

CREATURES OF THE NIGHT

Nocturnal wildlife in the Little Desert



The Little Desert

The Little Desert region is located in western Victoria, 375 km west of Melbourne. It encompasses a National Park and the Little Desert Nature Lodge, a private bushland retreat. With searing, hot day-time temperatures, it's no wonder many of the native animals inhabiting this region are nocturnal.

Nocturnal Wildlife

Nocturnal animals are mostly active at night, avoiding the heat of the day. Water is a scarce and precious resource in the desert. A nocturnal lifestyle helps animals conserve water, which would be lost if they were active during the day. They have many adaptations to help them go about their business while the rest of us are sleeping. They are likely to have an acute sense of hearing, an excellent sense of smell and eyes adapted to see with low-light conditions.

Tips to enjoy a Night Walk

Night walks are a great way to meet some of Australia's nocturnal creatures. You will need a good torch for every person, and preferably a very bright portable spotlight. Some tips to enjoy your night walk are:

- Watch your step in the dark
- Don't point your torch at other people
- Stay together
- Keep an eye out for eye shine and activity
- The quieter you are the greater the chance of seeing some of the more shy animals

Here's some of the animals you might see on a night walk.

Brush-tailed Possum

The Brush-tailed Possum (*Trichosurus vulpecula*) is one of the most commonly seen animals when spotlighting. It is a bold creature, making itself at home in almost any habitat including camp sites and backyards. In the cover of darkness it makes its way through the Mallee, eating leaves, blossoms and fruits. It may surprise you with piercing screeches in the middle of the night to defend its territory or warn of danger. When the sun rises, Brush-tailed Possums retreat to a hollow log, branch or tree trunk to sleep.



Photo by Toby Hudson, used under CC

About Conservation Volunteers

Conservation Volunteers was founded in Australia in 1982, and expanded operations to New Zealand in 2006. Involving over 10,000 volunteers every year, Conservation Volunteers is a leader in delivery of practical conservation programs, community involvement and a range of training programs. Conservation Volunteers has offices in 30 locations around Australia and New Zealand, and offers volunteer opportunities every week of the year. Conservation Volunteers has been recognised with many significant awards, including the United Nations' Environment Program Global 500, 6 Banksia Environmental Foundation Awards, and Ecotourism Australia's Ecotourism Award 2009.

Conservation Volunteers Australia is a Registered Training Organisation. For more information, visit: www.conservationvolunteers.com.au

Grey Kangaroo

Eastern Grey Kangaroo (*Macropus giganteus*), is a marsupial mammal with powerful hind-legs. Their long muscular tail is used for balance. The fur is a light grey, darker around the face and on the tip of the tail. They are found in the semi-arid Mallee scrub of Little Desert and eat native and exotic grasses, especially the young green shoots which are high in protein. Roadsides are a great place to look for them, where the green-pick is fed by surface water running off the road. This also makes them a target for motor vehicles. Slow down when driving at night and be cautious not to hit these precious creatures.



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Sugar Glider

Sugar Gliders (*Petaurus breviceps*) feed mainly on nectar and pollen but will also eat sap, invertebrates and seeds. They live in social groups containing up to 7 adults and their young, sharing a common nest, usually in the hollow of a eucalypt tree. Some individuals may be member of more than one group. Scent marking glands are well developed, particularly in the male, and individuals are recognised by odour. They can glide up to 50 m in places with taller trees.



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Bush Stone-curlew

The Bush Stone-curlew (*Burhinus grallarius*) is a strange and fascinating bird. It is now very rare in the Little Desert region and is listed as endangered in Victoria. It has large yellow eyes which help the bird see well at night, when it is most active. During the day the bird rests amongst the fallen branches and leaves, quite often lying flat along the ground with its neck stretched out. It is almost impossible to see because its colours blend in well with the ground. At night however, the Curlews become active looking for food including insects, skinks and small animals. The curlew hunts for its prey by slowly stalking on its long legs. When it sees some food (beetles, grasshoppers etc.) it will quickly strike with its sharp beak.



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