

## The wonders of the Kimberley

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### A glimpse at its unique environment – ‘Remnant rainforest’

(by Brian Kane)



“Rainforests occur on the east coast of Australia – right?” Well, they do today but millions of years ago the Kimberley had its own rainforests. It was only in 1987 with the use of satellite imagery and aerial photography that pockets of remnant rainforest were clearly visible in the Kimberley. With further research by experts who explored these areas on the ground it was discovered that the remnant rainforests of the Kimberley were of particular significance, as they are the only occurrence of rainforests in Western Australia, and they were found to support fauna and flora not found anywhere else.

These rainforest areas are characterised by their closed green canopy, a profusion of vines and plants only found in rainforest communities. Some of these patches of rainforest are so lush that they provide shelter and coolness for hundreds of butterflies beneath the canopy and unique birds such as the orange footed scrub fowl, channel-billed cuckoo and rainbow pita whose bright green back blends in with the bright green of the lush vegetation. The great bower bird is common in the Kimberley and is actually a survivor of the rainforest age but it has adapted remarkably now to our present day dry climate.



Great Bower bird Bower (photo: CAS)

At least 300 species of plants have been collected from the Kimberley remnant rainforests and 80% are restricted to this environment. Many of these species are of special interest because of their antiquity, as rainforests contain the most primitive flowering plants still in existence. It is thought that some inaccessible rainforest pockets on the coast are actually expanding today.

Broome contains the southernmost boundary of vine thickets which are a subset of the remnant rainforests and they lie behind the sand dunes. This coastal strip has been protected because of its diversity of plants and its significance for Aboriginal people. Today this unique area provides a variety of peaceful bush walks known to the local Yawuru people as ‘Minyirr’.

The remnant rainforests of the Kimberley are truly remarkable. At present they are protected by their isolated locations but we need to ensure they can survive into the future.

*Further information: BK’s Kimberley nature web site:*  
<http://www.stmarysbroome.wa.edu.au/home/nature/aaopen.html>