

TIM STRANKS

William Blandowski goes bush! The lower Murray expedition, 1856–1857

First Peoples Acknowledgement

I respectfully acknowledge the Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung and Boon Wurrung Bunurong peoples of the eastern Kulin Nations where I work, and First Peoples language groups and communities across Victoria and Australia. I also wish to acknowledge the different First Peoples groups across Victoria, New South Wales and South Australia that William Blandowski partnered with during his 10 years in south-eastern Australia from 1849–1859.

Cultural Warning

This paper includes the names of First Peoples who have now passed. It also includes images of dead and preserved animals, some of which may be part of First Peoples animal totem systems or have other special cultural significance. This paper also uses historical language from original accounts that is offensive.

Introduction

In an introduction to the proceedings of a symposium published to mark the 150th anniversary of William Blandowski's 1856–1857 expedition to the Murray River, the symposium convenor Harry Allen (from the University of Auckland) lamented that while a number of aspects of the expedition had been covered in various articles, there was, 'as yet, no recent discussion of the expedition available'.¹

The 170th anniversary of the expedition will be marked in 2026, shortly after the completion of the major project Berlin's Australian Archive: Addressing the colonial legacies of natural history, which ran from 2022 to 2025. To help mark those milestones, I now present a new narrative for the expedition. This account focuses on key elements of the expedition until its winding up in December 1857, including lodgement of the natural history collections at the museum in Melbourne by January 1858.

¹ Allen, H. (2009). Introduction: Looking again at William Blandowski. *Proceedings of the Royal Society of Victoria*, 121(1), p. 2.

This account is drawn from my research interests in zoological collections and the history of the museum from the 1850s to the 1890s. This work has been carried out over the past 20 years, which has allowed valuable time for reappraisal and reflection. My hope is for this paper to provide a useful history of the museum's first place-based interdisciplinary partnership with First Peoples (and hopefully in turn lead to further discussions).²

The research has involved revisiting old sources of information about Blandowski's expedition to the lower Murray and attempting to reassemble all of the surviving evidence about the expedition from various Australian and European institutions.³ A number of newly uncovered collections and associated records have resulted from recent work on the Berlin's Australian Archive project, which involved collection surveys at key institutions in the German capital.

Crucial records relating to the expedition that were known to exist at one time are currently missing and remain to be traced, or must now be considered lost or destroyed. Examples include the daily diaries of Blandowski and his second-in-charge Gerard Krefft (a rough written narrative by Krefft exists, but only covers the expedition from its starting point in Melbourne in December 1856 to a staging point at Lake Boga in March 1857); a large number of official letters and progress reports to the Surveyor-General's Office and other state government agencies; a vital set of archives about different First Peoples groups in the region and their cultures; and many of the original field sketches and illustrations, including all of Blandowski's original photography from the expedition.

This account intends to build on the previous efforts of others in the field and several recently published monographic works.⁴

The Museum of Natural History was established in 1854; however, Victorian government-wide funding cuts during 1855 saw museum operations curtailed. By mid-1856, the struggling museum had been physically relocated to the University of Melbourne, where Frederick McCoy took over and transformed the organisation into the Public Museum (later known as the National Museum) at the University. Blandowski was deposed as museum curator, lost control of the institution and was effectively sidelined.⁵

Blandowski retained an official position in the Victorian public servant lists as an assistant surveyor in the Surveyor-General's Department (under Andrew Clarke) and continued in his role as government zoologist. He still had some authority to contribute to museum collections and was eventually able to negotiate with the government to undertake a fourth and final expedition into the Victorian regions — on this occasion to north-western Victoria from December 1856 to December 1857.

² The preferred naming convention used at Museums Victoria for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples is 'First Peoples'.

³ The area that Blandowski referred to as 'Lower Murray' is now known as 'central Murray'.

⁴ These major works include: Allen, H., & Weldon, E. A. (2009). (Eds). Special issue on Blandowski's expedition to the Murray River: European naturalists and their contribution to science in Australia between 1850 and 1859. *Proceedings of the Royal Society of Victoria*, 121(1), pp. 1–204; Allen, H. (2010). (Ed.). *Australia: William Blandowski's illustrated encyclopaedia of Aboriginal Australia*. Aboriginal Studies Press; and Wosz, E., & Hermannstädter, H. (2013). (Eds). *Naturalista, czyli Wilhelm von Blandowski w Australii / Wilhelm von Blandowski: Ein Naturforscher in Australien*. Muzeum w Gliwice: Gliwice, Poland and Museum für Naturkunde Berlin.

⁵ The institution originally known as the Museum of Natural History developed into the Public Museum or National Museum at the University of Melbourne, and ultimately into what we know today as Museums Victoria.

The Victorian Government, who supplied the funding for this expedition, provided Blandowski with a set of instructions around natural history collecting at the 'junction of the Murray and Darling rivers' for the Public Museum. Blandowski, however, took a much wider and more interdisciplinary approach, particularly regarding his relationships with First Peoples.



Figure 1: W.v. Blandowski, Gleiwitz [Photographic self portrait], 1869. Source: Museum für Naturkunde Berlin, Ornithologische Sammlung, Registration: Zool. Mus., Orn. 18,5.

This paper aims to clarify the expedition's route from Melbourne to the 'junction' and back, and the 12-month-long journey in between. The expedition has previously been presented as an episode which primarily took place at the river junction (or more precisely at a location which was known to local First Peoples as Mondellimin, near present-day Merbein and Mildura). This overlooks the important episodes which took place at the first expedition base camp at Gunbower (over two months from January to February 1857), as well as the intervening journey along the central Murray, before they reached the better-known camp at Mondellimin (where they spent eight months from April to December 1857). The study also takes a closer look at expedition work on both the Victorian and New South Wales sides of the central Murray, together with activities in New South Wales on the lower Darling.

The expedition relied on a small team led by Blandowski and his second-in-charge, Gerard Krefft. This team included a succession of behind-the-scenes workers who laboured throughout the expedition, and I have attempted to identify some of these previously unknown Europeans. The expeditioners worked with different First Peoples groups at each stage, and were especially immersed with the groups living in the Gunbower and Mondellimin vicinities. I have tried to raise the profile of each of these First Peoples groups, who were responsible for collecting many of the natural history specimens and for sharing associated knowledge through the different seasons on Country. I have also tried to identify individual First Peoples along the way where possible, noting that they were integral to the expedition's success.



Figure 2: Gerard Krefft, Naturalist [Photographic portrait], 1850s. Photographer not known. Source: Australian Museum Archives, V7359.

Blandowski's expedition of 1856–1857 took place at a moment in time. His central Murray expedition occurred 20 years after Thomas Mitchell conducted his 'Third Expedition' to the Murray and Darling rivers in 1836, and some 10–25 years after Charles Sturt completed his expeditions to the region (the 'Second Expedition' from 1829 to 1830 and the 'Third Expedition' from 1844 to 1846). Despite the years that had passed, Blandowski drew on the experiences of both these European explorers to help shape his own expedition.

In the years between the expeditions of Mitchell and Sturt and Blandowski's own expedition, the region had undergone major change. Squatters had taken over lands for large sheep and cattle stations (occupying much of the frontage along the rivers), land clearing and timber cutting had resulted in loss of original forest and bushland, and waterways were altered by the destruction of reed beds and removal of snags to make way for riverboat traffic and encroaching agriculture. Each of these changes had different effects on the natural history that Blandowski's team was to see.

Blandowski and Krefft witnessed First Peoples' living culture as it endured in 1856–1857. First Peoples were largely displaced by squatting, with their access to traditional hunting, fishing and ceremonial grounds affected. Dispossession meant that many had little choice but to camp on squatters' properties (where they provided essential labour) or at church missions (where their lives became heavily regulated).

I have retained the use of the original names for the different groups of First Peoples that Blandowski and Krefft recorded at particular places and times along the central Murray and lower Darling rivers. These names include the 'Gunbowers or Loddon tribe' met at Gunbower Station in January–February 1857, the 'Yarree Yarree Aborigines' or 'Murray natives' at Yerre Yerre Station in April–December 1857, the 'Darling tribe' at Yelta mission and near the junction of the Murray and Darling rivers in the same period, and 'Wombangee' on the lower Darling in May–June 1857. I have not included portraits of any individual First Peoples who were identified or named during the expedition. Further engagement with relevant First Peoples communities in north-western Victoria and south-western New South Wales is needed to determine the affiliations of the historic groups with present-day Traditional Owner groups, and identities of individuals.

I have noted a number of First Peoples' cultural practices which were observed and recorded; however, I have refrained from providing detailed descriptions. Some of these practices include *Typha* or bulrush harvesting and fibre making, large fish- and duck-net manufacture (and the trade in these cultural belongings along the rivers), canoe-making, animal hunting and collecting methods, and names for animals. These are cultural stories for the relevant First Peoples communities to hold and share.

In their landmark 2019 publication *Australia's First Naturalists: Indigenous peoples' contribution to early zoology*, Penny Olsen (Australian National University) and Lynette Russell (Monash University) stated that Blandowski was '*perhaps the first European to employ whole Indigenous Australian tribes, purely as collectors of animals*', and that he was among the '*most successful natural history collectors who recognised that many of the Indigenous people not only made superb guides but also were reliable collectors of specimens and sources of information on animals*'.⁶ This paper affirms their assessment of the significance of First Peoples' contributions to the outcomes of Blandowski's expedition to the central Murray in 1856–1857.

The lower Murray expedition, 1856–1857

Part 1 – Background to the expedition to the central Murray

The Museum of Natural History in Melbourne opened in March 1854, as part of the Surveyor-General's Department, with initial funding of £2,000 from the Victorian Government. William Blandowski was appointed as the founding curator and also held the role of government zoologist.

In the Museum's first two years of operation, Blandowski undertook three expeditions around Victoria to build natural history collections: central Victoria (1854), Mornington Peninsula and Western Port (1854–1855) and Mount Macedon (1855).⁷ These expeditions gave him a wealth of experience working in regional areas and partnering with local First Peoples in the search for collections and knowledge.

In mid-1856, Blandowski faced major challenges as funding from the Victorian Government dried up and the Museum of Natural History was taken out of his

⁶ Olsen, P. & Russell, L. (2019). *Australia's First Naturalists: Indigenous Peoples' Contribution to Early Zoology*. National Library of Australia Publishing, p. 73 and p. 132.

⁷ Details of Blandowski's first three Victorian expeditions were provided in Darragh, T. A. (2009). William Blandowski: A frustrated life. *Proceedings of the Royal Society of Victoria*, 121(1), p. 33–38.

curatorial control and relocated to the University of Melbourne (with professor of natural science Frederick McCoy taking over). Blandowski was effectively sidelined and left without meaningful employment.

The respective approaches of Blandowski and McCoy to building the museum and its collections were entirely different. Blandowski had more modest ambitions, focusing on Victorian natural history, and was willing to travel throughout the state and endure hardships to build up reference collections ready for later study. McCoy had grander desires, envisioning a 'national museum' with large collections of comparative material from throughout Australia and overseas. He was unwilling to travel any distance for fieldwork, preferring to remain at his study desk and relying on others to bring him collections. In a critical tone, McCoy described Blandowski as '*best fitted for work in the field*' and '*unwilling to attempt the naming or literary investigation of the objects, as it requires much patient study in the closet and a large library*'.⁸

In August 1856 Blandowski sought approval from Surveyor-General Andrew Clarke to resume his expeditions, and in-principle approval was quickly granted. Blandowski later reported that '*Capt. Clarke (vide letter of 15th August 1856) wished to have me out of town with all speed, and he accordingly offered me a small party under the mask of an Exploring Expedition*'.⁹

In October 1856 Blandowski received advice from Clarke about support for the expedition. Funding was to be drawn against the existing museum budget and was limited to Blandowski's existing salary (£400 per year), salary for a party of three labourers (£15 per month each) and a field allowance (£300 per year) meant to cover all other expenses.¹⁰ Blandowski received final instructions for the central Murray expedition on 2 December 1856:

*I received orders from the Government to proceed to the junction of the Darling and Murray Rivers, for the purpose of making investigations on the natural history of that district, and also, with a view of collecting as many specimens as possible for the National Museum, and marking the distribution of animal life along the route.*¹¹

Part 2 – Departure of the expedition

Blandowski reported that:

*I left Melbourne on the 6th December, 1856, with a very complete field equipment, consisting of five horses, two bullocks, two drays, four tents, a full set of tools and implements, and also a photographic apparatus.*¹²

⁸ McCoy, F. (1855, June 29). [Letter to colonial secretary William Haines]. Public Record Office Victoria. (Letter 55/8337 in File 55-12888, Unit 205, VPRS 1189/P0000, Colonial Secretary – Inwards Correspondence).

⁹ Blandowski, W. (1860, October 5). [Letter to governor Henry Barkly.] Public Record Office Victoria (Letter 61/273 in File 70-13610, Unit 470, VPRS 3991/P0000, Chief Secretary – Inwards Correspondence).

¹⁰ Clarke, A. (1856, October 14). [Copy of Letter 56/1051, Surveyor-General Andrew Clarke to W. Blandowski, in File 58/2282, secretary of the Board of Science Robert Brough Smyth to chief secretary William Haines, Report of the Board of Science and minutes of evidence]. Museums Victoria Archives.

¹¹ Blandowski, W. (1858). Recent discoveries in natural history on the lower Murray. *Transactions of the Philosophical Institute of Victoria, from September to December, 1857, inclusive*, 2(2), p. 125.

¹² The well-equipped expedition party is illustrated on Plate 20 in Blandowski, W. (1862). *Australien in 142 photographischen Abbildungen nach zehnjährigen Erfahrungen zusammengestellt von Wilhelm v. Blandowski*. Gustav Neuman.

The expedition team departing Melbourne included three other men: Gerard Krefft (an artist who had come to Blandowski's attention at the Public Library in Melbourne), Ninian Batchelor (taxidermist) and '*a young gentleman, Mr Tuck*'. As the expedition progressed, team members successively left and joined.¹³

'Young Mr Tuck' has now been identified as Gustav Tulk, eldest son of the librarian of the Public Library in Melbourne, Augustus Tulk. Young Gustav was about 16–17 years old at the time of the expedition's departure.

The expedition travelled northwards from Melbourne, passing through the townships of Kaylor, Sunbury and Lancefield. They crossed over the Great Dividing Range and followed along the Campaspe River to near its junction with the Murray River at Echuca (where Krefft reported that '*bushfires were raging in all directions and impeded our progress several times*'). Three weeks after leaving Melbourne, the expedition approached their first base camp at Gunbower.¹⁴

Part 3 – Gunbower base camp

On 28 December 1856, the expedition stopped by Gunbower Island, which was bordered by Gunbower Creek on the south side and the Murray River on the north. They set up a camp on a tight and narrow bend of Gunbower Creek and stayed for two months.

The Gunbower base camp was established beside the main homestead of Gunbower Station, held by absentee squatter George Houston with day-to-day management from Robert Gardiner. The station covered 180,000 acres [72,850 hectares] and carried 8,500 sheep at the time.¹⁵

The original location of the base camp has been confirmed — it was situated between the present-day townships of Gunbower and Leitchville. The station homestead was located approximately 3 kilometres from the eastern shores of Kow Swamp.¹⁶

Krefft provided a total count of First Peoples at Gunbower Station at the time: 45 people at what he referred to as '*Gardiner's Station*' (the main homestead) plus another 12 people at '*Gardiner's Out-Station*' (likely a second homestead or shepherd's hut on the west side of the station).¹⁷

Blandowski recorded the identity of the First Peoples group that they met at Gunbower Station as the '*Gunbowers or Loddon tribe*', while Krefft referred to them as one of the '*tribes inhabiting the reed beds*'.¹⁸

Krefft reported that on the day after the expedition arrived at Gunbower, '*a host of men, women and children arrived who made their mia mias not 15 yards from our tent*' and that they became involved in natural history collecting almost immediately. An initial focus was birds and mammals, and as '*almost all the natives carried firearms*' and

¹³ For example, Blandowski's regular driver, James Manson, later joined the expedition at Mount Hope, replacing Batchelor.

¹⁴ Maps showing the expedition route and key locations were provided in: Allen, H. (2009) Figure 1; and Allen, H. (2010). Editor's note. In H. Allen (Ed.), *Australia: William Blandowski's Illustrated Encyclopaedia of Aboriginal Australia* (p. vi). Aboriginal Studies Press.

¹⁵ See Billis, R. V., & Kenyon, A. S. (1974). *Pastoral Pioneers of Port Phillip* (2nd ed.). Stockland Press. Gunbower Station was previously held by George Rowan and managed by John Hinkins. An account of Gunbower Station life from 1845–1847 and interactions with local First Peoples is provided in Hinkins, J. T. (1884). *Life Amongst the Native Race: With Extracts from a Diary*. Haase, McQueen & Co.

¹⁶ The only known illustration of the main Gunbower station homestead and base camp site at the time is considered to be an original watercolour by Krefft, G. (circa 1857). *Station on the Murray*. Mitchell Library, State Library of NSW, PXD-9.

¹⁷ Krefft, G. (1866b). On the manners and customs of the Aborigines of the lower Murray and Darling, *Transactions of the Philosophical Society of New South Wales, 1862–1865*, p. 358.

¹⁸ Blandowski, W. (1858), p. 136; Krefft, G. (1866b), p. 361.



Figure 3: *Station on the Murray* [Watercolour on paper, probably showing Gunbower Station, on Gunbower Creek, in January–February 1857], not dated. Gerard Krefft. Source: Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales, reg. no. PXD 9/25.

Blandowski was initially offering 'about 1 shilling for each skin', the flow of specimens into camp soon became overwhelming. The terms of exchange were rapidly switched to supplies such as flour, sugar, tea and tobacco.¹⁹

The expedition soon established a regular daily routine: observing killed and living animals brought in by First Peoples, preparing illustrations, and preserving specimens by skinning, drying, stuffing or pickling in spirits for eventual transfer to the museum in Melbourne.

One of the main First Peoples guides, collectors and knowledge-holders for the expedition at Gunbower (and one of the few First Peoples participating in the expedition whose identity is known) was a senior man named Sergeant (his First Peoples name is not known).²⁰

Sergeant took a group of 10 First Peoples and escorted Krefft on a short excursion from the Gunbower camp to Mount Hope and Pyramid Hill. Their hunt focused on several large animals (Red Kangaroo, Dingo and Emu) that were uncommon at Gunbower at the time, but that First Peoples guides knew could be found further inland.

¹⁹ Krefft, G. (circa 1857–1858). *Narrative of an exploring expedition led by W. Blandowski, 1856–7* [Unpublished manuscript]. Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales, A.267 & A.268. This unpublished narrative provides an almost daily account of the expedition at Gunbower.

²⁰ For an original watercolour portrait by Krefft, see: Krefft, G. (1857). *Sergeant, Gunbower Creek, February 1857*. Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales, PXD-9.

The expedition here relied on First Peoples partners to find rare, unusual, cryptic or nocturnal animals (and this remained the case throughout the expedition). This significantly expanded the scope of the collecting and the number of different animals collected. First Peoples were also willing to share their own cultural knowledge about the different animals, including many First Peoples names for each variety.

First Peoples would not collect all animals, and there was a taboo on killing bats at Gunbower. When Krefft captured an unusual 'little grinning bat' (probably the Eastern Horseshoe Bat, *Rhinolophus megaphyllus*), a First Peoples man 'begged very hard for the little creature's life'. Krefft promised to let it go but then waited until the man was out of sight before wilfully killing it. Krefft recalled some years later that, 'There was a regular row about it and the bat was held up, examined, and passed from hand to hand', with First Peoples in camp all agreeing that 'the expedition on which I was then engaged would come to grief'.²¹

Krefft showed his unflinching determination to collect these protected animals, and in doing so he ignored the explicit wishes of the local First Peoples and was willing to incur their wrath. Krefft's actions contributed to a rise in tensions with the First Peoples at Gunbower, and this would have hindered Blandowski's efforts to build a respectful and trusting partnership.

Blandowski and Krefft observed summer activities in the Gunbower area during January–March 1857, when the water level in the creek was dropping and swamps and billabongs were drying out. A major activity observed at Gunbower was the seasonal harvesting of *Typha* bulrushes (known by the local First Peoples name 'Wongal' or 'Vangall'), production of fibre and twine, and making of large duck nets, fish nets and other cultural belongings.²² The expedition left the Gunbower base camp on 1 March 1857.

Part 4 – Travel along the Central Murray

Blandowski's expedition route was informed by European explorers who had gone before. Krefft complained that the expedition had to carry Blandowski's extensive library, 'including all the exploring expeditions from Sturt to Leichardt'.²³ Among these books were Mitchell's *Three Expeditions into the Interior of Eastern Australia* (1839), and Sturt's *Two Expeditions into the Interior of Southern Australia* (1834) and *Narrative of an Expedition into Central Australia* (1849), which each held vital information about navigating the Murray and Darling rivers.²⁴ Mitchell's accounts proved invaluable, and several of the lower Murray expedition accounts mention following Mitchell's old tracks on both sides of the Murray River.

²¹ Krefft, G. (circa 1857–1858); Krefft, G. (1873, 6 December). Natural history – the bat tribe (continued). *The Sydney Mail and New South Wales Advertiser*, p. 725.

²² The harvesting and use of *Typha* was illustrated on Plates 32 and 41 of Blandowski, W. (1862).

²³ Krefft, G. (circa 1857–1858).

²⁴ Blandowski's personal library held copies of the following key references: Mitchell, T. L. (1839). *Three expeditions into the interior of eastern Australia, with descriptions of the recently explored region of Australia Felix and of the present colony of New South Wales* (2nd ed.). T. & W. Boone, two volumes; Sturt, C. (1834). *Two expeditions into the interior of southern Australia, during the years 1828, 1829, 1830, and 1831, with observations on the soil, climate, and general resources of the colony of New South Wales*. Smith & Elder, two volumes; and Sturt, C. (1849). *Narrative of an expedition into central Australia, performed under the authority of Her Majesty's government, during the years 1844, 5, and 6*. T. & W. Boone, two volumes.

By the time that Blandowski's expedition arrived on the central Murray, some 20 years after Mitchell had travelled through, all the frontage along the river had been taken over by squatters and turned into very large sheep and cattle stations. In the process, First Peoples were displaced from their Country and the environment was drastically altered.

Between leaving the first base camp at Gunbower on 1 March and arriving at the second base camp at Mondellimin on 8 April 1857, Blandowski's expedition successively passed from station to station, encountering different First Peoples groups and gathering different collections and knowledge.

From Gunbower in the east to Mondellimin in the west, this series of stations and collecting localities included: Campbell's Gannawarra Station, Ebden and Keene's Reedy Lake Station, Beveridge's Tyntyndyer Station, Coghill's Piangil Station, Hamilton's Narrung Station, McCallum's Youngera Station, Grant's Bumbang Station, Morey's Euston Station (New South Wales side of the Murray River), Keane and Orr's Kulkyne Station, and McGrath's Carwarp Station.²⁵

In March 1857 the expedition paused at Lake Boga, the former site of a Moravian church mission which had been set up by two missionaries, Andreas Täger and Friedrich Spieseke, and had operated from about October 1851 to July 1856. The expedition noted the deserted nature of the mission, abandoned by the missionaries approximately eight months earlier.²⁶

The expedition journeyed along the Victorian side of the Murray, except for a shortcut into New South Wales to present-day Euston, to visit Morey's Euston Station and a nearby small settlement which included a Native Police force controlled by Crown Lands Commissioner Stephen Cole. This shortcut would have saved some travelling distance and avoided rough travel through dense Mallee scrub and sandhills on the Victorian side. The expedition passed back into Victoria in the vicinity of Keane and Orr's Kulkyne Station (near present-day Kulkyne).

Part 5 – Mondellimin base camp

The expedition stopped short of the Murray and Darling rivers junction, and on 8 April 1857 established a base camp 'at a place called by the natives Mondellimin' where they remained for eight months.²⁷

The Mondellimin camp was set up on a sheltered landing area on the Victorian side of the Murray River (now known as Blandowski Walk or Chaffey Landing, near Merbein). The camp was located on Hugh and Bushby Jamieson's Yerre Yerre Station (later renamed Mildura Station) and roughly 6 kilometres away from the Jamieson brothers' main station homestead.²⁸

²⁵ A full list of the pastoral stations that the expedition passed by, and a count of the number of First Peoples encountered at each station, is included in Krefft, G. (1866b), pp. 358–359.

²⁶ For a history of the Lake Boga Moravian mission, see: Jenz, F. (2010). *German Moravian missionaries in the British colony of Victoria, Australia, 1848–1908: Influential strangers*. Brill. Especially Chapter 3, Lake Boga – A putrid stain, pp. 71–105; and Kenny, R. (2003). La Trobe, Lake Boga and the 'enemy of souls': The first Moravian mission in Australia. *La Trobe Journal*, 71, pp. 97–113.

²⁷ Blandowski, W. (1858), p. 126. The Mondellimin camp was illustrated on Plate 21 in Blandowski, W. (1862); and also in Mr Blandowski's encampment on the Lower Murray. (1858, 6 February). *Illustrated Melbourne News*, p. 65.

²⁸ The location of the Mondellimin camp was identified in Orchard, K. (1997). Regional botany in mid-nineteenth century Australia: Mueller's Murray River collecting network. *Historical Records of Australian Science*, 11(3), pp. 389–405.

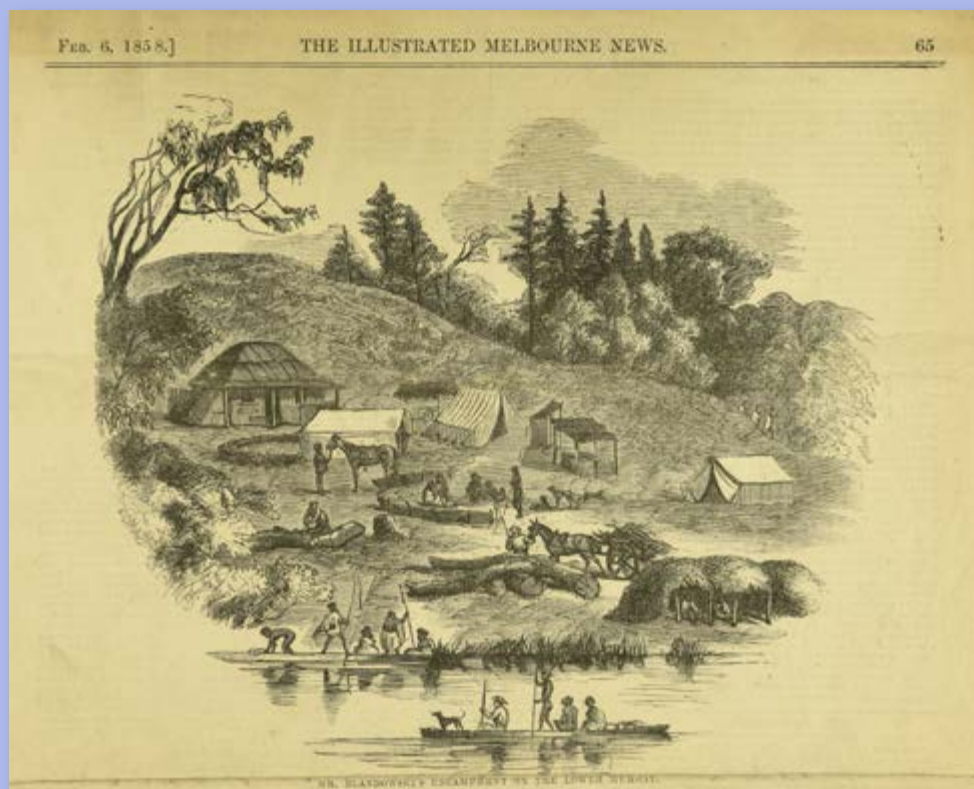


Figure 4: *Mr Blandowski's encampment on the Lower Murray* [Wood engraving], circa 1857–1858. Gerard Krefft (artist attributed) (engraver not known). *The Illustrated Melbourne News*, 6 February 1858, page 65. Source: Museum für Naturkunde Berlin, Historische Arbeitsstelle, Blandowski Collection, Collection ID B001-03-361.



Figure 5: *Gall Gall Station, the property of Mess. J. H. Williams, Lower Murray* [Watercolour on paper showing Gol Gol Station, occupied by John Williams, his wife Elizabeth and his brother Henry], 1857. Gerard Krefft. Source: Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales, reg. no. PXD 9/29.

The camp was directly opposite the station of John Williams, his wife Elizabeth and his brother Henry, which was on the New South Wales bank of the Murray River and known as Gol Gol Station.²⁹ Figure 5 shows Krefft's view from the Mondellimin campsite across the river to the Gol Gol Station's main homestead.

Krefft counted a combined total of 35 First Peoples living on the Williams's 30,000 acre [12,140 hectare] cattle station on the New South Wales side of the river and the Jamiesons' 150,000 acre [60,702 hectare] sheep station on the Victorian side. The First Peoples group encountered there at the time was living on both sides of the Murray River.

Blandowski recorded the identity of the First Peoples group that they met at Mondellimin as the 'Yarree Yarree Aborigines' and Krefft also described this group as 'Murray natives'.³⁰

Krefft described the initial encounters:

*in a few days some twenty of them, including men, women, and children, were assembled near our huts; they could not at first understand what brought us there, but when we purchused some of the native animals captured by them, they ever after brought in a good supply and became our permanent huntsmen. The boys would go out to collect insects, the women to look for small mammals, and the men looking for the larger game.*³¹

Blandowski reported on the formation of the mammal collections there:

*they are entirely the results of the exertions of my friends the Yarree Yarree Aborigines, and for which I have given them flour, sugar, tea, blankets, clothing, and other small presents, amounting in all to about £200 in value.*³²

The identity of two First Peoples partners at Mondellimin is known — their European names were provided, but their First Peoples names remain untraced. Krefft prepared two watercolour sketches of Jimmy Bigfoot carrying a large kangaroo into camp (one sketch for Blandowski's portfolio, and a copy that Krefft retained in his personal collection).³³

Krefft also mentioned 'a man named Piper ... who was then about 25 years of age'. This appears to be the same man that Krefft referred to in a later newspaper account, where he described 'a man named Youngman Piper, a relation of Sir Thomas Mitchell's famous companion Piper [who] accompanied me during several excursions on the Lower

²⁹ An original watercolour illustration by Krefft, G. (1857). Gall Gall station the property of Messrs J. & H. Williams is held in the Mitchell Library, State Library of NSW, PXD-9. Details of Williams's Gol Gol Station are from Whitworth, R. P. (1866). *Bailliere's New South Wales Gazetteer and Road Guide*. Bailliere: Sydney, p. 213; and details of Jamieson's Yerre Yerre Station are from Anon, (1848, 12 December). Supplementary list of claims to leases of Crown Land beyond the settled districts, Wimmera District, *The Argus*, pp. 1–2. The location of the old Gol Gol Station homestead is near present-day Coomealla, not at the site of the current Gol Gol township.

³⁰ Blandowski, W. (1858), p. 136; Krefft, G. (1866a). On the vertebrated animals of the lower Murray and Darling, their habits, economy, and geographical distribution. *Transactions of the Philosophical Society of New South Wales, 1862–1865*, pp. 1–33.

³¹ Krefft, G. (1866b), pp. 364–365.

³² Blandowski, W. (1858), p. 136.

³³ The Krefft illustration of Jimmy Bigfoot is held in the National Gallery of Australia (Accession Number 86.1942A&B), with a copy at the Mitchell Library, State Library of NSW (PXD-9). The image was also incorporated into an artistic representation of the Mondellimin camp which appears as Plate 22 in Blandowski, W. (1862).

Murray'.³⁴ The possible connection between Youngman Piper and another Piper (guide, diplomat and translator for Mitchell during his three major expeditions in south-eastern Australia between 1836 and 1846) is intriguing and remains to be researched.

The expedition remained at Mondellimin for eight months, building a strong and enduring partnership with the Yarree Yarree in particular, and assembling significant natural history collections and associated knowledge (including records of First Peoples' knowledge of natural history and their names for animals).³⁵

Part 6 – Excursions from Mondellimin and Blandowski's return to Melbourne

Whilst based at Mondellimin, Blandowski completed two major excursions. He explained his rationale for leaving camp and exploring the surrounding country in an earlier expedition proposal:

*I for my person would be entirely engaged in searching and investigating the country within a radius of 50 miles around the camp including an area of about 2000 to 3000 square miles.*³⁶

Blandowski's first excursion was for three weeks in April–May 1857, 'for the purpose of examining the banks of the river westwards along the Murray, to the neighbourhood of Moorundee [sic]'. He estimated the total distance covered was over 600 miles [965 kilometres]. Moorundie (near present-day Blanchetown, South Australia) had been a First Peoples ration depot operated by Edward John Eyre (protector of Aborigines and resident magistrate) from 1841–1844, as well as a staging post for Charles Sturt during his expedition to central Australia in 1844–1846.

Blandowski's second excursion was for 24 days in May–June 1857, 'up the Darling River towards Mount Murchison'. He estimated the total distance covered was 700 miles [1,125 kilometres]. He visited Hugh and Bushby Jamieson's second property, Mount Murchison Station (near present-day Wilcannia), attracted by the fact that the station at the time sat on the edge of the 'unsettled districts' on colonial maps.³⁷ Blandowski recorded the identity of the First Peoples group that he met at Mount Murchison as the 'Wombangee tribe, Darling River'.

Given the extended distances, the difficult terrain and the need to pass through various First Peoples' Country, it is unlikely that Blandowski travelled alone and is more likely that he was assisted by First Peoples guides.

Following the excursions, Blandowski rejoined the expedition team at Mondellimin from about 20 June 1857.

³⁴ Krefft, G. (1866b), p. 372; see also Krefft, G. (1873, 16 August). Natural history – savages, fossil and recent. *The Sydney Mail and NSW Advertiser*, p. 210.

³⁵ A significant collection of Krefft's original sketches of animals collected at Mondellimin and annotated with 'Yarree Yarree native names' is held in the Museum für Naturkunde Berlin.

³⁶ Blandowski, W. (1855, August 13). [Letter to surveyor general Andrew Clarke, re: propositions for the management of the Museum of Natural History]. Public Record Office Victoria (Letter 55/11008 in Unit 197, VPRS 1189/P0000, Colonial Secretary – Inward Registered Correspondence).

³⁷ Blandowski, W. (1858), p. 126.



Figure 6: *View on the Lower Darling: the Albury, Steamer, at Wentworth* [Hand-coloured engraving], circa 1872. Hoddell and Butcher. Source: *Town and Country Journal*. Private collection.

Blandowski left Mondellimin to return to Melbourne on 6 August 1857. By August, water levels in the Murray were sufficiently high (due to snows beginning to melt in the Victorian Alps and meltwaters starting to flow into the upper Murray) and riverboats had begun their seasonal operations again. Figure 6 shows the River Murray Navigation Company's steamer *Albury*, which picked up Blandowski at Mondellimin and took him down the river as far as Goolwa. From Goolwa, Blandowski sailed to Port Adelaide on the *Corio* and then across to Melbourne on the *Havilah* (arriving on 18 August 1857).³⁸

Blandowski returned with several consignments of natural history collections destined for the Public Museum (probably the specimens accumulating at Mondellimin from about May to August 1857). He had been away from Melbourne for more than eight months, and would have needed to provide a progress report to the new Surveyor-General George Darbyshire and other stakeholders in the government, including the president of the Board of Lands and Works David Moore, in his efforts to try to obtain further support and funding to keep the expedition going.

³⁸ Blandowski, W. (1858), p. 126.

Part 7 – Krefft left in charge of the Mondellimin camp

With Blandowski away in Melbourne, Krefft was left in charge of daily operations at the Mondellimin camp and appears to have gained a certain degree of independence.

Krefft visited the Yelta Church of England mission, located about 10 kilometres downstream from the Mondellimin camp on the Victorian side of the Murray River, close to the junction of the Murray and Darling rivers. The mission was established in 1855 by Reverend Thomas Goodwin and his assistant John Bulmer, and operated until 1868. Most of the First Peoples camped at Yelta at the time were considered to be from the 'Marowra tribe' (or 'Darling tribe') and originated from the northern side of the Murray River and the lower Darling.³⁹

Krefft counted 35 First Peoples at the 'Darling Junction', which likely included the people living at Yelta mission. Among the First Peoples that Krefft met at Yelta and inhabiting the country near the Darling junction was 'Old Jacob, a Darling chief', who shared cultural knowledge (his First Peoples name is not known). In July 1857, Krefft and Goodwin observed a large seasonal corroboree on the New South Wales side of the Murray River and on the lower Darling, which involved about 200 First Peoples and included Old Jacob.⁴⁰

Krefft also visited other localities on the lower Darling, interacting with the 'Darling tribe(s)' there and recording cultural knowledge. He visited at least two large stations on the lower Darling: Dugald Fletcher's Tapio Station and James Scott's Para Station, approximately '30 miles' [48 kilometres] and '68 miles' [109 kilometres] above the Murray-Darling junction respectively.⁴¹

The expedition was searching for specimens of one of the small mammals on the lower Darling — the Numbat *Myrmecobius fasciatus* — and Krefft reported that 'A quarrel existed between the Darling natives and the [Murray] tribe which accompanied me, so that I was not able to procure any live specimens of this singular animal'. This indicates that Krefft was gathering collections and knowledge near the Murray and Darling junction from both the 'Murray tribe' and the 'Darling tribe'.

Part 8 – Blandowski reports on expedition progress

Soon after arriving back in Melbourne on 18 August 1857, Blandowski presented his *Preliminary Report to the President of the Board of Lands and Works* to colleagues at the monthly meeting of the Philosophical Institute of Victoria on 2 September 1857. The progress report covered the first eight months of the expedition (December 1856–August 1857).

³⁹ For a history of the Yelta mission see: Massola, A. (1970). *Aboriginal mission stations in Victoria: Yelta, Ebenezer, Ramahyuck, Lake Condah*. Hawthorn Press; and Shaw, E. (1957). *Early days among the Aborigines: The story of Yelta and Coranderk missions*. Barr.

⁴⁰ Krefft, G. (1866b), p. 359, pp. 366–367; Thomas Goodwin provided some further information on Old Jacob and his death in 1857: 'Jacob was a fine old man ... He was a great warrior, and looked upon with fear by the rest of the tribe ... He appeared healthy and strong to the last, but he died very suddenly of apoplexy' in Church of England. (1858). *Fourth annual report of the Melbourne Church of England mission to the Aborigines of Victoria*. Mason & Firth, p. 10.

⁴¹ Krefft, G. (1866a), p. 12.

Blandowski reported that:

*I now beg to lay before you the result of my labours, observing, in the meantime, that the mechanical part—viz., that of preserving the specimens—was done by my white labourers alone, whilst the specimens were obtained by the assistance of the aborigines, to whom I am indebted for all the information and discoveries I have made, so that I can but claim a small share of the credit of having, with my party, been successfully exploring the desert of Australia for eight months.*⁴²

On 3 September 1857, the Philosophical Institute organised a 'most sumptuous dinner' for 30 gentlemen at Charles Wedel's Criterion Hotel in Collins Street to congratulate Blandowski 'on the zeal he had displayed in conducting his explorations, and in bringing to light the zoology of the country'.⁴³

Whilst Blandowski attempted to shore up support for the continuation of the expedition, Krefft remained working at Mondellimin and occasionally updating Blandowski on new discoveries in the field.

Krefft again relied on First Peoples in the search for the much sought after Pig-footed Bandicoot, *Chaeropus ecaudatus ecaudatus*.⁴⁴ Krefft reported on the capture, which took place on the New South Wales side of the Murray River, in a diary entry for 4 October 1857: 'After returning from a short excursion into the scrub, I fell in with a party of natives who had succeeded, at last, in securing a pair of the *Chaeropus*'.⁴⁵



Figure 7: *Choeropus occidentalis* [Watercolour, ink and pencil on paper, showing what is now known as the Pig-footed Bandicoot, *Chaeropus ecaudatus ecaudatus*], not dated. Gerard Krefft. Source: Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales, reg. no. PXD 132/63. A newly rediscovered illustration, located in James Stuart's album of natural history drawings of marsupials, rodents and reptiles (previously held by the Linnean Society of New South Wales).

⁴² Blandowski, W. (1858), p. 127.

⁴³ Complimentary dinner to Mr W. Blandowski. (1857, 4 September). *The Age*, p. 5.

⁴⁴ Early expedition accounts record the scientific name of the Pig-footed Bandicoot as *Chaeropus ecaudatus*, *C. castanotis* or *C. occidentalis*; however, the current accepted scientific name is *C. ecaudatus ecaudatus* (a subspecies).

⁴⁵ The rare extract from Krefft's diary appears in: Krefft, G. (1866a), p. 12.

The good news took a couple of weeks to reach Blandowski in Melbourne. On 20 October 1857, the *Argus* newspaper reported that: 'We understand that Mr Blandowski has just received information from his assistants that they have succeeded in procuring two living specimens of this remarkable animal, near the junction of the Darling and Murray rivers'. This species was high on Blandowski's wish list of animals to collect from the lower Murray; although he missed seeing live specimens, he eventually saw preserved ones when they were sent down to Melbourne.^{46 47}

Part 9 – The end of the expedition

With Frederick McCoy's expansive plans using up all the Public Museum budget for 1857, and no further provision to cover any more of Blandowski's expedition expenses, McCoy exerted pressure on the government to bring the year-long expedition to an end. On 16 October 1857 David Moore, the president of the Board of Lands and Works, wrote to Blandowski ordering him to discontinue: 'I have to request that you will take immediate measures to recall the labourers at present employed on the Lower Murray'.⁴⁸

Krefft appears to have broken up the base camp at Mondellimin in mid-November 1857 and gradually travelled to Melbourne by an overland route, bringing back all the natural history collections made between August and November 1857, together with all the field equipment (perhaps including what Krefft referred to as Blandowski's 'prancing charger' — his favourite black horse).

Blandowski reported that his remaining team of three men (Krefft, James Manson and Charles Dorgeloh) arrived in Melbourne on 15 December 1857, marking the end of 12 months of fieldwork for the expedition. The three men remained working for Blandowski at his private residence in Melbourne from at least 16 December 1857 to 15 January 1858, continuing to sort and register the last of the collections and finalise the catalogue.⁴⁹

After finishing with Blandowski, Krefft took up a short appointment with McCoy at the museum. Krefft worked for four weeks during February–March 1858 to process, sort and identify the expedition collections. He prepared various 'Lists of Specimens of Natural History to be Kept for the Museum' (including mammals, birds and reptiles) and selected specimens to be stuffed and mounted by the museum taxidermist Charles Fulker.⁵⁰

By January 1858 all the natural history collections from the lower Murray expedition had been delivered to the Public Museum at the University of Melbourne in Carlton, out of Blandowski's hands and into McCoy's possession.

⁴⁶ *Chaeropus ecaudatus*. (1857, 20 October). *The Argus*, p. 5.

⁴⁷ For details see: Stranks, T. (2015). Blandowski and the Pig-footed Bandicoots from his 1857 expedition to the Murray, *Museums Victoria Collections*. <https://collections.museumsvictoria.com.au/articles/14266>

⁴⁸ See: Moore, D. (1857, October 16). [Copy of Letter No. 494, President of the Board of Lands and Works David Moore to W. Blandowski, held in File 58/2282, secretary of Board of Science Robert Brough Smyth to chief secretary John O'Shanassy, Report of the Board of Science and minutes of evidence]. Museums Victoria Archives.

⁴⁹ Blandowski, W. (1858, January 20). [Letter to chief secretary William Haines]. Museums Victoria Archives (Letter No. E765, Chief Secretary – Inwards Correspondence).

⁵⁰ Krefft, G. (1858). [Letter to director of museums Frederick McCoy, seeking employment]. Museums Victoria Archives (Museums Victoria – Inwards Correspondence); and James, J. (1858, January 29). [Letter from museum secretary John James (on behalf of McCoy) to G. Krefft, offering temporary employment]. Museums Victoria Archives (Museums Victoria Letterbook – Outgoing Correspondence).

The animal specimens and associated knowledge now sat some 250–550 kilometres away from their origins on the central Murray and lower Darling rivers, and far away from Country and connections to respective First Peoples communities.

A page bound into the front of the catalogue volume summarises the '17,434 specimens booked under 3,000 numbers' collected at the two main base camps at Gunbower and Mondellimin (and beyond) between December 1856 and December 1857.⁵¹



Figure 5: *Choeropus occidentalis* [Wood engraving on paper, showing what is now known as the Pig-footed Bandicoot, *Choeropus ecaudatus* ecaudatus], circa 1858–1859. Gerard Krefft. Source: Museums Victoria, Scientific Art Collection, reg. no. BA 509. One in a series of artist proofs produced by Krefft (Brunswick, Germany) and enclosed in a letter posted to Frederick McCoy (Melbourne) in 1859.

Part 10 – A postscript: The fish naming scandal

Blandowski felt entirely uncomfortable working at the Public Museum under McCoy and continued to run his curatorial practice from home throughout 1858. Without physical access to the expedition collections, he otherwise kept busy writing reports and preparing illustrations.

Blandowski finalised his preliminary report on the lower Murray expedition to be published in the *Transactions of the Philosophical Institute*. He decided to honour several members of the institute by naming new species of fishes discovered on the expedition after them. In March 1858, when the council of the institute saw the proofs, they immediately objected to the fish descriptions. John Bleasdale and Richard Eades took the strongest offense at the language used to describe the species named after them: *Cernua eadesii* (Silver Perch) and *Brosmius bleasdalii* (River Blackfish) respectively. The former was described as 'a fish easily recognised by its low forehead, big belly and sharp spine', and the latter as 'a slimy, slippery fish, lives in the mud, is of violet bluish colour on the belly'.

⁵¹ See the 'Recapitulation' page in: Blandowski, W., & Krefft, G. (1856–1857). *Catalogue of all specimens of natural history collected by Mr Blandowski's party during an expedition to the lower Murray in 1857*. Museums Victoria Archives.

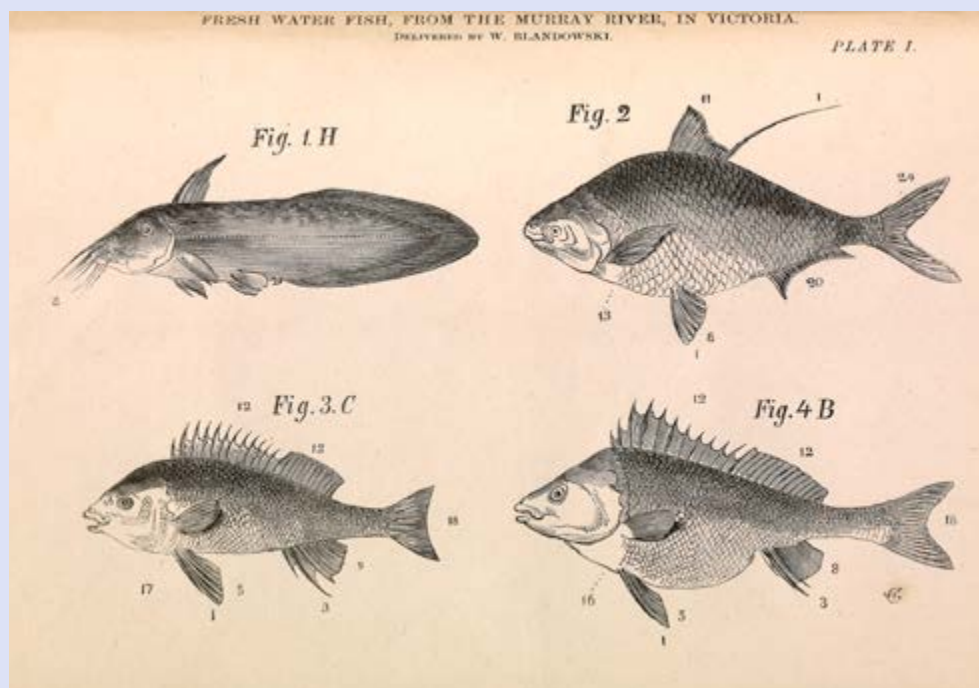


Figure 9: *Fresh Water Fish, from the Murray River, in Victoria, delivered by W. Blandowski – Plate 1* [Wood engraving on paper], circa 1858. Friedrich Grosse (engraving) after Nicholas Chevalier (drawing). Source: Museums Victoria, Scientific Art Collection, reg. no. BA 505. After original field sketches by W. Blandowski. From a series of four plates, featuring the 19 different varieties of fishes recorded in the Murray River by the expedition, which were produced for Blandowski's Preliminary Report in the *Transactions of the Philosophical Institute*. The plates were printed but later suppressed, and never appeared in the *Transactions* published in April 1858. The monograms for both Grosse ('FG') and Chevalier ('NC') appear on these plates, indicating the involvement of both artists. Plate 1, Figure 2 shows *Megalope Caillentassart* [now Bony Bream or Bony Herring, *Nematalosa erebi*] which Blandowski described as a 'fish found in the neighbourhood of Euston' and 'most numerous in the Darling, but also found above and below the junction of the Murray and Darling rivers.'



Figure 10: Bony Bream or Bony Herring, *Nematalosa erebi*. [Preserved and dried specimen], circa 1857. Source: Museums Victoria, Ichthyology Collection, Registration no. A 16515. Photographer: Nishath Nizar. After almost 170 years, this specimen still has one of the species' defining characters (the delicate elongated ray or filament on the dorsal fin) intact.

The episode resulted in a public scandal, and the council decided to suppress the entire section dealing with the 19 varieties of fishes. The preliminary report was finally published in May 1858, including a slip advising that, '*Pages 131-134 inclusive, with four plates, are omitted from this volume of the Transactions, by an order of the Council, of date, 7th April 1858*'.⁵² ⁵³

Conclusion and next steps

Before leaving Melbourne in December 1856, Blandowski received his official commission from the Victorian Government to '*investigate the natural history of the Central Murray, collect as many specimens as possible for the Public Museum in Melbourne, and record animal distributions along the way*'. The extent of the assembled collection provides evidence that the expedition met its primary scientific objectives.

The natural history collection from the expedition was lodged at the Public Museum (which by the time of the expedition was becoming known as the National Museum, situated at the University of Melbourne). A portion of the collection remained at the museum; however, during the late 1850s to mid-1860s Frederick McCoy ordered hundreds of specimens from the expedition to be sent away as part of an exchange program with other museums and institutions (including specimens now considered highly significant, and those that are now classified as extinct or endangered). Work is continuing to track these expedition collections, which are currently dispersed in Australia and overseas.

Many of the expedition's achievements relied on First Peoples collecting animals and bringing them into camp, and First Peoples sharing knowledge about these animals with Blandowski and Krefft. These partnerships provided critical insights into biological diversity, whether a particular species was common or rare, where animals lived, what they ate and how they behaved. Some of the records show that certain animal species were becoming increasingly rare or had even disappeared completely from areas where they were previously known, indicating a concerning level of environmental change even at that time.

Blandowski's interests went far beyond natural history collecting, and his sense of the interconnectedness of different scientific fields meant that he inevitably made extensive observations on First Peoples' culture (and differences he encountered with different groups along the central Murray and lower Darling rivers). His meaningful and enduring partnerships with First Peoples (in particular at Mondellimin and Gunbower) resulted in a mass of cultural information.

Some of Blandowski's and Krefft's knowledge of natural history and First Peoples cultures appeared in brief articles published by both in the decade following the expedition. Other knowledge exists in manuscript form only, such as Blandowski's *Australien in 142 photographischen Abbildungen* produced in 1862 (a limited-run prospectus for a much larger publication on Australia which never eventuated).

⁵² Blandowski, W. (1858).

⁵³ The 'fish scandal' has been covered extensively by several authors, including: Allen, H. (2001). William Blandowski's fish: An ethnohistorical account near the junction of the Murray and Darling Rivers. In: A. Anderson et al. (Eds.), *Histories of old ages: Essays in honour of Rhys Jones* (pp. 211–224). Pandanus Books, Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies; Humphries, P. (2003). Blandowski misses out: Ichthyological etiquette in 19th century Australia, *Endeavour*, 27, pp. 160–165; Humphries, P. (2009). Wilhelm Blandowski's contribution to ichthyology of the Murray-Darling Basin, Australia. *Proceedings of the Royal Society of Victoria*, 121(1), pp. 90–108; and Darragh, T. A. (2009), pp. 11–60.

This album includes a series of artistic compositions commissioned from Germany-based artist Gustav Mützel, with many of these based on original field sketches and photographs by Blandowski or Krefft which are now considered lost. Some of the First Peoples' knowledge recorded by Blandowski only existed in an archival holding, which was originally lodged at the Königliche Bibliothek (the Royal Library) in Berlin in the 1880s following Blandowski's death, but is now classified as lost. The loss of knowledge sources such as 'Blandowski's ethnographic archive' is a tragedy; however, the information about First Peoples that still survives in other sources shows the richness of culture in the region during the period, even at what was already a time of displacement and dispossession.

Much work has taken place over the past 20 years to try to determine the fate of the expedition collections and associated archives, including efforts to document what has survived over the years and explore what may have been lost. Limited space here prevents any detailed discussion; however, I have drafted a finding aid (prepared during work on the Berlin's Australian Archive project in 2022–2025, and a companion piece to this paper). Ongoing research will examine collection and archive provenance (including what remains in Melbourne and Berlin), what other material has been distributed around the world and what appears to have been misplaced or entirely lost.



Figure 11: *Hapalotis conditor*, Building Hapalotis [Watercolour and ink on paper, showing what is now known as the Greater Stick-nest Rat, *Leporillus conditor*], circa 1857. Gerard Krefft. Source: Museum für Naturkunde Berlin, Historische Arbeitsstelle, Blandowski Collection, Collection ID B001-03-295 (Old signature ZM_B_VIII_228). This illustration includes a sketch of First Peoples hunting Stick-nest Rats by encircling their nests with long nets (recorded from the lower Darling, 'about 10 miles from the Darling junction'), and a First Peoples name for the rat (recorded from the Yarree Yarree); this cultural knowledge has been redacted pending consultation with relevant First Peoples groups.

In some cases, due to gaps in the expedition records, the detailed information about where and when particular collections and observations were made (and exactly who was involved at the time) is not clear, and studies require a critical and nuanced approach. It is perfectly clear that the collections and archives do not just relate to the expedition's eight months at Mondellimin from April to December 1857. The records also cover the time spent camped at Gunbower for two months from January to February 1857, as well as other locations along the central Murray and lower Darling during the expedition's year-long duration.

These approaches include trying to determine which First Peoples groups were involved as expedition partners at certain times, and on whose Country the expedition was working. This will necessitate work with relevant First Peoples communities to confirm the identities of each of the groups that the expedition met at Gunbower and Mondellimin (and in between, along the central Murray) and those they met on the lower Darling. The historical names for the different groups that the expedition worked with (e.g. 'Gunbower or Loddon tribe', 'Yarree Yarree or Murray tribe' and 'Darling tribe') obviously require updating, but have been retained here pending further work.⁵⁴ In a similar vein, the identities of the few named First Peoples individuals who were instrumental in guiding the expedition at certain points (e.g. 'Sergeant' at Gunbower, 'Jimmy Bigfoot' and 'Piper' at Mondellimin and 'Old Jacob' at Yelta) should be updated with their proper First Peoples names and any biographical information if traceable.

There is value in continuing to uncover as many of the distributed collections and archives as possible, linking them with what we can already access and considering them as a whole (in much the way that Blandowski himself originally did). This re-examination will improve our understanding of the expedition, and there is important information still to be gleaned from the faunal collections and documentation, along with the records of First Peoples' lives along the Murray and Darling rivers.

Blandowski's expedition in 1856–1857 was the fourth and final time that he 'went bush' in Victoria on a museum expedition, leaving Melbourne to immerse himself in life along the central Murray and lower Darling rivers. On 17 March 1859, he departed Victoria and sailed back to Europe, hoping to write up and publish his comprehensive studies about the Australian land and its peoples. Shortly afterwards, on 28 March 1859, Ferdinand Mueller, as president of the Philosophical Institute of Victoria, gave an annual address to the members of the institute, acknowledging Blandowski's contributions and sending good wishes:

*Having spent almost ten years of toil in advancing our insight into the singularities of nature which here surround us, Blandowski left our shores to enter ... upon a new, and may we trust a fruitful field for his researches.*⁵⁵

⁵⁴ Further community consultation is required with relevant Traditional Owners affiliated with Gunbower and the surrounding neighbourhood where the expedition worked (including Yorta Yorta, Barapa Barapa and Wamba Wamba groups who have interests in the area); and for those in the Mondellimin, Yelta and surrounding areas on both the Victorian and New South Wales sides of the Murray River and lower Darling River where the expedition worked (including Nyeri Nyeri, Ngintait, Latji Latji, Marrawarra, Barkandji, Kureinji, Tati Tati groups and possibly others).

⁵⁵ Mueller, F. (1860). Anniversary address of the president. *Transactions of the Philosophical Institute of Victoria*, 4, pp. 5–6.

Acknowledgements

This paper had its origins in my research for a presentation at the symposium marking the 150th anniversary of William Blandowski's 1856–1857 expedition to the Murray River (organised by the Royal Society of Victoria and Museums Victoria, September 2007). It also relates to curatorial work for another event linked with the 150th anniversary – the *Blandowski's Expedition to the Lower Murray, 1856-57* exhibition. The exhibition was co-curated by myself and John Kean, in collaboration with Mark Grist (Wergaia, Wamba Wemba and Nyeri Nyeri) and Rebecca Carland, and staged at the Mildura Arts Centre (September to November 2007) and Bunjilaka Aboriginal Cultural Centre, Melbourne Museum (December 2007 to March 2008).

I thank staff at Museums Victoria, Public Record Office Victoria, State Library Victoria, Mitchell Library at the State Library of New South Wales and the Australian Museum, Sydney for access to Blandowski collections and associated records. I am grateful to Harry Allen (University of Auckland) and Tom Darragh (Museums Victoria) for sharing their Blandowski experiences and ongoing advice.

My Blandowski research has been spurred along by two key events. First, a history study for the Murray Explored project based at Cohuna in October 2016, marking the 160th Anniversary of Blandowski's visit to the Gunbower region during his 1856–1857 expedition. This work was supported by the Gannawarra Shire Council, Museums Victoria, Parks Victoria, North Central Catchment Management Authority and Barapa Barapa Water for Country Team. I am especially grateful to the late Aunty Esther Kirby OAM (Barapa Barapa, Wamba Wemba and Yorta Yorta) for her wisdom, encouragement and patience.

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