**Animals of the Kakadu region**

The diverse environments of Kakadu National Park support an astonishing array of animals, a number of which have adapted to particular habitats. Some animals in the Park are considered rare, endangered or endemic (not found anywhere else in the world). Responding to the extreme weather conditions experienced in the Park, many animals change their behaviour and are seen only at particular times of the day or night or at particular times of the year.

**Mammals**

The largest kangaroo of Northern Australia is the Antilopine Wallaroo. Males are reddish, whilst the females and young are a soft blue-grey colour. About 60 mammal species—marsupials and placental mammals—have been recorded in the Park. Most of them inhabit the open forest and woodlands and are nocturnal, making it difficult to see them. Others, such as wallabies and kangaroos (macropods), restrict their activities to the cooler parts of the day and are easier to see.

Marsupials are born in a very immature state, minute, blind and hairless. As soon as a marsupial is born, it works its way up its mother's abdomen, usually to a pouch, and attaches itself firmly to a nipple, where it stays until it is fully developed. Although the name for this group of mammals derives from the Latin marsupium, meaning pouch, not every marsupial has a pouch, and some have only temporary pouches. Among the marsupials found in Kakadu are eight species of macropods, and various species of possum, bandicoot, quoll, phascogale and antechinus.

Unlike marsupials, placental mammals develop wholly within the mother's body and are more developed at birth. Among the placental mammals found in Kakadu are 26 species of bats, 15 native rodent species, one dog species and one dugong species.

**Birds**

Yellow chat

Kakadu's many habitats support more than 280 species of birds, or about one-third of Australia's bird species. Some birds range over a number of habitats, but many are found in only one environment. Peaceful doves and red-collared lorikeets are examples of widespread and common species; black-banded pigeons, white-lined honeyeaters and yellow chats are examples of species that occupy special, localised habitats; crested
pigeons and pictorella mannikins are examples of species for which Kakadu is the northern limit of their range, so they are seen only occasionally.

Two notable species found in Kakadu are the endangered Gouldian finch and the vulnerable red goshawk.

A bird checklist is available from the Murrawuddi Gallery at the Bowali Visitor Centre. Tour operators and visitors are encouraged to report any unusual bird sightings, such as the Gouldian finch and the yellow chat.

![Marbled velvet gecko](image)

**Reptiles**

To date, 117 species of reptiles have been recorded in Kakadu. Being poikilothermic (cold-blooded), these animals rely on heat from an external source such as the sun to regulate their body temperature. This is not to say that reptiles are active only during the day; in fact, few snakes can withstand Kakadu's midday heat and most are active at night. Always encourage use a torch and wear covered shoes at night.

A variety of reptile species inhabit the Park, among them eleven types of turtle and tortoise, eleven goanna or monitor species, thirty-seven skink species and thirty-six species of land snakes. Only four of the snakes are considered potentially lethal to humans—the taipan, the death adder, the king brown and the western brown.

The crocodile is perhaps the reptile of most interest to visitors. Two species of crocodile occur in Kakadu: the freshwater crocodile (*Crocodylus johnstonii*) and the estuarine, or saltwater, crocodile (*C. porosus*). Freshwater crocodiles are easily identified by their narrow snout and a single row of four large 'scutes' (dermal plates) immediately behind the head. Estuarine crocodiles do not have these scutes and their snout is broader. The maximum size for a 'freshie' is three metres, whereas a 'saltie' can exceed six metres.

**Amphibians**

![Green tree frog](image)

Kakadu's frogs are extremely well adapted to the region's climatic extremes. Many remain dormant during rainless times. With the onset of the wet season, when the billabongs and swamps start to fill with water, the night air is filled with the sounds of frogs such as the northern bullfrog and the marbled frog.

As the water builds up frogs and tadpoles have an abundance of food, such as algae, vegetation, insects, dragonfly nymphs, and other tadpoles. Not all of Kakadu's frogs are found in the wetlands: many, such as the green tree frog and the spadefoot toad, live in the lowland forests.
Fish

Sooty grunter or black bream
Fifty-three species of freshwater fish have been recorded in Kakadu's waterways; eight of them have a restricted distribution. In the Magela Creek system alone, thirty-two species have been found. In comparison, the Murray-Darling river system, the most extensive in Australia, supports only twenty-seven native fish species.

Some species, such as the primitive archer fish, the sooty grunter, or black bream, and the toothless catfish, live mainly in clear water near the escarpment. In the billabongs and creeks, some of the more common fish are barramundi, freshwater long-toms, salmon-tailed catfish, chequered rainbow fish, and the saratoga. The last two also appear in waters near the escarpment.

Chequered rainbow fish
Although introduced fish have been found in most Australian waterways, none have been recorded in the Park.

Recreational fishing (with lures) is generally permitted in waters west of the Kakadu Highway except in the West Alligator River System. To provide refuge areas, fishing is not permitted in waters east of the Kakadu Highway except at the camping areas of Muirella Park (Djarradjin and Sandy Billabongs) and Jim Jim Billabong. Cast nets, traps, spear guns and crab pots are not permitted but can be left at the Bowali Visitor Centre during your stay. Bag limits apply to barramundi and other species. Contact the Bowali Visitor Centre, telephone (08) 8938 1120 for up-to-date information.

Invertebrates

Termite mounds
Despite the fact that Kakadu supports more than 10 000 types of insect, these creatures are often overlooked by visitors. Among the insect groups are grasshoppers, beetles, flies, termites, butterflies and moths, bees, wasps, ants, dragonflies and damsel flies, caddis flies, non-biting midges and mayflies. The great variety of insects is a result of the varied habitats and relatively high temperatures throughout the year.

Perhaps the most striking insect-created features in the Park are the termite mounds. The huge mounds in the southern part of the Park are storehouses of harvested grass. Leichhardt's grasshopper, in colours of orange, blue and black, is perhaps the most spectacular insect found in Kakadu. It is also found on the Arnhem Land plateau and in Gregory National Park.