

Djiti Djiti and Wardong

A Game of Ecological Balance

Theme: Predator and prey

Ages: 7+

Space: Nature space

Materials: Cups, popcorn/tokens

Time: 30–60 minutes

Group size: 12–120 players

Set Up

Djiti Djiti (willie wagtail) and **Wardong** (raven) is a game that explores food webs and balance. Children play in pairs of **Djiti Djiti**, finding food and stashing it in their nests. As the game progresses, **Wardong** and other creatures are introduced. These animals find food in different ways, changing the behaviour of the group.

This game works best when it is introduced as a story that children step inside:

“Today we are going to be **Djiti Djiti**, small partner birds. You will work with one other bird. You will build together, gather together, protect together and rescue each other when needed.”

Steps

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Choose Boundaries

Select landmarks to mark each boundary.



Establish a Recall Call

Choose one call that means everyone must stop and return (eg: a dingo howl).



Pair the Djiti Djiti

Children work in groups of two to mimic Djiti Djiti.

Stage One: Building the Nest

1. Build Nests

Each pair finds a spot to build a nest about the size of two cupped hands.

Facilitator Language: “Your first need is shelter. With your partner, build a nest the size of two cupped hands. Use natural materials from the ground. Do not break plants. Choose your location carefully.”

2. Keep in Touch

Djiti Djiti should call out to each other to make sure they are safe.

Facilitator Language: “It can be dangerous for **Djiti Djiti** on their own. To keep safe, they call out to each other. As you fly around, chirp “djiti-djiti” and make sure you hear your partner say it back!”

3. Debrief

Facilitator calls back children after 5-10 minutes (longer if engaged).

Discussion Questions:

Why did you choose that nest site?

What materials worked well?

How do real birds choose where to nest?

Stage Two: Collecting Food

1. Create Larders

Facilitator secretly makes 3-6 piles of popcorn or tokens.

Suggestions: Create the larders across the space, not too close to any particular nests. If food items are not appropriate for your setting, use non-food tokens such as gum nuts or wooden beads.

2. Collect Food

Djiti Djiti collect pieces of food to deposit in nests one at a time.

Facilitator Language: "You have shelter, now you need food. **Djiti Djiti** have small beaks, you can only carry one item at a time. Take an item, return it to your nest, then go again. You may not carry handfuls."

3. Debrief

Facilitator calls back children after 2-4 minutes.

Discussion Questions:

Who collected a lot of food?

Did nest location matter?

Can **Djiti Djiti** eat all day without any worries?

Stage Three: Wardong Arrives

Wardong Rules

Wardong may steal one food token at a time from a nest. They place these in a cup they hold as they fly around. As they are scavengers, **Wardong** do not steal from larders.

If both **Djiti Djiti** partners are at the nest they can scare Wardong away by loudly calling "Djiti Djiti Djiti!"

If only one **Djiti Djiti** is at the nest, **Wardong** can steal.

Wardong may return to the same nest later.

One **Wardong** per fifteen players is recommended.



1. Add Wardong to play

Choose players to become Wardong, give them cups.

Facilitator Language: "There are other birds in this ecosystem. **Wardong** are clever scavengers. They watch, wait and look for opportunities. Wardong may steal food from nests, one seed at a time."

2. Debrief

Facilitator calls back children after 3-5 minutes.

Discussion Questions:

Did you spend more time gathering or guarding?

What was the best strategy?

Is Wardong "bad", or playing its role in the system?

Stage Four: Additional Predators

Eagle Rules

Eagles are birds of prey. They 'tag' **Djiti Djiti**. They do not steal food.

If a **Djiti Djiti** is tagged, they crouch down where they were tagged. Only their partner can rescue them.

To rescue a partner, the free **Djiti Djiti** tags them gently and they return to the game.

If both partners are tagged, they are out until the next round.

Four **Djiti Djiti** can scare away an eagle.



Feral Cat Rules

Feral cats can tag **Djiti Djiti** and, optionally, **Wardong**.

Cats do not collect food.

Nothing scares away a cat.

Tagged players get out until the next round, or, optionally, become a 'Carrion Bird'.

Carrion birds move through the game dramatically, circling, calling and creating playful distraction.

1. Introduce predators

Slowly develop the game with new predators and animals.

Monitor engagement of group, adding in predators as they become more confident. You can also ask the children for ideas, adding in new animals and rules that they develop.

2. Debrief

Facilitator calls back children after 3-5 minutes.

Use debriefs in-between each round to discuss how each additional animal impacted the food web. Link this to real-life situations and environments.

Optional Ecological Layers

Habitat Loss

Remove or close part of the playing area due to clearing.

Drought or Over Population

Create food scarcity by removing some larders, or adding extra **Djiti Djiti**.

Human Impact

Introduce roads, buildings, hunters, pets or conservation workers.

Conservation Action

Allow children to propose ways to restore balance. For example, adding safe nesting zones, removing feral predators, or creating wildlife corridors.

Adjustments

For Younger Children

Stop after Stage Three or Stage Four. Keep the story simple: nest, food, Wardong, Eagle.

For Older Children

Add ecological disturbance, mapping, food web diagrams, data collection and reflection.

For Larger Groups

Use teachers as the first predators, keep rounds short, clearly announce each stage, place enough larders and use a loud call to bring everyone in quickly between rounds.

For Children Who Need a Different Entry Point

Some children who are less engaged as **Djiti Djiti** may become deeply involved when given a powerful role in the system. Offer roles such as: larder helper, boundary keeper, nest observer, storyteller, food web mapper or one of the predators.

For Limited Mobility

Adapt the game with smaller territories, closely placed larders, seated guarding roles, hand signals instead of running and strategic leadership roles.

Follow-up Learning

Science: Create a food web showing animals and food sources from the game.

English: Write a short story from the perspective of one of the animals.

Mathematics: Collect and compare data on food collection/loss, predator impact etc.

HASS: Discuss human impact, conservation projects and responsibility for land.