

Royal National Park and Garawarra State Conservation Area

NEW SOUTH WALES



Within 40 kilometres of the centre of Australia's largest and most populous city, Sydney, lies a landscape of sparkling beaches, spectacular coastal cliffs, wild heathlands and windswept woodlands that host a glorious diversity of plant and animal life.

Australia's first national park, Royal National Park, together with the adjacent Garawarra State Conservation Area, has one of the richest concentrations of plant species in temperate Australia with more than 1000 species. This diverse vegetation supports a rich array of birds, reptiles and butterflies.

Royal National Park was the second national park to be established in the world, after Yellowstone in the United States. Its declaration in 1879 marked the beginning of Australia's conservation movement and of the development of Australia's national park system.

Following the gold rush of the mid-1800s Sydney expanded rapidly to become one of the world's larger cities, and demand grew for the creation of recreation areas to relieve crowded, polluted inner city areas. An area of 18 000 acres, including ocean frontage, was reserved from sale and on 26 April 1879 it was dedicated as a reserve for the use of the public as the National Park. During the 1954 visit to Australia by Queen Elizabeth II, the park was renamed Royal National Park.

Although the park was established as a recreation area it also marked a time when the Australian public began developing a greater appreciation for the natural environment. Social changes, such as improvements in working conditions and increased leisure time, better rail transport and the arrival of the motor car, enabled more people to visit the park. Royal National Park contains

many features developed for recreation, such as the boating area, causeway and picnic lawns at Audley and Lady Carrington Drive.

Greater access to, and use of, this beautiful area contributed to the emerging interest in conserving Australia's natural places. This interest was further demonstrated by an increase in nature writing and painting, especially the popular picturesque style of painting, and in the popularity of activities such as bushwalking and early nature tourism.

The emergence of the conservation movement was timely for the long term survival of the region's rainforest and wet eucalypt forests, which contain red cedar and other valuable timbers. About 75 per cent of the rainforest of the Illawarra has been cleared since European settlement; making these reserves especially important for conservation purposes.

The eastern side of Royal National Park supports heathlands rich in plants and animals. The sandstone plateau contains more than 500 species of flowering plants, including heaths, peas, wattles, orchids, grevilleas, banksias, waratahs and the spectacular Gynea lily. The cliff top dunes to the east and south of Bundeena support a wide variety of large shrub species which once covered the eastern suburbs of Sydney.

The abundant and diverse plant life supports a variety of insects, mammals (43 species), reptiles (40 species) and amphibians (30 species). The area is especially rich in birds (231 species), including many honeyeaters and a variety of rainforest birds.

National Heritage List: 15 December 2006