



## Flora and Fauna



Tuggerah Lakes catchment is a haven of biodiversity, being home to approximately 427 species of native mammals, birds, amphibians, reptiles and fish, as well as many invertebrates, such as insects and crabs.

The forested hills and fertile valleys in the upper catchment to the west, slope down to floodplains and lake basins near the coast. This changing landscape creates an array of vegetation types and habitats that support this rich biodiversity.

### Catchment vegetation

Vegetation types across Tuggerah Lakes catchment include rainforests, woodlands, wetlands, saltmarshes and seagrass meadows. Within these varying vegetation types, hundreds of plant species form specific habitats to which animals have adapted.

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In the hills and valleys, stands of eucalypt trees including blackbutts, scribbly gums, spotted gums and blue gums grow. Numerous bird species fly in and around the tall forest trees, roosting in the canopies, finding food or spying prey from above. On the ground, small marsupials such as bandicoots and antechinus (marsupial mice) feast on insects, earthworms and spiders in the leaf litter.

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### Going with the flow

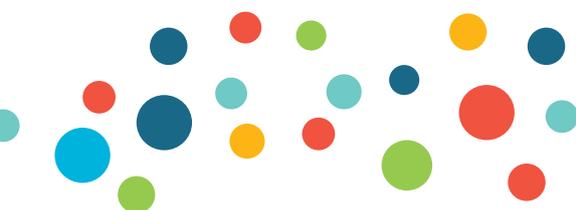
As freshwater flows down rivers and creeks, plants adapted to waterlogged soils grow along the banks. This area is called the riparian zone and provides food and shelter for animals living in and around rivers. Some animals, such as frogs and reptiles, use the riparian zone to move between the land and water, while platypus use banks for their burrows.

Where water slows or pools, wetlands are formed. Here, plants can tolerate both periods of dry and being permanently or seasonally wet. Many animals rely on wetland habitats for feeding, breeding and or shelter. Wetlands also play an important role in water quality, filtering out sediments and pollutants by trapping them while microorganisms help to break them down. The plants also take up excess nutrients, helping to prevent eutrophication (or 'over-fertilisation') of the Tuggerah Lakes estuary downstream.

### Tree houses, saltmarsh and mud

A range of trees and shrubs grow around the Tuggerah Lakes. Swamp mahoganies, red gums and paperbarks provide shelter in the form of trunk hollows for possums and bird nests; and food such as blossom nectar for birds and bats, and seeds for parrots. At the water's edge, invertebrates such as crabs, insects and molluscs live in and around saltmarsh plants and mud. Saltmarshes attract wading and migratory birds looking for a meal. Wading birds are equipped with long legs and beaks which enable them to walk through shallow water and hunt in the muddy depths for food.

Images above: The Black swan is the most numerous bird species on Tuggerah Lakes, with up to 4000 swans on the lakes on any given day.



love our living lakes



### A pinch of salt

When freshwater reaches Tuggerah Lakes, it mixes with small amounts of seawater, forming 'brackish' water. Salinity levels (salt content) change depending on weather patterns. High rainfall brings large volumes of freshwater down the rivers, diluting the salt, while hot and dry weather creates evaporation and higher concentrations of salt.

Many animals have adapted to these variable conditions. Fish, crabs, prawns and seahorses live in and around the seagrass meadows, relying on them for feeding, breeding and nursery grounds.

Black swans are vegetarian and rely on seagrass as one of their main food sources. By plunging their long necks into the water they can reach plants down to a metre in depth.

### Vital habitats

Streambanks, wetlands and saltmarsh habitats are vital components of the Tuggerah Lakes catchment and are necessary for maintaining its ecological health into the future. Wyong Shire Council has been restoring and rehabilitating all of these habitats under the Australian Government's Caring for our Country initiative with the aim of improving the overall health and water quality of the catchment.

### How you can help

- Keep fertiliser use to a minimum or plant native vegetation that does not require fertiliser.
- Use a carwash or wash your car on the lawn.
- Launch boats from public boat ramps only.
- Always walk or ride on paths provided.
- Leave saltmarsh areas to grow, don't mow to the shoreline.
- Deposit garden waste and grass clippings in compost or your green waste bins.
- Join a local Landcare group.
- Put litter and dog poo in the bin.

**did you know...**

**Cabbage Tree Palm:** The 'cabbage' or growing part of the palm leaves were a popular tasty food source with indigenous people. The leaves were also used as roof thatching and for weaving baskets, and its fibrous bark was used to make fishing lines.

Images above, left to right: A stand of young paperbark trees. This wetland species can tolerate seasonal waterlogging. Photo: M Hislop. Australian bass live in the freshwater streams and creeks of Tuggerah Lakes catchment and migrate to the lakes to spawn. Illustration: Nicole Maloney Cabbage Tree Palm. Photo: M Hislop The Black-winged stilt uses its long legs to wade through shallow water and its long beak to find food in the mud. Photo: G Satherly

For more information about Tuggerah Lakes estuary go to [www.loveourlivinglakes.com.au](http://www.loveourlivinglakes.com.au)



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CARING FOR OUR COUNTRY

