

# Eucalyptus rubida

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## Are we realising a new ecological "WE"?

When Queen Victoria said "We are not amused," people were introduced to the 'royal plural'. The implication was possibly Queen Victoria speaking on behalf of the Empire, or maybe a subtle hint of possession.

When a friend phones to say she is visiting with her pet dog, we should not be surprised if she says "We will be over shortly." 'We' now stands for the friend and her dog. However it is not common to hear language used in this way. In this instance the intimacy between the person and the pet allows the use of 'we'.

John Seed, the Australian ecologist once said of his deep concern and activism on behalf of the forests "I am part of the rainforest protecting myself. I am that part of the rainforest recently emerged into thinking." The 'myself' here realises an emerging identity between self and the forest.

Many of us are old enough to remember reading Martin Buber's fine little volume *I and You*. As I prepared for this article, I had the urge to re-read this little volume and downloaded an electronic form of it, translated by Walter Kaufmann. It is an enlightening experience to once again read the text and realise that my present mindset gives me a much deeper insight to this complex but wonderful work, and any attempt to utilise Buber's thinking would be difficult, if not dangerous.

I was looking for signs that would speak about the human animal relationship I referred to in the second paragraph. I was astonished at what I found and can only hint at its relevance here.

Buber speaks of reciprocity as an essential element of the genuine I/You relationship as opposed to the I/It. He very delicately and with some diffidence admits that 'outside the tamed circle' of pets some "men have deep down in their being a potential partnership with animals - most often persons who are by no means 'animalic' by nature but rather spiritual."

I have seen such beautiful examples of this where reciprocity is truly evident, if only 'latent', to use Buber's word. Even in the contemplation of a plant by the

human the very contemplation of the being of the plant he describes as the 'pre-threshold' of the human-human experience, and describes it in terms of the 'huge sphere that reaches from the stones to the stars.'

When we consider that we share animal life with a great diversity of species, we ought not to be surprised to find the origins of reflective mindfulness in prior times and animals. This was one of the teachings of Pierre Teilhard de Chardin.

Looking to the East we encounter parallel teachings in the works of Sri Aurobindo and The Mother (his mystical companion). The Mother says:



*In everyone, even at the very beginning, this spiritual presence, this inner light is there .... In fact, it is everywhere. I have seen it many a time in certain animals. It is like a shining point which is the basis of a certain control and protection, something which, even in half-consciousness, makes possible a certain harmony with the rest of creation.*

Dolphins have brain similar in size to the human brain, but different in proportions of the parts. They have a well-developed para-limbic brain that probably explains their ability to display a complex social network into which we are sometimes privileged to participate. The apparent knowledge they have of human illness is remarkable. When one of their own is ill, they will gather around them and even beach themselves in an attempt to stay with them.

You may remember the enclosed photo which I published in an earlier edition of Rubida (No.48) showing a very close bond between dog and human.

In earlier cultures, uncontaminated by anthropocentrism, animals were seen as special messengers of the gods, and sometimes warranting worship in their own right. Kings and emperors sometimes appropriated or were given special divine status by their subjects. Anthropocentrism may now be coming to its full circle. Some may know of Lynn White's "Historical Roots of our Ecological Crisis," which attributed most of the crisis to the human. This caused a storm of criticism, which criticism still lingers in the skeptic community.

Less well known is the following piece by White: "*Since the Churches remain, despite some competition, the chief forges for hammering out values, this (the abandonment of Man's Dominion over Nature) is important. I feel that before too long, however, they will find themselves going on to the third legitimately Biblical position, that Man is part of a democracy of all God's creatures, organic and inorganic, each praising his Maker according to the law of its being.*"

White, a convinced Christian, pursued his search for a way to recognise other creatures as spiritually autonomous beings: "I am not wanting a revival of animism! I am searching for ways to regain perception of the spirituality of all creatures and to demote modern man from absolute monarchy over nature."

Here at Glenburn, several residents and visitors have been privileged over time to commune with the resident wallabies. Frequently it is possible to encounter them in the bush at a distance of only several metres, quite close enough to make eye-to-eye contact with the docile marsupial. They frequently do not startle, but stand their ground, asserting their right to be there, but in no way threatening, but rather curious. It is a sacred moment, celebrating the underlying level of wildness that we share with the animal, and which we discover in ourselves.

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