



## Koala Recovery Experience with Kirby Leary and Janine Duffy

RELATED EXPERIENCE:

### Koala Recovery Experience

2-3 DAYS (SHARED)



#### CONSERVATION IN ACTION

- Participate in planting targeted Koala trees in places where Koalas need them most
- Includes financial contribution to Koala Clancy Foundation



This year, the Echidna Walkabout Nature Tours team, together with hundreds of volunteers, is aiming to plant 50,000 trees across the Melbourne and East Gippsland region... and 2022 is set to be even bigger.

"Our tree total is going up every year and managing the work is a huge job," Janine Duffy, founder of Echidna Walkabout Nature Tours along with Roger Smith, explains. "We need to plant at least 30,000 trees every year to reach our target of 300,000 by 2030. We need that many trees to support the population of Koalas."

Kirby Leary, General Manager of Echidna Walkabout Nature Tours, is the one responsible for managing the Koala conservation work, and she explains that when it comes to the general public, awareness and understanding are both key. "The most important factor affecting Koalas is their loss of habitat due to climate change," she explains. "They need it back along the riverbanks and estuary lines, because the moisture content of the leaves they eat is really important for them."

Janine explains that climate change is making conditions too hot and dry for Koalas. "The increased carbon dioxide in the atmosphere

is reducing the nutritional content of eucalyptus leaves," she says. The Koala Recovery Experience is designed for those who want to contribute with tree planting, which only takes place during a short period of the year because of soil moisture levels.

"July is the optimum time for tree planting around the Melbourne region, while May and September are the best times for the East Gippsland region," Kirby says. "People can join tours in both locations, and we're especially keen for the extra assistance on week days."

Although Red River Gums are favoured by koalas for consumption, they eat a variety of eucalyptus leaves, including Yellow Gum and Grey Box varieties. "It's a myth they only eat one type of tree leaf," Janine explains. "We plant a variety of tree species, which is vital for long-term ecosystem health – and the health of our Koalas."

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# Exploring the Impacts of Climate Change at Mungo National Park with Roger Smith

## RELATED EXPERIENCE:

### Mungo Outback Journey

4 DAYS / 3 NIGHTS (SHARED)



## CONSERVATION IN ACTION

- Participate in citizen science programs, including atlassing the impacts of climate change and feral species intrusion on biodiversity
- Includes financial contribution to Koala Clancy Foundation



When you ask Roger Smith, co-founder of Echidna Walkabout Nature Tours along with Janine Duffy, about climate change at Mungo National Park, he cites an example. “To help people understand the impacts of climate change in a certain area, I usually profile a creature,” he says. “I’ve been visiting Mungo for over five decades and have noticed the number of emus over the last few years has declined.”

Mungo National Park was recognised and included in the Willandra Lakes World Heritage Region in 1981 for its record of Aboriginal settlement (experts hypothesise that the park is home to the oldest culture on earth after the discovery of Mungo Lady and Mungo Man), its strong representation of Australian megafauna, and its important geological attributes.

The park – which spans 111,000 hectares – is also famous for its diverse bird life. “Many serious birdwatchers come here to see the 150 or so species of birds we have here,” Roger says. “The Pink Cockatoo, Chestnut-crowned Babbler and a staggering diversity of parrots are all highlights.”

Emus, are one of the more popular birds to spot, however, in April 2021 Roger saw only

eight emus over three days. “A few years ago, at the same time of the year, I’d usually see hundreds,” he says. “One of the most important things we do when we assess the impacts of climate change is to monitor the health of the environment, and one of the best ways to do this is to track and record the number of creatures we see.”

Although the majority of the emus seemed to have moved on to ‘greener pastures’ for now, Roger is confident that they will return (probably in reduced numbers), explaining that animals naturally move between areas to survive different booms and busts. “Australian wildlife is capable of dealing with dramatic changes in the environment,” he explains.

In the meantime, spotting an emu feels just that little bit more special when in Mungo, and Roger says that by coming along on the Mungo Outback Journey, guests are already partaking in important conservational work.

“By walking around, looking for seeds, looking for wildlife, and logging the species that we see, guests are already doing a great deal,” he says. “However, for Mungo to lose so many of its emus is extraordinary, and a warning that even Australia’s toughest bird is having problems with climate change.”



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# Post Bushfire Surveys with Janine Duffy

## RELATED EXPERIENCE:

### East Gippsland Wildlife Journey

4 DAYS / 3 NIGHTS (SHARED/PRIVATE)

## CONSERVATION IN ACTION

- Participate in citizen science programs contributing to iNaturalist and post bushfire studies
- Includes financial contribution to Koala Clancy Foundation

Janine Duffy, founder of Echidna Walkabout Nature Tours along with Roger Smith, knows a thing or two about Southern Emu-wrens... but then she knows a thing of two about hundreds of wildlife species. "If it's native and it's wildlife, I love it," she says. "I joke that my favourite animal is the one right in front of me."

Southern Emu-wrens, however, do hold a special place in Janine's heart because she – alongside a team of 40 others – found 18 of them in Mallacoota when it was previously

The notion of seeing a threatened species and recording the sightings sounds relatively straightforward, yet the repercussions can be profound. "Often scientists don't have enough time to visit each region regularly, so when ordinary people take a photograph and record the data it's a huge help all round," Janine explains. "There are a number of fantastic online platforms where people can submit sightings too."

On any given tour, the Echidna Walkabout Nature Tours team log relevant wildlife

"The findings and recordings can influence policy and strategy when it comes to conservation work."

thought that the bushfires of 2019/2020 eradicated them all.

"So much of the habitat was burnt during the fires, and because Southern Emu-wrens are really small birds and can't fly very far, it was assumed that they were completely gone from the entire region," Janine says.

"While we were there with the Mallacoota Birders Big Weekend in March 2021, we found and recorded sightings of 18 Southern Emu-wrens. Scientists now predict that there is enough of a population in the region to enable the species to bounce back."

sightings, and guests keen to participate are encouraged to join in. "We focus on logging bird species data, in particular, when in East Gippsland on our Wildlife Journey, because the tour goes to an area that is right on the edge of a burn zone," Janine explains. "We log sightings on every tour and can share those details with guests who are interested, of course. The findings and recordings can influence policy and strategy when it comes to conservation work."



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# Birdwatching Across East Gippsland with Martin Maderthaner

## RELATED EXPERIENCE:

### East Gippsland Wildlife Journey

4 DAYS / 3 NIGHTS (SHARED/PRIVATE)



## CONSERVATION IN ACTION

- Participate in citizen science programs contributing to eBird and Birdlife Australia databases
- Includes financial contribution to Koala Clancy Foundation



The spring and summer months are the favourite time of year for birdwatching in East Gippsland for Echidna Walkabout Nature Tours guide, Martin Maderthaner. "It's an active time for birds, and it's a very exciting time to be in the forest. The birds are all singing, and competing with each other for territory, for breeding purposes – so you get a lot of activity," he says.

"They are also nesting at this time and quite often we find nests and, with time and patience, we might see birds sitting on the eggs or even bringing food to the nestlings." For guests exploring the region, the diversity of bird species is another highlight, with close to 340 species recorded in the area.

"East Gippsland is considered to be one of the more biodiverse regions of Australia, because you get a little bit of the east coast summer rainfall as well as the west's winter rainfall. It's the meeting of two systems," Martin explains. "There are dry eucalyptus forests, wet eucalyptus forests, temperate rainforests, coastal heathlands and riverine forests. That results in a big diversity of both bird, and plant life."

Although any bird sighting excites Martin (he's a keen eBird contributor and spends much of his free time birdwatching), he always gets a thrill when he comes face-to-face with a Black-faced Monarch. "It's a beautiful bird with a black face, grey-silver back, bright rufous belly

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and a lovely high-pitched whistle," he says.

"We also often see Gang-gang Cockatoos and guests like them because they're unassuming, with their soft voice and subtle colouring. We often hear their 'creaking door' calls before we see them. Sometimes, too, we see the Glossy-black Cockatoo and that's really special as they are listed as threatened in Victoria."

Wherever Echidna Walkabout Nature Tours guests go, the guides leading the adventures are taking notes and posting lists of the birds seen on eBird and Birdlife Australia. Martin explains that this simple action is a huge help in governing responses from conservational bodies.

"By knowing where certain birds – particularly vulnerable species – are doing well, or where they are absent, Birdlife Australia and other conservation groups can target their recovery programs and pressure the government to protect certain areas," he says.

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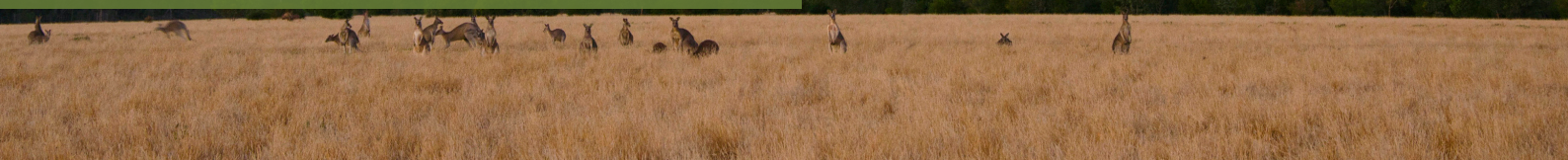


# Exploring the You Yangs with Norm Jurrawaa Stanley and Nikki McKenzie

RELATED EXPERIENCE:

Sunset Koalas & Kangaroos

FULL DAY (PRIVATE GROUP)



For Norm Jurrawaa Stanley and his wife Nikki McKenzie, everything is tied to connections. "When I take guests to the You Yangs we look at traditional life and how it compares to our life today. We talk about our connection to culture, and what our connection to the country looks like today," Norm explains. "It's an integral part of who we are, personally, emotionally and spiritually."

Norm and Nikki lead the first portion of the private Sunset Koalas and Kangaroos Aboriginal Welcome, where they introduce guests to the You Yangs from the Aboriginal perspective. "Nikki is a Wadawurrung woman and my heritage is the Kurnai/Wotjobaluk people of Gippsland and Horsham.

"It's an integral part of who we are, personally, emotionally and spiritually."

The You Yangs are found on Wadawurrung Country," Norm says. "We want to show guests the land and help them understand how Aboriginal people lived with and belonged to the land."

Norm and Nikki do this by talking about their cultural beliefs and by bringing guests' attention to certain landforms. "A major feature is a

rock well situated at Big Rock. It was created by lighting a fire and then chipping away at the rocks surface to create a bit of a crevice in the stone. This process continues until the right depth has been obtained.

This particular rock well has been used by many generations and it has certainly been there way beyond the 230 years of white Australian history," Norm says. "I also share a number of traditional weapons and stone tools and talk about how they were created and used, and importantly how these things were learnt."

In Aboriginal culture, everything that is learnt is passed down from generation to generation through hands-on practice and through the spoken word, and Norm continues the tradition when sharing stories about his culture. "One story I share quite often is in reference to the Three Hills of Anakie, an old Wadawurrung story about the three sisters – three land formations," he says.

"When we are standing in front of what is known as Big Rock – where the rock well is – we get a beautiful view of the hills. That is where the story was originally told to me. And that is where I continue to tell this story."

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# Tracking Powerful Owls with Martin Maderthaner

## RELATED EXPERIENCE:

### East Gippsland Wildlife Journey

4 DAYS / 3 NIGHTS (SHARED/PRIVATE)



## CONSERVATION IN ACTION

- Participate in citizen science programs contributing to eBird and iNaturalist databases
- Includes financial contribution to Koala Clancy Foundation



When you ask long-standing Echidna Walkabout Nature Tours guide, Martin Maderthaner, to describe the hoot a Powerful Owl makes, he doesn't hesitate. "It's a very loud and deep hoot, a double hoot, really," he explains. "It's a commanding sound and you immediately know it's coming from a large bird, a bird with a big presence."

Powerful Owls are very big birds, with an average adult owl measuring 50-60cm, weighing 1.5-2kg and having a wing span of up to 140cm. "It's Australia's largest owl, and it takes on all sorts of prey," Martin explains. "In East Gippsland we've seen Powerful Owls with captured young Koalas, Sugar Gliders, Ringtail Possums, Brushtail Possums, and as well as various diurnal (day active) birds, including Galahs and Magpies, caught while roosting."

Although Powerful Owls are mostly found in wet eucalyptus forests and rainforests in eastern parts of Australia, they are also regularly seen in bushland located close to cities, and even sometimes within city suburbs where possums are abundant and enough tree cover remains.

"At Echidna Walkabout Nature Tours, we offer a number of private day tours that we personalise to our guests' interests. We often

see Powerful Owls in the eastern suburbs of Melbourne, as well as in the Dandenong Ranges, which are only a short drive away from the centre of the city," Martin explains. "On these day tours we also keep our eyes out for other wet forest birds, such as Lyrebirds, King Parrots, Rose Robins, Golden Whistlers and Whipbirds."

East Gippsland is another location where Powerful Owls are seen frequently, although due to the bushfires of 2019/2020, some of the forest areas Echidna Walkabout Nature Tours used to visit are not accessible at present.

Still, there are opportunities to see the birds in other areas of East Gippsland, and Martin is confident that, when forests affected by the fires regenerate and possum numbers increase, the Powerful Owls will return.

"On the four-day Wildlife Journey we stay in a homestead overlooking the Snowy River Valley at Orbost, and one of the highlights here is hearing the owls' deep hoots from the accommodation, or finding them in one of their daytime roosts," he says. "They just stare at you unflinchingly with their piercing golden eyes, and you realise you're in the presence of a formidable predator."

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