



MEDIA INFORMATION

NATURE

Despite the often harsh climate, Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park is home to hundreds of different animal and bird species. One of the best things about a visit here is to see some of this wildlife in their natural habitat. Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park has 21 species of native mammals, over 200 species of birds, 73 species of reptiles and literally thousands of invertebrate species including ants, spiders and bugs.

Some of the most commonly known and found are listed below, but for a more comprehensive look at what you could see while you're here, stop by the Visitors Centre located near Desert Gardens Hotel.

BIRDS

This seemingly harsh landscape plays host to over 200 different bird species, whether dwelling here year-round or offering seasonal appearances along their migratory route. Ayers Rock Resort invites you to partake in the joys of discovering some of the "local species". Keep your ears open and eyes peeled, as you may come across the following species of birds on your adventures through the National Park and as you move around the Resort.

5 tips for successful bird watching in the Red Centre:

1. Schedule bird watching trips for either the early part of the morning or at dusk.
2. Natural and man-made watering holes and wetland areas are terrific spots to monitor birding activity. Also keep an eye out for food sources such as flowering shrubs.
3. Listen out for birdcalls and other markers indicative of bird presence.
4. Study the many species you are likely to encounter prior to going out into the field.
5. Play it safe when venturing into the outback - observe National Park guidelines, adhere to designated walking trails and carry adequate water and other supplies.

FLORA

As its world heritage listing indicates, Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park contains unique, rare or superlative natural phenomena, formations and features.

Anangu have, for centuries, divided the flora in the Park into a number of categories: Punu (trees), Puti (shrubs), Tjulpuntjulpunpa (flowers) and Ukiri (grasses).

Perhaps the most prevalent tree is the Desert Oak, or Kurkara. Desert Oaks are slow to mature and grow in deep sand in large numbers. Juveniles look like Christmas trees and when matured to an adult form, spread massive limbs when the roots meet the water table. It is the only member of its family in Central Australia and its cones are the biggest of its kind. Fire burns its foliage but usually does not kill the tree.



Shrubs such as grevilleas and hakeas (corkwood trees) flower in the spring and winter and are known for their big bottlebrush heads. Kaliny-kalinypa (honey grevillea – *Grevillea eriostachya*) flowers are bright yellow and green. Colourful ground flowers are called tjulpuntjulpunpa.

Daisies and other ground flowers bloom after rain and during the winter. Others such as the wattles bloom as spring approaches. The prickly tjanpi (hard spinifex - *Triodia basedowii*) hummocks are prevalent throughout the Park. Their enormous root systems prevent desert sands shifting, spreading underground beyond the prickly clump and deep into the soil and forming an immense cone.

GEOLOGY

Anangu know how Uluru and Kata Tjuta were formed. This knowledge comes from Tjukurpa, the stories and lore that explain and govern Anangu life. Much of it, particularly about Kata Tjuta, is sacred and cannot be explained. Geologists have their own explanation.

CREATING THE FANS

Around 550 million years ago the Petermann Ranges to the west of Kata Tjuta were taller than they are now. Rainwater flowing down the mountains eroded sand and rock and dropped it in big fan shapes on the surrounding plain. One fan had mainly water smoothed rocks. The other fan was mainly sand. Both fans became kilometres thick.

PRESSING THE FANS

Later, 500 million years ago, the whole area became covered in sea. Sand and mud fell to the bottom of the sea and covered the seabed, including the fans. The weight of the new seabed turned both it and the fans beneath into rock. The rocky fan became conglomerate rock. The sand fan turned into sandstone.

FOLDING AND TILTING

About 400 million years ago, the sea had disappeared and the whole of Central Australia began to be subjected to massive forces. Some rocks folded and tilted. The rocky fan tilted slightly. The sand fan tilted 90 degrees so the layers of sandstone almost stood on end.

FLAKY RED SKIN

Close up, much of the surface of Uluru is flaky red with grey patches. The flakes are bits of rock that are left after water and oxygen in the air have decayed minerals in the rest of the rock. The red is the rusting of the iron in the arkose. The grey is the original colour of the arkose. You can see the grey rock, which is not rusted, inside the caves.

THE SHAPING OF ULURU AND KATA TJUTA

From a distance, Uluru looks smooth and featureless. But up close its face is weather-beaten - pitted with holes and gashes, ribs, valleys and caves. To Anangu, these features are related to the journeys and actions of ancestral beings across the landscape. These stories, known as Tjukurpa, tell about the travels and actions of Kuniya (womapython women), Liru (poisonous snake man), Mala (rufus hare-wallaby) and Lungkata (blue-tongue lizard man). Geologists have different explanations about how these features formed.



THE RIBS

Some layers of arkose, the rock that makes up Uluru, are softer than others and wear away more quickly. This leaves Uluru's characteristic parallel ribs or ridges.

THE CAVES

There are many types of caves at Uluru – those that look like honeycombs, high up on the walls and wave-shaped caves at ground level. Small pits became bigger dimples, then hollows, then caves. Or they may have been eaten away by water when the land's surface was higher; then exposed as the land was eroded away.

CARVED OUT BY WATER

Water has shaped the valleys, potholes and pools of Uluru. Rainstorm after rainstorm over millions of years has sent water plummeting down the hard rock, wearing it away to form grooves, and chains of potholes and plunge pools.

THE DOMES

When the huge slab of rock that is Kata Tjuta was being folded and faulted, vertical joints or fractures cracked through the rock. Water seeped down the cracks and over millions of years the rock eroded away - grain by grain, pebble by pebble, to form valleys and gorges that split the rock slab into blocks. Curved cracks called topographic joints formed on the surface of the blocks. Weathering and erosion wore away the rocks above the cracks to produce the rounded domes we see today. Kata Tjuta, the Pitjantjatjara name for the collection of domes, means "many heads".