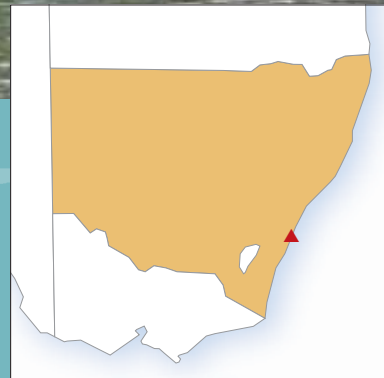


National Park



Date of inscription: 15 December 2006

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, 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, have 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 America. Its declaration in 1879 marked the beginning of Australia's conservation movement and 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. During the 1870s demand grew for the creation of open spaces and recreation areas to relieve crowded, polluted inner city areas. The New South Wales Government reserved an area (18 000 acres including an ocean frontage) from sale and on 26 April 1879 the area was dedicated as a reserve for the use of the public as the National Park. During the visit to Australia by Queen Elizabeth II in 1954, 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. The natural environment was now appreciated for its recreation potential, not just its economic value. The establishment of Royal National Park can be seen as the beginning of the Australian conservation movement.

This interest was further demonstrated by an increase in nature writing and painting, in the popularity

of activities such as bushwalking and early nature tourism, and in the popular picturesque style of landscape painting.

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. It is estimated that 75 per cent of the rainforest of the Illawarra has been cleared since European settlement. As a result, regional reserves such as Royal National Park and Garawarra State Conservation Area are especially important for conservation purposes.

The eastern side of Royal National Park is covered in heathlands rich in plants and animals. The sandstone plateau contains over 500 species of flowering plants, many of which bloom from July to November. Prominent among the wildflowers are 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 tremendous variety of insects, birds, mammals, reptiles and amphibians. The area is especially rich in birds with 231 species including many honeyeaters and a variety of rainforest birds particularly in the Garawarra State Conservation Area.

The two reserves provide a haven for reptiles and frogs, including 40 species of reptiles and 30 species of amphibians. There are at least 43 species of mammals recorded in the reserves of which 16 are bats.

Royal National Park is one of only four coastal national parks in New South Wales that protect land below high water mark and associated estuarine habitats.

South West Arm and Cabbage Tree Basin are sheltered bodies of water which support juvenile fish and invertebrates, seagrass beds and a diverse seabed fauna. The mangrove community at Cabbage Tree Basin is frequented by migratory birds.

In Australia in 2007 there are 558 national parks which form 40 per cent of our protected area system.