

Lord Howe Island

25 years of World Heritage Listing



The Lord Howe Island Group is an outstanding place with extraordinary terrestrial and marine ecosystems. These natural values were formally recognised to be of global significance in 1982 when the Lord Howe Island Group was listed as a World Heritage Property under the World Heritage Convention.

The Lord Howe Island Group World Heritage Property now includes the main island, offshore islets and Balls Pyramid, totalling about 1455 hectares of land. A further 145,000 hectares of marine environment are included in the World Heritage area, with conservation values reinforced in 1998 when the State Government declared a Marine Park in these waters.

The island's isolation and its varied landscape of mountains (over 800 metres), valleys, hills, lowlands and sea-cliffs has resulted in a diverse array of habitat types supporting many distinctive flora and fauna assemblages. Vegetation associations range from exposed coastal grasses and heath to luxuriant mossy rainforest shrouded in mist. Today, approximately 75 per cent of the island's original natural vegetation remains intact and undisturbed.

The Island has recorded 241 species of indigenous plants of which 113 or 47 per cent are found nowhere else in the world. Typical of remote oceanic islands, the vertebrate fauna is largely dominated by birds, including the Lord Howe Island Woodhen, which has been the centre of a highly successful captive-breeding programme. There are 11 species of seabirds, which continue to have important breeding populations. Lord Howe Island is reputed to have more seabird species breeding in higher numbers than anywhere else in Australia.

More than 1,600 terrestrial insect species have been recorded with approximately 60 per cent found nowhere else. The rate of discovery remains high, indicating that numerous endemic species are yet to be discovered.

One of the most spectacular insects is the Lord Howe Island Phasmid, the world's largest stick insect - thought to be extinct, but rediscovered in recent years on Balls Pyramid, a 550 metre high volcanic stack rising from the sea, 23 km from the island.

In recent years, cats, pigs and goats have been successfully removed from the island. These important initiatives have greatly reduced the threats to a host of native and endemic plant and animal species. The Lord Howe Island Board has also investigated the feasibility of removing rodents from the island. Whilst eradication is a complex undertaking, early field trials have proved successful with further research planned for 2008.

Other significant achievements include a major weed eradication program. Funding of approximately A\$2 million from both State and Federal governments has provided the catalyst for an ambitious and rigorous weed treatment program. Local staff and mainland volunteers and contractors have participated in this highly successful program.

The island also has a fascinating history and a culture evolved from its isolation and sea trading links with early whaling vessels and other Pacific nations including New Zealand, Norfolk Island, the wider Pacific Islands and mainland Australia. Today the island is governed by a Board comprising four locally elected Islanders and three appointed mainland representatives including the Chairperson.

Another unique factor of the Island is its current 400-tourist bed limit. This limit ensures an uncrowded and relaxing atmosphere and less pressure and impact on the island's landscape. The recently adopted Regional Environmental Plan for the Island has in consultation with the local community established a housing limit of a maximum of 25 new houses over the next 25 years.

Lord Howe Island is an iconic World Heritage destination, come and visit soon.

Terry Wilson

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Lord Howe Island