

The Firebird - summary

'The Firebird' is an Aboriginal 'Dreamtime' myth from Northern Australia. The main events of the story are:

Wirritt-wirritt is a brightly coloured bird, living high in the trees.

Koimul is a stern and secretive creature living on the ground. Koimul has the secret of fire and guards it very closely.

Nobody else has fire. So the people have to eat their food raw; they have no fire to warm themselves or to see by at night.

The secret of making fire is two sticks that Koimul keeps very close to him.

Many times people had tried to get the sticks - but they had always failed.

One day Wirritt-wirritt saw the people eating their food raw and asked why they didn't get the fire from Koimul.

'We've tried and we can't!' they said. 'Why don't you try, Wirritt-wirritt?'

Wirritt-wirritt stole up on Koimul and then with a brilliant swoop came down and took the two sticks from Koimul.

Wirritt-wirritt gave the two sticks to the people. One stick was sharpened at one end and the other had a small, round notch in it. When the sharpened stick was rotated very quickly in the notch enough heat was created to start a fire.

Soon the people had mastered fire and could cook their food. They had warmth and light.

Koimul now had no fire and he decided to live in the river. He dived into the water and became a crocodile.

And thereafter whenever the people saw Wirritt-wirritt they said: 'There is the Fire-bird! Look there are two firesticks in his tail!'