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Musings

‘The story of the great Wedge-tailed Eagle of Australia—the second largest eagle in the world—is one to thrill the imagination and enlighten the mind of young and old alike.’

Will Lawson, poet, balladist, in foreword to *Monarch of the Western Skies: the Story of a Wedge-tailed Eagle*, C.K. Thompson (1946).

Every nation has its eagle, the biggest, boldest and most beautiful in the world. Eagles fire imaginations and fuel obsessions. Even their parts promise as much as their whole: mighty wings for freedom, eyes for insight, talons for power. We have them lead battalions to war, yet some would have them blamed and tamed for the loss of a few sheep.

To me, quintessential Australian landscape is one in which two great dark shapes soar above in dignified solitude. Hence, my perceptions of eagles stem from this view of them as one of the more majestic players in nature’s game. Clearly early explorers and surveyors felt similarly, reflected in the number of landmarks named for eagles or eaglehawks.

As a teenager I crested a hill on horseback and we, horse and I, came suddenly upon a huge black bird perched on a fence post. The eagle looked back over its broad shoulders deep into my eyes. After some minutes’ contemplation it turned away and launched gracefully off the hillside. We were within three metres but not a scrap of fear was apparent all round. I couldn’t say that there was a meeting of souls, but the mutual calm acceptance between the three of us had a certain unforgettable spiritual quality.