



FOUR SEASONS OF WILDLIFE ON KANGAROO ISLAND

Kangaroo Island's renowned wildlife experience is a rewarding treat – those that show a little patience, planning and source a little local knowledge will be justly compensated.

Animals abound from land, sea and sky, some readily observed and abundant, others exceptionally rare, existing in refuge. You can be assured that a wide array of animals can be found all year round, with many coming out to feed and play at night. Viewing in the light of day or the cover of night, the reward of watching animals in their native habitat is splendid. Take care on our roads at night as these marsupials emerge from the bushland for their most active part of their day.

The Kangaroo Island Kangaroo is the largest and most visible of the 18 species of native land mammals on the island – males can be two metres tall! The smallest is the Little Pygmy Possum weighing in at a meagre ten grams, it can be difficult to spot in the foliage of flowering gums. Koalas live in eucalypt trees along river systems, most active at night but a sharp eye can spot them high in treetops sleeping during the day. A good viewing spot is at Duck Lagoon on Cygnet River.

At the aptly named Seal Bay you can wander with a guide amongst a colony of Australian Sea Lions basking on the white sandy beach in between fishing trips out to the continental shelf. The unusual 18-month breeding cycle of Australian Sea Lions means that the presence of pups on the beach changes each year. However if you are visiting in 'pup season' you will be sure to witness commotion on the beach with their playful antics.

Two species of fur seal are dotted around the island, Long Nosed Fur Seals (New Zealand Fur Seals) and the less common Australian Fur Seals. Thousands of Long Nosed Fur Seals frolic and play under Admirals Arch in the Flinders Chase National Park all year round and you can spend hours watching them duck, dive and play from the boardwalk.

Out in the water, Bottlenose Dolphins are common all year. A resident pod cruises back and forth around Penneshaw and others patrol waters dotted around the island, sometimes in the calm waters of Emu Bay a pod will cruise the blue line delighting beach goers. Pelicans glide into bird filled coves at the Bay of Shoals and American River, both are a sea birders paradise.

In the air, Wedge-tailed Eagles are a common sight soaring in wind pockets over farmland as they scan for food. Easily identified by their diamond or 'wedge' shaped tail silhouette against the sky. Not nearly so often – but you can be lucky – you might catch a glimpse of a threatened, White-Bellied Sea-Eagle majestically gliding on wind pockets near the coast.

Autumn

Autumn invites nature lovers to Kangaroo Island and asks them to explore. The wind is low, the days are bright and clear, and winter rain has not yet set in.

Many animals are taking the chance to soak up the sun, especially the island's reptiles. One of the most spectacular is the Rosenberg's Goanna which can grow to 1.5 metres long! These large lizards are commonly spotted crossing our road network, or feeding on carrion along roadsides, so please drive carefully.

Along with 15 species of small lizards, keep an eye out for Tiger Snakes and, more rarely, Pygmy Copperheads on sunny days; both are venomous, so be sure to give them respect and space!

Cape Barren Geese prepare to nest in Native Iris tussocks or build a stick saucer nest on the ground in open grassy flats at Flinders Chase and nearby lagoons, and on the North Coast near the Wisanger salt pans.

Winter

Nature may be 'acting out' but for those with even the tiniest sense of adventure, winter is when Kangaroo Island comes into its own as a force-of-nature destination. Someone once said "There is no such thing as bad weather, just bad planning" - so rug up and head out to get amongst a winter adventure.

Kangaroo joeys are emerging from their mothers' pouches and starting to explore. Tammar Wallabies, with joeys peeking out from pouches, move to the edge of scrub around dusk to feed in open areas. Koala young are perched on their mother's back while she feeds on the tender tips of eucalyptus trees.

Winter is Echidna mating season, with animals more active during the day. The intrepid might find an Echidna train, with one female being closely pursued by up to 10 males, but when it is cold and wet, they can hunker down and hide away. Adult Rosenberg's Goannas may bask near burrows on warm winter days and Pygmy Possums head into torpor where they lower their own metabolic rate to conserve energy over the winter period. Snakes and lizards are also less active during the winter months, only emerging to catch glimpses of warming sunshine.

Winter is whale time, particularly Southern Right Whales which visit each year. Look for them close inshore along the north and south coasts where mothers may rest with young in more sheltered bays. For the devoted, other less common whale species, such as Humpbacks, Orcas, or Killer Whales, are occasionally spotted cruising the coast looking for a meal.

Young Glossy Black-cockatoos perch at the entrance to their nest hollow for some days before taking their first and final flight from the nest, heading off fully-fledged in search of sheoak (Casuarina) cones along the northern coastal areas.

Spring

In spring Kangaroo Island Kangaroo and Tammar Wallaby joeys are spending more time out of the pouch and exploring. Echidnas have young too and Pygmy Possums are coming out of winter torpor.

In September, hatchlings of Rosenberg's Goanna begin to excavate their escape tunnel from termite mounds where eggs were laid. In October and November, the orange and grey hatchlings emerge in warm sunny weather to bask and forage, returning to the safety of the nest at night.

Large and bright native Green Carpenter Bees measure in at two centimetres. In spring they are busy storing pollen and nectar in brood cells to feed their young. If you do see this rare bee, more likely out west, please let the people at the Kangaroo Island Landscape Board in Kingscote know.

Flocks of non-breeding Glossy Black-cockatoos are feeding in sheoak pockets scattered along the north coast near Penneshaw, American River and Stokes Bay. Their creaky, wheezy call might be heard on dusk as they return to roost in Sugar Gums nearby.

As the days start to lengthen and the temperature warms up you are more likely to find kangaroos and wallabies quietly grazing on grassy plateaus as dusk approaches. For those keen for a close-up wildlife encounter, find a grassy patch near by the safety of bushland, and as the sun sets watch the kangaroos and wallabies emerge to feed on juicy green tendrils of fresh grass.

Summer

During the island's warmest months, nature is an agreeable companion to a relaxing Kangaroo Island holiday.

Summer is Koala mating time, where you may hear a ruckus from the treetops as Koalas call out to each other. While young are born five weeks later, it's not for another seven months that you might catch a glimpse of a baby Koala safely perched on its mother's back where they start to spend increasing amounts of time out of the pouch.

Echidna young are being weaned at seven months old when they are already covered in spines and half-size miniatures of their mother.

Platypus are highly elusive and rarely spotted, the best chance of a fleeting glance is late Summer when water levels in creeks and pools are low.

Bottlenose Dolphins may breed year-round but usually give birth to their calves near the end of summer. With calves suckling for up to 18 months, there is every chance you will see younger dolphins amongst a pod in the bays and coves around the island year-round. Join a local tour to experience these inquisitive and playful creatures ducking and diving amongst the white water of waves, their speed and agility under the water is astounding.

Summer is breeding time for both Australian and Long-Nosed Fur Seals. At the season peak in January fierce territorial battles are common – get a close-up view from the safety of the boardwalk at Admiral's Arch to hear the roar and watch the chest clashing action!

Discover more...

Take a wildlife tour with experts who know where and when to find wildlife and how to get the best wildlife viewing experience with as little disturbance as possible.

Visit Kangaroo Island Tourism Alliance at www.tourkangarooisland.com.au to find out more or to look for a local wildlife tour host or visit National Parks at www.parks.sa.gov.au