

Platypus

Fast Facts

The platypus uses its tail for storage of fat reserves.

Platypuses that live in colder climates are bigger than those living in warmer areas.

They have strong claws on their feet for burrowing and moving on land. Platypuses use electroreceptors on their bill to detect electrical signals given off by prey moving through the water. This echo-location allows them to 'see' while foraging for food underwater.



A little about us

The platypus is one of the most unusual creatures in the animal kingdom. When first discovered, European naturalists and scientists believed that the animal was an elaborate hoax. They thought that a trickster had sewn many different animals together as it had; a paddle-shaped tail like a beaver, a sleek, furry body like an otter, and a flat bill and webbed feet like a duck. This amazing little monotreme spends its days resting in the burrows of a riverbank, emerging after dusk in the water to feed. The platypus has fur thicker and denser than a Polar Bear – each square millimetre of platypus hide contains around 900 hairs. It also has two layers that trap air to keep the platypus dry when submerged. This gives them a silvery sheen when underwater. Platypuses are among the few venomous mammals in the world. Males have a spur on the back of their hind feet that is connected to a venom-secreting gland. More venom is secreted during mating season, leading researchers to think that the spurs and venom help males compete for mates. They are also one of the few semi-aquatic mammals and have amazing retractable webs on their feet. When they are in the water the webbing expands to act like a paddle for swimming and retracts when they are on land, making the claws more pronounced. They walk awkwardly on their knuckles to protect this incredible webbing.

What's so important about the Platypus?

The platypus is an incredibly unique and iconic Australian native species that plays an important role in the food web and ecology of Australian freshwater ecosystems. Although they are only considered near threatened, knowing how many platypuses exist in the wild is one of Australia's great mysteries. The animal is the sole living representative of its family and its unique features make it an important subject in the study of evolutionary biology. The platypus is featured on the back of the 20 cent coin and is the animal emblem of the state of New South Wales.



How can I help?

In order to help the platypus thrive in the wild there are some easy things you can do that make a big difference. Try to minimise the amount of chemical waste, pesticides and fertiliser entering creeks and rivers, minimise your water consumption and install rainwater tanks or grey water systems. Be a responsible pet owner and make sure you keep your pet inside at night and on a leash where there is wildlife. You can also plant local native plants in your backyard, balcony and courtyard and join a conservation group such as Landcare or Coastcare to help save and create animal habitat. Finally, report any sightings on PlatypusSPOT to contribute to the ongoing conservation and research.



What is Taronga doing to help the Platypus?

Taronga supports platypus conservation in collaboration with the Australian Platypus Conservancy. Some styles of yabby traps are particularly dangerous to aquatic wildlife such as the platypus. These traps result in death by drowning for many animals. Taronga supports a research program that investigates modifications to trap designs that significantly reduce platypus mortality. Taronga Conservation Society is also collaborating with the University of New South Wales to investigate the impacts of water extraction methods on platypus habitats. Taronga Western Plains Zoo's Project Platypus is a community conservation education project aimed at supporting platypus populations that live in NSW's Western region. Project Platypus is designed to raise awareness in the community to empower students to become advocates in their communities. As part of the program, students have the opportunity to plant native shrubs, conduct field surveys to assess habitat quality, and learn about the environment from local indigenous perspectives.

Does that sound like a threat?

The predominant threat to the platypus is reduction in stream and river flows due to droughts and extraction of water for agricultural, domestic, and industrial supplies. River bank erosion and stream sedimentation are also of great concern. Deteriorating water quality is adversely affecting its habitat, particularly from household chemicals, pesticides and fertilisers that enter our waterways through human activity. Accidental drowning in nets and traps set for fish and crustaceans has the potential to impact on the distribution and abundance of the platypus in all parts of its range, especially in small streams where populations may be critically small. Feral cats, foxes, dogs and dingoes also kill platypus that move on land or in shallow waters. Bank erosion and clearing has a huge impact on the habitat of the platypus, as they need substantial vegetation to support the delicate balance of their habitats.



Want to know more about this iconic Australian creature? Click onto any image of the Platypus!

Greater Bilby

Fast Facts

Australians have begun a trend of using the bilby as the symbol of Easter, replacing the rabbit which has caused so much damage to the Australian environment.

The Easter Bilby has raised further awareness of its plight in the wild as well as funds to support conservation efforts.



A little about us

Bilbies are the largest species in the bandicoot family and have beautiful fluffy, silky grey fur and a long snout with a slender tongue. They keep cool in the hot Australian summer by using their strong claws to dig cool burrows underground. These burrows generally spiral down up to 3 metres deep. Their large, hairless ears let heat escape from their bodies and they emerge to find food in the cool of the night. Due to their big ears they are sometimes called the rabbit-eared bandicoot. Their amazing sense of smell and hearing is important for finding food and detecting predators over large distances. Their ears are exceptionally maneuverable and can be rotated, flattened against their body, positioned at right angles or even folded in half. Bilbies are part of a unique group of mammals called marsupials. That means they give birth to live young at a very early stage of their development and the young develop while attached to a teat in a pouch. Bilbies are even more unusual because they have a backwards facing pouch. This is a very useful adaptation because it means that when a female is digging away soil to hunt for food or build a burrow, the soil does not fill up the pouch.

What's so important about the Greater Bilby?

Bilbies are classified as vulnerable on the IUCN Red List of threatened species and listed as a threatened species under Australian law. They're very important "ecosystem engineers" in the iconic Australian bush as they create disturbances in the form of nose pokes, scratching, shallow and deep digs, long bull-doing tracts and complex subterranean burrows. They might be small but these mammals punch above their weight, shifting up to 3.6 tonnes of soil per kilogram of body mass in a year. In doing this, they improve the soil health by turning over and mixing organic matter and bringing deep soils and their nutrients to the surface. Their diggings also trap organic matter and other materials, increasing nutrient availability for the plants. The soil in the harsh Australian bush can sometimes be very hard and dry. Bilbies can break through these hard soils, which would otherwise be impenetrable to plant seedlings. By breaking through this hard soil, water can infiltrate which increases soil moisture. These digging sites can be the only site of water infiltration in otherwise water-repellent soils. They can also reduce the amount of combustible plant material within a landscape, possibly preventing a bushfire!



How can I help?

Taronga is committed to bilby conservation, but it is you who can make the greatest difference to wildlife and habitats. There are many things you can do including being a responsible pet owner and keeping cats indoors at night as well as planting native seeds in your garden. During Easter you can even purchase chocolate bilbies from manufacturers that contribute to bilby conservation.



What is Taronga doing to help the Greater Bilby?

In October 2019, Taronga released four male and five female bilbies into a predator proof 110 hectare sanctuary at Taronga Western Plains Zoo with the goal of establishing a breeding population to support rewilding and reintroduction projects. In December 2019, Taronga released another four males and three females with a third release planned for Spring 2020. The program has had successful breeding in its first season with 19 joeys being born. Taronga looks forward to working with conservation partners to release bilbies born in the sanctuary back into the wild. Taronga has an established partnership with 'Save the Bilby Fund' to support a Population and Habitat Viability Assessment to build a science-based conservation action plan for the bilby in Queensland. The assessment will set the direction for Bilby conservation and management for the next 5-10 years and will form the basis of a new National Recovery Plan for the Greater Bilby. Taronga also partners with the Australian Wildlife Conservancy to support multiple recovery projects aimed at maintaining feral-free areas and implementing fox and feral cat controls. This partnership ensures the protection of almost 15% of the global population of bilbies and secures an important source population for reintroduction to regions where the species has become regionally extinct.

Does that sound like a threat?

Bilbies have an amazing ability to survive in a wide range of habits and were once found over 70% of the Australian mainland. They can survive anywhere from arid rocky soils with little ground cover to semi arid scrublands and woodlands. They particularly love spinifex and tussock grasslands and acacia scrublands. They are able to get most of their water requirements from food rather than from drinking, which means they can survive in habitats without access to free standing water. The main threats to their survival are loss of habitat, competition with introduced species and predation, particularly by cats, foxes and dingoes. Rabbits, cattle and other hoofed animals compete with bilbies for food and habitat, as agricultural activities now extend over most of Australia's fertile regions. Tree clearing, crop planting and domestic stock grazing are making these areas unsuitable for bilbies. Altered fire patterns have also changed the types and abundance of food plants available to bilbies and road mortalities are increasing. Today the remaining wild populations of bilbies are found in fragmented and patchy areas in the Tanami Desert of the Northern Territory, the Great Sandy Desert, the Pilbara and Kimberley regions of Western Australia and an isolated population lives in south-western Queensland. Bilbies need us to protect important remaining natural habitat and restore greater areas of land to its natural, pest-free conditions to thrive in the wild.



By clicking any image you can hop on over to Taronga's website and find out more about the Greater Bilby.

Corroboree Frog

Fast Facts

'Corroboree' is an Indigenous Australian word for a gathering or meeting where traditionally the attendees paint themselves with yellow markings similar to those of this frog.

This species has limited predators due to its toxic skin secretions.

Not only does it obtain toxins from its diet, it also produces its own poisons.

They live 1300-1760m above sea level.

During the breeding season, males compete for females via song.

The frog's toes are not webbed and they can't hop.



A little about us

Southern Corroboree Frogs are Australia's most iconic amphibian species and amongst the most visually spectacular frogs in the world. They can be readily distinguished by the bold yellow and black longitudinal stripes on their top, sides and legs. Their bellies are marbled black, white and yellow. They are between 2.5cm-3cm in length and weigh up to 3g, that's roughly the size of a paper clip! All known populations of these frogs inhabit Kosciuszko National Park. Catching a glimpse of these stunning creatures is a rare and exciting occurrence. They are largely nocturnal but are occasionally active during the day. Southern Corroboree Frogs breed in high altitude bogs and swamps. The males produce a 'squelching' mating call during summer from nests in thick vegetation, at the edges of pools and seepages. Female Southern Corroboree Frogs are attracted to these calls and lay their eggs in the nests. The eggs develop and hatch when sufficient rain falls in autumn and winter; the rain floods the nest sites and stimulates the tadpoles to hatch. Once hatched, the tadpoles move through the vegetation into a main pool where they metamorphose by the following summer.

Does that sound like a threat?

The decline of Southern Corroboree Frogs, and many other frog species throughout Australia, is due to a disease known as Chytridomycosis. This disease is a recent introduction to Australia, which is why many of Australia's frog species have limited resistance to this pathogen. The fungus attacks the skin of frogs and causes an electrolyte imbalance, resulting in a cardiac arrest. The fungus does not cause immediate death, allowing time for infected frogs to spread the disease. In order for these iconic little creatures to thrive in the wild they need an environment which is free from pests and diseases.

What's so important about the Corroboree Frog?

As well as being an iconic Australian species, Southern Corroboree Frogs are an important component of our natural heritage. They contribute to the richness of the alpine ecosystem in which they're found, which is why it is unfortunate that they are considered critically endangered. Even as tiny tadpoles they remove algae from alpine ponds, keeping the waters crystal clear and benefiting other aquatic plants and animals.

Worldwide, amphibians have declined over the past 50 years and are becoming extinct at a greater rate than birds, reptiles or mammals. Australia alone has seen the extinction of six frog species in recent decades. Luckily, Southern Corroboree Frogs have attracted significant publicity which is helping to save it from extinction. Some of the broader management actions undertaken specifically for the Corroboree Frogs (like monitoring and managing disturbance to alpine bogs by feral pigs) are benefiting other alpine species, and contributing to the overall recovery of the ecosystem.



What is Taronga doing to help the Corroboree Frog?

Taronga is heavily involved in a National Recovery Program to help save the Southern Corroboree Frog together with the NSW Department of Planning, Industry and Environment, Zoos Victoria, the Amphibian Research Centre, Tidbinbilla Nature Reserve and the University of Wollongong. Taronga has two specialised breeding facilities equipped with computerised temperature and water filtration systems. This ensures the conditions remain perfect as these frogs require very specific climatic conditions to breed and survive. Some of the captive bred frogs are re-introduced to the wild while others are kept at Taronga to develop our breeding program. This is done to guarantee we maintain a genetically diverse population for many generations to come. Taronga has successfully released hundreds of frogs and thousands of eggs to prevent the extinction of this species and increase the wild population. Maintaining a broad genetic population for the species is important as it can help capture any potential genetic adaptation to disease that may be present.

How can I help?

You can help the Southern Corroboree Frog by not disturbing or moving tadpoles or frogs from their native areas. This helps reduce the spread of disease and parasites between different habitat areas. Additionally, you can join a conservation group such as Landcare or Coastcare and help save and create precious habitat.



Click on any image on this page to jump over to Taronga's website.

Marine Turtle

Fast Facts

- The largest Leatherback Turtle recorded weighed 916kg.
- Marine turtles cannot retract their head or limbs under their shell as a land turtle can.
- Green Turtles can stay underwater for up to 5 hours!
- Leatherback Turtles can dive to more than 1,190m.
- The temperature of the nest will determine if a turtle hatchling is female or male.
- Warmer nests produce more females and cooler nests produce more males.



A little about us

Marine turtles have been living in our waters for over 100 million years meaning they were around when dinosaurs walked the earth. They have evolved some incredible adaptations that have allowed them to survive over such an impressive period of time. For a start, they can obtain fresh drinking water from the salty sea water by excreting the excess salt through a special gland in their eye. Females also use this gland to flush sand out of their eyes when laying their eggs on sandy beaches. Some turtle hatchlings have the ability to imprint the location of their nesting grounds and use the Earth's electromagnetic field to return to the same spot up to 30 years later ready to lay the next generation of turtle eggs. The marine turtle's shell is another distinctive evolutionary modification which is made up of about 50 different bones and is an adaptation of the rib cage and spine.



What is Taronga doing to help the Marine Turtles?

Whilst Taronga Zoo does not have any marine turtles permanently, we are committed to their conservation through our rescue, rehabilitation, and release programs. The Taronga Wildlife Hospital treats an average of 45 marine turtles each year that have been washed up on beaches or found floating in the ocean, unable to dive. Rehabilitating and releasing these animals is a priority of the staff at Taronga Wildlife Hospital. Turtles admitted to the Taronga Wildlife Hospital are given a full veterinary examination, radiographed, have blood tests and in many cases, spend weeks in intensive care to ensure their survival. When they have recovered enough to leave intensive care, they are moved into the rehabilitation pools. Once they are eating well, gaining weight and swimming and diving proficiently, they are released back into the wild.

In 2013 Taronga launched a satellite tracking program for marine turtles released after life-saving rehabilitation. The project focuses on tracking marine turtles with prior plastic ingestion or entanglement – the aim is to map turtle habitat use and monitor survival after rehabilitation as well as increase our understanding of their behaviour.

What's so important about Marine Turtles?

Nearly all species of marine turtles are listed on the International Union for Conservation of Nature Red List of Threatened Species which means they are recognised internationally as being at risk of extinction. Marine turtles have played a vital role in maintaining the health of the world's oceans for more than 100 million years. They support the health of seagrass beds and coral reefs, providing key habitat for other marine life, helping to balance marine food webs and facilitating nutrient cycling from water to land. Marine turtles even improve our iconic beaches by supplying a concentrated source of high-quality nutrients to their nest sites. These nutrients aid the growth of vegetation and help to stabilise important sand dunes. Additionally, they are an integral part of the traditional culture of many coastal indigenous people throughout the world.

Does that sound like a threat?

Australia has some of the largest marine turtle nesting areas in the Indo-Pacific region, including the only nesting populations of the Flatback Turtle. Many species of marine turtle love to eat jelly fish, unfortunately they often mistake people's rubbish for food, swallowing things like plastic bags, balloons, and bottle tops. This rubbish can cause internal organ damage, prevent them from feeding and eventually kill them. In order to thrive in the wild, marine turtles need a clean, safe ocean that is free from pollution, especially plastic!

How can I help?

Australians love plastic bags, using more than 10 million single-use shopping bags every day. Sadly, much of this plastic ends up in our waterways which then impacts the species that call our oceans home. Marine turtles, seabirds and marine mammals mistake it for food and can ingest, choke, starve and even be suffocated from single-use plastic bags causing millions of deaths every year. You can become an ocean defender – simply choose reusable shopping bags and keep our oceans plastic free!



Click on any image on this page to swim on over to Taronga's website.

Regent Honeyeater



Fast Facts

Regent Honeyeater eggs are speckled with small purple-red and violet-grey markings. They feed quickly and aggressively in the outer foliage then fly swiftly from tree to tree collecting nectar and catching insects in flight. They make a beautiful quiet, flute-like, metallic ringing call.

A little about us

The Regent Honeyeater is a favourite of bird watchers as it is a beautifully patterned native Australian bird. It has striking black and yellow lacy scalloping on its breast and back, with brilliant yellow patches on its wings and tail feathers that are visible during flight. It was once seen overhead in flocks of hundreds, these days the birds are elusive and their distribution is patchy. They can fly long distances to follow the flowering of favoured plant species and generally move north in autumn and winter.

During this winter period, they often exhibit an unusual behaviour where isolated individuals will associate with and then often mimic the calls of wattlebirds and friarbirds. Although many birds display the behaviour of vocal mimicry, no other bird species is known to mimic close relatives in this way.

Does that sound like a threat?

The Regent Honeyeater once occurred in congregations of 50-100 but today it is found either singly, in pairs or small groups of no more than ten and is considered critically endangered in NSW and VIC. Sadly, land clearing has reduced the abundance of the eucalypt species that the Regent Honeyeater is dependent on for nectar and stock grazing is preventing the regeneration process. In order for Regent Honeyeaters to thrive in the wild they need us to create more habitats for them to feed on. By planting the four species of eucalypts that the Regent Honeyeater feeds on, their chances of survival can be greatly increased.

What is Taronga doing to help the Regent Honeyeater?

Taronga Zoo has established a captive population of the endangered honeyeaters as part of a recovery plan. The Regent Honeyeater is on display in the Blue Mountains Bushwalk at Taronga. This population ensures that there is a genetically viable insurance group and enables the captive breeding and release of these critically endangered birds back into the wild. So far, almost 300 birds have been bred, both at Taronga Sydney and Western Plains Zoo, and released into the wild at Mt Chiltern, Victoria or Capertee Valley, NSW. Breeding between captive bred and wild birds has been recorded which is evidence of the success of this conservation program. The Regent Honeyeater recovery plan also includes the protection of woodland areas in which Regent Honeyeaters have been sighted. These areas will be protected from activities such as clearing, logging and firewood collection. Landcare organisations are revegetating areas to link remaining patches of habitat. Taronga staff and volunteers also participate in habitat restoration initiatives and have helped plant over 30,000 trees in the Capertee Valley.

What's so important about the Regent Honeyeater?

With less than 500 Regent Honeyeaters, they are considered critically endangered in Australia. It has become a 'flagship species' for conservation in the threatened box-ironbark forests of VIC and NSW. The decline of the Regent Honeyeater has had a huge impact on the greater ecosystem because these birds are major contributors to the pollination of native plant species, in particular, our iconic eucalyptus trees. This provides important food and habitat for many other native animals, including the Koala. The plight of this species in the wild has drawn attention to the importance of protecting our beautiful natural forest landscapes.



How can I help?

You can help Regent Honeyeaters by planting one of the four species of eucalypts that the Regent Honeyeater feeds on. You could also help Regent Honeyeaters and other woodland birds by protecting remnant woodland in your community which provides essential habitat for all our native animals. Leave dead and fallen timber on the ground and avoid taking trees with hollows. Ask firewood merchants where their timber comes from and avoid box iron-bark species.

Look out for Regent Honeyeaters when bushwalking. If you see a Regent Honeyeater try and take a photo or take a record of its band colours (if any) and the specific area it was spotted, then report your find to the Recovery team on 1800 621 056



For more information on Regent Honeyeaters, click any image.

Sumatran Tiger

Fast Facts

Tigers love water and are fantastic swimmers, they even have webbing between their toes.

A tiger's roar can be heard as far as 3km away and they can jump over 5m in length.

The tiger's whiskers are just a little longer than the width of its body which helps it to navigate in the dark dense undergrowth.

A tiger's hunting method is slow and patient, stalking through dense cover until close enough to spring.

A tiger's final blow is a throat bite, their prey's death caused by suffocation.

TARONGA
For the Wild



A little about us

Tigers are a symbol of all that is splendid, mystical and powerful about nature. The Sumatran Tiger has lived exclusively, for over a million years, in the once extensive humid tropical jungles of the island of Sumatra, Indonesia. Sumatran Tigers are the smallest surviving subspecies of tiger. On their coats they have thinner stripes than other species of tigers, which help them to camouflage through long grasses. Each Sumatran Tiger has a unique pattern of stripes. They have white spots behind their ears, which are known as "eye spots". These function as false eyes warning off any predators approaching from behind. Male Sumatran Tigers have particularly long fur around their faces, giving them a distinctive maned appearance.

What is Taronga doing to help the Sumatran Tiger?

Breeding programs for these big cats are now more important than ever. Taronga is very fortunate to be caring for Sumatran Tigers, as part of international conservation efforts to protect this critically endangered species. Taronga is raising the profile and importance of tigers through the Tiger Trek, our immersive Indonesian themed Sumatran Tiger Exhibit. Tiger Trek is also playing a key role in encouraging our visitors to learn more about how simple shopping choices can help to preserve tigers' precious, natural habitat. Taronga also assists with protecting Tigers on the ground by funding local Non-Governmental Organisations to undertake a variety of conservation tasks including protection through Wildlife Protection Units, installation of cameras to monitor biodiversity and populations, community engagement including education, and income diversification.



Does that sound like a threat?

The two major threats to the survival of Sumatran Tigers are habitat destruction and poaching. The rapid agricultural growth on the island of Sumatra has reduced the area of habitat available to tigers. Also, the encroachment by villages has increased the contact and conflict between tigers and humans. Habitats continue to be impacted due to conversion of forest for palm oil, coffee and rice production by illegal settlers. Sadly, tigers are illegally poached to support the trade in tiger products, including their body parts for use in traditional medicine and their pelts as trophies.

Why are Sumatran Tigers so important?

With less than 400 left in the wild, Sumatran Tigers are critically endangered. Sumatra is one of the top biodiversity hotspots in the world and being an apex predator, Sumatran Tigers are incredibly important in maintaining this balanced, healthy ecosystem. Loss of large cats, such as tigers, from their natural habitat has resulted in irreversible changes to natural ecosystems. Apex predators are at the top of the food web. Their decline may lead to an over-abundance of herbivores, which has consequences on tree regeneration and seed dispersal. Such effects impact through the food-web, causing long-term changes in natural flora and fauna, and eventually leading to species losses.

How can I help?

Visit Taronga's Tiger Trek to learn about palm oil and to send an email to a manufacturer encouraging them to use sustainable palm oil in their supply chain! You can also help to fund conservation efforts by visiting Taronga or becoming a Zoo parent for a Sumatran Tiger here: [Adopt a Sumatran Tiger](#)



Keen to learn more about this cool species? Click any image.

Asian Elephant

TARONGA
ZOO
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Fast Facts

An elephant's trunk is the most versatile appendage in the animal kingdom.

Females weigh up to 4,000kg & males up to 5,400kg.

The brain alone of an adult elephant weighs between 3.6-5.4kg.

Elephants develop six sets of molar teeth throughout their lifetime.

Elephants can communicate to each other in a low rumble that can be picked up over 9km away, and what's more, the elephant receiving the call picks it up through its feet.

A little about us

Elephants are an important cultural icon in Asia. Exceedingly adaptable in diet and behaviour, Asian Elephants can survive anywhere from grasslands to rainforests but they need to migrate across large areas to find water and suitable food at different times of the year. Such vast ranges have become rare in rapidly developing and densely populated Asia. Asian Elephants have an amazing trunk, which is a fusion of the nose and the upper lip. It contains over 40,000 muscles but no bones or cartilage and is an incredibly versatile appendage, used for breathing, eating, drinking, dust bathing, showering and as a snorkel when swimming. An elephant's trunk can pick up something as small as a peanut and as big as a tree trunk. It also assists in communication, smelling, lifting, defence and offence.



Does that sound like a threat?

A significant factor that has led to the Asian Elephants endangered status in the wild is the conversion of forests to agricultural land, leading to reduced habitat availability and fragmentation. Consequently, reduced habitat has also led to increased human/elephant conflict in regional areas and poaching remains an ongoing problem, with elephants killed for their tusks.

What is Taronga doing to help the Asian Elephant?

For the past decade, Taronga has assisted Asian government and non-governmental organisations in their efforts for Asian Elephant conservation.

Taronga has provided direct support for field conservation initiatives including Wildlife Protection Units and expertise on environmental education, wildlife health, and facility design and management of elephant populations in Indonesia, Thailand, Cambodia, Nepal and Sri Lanka. Taronga's successful breeding program, driven by experts and partner zoos, is a vital part of the international effort for this endangered species.

Why are Asian Elephants so important?

With approximately 40,000 Asian Elephants left in the wild, this species is considered endangered.

Elephants play a crucial role in keeping forests strong, resilient and diverse. They can spend up to 19 hours a day feeding and can produce about 100kg of dung per day, covering up to 125 square kilometres! When elephants eat, they create gaps in the vegetation.

These gaps allow new plants to grow and create pathways for other animals in their footprints. Their massive size enables them to reach high hanging fruit and transport seeds across vast distances. As the human population and the demand for various resources increases, forests in Sumatra are rapidly shrinking. In the past 22 years, about 12 million hectares of forest in Sumatra has been cleared, a loss of nearly 50%.



How can I help?

You can lend your eyes to the wild - download the free Wildlife Witness app and report illegal wildlife trade. You never know when you may witness wildlife crime, especially when travelling to markets and shops across South East Asia that are hotspots for wildlife trade. Share the Wildlife Witness app with your friends and family and let's put an end to illegal wildlife trade within our generation. You can also help to fund conservation efforts by visiting Taronga or becoming a Zoo parent for an Asian Elephant: [Adopt an Asian Elephant.](#)



Click any image for more information about Asian Elephants.

Pangolin

Fast Facts

Pangolins are born with all of their scales which can number up to 1000.

Pangolins mark their territory with poo & a stinky secretion from a special gland under their tail.

Baby pangolins ride on their mother's tail.

They are most active between 3am-6am.

Their tongues are longer than their body, and are sticky to scoop up ants.

Their tough, protective scales have razor sharp edges.



A little about us

Sunda Pangolins are one of the most fascinating and bizarre mammals in the world and are often referred to as a walking pine-cone, modern-day dinosaur or scaly anteater. They are "the most trafficked mammal you've never heard of" and there is a chance they could go extinct before most people even realise they exist!

Pangolins possess none of the status of better-known animals that are 'hot' on the international black market. It lacks the tiger's grace or the rhino's brute strength. Covered in tough, overlapping scales made of keratin, they love to eat ants and termites using an extraordinarily long, sticky tongue. When frightened the pangolin will curl up into a tight ball to protect its bare belly. While this defense method can be effective against predators like tigers it is not so effective against humans. Poaching for illegal wildlife trade and habitat loss has made the Sunda Pangolin species become critically endangered.

Does that sound like a threat?

1 million Pangolins have been estimated to be taken from the wild and trafficked in the last ten years, although this number may be much higher. Pangolins are believed to be the most trafficked mammal in the world. An estimated 195,000 pangolins were trafficked in 2019 alone! Sadly, Sunda Pangolins are predicted to decline by a further 80% within the next two decades unless urgent action is taken. The primary threat to the Sunda Pangolin is hunting and poaching. In parts of Asia, the flesh of pangolins is considered a delicacy, despite being made of keratin which is the same substance found in human nails and hair. Powdered pangolin scales are thought to hold high medicinal qualities. The Sunda Pangolin is also threatened by the widespread habitat loss that has occurred throughout its range.

Why are Pangolins so important?

Pangolins' insatiable appetite for insects gives them an important role in their ecosystem - pest control! Estimates indicate that one adult Pangolin can consume more than 70 million insects annually. Pangolins have special muscles that seal their nostrils and ears shut, protecting them from attacking insects. They also have special muscles in their mouths which prevent ants and termites from escaping after capture. By constructing burrows and digging to get at ants and termites, these animals also aid in soil aeration.



How can I help?

You can lend your eyes to the wild - download the free Wildlife Witness app and report illegal wildlife trade.

You never know when you may witness wildlife crime, especially when travelling to markets and shops across South East Asia that are hotspots for wildlife trade.

Share the Wildlife Witness app with your friends and family and let's put an end to illegal wildlife trade within our generation. Would you like to one day work in science or conservation to help solve global issues such as wildlife trafficking? You can start thinking about enrolling in a Taronga university course! More information is available here:

[Taronga Degree Programs](#)



What is Taronga doing to help the Pangolin?

Taronga has provided a Field Conservation Grant to the organisation Save Vietnam's Wildlife which plans to create a Pangolin Conservation Action Plan. This plan will ensure that the latest scientific research and the best management practices are brought together to achieve the best possible outcomes for the Pangolin. Save Vietnam's Wildlife (SVW) rescues several hundred critically endangered Sunda Pangolins each year, all confiscated from the illegal wildlife trade. Since 2014, it has received over 800 Pangolins. After a period of rehabilitation, including quarantine and a health check, any healthy pangolin is released into a protected area in Vietnam. Taronga's science team is undertaking a project to understand how captive bred animals and wild animals can be differentiated to assist with wildlife trafficking. You can learn more about this unique project here: [Forensic Science and Native Animal Conservation](#)

Want to know more about this cool species? Click on any image of the Pangolin.



Sun Bear

Fast Facts

Sun Bears are the only bear that does not hibernate.

They have a strong jaw for crushing and biting down on branches and coconuts.

Sun bears have a patch on their chest which looks like the rising sun, no two 'sun' markings are the same.

Don't be fooled by their 'teddy bear' looks. Sun Bears are fierce and will fight off tigers, leopards and large pythons when threatened.

They are the world's smallest bear, standing at around 1.5m high.



A little about us

Sun Bears are the smallest of all the bears weighing only 65kg. Despite their size, they are strong and fast and have a reputation for being vicious fighters when necessary. If bitten by an attacker, their loose skin allows them to turn completely around inside their skin and attack back. Their sleek, black coat is short, thick and coarse which helps prevent overheating as well as providing protection from branches and rain. Their name comes from the yellow patch on their chest which looks like a rising sun. Sun Bears are the only truly tropical bear, living in beautiful rainforests in South East Asia. They forage for food in the safety of cool nights, spending most of the day sleeping and sunbathing in their nest. They build nests in the fork of a tree by lying on their stomach and scooping in twigs and leaves.

Sun Bears are omnivorous, eating fruit, berries, grasses, insects, and even eggs and chicks found in a bird's nest. With 7.5cm long claws, they are skilled climbers. They rip bark from trees where they use their 25cm long tongue to lick up insects and wild honey from tree hollows. Food is available all year round so unlike other bears, the Sun Bear doesn't need to hibernate in winter.

Does that sound like a threat?

Extreme habitat loss and illegal wildlife trade for the pet industry and use in gourmet cuisine and traditional medicine continues to threaten the survival of bears in South East Asia. Large scale deforestation, logging and conversion of forest to agricultural land has destroyed much of the Sun Bear's habitat. The creation of logging roads has also provided convenient access for poachers. Sun Bears are often captured from the wild to be kept as pets, the mother bear being killed to obtain cubs young enough to tame. Sun Bears will also eat farmed crops such as coconuts and oil palms which leads them into conflict with the farmers. Bear Paw Soup is considered both a "tonic" food and a gourmet delicacy - consumers flaunt their wealth by buying it for themselves and their guests. Bear products and meat are served openly at restaurants throughout Asia and are available from black markets around the world. It is estimated that around 14,000 bears are caged in bile extraction facilities across Asia to meet the high demand for bear bile medicines. Many of these Sun Bears were taken from the wild as their bile is 30% more potent in ursodeoxycholic acid than the captive Sun Bears.

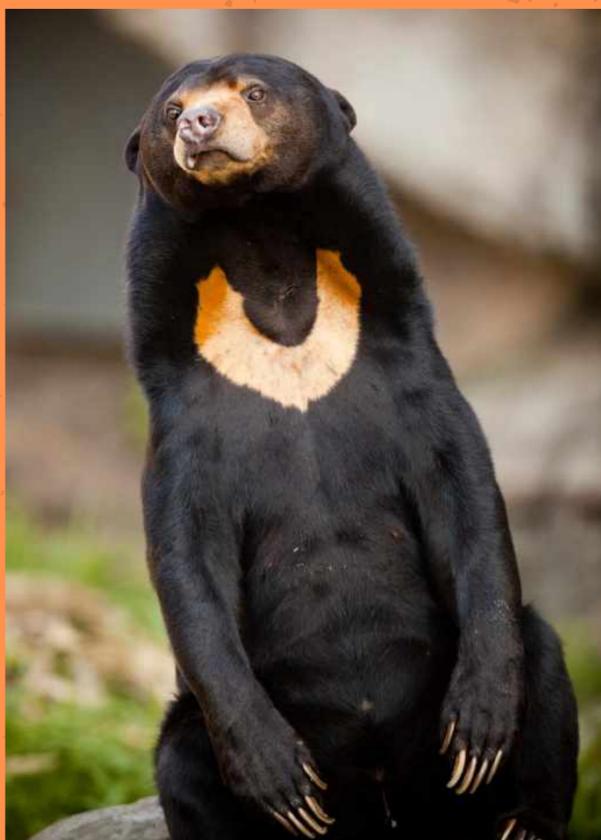
What is Taronga doing to help Sun Bears?

Taronga has supported Free the Bears in a range of projects since 2013 through an agreed partnership to work together for the conservation of Asian bears. Currently, Taronga's support is assisting with the surveillance and risk mitigation of Tuberculosis in the world's largest captive Sun Bear population. Taronga is also working with local Non-Governmental Organisations on the ground in Indonesia to help preserve habitat, tackle wildlife trafficking, protect and patrol forest and install cameras to monitor populations and biodiversity.

What's so important about the Sun Bear?

Sun Bears are important in maintaining the health of the lush rainforests of South East Asia. The holes their claws make in trees and fallen logs provide homes for other animals.

As avid fruit eaters, they are critical seed dispersers for many plants. Sun Bears are an indicator species, meaning they give us information about the environment; when Sun Bear populations are healthy it indicates that the ecosystem is also healthy and balanced. Their status is considered as vulnerable to extinction, but exact numbers are unknown.



How can I help?

You can visit Taronga and learn more about our Sun Bears, Mary and Mr Hobbs. Visiting Taronga's Tiger Trek will also tell you more about what you can do to reduce habitat destruction by choosing products that only use Sustainable Palm oil. In the future, you may be able to join Taronga on a Sumatra Eco Tour to see the Sun Bear, as well as other wildlife. These tours help to support the local economy and education local people on the importance of saving their unique wildlife from extinction. You can learn more about the Eco Tours here:

[Sumatra Eco Tour.](#)



Check out Taronga's website for more information about the Sun Bear. Just click any image!



Sumatran Rhinoceros



Fast Facts

- The rhinoceros's armour-like skin is nearly 2cm thick.
- They are also referred to as the Hairy Rhinoceros or the Asian Two-horned Rhinoceros.
- Their upper lip is hooked and prehensile.
- They eat an average of 50 kg of food every day.



A little about us

Sumatran Rhinoceros, also known as Sumatran Rhinos, are the smallest and hairiest of all the rhinoceros species. They are the closest living relative of the Woolly Rhinoceros that lived during the ice age. They love to spend their time wallowing in mud holes and licking salt from natural mineral springs and rocks. Their horn is made from a protein called keratin, the same substance as our hair and fingernails. Unfortunately, many people believe this horn can be used for medicine, causing the rhinoceros to be illegally poached. Sumatran rhinos have two horns. The front horn is larger and measures between 25-79 cm long and the second horn is smaller, generally less than 10 cm. Rhinos risk overheating under the hot tropical sun, and they lack sweat glands that would help them cool off. So whether they live out on the plains, in marshes or in dense jungles, they routinely seek out water to help them cool down.

Does that sound like a threat?

There has been a 70% decrease in Sumatran Rhinoceros over the past 20 years for a number of reasons. Habitat loss due to forest conversion for agriculture and human settlements is threatening to push the Sumatran Rhinoceros towards extinction. Habitats continue to be impacted due to conversion of forest for palm oil, coffee and rice production by illegal settlers.

Human development has divided landscapes where rhinos live, leading to small isolated pockets of populations that cannot come together to breed. Another threat comes from the species declining genetic diversity. With such a small population, breeding needs to be managed carefully. Female Sumatran Rhino's are known to have fertility issues, which further complicates breeding and population viability.

Finally, poaching can also be a threat to the Sumatran Rhinoceros. This is primarily driven by the demand for the rhinoceros' horns and other body parts for the treatment of a variety of ailments.

What's so important about the Sumatran Rhinoceros?

The Sumatran Rhino has been on earth longer than any other living mammal. However, with less than 70 individuals remaining in the wild, they are considered one of the world's most critically endangered megafauna. Protection is needed around-the-clock to allow the remaining population to be appropriately cared for. Sumatran Rhinoceros play an important role in their ecosystem; when they browse, they keep the areas trimmed, making paths and more accessible areas for smaller mammals. They also enrich the soil and help the plants by spreading seeds through their dung. Rhinoceros inhabited areas can have up to 20 times more prime eating vegetation than areas without them. This means their survival directly impacts on the survival of other plants and animals.



How can I help?

You can ensure that any products purchased containing palm oil, come from sustainable palm oil. Similarly, if you purchase timber products make sure that they have been sustainably sourced and FSC (Forest Stewardship Council) certified.

In the future, you may be able to join Taronga on a Sumatra Eco Tour to see the Sumatran Rhino, as well as other wildlife. These tours help to support the local economy and education local people on the importance of saving their unique wildlife from extinction. You can learn more about the Eco Tours here:

[Sumatra Eco Tour](#)



What is Taronga doing to help Sumatran Rhinoceros?

Taronga is a founding member of the International Rhino Foundation (IRF). In 2019, Taronga partnered with the International Rhino Foundation and Way Kambas National Park to begin a pilot restoration project, to restore habitat for Rhino and other species as well as supporting the local community. We hope to expand this project into the future. We are also a member of the global Sumatran Rhino Survival Alliance, where we provide expertise including vets, pathologists, and reproductive biologists to help the Sumatran Rhino Sanctuary.

Want to learn about the Sumatran Rhinoceros? Click any image.

