

18. Habitat fieldwork - Port Campbell National Park

Teacher notes

Organisational details are in italics

INTRODUCTION.

If you or the students are not sure of a plant's identity, take a photo and indicate where it was taken. Identification can then be carried out at school from more detailed sources.

The purpose of this walk is to observe variations in ecosystems and the factors that determine what type of vegetation will grow and therefore the habitat available to wildlife.

This fieldwork begins at the base of the Discovery Walk steps, where the track follows the coast along the edge of Port Campbell Bay.

SITE 1.

Walk to the first wooden railing. Take a photograph or a sketch of the track and the rails. What effect do you think these would have on the habitat of birds and animals. List the changes these alterations could have had on this environment (consider noise, light, access by humans, runoff, shade, moisture).

SITE 2. Heathland community

When you reach the heathland community, look for the dominant species of Common Correa, Chaffy Saw-sedge and Guinea-flower.

Plants growing in the gully show the effects the prevailing salt laden south-westerly winds have on coastal vegetation. Near the track the plants are taller because they are partly sheltered from the wind.

A. Take a set of readings for your environment summary sheet. Label it DW1. Note the design of the track and drainage here.

SITE 3. Shelter from salt laden winds

Near peg 6 the vegetation is sheltered from salt laden winds. The plants growing here are taller than those closer to the coast.

The higher soil moisture here means that some different species grow at this location, including Woolly Tea-tree with its silvery leaves and woolly fruit, and Scented Paper-bark.

This dense vegetation provides good habitat for birds. Some common birds are the Grey Shrike-thrush, Singing Honeyeater and Superb Fairy-wren.

B. Take a set of readings for your environment summary sheet. Label it DW2.

Why might this be a favoured site for birds?

SITE 4. Erosion control

Look for Drooping she-oaks and the stunted eucalypt Messmate growing among the heathland community. Can you see any evidence of inappropriate recreation use and subsequent management action? An old severely eroded foot track was closed to allow restoration work to be carried out.

C. Complete a sketch and/or take a photograph of the management strategies being undertaken here. As the track moves further from the coast, clumps of Drooping She-oaks and Messmate become more common. Bird life is also more common in this sheltered environment.

This dense vegetation provides a suitable habitat for a variety of native animals including Ringtail Possums, wallabies and echidnas. Students may see holes scratched by echidnas searching for ants. They may also see tracks or scats (droppings) of animals.

Birds of prey can also be seen here. Marsh Harriers, Australian Kestrels and Brown Goshawks are the most common species.

SITE 5. Eucalypt woodland

Further along the track you enter Eucalypt woodland. Here Messmate reaches a height of 3 or 4 metres. Although these trees are much taller than those near the cliff tops, they are still small compared to the same species further inland.

The understory includes some of the heathland species seen earlier, and also several new species, including Bracken. Bracken is not an introduced plant as believed by many.

D. Complete a record for the environment summary sheet. Label it DW3.

Make a note of the types of animals and birds that can sometimes be found here. Why is it unlikely that these animals will be seen?

SITE 6. Two Mile Bay

At the end of the walk is Two Mile Bay. Walk to the lookout on the western side of the carpark. Here the coastline is quite different. The limestone cliffs are stable and sand dunes have been deposited in front of them. This may be due to offshore reefs reducing the impact of waves, and thereby reducing erosion at this location.

If you look closely at the vegetation pattern around the Bay you can see several distinct types reflecting the different soil texture, fertility, drainage and the effect of salt spray.

E. Create a sketch of Two Mile Bay, labelling the six different types of vegetation you can see in front of you. Suggest reasons why they might vary in this way.



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