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Pohlner. "We don't talk to them, we don't touch them, we don't sing to them." There are only about 10–12,000 of these endangered animals left in the world, and 80 per cent are in SA. They pull up onto this beach for a rest after about three days at sea.

On the far north coast of NSW, a nocturnal wildlife tour has taken a novel approach to protecting the animals in its sights. Vision Walks uses \$935 military-grade night-vision goggles and infra-red torches in World Heritage-listed Nightcap NP, so that no torches shine into the animals' eyes. Participants walk around in total darkness gazing at frogs, pademelons, tawny frogmouths, possums, koalas and mice. Seeing the world clearly in monochrome is a marketable gimmick, and gives tourists an edge over some of the animals. "You can tell it doesn't disturb them," says Vision Walks owner/operator Wendy Bithell, who was told by an Animal Ethics Committee that the infra-red technology was better than spotlights. "I've had bandicoots running over our feet. We're seeing more and more animals each time we go out."

As my whale-watching boat starts heading across Hervey Bay for home, my companions descend into an awed silence, contemplating what they've

witnessed. They talk in hushed tones and study their digital photos and videos. I keep scanning the sandy shores of Fraser Island as we pass, and finally have another ecotourism encounter I've been hoping for – a lone dingo trotting along the beach. Magnificent. Proud. King of its territory.

I keep my eyes on it long after our boat has passed, until eventually it plops down on the sand, paws out like a sphinx, as if patiently waiting for the next boatload of tourists. AG

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USEFUL WEBSITES

Ecotourism Australia: www.ecotourism.org.au
Indigenous experiences: www.aboriginalaustralia.com.au
Australian wildlife tourism: www.wildlifetourism.org.au
Latest Australian eco-news: www.ecodirectory.com.au
International ecotourism destinations and travel tips: www.responsibletravel.com, www.itsagreengreenworld.com and www.ecotourdirectory.com