

# GIPPSLAND HIGH COUNTRY TOURS

Newsletter no. 43

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Australia

Spring/Summer 2017

Telephone (03) 5157 5556

Email: [info@gippslandhighcountrytours.com.au](mailto:info@gippslandhighcountrytours.com.au)

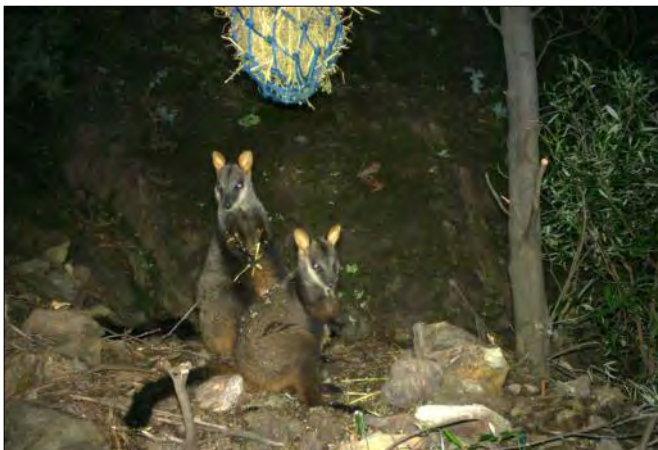
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## Victoria's most endangered marsupial - Rockies on the road to recovery

Those of you who have been receiving these Newsletters for many years will remember stories in early editions in the late 1990s talking of the plight of Victoria's last wild colonies of Brush-tailed Rock Wallabies. The pendulum has begun to swing in favour of these endearing marsupials and I thought it was time for an update.

The Southern Brush-tailed Rock-wallaby population in the Snowy River National Park has more than tripled in the last 20 years due to persistent and continuous work in protection, monitoring and captive breeding.



**Two untagged Brush-tailed Rock Wallabies caught on a remote camera enjoying some lucerne hay at a new site.**

Senior Biodiversity Officer with the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (DELWP) Marc Perri said: "This is a fantastic result for the recovery of this threatened species, starting from an extremely precarious population of fewer than 10 animals in 1996 to at least 40 in 2017."

"The cliffs and rocky habitat of the Little River Gorge near Gelantipy are host to this remnant population of the most endangered marsupial in the state and the only site in Victoria with a natural population of these wallabies."

"It's a harsh environment that offers these agile animals some chance of survival against their most

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## Flinders Ranges Natural History Tour

It has been a few years since we last offered an interstate natural history tour, but with quite a few people expressing interest in the past year or two, the Flinders Ranges is back on the program for 2018!



This will be a slow pace tour with lots of exploring time, but no long walks. There will be plenty of time to birdwatch, plus wildlife to discover and learn about, wildflowers for careful observers and so much history.

Following a geological trail will get us thinking about how these landforms came to be and aboriginal stories are also woven into the landscapes.

This natural history tour will give you the opportunity to gain a real appreciation and understanding of the Flinders Ranges and return invigorated and informed. Maximum group size is 10 and the tour is fully accommodated with 9 nights accommodation.

**Departs April 29, 2018**

*(Sorry discount on page 2 does not apply to this tour)*

### ***INSIDE:***

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## Editorial

Hello and welcome to our 2017 Spring/Summer Newsletter which is timed to arrive in early Summer so the program now takes you right through to the end of 2018. Of course as usual, if we have your email address, you will receive a few email updates throughout the year featuring changes or new additions to the program and some great specials as soon as they are on offer.

For the first time for a number of years, we are offering a Flinders Ranges Natural History Tour in 2018 and if there is enough interest, perhaps one to Tasmania in 2018-19.

We are constantly reviewing our program of offerings and as trends change over the years, our program needs to reflect that. It is with some sadness that the "Wilderness Bushwalks" section is now removed from the website. These really challenging overnight hiking tours with many days away from vehicle support were very popular in the first 15 years of the business, but have been languishing with little or no interest for the past decade, so sadly will not be offered in the future. There will still be plenty of Walking Tours on offer, but mostly with accommodation and always carrying day packs only.

We would really like to focus on the tours that most of you say you enjoy the most, small groups (less than 10 and often a maximum of 4 only), accommodation and easy or moderate walks with lots of nature experiences and knowledgeable guides to help you learn about and understand the wonderful places we visit, their wildlife, plants, history and more.

### What Does the Tick Mean?

Australia's Ecotourism Certification Program is an innovative "world first" program. It is a national scheme with hundreds of products across every state and territory of Australia.

[www.ecotourism.org.au](http://www.ecotourism.org.au)



Choosing a product that displays an **Eco Certification** logo means you will enjoy an experience with a quality operator, leaving minimal impact on the environment.

**Advanced Ecotourism Certification** recognises Australia's leading and most innovative ecotourism products, providing an opportunity to learn about the environment with an operator who is committed to achieving best practice when using resources wisely, contributing to the conservation of the environment and helping local communities.

**Gippsland High Country Tours is proud that all ecotour and walk products in the regular program have received Advanced Eco Certification.**

Private tours are becoming more popular too. In addition to tours scheduled to specific dates we have others that can be offered at any date that suits you, provided we can get enough to make up a "quorum". Please send us an email (or ring) with an expression of interest and we'll take it from there and see what we can arrange for you.

I hope you enjoy reading this newsletter and maybe we will see you on a tour in 2018!

*Jenny Lawrence*

*Established in 1987, Gippsland High Country Tours is an Accredited Tourism Business and a member of Victorian Tourism Industry Council. All product has Advanced Ecotourism Certification under Ecotourism Australia's Eco-Certification Program.*

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*Illustrations by Catherine Turnbull (All illustrations and photographs are subject to Copyright and must not be reproduced without permission) Photographs by J. Lawrence and the Southern Brush-tailed Rock Wallaby Program.*

### Spring Discount

Select your ecotour or walking experience and book **before January 15, 2018**

Attach this coupon and receive

**5% Discount**

**in addition to the regular discounts** off the advertised fare for any departure of 1-8 days duration

### REGULAR DISCOUNTS

Available on all 1-8 day departures

**Before Jan 15, 2018 add 5% to these discounts**

- Past Passengers 10% Discount.
- Pensioners 10% Discount.
- Early Booking (90+ days in advance) 10% Discount.
- Locals (East Gippsland or Wellington) 15% Discount
- Group Bookings, generous discounts apply

**NOTE: Only one discount can be used on any one booking.**



## TRIP HIGHLIGHTS

### Deddick

by Anne Pickles

Binoculars on the breakfast table  
 An oriole calling in the fig tree  
 White cockatoos raiding the orchard  
 Wedge tailed eagles rising on the thermals  
 Rainbow bee eaters flashing in the sun  
 Yellow robins on the verandah rail  
 A friar bird perched on a distant branch  
 Wood duck in the river  
 White browed scrubwrens flitting round a log  
 A scarlet robin swinging on the mullein  
 White winged choughs gossiping by the fence  
 Blue wrens flaunting their tails on the lawn

*(Birds of the Snowy River Tour)*



### Point Hicks Lighthouse Nature Tour

*"You brought us to an amazing place - literally "out of this world". We saw beautiful forest and spectacular beaches. I appreciated your knowledge and understanding of everything we saw".*

Cynthia (SA)



#### Gil's highlights-

- Looking up on a clear night to see the stars and the lighthouse light flashing
- The whales, the birdlife
- The wombat having a feast
- Wildflowers in spring
- Being away from the noise of the city



*Pt Hicks is a very special place. It is astonishingly beautiful and really touches one's soul. The natural world, the lighthouse and its amazing history and the amazing skies. We saw so many beautiful creatures - wombats, whales, birds of all kinds, lizards, snakes - many different habitats and amazing walks. Such a knowledgeable organised and terrific guide in Jenny. Great company, no TV news, no internet, no newspapers. Bliss!!! Thank you for everything Jenny, I love your tours and will no doubt see you another before too long. Cathy*

## Calendar of Ecotours and Walks 2018

<b>January 8</b>	<b>Alpine Discovery Tour</b> Graded: EASY Fully accommodated, lots of short easy nature walks . 5 Days ex. Bairnsdale \$2700
<b>March 5</b>	<b>Mt Feathertop Adventure</b> Graded: MODERATE or CHALLENGING Fully accommodated. Lots of walking with a choice of moderate walks or more challenging walks. 5 Days ex. Bairnsdale \$2700
<b>March 24</b>	<b>Snowy River Nature Tour</b> Graded: EASY Fully accommodated. Easy walking with a range of nature experiences. 4 Days ex. Bairnsdale \$2100
<b>April 21</b>	<b>Bindi Station in Autumn</b> Graded: VERY EASY Single day tour with a focus on history. Really easy strolls around historic buildings & garden. 1 Days ex. Bairnsdale \$200
<b>April 27</b>	<b>High Country Huts North of Licola</b> Graded: EASY/MODERATE Fully accommodated. Easy/moderate walks with a focus on history 3 Days ex. Traralgon \$1600
<b>April 29</b>	<b>Flinders Ranges Natural History Tour</b> Graded: EASY/MODERATE Fully accommodated. Easy/moderate walks with a focus on history 10 Days ex. Melbourne \$5050
<b>August 26</b>	<b>Birds of Hattah Kulkynne &amp; Murray Sunset</b> Graded: EASY/MODERATE Fully accommodated. Easy-moderate walks with a focus on birdwatching. 8 Days ex. Melbourne \$4860
<b>September 10</b>	<b>Nature Sounds and Birdsong - Mitchell River</b> Graded: EASY/MODERATE Fully accommodated and includes specialist guide. Easy/Moderate walking 5 Days ex. Bairnsdale \$2820
<b>September 17</b>	<b>Walking Croajingolong</b> Graded: MODERATE Fully accommodated. Lots of moderate walks surrounded by nature experiences. 7 Days ex. Bairnsdale \$3660
<b>September 17 &amp; October 8</b>	<b>Croajingolong Coastal Ecotour</b> Graded: EASY Fully accommodated. Lots of Easy Nature Walks. 7 Days ex. Bairnsdale \$3660
<b>October 8</b>	<b>Pt Hicks Lighthouse Weekend</b> Graded: EASY Fully accommodated. Lots of Easy Nature Walks. 4 Days ex. Bairnsdale \$1900
<b>October 22</b>	<b>Birds of the Snowy River</b> Graded: EASY Fully accommodated, easy walks with a focus on birdwatching 5 Days ex. Bairnsdale \$2480
<b>November 30</b>	<b>High Country Huts beyond Licola</b> Graded: EASY/MODERATE Fully accommodated. Easy/moderate walks with a focus on history 3 Days ex. Traralgon \$1700

More than just a holiday, these are a rewarding experience featuring expert guidance and lots of interaction with nature. These small group tours promote an appreciation and understanding of varied environments, rich history and diverse flora and fauna. **Fares are per person and all inclusive of accommodation, meals and travel from departure point as per itinerary. Full itinerary for each trip available on request. Discounts detailed on page 2.**

**More details also available on website– [www.gippslandhighcountrytours.com.au](http://www.gippslandhighcountrytours.com.au)**



## MORE TRIP HIGHLIGHTS

### Nature Sounds and Birdsong - Mitchell River

*This tour in September was so stimulating and left me with much to consider about my previous conceptions of bird calls. The organisation of Jenny combined with sound expert Andrew Skeoch made for a very different and exciting tour.*

*The very early morning experiences in the bush were magical. To be above the Den of Nargun to listen as dawn broke was an unforgettable time. Then to view the soundscapes that Andrew had made from within the rainforest gully gave a very unique picture of our experience.*

*The cottage where we stayed was surrounded by birds and was ideal as a base. We were all keen to make the most of listening to sounds in the bush so early morning rises were greeted with no complaints.*

*We were so fortunate to have Andrew Skeoch, who is an extremely experienced and exciting expert in sound recording. It was an unforgettable tour guided by Jenny in her very capable and relaxed manner. Thanks for a wonderful time, Ruth Akie*



**The sun rising over the Mitchell River valley as we enjoyed an early cuppa**



**Above - Listening to the sounds of the rainforest**

**Below - Lunch at our cottage accommodation**



**Above- Yellow-bellied Gliders heard at night had been hard at work feeding on sap.**



*Wonderful accommodation. Physically, visually and spiritually, couldn't be better. The input from Jenny and Andrew was amazing, immediate and very interesting. Andrew's field of study opened so many new doors of thought, both moment to moment and the big picture. Thank you very much, Catherine.*



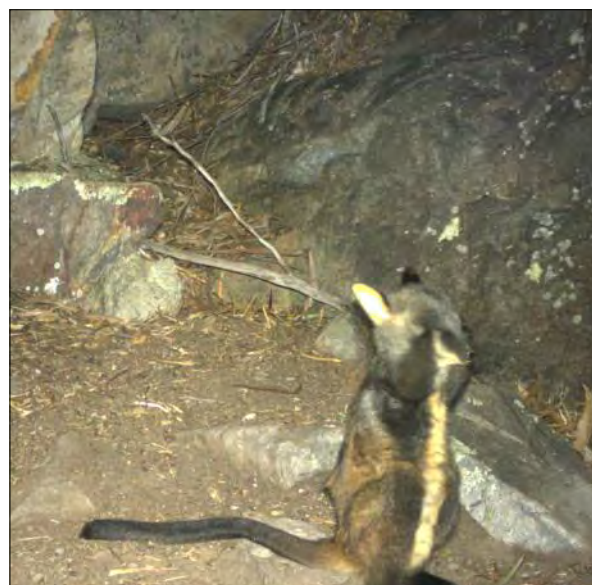
**Continued from Page 1**

significant threat: predators like foxes, cats and wild dogs,” Mr Perri said.

“Rock wallabies were once common in the upper Snowy River area but they were almost wiped out in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century by hunting, foxes and perhaps a disease. The key to their slow recovery has been predator control, but we also know a lot more now about the ecology of the wallabies at this site.”

“The Southern Brush-tailed Rock-wallaby Recovery Program was established in 1996 to address the decline of this iconic species. The program is led by DELWP, with involvement from Parks Victoria, ACT Parks and Conservation, Melbourne University, Adelaide University, Zoos Victoria, Mt Rothwell Conservation and Research Centre and private contractors – it’s a great cooperative program.”

“Locally, DELWP and Parks Victoria make up the East Gippsland Field Management Team, which conducts control of introduced predators throughout the year and regular remote camera monitoring to check the number of wallabies. In autumn this year, cameras were set up at our 24 existing sites and an additional 17 cameras were put in previously unsurveyed areas. The results are exciting, with the population at known sites increasing from 23 to 29 and an additional 11 of these special animals filmed in the new survey areas.”



**“Edwina” above with her youngster out of the pouch and on right, the young one rubbing its eyes.**

“The team also does cage trapping to collect genetic samples, check animal health and to learn about the breeding status of the animals. A key trapping task is to place coloured ear tags on the wallabies so individuals can be identified from colour photos during camera monitoring surveys.”

“We also cage-trap periodically to remove selected animals to the captive breeding program for this species, which is going well. Young male wallabies were removed in 2014 and 2016 and there are plans to remove another young male in 2017. We’re looking to be able to release animals back into the wild in a few years”

“This new total of 40 known animals in Little River Gorge is really encouraging, especially with the animals seen at new sites. The goal is to have 200 animals in captive populations by 2025 and to build the population in the Little River Gorge to 50 by 2020. With the recent results these targets are looking achievable.”

The East Gippsland Field Management team have more tasks planned work for 2017 - 2020 including ;

- Continuation of extensive predator baiting
- A full camera survey in late Summer 2018 across all known occupied areas
- Establishment of new cage trapping lines on the East of Little River to collect genetics of newly formed colonies. This area was unoccupied 4 years ago and there has been no trapping effort in this section of the gorge.
- Removal of two young-at-foot males to captive breeding program (Mt Rothwells and Tidbinbilla NCR) in Autumn 2017 to enrich genetic diversity in the captive population

The East Gippsland Recovery Program is supported by the Victorian State Government and funding from the Federal Government's National Landcare Program. Photos courtesy of Southern Brush-tailed Rock-wallaby Program.

## Vale John Armit

It was with great sadness that we learnt that John Armit of Bindi near Omeo died recently. Many of you have enjoyed John's warm welcome on our day tours to Bindi Station and his great generosity in sharing both the history of the property and present day life at Bindi.

John was a great gentleman, but you had to watch for the twinkle in his eye when he told a story that seemed a little larger than life! However his stories told of a life rich in experiences and care of this beautiful mountain property which has been enriched by many tree plantings and other environmental programs. Landcare in action before "Landcare" was popular.



We are fortunate that John's family share his love of the history and desire to preserve historic buildings and the stories that goes with them. John's daughter Penny welcomed us for our annual day visit this year and has invited us to return again next year when Bindi is at its autumnal best.

### Bindi Station in Autumn, Saturday April 21, 2018

(If you are coming from Melbourne, book a couple of nights in Bairnsdale and make a weekend of it)

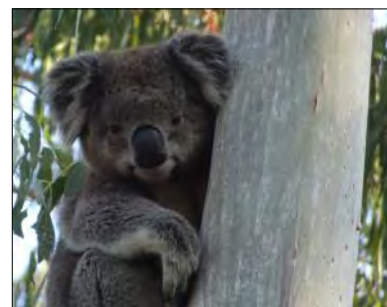
**Sometimes the best things in life are hard to find, but when you do, you share these things with others.**

**At Gippsland High Country Tours we are proud of our return client base and our recommendation rate. On any tour you are likely to find at least half the other participants are repeat clients. Some have travelled with us more than a dozen times.**

## Wildlife Tours

Yes, our tours are wildlife tours.

Koala's like this one we found on a spring tour are an iconic symbol of Australian wildlife. On our tours we'd like to show you some other



Australian wildlife that are less well known too. Taking time to quietly observe, we might watch lizards courting in spring, a bullant carrying a "giant" pebble, seals frolicking in the surf or we could listen to a chorus of unseen frogs or a lyrebird concert. If you love wildlife, our local guides will have something special to share with you.

## Private Tours - some suggestions

As well as the tours that are scheduled on the program or calendar, private tours or additional departures are often available. Sometimes the dates we've set do not work for you or maybe you would like to invite a friend or two and have your own very small group.

On the Easy Ecotours page of our website, look for these trips which are just some that we can easily tailor to your needs.

- Snowy River Nature Tour
- Pt Hicks Lighthouse Nature Tour
- High Country Huts beyond Licola
- Gabo Island Discovery Ecotour

## Birds of Hattah Kulkyne & Murray Sunset

For one wonderful week at the end of August, we leave Gippsland behind and take a small group of just 3 or 4 participants to enjoy the birds of Victoria's arid Mallee country near the Murray River. Spinifex and saltbush, beautiful mallee eucalypts, freshwater and salt lakes, sand dunes and windswept plains. Whether you are an experienced bird-watcher or a keen novice with an interest in observing birds, this tour is always a very special experience.

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## An Alpine Summer followed by a balmy Autumn

Whether you are a bushwalker or a nature enthusiast, Summer and Autumn are about the best times to visit Victoria's Alps. Plants and animals take a while to get going in spring and shake off the last of the effects of winter. But as the soil finally warms up, everything suddenly bursts to life. Its hard to know what to appreciate first, the long distant mountain vistas or the close up details of wildflowers with colourful butterflies and beetles. Do you watch the colourful Flame Robin perched on the smooth branch of a snowgum or focus on the Kestrel hovering over the ridge hoping for a juicy grasshopper or lizard?

Close your eyes and imagine sitting on the soft snowgrass breathing in the clear mountain air with a soft breeze wafting by. Then visualise standing outside your lodge accommodation gazing up at the dark night skies filled with stars. Sunsets, Bogong Moths flying at dusk and plenty of quiet times with only natural sounds reaching your ears.

With the summer temperatures milder than our capital cities you can enjoy gentle walks with magnificent scenery and lots of time for nature experiences in January. Then in March when the Autumn mornings are cool and crisp we offer some more energetic walking, but there is never a rush, so you will still have time to enjoy the landscapes and discover the wonders of the alpine environment.

You can relax and let your knowledgeable guides take care of the details, returning to cosy accommodation every night and no meals to prepare. Even better, these are small group tours, there are no more than 10 participants.



**January 8-12, 2018 Alpine Discovery Tours (Graded Easy)**

**March 5-9, 2018 Mt Feathertop Adventure (Two different walking options so you can choose from either Moderate or Challenging walks each day)**



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or email to: **info@gippslandhighcountrytours.com.au**

**Please send me more information about the following trip/s -** \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Name:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Address:** \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ **Postcode:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Phone:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Email:** \_\_\_\_\_