



Photo by Kelly Gallo

Koalas were the star attraction at Koala Bay, one of the many places teacher Joey Flowers encountered during her visit to Australia with Earth Expeditions.



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Hamilton teacher waited a lifetime to see Australia

I'm a middle school teacher at St. Joseph Consolidated School in Hamilton. In my spare time I am working on a Master's in Education degree from Miami University through a program by Project Dragonfly, Miami and the Cincinnati Zoo. The degree allows educators to travel to some wonderful locations around the world.

For 2011, two new trips had been added: Australia and Guyana. I crossed my finger and applied for Australia. When I received the e-mail that I was lucky enough to be chosen to be a student on the maiden voyage, I think every person in my school heard shrieks of happiness.

Let me share with you a little personal background to help explain the unprecedented joy the news created in me.

Although I was born and raised in landlocked Hamilton, I have always loved the ocean. At age 16, I was finally able to coerce my parents into letting me obtain my open water scuba certification.

My dream was to dive the Great Barrier Reef of Australia.

Finally, at the age of 40, I was going to make this dream come true — and I was going to be achieving college credit hours at the same time!

The journey began with the longest plane ride of my life.

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The Sea Turtle Hospital at the National Education Centre for the Great Barrier Reef in Townsville makes every release of a rehabilitated turtle a cause for celebration

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It started in Dayton and went to Washington D.C., then to Los Angeles and finally to Townsville, Australia.

Upon arrival in Australia I met some of the wonderful people who would be my classmates. This program is amazing in that it brings together educators from all areas in education and from all around the United States. The wealth of knowledge that can be shared is overwhelming.

Our first stop was at Reef Headquarters (Reef HQ) in Townsville. This is the National Education Centre for the Great Barrier Reef. It contains the largest living coral reef in the world. We spent the first night at this location and took an amazing tour.

For the first portion we were able to look behind-the-scenes at the predator & coral reef tanks. We were able to walk around the upper ledges and see down into the huge open water tanks. We were told how the tank maintenance can be tricky depending on if it's the wet or dry season.

The second portion of the tour was a trip to the sea turtle hospital on premises. Seven turtles were being treated. They ranged in their

degree of health. In fact, some were ready to be released. They make the release a celebration for everyone down at the beach. We then headed back into the upstairs of the aquarium for restful evening sleeping next to the touch-tank.

By 6 a.m. we were up, packed and loaded onto a ferry to head about 8 kilometers offshore to Magnetic Island (Maggie Island). This large mountainous island is home to a World Heritage National Park and bird sanctuary. It also has excellent walking tracks that can be taken between the populated bays and to a number of tourist destinations.

Upon disembarking from the brief ferry ride we met our enthusiastic guide, Tony, at Bungalow Bay in Koala Village. We were assigned our cabins and given only a few minutes before being shuttled to an introduction to local animals that Tony maintains. These animals ranged from a black cockatoo to shingle-back skinks to echidnas and even salt-water crocodiles. Needless to say though, the stars of the show were the koalas. Handling so many different animals was a completely foreign experience to me, but I knew it was an opportunity not to be passed up.

Our days on this island were filled with

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amazing experiences. One day we spent time with individuals working with the local Queensland Park and Recreation department. They put us all to work helping to clear out an area of an invasive species of periwinkle. The only scary part was that we had to be careful and watch out for black adders (only one of the most poisonous snakes on the island).

After earning and partaking of a delicious beachfront lunch, we were hurried along for a hike to see a local World War II lookout site.

Even after having to run to catch the local bus we were not given a break other than dinner. Immediately after eating we were hurried out to the local mangroves to spy on a colony of flying foxes as they prepared to start their evening flight.

Before we knew it, we were packing again and heading back to Reef HQ, but only for a day. The time was spent either becoming scuba certified, for those who needed it, or exploring the town.

We were all ready to start on what was to be my first live-aboard adventure. All the individuals in our expedition boarded the Kalinda for a three-day, two-evening trip to sea.

Our first night was scary! As the boat plowed through 3-meter waves we were expected to try and sleep. My top bunk did not seem a wise choice at this point.

By morning, though, the waves were calm and Captain Dave had anchored us right off Pelorus Island.

We all geared up for a great day of diving. I hadn't seen such a plethora of coral in ages. The most beautiful sight in my opinion, though, was a bright nudibranch that was discovered.

My other highlight was that I managed to avoid being sea-sick the entire trip duration. Not everyone was so lucky, though.

Time was going by so quickly, but Earth Expeditions wasn't finished with us yet. Upon returning to Townsville, we were given the special



Photo by Kelly Gallo

This nudibranch caught Joey's eye. A nudibranch is a soft-bodied mollusk that sports a colorful shell early in life.

opportunity to travel to Mungalla Station. This is a working cattle ranch worked by the local aboriginal owners, the Nywaigi people.

I was stunned by the story of the Aboriginal people from Mungalla Station and surrounding areas who were exhibited as cannibals and savages in the nineteenth century circuses and sideshows of Europe and America.

The climax of this day was a boomerang-throwing contest among all of the Americans. Not to brag, but I was the only one able to have the boomerang return. Of course, I almost knocked myself out in the process — but still!

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What's a trip to Australia without trying a boomerang? Joey took a toss — and hers returned!

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Finally, the class came to an end. I couldn't believe how much I had learned and experienced in such a short time.

I knew the memories of all the astounding animals and people we had encountered would last a lifetime.

More importantly, though, I knew that I was now even more in awe of the wonders of the natural world. I found myself renewed and ready to pass my passion on to my students.

— Joey Flowers

Editor's note: Joey Flowers was one of two educators to receive summer scholarships from Audubon Miami Valley for Earth Expeditions journeys.

Shena Ashcraft, who teaches at Elda Elementary School in Ross, was involved in conservation work at the Monteverde Cloud Forest in Costa Rica during her trip.

Watch for her story in a future edition of the Audubon Miami Valley newsletter.

This is YOUR newsletter!

The quarterly Audubon Miami Valley newsletter welcomes submissions from all members and friends. We'll do our best to publish all of your news and photos concerning any bird, conservation or other Audubon- or chapter-related topic. Send your information to newsletter editor Judi Hetrick at juhetric@yahoo.com



Jim Reid snapped this photo of the "Princess of Audubon" — a.k.a. AMV President Gail Reynolds.



John Blocher spied Dave Osborne and Larry Sherman at a 2011 AMV chapter meeting.

