

OZ

MAGICAL LAND OF



THERE'S NO PLACE LIKE HOME

3X1HR NATURAL HISTORY SERIES FOR **ABC, BBC, PBS** AND **SCREEN AUSTRALIA**

PRODUCED BY **NORTHERN PICTURES** AND **OXFORD SCIENTIFIC FILMS**

NARRATED BY **BARRY HUMPHRIES**

PRESS KIT

SYNOPSIS



Across Australia, as the dawn rises the marsupials go to bed – except for the ones that don't – because there are exceptions to every rule in this land of ancient wonders, big skies and jewelled seas. Magic does not have rules. It has splendid dragons, saltwater monsters and dancing spiders.

MAGICAL LAND OF OZ offers a blue chip, continent wide series ranging from the land's highest snow peaks to the depths of the frigid and wild southern seas; from its last populations of wild numbats to its largest diorama of giant cuttlefish. It's a land of diverse beauty, that delights and surprises. The series both entertains and deepens our understanding of how the natural world is made up of not just unique species, but distinct individuals, whose lives are far from predictable.

Using the latest camera technology we capture animal populations only recently discovered and behaviours not associated with species we thought we knew well. We meet animal characters so enigmatic, most Australians are unaware they share not just their island continent – but their own suburban backyards.

We reveal the challenges these animals must navigate in a land of extremes, and extreme human-induced change. To do this, we fill the screen with colour, dance, acrobatics, music, mating and murder – all performed by the animals which make Australia a truly magical land.

The stage is set for the story to begin...



MAP OF

STORIES





EPISODE ONE

OCEANS



THREE OCEANS
THOUSANDS OF ISLANDS
AND AN EXPLOSION OF LIFE

Most of Australia lies underwater. Its marine wilderness is double that of its landmass. Journeying in this episode through Australia's three surrounding oceans and their islands, we discover an explosion of life in the cold, spectacular southern sea, the sanctuary of the Pacific and the Indian Ocean with its awe-inspiring predators.

- Shark swarm – Red Bluff, WA
- Australian sea lion – Pearson Island, SA
- Cuttlefish – Spencer Gulf, SA
- Southern Right Whale – Head of the Bight, SA
- Bottlenose Dolphin – Surfing, Esperance WA
- Spider Crab – Port Phillip Bay, VIC
- Humpback whale and Migaloo, East Coast
- Gould's Petrel – Cabbage Tree Island, NSW
- Green Sea Turtle – Great Barrier Reef, QLD
- Brown boobies and frigate birds – Lacepedes, WA
- Whale Shark – Ningaloo, WA
- Tiger shark - Coral Bay, WA





EPISODE ONE

STORY BREAKDOWN

BAITBALL

We begin our journey through the three oceans which circumnavigate Australia, in the warm waters of the Indian Ocean. Only metres from the shore, tiny sardines have formed an enormous, sinuous baitball. From birds eye view, we watch board riders paddle along its edges, and a battalion of hungry dusky sharks arriving below them for a frantic, acrobatic feast.

PEARSON ISLAND

Where the Southern Ocean is calmed by the Great Australian Bight, a remote group of Islands provides a pristine breeding ground for Australia's only endemic pinniped, the endangered Australian sealion. We discover that even in an ocean as richly stocked as these waters off South Australia's coast, life can be hungry for an Australian sealion pup whose mum has left on a fishing expedition.

CUTTLEFISH

Travelling east to Spencer Gulf we discover one of the sealion's favourite foods in the midst of its spectacular annual breeding aggregation. Thousands of male giant cuttlefish are flashing their rainbow colours, expanding their tentacles and dousing each other in ink as they battle to secure mating rights over females.

SOUTHERN RIGHT WHALE

At the same time of year in the warm waters of the Great Australian Bight, southern right whales arrive from Antarctica. Their newborns, yet to grow insulating blubber, are protected here as they begin their swimming lessons. But these waters are also the whale's hotly contested breeding ground and, like the cuttlefish, males compete for dominance. Jostling their great bulk for advantage and waving four-metre-long penises, the whale's spectacular mating event is gate-crashed by a curious pod of dolphins.

SPIDER CRABS

Further east again, off the coast of Melbourne, there's a writhing mass of legs as spider crabs congregate. They form pyramids of clanking exoskeletons, providing protection in numbers as they begin to shed their outgrown shells. But spider crabs prove ruthless neighbours, cannibalising each-other mid-moult as soft body parts are exposed. And if that's not threat enough, smooth stingrays join the massacre, sucking up soft crabs like super charged vacuum cleaners.

GOULD'S PETREL

The wild can be a hard place. Just ask a Gould's Petrel chick on Cabbage Tree Island, off the coast of New South Wales. After months of feeding their offspring, its parents have abandoned the feathered fledgling and returned to sea. If the chick is to ever eat again, it must follow them. But to escape its nesting ground below the canopy of Cabbage Palms, the petrel must scale a spike covered trunk 10 metres high and launch itself off the Island. One of the toughest starts to life for a seabird.

MIGALOO

Migrating past Cabbage Tree Island on his way to the Great Barrier Reef is one of the world's most miraculous sights. Migaloo, once thought to be the only white whale in existence, has stopped to tail and fin slap before resuming his journey. Spotted migrating now for 27 years on the Humpback Highway, Migaloo is heading for his breeding grounds where he is thought to have already fathered his own white calf – MJ (Migaloo Junior).

RAINE ISLAND TURTLES

While whales use the waters off the Great Barrier Reef for their mating, birthing and courtship, the sea's ancient mariners – the green sea turtle – use its sandy Island shores for their egg laying. Having hauled her bulk to dry sand, a single female can lay over 100 eggs in a clutch. As the season hits full swing, she may be flanked by 14,000 of her sisters, digging, laying and returning to the water under the cover of darkness. Two months later, their little hatchlings will run a gauntlet of predators in a desperate bid to reach the sea.

BROWN BOOBY

While on an Island across the other side of the continent, the Lacepede Islands of north Western Australia, it is noisy, nesting brown booby birds busy with their eggs. On this largest of all the world's booby colonies, eggs are hatching and booby pairs proving that not all parents are equal – while some are gentle and attentive, others have better things to do than listen to whinging offspring. But it's at sea, feeding on a whirling baitball alongside shark and tuna, that the skill of these seabirds (hunting to feed their young), is showcased in all its acrobatic splendour.

WHALE SHARK

Further south the waters are a little more serene as we glide alongside the world's biggest fish – the famously peaceful whale shark. As scientists descend with the big fish, it drifts into a dreamlike state and a knife is gently scraped across its nose. The fish hangs in the water column as scientists relieve the creature of little parasites feeding on its skin. The unusual interaction offers the whale shark respite from a freeloader, and scientists a DNA sample to discover more about this remarkable fish, which has made Ningaloo Reef its most famous feeding ground.

TIGER SHARKS

The mood is quite different a little further south again along West Australia's coast. A whale has died at sea and its carcass provides a powerful magnet for a school of 70 tiger sharks moving through the aptly named Shark Bay. As they converge on the whale's body, the water turns into a whirlpool of shark powered frenzy – lucky tourist boats take ring side seats beside this once in a lifetime spectacle as death provides life in the Indian Ocean.

THE ABUNDANCE AND DIVERSITY OF AUSTRALIA'S OCEAN REALM PROVIDES ANOTHER OPPORTUNITY – FOR THE ISLAND NATION TO LEAD THE WORLD IN MARINE CONSERVATION, AT A TIME WHEN GLOBAL OCEANS ARE UNDER THREAT.

AUSTRALIAN WATERS NOT ONLY NURTURE UNIQUE SPECIES FOUND NOWHERE ELSE, BUT ALSO PROVIDE PROTECTION TO SPECIES FROM DISTANT SHORES.



EPISODE TWO

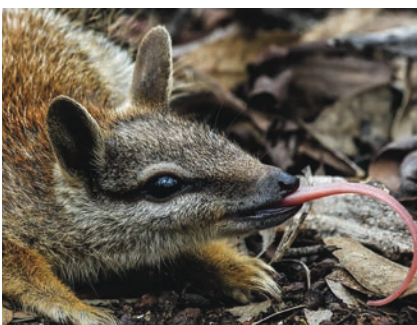
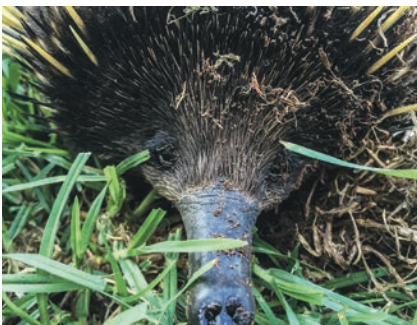
LAND





SURVIVING AND THRIVING IN THE CONTINENT'S INTERIOR

Australia is one of the most biodiverse of all landmasses – its landscapes spectacularly varied. The Australian 'bush' is a generic term but its landscape is anything but. In equal amounts it is lush and wet, arid and sharp, a perfumed expanse of dappled light. We move from the continent's snow-covered peaks to its ancient rainforests and tropical savannas, discovering how it is animals have learnt to thrive across the continent's harsh and beautiful extremes.



- Monotremes – echidna/platypus - Snowy Mountains, NSW
- Eastern Grey Kangaroo – Tidbinbilla, ACT
- Wedgetail Eagle – Cooma, NSW
- Numbat – Dryandra Woodland, WA
- Rainforest – Wet Tropics, QLD
- Tree Kangaroo – Daintree, QLD
- Parrots – Cape York, QLD
- Saltwater Crocodile – Adelaide River, NT
- Diving tarantula – Maningrada in Arnhem Land, NT
- Black kite – Weemol, NT



EPISODE TWO

STORY BREAKDOWN

ECHIDNA

On Australia's highest peak, winter has engulfed all sign of life. Most animals have retreated below the snowline to escape the deep freeze. But what is arguably Australia's toughest little mammal, the echidna, has stayed put. It gives away its hibernating as the snow turns to river and waddles with purpose down the mountain. Neither snow nor fast flowing river will halt the march of this spikey monotreme marvel.

EASTERN GREY KANGAROO

On the plains below the Snowy Mountains, is another mammalian success story. Eastern Grey Kangaroos are one of the few native Australian animals to benefit from the clearing of Australia's forests for farming. But as we join a doe and her joey, we learn that kangaroo society is a little more complicated than it appears, and that the grandstanding of the males isn't nearly as impressive as the quiet power of the female.

WEDGE TAILED EAGLE

Australia's grand hunter of the skies, the wedge tailed eagle, was almost hunted to extinction. Its great body strung up on fences in a perverse gesture of human prowess. Now protected, the glorious bird of prey is making a comeback. In this twist on an Aesop's Fable, we go flying, and hunting, with the eagle.

NUMBAT

Once a good contributor to the eagle's diet, the numbat – one of Australia's few truly diurnal marsupials – is now reduced to a remnant population in Western Australia. We follow the fortunes of four precious pups, making their first explorations of the world beyond their burrow. With only 1000 left in the wild, each one of these pups is critical to the species' survival.

TREE KANGAROO

While in the living remnants of ancient Gondwana rainforest that make up Australia's wet tropics, there is a kangaroo bouncing skyward. The young Lumholtz tree kangaroo, just beginning to establish his territory, crosses the canopy to visit his Mum. But it's no welcome. He has been usurped!

PARROT WARS

While Australia's rainforests only cover 2% of her landmass, they hold 80% of her biodiversity so while life is rich, there is plenty of competition for resources. Tree hollows are particularly hot property and a nesting eclectus parrot, who has guarded a prize hollow well before she was ready to lay, is monstered by the neighbours nobody wants – loud, aggressive and determined sulphur crested cockatoos.



PALM COCKATOO

Another hollow has been claimed by the largest and most intelligent of all Australia's parrots – the splendid palm cockatoo. This elusive, highly sensitive bird uses its brain power to do something no other animal, apart from humans, is known to do. Using instruments fashioned from its forest, the 'Palmy' very deliberately makes music.

SALTWATER CROCODILE

Moving into Australia's humid top end, the saltwater crocodile rules the river systems. Like the eagle, it too was almost hunted to extinction and has, since protections were enshrined in law, slowly rebuilt its population. Now, humans and crocs have found a mutually beneficial way to co-exist – with crocs showing off their hunting prowess to the delight of tourists. But the croc isn't completely safe from callous hunters... every day they are relentlessly attacked by one of the top end's most despised and abundant blood suckers.

TARANTULA

As the top end sees saws between the wet and dry seasons, birds migrate to escape its extremes. But without the convenience of wings, many must endure the region's floodplain in its variations. Which is how the children of Maningrida came to find a web of life beneath their feet – discovering the world's highest concentration of tarantulas as they studied their local floodplain. But what they found is no ordinary tarantula – like an astronaut in space, this one creates her own atmosphere. She is the world's only known diving tarantula.

FIREBIRD

Immediately south of Maningrida, on the savannahs of Arnhem Land, another creature we thought we understood, defies convention. The black kite is the world's most common bird of prey, found on all continents except Antarctica, but it is only Australia's black kites which have been witnessed 'playing with fire'. With the traditional owners guiding us, we follow the black kite through fire, and learn why it has earned a special place in their hearts and the moniker 'Firebird'.

AUSTRALIA HAS LOST ITS TOP CARNIVORES.

THE TASMANIAN TIGER, WAS HUNTED INTO
EXTINCTION BY THE 1930S.

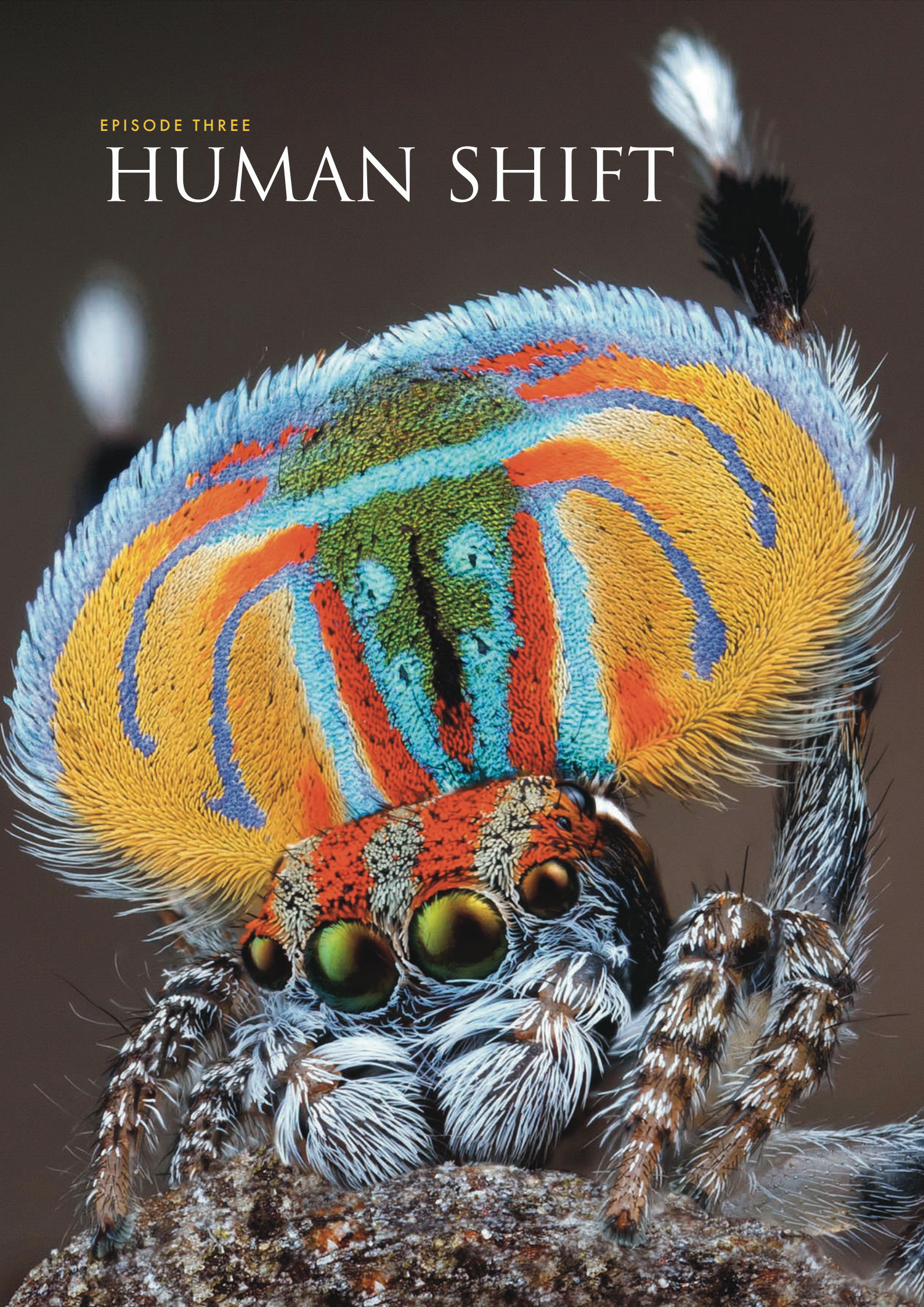
AND THE GRAND HUNTER FROM THE SKIES –
AUSTRALIA'S OWN EAGLE – HAS COME PERILOUSLY
CLOSE TO BEING LOST.



IN THE MID 1900S THERE WAS A BOUNTY ON ITS
HEAD – WITH UP 30,000 EAGLES KILLED IN A SINGLE
YEAR, THEIR GREAT BODIES STRUNG UP ON FENCES.

EPISEDE THREE

HUMAN SHIFT





AS HUMANS IMPACT THE LANDSCAPE, ANIMALS
MAKE THEIR OWN DRAMATIC ADJUSTMENTS

Despite Australia's relatively small population, the force of human induced change has been rapid and dramatic. And so, animal populations have reacted in rapid and dramatic ways. Researchers have found hectare for hectare, urban areas contain more threatened species than non-urban areas. It appears cities are in fact the hotspots for Australia's unique fauna. And wild lives intersect with human lives in surprising ways. We meet Australia's contemporary natural history success stories, and those being left behind as the continent rushes through the 21st century.

- Brushtail Possums – Melbourne, VIC
- Peacock Spiders – general suburbs
- Eastern Water Dragons – Brisbane, QLD
- Red fox – Sydney beaches, NSW
- Dingoes – Great Sandy Desert, WA
- Inland Fish – Great Northern Highway, WA
- Koalas – Gunnedah, NSW
- Little Penguins – Phillip Island, VIC





EPISODE THREE

STORY BREAKDOWN

POSSUMS

In the heart of Melbourne is a tree and in the heart of that tree are so many brushtail possums that it screams with territorial disputes. For a young male possum, ejected by his mother and searching for somewhere safe to sleep – the park's few trees offers no sanctuary. So he takes a huge risk, leaving the park in search of a home. And unlike most young possums leaving their home range – this little adventurer gets lucky.

PEACOCK SPIDERS

Australia's urban landscape is home to many more native species than we realise. And some of them aren't just thriving, they're performing glorious dances just below our toes. These tiny peacock spiders have long gone undetected but, with glorious magnification we reveal an incredible courting ritual and costumes rivalling anything on display at Mardi Gras.

EASTERN WATER DRAGON

The centre of Brisbane is graced by several lush urban parklands, providing an oasis for city workers and a home for expanding populations of eastern water dragons. But while these parks offer plenty of food for dragons, the animals are imprisoned by the freeways which run along its boundaries. These dragon populations have gone into a process of evolutionary overdrive as they adapt to the new food, predators, surfaces and population dynamics of their modern man-made ecosystems.

RED FOX

Of all Australia's urban animals, it is a non-native which is, arguably, the most successful. Since the tragic introduction of these animals from England in the mid-1800s, they have spread like fire across Australia's diverse landscapes. In the Eastern suburbs of Sydney they own the night. As soon as human numbers dwindle the foxes come out to play...



DINGO

Australia's own native dog has not conquered like the fox. A victim of mass slaughter across Australia, the dingo is now reduced to a small number of purebred populations. One of these have found a home on the edge of an abyss... a gold mine in the Great Sandy Desert. Joining a distinct family of dingoes we discover complex social bonds and a remarkable ability to survive against the odds.

FISH ROAD

The roads leading in and out of West Australia's remote mining tenures are themselves the unlikely locations for extraordinary natural events. Like fish which appear to fall from the sky. As flash floods inundate the plains, sparkling grunters appear – making a perilous attempt to cross the road.

KOALA

For most of Australia's mammals, an increasingly urbanised Australia, whose land clearing rates are among the highest in the world, the future is very uncertain. The icon of Australia's extraordinary marsupials, the koala, is disappearing. By 2050 NSW may have lost every one of these eucalypt specialists. One farmer is doing everything he can to understand why their numbers are declining so rapidly, and what he might be able to do – on his land at least – to save them.

LITTLE PENGUIN

For Australia to overturn existing predictions of impending animal extinctions, and to scale back on disastrously unsustainable habitat destruction, attitudes to the environment must change. Policies must take ecosystems from expendable to secure. In very isolated cases, such a thing has already been achieved in Australia. The little penguin population of Philip Island has been saved after locals gave up their holiday houses and the land was restored as a predator free breeding colony. There is time to give other animals a fighting chance. Not much time. But enough...



This is a series about the only country in the World spanning an entire continent.

2.97 million square miles (almost as large as that of the United States of America and 32 times larger than the United Kingdom)

It is one of the **most biologically diverse countries on the planet**: home to more than one million species of plants and animals, **80% of animals here are found nowhere else in the world.**

It is also home to just 24 million people. The country's vast openness means it has the **lowest population density in the world** - only two people per square kilometre.

Aboriginal people have lived here for more than 60,000 years. In fact, **Australia's indigenous people have the longest continuous cultural history of any group of people on Earth.**

The mammals come from the oldest known groups alive today... platypus, echidnas, kangaroos and koalas, all occur nowhere else.

The majority of the world's birds have Australian ancestors. No other continent has been as important for bird evolution. In fact, **Australia is where bird song began.**

Australia's marine territory is double that of its landmass. It is the **only country in the world surrounded by three different oceans**: the Pacific, the Indian and the Southern.

30 native mammals have become extinct since European settlement just over 200 years ago. To put this in a global context, 1 out of 3 mammal extinctions in the last 400 years have occurred in Australia.

CHALLENGES FACING

AUSTRALIA'S NATURAL WORLD



CLIMATE

Australian average temperatures have increased by 1°C since 1910.

In the past decade, record high water temperatures in our oceans have caused widespread coral bleaching, habitat destruction and species mortality.



EXTINCTION RATES

For all its natural beauty, the sad reality is that Australia leads the world on extinction. Australia has the worst mammal extinction rate in the world.

The primary factors causing this loss of wildlife include:

- **Feral cats and foxes.** For example, feral cats kill an estimated 75 million native animals every night across Australia
- **Feral herbivores** including pigs, goats, rabbits, donkeys, horses, camels, buffalo and feral cattle
- **Changes in fire regimes,** especially an increase in the extent and severity of wildfires
- **Clearing native vegetation**
- **Weeds**



DEFORESTATION

Australia has one of the highest rates of land clearing in the world.

More than 40% of the country's forests and woodlands are estimated to have been cleared since European colonisation.

There is so much forest and bushland destruction happening that Eastern Australia is now in the top 10 'deforestation fronts' in the World.

In recent years, land has been cleared at a rate equivalent to 1,000 rugby fields a day in the state of Queensland.

More than one million hectares of native bush and forest has been cleared in Queensland over the last four years. More than a third of that land had never been cleared before.



THE CONSERVATION IMPERATIVE

Australia is one of just five countries that holds 70% of the world's remaining untouched wilderness areas. U.S., Brazil, Russia, Canada and Australia hold the vast majority of the world's remaining wilderness.

Australia is the only megadiverse nation on Earth that is a developed nation with a low population density - the only country in the world with a high level of economic ability for biodiversity protection, without the population pressures that could compete with biodiversity protection for land use.

Australia provides our best chance of maintaining wilderness on Earth, and with the face of the great changes sweeping the world, now is the time to make this commitment.



AUSTRALIA IS AMONG THE SEVEN NATIONS RESPONSIBLE FOR MORE THAN HALF OF THE WORLD'S BIODIVERSITY LOSS IN THE LAST FEW DECADES. WHICH LEAVES US WITH A CHOICE. CARRY ON AS WE ARE UNTIL THERE'S NO TURNING BACK. OR, START DESIGNING A NEW FUTURE WHICH PLACES ANIMALS AND ECOSYSTEMS IN THE PICTURE.

MAKING MAGIC



NARRATOR

Narrator, **BARRY HUMPHRIES**, hasn't had much experience with wildlife in his illustrious career... although he has worked with a cinematographer whose nipple was bitten off by a koala who mistook it for a gumnut. He has had more experience than anyone else on the planet, as Australia's most celebrated satirist. As our most ubiquitous commentator of the Australian character – he's used his wit and observation of detail to create a troupe of internationally recognised voices from the acerbic Dame Edna to the shameless Les Patterson. In adding his voice to *The Magical Land of Oz*, Barry Humphries brings humour, poignancy and awe to his own magical land.



SERIES DIRECTOR

TOSCA LOOBY has had a long and glamorous career as creator of natural history and factual television for over two decades. Having gained her Masters in Journalism in London, she gave up her desk for a more fragrant office in her Australian homeland. She has trained flies to juggle, crawled through dingo dens, been defecated on by eagles and made timelapse of rotting corpses. As Series Director of *Magical Land of Oz* she has returned to the mud, the waiting, the failed attempts and even occasional successes, that come with creating blue chip natural history television in some of Australia's most remote and beautiful locations. It's been a challenging but magical ride.



CINEMATOGRAPHERS

Magical Land of Oz was made by a battalion of passionate cinematographers, filming across the continent for 14 months. In the West, **PAUL BELL** covered the Kimberley Coast and captured amazing flood events with blooms of fish in the desert. Underwater, we had **JON SHAW** covering stories for the ocean episode involving whale sharks, spider crabs and cuttlefish courtship. Wildlife legend Wade Fairley chased dragons, sea lions and numbats for us. Planet Earth cameraman, **MARK PAYNE GILL**, did most of our bird stories and had to live in a telly tubby house on Cabbage patch island to capture the never before filmed Gould's petrel. **RALPH BOWER**, famous for his work on Meerkat Manor, applied his natural history nous to foxes, jumping crocs and koalas. He also got to stay in the telly tubby house. Attenborough's favourite macro-cameraman, **PETER NEARHOS**, filmed life in Australia's undergrowth. He trained young upcoming macro camera-woman, **ROMILLY SPIERS**, who joined the crew for specialist macro sequences. And drone pilots **DAN PROUD**, **SEAN SCOTT** and **JAIMEN HUDSON** captured extraordinary wildlife events from the air. But the most miles covered on the series was by **BEN CUNNINGHAM**, who worked across the series from beginning to end, often working long night shifts as is the way of Australia's mainly nocturnal wildlife. **ADELE BENNET** joined the crew as camera intern and underwater second camera.

EXECUTIVE PRODUCER

22 years ago, **KARINA HOLDEN** was a wildlife biologist pumping crocodile stomachs and doing testicular biopsies on snakes. She made the switch to film making when she joined the ABC Natural History Unit in 1995 as a researcher, working her way up the food chain to work on blue chip wildlife series and international co-productions. Karina is now Head of Factual at Northern Pictures, overseeing a slate of natural history and social issue films. She was able to get hands on again with crocodiles, tarantulas, boobies and wedgies in the Magical Land of Oz, joining in as a field director when the occasion called for more hands on deck.



MAKING MAGIC

NORTHERN PICTURES deliver large-scale factual television to the Australian and international market, with a focus on wildlife and social documentaries. It is known for innovation, priding itself on documentary series underpinned by journalistic values, unique access and cinematic sensibilities. The production company has also become a leader in the field of natural history, delivering international series including *Kakadu* (ABC, Discovery), *Great White Matrix* (Discovery), *Secret Life of Pearls* (National Geographic), *Saltwater Heroes* (Discovery), *Life on the Reef* (ABC, PBS, Arte), *Outback* (PBS, 9) and *Blue* (Transmission Films).

OXFORD SCIENTIFIC FILMS is a BAFTA and EMMY award-winning producer of innovative specialist factual. Its producers were credited with "changing the landscape of natural history filmmaking" with the cult hit animal soap opera *Meerkat Manor*. Other notable credits include *Secret Life of Dogs*, *Cats*, *Babies and Twins* (ITV), *Animal Odd Couples* (BBC1), *Honeybadgers: Masters of Mayhem* (Natural World, BBC2) and *Pandas 3D – The Journey Home* (National Geographic). OSF is one of Realscreen's Global 100 producers.

