

Wild Tails: the value of storytelling and other quality interpretation in wildlife tourism



A report on the Wildlife Tourism Australia National Conference 2024

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Wildlife Tourism Australia

Promoting environmentally-sustainable wildlife tourism



Executive summary

Quality interpretation is an essential component of high-quality wildlife tourism. It entertains, educates in a way that enhances appreciation and understanding of the wildlife, and explains conservation issues and how tourists can assist or at least avoid adding to the problems. At our 2022 national conference themed “Wildlife tourism helping wildlife: making it really happen”, Susanne Cooper from the National Parks Association of Queensland stressed that the critical challenge is having good interpretation that leads to appreciation and understanding, and communicating what is special about a place. Many people visit a place for two or three days and go away without gaining such understanding. We’ve seen this many times over in many regions. We think we’re a long way from where we need to be with quality guiding.

Our national conference in 2024 was held at Tasman Holiday Parks – North Star, a coastal resort in Hastings Point, situated in the Tweed Shire, northern New South Wales (NSW). Mayor of the Tweed Shire, Chris Cherry opened the conference speaking about the value of environmentally responsible tourism in the region. The central theme of the conference was quality interpretation, with special emphasis on storytelling and how well-told narratives can capture the imagination of listeners and engage them far more than a set of unrelated facts. The conference also explored other varied ways of capturing people’s attention and interest, including face-to-face guiding, signage, books, videos, holograms and even puppets.

Amongst the rich diversity of presentations, Jennifer Waithman from Interpretation Australia and Anton Lategan from EcoTraining covered the value of good training for guides, with Anton giving examples from South Africa, a country with a reputation for knowledgeable guides. Jennifer discussed the importance of learning how to create meaningful connections between visitors and wildlife, creating transformative experiences. Our chair Ronda Green spoke of wildlife guide-training workshops in Sabah, Malaysia, and Thomas Jones from Asia-Pacific University spoke about relevant education of university students in Japan.

Measuring the value of interpretation has its challenges. The Canadian study presented by Glen Hvenegaard from University of Alberta was encouraging in showing a correlation between attendance at interpretive events on visitor satisfaction, knowledge gain, park-friendly attitudes, and positive memories, and to some extent an increased connection to nature. Leah Burns from

Griffith University reported on a study of ecotourism in an urban forest in Queensland that showed high visitor satisfaction and knowledge gain.

Conveying conservation problems to tourists without spoiling the holiday mood is also challenging. Several presenters included the conveying of advice for minimal-impact wildlife viewing. Elleke Leurs from the University of Tasmania tackled the issue of high levels of roadkill in the island state, and Simin Maleknia from Tetratherix Technology addressed the role of public education on global wildlife trafficking. Both discussed ways of combating the problems.

With a career focussed largely on storytelling for all ages in recent years, Sarah Pye from the University of Sunshine Coast partnered with our vice-chair Maree Treadwell Kerr to discuss the development of an entertaining and educational story about a young girl’s endeavour to learn more about bats and other wildlife. Sarah also led an interactive discussion on connecting with audience and the power of storytelling to impart scientific and conservation information. Moonlit Sanctuary’s Sian Mulhall spoke of their endeavours to develop engaging stories to convey memorable information about the wildlife species represented in their collection. The Erth company presented three posters on their inspiring puppetry-based theatrical productions. Their delegates also brought along puppets that help tell important stories relating to nature appreciation and conservation values. Maree Treadwell Kerr informed us that amongst other skills, the volunteers at Kuranda Visitor Information Centre are trained in storytelling. Maree also presented a poster on Kuranda’s Cassowary Trail, which explains that each southern cassowary portrayed has its own story. Our former secretary, Aise Kim from the University of South Australia discussed the role of storytelling in tourists’ emotional engagement and well-being, and practical approaches to specific storytelling techniques for maximising these benefits. Independent researcher Jonathon Spring led conference delegates through a number of storytelling examples.

There are many different approaches and techniques for quality wildlife interpretation. Manuel Ramon Gonzalez from the Autonomous University of Ciudad Juarez presented a step-by-step methodology asking the following about interpretation: why, what, who, where, and how, with the aim of fostering awareness and understanding of the objects observed and an affective relationship that connects visitors with the landscape. Mike Mayer and Bill Reynolds from

Experiential Interpretive Design discussed expressing a site's sense of place and matching objectives with visitors' needs to create enriching interactions. They also discussed the importance of considering the complete visitor journey, encompassing the stages pre-visit, arrival, on-site visit, departure and post-visit, as the key to achieving a successful visitor experience. Several presenters discussed face-to-face guiding, with the Erth company, Sarah Pye and Rebecca Scollen from University of Southern Queensland each presenting on the use of puppets. Rebecca also discussed the use of holograms, and the potential for these and puppets as viable alternatives or complementary additions to watching actual animals. Sarah spoke of the development of books for children to inspire interest in wildlife. Dale Treadwell from Naturally Wild, Ireland, led an interactive presentation involving audience participation to illustrate the web of life, before reading his children's book, *Harry the Hedgehog*. Ronda Green presented a poster on catering simultaneously to different audiences in the Scenic Rim Wildlife Ecology Centre that she and her family are currently developing. Ronda and Maree Treadwell Kerr coordinated a discussion on wildlife interactions, and Tony Isaacson, the Founding President of the Marine Life Society of South Australia, introduced Jim Abernethy of Abernethy's Scuba Adventures who showed us some amazing footage of befriending large wild sharks. Angus Robinson from Leisure Solutions explained that geotourism initiatives highlight the ecological importance of geological features, promoting an understanding of the interconnectedness of geology and the fauna, flora and human culture of a locality, and used the yellow-footed rock-wallaby as an example of how to integrate geology features with information about the wildlife. Vikki Schaffer from the University of the Sunshine Coast described a citizen science project for disabled participants, wherein experts in astronomy and marine science worked together to increase scientific awareness in innovative, fun, and interesting ways.

Many different animal groups were discussed in relation to wildlife tourism. Colleen Foelz from eye4insects pointed out that insects are often neglected, but that with increasing pressures on their populations, it would be valuable for guides to draw attention to them. She discussed challenges and ideas, drawing from her experiences in Queensland and Borneo. Jake Rendle-Worthington from We Are All

Mammals spoke on why many elephants in southern Africa need to remain in human care, and the complexities of ensuring their welfare. Elizabeth Hawkins from Dolphin Research Australia introduced us to a project by a local indigenous group looking at citizen science research, public education and the positive and negative aspects of tourism relating to dolphins of the Tweed Coast. Katrin Hohwieler from the University of the Sunshine Coast spoke of a citizen science project involving koalas and the use of blue-tooth, and the resultant engagement of volunteers in appreciation of koalas and concern for their conservation and welfare. Ecologist Greg Clancy took us through some examples of interpreting birds and other wildlife in Far North Queensland. Matthew Mo from the NSW Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water and Tyron de Kauwe from Sunshine Coast Council both delivered presentations on the role of tourism for improving public perceptions of flying-foxes.

Several excursions showcasing the theme of storytelling and interpretation were enjoyed by delegates. The Marine Discovery Centre, within the conference venue, features many displays on habitats and marine life, and delegates explored the interactive approach harnessed by some of these exhibition pieces. A half-day excursion took in a bushfoods walk led by First Nations local councillor Delta Kay and a visit to the Byron Bay Wildlife Sanctuary where keepers spoke about the interpretation they deliver to patrons and their relationship with the adjoining Byron Bay Wildlife Hospital. The excursion also featured a visit to a local grey-headed flying-fox roost where Claudia Caliarì from Byron Shire Council, alongside a colleague in a full-body flying-fox suit, inspired delegates about opportunities for tourism and education amid challenging human-wildlife conflicts facing the species. Arakwal National Park was a pivotal last stop in this excursion, having achieved a place on the International Union for Conservation of Nature Green List of Protected Areas. Following the conference, some of the delegates were treated to a birdwatching tour of a local estuary and forest led by Greg Clancy.

Wildlife Tourism Australia is grateful to Dione Green for helping to promote the conference, including facilitating interviews with Ronda Green and Sarah Pye on the radio station Bay FM, and connecting Wildlife Tourism Australia to Delta Kay.

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The slide decks of some of the presentations are available on the Wildlife Tourism Australia website.

Inspiring interest and imparting memorable information

Presentations from day 1

Keynote: Beyond the tour – the role of interpretive training in enhancing wildlife tourism

Jennifer Waithman

Interpretation Australia (jenwaithman@outlook.com)

As Yoda wisely said, “Always pass on what you have learned”. In this keynote presentation, I drew upon my years of experience in interpretation to share how we can create meaningful connections between visitors and wildlife, igniting deeper universal connections of growth and discovery. Just as the heroes in Star Wars grapple with their destinies, I

believe many of us face similar challenges in our pursuit of impactful experiences. An interpretive approach provides the vital steps to help us achieve these goals. We can elevate our practices and create transformative experiences that echo the timeless lessons of connection and understanding across our galaxy.

Keynote: Mind the gap – animals, guiding, storytelling and you

Jonathon Spring *online*

Independent researcher (spring.jonathon@gmail.com)

How we use words and order them, make or break the stories we tell. Three terms have the potential to scuttle a story during a wildlife tour in Australia or Papua New Guinea: monotremes, marsupials, and placental mammals. Scientists concede that these names for the mammalian crown-groups are “misleading”, but console themselves with the thought that, “at least we all know what we are talking about”. Research shows that participants identify stories as a defining part of a successful tour. The stories they cite are constructed around memorable

phrases, credible scientific information, distinctive animal encounters, and interaction between stimulated minds. If scientific knowledge is conveyed through terminology requiring qualification, gaps can easily form in the telling of a story, the flow of information, or its relevance. This presentation explored ways of telling memorable stories that embrace information gleaned through scientific attention to detail, but navigate the murky phrases used by academic convention to order the knowledge of the mammals seen on your tours.

Interpretation through flow learning

Dale Treadwell

Naturally Wild (daletreadwell7@gmail.com)

Dale has been an ecological interpreter for over 30 years. He developed the original Australian Trust for Conservation Volunteers remote schools programme in the early 1990s, then mixed bushland regeneration works with educational activities for Ku-ring-gai council in the mid-1990s before a move to Ireland, which has seen Dale present on children's TV, at major Science Festivals, Dublin Zoo and schools across the island of Ireland and author children's books with a wildlife theme. Forever young at heart, Dale has a unique and informative style that he is

delighted to bring back to Australia and share after over two decades away. His educational background as he likes to put it has come through the university of hard knocks. It is his practical approach and incorporation of hands-on activities and games that have been a drawcard to inspire audiences young and old. In this presentation, Dale explored flow learning through a style that he has utilised in Australia and Ireland, including a combination of interpretive games and activities, delved into the learning theory behind the action and his children's book *Harry the Hedgehog*.

Design of participative environmental interpretation in White Sands New Mexico, USA

Manuel Ramon Gonzalez Herrera *online*

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The bases that support the theoretical underpinnings and conceptual approaches on which this case study is based refer to the themes of environmental interpretation and sustainability, in which environmental, social, and economic aspects are considered holistically for planning field trips to natural protected spaces, with a particular interest in understanding the site, its flora, and fauna. The general aim is to develop a methodology for environmental interpretation in a participative way with students in the classroom, which has been applied in practice for six semesters. The result presented in this communication is a step-by-step methodology asking the following about interpretation: why, what, who, where, and how?

The design of participative environmental interpretation through field trips to White Sands National Park in New Mexico, USA, was based on the requirements of curriculum planning for tourism undergraduate students at the Autonomous University of Ciudad Juarez, Mexico. The interpretation plan was the instrument through which the educational practice was organised, integrating the contents, methodological focuses, educational strategies, and materials, which allowed sequencing of the activities and made it possible to achieve the objectives (Aho 2001; Ballantyne and Hughes 2001). The conceptual, procedural, and attitudinal contents were structured as part of this process (Quevedo *et al.* 2020). The first aspect applied in the classroom, according to the students' needs, was the didactic conceptualisation of the activity considering the general characteristics of the field trip.

As a result, the process of making the environmental interpretation plan was divided into five key steps according to the contributions of different authors (Ballantyne and Hughes 2001; Christie and Mason 2003; Mexican Secretariat of Tourism 2004; Coles *et al.* 2014; Leanza *et al.* 2016; Beall *et al.* 2021; Lee *et al.* 2021) and practical validation. The resulting step-by-step methodology asked the following about interpretation: why, what, who, where, and how?

The design of interpretive messages should answer the following questions (Subsecretaría de Turismo 2017): What should visitors know? What could they feel? What could they commit to? What changes in attitude can be promoted? What is each visitor

expected to remember after the visit? An effective interpretive story will address what is expected to be communicated and enrich the visitor's experience using language that is understandable and accessible to all visitors, promoting interpretation of the visible elements from each observation site.

The messages will foster awareness and understanding of the objects observed and create an affective relationship that connects visitors with the visual landscape, encouraging the transmission of ideas or meanings and contributing to the formation of significant experiences. Different techniques, as Youngtob and Hostetler (2021) have noted, will be used to facilitate interpretive messages, such as stimulation and provocation of the visitor; personification, creation of analogies, entertainment, use of the senses for harmonisation with the environment (listening, seeing, smelling, and touching), mystery, and use of humour. It concludes by ratifying the importance of planning and designing the environmental interpretation processes before the field trips with a holistic and systematic approach.

The results presented show the methodological derivation of a step-by-step procedure used in practice with satisfactory results, helping students in a didactic way to understand the objects, phenomena, and processes they observe during the related environmental interpretation activities to the study plan of the undergraduate tourism program at Autonomous University of Ciudad Juarez, Mexico.

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Enhancing geotourism through engagement with wildlife

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At the core of geotourism is the abiotic (climate, sky, landscape and geology), which shapes the geosystem services provided to the biota and human societies that live in the place, i.e., cultural heritage.

Geotourism is therefore integrated.

Biotic features in geotourism refer to living organisms and the ecological aspects associated with geosites. The presence of diverse flora and fauna can enhance the overall experience focusing on biodiversity interacting with geological sites can contribute to the overall attractiveness of a geotourism destination. Moreover, the presence of diverse wildlife, including birds, mammals, reptiles, and insects, can enhance the geotourism experience.

Geological sites that serve as habitats for specific species can be of particular interest to wildlife enthusiasts. Geosites often demonstrate the dynamic interactions between geology and ecology, and this includes wildlife.

Aboriginal communities are likely to have traditional knowledge about the geological features and the relationship between these features and the resultant ecosystems, embodied in totems. This knowledge can add a cultural and educational dimension to the geotourism experience. For them a totem can be a natural

object, a plant or an animal that is inherited by members of a clan or family as their spiritual emblem.

The presentation discussed how the yellow-footed rock-wallaby, living in the Flinders Ranges of South Australia, resides in a habitat created by the geomorphology of the area, and how it represents an important totem for the Traditional Owners of the Flinders Ranges, the Adnyamathanha people, who have a deep understanding of their land and the cultural significance of sites across this remarkable landscape.

Wildlife also features in Australian indigenous astronomy, an aspect of which adds an exciting extension to the abiotic expression of geotourism. Geotourism initiatives therefore highlight the ecological importance of geological features, promoting an understanding of the interconnectedness of geology and biology. The inclusion of biotic features adds depth to the overall experience and promotes a holistic understanding of the natural environment. Geotourism enables integration of sustainable nature tourism, inclusive of wildlife tourism, with Aboriginal tourism thus providing economic opportunities for Traditional Owners.

Together, writers and scientists make magic

Sarah Pye¹ and Maree Treadwell Kerr^{2,3}

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Researching wildlife is a science, but communicating wildlife science is an art, and storytelling is an important part of wildlife tourism interpretation. When scientific toolboxes and literary toolboxes are combined, magic happens.

In this presentation, author Dr Sarah Pye and passionate bat advocate Maree Treadwell Kerr shared their experiences working together to create an engaging wildlife narrative for 8–12-year-old children: *Curious Kai Asks Why*. This blended non-fiction/fiction narrative features a young girl with endless questions. Her teachers struggle, and her mum is flummoxed so they hitch up their camper and go in search of the *real* scientists who can help. *Curious Kai Asks Why* is the first book in a series, highlighting spectacled flying-foxes, praying mantis, southern cassowaries, greater bilbies, loggerhead turtles, songbirds and manta rays.

Dr Sarah Pye's doctorate focused on how narratives can be used to engage non-scientists in conservation. It resulted in the biography of Dr Wong Siew Te, a Malaysian ecologist and founder of the Bornean Sun Bear Conservation Centre. The award-winning biography titled *Saving Sun Bears* was followed by seven children's books in the *Wildlife Wong* series about Dr Wong's adventures in the jungles of Borneo with different species. The Bornean Sun Bear Conservation Centre now utilises Sarah's books to extend visitor engagement, illustrating the importance of storytelling in both conservation *and* tourism. Sarah's newest children's book, *Curious Kai Asks Why*,

profiles Queensland scientists while applying Sarah's narrative skills to Australian species.

Maree Treadwell Kerr features in *Curious Kai Asks Why*. She is an ecologist and wildlife communicator based in Kuranda, a township situated in Far North Queensland, who has been working in conservation and community engagement around bats for over 30 years. Maree is the president of the Bats and Trees Society of Cairns, a non-government organisation that works to conserve bats in Far North Queensland and coordinates the Spectacled Flying-fox Recovery Team. Maree also co-convenes the Australasian Bat Society's Flying-fox Expert Group and coordinates their Australasian Bat Night program, a project comprising a series of local community events designed to raise awareness of bats held each autumn across Australasia. Maree is also Wildlife Tourism Australia's vice-chair and a member of the executive committee of Interpretation Australia.

Since the conference, *Curious Kai Asks Why* has been launched through a Kickstarter campaign, an online book launch and three in-person launches in Cairns, the Sunshine Coast and Brisbane. Sarah has designed school workshops around its themes and now delivers these nationally and internationally. She is now working on the next book in the series, *Curious Kai Quits School*, which takes the protagonist through New South Wales in search of answers to her questions about oysters, quolls, glowworms, dinosaurs, Wollemi pines, orcas, humpbacks and iconic koalas.

Interpreting Cape York wildlife

Greg Clancy

Ecologist (gclancy@tpg.com.au)

Greg Clancy presented a series of photographs of fauna native to Cape York, mostly photographed at Iron Range, Kutina-pyumu National Park and at the Greenhouse.

In the presentation, Greg discussed some aspects of their biology and ecology of the species starting with flora, then mammals, including two flying-fox species and the short-beaked echidna, then birds such as the

red-cheeked parrot, ecleetus parrot and palm cockatoo, reptiles such as *Carlia* skinks, the green python and scrub python, amphibians such as the white-lipped tree frog and wood frog, and invertebrates such as the Cape York birdwing, other butterflies and the giant rainforest snail.

Greg emphasised the value of these diverse species as subjects of wildlife tourism.

The Gowonda project: a story of dolphins, marine life conservation and cultural knowledge

Elizabeth Hawkins¹ and Josh Slabb²

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The Gowonda Project is a local project of Dolphin Research Australia led by the Tweed Byron Local Aboriginal Land Council. The overarching aim of the Gowonda Project is a long-term research and monitoring that integrates non-invasive scientific research, citizen science initiatives and education to provide for environmentally positive outcomes to address key conservation priorities in the Tweed region. An important aspect of this work is to provide for more informed marine tourism education and interpretation that emphasises the cultural significance of marine mammals and strives to

facilitate behavioural change for marine users to care for these culturally significant species and sea country. This project comes at a pivotal time, as we have a number of growing marine wildlife tourism issues in the Tweed region, including marine wildlife harassment, increasing vessel use and marine tourism sector. Through the provision of knowledge sharing and storytelling on multi-media platforms, citizen science and tourism-based opportunities, alongside field-based research, we aim to facilitate improved protection and conservation of marine mammals in the Tweed region.

Interactive discussion: Interactions with animals – exploitation or valuable conservation and interpretive tool?

Ronda Green

Araucaria Ecotours

Chair, Wildlife Tourism Australia (chair@wildlifetourismaustralia.org.au)

Interactions with wildlife have often been the trigger to lifelong fascination with animals and dedication to conservation. There are others who consider themselves wildlife enthusiasts but cannot see anything negative about activities such as trophy hunting or energetic and emotional creatures being kept in tiny, barren enclosures: have these people never had the opportunity of communicating with an animal and learning to see it as a sentient being? Many others hardly give wildlife a thought in their daily lives, and despite many excellent books and documentaries, they are unlikely to encounter wildlife, and we are running out of time to protect biodiversity: can the opportunity for interactions capture their attention and make a difference?

The spontaneous interaction initiated by an inquisitive animal in a quiet setting is however very different to a staged show where a nervous animal (sometimes drugged or mutilated to make it safer for the humans) is forced into interactions with a noisy crowd in a captive setting, or where a tourist attracting animal in the wild, whether on land or sea, is surrounded by vehicles or divers impeding its natural behaviour, sometimes even chasing it.

Interactions in the wild led by commercial operators have led to the cessation of hunting and fishing for the target species, which is a plus for both conservation and animal welfare and interactive activities in captive settings have alleviated unnecessary fears and encouraged a positive feeling towards wild animals.

Exploitation solely for commercial gain in many situations has however caused much suffering and depletion of wildlife species from their native habitats. Purists often say any kind of interaction is inherently cruel, but would the cessation of all interactive activities lead to less awareness of and concern for animal welfare and conservation issues, and more support for the consumptive forms of wildlife tourism?

How can tourism operators, both land- and water-based, and in both wild and captive settings, encourage quiet, genuine, non-obtrusive interactions (with or without physical contact) of the sort that enhance respect and affection for animals? This workshop attempted to answer these questions using real-life scenarios.

Invert Interp – promoting our smallest natural wonders

Colleen Foelz

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Insects and other invertebrates are often not a feature of walks and talks given by guides, nature-based tourism operators and other presenters. They are frequently missing from or scantily dealt with in interpretive displays. Invertebrates are under fire from human-induced impacts such as habitat loss, pesticide use, climate change and light pollution, and as a result increasingly in the news or the subject of conservation concerns. So it seems timely to look at

how to promote more invertebrate interpretation. Let's call it Invert Interp! This talk looked at why invertebrates are important, outline obstacles to Invert Interp and entomo-tourism and suggest how some of these might be ameliorated. Content was drawn mostly from Queensland experiences and examples as well as recent travels in Borneo. I invite opportunities for further discussion and collaboration.

From nature connection to wellbeing: promoting wellbeing experience through wildlife storytelling

Aise Kim *online*

University of South Australia (aise.kim@unisa.edu.au)

Secretary, Wildlife Tourism Australia

Recently, the desire for gaining health and well-being benefits through wildlife tourism experience has become a newly recognised interest for nature-based tourists. Wildlife interaction-based tours are increasingly addressing tourists' mental recovery and their well-being benefits through other associated tour activities including voluntary environmental conservation activities, guided forest healing, or wellness programs. However, it is argued that the outcomes of such tours are still questionable as tourists' experiences can be personalised and shaped in a different way by various factors such as the type of wildlife-related issues or quality of tour guiding

services. Of these, it is suggested that the quality of a tour guide's inspiring stories can play a crucial role in fostering a complex aspect of tourists' wellbeing and healing benefits, beyond their short-term emotions and relaxation-based experience.

This presentation examined how wildlife tour guiding experience can contribute to fostering wider aspects of wellbeing benefits (e.g. socially inclusive, immersive, symbolic and environmentally oriented). It also discussed key practical approaches to specific storytelling techniques for maximising tourists' stronger emotional engagement and well-being benefits.

Moonlit Sanctuary's story to storytelling

Sian Mulhall

Moonlit Sanctuary (show@moonlit-sanctuary.com)

Moonlit Sanctuary is home to over 70 different Australian species, and a unique work environment to the many keepers, educators and tour guides that all collectively call themselves nature lovers. Our staff at Moonlit Sanctuary are dedicated and passionate about protecting our environment, its many different creatures and most importantly educating visitors to inspire meaningful change. Over the past few years, we have been working on how we present our animals to the public. Enthusiasm for what we share

isn't enough and it could be counterproductive. Excitingly listing off every single fact we have ever known about a species (that we ourselves may find fascinating) is not going to be memorable to most of our audience. In this presentation, I invited delegates to join me for a quest to develop our animal tales. Starting from Moonlit Sanctuary's early days in presenting facts with no structure to developing our storytelling skills to ensure our interactions with visitors are relatable, engaging, and memorable.

Sentient shark tourism: storytelling about the affectionate nature of sharks

Tony Isaacson¹ and Jim Abernethy²

¹Founding President and Life Member, Marine Life Society of South Australia

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The affectionate side of sharks is something most people do not believe is true or even possible, however this presentation left no doubt about its truth. Living at sea running back-to-back shark expeditions since 1997 has enabled me to discover many things, including the affectionate side of sharks, while trying to remove a hook from one of them, using love and affection. Using these tools, I've been able to build long lasting relationships with many sharks, built on trust. These shark relationships have enabled me to remove hundreds of hooks from eight species. If this were a dog, it would be no big deal. However, these are some of the largest predatory sharks on the planet. For example, Emma, a 15-foot

tiger shark I befriended in 2001 has had 5 hooks removed and I am very happy to still enjoy her company today. This is just one of many stories in this presentation, supported by jaw-dropping footage as proof.

Sharks as the apex predators in the sea, are responsible for maintaining the health and balance of the lungs of our planet, our oceans. Presently over 50 percent of the air we breathe and roughly 70 percent of our protein comes from our oceans, so it is vital that we do all we can to save our sharks for our own existence on the planet. This presentation was proof that love conquers all!

Interactive discussion: Twisting a tale (or tails)

Sarah Pye

University of the Sunshine Coast (sarah@sarahpye.com)

With a passion about the role that narrative storytelling and tourism interpretation can play in conservation of wildlife, Dr Sarah Pye in this hands-on workshop discussed the importance of knowing and connecting with your audience, the power and problems of anthropomorphism, the differences between inductive storytelling and deductive science, and the importance of provoking a response if conservation goals are to be met. Participants added new storytelling skills to their interpretation toolbox. Narratives have the power to engage visitors long after they go home. A good story can translate into environmental stewardship and action. In the wildlife tourism industry, we are in a privileged position to speak for nature. We have the responsibility to do more than profit from wildlife.

Connections made during this workshop led to two exciting projects:

Tim's Tiny Ten

Wildlife Tourism Australia member, Albert Teo from Borneo Eco Tours asked Sarah to pen a sustainable children's story about his award-winning company. The resulting middle-grade book *Tim's Tiny Ten* tells the tale of Albert's impending retirement from the

perspective of the wildlife along the Kinabatangan River in Borneo. It includes activities, information, and spotting hints for 10 little-known species. The book will be launched soon.

The Parliament of Animals

The Sunshine Coast Council engaged Sarah to develop one of her workshops as an open-source teaching unit. *The Parliament of Animals* starts with a provocation where the acting mayor needs help to decide if a proposed development should be supported. She has asked human and non-human residents to a meeting. Through five acts, students learn about the environment and civics, research a given character, create a costume to become that character, represent their character's perspective in a debate, and vote for or against the proposal. *The Parliament of Animals* package will be available at no cost to educators in mid-2026. Sarah is available to deliver it to school classes and leadership groups.

For more information on Sarah's workshops, or to buy signed copies of her books, visit www.sarahpye.com.

Telling tales: wildlife interpretation in Visitor Information Centres – a case study from Far North Queensland

Maree Treadwell Kerr

Vice-chair, Wildlife Tourism Australia (vice-chair@wildlifetourismaustralia.org.au)

Kuranda Visitor Centre, Mareeba Shire Local Tourism Organisation

Visitor Information Centres are pivotal in providing information on wildlife experiences in the Wet Tropics of Far North Queensland. Nature, particularly wildlife, is a major draw for visiting the region. While many people initially plan their holidays online, the volume of information can be overwhelming. Visitor Information Centres provide a personal experience with local knowledge.

The Kuranda Visitor Information Centre is an accredited Visitor Information Centre and networks with other accredited centres in Mareeba and the Atherton Tablelands. Each centre is volunteer-run with a paid manager. Volunteers are trained in customer service, storytelling, interpretation and specific regional knowledge covering history, culture, nature and local tourism operations and attractions. Many volunteers are accredited Ambassadors for the Wet Tropics and some are trained Wet Tropics guides. In this presentation, I highlighted three interpretive experiences provided at the Ravenshoe, Malanda and Kuranda Visitor Information Centres:

- The World Heritage listing of the Wet Tropics at the Ravenshoe Visitor Information Centre
- The tree kangaroo discovery experience at the Malanda Visitor Information Centre
- Live animal experiences at the Kuranda Visitor Information Centre

I also detailed a case study of the Kuranda Walking Tour app and its relationship with the Kuranda Visitor Information Centre. The concept was presented by Cathy Retter from Kuranda EnviroCare at a Wildlife Tourism Australia workshop on wildlife interpretation in Atherton in 2017. Workshop participants gave feedback on the nature trail, which follows the walking tracks of Kuranda. It was produced as a brochure available from the Kuranda Visitor Information Centre until the grant funding was completed. After this, the walking tracks map was printed on the back of the Kuranda Village map. However, the original concept always envisaged the brochure becoming an app.

As well as the nature trail, the QR codes interacting with the app incorporate other aspects of Kuranda, including previous history and public art trails, such as the Cassowary Art Trail, which aims to raise awareness and funds for cassowary conservation. The app highlights nature stories and videos including the story of discovery and conservation of the critically endangered Kuranda tree frog and wildlife attractions in Kuranda including the Kuranda Riverboat, Koala Gardens, Birdworld, Butterfly Sanctuary and BatReach, as well as flora and fauna that can be encountered on Kuranda walking tracks.

Visit the website at explorekuranda.stqry.app

Wildlife tourism interpretation in Asia

Presentations from day 2

Explaining the blue economy to wildlife guides and tourists in Sri Lanka

Madura Thivanka Pathirana

Edith Cowan University, Sri Lanka (t.pathirana@ecu.edu.au)

Sri Lanka, an island nation with a tourism-driven economy, relies heavily on ocean resources for its wildlife and adventure tourism, particularly in regions such as Kalpitiya, Mirissa, Pigeon Island, and Unawatuna. These coastal areas offer activities like whale watching, snorkelling, and surfing, which make significant contributions to the nation's foreign income. However, with increasing tourism pressures, there is an urgent need to adopt sustainable practices within the framework of the blue economy. This study explores the level of awareness of the blue economy among wildlife guides and tourists in these key regions and suggests a model to improve the awareness about blue economics. A qualitative research design was employed, using proportional sampling to select 40 wildlife guides and 40 tourists for interviews across these locations. The thematic analysis identified gaps in awareness, particularly among tourists, and revealed that wildlife guides are more attuned to conservation but lack formal education on the broader blue economy concept.

The research was guided by Rogers' Diffusion of Innovations Theory, which provides a conceptual framework for understanding how new ideas, such as sustainable blue economy practices, are communicated and adopted by different stakeholders. Findings from the study showed that wildlife guides are aware of the importance of conserving marine ecosystems but are often limited by a lack of access to formal training and structured support. Tourists, while generally supportive of eco-friendly practices, have little understanding of how their participation in activities such as diving or whale watching can directly contribute to blue economy initiatives.

To address these challenges, the study proposes a model for implementing blue economy-based wildlife tourism. The model includes education and training programs for wildlife guides, which focus on integrating blue economy principles into their daily

practices. In addition, it advocates for tourist awareness campaigns using multimedia to enhance understanding and engagement. Local community involvement is also a central pillar of the model, with revenue-sharing initiatives and eco-friendly tourism infrastructure developments suggested to ensure the long-term sustainability of tourism activities. Furthermore, the model proposes a feedback and monitoring mechanism where both guides and tourists can contribute to improving sustainability practices.

The Blue Economy-Based Wildlife Tourism Implementation Model integrates sustainable blue economy principles into wildlife tourism in Sri Lanka's coastal regions. It emphasises education and certification for wildlife guides, awareness campaigns for tourists, and community involvement in eco-friendly tourism infrastructure and revenue-sharing schemes. Collaboration between stakeholders, including government, policymakers, and conservation experts, ensures policy enforcement, while designated Blue Economy Tourism Zones support sustainability. The model also incorporates continuous monitoring, feedback, and adaptive management to improve practices based on environmental changes and conservation research. Overall, it aims to foster long-term sustainability, benefiting both local economies and marine ecosystems.

This research highlights the potential for the blue economy to create a more sustainable and economically viable wildlife tourism industry in Sri Lanka. By increasing awareness and implementing structured programs for both guides and tourists, the nation can secure its position as a leading eco-friendly tourist destination. The study underscores the importance of stakeholder collaboration and educational outreach in achieving sustainable tourism management that benefits both the environment and the economy.

Wildlife guiding workshops, Kinabatangan, Sabah (Borneo)

Ronda Green

Araucaria Ecotours

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I was invited twice to Sabah, north Borneo, in 2023. The first visit was to experience the hospitality and wildlife tours of several ecolodges and homestays who are members of the Kinabatangan Corridors for Life Tourism Association, to interview guides, managers and tourists, and join a meeting with the Minister for Tourism, Cultures and Environment. The second was to conduct the wildlife tourism component of a three-day workshop for guides, funded by the Ministry while professors from the University of Malaysia, Sabah, addressed other ecotourism aspects. I also stayed on for an additional day for guides who couldn't attend the formal workshop. Several times I divided them into groups for roundtable discussions on questions such as: What would you do to lower your impact on wildlife if you had a lot of money? What could you do right now with the resources that you have? What kinds of citizen science or volunteer conservation activity would you like to introduce for your tourists? I also sought their thoughts on a proposed set of wildlife viewing guidelines. They soon involved themselves in lively discussions resulting in some good, positive ideas. Every wild area of the world has its differences, so some of the ideas from the Kinabatangan Valley won't be immediately applicable to others, but a similar cluster of workshops could be valuable in any location.

The workshops were organised by Kinabatangan Corridors of Life Tourism Operator Association whose goals, as articulated on their website, are:

- Create a rainforest corridor along the Kinabatangan River connecting coastal swamps with upland rainforests and supporting people and wildlife.
- To establish a floodplain that supports a thriving and diverse economy that offers opportunity and options to the local people and to businesses.
- Implement good environmental management practices of natural capital.
- Preserve a balance of agriculture, people and nature conservation united by their shared vital resource – water.

Why a workshop for guides, as opposed to managers or lodge owners?

- Guides are the ones in contact with tourists, usually more so than their employers or the managers, so their communication skills are important, as are the restrictions they may need to explain to guests for conservation or animal welfare and human safety.
- Guides are the ones in contact with wildlife, so they need to know how best to view wildlife without having a negative impact on them, either in terms of the welfare of the individual or persistence of the species, and likelihood of continuing to be sighted by future groups.
- Guiding is far more complex than making hamburgers! Understanding and commitment are essential. I've been told by a business coach that guiding is essentially bus driving (in this case it would largely be boat travel) and that kids can be quickly trained to make MacDonal hamburgers, and guide training should be no different! Sorry mate, but nope!

Some outcomes from interviews with managers

- Much tree planting is organised and conducted by staff and tourists at lodges and elsewhere, and some homestays grow local plants from seed for restoration projects.
- Lodges buy and hire local products, including homestay products, for example knee-boots worn by visitors joining forest walks.
- Lodges hire local people whenever possible.
- Educational signage is displayed for tourists to read about the wildlife and environmentally sound practices.
- Managers encourage staff to read books and study English.
- Reporting wrongdoings of other companies is difficult (“we all know each other”).

- Supporting sustainable palm oil is better than boycotting all palm oil as many now depend on the income, and alternative crops may need additional land to be cleared, which would be even worse.
- Throughways for elephants are respected, and one lodge has a deliberate gap in the boardwalk to let them pass unimpeded.

Some outcomes from interviews with guides

- Most had good knowledge of vertebrates, some of invertebrates also.
- Some were extremely knowledgeable, some more limited, but all were able to give some good information.
- One said he saw no overcrowding by boats and considered it already well-controlled, but others disagreed.
- I had been told by guests that boar and mouse deer were hunted during the COVID-19 pandemic and this reduced their numbers, but guides said boar were not much hunted because most locals are Muslim and that the reason boar numbers plummeted was a contagious disease.

Some outcomes from interviews with tourists

Mostly very positive: wonderful area, great accommodation, friendly staff, etc.

Negatives were:

- Less animals than 10 or 20 years ago, especially bearded pig, mouse deer, snakes and raptors.
- Many complaints about litter in the river and concern about possible toxic pollution.
- No shops at lodges to buy food during day, other “comfort” aspects.
- The extent of oil palm plantations

A few problems with guiding noted while on tour

- Guides did not always back off when an approach towards an animal caused the animal to show nervousness, and sometimes guides did not back off until the animal left the site. I

saw this with egrets, water dragons, otters and other animals.

- Guides sometimes pointed lights towards nocturnal species for too long and too direct. For example, owls would turn their heads away to avoid the direct light, while tourists continued to photograph them, while others would fly away.
- Guides sometimes shone lights at close range and for too long towards sleeping diurnal birds, disturbing their sleep and sometimes causing them to blunder off into the darkness.
- Some guides allowed loud voices of tourists in boats. For example, one young girl loudly and constantly complained of boredom and wanting to go back to the lodge, which was not good for minimal impact viewing nor the enjoyment of other guests.
- Some guides took their groups closer than necessary to some animals, possibly discouraging them from using good foraging areas.
- There were some missed opportunities to tell us more about the behaviour and ecology of the animals.

Items on wishlists of some guides

- Camera traps to determine the presence of animals not often seen, and provide photos or videos of these species to share with guests.
- Night vision binoculars to have less impact than shining lights on animals.
- Electric boats for quiet approach. At least one lodge, Sukau has these. Notably four-stroke is quieter than two-stroke.
- Drones to find out what animals are in the canopy, and far from the river, and share with guests.
- Walkie-talkie to communicate with each other when something unusual is spotted.
- Observation towers for better viewing of birds, primates and other species in the canopy. At least one lodge, Abai already has a couple.

Responses of guides to the question “What would you most like your guests to understand about your local wildlife?”

- Endemism, that this is the only part of the world you can see particular species in the wild.
- Conservation status, that some species the guests are seeing are threatened with extinction.
- Conservation threats, understanding what is causing species to be threatened and what is being done about it.

Responses of guides to the topic of volunteer activities

- Some tourists are already planting trees, but collection of seeds would also be very useful.
- It would great for tourists to have an enhanced understanding of local ecology and the whole restoration process.

There was much other discussion that took place in these workshops. I ran some informal discussions with members of Kinabatangan Corridors of Life Tourism Operator Association in March 2026.

Interpreting the wild: enhancing visitor experiences in Sabah’s wildlife tourism

Albert Teo

Borneo Ecotours (albert@borneoecotours.com)

About Borneo Eco Tours

- Established since 1991
- Multi award-winning tour operator
- Ecotourism pioneer in Sabah, Borneo
- Specialising in birding, wildlife and nature tours
- Green and sustainable practices
- Showcasing variety, including adventure, culture and diving
- Over 200 staff across the organisations
- Non-profit non-government organisation arm Borneo Ecotourism Solutions and Technologies Society with a long track record of successful community, medical, environmental and conservation activities.

Definition and key principles of ecotourism

What does responsible travel to nature areas look like? It conserves the environment, sustains the well-

being of the local people and involves interpretation and education.

- Environmentally responsible travel and ecologically sustainable
- Nature-based (including culture)
- Benefits to local community
- Education and interpretation

Wildlife interpretation is the educational component of a tour, presenting accurate information in a way that enhances an understanding and appreciation of the animals and their ecosystems. Good interpretation enhances visitor experiences, supports conservation, and fosters a connection with nature.

Borneo Ecotours educates guests through training of guides, guiding on boat cruises, night walks and boardwalks, educational books, social media, special talks at Sukau Rainforest Lodge by invited experts, and talks at Sukau Rainforest Lodge on orangutan ecology and behaviour.

Developing effective interpretation design for communicating animal welfare messages to tourists in free-ranging settings in Japan: a preliminary investigation

Rie Usui¹, Remi Suga¹ and Meng Qu²

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The consideration of animal ethics has emerged as a significant issue in tourism studies on a global scale in recent years, as evidenced by the increasing number of research in this field. At the practical level, however, the pursuit of economic growth and the fulfilment of human needs frequently relegate the animal ethics aspect to a secondary concern. The previous studies found the lack of tourists' awareness on animal welfare concerns. This was found to be no exception in the context of free-ranging animal populations. Given their relatively unrestricted physical environment, tourists may overlook the welfare needs of these animals. As the nature of interactions with these animals is predominantly determined by the tourists themselves, fostering an ethical behaviour of tourists is urgently needed.

Although there is a substantial body of research on wildlife tourism interpretation, a considerable gap exists in examining the interpretation of animal ethics elements concerning free-ranging animals in Japan. Previous study found that effective interpretations between Western and non-Western countries varied, requiring tailored approaches that consider cultural differences and specific contexts.

Our study aimed to develop effective interpretation strategies to convey the importance of animal welfare to tourists in Japan, focusing on the case of free-ranging rabbit tourism. As a preliminary investigation, we presented on the interpretation design to be implemented at the case study site.

Teaching “wildlife tourism” in Japan: reflections from a new practicum

Thomas Jones

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How can higher education institutes inspire students to gain the necessary skill sets to learn about wildlife tourism and prepare for careers in related industries? Our qualitative study comprised a purposive, ethnographic sample of the 30 students enrolled in a new course co-taught by three professors for the first time in spring semester 2024 (April-July) that comprised 14 x 100 min classes. We followed a qualitative approach using inductive reasoning to reflect on the unique educational features via two field trips, broken down into twin modules around zoos and aquariums. The university's location enabled a holistic appreciation of mountainous and marine environments within the regional ecosystem. Interactions with animals were realised at the macaque feeding station and during the dolphin show, as well as browsing of fixed exhibits. In view of the strong entertainment leanings of both wildlife tourism attractions, students were encouraged to make constructive criticism, in particular proposals for

environmental education programs based on the profile and needs of the visitors. A meta-analysis of student groupwork was combined with findings from a final feedback survey in order to draw implications for future research and next year's course. Results showed that over half the students were freshmen, and only 30 percent had previous experience of a field study or practicum course. Overall feedback was extremely positive, with 29 students claiming the course had exceeded their expectations. However, various issues also emerged related to logistical problems such as public transport or cost and ethical issues linked to animal welfare. The site visits included time for first-hand observation and impromptu interviews with tourists to better understand their interests, needs, and satisfaction levels, and then propose ideas related to environmental education that could have management implications if the practicum can be continued in the future.

Interpretative signs at Iruka Jima Dolphinarium in Tsukumi City

Kurusu Isogai and Miku Higashi *online*

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In recent decades, environmental education in aquariums and zoos has increased its attraction programs to raise awareness about environmental issues and change people's behaviours through tourism attractions. While providing environmental education is recognised as one of the essential roles of captive wildlife tourism facilities such as zoos and aquariums in Japan, they often emphasise entertainment as their main priority.

The public perception of aquariums in Japan is heavily skewed towards viewing the aquariums as leisure facilities rather than educational platforms. This is partly due to the aquariums' reliance on visitors for economic sustainability. Dolphin Island, located in Tsukumi City in Ōita, Japan – the case presented – follows this characteristic by emphasizing dolphin shows and performances and lacks significant contributions to environmental education. To combat this, a three-day internship was conducted in November 2023 at Tsukumi Dolphin Island, where students proposed to enhance ecological interactions through games. Therefore, this research aims to design entertainment activities incorporating learning opportunities through games to enhance environmental awareness while maintaining tourist attractions at Tsukumi Dolphin Island.

The proposed game uses QR codes placed around the park to direct visitors to an official quiz game site managed by the park. To evaluate the effectiveness of this game in enhancing environmental education, we used a qualitative approach, conducting two semi-structured surveys with visitors. One survey explored tourist needs, while the other evaluated the proposed game from a tourist perspective.

We discovered that the prototype game demonstrated how environmental education information and quizzes could positively engage tourists, allowing them to learn and support ecological education. We interviewed 11 participants after the proposed games, and 90 percent of respondents agreed that this game could enhance environmental education for locals and tourists. Results suggest that Dolphin Island could be an appropriate location for promoting environmental education as the tourists were interested in learning and interacting with animals. In the future, there is strong potential for environmental education on Tsukumi Dolphin Island.

Proposed Japanese chapter of Wildlife Tourism Australia and other possible expansions

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²Araucaria Ecotours

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We have had a long association with academics conducting research on various aspects of Japanese wildlife tourism, and our chair has visited Japan twice to visit various wildlife tourism sites, present talks and have discussions with academic staff, students and others. There have been a number of suggestions in recent years, including a Japanese chapter or an East Asian chapter of Wildlife Tourism Australia, or Japan

starting a wildlife tourism association with a partnership or at least a memorandum of understanding with Wildlife Tourism Australia. It has also been proposed in the past that Wildlife Tourism Australia become Wildlife Tourism Australasia, thus including New Zealand and New Guinea. Since the conference, these and other options have been discussed.

An exploratory study of snake cafés in Japan: from the perspective of animal welfare

Dai Ikeya *online*

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Snake cafés, a unique and intriguing facet of Japan's tourism, have gained significant popularity. Along with other exotic animal cafés, they have become a part of everyday entertainment. In 2023, a pioneering study from Kyoto University (Sigaud *et al.* 2023) brought to light the field, uncovering various issues such as regulatory contradictions, hygiene concerns, and a lack of focus on animal welfare. However, some cafés pay their best attention to animal welfare and simultaneously provide great service.

In this study, we focused our attention on the Tokyo Snake Center, one of the most well-known ethical snake cafés. Through interviews and secondary sources, we gathered data corresponding to the Five Domains of Animal Welfare to assess the café's ethical standing. This study also led to the formulation of suggestions for other snake cafés and any stores displaying snakes, with the aim of promoting better animal welfare practices across the industry.

Our analysis unveiled a positive trend in most categories, particularly in the nutrition, health, and behaviour categories. While there are areas for improvement, particularly in the captive environment category, we can conclude that animal welfare is being managed well overall, meeting the criteria of the Five Domains of Animal Welfare. Snakes are generally well taken care of, thanks to the high level of experience and knowledge of the owners and staff. This finding should reassure all stakeholders that the current state of animal welfare in snake cafés is not dire, but it also serves as a call to action to further enhance the living conditions of these animals.

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Imparting conservation messages

Presentations from day 3

Keynote: Best practices for designing interpretive experiences

Mike Mayer and Bill Reynolds *online*

Experiential Interpretive Design (contact@eidcoaching.com)

Experiential Interpretive Design coach and co-founder, Bill Reynolds provided insights into their Visitor Experience Interpretive Planning framework for deciding how to design successful experiences for a variety of visitor types. Emphasis was put on expressing your site's sense of place and matching your site experience objectives with what your visitors' needs are in order to create enriching interactions. Bill shared a variety of lessons learned, from over 45 years of experience in planning and designing interpretive and tourism experiences. Designing engaging interpretive experiences are a direct result of using the 4H holistic person approach. This must integrate an individual's Head (conceptual), Heart (emotional), Hands (physical and whole-body involvement plus tangible mementoes), and Hunger (physiological food and beverage). Bill emphasised that we must aim for more than memorable information that just deals with the head aspect of a visitor. Even then it usually only addresses the logical right-brain and forgets the left-brain creative side.

How to think about a complete visitor journey (pre-visit, arrival, on-site visit, departure, post-visit) was introduced. The requirement for the interpreter having involvement with all stages not just the middle on-site visit was stressed as the key to a successful visitor experience. The critical smart practice of keeping the initial visitors' excitement alive, and expressing care and comfort while reducing their anxiety was discussed. Bill pointed out how the thoughtful choice of words, images, and infrastructure must be approached with design mindfulness in order to inclusively appeal to a range of visitors – either actual or desired.

The focus on being guest ready covered welcoming principles, along with properly setting the stage and setting visitor expectations. Accomplishing visitor receptiveness by best practice design was shown through softening the institutional feel and the use of humour.

Enhancing the traditional communication style of explaining and presenting as a show and tell type

approach with a share and do invitational-interaction approach, was stressed as a smart practice. Bill noted the following book as a wonderful guide that explains the principles and practices of such an approach:

Earth Education: A New Beginning by Steve Van Matre, published by the Institute for Earth Education in 1990

As people don't gravitate normally to interaction, Bill shared a few methods showing how to employ *the art of the invitation*. These food - for - thought ideas ranged from captivating letters to adventurous maps and to a magical nature nook "training station." He referenced the following book:

Earthkeepers: Four Keys for Helping Young People Live in Harmony with the Earth by Steve Van Matre and Bruce Johnson, published by the Institute for Earth Education in 1988

A checklist for designing interactions required for facilitating visitors to build an earth relationship was discussed highlighting the instilling of joy, kinship, reverence and love for our fellow earth passengers. Renewing connections with the earth needs to be founded on expanding perceptions and heightening sensory awareness. Bill pointed out that one of the best examples describing the leadership guidelines necessary to accomplish this shift in delivery was captured in the following book:

EarthWalks: An Alternative Nature Experience by Steve Van Matre and IEE Associates, published by the Institute for Earth Education in 2018.

Having successfully engaging visitor experiences is based on viewing the complete visitor journey to ensure the receptiveness necessary for rebuilding an earth relationship among visitors. The free blog at eidcoaching.com/blog is full of inspiring and insightful posts delving into various aspects of how to better choreograph the visitors' dance of experience at your site so you accomplish your desired outcomes and fulfill your mission.

Keynote: EcoTraining – the value of good wildlife interpretation and guide training

Anton Lategan *online*

Ecotraining, South Africa (antonlategan@ecotraining.co.za)

This presentation explored the importance of good wildlife interpretation, effective guide training, and EcoTraining's unique philosophy in fostering a deeper connection between people and the natural world. In today's fast-paced, materialistic society, many individuals have become disconnected from nature, leading to stress, unhappiness, and a lack of purpose. EcoTraining believes that by reconnecting with the wilderness, people can restore balance in their lives and rediscover a sense of well-being and belonging.

The presentation began by highlighting the value of good wildlife interpretation, emphasizing how well-trained guides can enrich visitor experiences by bridging the gap between humans and nature. Through thoughtful interpretation, guides not only enhance visitors' understanding of the environment but also promote conservation awareness, turning passive observers into active participants in preserving biodiversity.

The role of guide training is critical to this process. At EcoTraining, guides are trained through immersive,

sensory-based learning in wilderness environments. This hands-on approach equips them with essential knowledge of animal behaviour, ecosystems, and survival skills, as well as the ability to communicate complex ecological concepts in engaging ways.

EcoTraining's philosophy centers on empowering individuals to apply ecological understanding in all areas of life—whether in business, urban design, or personal well-being. By immersing students in nature, the organisation fosters a “wilderness renaissance”, encouraging sustainable practices and a harmonious relationship with the environment. Through these experiences, EcoTraining aims to inspire people to restore natural spaces, both globally and in their own backyards.

In conclusion, the presentation illustrated how reconnecting with nature through proper wildlife interpretation and guide training can not only benefit individuals but also contribute to a healthier planet for future generations.

Crafting inclusive interpretive experiences: engaging diverse audiences in wildlife tourism education

Pawas Chaturvedi and Akhilesh Kumar Singh

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Designing effective interpretive experiences for diverse visitors poses a unique challenge in the field of wildlife tourism education. This study explores the multifaceted approaches necessary to engage individuals across varying age groups, interest levels, cultural backgrounds, and prior knowledge. Through literature review, comparative analysis of existing interpretive programs, and case studies from various wildlife contexts, key strategies have been identified that can enhance understanding and appreciation of wildlife among visitors.

Our findings indicate that tailoring experiences requires a deep understanding of audience diversity. The study emphasises the importance of interactive and immersive storytelling techniques that resonate with audiences, as well as the use of visuals and

hands-on activities to bridge gaps in language and cultural barriers. Additionally, the role of guide training in fostering sensitivity to visitors' varying needs and preferences, reinforcing the significance of empathy and adaptability in interpretation.

This presentation aimed to provide actionable insights for wildlife interpreters and educators, equipping them with practical tools to cultivate richer, more inclusive experiences. By fostering an environment where every visitor feels valued and engaged, to enhance their connection to wildlife. The informed and environmentally conscious visitor contributes to the broader objectives of ecological education and awareness, paving the way for successful interpretive design that enriches the visitor experience.

Positive EcoTour experiences: enhancing conservation outcomes by encouraging pro-environmental behaviour

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²Committee Member, Wildlife Tourism Australia

As the Greater Brisbane region rapidly extends its urban developments, access to natural spaces risks being reduced in a process of alienation that has been coined the 'extinction of experience' (Soga and Gaston 2016). Toohey Forest has great importance in this context as a remaining natural space that encompasses diverse and important ecosystems and is home to endangered species including koalas, tusk frogs, powerful owls and glossy black cockatoos. It is also a popular location for human recreational activities such as bush walking, bike riding and bird watching.

To protect Brisbane's urban nature spaces, we need people to care about them and enact pro-environmental behaviours (Tam 2019; Sockhill *et al.* 2022). This project collected data on demographics and experiences of EcoTour participants in Toohey Forest as a first step to understanding, and then enhancing, desired behaviours through effective interpretation. Participants who consented to be contacted after the tour were sent a link to an online questionnaire which took approximately 10 minutes to complete.

The questionnaire had 36 respondents, which represents 18.5 percent of the total tour participants. The majority of respondents were female (80%), and most respondents had an undergraduate or postgraduate qualification. The age of respondents was heavily skewed towards older demographics, with 48 percent being between 55 and 64. Most respondents lived within 20 km of the Forest and for 11 percent of respondents it was their first experience in it. Almost half, 48 percent, had been there before but were not regular visitors. The top three reasons for attending the tour were to enjoy nature, connect with wildlife, and learn more about the Forest. All, except one, rated their experience

very positively with koala sightings being a highlight for many and 85 percent saying they learnt new things. The majority felt their knowledge had increased about the local biodiversity, plants and other wildlife in the forest.

The vast majority of the EcoTour participants in Toohey Forest are having a positive experience, and this bodes well for the intention to align future tours with interpretation that further encourages pro-environmental behaviours. This will need to build on the learning of new things to encourage participants to have an enhanced feeling of connectedness and desire to visit natural spaces more often. Understanding the demographics, motivations and interests of EcoTour attendees has both locally immediate and longer-term strategic benefits. The understanding we develop of who visits and why will enable the tours to evolve so that they can more effectively cater for needs and interests of the participants and encourage the types of behaviours that will help to conserve these natural areas.

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Inclusive citizen science

Vikki Schaffer

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Citizen science is recognised as supporting self-confidence, social interaction, empowerment, sense of belonging, scientific knowledge and skill development, and awareness for important issues. However, citizen science benefits are not broadly realised. Research shows citizen science participation does not reflect broader societal demographics, with limited inclusion of, and participation by, under-represented individuals/groups including people with disability. As 19.1 percent of Queensland's population, almost one in five, have a disability, designing citizen science activities for broad inclusion is a recognised need.

In response and linked to 2030 UNESCO sustainable development goals 10, 14 and 15, this project drew on universal design to investigate and facilitate inclusiveness in citizen science training for people with disability in two focal contexts: astronomy and marine science. Informed by the needs and preferences of people with disability, workshops were designed and delivered as citizen scientists training activities to raise awareness, engage, and increase participant confidence, scientific knowledge

and skill, and to encourage participation in other citizen science activities. Immersive experiences were offered using video and virtual environments to assist participants to gain skills in species identification, abundance and data collection (marine and terrestrial animals, and dark skies), and discuss important issues such as the impact of warming ocean temperatures, light pollution, and marine debris.

Taking an action research approach, the project commenced with the evaluation of existing immersive artefacts and what was needed to increase accessibility. Artefacts were shared with feedback informing workshop, artefact, and experience design. After each workshop, researchers undertook post-workshop reflection and consequently, refined the artefacts and delivery. Researchers, citizen science participants, carers/supporters, and Experts in astronomy and marine science, worked together to collectively participate to increase scientific awareness in innovative, fun, and interesting ways.

Kangaroos Alive – building the Kangaroo Walks and Talks Program

Ric Allport and Craig Thompson

Kangaroos Alive (craig.werr@gmail.com)

The kangaroo is Australia's number one icon, followed by the koala and the Sydney Opera House. Over 70 percent of overseas visitors wish to experience Australia's unique wildlife, with kangaroos and koalas by far being the most popular animals and thereby massively contributing to Australia's \$60 billion tourism industry. Yet, despite the iconic status of kangaroos there is little or no "kangaroo watching" in the wild. The Kangaroos Walks and Talks program invites communities to connect to their local mob by participating in a kangaroo watching tour.

We know from the success of 'whale watching' that people want to see Australia's charismatic megafauna. Whale watching is now a multimillion-dollar industry in Australia. This recognition of the great economic value of whales to tourism has played a significant role in the successful switch from being a whale-killing to a whale-watching nation, and the

conservation and ethical treatment of whales. We believe that the same can be achieved for kangaroos.

In collaboration with Save Kangaroos on the Mornington Peninsula and Back to Country, we developed the Kangaroo Walks and Talks program, recognising the enormous potential for kangaroo wildlife tourism. This new program offers a unique opportunity to provide visitors with a respectful, quality interpretive experience, the honest story about our national icon, their biology, ecological importance and their plight. Working with our partners Back to Country, the program teaches us that kangaroos are intelligent, sentient beings, living in family groups and have their own songlines, language, culture and dreaming.

After a highly successful pilot program in Victoria, the program is now ready to be rolled out throughout Australia using our ready-to-use toolkits.

Shark Dive and Hologram Zoo: two case studies of virtual animal encounters as possible models for sustainable wildlife tourism

Rebecca Scollen

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Observation framed by an Animal Studies perspective is employed to interpret two contemporary Australian family entertainments, Shark Dive and Hologram Zoo, centred on providing people with wild animal interactions but without real animals present. Shark Dive is a theatrical puppetry production replicating a real shark dive, and Hologram Zoo is an augmented reality experience that displays a variety of animals in 3D. The content of both is examined to understand how the animals are imagined, experienced, and given significance to

determine whether they offer viable alternatives or complementary additions to *in situ* wildlife tourism. Findings reveal both hold potential for virtual wildlife tourism. Shark Dive provides a positive representation of marine life, generating awareness about conservation and encouraging self-reflection. Hologram Zoo's depiction of wild animals is impressive, but to more closely align with contemporary wildlife tourism ideals, the experience could enhance its conservation messaging and positive human-animal interactions.

Koala Guardians: empowering tourists to protect an Australian icon

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Despite being an iconic species in Australia and the second most well-known animal in the world, koalas were listed as endangered in Queensland, NSW and the Australian Capital Territory and as vulnerable to extinction by the International Union for Conservation of Nature. There is an urgent need for innovative approaches to combat their widespread decline. Due to climate change impacts, coastal and urbanised habitats have become increasingly important to koala survival.

A citizen science project called Koala Guardians has been employed to use the accessibility of these habitats, to engage the community in effective koala guardianship. The project uses innovative solar-powered Bluetooth koala ear tags paired to a smartphone application. The tags are specially designed to be lightweight, are solar powered, and link to the individual koalas wearing them. Through the app, community volunteers can access specific koalas' profiles, which creates a special connection. This connection incentivises volunteers to report koala sightings and check for signs of diseases. Each koala, with a story and name, becomes a unique individual to volunteers. Fostering this connection

increases our ability to change behaviours to safer ones for koalas – or transform a community into Koala Guardians. Koalas are an important drawcard for international tourists yet the chance of seeing koalas in the wild is low in most parts of Australia and put at risk with koalas' further declines.

With the whole community involved, we hope koalas can be protected more efficiently and populations stabilised or increased. Healthy populations can then become attractions, where tourists also have a chance for a peek behind the scenes, at the private life of a koala. Elements of the program have been piloted, including the Bluetooth technology and activities to engage volunteers. Our next steps will focus on co-designing features of the smartphone application that further educate and incentivise users by leveraging gamification, outdoor recreation, and tourism. Social marketing research strategies will allow us to leverage co-design insights to adapt the app to make it relevant for tourists. In this presentation, we will discuss the proposed benefits of engaging tourists in conservation and share our blueprint that can be adapted to help other threatened species.

A flying-fox roost as the destination

Matthew Mo¹, Nicholas Colman², Maree Treadwell Kerr^{3,4,5} and Sera Steves³ *online*

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Flying-foxes are the world's largest bats and some of them are part of Australia's native wildlife. The flying-fox species that are readily seen in urban, suburban and rural areas on the Australian mainland are the grey-headed flying-fox, spectacled flying-fox, black flying-fox and little red flying-fox. Notably, they congregate during the day in roosts that may at times contain hundreds of thousands of individuals. While aggregations of flying-foxes can be a contentious issue for local communities when roosts are close to homes and businesses (Mo *et al.* 2023a), the sight of so many animals forming a colony in the foliage can alternatively draw wonder as a wildlife spectacle. Another intriguing fact about flying-foxes is the immense distances they travel in search of food, with individuals regularly redistributing themselves across different parts of their species' range (Welbergen *et al.* 2020). These journeys are what make flying-foxes effective long-range pollinators and seed dispersers, benefiting the genetics of numerous plant species.

While there is a lot of intrigue about flying-foxes, they do have an image problem. This largely stems from communities being affected by the noise, odour and faeces from nearby flying-fox roosts, as well as misconceptions about the risks of disease transmission and traditional prejudices towards bats. This image problem is also a conservation problem because some flying-foxes are threatened species and negative attitudes toward them result in public support for their conservation being limited. All this is in the midst of flying-foxes suffering from array of threats, such as habitat destruction, climatic events and mortalities from electrocution and entanglements on human infrastructure (Mo *et al.* 2023b).

The tourism sector has the opportunity to harness flying-foxes as part of the industry. In so doing, the tourism sector can contribute to flying-fox conservation and help address the image problem by influencing the way people, especially the next generations, think about flying-foxes (Mo *et al.* 2024). Conveniently, many flying-fox roosts occur in public spaces, some viewable from walking tracks and boardwalks and some in scenic locations like on the edge of lakes and rivers. Flying-foxes departing their

roosts *en masse* at sunset also provide an additional spectacle to experience.

For an example of flying-foxes being leveraged for tourism, Newcastle City Council is the land manager of Blackbutt Reserve, a recreational parkland with bush to explore, picnic facilities and an area of wildlife exhibits. A flying-fox roost naturally occurs in a forested section of the reserve, which the land manager has signposted as an attraction, effectively leveraged as a second arm to the curated captive wildlife maintained for visitors' experiences.

A concept currently being developed as a pilot on the Mid North Coast of New South Wales is an interactive virtual experience involving quick-response (QR) codes distributed around a flying-fox roost (Mo and Colman 2025). People passing through the site can scan the QR codes on their mobile devices, which open to relevant multimedia that engages them on ecological aspects of the site. Some of the designs being worked on include a QR code inviting people to see what animals feed in the trees around them, which links to a short video showing animals like possums and gliders foraging spliced with a concluding sequence of a flying-fox extracting nectar from flowers. This footage, highlighting the visual appeal of its facial features, rapid tongue action and how its fur becomes covered by pollen, would provide people with a thought-provoking experience with flying-foxes with minimal effort and time invested on their part.

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“Learning to give a flying-fox about bats”: exploring ways to affect positive behaviour change towards a maligned species

Tyron de Kauwe

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Flying-foxes have long-standing negative associations as being dark, mysterious, creatures of the night. They have been feared for generations through their proliferation in vampire mythology and more recently through negative media campaigns associated with health concerns and nuisance value.

Misunderstanding and media sensationalism has perpetuated inherent fear of this species, so how do we draw focus back onto their keystone pollinating services and get people to give a flying fox about them?

Sunshine Coast Council has explored inclusive, immersive, interactive and innovative ways of engaging and educating the community on the critical ecosystem services of these farmers of the forest.

The success of the program has been demonstrated environmentally, socially and educationally including transforming 'bat haters' into 'bat cheerleaders'.

The presentation covered the tools we have developed and future plans, such as:

- Bat Pod – a first of its kind educational podcast which sends students (10-15 years) on a conservation mission with a twist. A choose-your-own-adventure journey where participants tackle a challenge that Council

faces on a regular basis – trying to balance the wellbeing of community with conservation of flying fox roosts.

- Bat Map – a Queensland-first interactive and data-driven map for Council and community use which shows near-time flying fox population numbers across all current roosts, historic numbers and management actions.
- Guided roost tours – connect with the species by seeing them up close and chatting to bat ecologists
- Follow Frankie board game – a large educational board game
- Co-developed multi-media game – an educational multi-media game following the journey and threats of Frankie, the flying-fox
- Interpretive signage
- Immersive sound pods and 360° virtual roost tours – we are exploring partnerships to bring people into a roost, without having a potential impact on the species

And of course, our mascot Frankie, the flying-fox.

Interactive discussion: Interpreting roadkill

Elleke Leurs

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The island state of Tasmania in Australia is known for its diverse and abundant native wildlife, as well as the unfortunate distinction of having Australia's highest rate of wildlife fatalities caused by vehicle collisions, commonly referred to as 'roadkill'. This research explores the emotional responses of tourists to roadkill, using emotional geography as the overarching framework. A mixed-method questionnaire examined self-perceived emotions and their relationships to socio-demographic attributes. Almost all participants (97%) encountered roadkill during their stay, and 63 percent encountered live animals on or near the road. Tourists identified sadness as the most felt emotion when confronted with the consequences of wildlife-vehicle collisions. Anger and disgust were also experienced, primarily because of the unpleasant sight of roadkill and the realisation of animal suffering. Women were more negatively affected than men. Tourists who had visited to see wildlife were more affected than those who had not. We demonstrate that unplanned, sporadic, unexpected, and confronting tourism encounters detract from the tourism experience for most, especially if encounters are anticipated to be positive.

'An old man was walking along the road in the early morning. In the distance, he could see someone leaning over in the middle of the road. As he came closer, he saw that it was a young woman picking up the body of a roadkill wallaby, taking it to a safe place away from the road and checking the pouch. "Young lady, why are you dragging dead bodies off the road?"

"If I don't check them, they might have been still alive and injured, and if I do not check for a joey, the joey will die slowly. Also, other animals might get killed when they want to feed on it in the middle of the road, or an older joey may not want to leave their dead mother and will sit next to her in the middle of the road," she said.

"But young lady, do you not realise that there are at least 32 animals killed per hour all over Tasmanian roads? You cannot possibly make a difference."

The young woman listened politely, then bent down, picked up another wallaby, checked the pouch and found this scared little joey. She gently removed it from the pouch and said "It made a difference for this one."

Is interpretation effective?

Glen Hvenegaard online

University of Alberta (glen.hvenegaard@ualberta.ca)

Interpretation is regularly used in wildlife tourism settings to enhance visitor experiences, but few researchers have assessed the full suite of potential interpretation outcomes. In 2018 and 2019, at 11 provincial parks in Alberta, we surveyed 1672 camping visitors about their trips, of which 763 had attended a personal interpretation event and 909 who had not. Compared to non-attendees, attendees scored higher for satisfaction, knowledge gain, park-friendly attitudes, and positive memories, but the results were

mixed for park-friendly behaviours and connections to nature. One year later, results stayed the same for satisfaction, knowledge gain, and positive memories. Connections to nature now showed differences between the groups, but attitudes and behaviours were not different. These results demonstrate the value of interpretation and can help interpretive planners and frontline staff manage and improve target outcomes from personal interpretive programs.

Interventions in wildlife trafficking: the role of public awareness and eNose sensor development

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Treasurer, Wildlife Tourism Australia

Transnational organised crimes, driven by illicit profits, pose significant threats to the environment and ecosystems, particularly through the trafficking of wildlife and timber. These crimes are most prevalent in regions where governments lack the resources to effectively regulate natural resource exploitation. In response to deforestation, governments have adopted timber traceability systems to improve monitoring of legal compliance while addressing region-specific needs (Stäuble *et al.* 2023; Mortier *et al.* 2024; World Forest ID 2024).

Global and local initiatives emphasise the essential role of public awareness in curbing illegal wildlife and timber trade (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime 2024). This presentation will highlight key aspects in the power of informing the public about endangered species through storytelling, promoting ecotourism, debunking myths, exposing the cruelty of poaching, and raising awareness of the illegal practices involved. Additionally, updating on mobile technology platforms such as the Wildlife Reporting App and Wildlife Protect App that facilitate the reporting of wildlife crimes.

A significant enforcement challenge lies in obtaining fast and reliable methods to detect wildlife in illegal transit, and trace species' geographic origins, which can aid in distinguishing between legal and illegal wildlife. Analytical tools, such as eNose sensors, offer

non-invasive methods for detecting wildlife and timber in transit. However, the development of these sensors involves challenges in accessing wildlife and endangered species, which were explored in this presentation.

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Transforming the lives of African elephants in human care to improve welfare, conservation, education and human-wildlife coexistence

Jake Rendle-Worthington *online*

We Are All Mammals (jake@weareallmammals.org)

In 2018, I was engaged by a tourism company based in Victoria Falls, Zimbabwe, that owned 12 elephants that were used in elephant back safaris. Due to the negativity around this activity and the need to improve the lives of these elephants the owners wanted to find a new path. Release of elephants into the wild that have spent the majority of their lives in human care is seldom successful and often fatal, especially into an environment that some already believe has too many elephants. Caring for elephants well is costly and complicated requiring highly skilled staff on many different levels.

As an animal welfare specialist and conservationist, this presented many opportunities:

- to create the best possible system of cooperative care to uplift the lives of these elephants
- to utilise this situation to really engage, inform and enthuse tourists about elephants and conservation
- to develop a set of standards for the management and welfare of elephants in human care

- to engage with communities living side by side with the world's largest land mammal to do so more harmoniously
- to facilitate valuable scientific research and understand the lives of these individuals
- to educate underprivileged children about a keystone species they share the world with
- to introduce and develop adaptive management and welfare monitoring systems

This journey involved the incorporation of a United Kingdom charity, We Are All Mammals to facilitate the development of evidence-based, consensus-driven welfare standards. In doing so utilising the opportunity to lead a Zimbabwean Trust to becoming a unique elephant care and tourism organisation, conveying knowledge and core concepts of human-animal-interactions, conservation welfare and human-wildlife coexistence. Imparting conservation and welfare messages through storytelling, workshops and stakeholder engagement.

Posters

Reaching different audiences: an example of signage in a Wildlife Ecology Centre

Ronda Green

Araucaria Ecotours

Chair, Wildlife Tourism Australia (chair@wildlifetourismaustralia.org.au)

Scenic Rim Wildlife Ecology Centre

Ronda Green, BSc(Hons) PhD, Araucaria Ecotours, Running Creek

Designing for mixed audiences

The Centre is designed to showcase:

- An overview of our animals, plants and fungi
- Why the Scenic Rim has such high biodiversity
- How our geological and biological history contributed to this
- Basics of ecology, behaviour and scientific research into these
- Examples of ecology and behaviour of local wildlife
- Major conservation issues



But visitors can include people of all ages, nationalities and educational backgrounds

For the average" visitor

- Simple (but accurate) messages in large print on contrasting background
- plenty of illustrations
 - colours that attract attention
 - Meaningful, easily understood, accurate
- 3D models and actual specimens help to attract attention and bring concepts to life
- Interactive – computer programs, flip charts

Flipchart on wall. Leads to 6 pages of explanation






Lift coloured flaps to find information about extinct megafauna

For children

- Cartoons
- Puzzles
- Activities – make a bowerbird bower, colour in

4. Solve the jumbled names of creatures living in the Scenic Rim

ANTICDOBO

ARBOURKOKA

THEONEYEAR

COKEG

GRANDLYFO

GOTREFER

Guess what the photos are, then lift to find out






For researchers, students and amateur naturalists

- Folders with further information
- Books, journals, articles and detailed species lists
- Pinboards with news of recent discoveries or on-going research
- Small print insets with further information



The Cassowary Trail: interpreting wildlife through stories and art for conservation

Maree Treadwell Kerr

Mareeba Shire Local Tourism Hub

Vice-chair, Wildlife Tourism Australia (vice-chair@wildlifetourismaustralia.org.au)

The southern cassowary is an iconic threatened keystone species of Far North Queensland. It has special cultural importance to the local Aboriginal groups and is loved by locals and visitors to the region. Not all visitors are lucky enough to see a wild cassowary, but they can find the Cassowary Art Trail.

The Cassowary Art Trail was the brain-child of Jurg Jutzi, owner and manager of an art shop and gallery in Kuranda village, in collaboration with Kuranda Conservation Community Nursery. A world's first, it aims to create a better community awareness about this relict of the dinosaur age to protect and conserve the species. Local artists painted real-size cassowary statues set up as a tourism trail around Kuranda and then expanded to other places in tropical north Queensland.

Each painted cassowary has a story. This poster explores the stories behind the cassowaries, the artists and the supporters of this project, which include major tourism operators and grassroots conservation groups working together to conserve the cassowary and its habitat.

Visit the website at www.cassowarytrail.com.au

Bagarra maynggal, Mayi maynggal, Bunda:rra Maynggal
(No Rainforest, No Food, No Cassowary in the Djabugay language)

Poster shown on the next page

The Cassowary Art Trail



www.cassowarytrail.com.au
info@cassowarytrail.com.au



Kuranda is a hotspot for cassowaries. Kuranda Conservation began counting and naming cassowaries in 2010. A decade and a half later, the number of known birds around Kuranda has risen from 12 to 40. Adult males raise 2 - 6 chicks per year. Sub-adults leave the parent bird to find their own home range, when he is ready to mate and incubate a new clutch. Kuranda Conservation is researching ways to track the young to find out where they go. While there is still suitable forest habitat it is at risk due to clearing for housing which exposes the birds to dogs and roads. The conservation focus is to identify, protect and connect natural vegetation corridors to the world heritage wet tropics area to protect the cassowaries.

Our Cassowaries



Many people don't see a cassowary in the wild but their attention is caught by the painted statues. The trail website gives information on cassowaries, the trail and the artists. Originally, the trail comprised three statues in Kuranda, but has expanded to the south and north of the Wet Tropics. To further raise awareness, a giant cassowary statue will be created in Kuranda village.



One of the original cassowaries, Kuranda Village. Painted by Gemma Rovina



One of the original cassowaries, Kuranda Village. Painted by Rebecca Koller



One of the original cassowaries, Kuranda Village. Painted by George Riley

In order to raise awareness of the importance of the cassowary in our natural ecosystem, Kuranda Conservation partnered with Kuranda businessman and entrepreneur, Jurg Jutzi, to create the Cassowary Art Trail, a trail of full-sized statues of cassowaries painted by local artists. These amazing and unique art pieces form a trail to follow from town to town across the Wet Tropics.

Photos and text: Jax Bergman, (Kuranda Conservation), Jurg Jutzi (creator Cassowary Art Trail) and Maree Treadwell Kerr (Mareeba Local Tourism Organisation)

ERTH: Leading the way in storytelling for conservation

Scott Wright

ERTH Visual and Physical Incorporated (scott@erth.com.au)

Erth is a company fuelled by beautiful accidents: a team of creators, makers and performers pushing the limits of design, content and experience. Erth's puppetry-based theatrical productions and innovative community projects have challenged and inspired audiences for more than 30 years, driven by a special interest in natural history, First Nations stories and urban mythology. With a prime focus on environmental sustainability, conservation and social justice, the company's core motivation is the creation of emotionally impactful artistic work, which through connecting with audiences young and old educates, inspires, motivates and empowers people to make an impact in the world through their own actions.

Today Erth is recognised internationally as an innovator of visual theatre, and a creator of brave, unbridled work for children. Erth is a leader in the field of visual storytelling. Its work highlights the need for empathy and connection when engaging with discussions around environmental conservation, particularly with younger audiences.

The company's most recent work, *Erth's Shark Dive*, was developed for the Australian Museum to accompany the 2023 touring exhibition *Sharks*. It has also been featured at Sydney Festival and Brisbane Festival and toured through venues around Australia. The work is an interactive theatrical experience that brings audiences up close and personal with the

much-maligned predator of the sea. It is a gentle contemplation on our complicity that will challenge you to reconsider our own role in protecting these magnificent creatures.

Another key environmental work, *Arc* is a profound experience that embraces the natural world and the creatures that cohabit this place we call Earth. *Arc* presents intimate, magical encounters with rare and vulnerable species, raising important questions about our collective and individual relationship with nature and loss. Featuring a menagerie of at-risk and critically endangered animals, including a numbat, Leaderbeater's possum, southern cassowary and Sumatran pygmy rhinoceros, *Arc* revels in the fragile precious beauty of the world around us.

On our recent national tour, Erth engaged local presenters with a call to action, ensuring a lasting legacy of positive climate action and environmental activism wherever we tour, from our own green touring initiatives through to post-show fundraising in which we raised over \$10,000 in funds that directly supported a local wildlife rescuer at every stop on the tour. Erth's Artistic Director, Scott Wright showcased a range of Erth's puppets and spoke to delegates during the conference's lunch breaks.

Posters shown on the next pages

erth

is a company fuelled by beautiful accidents; a team of creators, makers and performers pushing the limits of design, content and experience. Erth's puppetry-based theatrical productions and innovative community projects have challenged and inspired audiences for thirty five years, driven by a special interest in natural history, First Nations stories and urban mythology.

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Scott Wright
Artistic Director
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Erth creates exquisite bespoke hand-crafted puppets for cultural residencies, roving performances and theatre shows that tour Australia and internationally, from the world-famous **Erth's Dinosaur Zoo** to more recent offerings **Arc** and **Erth's Shark Dive** that explore the beauty and fragility of the world around us.

The company has brought to life hundreds of exhibitions and experiences through commissions and residencies with organisations including the Smithsonian Washington DC; Auckland War Memorial Museum NZ; the Australian Museum; Melbourne Zoo; Royal Botanic Gardens, Sydney; Adelaide Zoo; Hunter Valley Gardens; Australian National Maritime Museum; Greater Sydney Parklands; ACMI: Australian Centre for Moving Image; and Museum of Tropical Queensland.

Talk with us about how we can customise a program to engage audiences at your venue, tour or experience.



"Erth's approach gives a sense of hope and makes the audience realise that these animals can be saved if we all do our part."

The Plus Ones

A place to keep the most precious of things.

A place to embrace the awe and wonder of nature.



ARC

by *erth*

"It's an invocation, especially to the children, to think about their place in the natural world; about where they fit in with these remarkable animals." Artsplorers



www.erth.com.au



"It's been such a long time since I felt 'nourished' by the magic of a live performance. My kids were in raptures the whole way through, and I wanted to express just how thankful I was that such a joyful experience was available for us to share. Parenting has been hard over the past almost 3 years. But yesterday, I felt I'd hit the jackpot!"
Audience feedback

"Each species, Arc argues, is of intrinsic value to the earth and in learning about them and understanding their wondrousness, the desire to nurture and protect them will flow from the well-springs of the heart."
South Sydney Herald



www.erth.com.au



King of Tanzania Safaris

Juma Mbelwa
King of Tanzania Safaris

SAFARI TO THE NATIONAL PARKS

Mount Kilimanjaro Climb
Beach Holiday
Cultural tourism

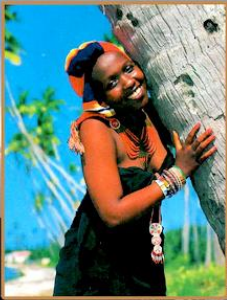


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Manyara / Serengeti / Oldivai / Ngorongoro

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With Safety and enough time while on a tree, leopards are known to remove skins of prey they have caught before eating the flesh.



delivers
d eats
centa

Mother baboons eats own placenta while clutching her newly brn baby.



Young African reallyd carrying fire wood for preparing meals

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