

Flora and fauna

[Parts of the World](#), [Australia](#)



| Flora and Fauna | | 10/3/2013 | | Outline Australia's unique flora and fauna: Australia has a large variety of unique flora and fauna spread all over the continent, from coast to coast, including in the ocean. More than 80 per cent of the country's flowering plants, mammals, reptiles and frogs are unique to Australia, along with most of its freshwater fish and almost half of its birds. Australia is home to more than 140 species of unique marsupials, including kangaroos, wallabies, koalas, wombats and the Tasmanian devil, which is now found only in Tasmania. There are 55 different species of kangaroos and wallabies, native to Australia.

Australia's marine environment is home to 4000 fish species, 1700 coral species, 50 types of marine mammals and a wide range of seabirds. Most marine species found in southern Australian waters occur nowhere else. Australia has over 1000 species of Wattle and around 2800 species in the Myrtaceae family, (gum trees and eucalypts). Describe the threats to Australia's flora and fauna: Extinction Since European settlement of Australia began, a little over 200 years ago, 18 species of Australian mammals and about 100 species of native plants have become extinct.

Currently about 40 species of mammals and many hundreds of species of plants are threatened with extinction. These figures are among the worst in the world. Extinction is a natural ongoing process. However at the moment the majority of extinctions are caused by humans. We can clearly tell that it is the humans that are doing the damage, because of the unusually fast rate of extinction. The current rate of extinction in Australia is 100 times the background rate (naturally occurring rate of extinction). There are many things that cause extinction, some of these are: * Habitat loss Natural causes

(flood, fire, drought) * Introduced species
Picture Caption: This image shows the crisis that Australian flora and fauna are presently in. In this image the more red the region is, the more species in region are thought to be endangered and threatened. As we can see the species under the most threat reside around the capital cities and the coastal regions. This is because habitat has been cleared around the capital cities and higher numbers of threatened species. Also over 50% of Australia is uninhabitable so many plants and animals live in coastal areas because they cannot survive in central Australia.

That is also why we might see higher threatened species rates on the coasts of Australia. Habitats under threat: Habitat loss is currently the main cause of species extinction in Australia. The main causes of habitat loss in Australia are; agriculture, clearing for urban living, logging and mining. When an ecosystem has been dramatically changed by human activities, it may no longer be able to provide the food, water and shelter all animals need to survive. Every day there are fewer places left, wildlife can call home. Most native species cannot exist outside a natural ecosystem.

Australia is one of the top ten land clearing nations in the world. While clearing rates are starting to decline, we are still clearing more vegetation than we are planting or are able to regrow naturally. This continuous trend threatens Australia's environment and flora and fauna species. In addition clearing land increases the chances of erosion and sedimentation of waterways and reduces water quality, also dramatically affecting our flora and fauna. Introduced species: One of the greatest threats to Australia's

Flora and Fauna is introduced species. Australia has a large number of introduced mammals and birds.

Introduced frog species, have caused extinction of many native species, due to a massive change in the food pyramid. A prime example of an animal that is greatly damaging Australia's native species is the Cane toad, which was introduced originally to destroy the harmful cane beetle. It is damaging Australia's native species, because larger animals see cane toads as prey and therefore hunt them. When cane toads are ingested, a poisonous toxin is put into the predator causing rapid heartbeat, excessive salivation, swelling and eventually death. The animals that commonly suffer are native reptiles, snakes and crocodiles.

Risk of natural hazards: It isn't only humans that are causing the irreversible damage to Australia's native species. A very small threat to our animals is natural causes. These causes include fire, erosion, floods, drought, landslide and cyclones. Many of these things are a very common occurrence in Australia. One of the main natural hazards that Australia faces often is fire. Tens of thousands of animals died in the Victorian bushfire. Not including the many thousands that had to be euthanized afterwards, due to severe burns and dehydration. Most are small, non-flying animals that could not escape the flames.

Insect populations took the worst hit. Natural factors usually occur at a slower rate and therefore cause a low extinction rate. Human activities occur at a faster rate and cause higher extinction rates. Human activities are mostly responsible for the present extinction rates. Current policy position: Different governments around Australia have various pieces of legislation

that protect Australia's flora and fauna. The state governments are responsible for the bulk protection and sustainability of flora and fauna, while the federal government has little power over matters relating to flora and fauna.

Many rules/laws on these legislations are very similar and have a few small differences to fit each state/ territory's needs. However all legislations aim to protect all native species from harm, minimise the loss of habitat and to prevent extinction. These types of flora and fauna legislations are in place in all states/ territories around Australia. An example of this type of legislation is the Victorian Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act from 1988, which was the first Australian legislation to deal with issues relating to flora and fauna. The Flora and Fauna Guarantee act Victoria (1988) is designed to: * Protect species Protect genetic material and habitats, * Prevent extinction and * Allow maximum genetic diversity within the state of Victoria. Future action plan: There are many individuals, groups and governments that are having big impacts on the state of Australia's flora and fauna. Some of which are positive and some are negative. The majority are positive; however there are more steps that individuals, groups and governments could take to ensure a brighter future for Australian native species. Individuals Wildlife Tourists Wildlife tourism is watching wild animals in their natural habitat.

Australia has a large amount of wildlife tourism due to our unique flora and fauna species. These include; kangaroos, koalas, echidnas, dingos, platypuses, wallabies and wombats. Animal tourism in Australia is very beneficial not only for the tourists but also for the animals. When tourists come to Australia, they are educated about the animals, their habitat and

how important it is to protect these animals. The tourist's views and opinions are then changed and they walk away caring more for the animals and plants, as well as the importance of maintaining biodiversity.

Secondly a proportion of the revenue raised from tourism goes towards more educational projects as well as conservation projects, which are very beneficial to all animals. Wildlife Tourism has many positives and the Australian wildlife tourism is moving in the right direction, but there are more highly important steps that need to be taken by the Australian tourism industry, to protect flora and fauna. When building accommodation for tourists, animal's homes and habitats are often knocked down, causing disturbance to animals and leading to increased vulnerability.

As explained earlier habitat loss is one of the major causes of extinction and should be minimised as much as possible. Instead accommodation should be constructed away from animal's habitats, where it does not affect them too much. Secondly stricter rules should be in place to prevent the feeding of animals by tourists. Feeding of wildlife by tourists can have severe consequences for social behavior patterns. Artificial feeding can also result in a complete loss of normal feeding behaviors. When feeding of animals stops some animals are unable to locate their natural food sources. Hunters

Hunting is the practice of pursuing any living thing, usually wildlife or feral animals, by humans for food, recreation, or trade. Although hunting is not very common in Australia, it is still having a big impact on Australia's flora and fauna. Hunting is seen by some as good for the environment as well as flora and fauna, because it keeps feral pests in check and gives native animals a chance. The majority of animals hunted, are feral. These include

non-native animals such as rabbits, hares, feral goats, pigs, buffalo, feral donkeys, horses and camels, which have been proven to endanger our native animals.

Also the taxes from hunting activities go to the state or federal governments for such purposes such as enhancing wildlife habitat and managing and maintaining national parks. These things are beneficial, however it is quite clear, in the case of hunting the negatives outweigh the positives. The main reason is hunters are only allowed to pursue specific species. Some environmentalists argue that hunting creates an imbalance in the natural elements of the environment. For instance, if an animal that is typically a predator is hunted to lower numbers, their prey will increase in number.

Nature has a delicate balance and hunting can have an impact on that natural balance. Opponents to hunting claim that animals have their own ways of population control and humans are not needed to aid that process. Groups WIREs WIREs are the largest wildlife rehabilitation charity in Australia. It is not for profit organisation that provides rescue and rehabilitation for all native Australian fauna. All animal rescuers and carers are volunteers. WIREs mostly respond to individual public reports of sick, injured or orphaned native wildlife. WIREs volunteers will rescue a sick animal, foster it and release it back into the wild.

WIREs also educate kids about the importance of native animals and how to act and look after them to ensure they remain happy, healthy and in abundance. After rehabilitation of animals, WIREs releases animals back into the environment. However as we know, animals have a lower chance of survival after being released as they are not adapted to certain ways of

living, predators and finding food. They may also be hunted. This is why WIRES needs to develop reserves where the animals can be released and monitored. With no roads and anti-poaching patrols, to ensure the best chance of survival.

Green Groups (Australian bush heritage fund) There are many different green groups across Australia, dedicated to protecting Australia's diverse environment, especially its unique Flora and Fauna. One of these is the Bush Heritage Fund, which is a national, independent, non-profit organisation that's aim is to preserve Australia's biodiversity by protecting the bush. It is Australia's most widely supported environmental national organisation. The Australian Bush Heritage Fund has a very simple yet effective scheme of protecting the biodiversity of flora and fauna.

They do this through the creation of reserves on private land. The land the fund purchases are private and protected, meaning that no one can hunt/degrade habitat on the land. This means animals can live naturally, without harm. For example, the fund now owns Naree station. This reserve in Naree protects many native and important plants and animals. These include: Animals on protected on the Naree property: * Brolga (vulnerable) * Freckled duck (vulnerable) * Little red flying fox * Pied honeyeater (vulnerable) * Spotted harrier (vulnerable) Brown treecreeper (vulnerable) * Kultarr (endangered) The reserve also protects iconic plants such as: * Coolabah tree * Bimblebox * Leopardwood * Beefwood * Supplejack * Belah The things the fund is doing are great and very beneficial for the flora and fauna of Australia. However, the fund could be doing many other things to protect our native flora and fauna. Firstly they should be conducting more research on

the flora and fauna of Australia, to ensure they are purchasing the most important pieces of land, where the most vulnerable species are located.

Secondly the fund should introduce education schemes for land owners, teaching them how to best manage their land to protect flora and fauna, as they have more land than the fund and therefore bigger impact on the flora and fauna. Zoos Zoos are defined as a facility in which animals are confined within enclosures, displayed to the public, and in which they are bred. However nowadays zoos are much more than that. Many zoos have now set up conservation societies, such as the Taronga conservation society. There are a number of things zoo's conservation societies do to help protect animals.

This includes educating people about animals to help them make better decisions, breed animal populations that are endangered/ critically endangered, to increase their numbers and give the species a better chance of survival and help sick/ unwell animals to recover with veterinary care. These things are all important, however there is so much more zoos could be doing to ensure the preservation of animals. Firstly when they release animals into the wild, they may become sick or hunted again. Zoos should therefore establish protected reserves where no hunting/ poaching is allowed and all animals especially re-released ones are safe.

Secondly zoos should establish anti poaching patrols to make sure a minimal amount of animals are hunted in the first place. Lastly zoos should lobby for better legislation concerning poaching and habitat destruction, as they have a much bigger voice and authority than many other people/groups. Government National parks/ state parks National/State Parks are large areas

of public land set aside for native plants, animals and the places in which they live. They also protect places important to Aboriginal people.

Because the area in National parks is protected, no habitat is allowed to be cleared as the land is owned by the government. This ensures there is not a loss of habitat leading to vulnerability of certain species of animals and plants. National parks also educate visitors, both adults and children alike, about the importance of Australia's native flora and fauna and what steps need to be taken to ensure they can survive. The education scheme also teaches about how individuals, even children can have an impact on the native species of Australia. These things are all fantastic and there was nothing to fault about national parks, until recently. Unfortunately within a few months, we will start seeing hunters being allowed to hunt in national parks. This should be stopped as it is a danger to tourists and native animals that live in the national parks. Also this type of activity will disrupt the natural food chain that has developed in national parks. This will also mean tourists will be more hesitant to visit national parks due to hunting, leading to less people being educated about Australia's flora and fauna and smaller amounts of money being raised, to fund vital environmental schemes.