

Eastern Lookout Nature Tour

Wyperfeld National Park



Car 1 hour



Bike 2-3 hours



Walk 4-6 hours

Beginning at the eastern side of the Wonga Campground - look for the signposts. Take this easy loop drive, suitable for 2WD vehicles and travel along 15km of gravel road. Pass through usually dry lakebeds, flood plains, sand dunes and peaceful Mallee country. Morning and evening are best times for wildlife viewing. Please travel slowly, look out for wildlife and ensure you don't drive off the formed road - it's very easy to get bogged off-road in the sandy soil. Roadside numbers refer to these notes.



Grinding stones and coolamon

1. Local history – rich and varied

Wotjobaluk and Wergaia people roamed the Wyperfeld area using watercourses, woodlands and surrounding Mallee to their advantage. Their approach to the land was one of sustainability and coexistence, and their spiritual and physical connections are still celebrated through their descendants.

Victoria's Indigenous communities and other cultural heritage such as shell middens, oven mounds, scar-trees, artefacts and stories are all indicators of this earlier, and current, presence dating back more than 5,000 years.

Europeans followed the watercourses in the 1850s and had soon established themselves in the Mallee area.

In 1856, the original Pine Plains Pastoral Run, which encompassed much of the present park, was subdivided into a northern section *Pine Plains* and a southern *Wonga Lake*.

The Wonga Lake Pastoral Run homestead is believed to have been at the edge of Lake Brimin on the southern side of the Wonga Campground. *Wyperfeld –Australia's First Mallee National Park* (Friends of Wyperfeld) gives insight into the parks history and nature.

2. A popular home – for large and small

This line of large River Red Gums (*Eucalyptus camaldulensis*) became established when a major flood carried seed through the Outlet Creek system.



Wedge-tailed Eagle

The large spreading branches and numerous hollows of River Red Gums are a habitat for mammals, birds and insects, ranging from ants, spiders and moths to Brushtail Possums (shown here), Wedge-tailed Eagles, various parrot species, bats and reptiles.



3. Flagstaff Hill

Formerly known as Beacon Hill this large sand dune was used to hoist a bucket of burning wood and coals to the top of a pole at night in the early station days to act as a guide for returning bullock teams.

The surrounding dunes still show scars left by wildfires (1946) and prolonged overgrazing. Parks Victoria staff work with Friends, school groups and other volunteers to collect and propagate local seed re-establishing plant communities on these degraded dunes.

4. Lake Brimin - waiting for floodwaters

This lake last held water in 1921 and is part of a complex lake system, flooded only when the Wimmera River overflows through Lakes Hindmarsh and Albacutya. Historically, this occurred every 20 years.

The proposed piping of the Wimmera-Mallee Water Supply System would deliver significant water savings (80%) and provide increased environmental flows to the Wimmera River and Lakes system. Currently the open-channel water network loses more than 90% to seepage and evaporation.

Look for the metal bore cap

Bores tap into the watertable and are regularly monitored for depth and salinity. As long-term water salinity rises larger trees with roots poisoned by this salty water table soon begin to suffer and 'die back'. Can you see dieing treetops on the floodplain? Water last reached Wirrengren Plain in 1901.





Red-rumped Parrots need hollows to breed

5. Black Box – prime real estate

These dark, rough-barked trees are Black Box (*Eucalyptus largiflorens*). Along with River Red Gums, they too arrived here on a giant flow of high floodwaters.

Black Box trees supply important habitat for wildlife – supplying them with larger hollows to breed, shelter and hide in.

6. Copi Rise

Leaving the floodplain, the road now follows a relatively treeless ridge formed by dust blown from lakebeds thousands of years ago, before these plants were here.

Copi is the indigenous word for gypsum (calcium sulphate). These ridges may once have been covered in Slender Cypress-pine (*Callitris gracilis*) and Buloke (*Allocasuarina luehmannii*). Since lost to bushfires and overgrazing by rabbits, stock and kangaroos. Rangers, Friends and other volunteer groups are continually striving to restore the natural balance through Parks Victoria's Total Grazing Management and revegetation programs.

7. Eastern Lookout - a bird's-eye view

For an excellent overview of the park, take the short walk up the sandy rise. Some of the common plants along the way are marked with pegs. Watch the sky for large Wedge-tailed Eagles, or smaller Black-shouldered Kites and this Nankeen Kestrel.



Eastern Lookout Walk, 25 minutes return

- Over millions of years the multi-stemmed mallee eucalypts around you have developed various ways of adapting to fire. They have a rootstock or lignotuber beneath the ground that stores the plant's energy. This enables burnt stumps to sprout new life again. They avoid the summer's heat by turning their leaves edgewise towards the sun. (The tree near the peg is Yellow Mallee, *Eucalyptus incrassata*.) The native parasitic climber Dodder Laurel (or 'Snotty Gobble') grows prolifically in the Mallee and is an ideal tangle for small birds to build nests.
- If you look to the southwest, three major plant communities can be seen (most of this area was burnt in 1946):
 - Black Box/ Red Gum woodland (the floodplain)
 - Native Cypress-pine woodland (on sandy ridges)
 - Mallee woodland.
- This tall slender bush is Broom Baeckea (*Baeckea behrii*). It has delicate white flowers that appear in spring. Early settlers used the branches (brush) of this shrub as a house broom.

8. Into the mallee - leaving the floodplain

The trail now enters the mallee section of the park. If you drive slowly or go for a stroll near the Lowan Track area, you may catch a glimpse of a Malleefowl or a lizard such as the Bearded Dragon.



9. Grass shelters – a prickly fortress

The tussocks growing on both sides of the road are the aptly-named Porcupine Grass (*Triodia irritans*). These tussocks shelter countless insects, small marsupials, particularly Mitchell's Hopping-mouse, birds such as this Emu-wren and reptiles like this Bearded Dragon.



10. Mallee eucalypts – stop the car!

Growing near here is a common mallee eucalypt - Slender or Narrow-leaf Mallee (*E. foecunda*). By looking carefully you can begin to identify different mallee trees. Look for differences in the size, proportion and colour of the leaves, the size, shape and number of buds and fruit capsules, the texture and colour of the bark, and the preferred soil type/colour. Watch for at least three different species of mallee along this section.

Springing into life – especially after drought

During spring, this section of mallee is sometimes carpeted with the bright yellow flowers of Golden Pennants (*Glisschrocaryon behrii*). Take a wander...although small, and often inconspicuous at first glance, the understorey plants are interesting. Like many other plants of semi-arid areas, these low shrubs have tiny leaves that help them cut down on water loss during hot, dry periods. At Wyperfeld, like most of the Mallee, rainfall is both low and unreliable.

11. Pink Velvet-bush

This is the dominant understorey plant along here, (*Lasiopetalum behrii*).

Watch for changes in the understorey plants as you travel. Here's a clue...when the soil colour/type changes the plants often do. Notice any changes?

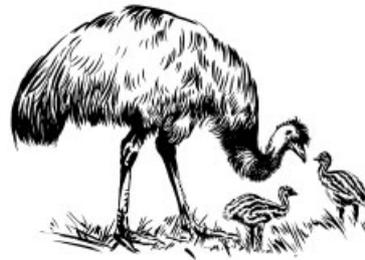


12. Different soil, different plants

Small Hop-bush (*Dodonea bursariifolia*) is the most common shrub in this section of mallee found on sandy-red loam soils.

13. Weedy woodland – worldly travellers

Early settlers have inadvertently introduced many of the common plants in this Black Box woodland, such as wild turnip, thistles and horehound. Soil disturbance from sheep, cattle, rabbits, fire and fluctuating high populations of kangaroos have damaged the native vegetation and encouraged the spread of weeds. Weed control and grazing management programs are ongoing with the support of Friends and volunteers.



Father Emu and chicks

14. Kangaroos, Emus and open spaces

The large flood plain to your right is Lignum Swamp.

Early and late in the day are the best times to view them at their favourite feeding place.

A home, a meal, a shelter

Logs and dead branches on the ground are an important habitat and link in the foodchain for a wide range of species, ranging from insects, other invertebrates, to reptiles and birds to smaller ground-dwelling mammals.

Firewood may be collected sparingly along the park entrance road, but not elsewhere.

- Help ensure there will always be habitats for wildlife – use firewood sparingly!

Please return for re-use, thank you!



Western Grey Kangaroo