

## ECONOMIC VALUE OF BIODIVERSITY

### WOULD GROUPS OF TOURISTS LIKE YOUR BLOCK?

Kevin Coate

**S**O! You have a block of land that you love and want to preserve. You most likely have friends who visit your block and perhaps you belong to clubs that have an affinity with your aims and whose members occasionally visit.

Perhaps your bush block does not bring in an income and can be costly to maintain (eg fencing, fire breaks and the control of feral animals). You think you would like to make it available to tourists, from whom you would expect to collect a fee in order to help offset some of the costs incurred and possibly give you an income. Probably more importantly, it would give you a sense of place, a chance to expound on it's attractions and help make people more aware of the environment we all live in. Your thoughts turn to eco-tourism and you wonder what would be necessary to induce operators to your block.

At this point I don't want to kill enthusiasm, but realistically, most owners of small bush blocks would find the commitment involving tourism too daunting - and tour operators would not be interested unless you have an unique attraction. However, while saying this, if you do have something special - persevere.

Firstly, approach your regional tourism centre, as they would have some idea of the viability of your project. If you have a positive response, you would then contact tour operators working in the area. Be aware that a tourist business is highly competitive and itineraries and brochures are planned up to a year in advance. Whatever the attraction on your block (eg wildflowers, breakaways, hills, lakes, birds etc), tour operators will need to assess it's potential at least 12 months before bringing tourists.

Points a tour operator will look for:

- 1 Location: Ideally, entrance should be on a tourist route or close to a regional centre from which a day or half-day trip could be conducted.
- 2 Vehicle access: The drive should be over firm ground without low overhanging branches. There needs to be adequate parking space and turning circle for a large coach and trailer.
- 3 Walking trails: Safe tracks made to points of interest.
- 4 Toilets: Toilets are necessary and must be kept in good order and regularly checked. Unhygienic toilets reflect badly on both you and the operator. Hand washing facilities are important.
- 5 Shelter: A shady picnic area for lunch, morning and afternoon teas. Some kind of cover is advisable in times of adverse weather conditions.
- 6 Camping ground: In more remote areas a camping ground in pleasant surrounds with even campsites and a fire-ring, would be an asset. It would need to be in a sheltered place with space to spread out.



Kevin Coate and an Abbotts Booby inspecting each other, Christmas Island. Photo, P. Hussey.

- 7 Publicity: Assist in publicising your block, either in a brochure or press releases.
- 8 Insurance: Public liability insurance is essential and expensive. It is a big consideration for those contemplating opening their block to the public. Check with your insurance company as to your liability, should someone be injured.

It could be more appealing to a wider range of tourist, if your block is part of a farm and you are able to 'value add' with other activities such as sheep shearing or a sheep dog working. A list of birds and plants on the block would be useful. Other inducements would be to provide lunch or country style morning tea, with special scones or home-made cake. A camp-fire situation, where a damper is taken from the camp oven and served with billy tea, is always a winner. There are quite a number of tourism ventures in the south-west and wheatbelt where Home Stay and Bed & Breakfast (in more remote areas Station Stay) are becoming increasingly popular as a way of bringing in additional income.

There is more useful information for those venturing into eco-tourism in an article I wrote for the WA Naturalists' Club (see ref below). Good luck with your endeavours!

Ref: Coate, K. 2001. "The Development of Nature-based Tourism in Western Australia" The Western Australian Naturalist, 23: pp (for info about copies, email: wanats@iinet.net.au)

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