



Australia's unique animals are one of the many reasons people visit our country. Australia has more than 378 mammal species, 828 bird species, 4000 fish species, 300 species of lizards, 140 snake species, two crocodile species and around 50 types of marine mammal.

MAMMALS

Australia doesn't have large predatory animals, the dingo, or wild dog, is our largest carnivorous mammal. Other unique carnivorous animals include the Numbat, Quoll and Tasmanian Devil, but none of these are larger than the size of an average house cat.

Dingoes are found all across Australia, except for Tasmania. Best places to see them are Queensland's Fraser Island, Western Australia's Kimberley and across the deserts of the Northern Territory and South Australia.

Numbats are only found in Western Australia; and apart from wildlife parks, you can only see Tasmanian Devils in the wild in Tasmania.

Endangered Quolls are also difficult to spot in the wild, but inhabit the wet forests of south eastern Australia and Tasmania, and a small area of northern Queensland. The bilby, a member of the bandicoot family, may be seen in Francois Peron National Park in Western Australia.

MARSUPIALS

Australia has more than 140 species of marsupials, including kangaroos, wallabies, koalas, and wombats.

We have 55 different native species of kangaroos and wallabies. Kangaroos and wallabies vary greatly in size and weight, ranging from half a kilogram (1 pound) to 90 kilograms (14 Stone, 2 pounds). The main difference between them is size — wallabies tend to be smaller. Estimates of Australia's kangaroo population vary between 30 and 60 million. You should easily be able to see kangaroos in the wild in most rural parts of Australia. In Victoria see them in Anglesea on the Great Ocean Road and in the Grampians. Spot them in South Australia's Kangaroo Island and Flinders Ranges. Get up close, in Namadgi and Kosciuszko National Parks in the Australian Alps, in Peppy Beach in New South Wales and Tasmania's Maria Island. In outback regions, you will often see them as they bound across the road. Wallabies are widespread across Australia, particularly in more remote, rocky and rugged areas. Spot them in South Australia's Flinders Ranges, Tasmania's Freycinet National Park and in Namadgi and Kosciuszko National Parks in the Australian Alps.

The koala is everyone's favourite, but be aware — it's not a bear. You can spot koalas all along Australia's temperate eastern coast. Some of their top hangouts include Tidbinbilla Nature Reserve, near Canberra; Port Stephens in New South Wales and the Lone Pine Koala Sanctuary

in Queensland. Observe them in the wild on Victoria's Phillip Island and Yanchep National Park in Western Australia.

The wombat is another creature you'll find here — stout, burrowing animals that can weigh up to 36 kilograms (5 stones, 9 pounds). Again they are difficult to see in the wild, but some of the best places are the Blue Mountains National Park and Kosciuszko National Park in New South Wales, Wilsons Promontory in Victoria, Cradle Mountain-Lake St Clair in Tasmania, and in national parks in South Australia.

MONOTREMES (EGG LAYING MAMMALS)

Another animal group only found in Australia is the monotremes, or egg-laying mammals. The most distinctive is the platypus, a river-dwelling animal with a bill like a duck, a furry waterproof body and webbed feet. Platypus live in burrows which they dig into the banks of rivers. They are very shy and difficult to spot, but your best chances are in the eastern coastal areas in small streams and quiet rivers. Good places to see them are in the Tidbinbilla Nature Reserve near Canberra, on Lake Elizabeth in Victoria's Great Otway National Park, Tasmania's Cradle Mountain-Lake St Clair National Park and in northern New South Wales and Queensland.

The echidna, or spiny ant-eater, is another monotreme, which has a long sticky tongue and a prickly coat like a hedgehog or porcupine — so don't try and pick one up! Kangaroo Island is one of the best places to spot them in the wild.



BIRDS

Of the 828 bird species listed in Australia, about half are found nowhere else. They range from tiny honeyeaters to the large, flightless emu, which stands nearly two metres (6.5 feet) tall. The best chance of seeing emus in the wild is in grasslands, sclerophyll forests and savannah woodlands.

A vast array of waterbirds, seabirds and birds dwell in our open woodlands and forests. Examples include cassowaries, black swans, little penguins, kookaburras, lyrebirds and currawongs. You can easily see penguins on Kangaroo Island in South Australia and Philip Island in Victoria.

The Albert's Lyrebird can be seen in Mt Warning National Park and in the Gondwana rainforest around the Gold Coast hinterland. See the more common superb lyrebird in Dandenong Ranges and Kinglake National Parks around Melbourne and the Royal National Park and Illawarra region south of Sydney. You'll also find them in Tidbinbilla Nature Reserve, near Canberra, Tower Hill in Victoria and a number of national parks along Australia's east coast.

Kookaburras, best known for their hysterical, human-sounding laughter at dusk and dawn, are common, and you'll most likely spot (or hear) them in the countryside and often in city suburbs.

The Broome Bird Observatory and Kakadu National Park are both excellent places to view many species of wetland and migratory birds.

There are 55 species of parrots in Australia, as numerous as they are colourful, including a spectacular variety of cockatoos, rosellas, lorikeets, cockatiels, parakeets and budgerigars. They are commonly seen in rural and urban areas.

REPTILES

Australia has more species of venomous snakes than any other continent, 21 of the world's 25 deadliest in fact. But not all are poisonous; we also have some stunning pythons and tree snakes.

We are also famous for our crocodiles, both freshwater and saltwater varieties. Both the Kimberley and Kakadu National Park are excellent places to see crocodiles in their natural habitat.

There are five species of endangered sea turtles which nest and lay eggs on certain beaches in season; and eight species of freshwater turtle. Ningaloo Reef in Western Australia and Eco Beach in Broome are ideal places to see turtles.

We also have an amazing array of lizards, 'dragons' and goannas (monitor lizards), including the spectacular Frilled Lizard and Bearded Dragon. The Kimberley has some 178 species of reptiles with the more notable ones being the Frilled Neck Lizard and the ubiquitous 'ta ta' Lizard. Thorny devils can be found in desert habitats including Shark Bay, Carnarvon and Exmouth in Western Australia.

A variety of reptiles including bearded dragons, perenties and blue tongue lizards can be seen in Central Australia and Flinders Ranges in South Australia.

MARINE ANIMALS

Our marine environments support around 4000 of the world's 22000 types of fish, as well as 30 of the world's 58 seagrass species. We also have the world's largest coral reef system, the World Heritage-listed Great Barrier Reef, where there are so many species of colourful fish, including the beautiful clown fish, that you'll need more than one visit to try and count them all. We also have around 1700 different species of coral.

Larger marine species include the migratory gentle whale shark, humpback, southern right and orca whales, the dugong, numerous dolphin species and a number of shark species. Whales can be seen along the east and west coastlines from May to November. Ningaloo Reef in Western Australia is one of the most reliable places in the world to see whale sharks and a number of operators run tours to swim with these gentle giants. Kangaroo Island is one of the best places to see Australian fur seals in the wild.

AUSTRALIAN ZOOS

Australia's unique animals are a major drawcard for international visitors; and many zoos in Australia are among the world's best. Australia has both public and private zoos. Some Australian zoos showcase exotic species such as big cats and elephants; while others focus on Australian native animals and birds. Zoos and wildlife sanctuaries in Australia undertake vital environmental education and research for the conservation of endangered animals. Many zoos in Australia hold special events, 'behind the scenes' tours and overnight stays which include close encounters with the animals. Here is where to see koalas, kangaroos, wombats and Australia's other amazing animals.