



kakadu™

NATIONAL PARK

Wildlife

Kakadu has most of the major landscapes of Australia's Top End. These habitats contain a remarkable abundance and variety of wildlife.

The six major landscape types featuring in Kakadu range from stone country, hills and ridges, savannah woodlands and monsoon forests to billabongs, floodplains, tidal flats and coast.

Within them are well-known species as well as plants and animals yet to be described by scientists.



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Watch for agile wallabies in grassy areas during cooler parts of the day

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Dragonflies see the dry season in

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Leichhardt's Grasshopper is known as Aljurr, the children of Namarrgon (lightning man). Aljurr call to their father to start Gunumeleng, the pre monsoon storm season (October to December)

PROTECTION

Kakadu protects the habitats of animals which are rare or regionally endemic. The elusive black wallaroo and rare white-throated grass-wren are restricted to the stone country associated with the Arnhem Land Plateau.

Magpie geese were once widespread throughout eastern and southern Australia. Habitat loss and hunting have reduced their numbers and restricted them to northern Australia, with Kakadu being their main stronghold.

The wetlands of Kakadu are of international significance, with over 40 species of migratory birds, including the oriental pratincole and little curlew arriving after travelling from as far as Russia, China and Japan.



Australian Government



PARK NOTE



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INSECTS

Of the thousands of species of insects found in Kakadu, termites are among the most important. Wood-eating termites eat the dead wood in the centre of trees, hollowing out trunks and limbs. This creates homes for many small animals.

The spectacular blue and orange Leichhardt grasshopper first described by Ludwig Leichhardt in 1845, and well-known to local Aboriginal people, was not noted again until the 1970s.

AMPHIBIANS

About 25 species of frog live in the park. Frogs are important food for fish, wading birds and snakes.

During the wet season a loud frog chorus echoes from swamps and billabongs at night. As the water recedes through the dry season, many frog species burrow into the mud and wait for the next wet season rains.

FISH

More than 55 kinds of freshwater fish are found in Kakadu. Some show remarkable adaptations to their environment.

Barramundi change sex from male to female at six to seven years of age; female saratoga carry their eggs in their mouths; and archer fish can squirt water up to 1.5 metres above the water to knock down their insect prey.

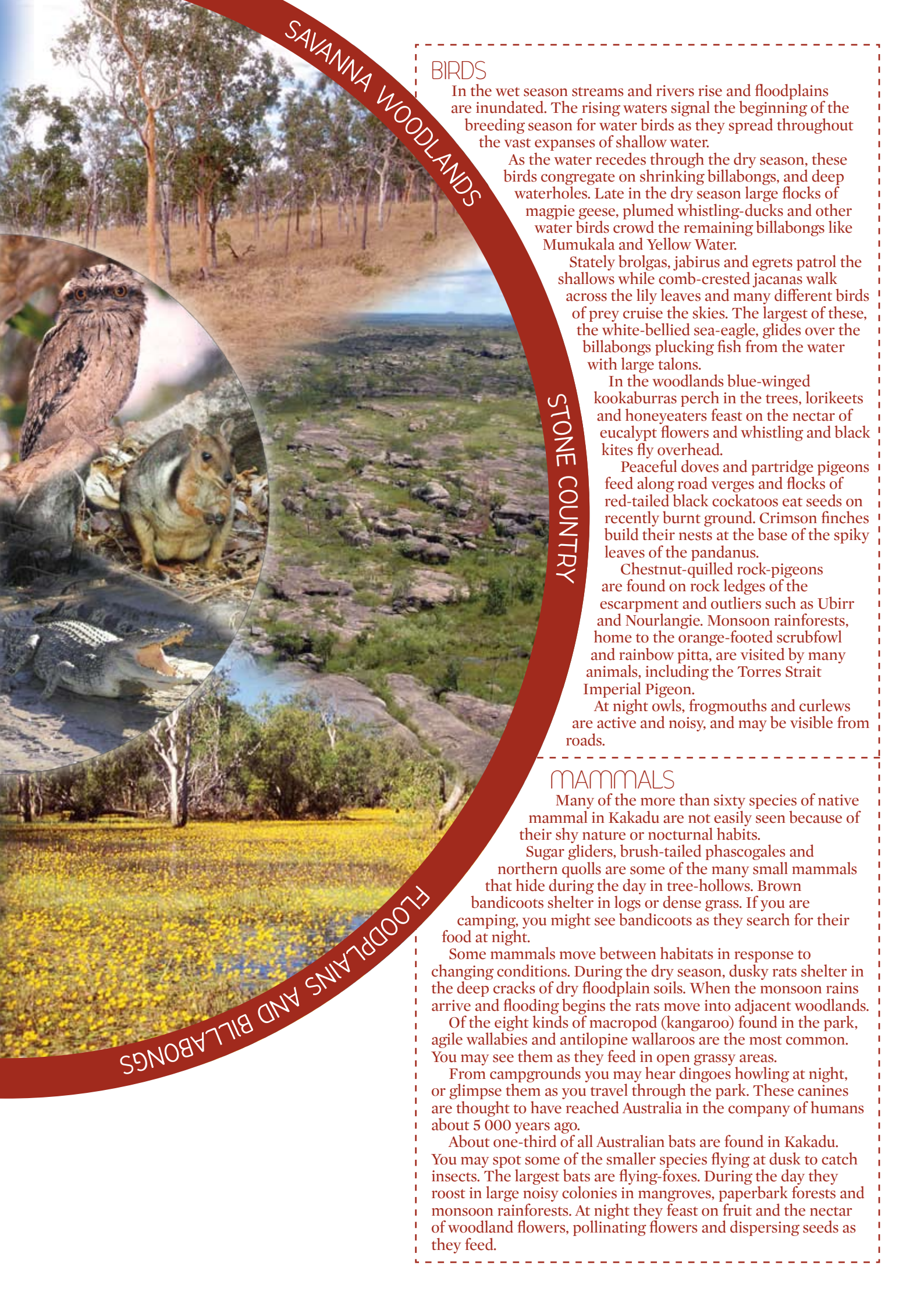
TIDAL FLATS AND COAST

MONSOON FORESTS

SOUTHERN HILLS AND RIDGES



Recording over 280 species, about one third of all Australian birds are to be found in Kakadu. The park presents one of the finest bird watching opportunities in Australia.



SAVANNA WOODLANDS

STONE COUNTRY

FLOODPLAINS AND BILLABONGS

BIRDS

In the wet season streams and rivers rise and floodplains are inundated. The rising waters signal the beginning of the breeding season for water birds as they spread throughout the vast expanses of shallow water.

As the water recedes through the dry season, these birds congregate on shrinking billabongs, and deep waterholes. Late in the dry season large flocks of magpie geese, plumed whistling-ducks and other water birds crowd the remaining billabongs like Mumukala and Yellow Water.

Stately brolgas, jabirus and egrets patrol the shallows while comb-crested jacanas walk across the lily leaves and many different birds of prey cruise the skies. The largest of these, the white-bellied sea-eagle, glides over the billabongs plucking fish from the water with large talons.

In the woodlands blue-winged kookaburras perch in the trees, lorikeets and honeyeaters feast on the nectar of eucalypt flowers and whistling and black kites fly overhead.

Peaceful doves and partridge pigeons feed along road verges and flocks of red-tailed black cockatoos eat seeds on recently burnt ground. Crimson finches build their nests at the base of the spiky leaves of the pandanus.

Chestnut-quilled rock-pigeons are found on rock ledges of the escarpment and outliers such as Ubirr and Nourlangie. Monsoon rainforests, home to the orange-footed scrubfowl and rainbow pitta, are visited by many animals, including the Torres Strait Imperial Pigeon.

At night owls, frogmouths and curlews are active and noisy, and may be visible from roads.

MAMMALS

Many of the more than sixty species of native mammal in Kakadu are not easily seen because of their shy nature or nocturnal habits.

Sugar gliders, brush-tailed phascogales and northern quolls are some of the many small mammals that hide during the day in tree-hollows. Brown bandicoots shelter in logs or dense grass. If you are camping, you might see bandicoots as they search for their food at night.

Some mammals move between habitats in response to changing conditions. During the dry season, dusky rats shelter in the deep cracks of dry floodplain soils. When the monsoon rains arrive and flooding begins the rats move into adjacent woodlands.

Of the eight kinds of macropod (kangaroo) found in the park, agile wallabies and antilopine wallaroos are the most common. You may see them as they feed in open grassy areas.

From campgrounds you may hear dingoes howling at night, or glimpse them as you travel through the park. These canines are thought to have reached Australia in the company of humans about 5 000 years ago.

About one-third of all Australian bats are found in Kakadu. You may spot some of the smaller species flying at dusk to catch insects. The largest bats are flying-foxes. During the day they roost in large noisy colonies in mangroves, paperbark forests and monsoon rainforests. At night they feast on fruit and the nectar of woodland flowers, pollinating flowers and dispersing seeds as they feed.

REPTILES

Reptiles are diverse and numerous. They include Kakadu's largest predators, crocodiles and snakes.

Freshwater and estuarine (saltwater) crocodiles inhabit the park. Estuarine crocodiles are most common in tidal rivers, floodplain billabongs and coastal waters but are also found in freshwater billabongs and waterways as far inland as the base of the escarpment.

There are many snakes in the park. One of the more unusual is the file snake. Their valvular nostrils and rough skin for grasping prey are adaptations to a life spent entirely in water.

Waterways are home to water pythons that feed on birds and their eggs. The Oenpelli python, which lives only on the Arnhem Land Plateau and is well known to Aboriginal people, was only discovered by Western scientists in 1976.

The northern yellow-faced, northern snapping, saw-shelled, long-necked and pig-nosed turtles all make their home in Kakadu's waterways.

Eleven species of monitor lizards, also known as goannas, may be seen along road verges, alongside rivers, creeks and billabongs. Depending on their habitat they eat fish, frogs, insects, eggs, birds, small mammals and carrion.

Watch for small dragon lizards and skinks scurrying into the undergrowth along walking tracks.

The spectacular frilled-necked lizard hides in the trees through the dry season and appears after the first wet season rains.

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The frilled-neck lizard comes down from its arboreal dry season retreat at the beginning of the wet season



FERAL ANIMALS

Animals that have been introduced and cause damage to the environment and biodiversity are referred to as feral.

Buffaloes and pigs are the largest and most dangerous of these. They do considerable damage by digging, wallowing and trampling. Cats predate on small animals.

One of the major feral animal threats to Kakadu's biodiversity is the cane toad. As well as preying on local species and displacing them by taking over their habitat, cane toads poison animals that try to eat them. Populations of quolls and monitor lizards are noticeably affected, with quolls once present in great numbers now struggling for survival.

OBSERVING ANIMALS

Early morning and sunset are good times to see wildlife

Use a torch at night to look for nocturnal animals. Be careful not to shine strong spotlights onto sleeping roosting birds

Look for clues to where animals have been, especially tracks, scats (droppings) and scratchings

Waterholes along creeklines attract animals. Sit quietly to avoid disturbing them. Animals in need of water can quickly become stressed

Animals are often heard before they are seen. Walk quietly, listen and watch for movement

Sit for a while and wait for animals to come to you

Walk in small quiet groups

Use binoculars to get a closer look

Look for animals such as lizards and snakes crossing roads. Slow down so that you see the wildlife rather than run over it

Some tours provide good opportunities to view wildlife

LOOK AFTER YOURSELF WHEN OBSERVING WILDLIFE

Do not approach, disturb or feed wildlife

Estuarine (saltwater) crocodiles inhabit Kakadu waters and deaths and severe injuries have occurred in the park. Obey crocodile warning signs

Snakes, pigs and buffaloes can also be dangerous. Keep well away from them.

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