

‘Getting up close and personal’: wildlife of the Gold Coast theme parks

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Who’s who in the zoo? Definition of the Gold Coast’s wildlife attractions

With the greatest concentration of theme parks in the southern hemisphere, Gold Coast residents and tourists alike are spoilt for choice. With two exceptions, these theme parks provide visitors with an opportunity to get ‘up close and personal’ with wildlife.

In discussing theme parks I immediately run into a problem associated with defining the term since my interest is in the wildlife exhibits rather than the theme parks *per se*. The familiar theme parks of today, the large multi-purpose entertainment/education facilities (e.g. Dreamworld) include wildlife exhibits. What of the much smaller, single-purpose wildlife attractions? In some sense they were the catalyst for the wildlife exhibitions in larger parks that have a diversity of attractions. In this chapter I wish to discuss the wildlife attractions, no matter whether they are associated with the large multi-dimensional theme parks of today, or whether they focus purely on wildlife. For the purposes of this chapter I have, therefore, defined any attraction that allows patrons to view wildlife as a ‘theme park’.

The first wildlife attraction

The history of the wildlife exhibits in the Gold Coast’s theme parks dates from the early days of the coast’s development as a mass tourist destination. Jim Cavill’s first tourist hotel on the Gold Coast was built in 1925 at Elston (later renamed Surfers Paradise), on the northern end of what subsequently became known as the Gold Coast. After the hotel burnt down in 1936 it was rebuilt in a grander art deco style, complete with the ‘Surfers Paradise Zoo’. Its major attraction was a kangaroo exhibit.

The Porpoise Pool

At the other end of the Gold Coast, at Snapper Rocks on the Queensland/New South Wales border, the ‘Jack Evans Pet Porpoise Pool’ opened in 1961. The animals that gave this