

# Spicers Peak Nature Refuge - Eco Guide



The Scenic Rim, South East Queensland, Australia

## Acknowledgements

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## Further information

Nature Refuge Notice Boards are located at the Lodge and Spicers Canopy Campsite. A Newsletter is published regularly by Hidden Peaks [www.hiddenpeaks.com.au](http://www.hiddenpeaks.com.au)

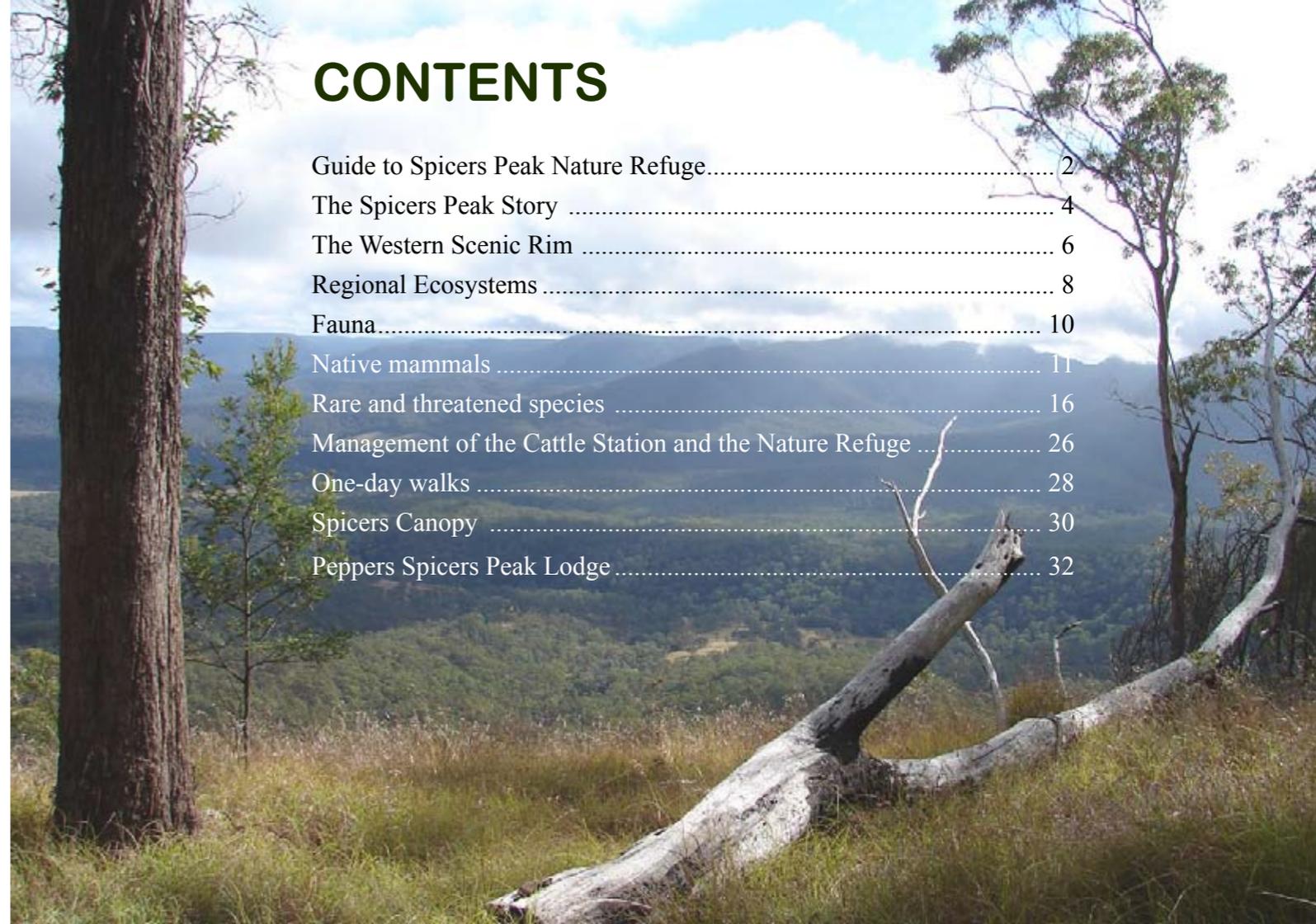
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# Guide to Spicers Peak Nature Refuge



Spicers Peak Nature Refuge was established in 2006 and comprises 2000 ha of a 3000 ha working cattle station.

It has seven kilometres of boundary with the Main Range National Park. This has meant that this area of significant conservation value is protected in perpetuity through a Conservation Agreement between the owner and the Queensland Government.

This agreement binds all future owners and those with an interest in the land to conserve the area's significant natural and cultural resources, and provide for the controlled use of the land's natural resources for livestock production, eco tourism and adventure activities.



# The Spicers Peak Story



The most distinctive features of the Refuge are the twin sentinels of Mt Mitchell ‘Cooyinnirra’ and Spicers Peak ‘Barguggan’. For many thousands of years the Aboriginal people must have looked in awe at these twin peaks. Their human presence had minimal impact on the natural environment. They split, dried and soaked the leaves of the native rush, *Lomandra longifolia* to weave into baskets. They also used the inner bark of the stringy bark, *Eucalyptus eugenoides*, as fibre for bags and nets. Resin from the native grass tree, *Xanthorrhoea johnsonii*, was used for stone axe glue.

Hunting was difficult in the mountains so most game was killed on the high plains to the west and coastal east of the mountains.

This mountain range also served as a barrier to contain the early convict settlement at Moreton Bay (today’s Brisbane City). Peter Spicer was one of the first convict overseers of the Moreton Bay Penal Settlement, when sometime between 1824 and 1827, the Peak was named. The range had not been breeched to explore the inland area. It was thought at that time that rivers such as the Brisbane flowed from an inland sea or marsh.



ALLAN CUNNINGHAM.

Allan Cunningham, a British botanist had explored the Brisbane River with John Oxley in 1824. It was not until 1827, after leading packhorses inland from near Sydney for six weeks, that Alan Cunningham climbed onto the Spicers Peak Lodge plateau on 11th June and took compass readings on prominent peaks to the east, including Mt Warning. He came from a campsite about 9km south west of the plateau in the Swan Creek valley. Only days before he had named the expanse of rich pastures he had travelled through, the Darling Downs, after his employer, the then Governor of New South Wales.

The squatters and their sheep followed in the 1840s. They did well despite encountering many bad seasons. The worst were the drought year of 1877 and a very severe drought in 1902 – when practically all livestock perished and ‘even the trees died’.

The gaps were more challenging than Cunningham had predicted. In the early 1840’s wool bales were sent down the range on slides since no more than “a single lane horse track existed”. Rocks and rain made the tracks quickly impassable.

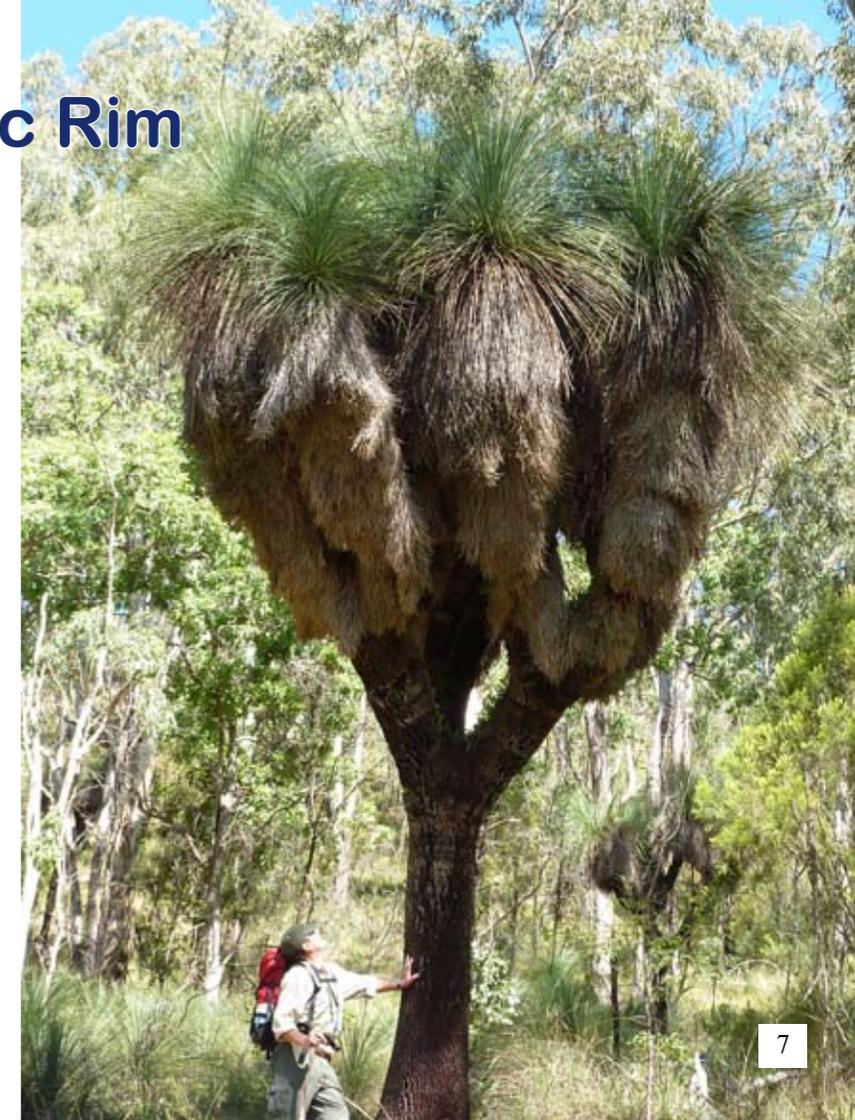
Originally there was huge stringy bark and hoop pine trees on ridges. The rainforest timbers were given the name ‘scrub wood’, and the only timbers considered to be of any great value were red cedar, white beech and rosewood.

Over subsequent years the advances of the pastoral and timber industries changed much of the vegetation. On the remote valleys and ridges, much of the vegetation remained relatively untouched.



## The Western Scenic Rim

The Great Dividing Range is an uplift of basalt rock - part of Queensland's basalt uplands. The basalt has weathered to the red-brown soils seen on the plateau. For many millennia these soils anchored rainforest vegetation that captured the rain and fog and created the vegetation. Surrounding slopes with less suitable soils maintained an open sclerophyll forest. Some of this vegetation survives from the time of Gondwana land millions of years ago.



# Ecosystems

An ecosystem is an ecological community, which together with its environment, functions as a unit. Vegetation communities in Queensland are categorised and mapped as regional ecosystems.

Each recognisable plant is designated a species. A *species* is defined as a population of individual plants that closely resemble one another and are normally capable of cross breeding. A group of closely related species is a genus. Individual plants are identified by two names comprising the *genus* first and *species* second eg *Acacia harpophylla* – usually written in italics. Plants provide animals with food such as pollen and nectar, seeds, fruit leaves and sap as well as nests, roosts, shelter and hunting surfaces.

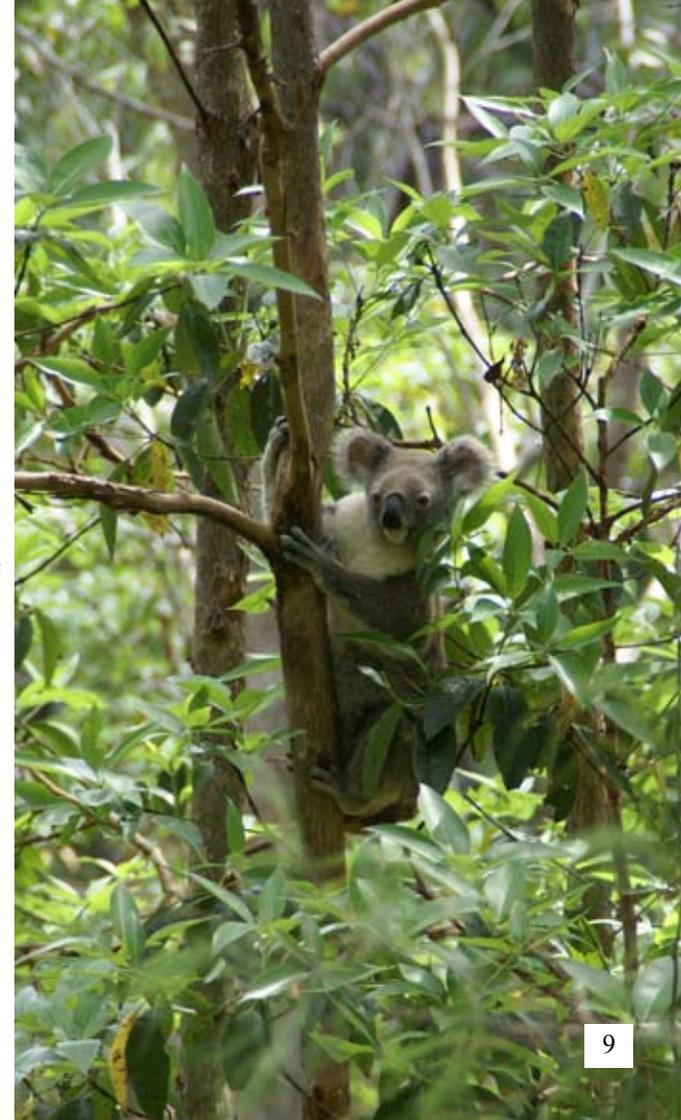
Spicers Peak Nature Refuge protects ten regional ecosystems, five of which are endangered or of concern, and twenty-seven fauna species identified as at risk. For details of the regional ecosystems, lookup bioregion 11 and landzone 11 at <http://www.derm.qld.gov.au>. For details of the tree species and their identification look at <http://plantnet.rbgsyd.nsw.gov.au/>



# Regional Ecosystems

There are ten regional ecosystems represented in the Nature Refuge. Eucalyptus open forest and woodlands make up the dominant plant communities with grass and woody plant understory. There are the gumbarks, ironbarks, stringybarks, bloodwood barks and box barks. Eucalyptus tereticornis (Forest Red Gum) or the ‘koala tree’, is one of the dominant species.

1. Brigalow (*Acacia harpophylla*)
2. Fuzzy Box (*Eucalyptus conica*), Ribbon Gum (*E. nobilis*), Forest Red Gum (*E. tereticornis*) \*koala tree, Apple (*Angophora floribunda*)
3. Ribbon Gum (*Eucalyptus nobilis*) tall open forest
4. Narrow leaved Iron Bark (*Eucalyptus crebra*), Forest Red Gum (*E. tereticornis*) woodland
5. Montane shrub land
6. Semi-evergreen vine thicket
7. Mountain Coolibah (*Eucalyptus orgadophila*) open woodland
8. White Box (*Eucalyptus albens*), Narrow leaved Iron Bark (*E. crebra*) woodland
9. Complex notophyll vine forest with Hoop Pine (*Araucaria* spp).
10. Thin-leaved Stringy bark (*Eucalyptus eugenioides*), Grey Gum (*E. biturbinata*), Yellow Box (*E. melliodora*) open forest.





## The Fauna

In the ranges nearby there are approximately fifty native mammal species. These include the iconic Australian mammals such as the koala, dingo and the platypus. In addition there are three types of possum, five gliders, seven rats and mice, and nine kangaroos and wallabies, fifteen species of bats and eight small mammals such as bandicoots.

Most native mammals have been affected by European settlement. Populations of many species increased after relaxation of Aboriginal hunting and dingo predation. However, government-subsidised control measures and rising numbers of introduced mammals led to declines in some kangaroos, wallabies, rat kangaroos and possums early in the 20th century. By contrast, most native species persisted in wilderness areas along the eastern escarpment where dingoes survive. Dingoes are thought to exclude foxes which would otherwise exterminate small- to medium-sized mammals

The main threats to native mammals are the introduced cats, foxes, hares and wild dogs. They either prey on the mammal species or compete with them for prey. In addition bush fires, land clearing and the presence of humans and domesticated animals, threaten native species.

## Native Mammals

### Platypus

*Ornithorhynchus anatinus*  
Found in freshwater rivers and creeks around Australia, the platypus is common but rarely sighted. It feeds mainly on larval aquatic invertebrates, small fishes and amphibians by detecting them with electrosensitive receptors in its bill. Food is stored in cheek pouches until it surfaces.

It burrows into the river bank just above the water level where it also nests. The platypus is usually active around dawn and dusk.



### Dingo

*Canis lupus dingo*  
The dingo is usually ginger although black, white or tan animals are occasionally observed. White markings on the dingo's feet, tail tip and chest are common.

The dingo grows to a length of 120cm and its bushy tail may be 38cm long. It weighs between 10kg and 24kg and stands 44-63cm tall.

The dingo rarely barks but occasionally emits short yaps or long, piercing howls in order to

communicate with others. The dingo's territory typically features rocky outcrops, caves, hollow logs or patches of dense vegetation that make suitable den sites.

Mating is most common between March and September and after a gestation period of sixty-three days the female gives birth to between two and nine pups. Pups are born in a den formed inside a hollow log, cave, or amid thick vegetation. The mother suckles the pups until they are weaned at four months of age.

The hours around dawn and dusk are when the dingo is most active, although it will hunt for short periods during the day and night.



Whiptail wallaby

## KANGAROOS AND WALLABIES (MACROPODS)

The kangaroo has stunted forelimbs but elongated hind legs, which give it great strength and speed in leaping along. Its big tail is used for balance or for pushing its body along slowly while grazing.

The birth cycle of the Macropodidae (kangaroos and wallabies) is one of the most fascinating features of these unique animal. The female macropod can 'pause' (known as embryonic diapause) a pregnancy in times of harsh conditions then resume the growth of the foetus when environmental conditions improve unlike most other marsupials. Macropods have specialised teeth for cropping grass and complex fore-stomachs for the breakdown of plant fibre by fermentation which are much more efficient than the stomachs of ruminant animals (cows, sheep etc.) therefore they require less food to sustain themselves.

### Whiptail wallaby

*Macropus parryi*

This wallaby has a rather slender tail which is a little longer than the head and body. From before dawn into the early morning and from late afternoon into the early night, it feeds on native grasses, also eating some herbs and ferns. For the remaining part of the day and night it sleeps in the shelter of a shrub or low tree. It is gregarious, moving in groups of up to fifty individuals of all ages. Males are up to twice the weight of females. Females become sexually mature in the second year of life while males seldom mate until they are two to three years old. Breeding is continuous and two young may be born in a year. The species exhibits embryonic diapause.

### Eastern grey kangaroo

*Macropus giganteus*

Eastern grey kangaroos live together in mobs. A mob is led by a mature male and consists of young males and females with their young. The Eastern grey kangaroo lives on the grassland and open woodland of eastern Australia and Tasmania. Their habitats range from semi-arid mallee scrub to the forested coastal areas of eastern and south eastern Australia.

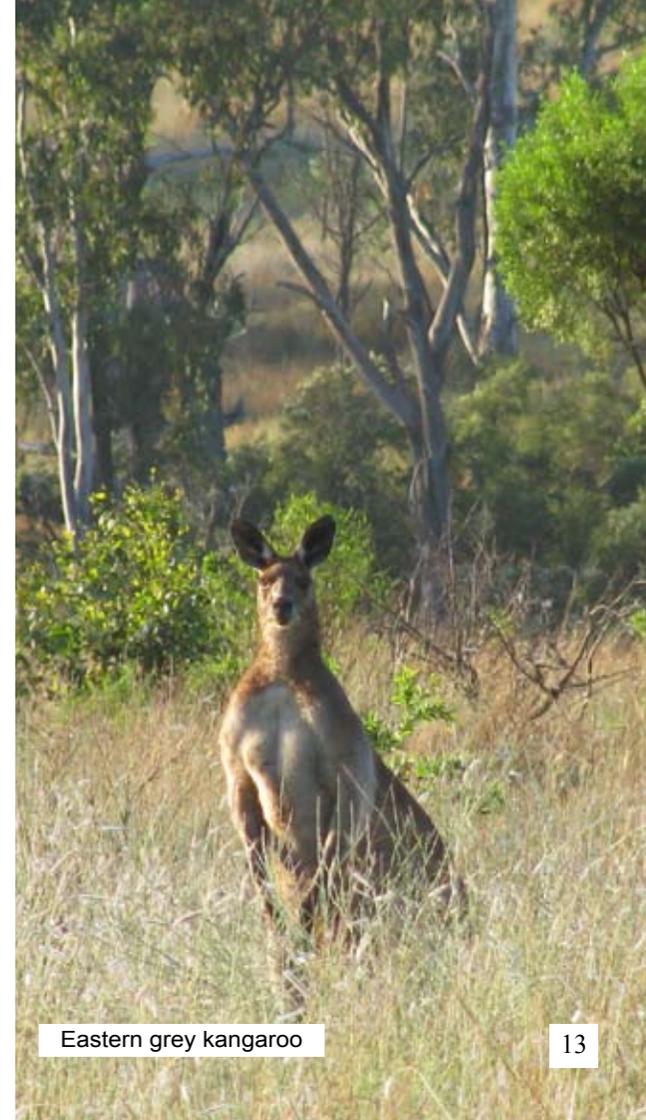
Eastern grey kangaroos are herbivores. They feed mainly at night and in the early morning. They sleep during the day under shaded trees or in depressions they have dug.

### Common wallaroo

*Macropus robustus* (refer front cover image)

The wallaroo, or hill kangaroo, is large and stocky and is found in small groups in hilly country. Wallaroos descend to the flats at night to feed. They are much less nomadic than their red and grey counterparts. During the day it sleeps in shelter, usually under a rock overhang or in a cave on the upper parts of a slope. It does not need to drink, obtaining all necessary water from its food. They are solitary animals and males are as much as twice the weight of females.

The common wallaroo, as with all wallaroos, has a large black rump and a bare muzzle. The male is distinctly darker in colour in comparison to the female which is very grey in colouration with black markings.



Eastern grey kangaroo

### Red-necked wallaby

*Macropus rufogriseus*

The red-necked wallaby is reddish brown with grey tips on its fur, has a pronounced reddish-brown neck, paler grey chest, black muzzle, white stripe on its upper lip, and paws and its largest toe is black.

This wallaby is fairly common in Queensland. It lives in eucalypt forests, where you would find open areas nearby, and in tall coastal heath areas. It is a grazing animal, eating mainly grasses and herbs.

The red-necked wallaby is usually seen in small groups and if disturbed they will scatter in all directions. They shelter in dense patches of forest during the day, coming out early evening just before dusk to graze.



### Long-nosed potoroo

*Potorous tridactylus tridactylus*

Listed as vulnerable in Queensland, this animal lives in coastal heaths and forests with a dense understorey. It shelters under tussocks and shrubs. Potoroos feed mainly on native truffles, other fungi, leaf material and tubers, but also eat insects and spiders. The species is secretive and seldom seen but its presence in an area can be determined by telltale conical diggings, broader than those left by bandicoots. Females possess four teats but only a single young is reared at a time. Pouch life for the young is around four months.

### Brush-tailed phascogale

*Phascogale tapoatafa*

The brush-tailed phascogale is a large rat-sized, carnivorous arboreal marsupial. Only rarely coming to the ground, it spends nearly all of its time foraging for food in the trees and is capable of leaping up two metres between trees! Like most marsupials, it is predominately nocturnal, coming out to eat between dusk and dawn. Brush-tailed phascogales have home ranges (territories) of over 100 hectares and are excellent predators of rats and mice. Its distinguishing features are its long snout, grey colouration above with cream below and, as its name implies, it has a beautiful black bushy tail.



### Long-nosed bandicoot

*Perameles nasuta*

This is an omnivorous marsupial with a reverse pouch. It is greyish-brown in colour on the back - with a creamy white underside. The animal's forefeet and the upper surface of its hind feet are also creamy white. The muzzle is long and pointed, much more so than in short-nosed bandicoots. Its days are spent in shallow nests which have been dug into the rainforest floor and lined with grass and leaves gathered with the forelegs.



The upper surface of the nest, which is sometimes flattened and partly covered with soil, may be well concealed under rainforest litter. When the nest is in use, its entrance is closed. These are solitary animals therefore meetings between males and females are restricted to mating periods.

# Rare and Threatened Species

## Koala

*Phascolarctos cinereus*

The koala is a small tree-dwelling, foliivorous (leaf-eating) marsupial which averages about 6-7kg in weight. Its fur is thick and usually ash grey, varying from brown to almost black in certain individuals, with a cream belly. The koala gets its name from an ancient Aboriginal word meaning “no drink” because it receives over 90% of its hydration from the eucalyptus leaves (also known as gum leaves) it eats, and only drinks when ill or times when there is not enough moisture in the leaves. i.e. during droughts etc. The koala is the only mammal, other than the greater glider and ringtail possum, which can survive on a diet of specific eucalyptus leaves. Koalas are solitary animals and only come into contact with each other to breed or dispute territorial boundaries.

## Hastings River mouse

*Pseudomys oralis*

Similar in size to the bush rat, this species was recently recorded on the Nature Refuge. There is little information on the Hastings River mouse due to its low abundance and the relatively small number of locations at which it has been recorded. Hastings River mice prefer moderate to high altitude grassy open forests with a high diversity of ground vegetation, often close to rainforests. Creek beds with dense vegetation are also utilised. They feed on leaves, seeds and fruits of grasses, sedges and other plants, as well as moss, underground fungi and insects. Home range size is around 1-2 hectares, and animals often show strong site fidelity. Nest sites for both sexes include root cavities, hollow logs, and crevices in rocks and cliff lines.

## Brush-tailed rock-wallaby

*Petrogale penicillata*

Brush-tailed rock-wallabies are extremely agile animals that shelter from predators through the day on rocky escarpments, cliffs and caves. They move from the safety of the cliffs to feed in more open areas at night. The brush-tailed rock-wallaby can climb trees if the trunks are not vertical. They have relatively short hind feet, with thickly padded soles that provide traction on slippery surfaces.

Adult brush-tailed rock-wallabies weigh between five and eight kilograms. They are brown to black with a reddish rump, grey shoulders and a long brush-tipped tail. They have a light cheek stripe and a black stripe that runs from their forehead, between their ears, to the back of their head. They are sometimes confused with the larger, more common swamp wallaby. The presence of their distinctive scats around highly rocky habitat is often the best sign of their presence.





### Spotted-tailed quoll

*Dasyurus maculatus maculatus*

The Spotted-tailed quoll is the largest native carnivore left on mainland Australia. It lives in forest, woodland and dense coastal heath land. The quoll's distribution has decreased markedly since European settlement, and it is now uncommon across most of its range.

It is largely nocturnal and eats small to medium sized mammals and birds, such as possums and rosellas. It also feeds on large insects, spiders and scorpions.

It forages in trees and on rock faces as well as on the ground. Mating takes place between April and July and the average litter size is five. Pups are weaned and independent by eighteen weeks and individuals only live for three to four years.

### Stephens' banded snake

*Hoplocephalus stephensii*

Medium-sized partly tree-dwelling venomous snake up to one metre long. It is brown or yellow-brown above, with a series of irregular, broad, dark cross bands. The head is black with a brown crown and a brown or cream patch on either side of the nape and the lips are barred with black and cream.



### Red-and-yellow mountainfrog

*Philoria kundagungan*

This frog is red, black or yellow on its back sometimes with two dark V-shaped patches near the back legs. There is a black stripe from the nostril through the eye to the shoulder. The belly is bright yellow and smooth. The skin on the back is smooth and the toes are not webbed.





### **Cascade treefrog**

*Litoria pearsoniana*

These small frogs are variable in colour ranging from green, through various combinations of green and brown to dark brown, with or without black spots or reticulations. A thin pale stripe runs from the nostril, through the eye, passes above the tympanum (ear) and continues along the flank to the midbody. This stripe is bordered below by a brown band, broadening as it extends along the flank to the midbody. There may be a pale stripe along the upper lip. The tympanum is distinct and brown in colour. The ventral surface is white or cream. The hidden parts of the groin and thighs are yellowish tan to brick red.

The fingers and toes have well developed discs but only the toes have extensive webbing. This species inhabits streams in rainforest and tall open forests in south-eastern Queensland and north-eastern New South Wales.

## **Rare and Threatened Birds**

*Refer to Bird guides for bird images*

### **Glossy black-cockatoo**

*Calyptorhynchus lathami*

A large black cockatoo with small crest on brown or brown and yellow head, and red or barred red and yellow tail panels. Not to be confused with the larger red-tailed black cockatoo which has a large crest (male) and yellow spots (female).

### **Powerful owl**

*Ninox strenua*

Very large (to 50cm) with yellow eyes, coarse V shaped bars on the under parts and broad bars on the upper parts.

### **Red-browed treecreeper**

*Climacteris erythroptera*

Olive-grey in colour with rusty eyebrow and seen creeping up bark.





Eastern bristlebird

### Square-tailed kite

*Lophoictinia isura*

Long winged kite with square tail and upswept wings in flight.

### Double-eyed fig-parrot (Coxen's)

*Cyclopsitta diophthalma coxeni*

A small dumpy large-billed parrot with red and blue on cheeks - usually inhabits fig trees. This species is listed as critically endangered.

### Eastern bristlebird

*Dasyornis brachypterus*

Grey-brown bristlebird found in heath. When moving on the ground will cock its tail when disturbed.

### Red goshawk

*Erythroriorchis radiatus*

It is large and reddish in colour with enormous yellow legs. The underparts are attractively marked with black 'arrowheads' and upper parts are striped black and thighs unmarked. The wings and tail are prominently barred. It is very rare and could be confused with juveniles of other more common hawks.

### Swift parrot

*Lathamus discolor*

This is a lorikeet-like parrot with long thin tail, red face and red patches on shoulder, outer edges of secondary feathers and underwing coverts. Has a buff white beak.

### Regent honeyeater

*Anthochaera phrygia*

Yellow-winged honeyeater with bare (red around eye) warty face, yellow edges to feathers on back and black edges to feathers on belly.

### Rufous scrub-bird

*Atrichornis rufescens*

Finely-barred rufous-brown scrub-bird found in highland rainforest. Among the most difficult birds to see as it keeps to undergrowth.

### Albert's lyrebird

*Menura alberti*

Redish-brown with rufous undertail coverts. Tail plumes of the male are wire like. Not to be confused with the superb which is greyish brown.

### Sooty owl

*Tyto tenebricosa*

Very dark barn owl with a sooty grey face sooty and very large eyes.



Regent honeyeater

# Rare and threatened flora

## Bailey's cypress pine

### *Callitris baileyi*

A tree growing to 18 m tall, with spreading or erect branches and rough greyish bark. The foliage is green, rather than bluish as with many other cypress pines.

## Austral toadflax

A small, straggling herb to 40 cm tall. Leaves are pale green to yellow-green and somewhat succulent.

## Hairy anchor plant

A thorny shrub between 30-90 cm high that is covered with small white hairs.

## Myrtle-leaf mistletoe

A parasitic mistletoe, attached to the branches of other plants by runners that can be seen on the outside of the host-stem.

## Rocky heath communities

These include *Helichrysum lindsayanum* (r), and *Wahlenbergia glabra* (r). Two endangered species of the genus *Marsdenia*, *M. coronata* and *M. longiloba* occur within the property.

## Blue knob orchid

### *Sarcochilus hartmannii*

An epiphytic orchid with upright or semi-upright stems attached by fleshy creeping roots to rocks. Stems can be up to 100 cm long, although are usually shorter



## Management of the Cattle Station and Nature Refuge



The Nature Refuge continues to support a livestock grazing enterprise. The native pastures have been modified by grazing, burning and fertiliser use over 150 years. Since 1980, the declining terms of trade and drier seasons have led to reduced inputs, sown pasture decline, and increased dominance of native pastures.

Tree clearing costs and recent strict controls on tree clearing has meant the tree canopies have thickened.

Trees affect the hydrology, soil structure, biota and fertility, and understorey composition of grazed landscapes, and are potentially more retentive of precipitation and nutrients than pasture.

Continuing grazing still impact on lower canopy and under story vegetation, however this is minimised by new grazing management systems such as ‘cell grazing’. This is managed as part of the Nature Conservation Management Plan. Cell grazing is a management system where large numbers of livestock are rotated through many small paddocks in succession, based on the productivity and the phenological state of the herbage, permitting pasture recovery between grazing episodes.

The significant change is the length and timing of the resting of the native pasture. This system also requires large volumes of livestock water to be available in each paddock. An extensive water storage and distribution system has been established on the cattle station which has meant that the riparian zones (the water courses where most livestock watering took place previously) can be fenced off from livestock. This in turn has meant that the biodiversity of these vegetation zones can be improved.

A Fire Management Program has been introduced to manage the frequency and location of fires. As well as controlling hot wild fires, appropriate naturally occurring fires are still important to native vegetation regeneration. Management strategies will continue to be developed that incorporate livestock and nature conservation outcomes.

### Breeds of Cattle

Brangus is the main breed of cattle on the station. This is a cross between Brahmin (*Bos indicus*) of Asian breeds and the Angus (*Bos Taurus*) of European breeds. This cross breed handles the sub tropical conditions well.

There are also long-haired highland cattle breeds usually near the lodge plateau. These docile animals are in tune with the high country and the early Scottish settlement of the area.

## Spicers private walking track



This un-signposted track winds through the Nature Refuge and the Main Range National Park over three days. It commences at 'Governors Chair' on the Eastern side of the Main Range and ends at Peppers Spicers Peak Lodge. Hidden Peaks offers this walk twice weekly from April to November.

## One-day walks

These one-day walks are open to guests of the Lodge and bush walkers by arrangement with Hidden Peaks Walks.

### Cunningham's commemorative walk

This one-day guided walk from Swan Creek to the lodge plateau commemorates the climb of Allan Cunningham and two other men to the site on June 11, 1827. They drew a sketch of the distant ranges Mt Warning and then returned to Sydney after discovering the rich pastoral region of the Darling Downs.

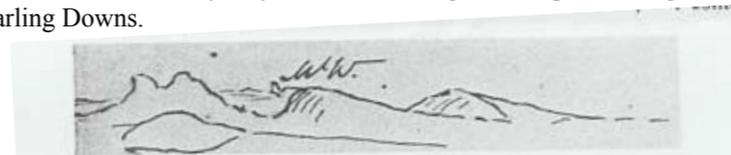


Fig. 30. Profile of Mt. Doubletop and Mt. Warning, sketched by Cunningham at his station on the Dividing Range in 1827. The original is in field book SZ25 in the Archives Office of New South Wales.

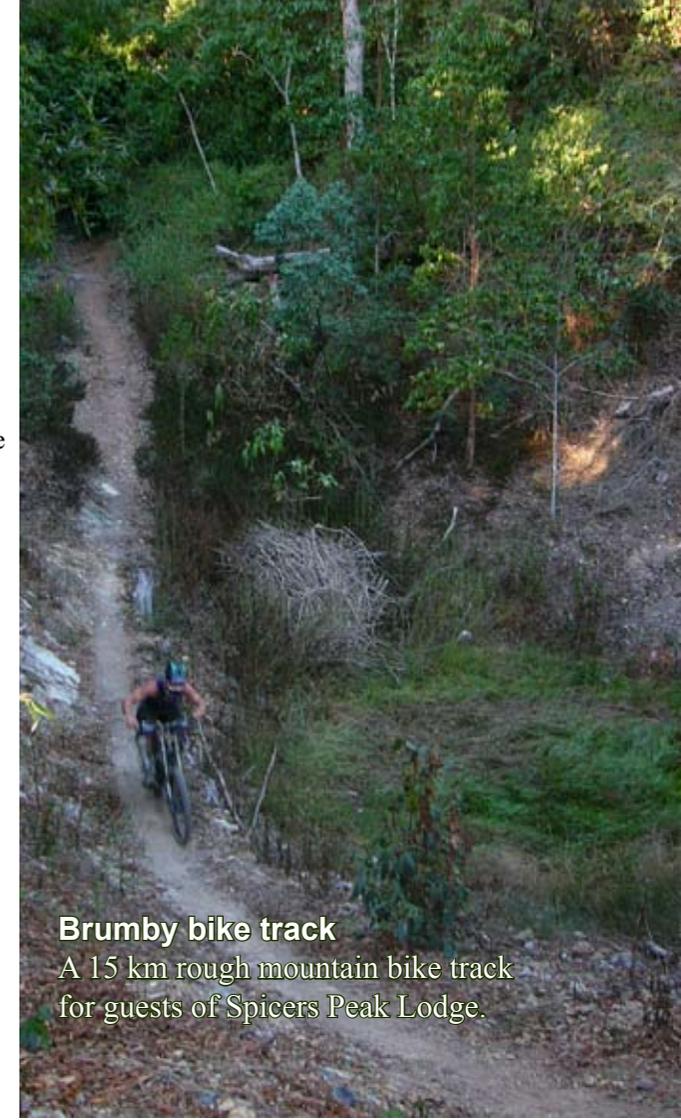
*Sketch by Allan Cunningham  
drawn near the Lodge in June 1827.*

### Spicers Peak climb and return to Lodge

A difficult walk requiring good equipment and navigation skills.

### Mt Mitchell 'Cooyinnirra' climb and return to Spicers Canopy

A medium level climb following graded paths.



### Brumby bike track

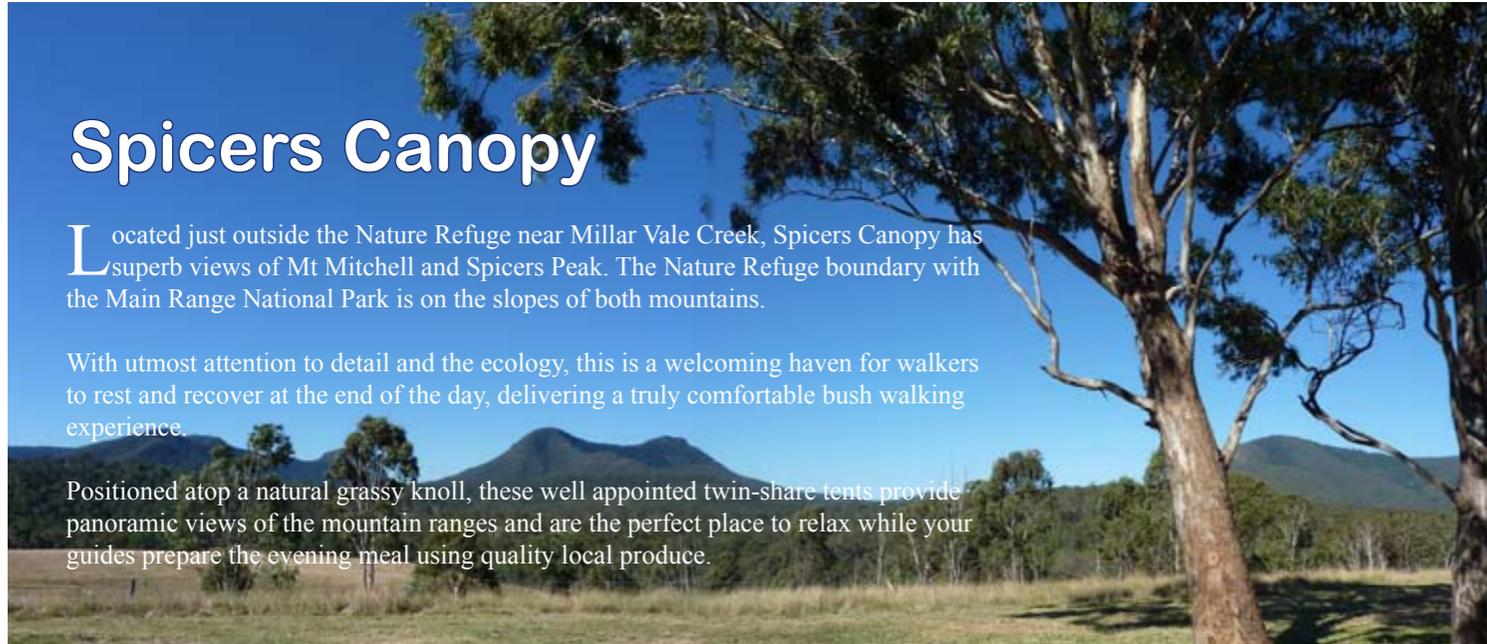
A 15 km rough mountain bike track for guests of Spicers Peak Lodge.

# Spicers Canopy

Located just outside the Nature Refuge near Millar Vale Creek, Spicers Canopy has superb views of Mt Mitchell and Spicers Peak. The Nature Refuge boundary with the Main Range National Park is on the slopes of both mountains.

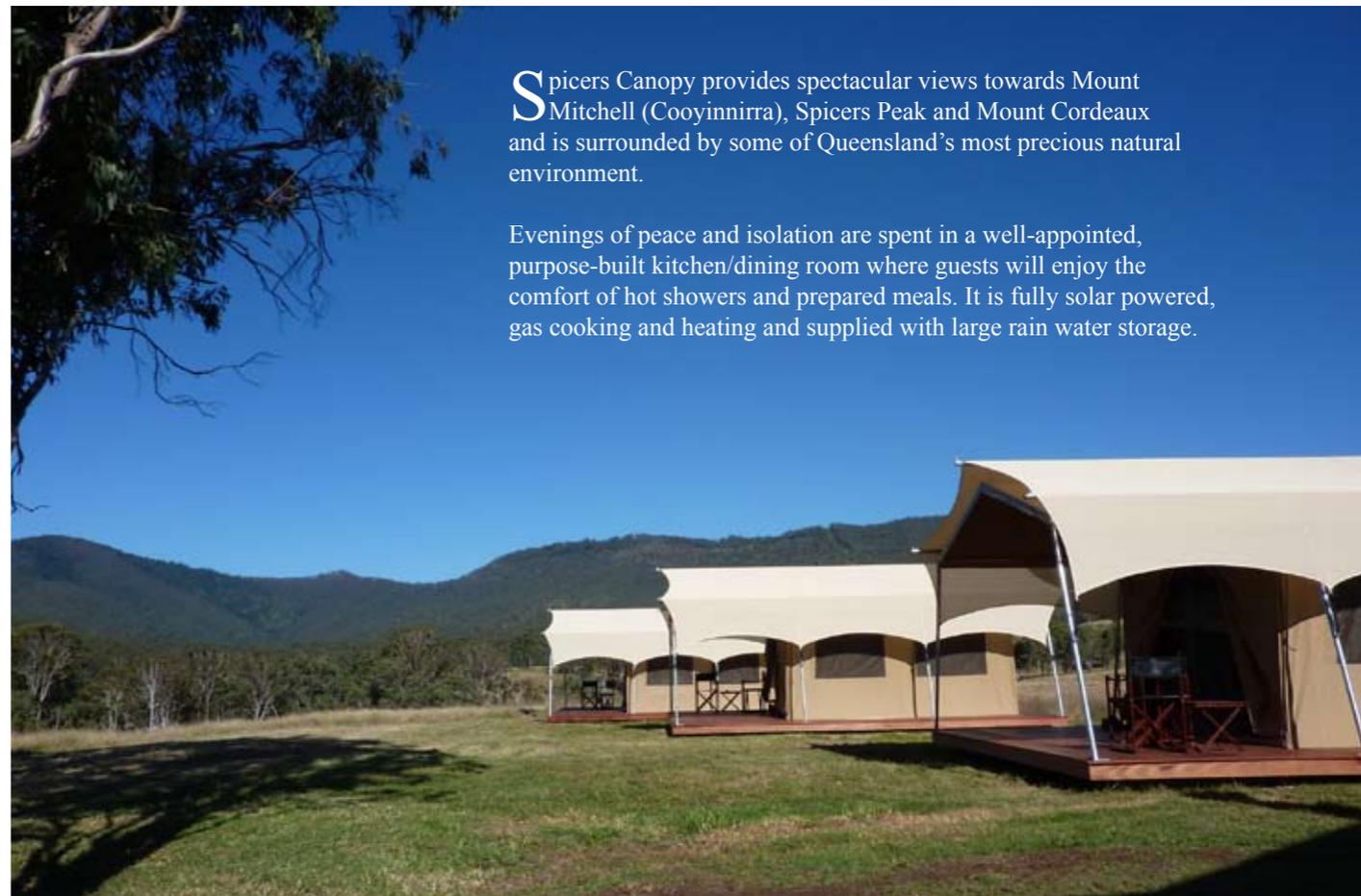
With utmost attention to detail and the ecology, this is a welcoming haven for walkers to rest and recover at the end of the day, delivering a truly comfortable bush walking experience.

Positioned atop a natural grassy knoll, these well appointed twin-share tents provide panoramic views of the mountain ranges and are the perfect place to relax while your guides prepare the evening meal using quality local produce.



Spicers Canopy provides spectacular views towards Mount Mitchell (Cooyinnirra), Spicers Peak and Mount Cordeaux and is surrounded by some of Queensland's most precious natural environment.

Evenings of peace and isolation are spent in a well-appointed, purpose-built kitchen/dining room where guests will enjoy the comfort of hot showers and prepared meals. It is fully solar powered, gas cooking and heating and supplied with large rain water storage.



# Spicers Peak Lodge

The luxurious lodge was opened in 2004 and along with walking and mountain bike tracks introduced eco tourism to the area.



## Eco-tourism

**E**cotourism is ecologically sustainable tourism with a primary focus on experiencing natural areas that fosters environmental and cultural understanding, appreciation and conservation.

The ECO Certification program assures travellers that certified products are backed by a strong, well managed commitment to sustainable practices and provides high quality nature-based tourism experiences.



