

Lesson 5: Resource Sheet 1

Indigenous Australian's seasonal knowledge

Australia's Aboriginal peoples had no way of knowing that the earth revolved around the sun. As a result, their knowledge of the seasons was determined by the changes taking place in the environment, their surroundings.

The Yolngu people of North-East Arnhem Land in Australia's north recognise six seasons. These are outlined in Table 1:

Table 1: The seasons of the Yolngu of Arnhem Land

Season	Timing	Weather experienced	Seasonal activities
Mirdawarr	Late March, April	End of the wet season. Scattered showers. Still hot and humid.	People live in big camps. Floodwaters restrict movement.
Dhaarratharramirri	Late April–August	Dry season. Milder temperatures.	People are increasingly nomadic as the wet-season camps break up. The burning of grasslands is widespread. Kangaroos, bandicoots and goannas are hunted. Fishing is still important with nets being used in shallow waters.
Rarranhdharr	September, October	Hot dry season. Lightening common and first thunder heard. Winds mainly from the northeast.	Nomadic activities start to decline after the burning of the grasslands. Fishing becomes concentrated into smaller and smaller areas as the wetlands dry up. The spearing of fish continues in rivers and coastal waters. An important ceremonial time (August to November).
Worlmamirri	Late October–December	Very hot and humid – immediately before the rainy season. Violent thunderstorms become increasingly common.	Nomadic movements limited by the need to camp near permanent water sources.
Baarramirri	Late December, January	Winds from the northwest; the beginning of the wet.	People based in wet season camps on higher ground. Travel restricted by flooding and the growth of rank grass.
Gurnmul or Waltjarnmirri	January–March	Wet season proper.	People largely restricted to camps. Inland travel difficult because of flooding.

Non-Indigenous Australians people in the far north of the country identify with two distinct seasons – the **Wet** and the **Dry**. To these we might add the *build-up* period between dry and wet can be seen as a third distinct season.

Figure 1: The Yolngu of Arnhem Land



Figure 2: The ancient rock art of the Yolngu



Figure 3: The landscape of North-East Arnhem Land



Figure 4: The flood plain of North-East Arnhem Land



Sources: 1 Alamy; 2-4 Photostock