

Eco Warrior

Bob Flemming, The Billabong Sanctuary

When it comes to learning about the environment, you can't go wrong with a teacher like Bob Flemming.

The owner and general manager of The Billabong Sanctuary in Townsville loves his home among the gum trees and hasn't looked back since moving to the area more than 21 years ago.

The environmental philanthropist, who thinks and dreams in green, developed the wildlife sanctuary from scratch after leaving a teaching career in environmental studies in Sydney.

"I had been teaching for 15 years when I decided that it was time to aim for the bigger picture," he said. "So instead of teaching a classroom of 35 school children, I now play a major part in educating the thousands of school children who come through our gates each year.

"We provide educational experiences based on the Queensland environmental science curriculum for children ranging from kindergarten to year twelve. My aim has always been to spread the importance of environmental conservation further and here in Townsville we do it every day."

With the help of wife Del, son Brett and Brett's wife Janelle, they also established Bungalow Bay Koala Village, an eco-friendly backpacker budget resort and wildlife park on nearby Magnetic Island, one of the first eco-resorts in Australia where guests can stay with the wildlife on the premises.

"Our motto is 'go to sleep with a koala and wake up with a croc'," he said. "With tours conducted not only within the site but also in the national park, guests can learn about a range of natural ecosystems and wildlife. Bungalow Bay Koala Park is also home to the Wildlife Rescue Group where sick, orphaned and injured animals are looked after by qualified carers."

Always planning the next big thing, Bob has a number of plans in motion for The Billabong Sanctuary including the creation of an eco-based convention area.

The wildlife facility recently received a \$100,000 grant from the federal government which will be put towards the construction of a convention venue for a range of eco-conference experiences.

Also planned is a bird flight show which is expected to be introduced in the coming months.

"If working as a teacher and now on The Billabong Sanctuary has taught me one thing it is this: we are here to look after the environment, not abuse it," he said.

"Everything we do has environmental repercussions and if I can teach people to foster an environmental consciousness and awareness of the world we live in then we are one step closer in ensuring it is here for generations to come." www.billabongsanctuary.com.au



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