narrative so much as an exploration of how, in times of pain and crisis, close engagement with the natural world can give us the joy required to want to carry on. I think that this is an insight which is relevant wherever one lives.

I grew up in Eastern Australia, moved to England during my early adulthood, remained there for eighteen years, and then came to live in Kinjarling / Albany. By the time I returned to Western Australia, both my heart and my writing were very attached to certain very specific places in England and Wales. I spent my first few years back in Australia feeling very disorientated, struggling to find that sense of deep connection with a place over here. *Eungedup*, the wetland itself, provided me with an answer to that problem. Part of the book directly addresses that problem: how to re-adapt and regain that sense of deep connection – itself a more problematic

thing when one has no ancestral links to the land. So, I think that *Eungedup* will be of interest to anyone who has had similar struggles to adapt to living somewhere new.

*Eungedup* also deals with ecological grief, at the same time as documenting an utterly inspiring community initiative which led to the preservation and replenishment of a beautiful and biodiverse wild site, which will protect it in perpetuity in the face of local mining developments. The book addresses the serious threats to wild habitats, and also to specific endangered species such as the Australasian bittern, but it also points to some good reasons for nurturing a sense of hope: specifically, that while individuals may feel powerless to turn back the tide of destruction, communities working together can achieve small victories, and if enough communities do this, a mosaic of wild habitats will develop, preserving the beauty and wonder for future generations. This story of hope is applicable anywhere in the world. It testifies to the fact that our fight to rescue the natural world needs to proceed place by place, and that communities have the power to make a huge difference.

### ***At what stage did you begin to write this book? Did you know it was a book when you began?***

I had visited Eungedup once, and was so thrilled with the place that I instantly decided to make a donation towards its purchase by the community. I knew I wanted to write a book about the place before my next visit, and I knew that my first option would be to send the manuscript to Fremantle Press. It so happened that I was due for long-service leave from my teaching job in fourth term that summer, so I decided to devote that term and the summer holiday to writing it.

But in reality, the book had a much longer genesis than that. I had been writing about the natural world and the power of wilderness to bring joy since I was a teenager – in England and in Australia. I had recently undergone the self-imposed poetic discipline of writing in poetic forms used by Emily Dickinson, and often directly in response to her work. So in a way, the book was lying latent within me, just waiting for me to find a place near to my new home that would make my spirit sing.

### ***How did you go about writing the book?***

I used a multiplicity of methods. Large portions of the book were recorded on voice recordings while I was at the site, or sometimes on video as I was making my explorations, and then transcribed. This was true even of some of the Dickinsonian-style lyrics. I would also take photographs and film, revisit them when I got home, and continue writing. Other passages were written in notebooks, in my almost illegible scrawl, often while I was walking around the site. The prose passages, and some of the poems documenting the symptoms of what I now know to be fibromyalgia, were written when I was too sick to travel to Eungedup.

The map-making was also an important part of the writing process; something about drawing the landforms became an essential part of the ritual of writing – another way of building my increasing connection with the land. The same was true of the little silhouetted illustrations.

### ***What effect did the writing have on your own health and wellbeing?***

I am never happy or well, mentally speaking, if I am not writing or in some way working towards a written piece. As I reached the time for my long-service leave, the chronic fatigue which I did not yet know was caused by a combination of sleep apnoea and fibromyalgia (the latter diagnosis came after the manuscript was completed) was increasingly disabling. There were many days – some of them described in diary entries in the book – when I was physically incapable of even driving to Eungedup. But there were days when I was able to break through the barrier of pain and fatigue, and even some very early mornings when I managed to get myself onto the site before sunrise, and there were even times when I was capable of climbing a tree to get a better view of the wetland.

Visiting Eungedup did not heal me, but it significantly increased my sense of wellbeing. I agree with Polly Atkin, author of *Some of Us Just Fall*, that the idea of the ‘nature cure’ – if that is taken to mean physical healing – is largely a myth. However, the regular visits to Eungedup did substantially lift my spirits, and writing

the book was therapeutic because it enabled me to sustain that feeling of joy, and to ameliorate some of the ecological grief – and sorrow over my own physical state.

### ***What's next for Giles Watson?***

I have turned my attention to a place much closer to home: Rushy Point, on Mamang Koort (Princess Royal Harbour) in Little Grove, on the opposite side of the harbour from Albany. It is visited by a sadly dwindling number of migratory wading birds. The buffer zone between it and the suburban houses was once, within my own memory, an absolutely fabulous wildflower site, partially under floodwater every winter. Much of this land has been drained and ploughed up for housing lots, so this is very much a site of grief and loss for me – but the Point itself is a wildlife reserve. I want to write about the harbour and its resident ospreys and whistling kites, its miraculous avian visitors from Alaska and Siberia, the remnants of its once sensationally beautiful flora: the wonder of them and the threats they face. I hope to follow the ospreys and kites to their roosts and nests, to watch and write about the wading birds throughout a whole season from their arrival to their departure, and to explore how Rushy Point fits into the mosaic of semi-urbanised but still wild local habitats which include the garden of the home where I live. No doubt, as with *Eungedup*, I will meet and write about some of the inspiring human inhabitants too.

Poems keep coming to me, largely unbidden, which are ekphrastic responses to paintings, almost but not quite lost to time, made by victims of the Nazi regime.

There is also a book of essays on the poetry of Emily Dickinson which has been growing over the years, but I am not sure that I will ever feel I have written the last essay!