

Eco Warrior

Robert Ashdown, Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service

'Salt of the earth' is one of those terms used to describe people who are down to earth, unaffected and dependable and in many ways it is the perfect phrase to describe Robert Ashdown.

Robert is an Interpretive Officer for Queensland Parks and Wildlife Services (QPWS) in Toowoomba and describes his role as inspiring people to appreciate our natural and cultural heritage.

"It's a great job. It's about translating the language of nature and the voices of history into stories and experiences that people can enjoy," Robert says.

He is passionate about protecting the natural environment for everyone to learn from, experience and enjoy, hence the Eco Warrior tag.

"Interpreters in the QPWS are varied in where they work and what they do, but I think we all strive to share our enthusiasm and passion for nature and culture — we try to inspire people to appreciate and enjoy Queensland's parks and wildlife and to share responsibility for their protection," he says.

Robert admits most of his time is spent working on interpretive signs and editing the QPWS magazine Bush Telegraph, but says that every now and then he "gets out of his cage" and visits national parks.

"I'm not an expert in ecotourism, but I think it's a critical part of effective conservation — it helps people understand and speak for the environment," he says.

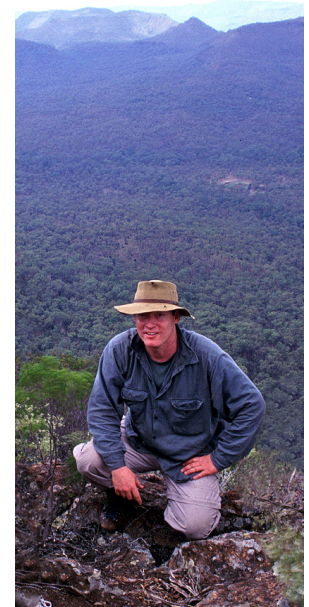
"It's clear that Australia's abundance of relatively wild areas and Indigenous culture will be an ever-increasing draw-card for people from around the world.

"Ecotourism's future depends on how well we manage these areas and how we solve critical conservation issues, such as the destruction of coastal environments by uncontrolled development, old-growth logging in Tasmania and the continued failure to get coordinated river management systems off the ground.

"I also think that truly equitable and honest partnerships with Indigenous people will be essential for ecotourism."

Robert previously worked as a primary school teacher and as an Education Officer with the Queensland Museum in Brisbane which he describes as "a fascinating place to work and visit".

Robert also worked as an Extension Officer for the Museum, where he visited remote schools with a van full of artifacts and specimens, and ran lessons on natural history using the specimens.



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"I really enjoyed meeting the communities in remote parts of southern Queensland, and learnt so much from my travels. While at the Museum I had a secondment to QPWS to develop interpretive signage for Cania Gorge National Park, then landed a permanent job in interpretation with QPWS at Toowoomba," he says.

And what would this modest Eco Warrior be doing if he wasn't working for the QPWS?

"Photography is my main passion, so my dream job would be working as a cameraman on natural history docos, perhaps lost somewhere in the scrub with David Attenborough or with the Parer-Cooks chasing iguanas on the Galapagos Islands."

Stay here Robert, we need warriors like you to protect and educate others on the need for natural environments.

If you'd like to nominate someone as an Eco-Warrior for a profile in Eco on Q; someone who is an exemplary ambassador for the industry please send your nomination to Eco on Q via email eco.onq@tq.com.au.