

Sydney – Nature & Wildlife

All the guides in this series are intended as an introduction to the topic to whet your appetite, prompt further questions and act as a starting point for further research to confirm costs, opening times and transport options etc.

Introduction

For a large city Sydney has a lot of wildlife, especially in the suburbs adjacent to the bush or national parks. For visitors with limited time the zoo or the wildlife park is the best place to see iconic Australian fauna, but for the adventurous it is possible to spot wildlife in its natural habitat if you know where to look.

Zoos and wildlife parks

Taronga Zoo is situated on the northern shore of Sydney Harbour with a direct ferry service from Circular Quay. Inclusive tickets for ferry and entrance fee should also include the aerial cableway to the top of the hill (and main entrance to the zoo).

Most coach tours heading to the **Blue Mountains** offer options to visit the **Featherdale Wildlife Park** (about 1 hour out of Sydney) this is a kids friendly park with feeding and petting of the kangaroo, koala etc.

The alternative to the above is to visit **Wildlife World** attached to the **Sydney Aquarium, Darling Harbour**, but nothing in my view equals the experience of travelling to and views from Taronga on a good day.

Manly also has a good (but older) aquarium called **Oceanworld** and would be ideal if you are staying locally. There is another wildlife park called the **Koala Sanctuary** in the Pennant Hills district that is very popular with school parties and tourist coaches, which is ok but not as expansive as the other outdoor parks.

Wildlife you find for yourself

If you are based in **Manly** you only need to walk to **Shelly Beach** to view the **Fairy Penguins** that have a small colony there. Typically they fish all-day and return at dusk. **Dolphins** find the Sydney beaches too busy, but are plentiful around **Port Stephens** which could be incorporated into a day trip to the **Hunter Valley** famous for wine tasting at the cellar door – more than fifty at the last count! **Seals** can often be seen in Sydney Harbour, particularly around the less busy bays and headlands.



There are a number of companies offering **Whale Watching** excursions to spot whales as they migrate up and down the coast (and sometimes enter the harbour), but Christmas is not peak season.

For something unusual (and free) head to the **Royal Botanical Gardens** to see the **Flying Foxes** at roost. The staff is currently trying to evict them as they are killing the trees because there are so many of them. They are very large bat like creatures with wonderful fox like faces. The Gardens are also full of bird life with great harbour views. PS there is a summer only outdoor cinema held in the grounds that features the screen rising out of the waters of the harbour with a backdrop of the Opera House and Harbour Bridge.

Ku-Ring-Gai Chase National Park

Slightly further afield is **Ku-Ring-Gai Chase National Park** a car is required, but you can get great views from **West Head** of the mighty Hawkesbury River, Pittwater and Barrenjoey Head (and lighthouse). If you are lucky you might also see the large **iguana** and **brush turkey** that frequent this spot. Also present but nocturnal are the **wallaby** (small kangaroo), **echidna**, and of course more birds. There is a park entrance fee (self-serve during the week). Apart from West Head you can also visit the marina at Akuna Bay and pleasure grounds at Bobbin Head. There are a number of excellent bush walks in the park including **aboriginal rock carvings** and more great views. This National Park is only 15km north of the harbour bridge.

Blue Mountains National Park

There are two locations I know of where **kangaroo** can be seen in the wild close to Sydney, the most accessible is in the foothills of the Blue Mountains at a camping ground known as **Euroka Clearing**.



Large tour coaches cannot access the clearing, as it is 3-4km off the sealed highway, but 'adventure tours' can as a stop on a tour of the Blue Mountains. A word of warning, though habituated to humans, they are wild and should be observed from a safe distance – i.e. don't attempt to get close enough to touch. The clearing is in the national park, so an entrance fee is payable, again self-serve during the week, but the rangers are always around keeping an eye on things.

There is a lot more to the Blue Mountains including nice old-fashioned towns, breathtaking views (the **Three Sisters**), cable car rides (**Scenic World**) and bushwalking opportunities. The drive from Sydney takes around two hours. The highway, which is the only route west for 100km north or south is not particularly inspiring and you only get glimpses of this World Heritage area so I always recommend visitors take the time to visit the **Edge Cinema** in **Katoomba** to view the movie 'The Edge' which provides a fabulous introduction to this unique part of the world, including the prehistoric **Wollemi Pine** that grew when the dinosaurs were alive and was only recently found still growing in the adjacent Wollemi National Park.

Taking a bush walk in the mountains you will encounter plenty of birds and the occasional **lyrebird** or **snake** if you tread quietly. If bushwalking always take lots of water, a map or guide as it is very easy to lose your way in the bush. PS there are no koalas in the Blue Mountains to my knowledge; the closest natural habitat is on the shores of Port Stephens.

Natural born killers

The beach is not the only place you may encounter an Australian killer, most north shore backyards have either the **redback** or **funnel web** spider lurking in the woodpile or garden and when on the beach it is not only the **shark** you need to keep an eye out for but also the **box jellyfish** or **stinger** (and further north in Queensland the lethal **irukandji jellyfish**).

Sydney Harbour National Park

And finally a little closer to Sydney around the harbour and northern suburbs there are extensive native bird populations wherever natural habitat survives. The remnant pockets of natural bush around the harbour have been preserved due to the military reserves that are now opened to public use and designated as Sydney Harbour National Park. Bird-life and views can be expected and best of all paths link to ferry wharfs and often have connecting bus services so you don't need to retrace your steps. Birds to look out for include the **kookaburra**, **sulphur crested cockatoo** and **rainbow lorikeet** (right).



Conclusion

Whether looking for kooky, cute or killer wildlife you can find it and more in and around Sydney. Enjoy!



Steve Irwin at Circular Quay

The Sea Sheppard 'Steve Irwin' is a regular visitor to Sydney, seen here berthed at the overseas passenger terminal opposite the Sydney Opera House, with a Sydney Ferries Manly Class double ended ferry approaching Circular Quay.



Late Changes:
Add Australia Reptile Park, Somersby to northern Sydney day trip.

Credits

Little Penguin. Photo: Max Herford: <http://fnpw.org.au/plants-a-wildlife/birds/little-penguin/manly-little-penguins>
Kangaroo: Screenshot from Sydney Weekender, Channel 7 TV

Version 2.0

