

Rainbow lorikeets, possums and pythons: the wildlife of the Gold Coast

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With over half a million inhabitants, over 10 million visitors to the Gold Coast annually and decades of rapid infrastructure development to maintain pace with demand, wildlife is typically the forgotten victim of the Gold Coast's development. The wildlife theme parks allow tourists, school groups, researchers and the rest of the community to learn about and get close to many iconic Australian species, to observe the animals at close quarters. This is the subject of Chapter 10. However, urban wildlife of the Gold Coast involves much more than just a visit to the local theme park – wildlife is ubiquitous!

Because of Australia's separation from any other landmass over 40 million years ago, much of the wildlife on this the largest, and only, island continent has evolved in isolation. The result is an amazing and unique diversity of wildlife. To conserve this diversity, Australia has developed a large estate of protected lands and boasts more Natural World Heritage areas than any other nation. The majority of these are reserved, at least in part, for the protection of wildlife (Hardiman and Burgin 2012). Gold Coast wildlife is protected in reserves that range in size from the smallest national park in Australia, the Burleigh Head National Park, abutting the coast beside the mouth of Tallebudgera Creek and bounded on another two sides by one of the longest-established urban tourist areas on the Gold Coast – Burleigh. At the alternative end of the spectrum of park size is the Gondwana Rainforests of Australia (formally the Central Eastern Rainforest Reserves), part of which is in the south-west of the Gold Coast. Inscribed on the World Heritage List in 1986 (extended in 1994), the area was reserved, in large part, for its natural values. The Gondwana Rainforests of Australia includes the most expansive area of subtropical rainforest worldwide and encompasses the major remaining area of rainforest in south-eastern Queensland/northern New South Wales. Its biodiversity includes a wide range of animals, communities and habitats with their origins in Gondwana. Many of its species are restricted (entirely or largely) to the World Heritage area, and a substantial number that inhabit the area are threatened or endangered (DoE undated).

Gold Coast residents and tourists may experience the wildlife of these natural areas as private visitors (walking the Burleigh Head National Park trails) or with commercial tours such as a trip to the wonders of glowworms at night in Springbrook National Park (within Gondwana Rainforests of Australia). However, effectively everywhere on the Gold Coast, wildlife can be viewed from the windows of hotel rooms, on the streets, along the coastline or in suburban backyards. Depending on where you are, there will typically be a