

# **Bardies, Quandong and Murray Cod. Bush food dinners and menus 1864 - 2024**

November 2025

This article reviews formal meals and menus for imagined meals focussed on Australian native foods across 160 years from 1864 – 2024.

The meals were:

- The first and second experimental dinners of the Acclimatization Society of Victoria in 1861 and 1864
- The February 1954 dinner of the Beefsteak Club
- A Bushfoods Buffet at the Fourth Symposium of Australian Gastronomy in 1990
- A 2024 dinner presented by Indigiearth partnering with the New South Wales Parliamentary Executive Chef to showcase the work of Indigiearth.

In addition there are two humorous proposed menus:

- A sixpenny dinner at the Colonial Exhibition of 1886.
- A Purely Australian Banquet from 1913

The results of a 1938 Bush Recipes Competition are included. An All Australian Christmas Menu proposed in 1932 is also included.

## **The first and second experimental dinner of the Acclimatization Society of Victoria**

One of the chief objects of the (Acclimatisation) society is, of course, to add to the stores of food possessed by this community -to show them what can be eaten, and to introduce whatever is eatable -and thus to administer to a principal want of our people, as well as provide for the advancement and enrichment of the country. And it is in fulfilment of this purpose that these experimental dinners are held.<sup>1</sup>

This was the Bill of Fare for the first dinner.

BILL OF FARE,  
SOUPS.  
Kangaroo Murray turtle Cray fish  
Iced punch  
  
FISH. -  
Schnapper Murray cod Golden perch  
Whiting Black fish Garfish  
Butter Fish Silver fish Soles  
Grey Mullet Flounders Pike  
Oyster Sauce Anchovy Sauce  
Lobster sauce Shrimp sauce

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<sup>1</sup> Acclimatisation Dinner, *The Herald* 7 July 1864 p.2

REMOVES.

Haunch of Kangaroo  
Native companion Wild turkey  
Wild duck and water Stewed ducks and green  
cresses peas  
Boiled turkey Roast turkey  
Bandicoot Boiled rabbit  
Guinea fowl Native pigeon  
Wallaby Wombat  
Patty of frogs Musk duck  
Water hen Cape Barron goose  
Parrequet pie Roast spring chicken  
Boiled spring chicken Tongues  
Hams Black swan

ENTREES

Salmi of wild duck Mayonnaise of fowl  
Stewed eels Filets of native pigeon  
Fricandeau of wombat Oyster patties  
and spinach Crayfish vol au vent  
Shrimp patties Supreme of black duck  
Kangaroo olives, and Curried opossum  
spinach Jugged kangaroo  
Bruised teals and truffles Curried crayfish  
Sweetbreads and white Mayonnaise of Murray  
sauce lobster

SECOND COURSE

Porcupine  
Teal Plover Quail Snipe Wattle bird

REMOVES.

Nesselrode Pudding, Iced,  
Cabinet Pudding Semolina Pudding  
Australian Pudding

EXTREMETS.

Orange Souffle Citron Cream  
Maraschino Jelly Fruit Tarts  
Compotes of Pears Vanilla Fauebonettes  
Noyeau Jelly Meringue of Apples  
Blancmange Strawberry Cream  
Custards Charlotte of Apples  
Open Jam Tarts Trifle  
Pyramid Cake  
Fondeau au Parmesan Maccaroni au Gratin  
Anniesle'gh Cheese

## DESSERTS.

In Season

Pine Apple Bananas Strawberries Loquats

Pears Apples Oranges

Preserved

Plums, Green Gages, Peaches, Apricots

Dried

Almonds Walnuts Raisins Prunes

Barcelona Nuts Figs.

In addition to the foreign liquors, the following Australian wines were provided : —

## WINE LIST.

### AUSTRALIAN WINES.

Victoria.— Sparkling Victoria.

New South Wales — Red Cawarra, White

Irrawang, and Rosy Kaladah.

South Australia. — Malvoisie, Verdelho, Gnapo,

Espanoir, and Burgundy.

This was the Bill of Fare for the second experimental dinner.

## BILL OF FARE.

Sydney Rock Oysters.

Soups.— Turtle, oyster. Australian wild turkey, kangaroo tail, bisque of Murray lobster.

Fish.— Boiled Murray cod and shrimp sauce: fillet of whiting, au gratin : fillet of soles, a la orlis; grilled mullet, a la maitre d'hotel ; matelotte of eels ; guard fish; Gippsland perch, a la Nauteuse. Yan Yean eels, a la Tartare; Murray perch, a la Chambord : boiled butter fish sauce genoise; flounders, a la Normande ; fillet of trumpeter. au turban ; John Dorey.

Entrees.— Vol au vent of frogs, Chartreuse bronze winged pigeon, fricandeau of wombat and spinach, cutlet of venison, sauce mushrooms, fillet of black duck, sauce orange, carried bandicoot, civet of venison, parroquet patties, salmis of teal aux truffes, wild rabbit, a la chasseurs.

Cold. — Mayonaise of fowl, chaud froid of game; chaud froid spring chicken, aspic d'escalop of rabbit, aspic of native pigeon, galantine of turkey, boar's head, wild Goulburn pig, cold hams, cold tongues.

Boiled.— Boiled rabbit, (Barwon park) celery sauce ; boiled turkey, celery sauce.

Roasts. — Saddle of Chinese mutton, Chinese lamb with pilaw, guinea fowl, spring chicken. Cape Barren goose, Chinese goose, wood duck, ham brase, Maderia sauce, Barwon park rabbit, haunch of venison, saddle of kangaroo.

Game. — Pheasants, hare, native companion, wood duck, bandicoot, teal, wattle bird, wild turkey, black duck, plover, wombat, widgeon<sup>2</sup>, mallee hen, quail.

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<sup>2</sup> A kind of duck

Vegetables in Season. — Queensland yams, sweet potatoes, Jerusalem artichokes.

Sweets - Corbeilles Garnis, Blanc Mange a la Moscovie, Biscuit of Almonds, Pine Apple Baignet  
Swiss Meringues, Parisian Charlottes, Savoy Orange Biscuits, Madeira Jelly, Apple Tarts Compote  
Apricot of Chantilly, Chartreuse of Fruits, Dansick Jelly, Meringue of Cream, Apples of Rice Meringue,  
Custards, Darling Pudding, Victorian Pudding, Fondue au Parmesan Macaroni au Gratin, Neapolitan  
Cakes

Omelet Souffle - Cerito Ice Pudding, Strawberry Ice Cream.

Reports on both dinners hail them as successful in this regard.

We are sure that there were few present with soul so dead, or, rather, with stomach so unsusceptible, who went away disappointed, or who could deny that there were many real delicacies provided of which they had previously no conception.<sup>3</sup>

The second experimental dinner of the Acclimatisation Society of Victoria was held last evening at Scott's hotel, Collins street and as an experiment it must be considered as perfectly successful. Not only were the indigenous products of the colony brought forward in various forms and shapes, and made pleasing to the taste, but some of the recent importations of the society were also sacrificed for the occasion.<sup>4</sup>

These two experiments drew on a remarkable range of native animals, fish and birds. They didn't shy away from the likes of bandicoots, opossums, wombats, and parakeets. There is on the other hand a dearth of plants except yams. Yet colonist-settlers were eating native plants at that time.<sup>5</sup> This also holds for the Sweets absent of native fruits that were by then being jammed, tarted and preserved. One source was identified, 'the pheasants and hares, presented by Mr Austin, of Barwon Park'. Some were 'recent importations of the society' though it's unclear which. The French appellation of dishes in the second Bill of Fare was not unusual for that time. The dinners were well subscribed with 110 – 120 for the first and 60 for the second.

Of those who went away 'being fully satisfied with the indigenous food presented to them there is no evidence of any follow through. The range of native foods eaten - apart from fish and crustaceans - continued to be no more than a handful – kangaroo, wallabies, ducks.

#### **A sixpenny dinner at the Colonial Exhibition of 1886.<sup>6</sup>**

'The Australian Agents-General propose to startle the culinary connoisseurs of London with a series of sixpenny dinners<sup>7</sup> at the Colonial Exhibition of 1886, the viands being exclusively Australian.

The menu will comprise kangaroo tail soup, smoked barracouta, pickled Murray cod, stewed iguana, possum ragout, roast wombat, haricot bandicoot, wallaby pie, salt bush salad, munyaroo<sup>8</sup> tart, preserved loquats, syrup of native cherries, bottled quandongs, and a

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<sup>3</sup> Acclimatization Society, Experimental Dinner, *The Herald* 16 October 1861 p.5

<sup>4</sup> Acclimatisation Dinner, *The Herald* 7 July 1864 p.2

<sup>5</sup> I have written about this. 'Not just cases of extreme hunger. Surveys of edible native plants in Australian newspapers 1834 – 1934' compost.sydney

<sup>6</sup> 'The Colonial Exhibition 1886', *Maryborough Chronicle, Wide Bay and Burnett Advertiser* 1 January 1886 p.2

<sup>7</sup> A six-penny restaurant was an inexpensive eatery where you could get a full meal for the aforesaid sixpence.

<sup>8</sup> Munyaroo, (*Carpobrotus glaucescens*) is also known as pigface

conserve of "bardies"<sup>9</sup> and wild honey (as a bush substitute for strawberries and cream). The repast will be moistened with she-oak beer, Warrenheip gin, Mount Gambier potato brandy, and "stock and rider" tea, served in quart pots and concocted with Yan Yean water<sup>10</sup>. Queensland corn cob pipes, New South Wales sheepwash tobacco, and cigars of Victorian leaf will be provided to top it off.<sup>11</sup>

I am reasonably sure this was a humorous item. However, it again demonstrated the range of native animals that could be dined on. Native plants are engaged with as are native fruits. There were 19 separate native animal and plant types. No dishes have a French appellation. Damper appears at the formal table. I found no references for she-oak beer. Warrenheip was near Bendigo in Victoria with a distillery that still makes whisky and gin. Mount Gambier is a potato growing area but I found no references for potato brandy. Yan Yean is a reservoir in Melbourne.

### **A Purely Australian Banquet - 1913<sup>12</sup>**

'Dubbo 'Dispatch' pokes fun at King O'Malley's<sup>13</sup> declaration that the banquet at Canberra was to be of a purely Australian character.

We respectfully submit the following substitute for the menu, which we specially recommend as a purely Australian composition.

Gum Balls  
Soup Consommé Cockroach.  
Roast Possum, Roast Goanna, Roast Bunny  
Canberra Jumbuck<sup>14</sup>, Gundaroo Bullock,  
Roast Sirloin Kangaroo.  
Corned Posso, Iced Gum Leaves.  
Salads Dressed : Wattle Blooms Bathurst  
Burra, Thistles a la Prickly Pear.  
Baked Yams, Wild Pea, Five Corners.  
Quandong Salad, Compote of Ground Berries. O'Malley Custard.  
Damper, Currant Browney and Camp Scones.  
Billy Tea.  
Cotter River Water.  
Black Charlie and Queensland Rum

The foregoing appetising menu, all of which are the product of Australia, will be prepared on the banks of the Cotter and served on pieces of bark with scalloped edges.

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<sup>9</sup> Bardies are tree dwelling Witchetty Grubs much prized in Indigenous cuisines.

<sup>10</sup> Stock and rider tea may be what is also called post and rail tea for little twigs and such that get into it.

<sup>11</sup> I have concocted a list of recipes for these dishes. <https://bit.ly/43xMfzQ>

<sup>12</sup> 'A Purely Australian Banquet', *The Young Chronicle* 2 April 1913 p.2

<sup>13</sup> King O'Malley was a Labor parliamentarian for several years. He was tasked with building the new Parliament House in Canberra and got his friend Walter Burley Griffin as architect. He also established the Commonwealth Bank of Australia.

<sup>14</sup> A jumbuck is a young sheep.

This one is clearly satirical - Soup Consommé Cockroach, Thistles a la Prickly Pear<sup>15</sup>. But again, it draws on a range of native animals and plants. To the list of breads, it adds Currant Browney (also spelt brownie and often made with sultanas) and Camp Scones. It elevates Billy Tea to the formal Australian Table.

### **An All-Australian Christmas Menu - 1932**<sup>16</sup>

Products Of The Outback Provide Good Cheer

Ruth Allman Plans The Menu

‘To the romantic-minded Australian, ‘ wrote Allman, ‘ it is a matter for regret that many pioneering customs, and local traditions, are gradually being lost sight of — unhonored and unsung — in the onward march of a new civilisation. Except in the far outback, national cookery, born in the days of camp ovens and kangaroos has long given place to customary foods and methods of an English character, varied, of course, by climatic and economic conditions prevailing in a new country.

In the meantime, however, what of the animals and fruits found only in Australia — interesting relics, many of them, of a prehistoric age? Could they not, at a time like this, lend their peculiar fascination to our dinner table, as well as our postage stamps?’

#### Menu.

Clear kangaroo tail soup  
Soused Murray cod, cold  
Hot roast fillet of kangaroo  
Boiled mutton ham  
Vegetables. Native currant Jelly.  
(Cold) Colonial goose or scrub turkey.  
Ham, mixed salad  
Quandong pie with cream  
Australian wine trifle  
Farm cream cheese, homemade rolls or damper  
Tea, Wheaten coffee  
Home brewed ginger beer.

This dinner is fascinating to me as an early example of questioning the appropriateness of the traditional Christmas dinner in Australia, given the temperature at Christmas here. Many Australians have embraced the change to seafood and in particular cold prawns. This menu on the other hand sadly simply substitutes Australian produce still of a heavy kind though some of it is served cold. It would be interesting to know what vegetables were used and how. I note the lack of native plants except two fruits - the quandong and the native cherry. Wheaten coffee was made at home out of pollard and wheatmeal.<sup>17</sup> I note also that the trifle calls for Australian wine. Australians at the time were shifting from fortified wines to table wines.

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<sup>15</sup> *Opuntia ficus-indica* brought together with the cochineal beetle with the Furst Fleet to establish a dyeing enterprise. It failed and the prickly pear began to be used as natural fences with devastating consequences. An attempt to eradicate it via introducing the cactus moth (*Cactoblastis cactorum*) had little success.

<sup>16</sup> An All Australian Christmas Menu, *Chronicle* 8 December 1932 p.83

<sup>17</sup> Wheaten Coffee, Requested recipes, *Sunday Times* 24 February 1935 p.2

## **Bush Recipes Competition 1938** <sup>18</sup>

This competition with its focus on 'natural resources of the Australian bush' was unique amongst most recipe competitions run by newspapers and magazines which usually were for Anglo-Australian dishes. I included them for what they say of what bush foods may have been at the home dinner table as opposed to that for formal events.

'Our new competition "Bush Recipe" is open from now until April 14. All recipes submitted must be taken from the natural resources of the Australian bush. Country people should find scope in this competition for their bush craft and originality.'

### XXIX. A Complete Bush Dinner.

Soup (Emu).

Savoury (Bardie).

Alternative Savoury (Goanna Tail).

Joint (Emu Leg).

Quandong Chutney.

Mushrooms.

Bush Pancakes.

Dessert

### XLII. A Country Dinner.

Kangaroo Tail Soup.

Fried 'Roo Steak and Onions.

Quandong Pie.

### LVIII. A Tasty Bush Dinner.

Yonga Nint Soup.

Kumare en Casserole.

Stewed Quandongs with Wattle Custard.

### LXI. Menu a la Bush

Kangaroo Tail Soup.

Fish.

Poultry.

Joint.

Cranberry Tart.

Quandong Jam.

### LXV. Another Australian Dinner

Soup a la Bush.

Pigeon Pie.

Pie Melon Jelly and

Cream.

The recipes range wider than the commonly drawn on kangaroo to include Brush Tailed Possums, Emu, and Pigeons. Fish were underrepresented. I am not convinced that Rabbit should be considered a natural resource of the bush. Ditto cranberry. No native tucker except quandongs and pie melons.

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<sup>18</sup> Bush Recipes Competition, *Western Mail* 17 March 1938

### Beefsteak club 1954<sup>19</sup>

The Beefsteak Club was a group of Sydney business and professional men who got together once a month at the Toby Tavern, in King Street, for a five-hour gustatory session. This dinner in August 1954 was unusual in being held when bush foods/native foods - excepting fish and crustaceans and the odd kangaroo or two, rosella jam and quandong jam - were rarely at the table. Goanna and snake were unthinkable as food.

‘The club's honorary chef, jovial, rotund Gerry Kearney, puts on a different "night" every time, and hasn't repeated himself in 18 months. There have been Elizabethan, American, Polynesian, French, Chinese, Italian, and Cosmopolitan nights. And last Tuesday was Australian night.’

For hors d'oeuvres: Oysters, prawns, yabbies (in a special sauce)<sup>20</sup>, abalones, edible seaweed (from Collaroy)<sup>21</sup>, mussels, witchetty grubs (in grated almonds).

Pippi soup.<sup>22</sup>

Kangaroo tail soup (consommé).

Galah-and-bacon stew.<sup>23</sup>

Curried goanna.

Yabbies with mushrooms.

Stuffed baked squid.

Grilled snake.

Murray cod, snapper.

Wild duck (teal and black) stuffed and baked.

Roast haunch of young kangaroo.

Ki-i (short ribs) of "old man" kangaroo.

Baked yams.

Damper (johnny-cakes).

‘Before the banquet got under way, chef Kearney formally apologised for the "incompleteness" of the menu. Floods and other factors beyond the Beefsteak control, he said, had delayed arrival of barramundi, mud crabs, turtle (and eggs), crocodile (and eggs), dugong, lily roots, wild goose, and trepang (sea-slug) from the North.

But these, he said, including Murray Crays, would be available for the next meeting, which would be an Aboriginal Night.’<sup>24</sup>

I think it interesting that the Club should have opted for an all native foods dinner and not another ‘international’ cuisine. Damper here is confused with Johnny cakes which are much smaller. The inclusions of mushrooms I find intriguing. There were Australian edible species but I know of none being commercially available so more likely they were foraged. There continues to be little native plants at the table except for the edible seaweed which also I imagine was foraged. Trepang was a long-standing commodity much gathered by Malaccan traders in the Northern Territory and a point

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<sup>19</sup> Plenty Tucker *Daily Telegraph* 21 February 1954 p.18

<sup>20</sup> Yabbies are fresh-water crustaceans

<sup>21</sup> All species of Australian seaweed are edible. ‘Simply put, we don’t have a cultural history of using and valuing seaweed for its many useful and tasty purposes. And you could argue that we’re almost the only coast-rich country who doesn’t.’ Milkwood.

<sup>22</sup> Native clams.

<sup>23</sup> Humorous recipe for galah. Put the galah and a boot in the billy and boil for a few hours. Then throw out the galah and eat the boot.

<sup>24</sup> Disappointingly I could not find a report on this dinner.



of cultural exchange with Indigenous communities. The sources of the foods is not mentioned in the article and there are no clues to track them down. Lilly roots were promised for the Aboriginal night. It would be interesting to see how the nights differed. I found no report of it.

### **Bush Food Buffet at the Fourth Symposium of Australian Gastronomy 1990**

Grubs and Riberry

A relative of the desert witjuti grub served with riberry from N.S.W.

York Ham With Illawarra Plum Sauce

Wood smoked kangaroo served with the blue Illawarra plum.

Smoked Roo with Rosella Chutney

Kangaroo smoked with Eucalyptus leaves and served with wild hibiscus chutney.

Peppered Water Buffalo

Northern buffalo spiced with the native Dorrigo pepper.

Wild Green Salad

With warrigal greens, water lily stem, macadamia nuts, lemon aspen and assorted salad greens.

Samphire Salad

The mangrove saltbush

Burrawang Bread

Made from the treated nut of the prehistoric burrawang served with King Island butter.

Stewed Quandong

The native peach from the outback.

Wattle Pavlova

A traditional dish but using seeds from an edible wattle.

Wattle

A beverage from the second Australian food plant commercialised.

Presented by

The Bushfood Caterers

Vic Cherikoff of Bush Tucker Supply Pty. Ltd.

Jean-Paul Bruneteau & Jennie Dowling of

Rowantrees The Australian Restaurant

A larger selection of native plants than previously are on the menu here both as seasonings – native Dorrigo pepper –and as a dish in their own right - Wild Green Salad. Time honoured dishes from the Australian Table are reimagined and refreshed with bush ingredients – York Ham With Illawarra Plum Sauce, Wattle Pavlova. It marks the establishment of the bush food industry with Vic Cherikoff's Bush Food Caterers. Cherikoff speaking before the dinner said: 'The wattle seed is harvested by Aboriginal people, for whom it is a cash crop. I hope that this enterprise is a sign of things to come - that Aborigines will be more involved in the selection and development of our bushfoods'<sup>25</sup> Other sources were: kangaroos from Maggie Beer of the Pheasant Farm Restaurant in South Australia, salad greens from Sara Adey of Darling Mills; and water lilies were foraged from Moore Park swamps. Cherikoff also presented a paper at the Symposium *Bush Food and the True Australian Cuisine*.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Cherikoff, Vic, Bushfood Buffet , *Fourth Symposium of Australian Gastronomy* p.23

<sup>26</sup> Cherikoff, Vic, *Bushfood and the True Australian Cuisine* Food In Festivity Proceedings of the Fourth Symposium of Australian Gastronomy 1988 pp. 37 – 39

In his paper he said:

I maintain that only a cuisine utilising indigenous produce can be truly Australian.  
Vic Cherikoff 1988<sup>27</sup>

In 1989 Cherikoff published *The Bushfood Handbook. How to gather, grow, process & cook Australian wild foods*.<sup>28</sup> In 1992 Vic Cherikoff published *Uniquely Australian. A wild food cookbook. The beginnings of an Australian bushfood cuisine*.<sup>29</sup>

The Buffet was at the beginning of the revival of bush food in Australia which was and is mainly around native food plants.

### **Indigiearth - NSW Parliament House Dinner 2024<sup>30</sup>**

Indigiearth is a catering and bush food experience company headed since 1997 by Sharon Winsor, a Ngembe Weilwan woman from western NSW.

This dinner was held in the New South Wales Parliamentary Guests' Dining Room in 2024.

Entrée  
Native Grain Damper with Bush Tomato Whipped Butter  
First Course  
Barramundi, lemon myrtle broth, sea succulents, finger lime crisps  
Second Course  
Sweet and sour crocodile  
Davidson plum, parsnip puree, kakaria  
Third Course  
Kangaroo, spiced sweet potato, bush tomato  
Fourth Course  
Pepperberry leaf crusted emu lilly pilly  
Roasted vine cherry tomato crispy saltbush  
Dessert  
Dark chocolate and quandong tart chantilly cream

This menu does several things. It brings to the fore native plants on equal footing with animals. It melds bush tucker and Anglo Australian cuisines together successfully as I can attest having attended the dinner, e.g. Davidson plum, parsnip puree, kakaria. It uses the structure of the formal dinner to emphasise its positioning at the Australian table. Here is one of the small group of Indigenous owned food services in Australia. It says of itself:

Indigiearth is an award-winning business fully owned and operated by Aboriginal people ... Indigiearth works with ingredients gathered from across the nation, including coastal areas and inland across our vast country. They partner with Aboriginal communities who use traditional land care practices that honour Mother Earth'.<sup>31</sup>

Its damper is made from native grain a product only recently come to the market popularised by Bruce Pascoe's 'Dark Emu'.

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<sup>27</sup> Cherikoff, Vic, *Bushfood and the True Australian Cuisine* Food In Festivity Proceedings of the Fourth Symposium of Australian Gastronomy 1988 p. 37

<sup>28</sup> Cherikoff, Vic, *The Bushfood Handbook*, Bush Tucker Supply Australia Pty Ltd 1989

<sup>29</sup> Cherikoff, Vic, *Uniquely Australian. A wild food cookbook*, Bush Tucker Supply Australia Pty Ltd 1992

<sup>30</sup> 'Menu', Indigiearth partnering with the New South Wales Parliamentary Executive Chef.

<sup>31</sup> Indigiearth home page.

**Postprandial summation**

This article has traced native foods at the Australian table through a series of formal and informal dinners, real and imagined, from being the object of acclimatising experimentation in 1864 to a multi-course dinner in the New South Wales Parliament Guests' Dining Room in 2024. Largely focussed on native animals till well into the second half of the century, the new bush food industry focussed on native plants. This last dinner underlines that native foods now have their place at the multiculinary Australian Table.