



# Save the Murray

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## Native Fauna



The large size and environmental diversity of the Murray-Darling Basin supports a wide variety of native animals. Dramatic environmental changes since the arrival of Europeans and development of the Basin have contributed to the decline of some species

The Murray-Darling Basin supports an estimated;

- 367 Species of Birds (35 endangered)
- 100 Species of Lizards (1 endangered)
- 85 Species of Mammals (20 extinct, 16 endangered)
- 53 Species of Frogs
- 46 Species of Snakes (5 endangered)
- 5 Species of Tortoises
- 34 Species of Fish

### Snakes and Lizards

Most snakes and lizards in the Murray-Darling Basin do not depend on aquatic environments. A small number of species exploit the rich food supplies of the floodplain and wetland habitats. The Red-bellied Black Snake (*Pseudechis porphyriacus*) and the Tiger Snake

(*Notechis scutatus*) are often found around wetlands and feed on the large frog populations. Other species of snakes may move into wetlands in drier times.

Two of the more common species of lizards found in the Basin are the Eastern Water Skink (*Eulamprus quoyii*) and the Eastern Water Dragon (*Physignathus lesuerii*). These lizards can be found in semi-permanent aquatic habitats. Hunting for their prey along the riverbanks.

Other lizards include two species of goanna, the Sand Monitor (*Varanus gouldii*) and the Lace Monitor (*Varanus varius*). Again these much larger lizards use the riverbanks for hunting insects, other lizards and small mammals.

### Mammals

Common native mammals found in the Murray-Darling Basin are kangaroos, wombats, possums and bats. Others include:

#### Platypus (*Ornithorhynchus anatinus*)

In the Murray-Darling Basin platypus are most common in the headwaters of rivers and streams along the Great Dividing Range. The species becomes rare or absent on the western plains, although occasional sightings have been reported along the lower reaches of the Murrumbidgee River and along the Murray River as far west as Renmark in South Australia.

Platypus live in fairly shallow rivers and streams with relatively steep earth banks consolidated by native vegetation. They prefer rivers with aquatic plants and also logs to support the invertebrates that are their main food source.

#### Water Rat (*Hydromys chrysogaster*)

The water rat is found in permanent water bodies across a range of habitats in the Murray-Darling Basin. It is adapted to aquatic life as it has partially webbed hind feet and its fur repels water. It is the only amphibious Australian mammal other than the



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## Native Fauna Continued

platypus. Water rats generally feed on large aquatic insects, fish, crustaceans and mussels. However their diet has known to include frogs, lizards and small mammals.

### **The Pilliga Mouse (*Pseudomys pilligaensis*)**

The Pilliga Mouse was first identified in 1975 and has a very restricted distribution. It is known only from the Pilliga Scrub near Narrabri in NSW. It has been found in mixed Cypress/Eucalypt forest and woodland. The mice have a head and body length of around 70 mm and a tail almost as long again. The Pilliga Mouse is on the vulnerable species list.

### **Mountain Pygmy Possum (*Burramys parvus*)**

The Mountain Pygmy Possum is the only Australian marsupial restricted to alpine regions. It occurs in small areas above the snowline on Mt Kosciusko, Mt Bogong and Mt Hotham. It is confined to rock scree and boulderfields, usually associated with Mountain Plum-pine heathland. While eating habits of Pygmy Possum are diverse, the diversity of prey is low, making the Pygmy Possum a specialised feeder, according to the season. It is currently classified as vulnerable in Australia with Victorian populations being threatened and the NSW population being endangered.

### **Squirrel Glider (*Petaurus norfolcensis*)**

The Squirrel Glider weighs about 250 gms, and measures between 400 and 530 mm in length. They are similar to Sugar Gliders (*Petaurus breviceps*) in general appearance, but are twice as large. The Squirrel Glider inhabits forest and woodland areas and eats pollen, nectar, sap, gum and insects.

## **Frogs**

In the Murray-Darling Basin there are more than 50 species of frogs that inhabit temporary or permanent waterholes and wetlands.

The Corroboree frog (*Pseudophryne corroboree*) is one of Australia's most attractive frogs. It lives in the moist forests and wetlands of the high country from the Snowy Mountains to the Australian Capital Territory.

Other frogs are found living in the wetlands and billabongs along the riverine floodplains. Peron's Tree frog (*Litoria peronii*) lives in low-lying areas inundated by summer rains during breeding and out of breeding season spends its time sitting under the bark of trees and foraging at night.

The Spotted Marsh frog (*Limnodynastes tasmaniensis*) one of the most common frogs found in the Basin and the Barking Marsh frog (*Limnodynastes flecheri*) shelter under rocks and logs. They breed after rain in sedges and rushes next to waterholes and hide among the leaf litter.

Frogs are also found in the semi-arid to arid region of the Murray-Darling Basin. The Giant Banjo frog (*Limnodynastes interioris*) found in New South Wales and Victoria and the Water-holding frog (*Cyclorana platycephala*) can live up to a metre below the surface, waiting for the next flood event, when they reappear to breed.

Suitable habitats for frogs are being lost through the regulations of rivers (which reduces the frequency of flooding), the construction of levees on the floodplain, the reclamation of wetlands for agricultural production and the grazing of riparian vegetation by cattle. However, rural developments in some cases have created new habitats with the construction of permanent water storages and farm dams providing that fringing vegetation is also present. Changes in water quality in the basin may also be affecting frog populations. For example frogs are very sensitive to pesticides, as these may be absorbed through their highly porous skin.