

# Contributing to conservation



This fact sheet will provide you with the information and tools needed to understand conservation and your role in it.

## Why contributing to conservation is important

**Australian wildlife is one of the main reasons visitors choose Australia as their tourism destination.**

Australia is one of the most abundant countries in the world when it comes to biodiversity, with one internationally recognised and 15 nationwide biodiversity hotspots. It is one of only 17 'mega-diverse' nations, hosting between 600,000-700,000 species, many of which are endemic and can only be found in Australia. Such high levels of diversity and endemism call for increased conservation efforts.



Phillip Island Nature Parks, VIC (Advanced Ecotourism & ROC)

### DID YOU KNOW?

In 2017, 69% (5.4 million) of international visitors to Australia engaged in some form of nature-based activity. [Source: Australia's Strategy for Nature - Commonwealth Government]

*"Ecotourism is ecologically sustainable tourism with a primary focus on experiencing natural areas that fosters environmental and cultural understanding, appreciation and conservation."  
(Ecotourism Australia)*

Genetic change and evolutionary processes cause constant changes to biodiversity. Reductions in biodiversity can be attributed to threats which lead to population decline and extinction. Conserving biodiversity is an essential part of safeguarding the biological life support systems on Earth. All living creatures, including humans, depend on these life-supporting systems. For example, humans require oxygen to breathe, clean water to drink, fertile soil for food production and physical materials for shelter and fuel.

The following examples showcase conservation efforts that are being made, and can be made, for different scales of influence:

- **A regional biodiversity conservation strategy** (e.g. Australia's Biodiversity Conservation Strategy 2010-2030).
- **Research & policies to support biodiversity** (e.g. the work from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD]).
- **Business measures to support and promote conservation.** Ecotourism, for example, plays an important role by educating consumers and changing attitudes towards conservation. Ecotourism can influence consumers, host communities, the broader tourism industry and government policies.
- **Projects for the general public and individuals to get involved in and contribute to conservation** (Conservation Volunteers Australia).



# How are Australian native species doing?

Australia's natural support systems are at a breaking point. Invasive species, increased land-clearing, warming oceans and a drought exacerbated by climate change are taking their toll on our biodiversity. Conservation is a key element in the efforts to save our native species.

## VULNERABLE

- Australia's biodiversity is currently in decline; more than 1,700 species and ecological communities are known to be threatened and at risk of extinction. [Source: Australian Government]
- In 2018, 41 new species of Australian plants and animals were officially added to the list of species at risk of extinction [Source: Australian Government]
- Koalas have been placed on the national list of vulnerable species since 2012. They could be declared as an endangered species after the 2020 bushfires and may be facing extinction in NSW [Source: World Economic Forum]



Currumbin Wildlife Sanctuary, QLD (Advanced Ecotourism & ROC)

## DID YOU KNOW?

Koalas are in serious decline, mainly because of habitat destruction, domestic dog attacks, bushfires and road accidents. [Source: Save The Koala]

## ENDANGERED

- More than 1,200 of Australia's threatened and endangered species are directly affected by more than 200 invasive plants, more than 55 animals and at least three pathogens. [Source: CSIRO Scope]
- It is estimated that more than 1,800 plant and animal species are at risk of extinction by climate change, invasive species, land use practices, etc.
- Coral bleaching and the 2017 severe cyclone impacted 80% of the Reef over the last two years. [Source: Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority]
- Worldwide, invasive species are the fifth most significant cause of biodiversity decline. [Source: IPBES report]. In Australia, invasive species are the number one threat. [Source: CSIRO Scope]



Quicksilver Cruises, QLD (Advanced Ecotourism & Climate Action Innovator)

## DID YOU KNOW?

The Great Barrier Reef is home to more than 1,500 species of fish, 411 types of hard coral, and one-third of the world's soft corals. [Source: World Wildlife Fund]

## EXTINCT

- Only three countries in the world have lost more animal species than Australia [Source: IUCN]
- More than 50 animal and 37 plant species have been lost in the last 200 years [Source: Australian Government]
- 11% of Australian endemic land mammal species are extinct [Source: Woinarski et al.]
- Since European settlement and introduced predators, hundreds of species have become extinct in Australia. Today, nearly **1 in 3 of our unique mammals is at risk of extinction!** [Source: The Nature Conservancy Australia]



Imagine Cruises, Port Stephens (Advanced Ecotourism, Ecotourism)

## DID YOU KNOW?

Decimated by commercial whaling, the humpback whales of Eastern Australia came very close to extinction. Introduction of whaling bans helped the population to recover, which contributed to a rapid growth of Australia's whale watching industry. [Source: Australian Government]

# What tourism operators can do

Your business can be a key player in conservation efforts. Tourism can cause damage if not managed properly, but can also have positive impacts when the right measures are in place.

Your involvement in conservation is very important to protect the environment and your business activities.



## TOURISM OPERATORS CAN MINIMISE VISITOR IMPACTS BY:

- Building and maintaining facilities like boardwalks or walking trails
- Limiting group sizes and setting seasonal visitation limits to avoid overcrowding
- Connecting with other operators to generate environmentally friendly policies (such as not feeding wildlife and sharing pathways)
- Collecting rubbish during their tours
- Informing guests about minimal impact behaviours and the conservation and biodiversity challenges in the area

## TOURISM OPERATORS CAN PARTICIPATE IN MONITORING AND RESEARCH EFFORTS BY:

- Recording data (e.g. animals sighted, species numbers) and providing them to relevant researchers
- Having staff trained in local species identification, especially for species sensitive to environmental changes
- Engaging staff and guests in citizen science projects (e.g. Platypus Watch, Grey Nurse Shark Watch, Project Manta, Coral Watch)

## TOURISM OPERATORS CAN SUPPORT CONSERVATION PROGRAMS BY:

- Promoting, supporting and being involved with local conservation organisations (e.g. tree planting, clean up groups, donations)
- Contributing to public education through existing conservation platforms (e.g. giving talks, having stalls at exhibitions etc.)

## TOURISM OPERATORS CAN HELP THE REHABILITATION AND WELLBEING OF ENDEMIC AND NATIVE WILDLIFE BY:

- Reducing the risks of feral animals and invasive species (see our fact sheet for ideas)
- Using indigenous plant species for re-vegetation
- Offering experiences rehabilitating the environment (e.g. tree planting, clean-up campaigns)
- Being involved in conservation committees
- Educating visitors about harmful chemicals (e.g. chemical sunscreen can harm marine life such as corals)
- Respecting the existing trails and not venturing off-path to avoid damaging wildlife habitats
- Identifying and avoiding sensitive sites (e.g. breeding sites)
- Having staff trained in monitoring wildlife behaviour so they can make the best decisions when wildlife is disturbed
- Reminding guests about the rules to protect wildlife (e.g. driving slowly especially at dusk and dawn, not feeding nor touching wildlife)
- Assisting wildlife by providing nest boxes and wildlife corridors (consult your nearest protected area management agency)



# Communicating your conservation efforts

Conservation efforts can be the difference that saves an entire species. Communicating your conservation efforts and why they are necessary is just as important. As an ecotourism business, you should inform your guests, your staff and your community about your positive actions to preserve biodiversity and culture.

If you're unsure about how to communicate your conservation efforts, we have listed a few examples below.

## On your website by:

- Creating a page to outline your efforts in conservation (e.g. list of local organisations that you are helping with donations, volunteer work, visits with tourists, etc.)
- Listing nature and cultural heritage places in your destination, and encouraging your visitors to visit them and learn more about the risks local species are facing

## In your interpretation by:

- Encouraging tourists to be active and join your conservation initiatives
- Explaining how climate change is impacting your destination by showing pictures of the impact now and in the past and sharing examples of what your business is doing to improve the situation
- Training your guides and customer-facing staff about biodiversity and conservation, and about your efforts and the results. Bonus: employees love knowing they are making a positive impact at work!

## In a newsletter, by:

- Creating your own newsletter to feature your business' achievements, including your efforts in conservation
- Featuring your efforts in other organisation's newsletters. You can send your conservation efforts to us! Ecotourism Australia has a monthly newsletter and we are more than happy to share your stories. Email us at [eco@ecotourism.org.au](mailto:eco@ecotourism.org.au)

## In your take home messages by:

- Including a conservation message in the thank you email you send to your visitors after their stay. For example, you could feature local organisations that they could donate to, or tips to contribute to conservation at home
- Using interpretation during their visit (e.g. guide speech, brochure, signage, website) to make your visitors think about what they can do at home

## Additional Resources

- EPBC Act List of Threatened Fauna. Australian Government
- Numbers of Living Species in Australia and the World - Australian Government
- Protected Area Management information - Ecotourism Australia
- Australian Wildlife Conservancy
- The Australian Citizen Science Project Finder
- How to minimise the introduction and spread of invasive species



Orpheus Island Lodge, QLD  
(Advanced Ecotourism & Climate Action Business)