

## Snapping up those croc tales Paige Taylor, March 05, 2011

- **DESTINATION AUSTRALIA**

**CROCODILES** seemed ever present in my Northern Territory childhood. Living in Perth, thousands of kilometres south of their known habitats, has done nothing to dim my fears. I still imagine encountering the world's largest reptile at the top of the stairs.

Where croc tales are concerned, drama is all. And so it is in the east Kimberley, the faraway corner of Western Australia where the frightening antics of salties with names such as Jethro and Cedric are worked over for the good of the yarn.

I don't need to know anything more about Jethro than his weight (900kg). He is apparently inside the enclosure into which I am staring at Wyndham Crocodile Farm. Jethro emerges at great speed from under the surface of what seems an improbably small pool of water. He is beyond enormous. He growls like a movie dinosaur as he chomps on a piece of beef. I wonder if I will have a heart attack.

"Jethro used to be in our breeding program but he kept killing his girlfriends," guide Tayler Cavanagh cheerfully announces.

Next, Cavanagh - a young woman with a gift for storytelling - takes us to meet River Farm; he weighs even more than Jethro and is lying assertively on a patch of grass where everyone can see his terrifying girth.

Cavanagh tells us that River Farm ended up in detention at Wyndham after "eating some lady's show horse" on a mango plantation outside Kununurra. I try not to contemplate the last moments of the hapless beast.

One of the crocs here has been removed from a nearby former orchard called Parry Creek Farm; its crime was to eat a dog. Parry Creek Farm Tourist Resort & Caravan Park is about 20km from Wyndham and 90km from Kununurra; owners Terry White and Anne Jongedyk are accustomed to salties venturing close to their small tourist operation in the 36,000ha Parry Lagoons Nature Reserve. Dotted with boabs in long grass, it feels a long way from the white sands of Broome's Cable Beach, which so many Australians associate with the Kimberley. The accommodation is not as fancy or expensive as the resort's title might suggest, which also sets it apart from much of the accommodation on offer in popular Broome.

The main billabong at the centre of the nature reserve is dark and glossy, smattered with lilies and teeming with birds. When we arrive at dusk, birdwatchers from Germany are seated in silent concentration at a wooden lookout jutting over the edge of the lagoon.

We see magpie geese, whistling ducks, brolgas and cattle egrets; the racket is wonderful. These are the birds that nest in the floodplains that surround White and Jongedyk's property in the wet season, when they are often cut off from the rest of the Kimberley for weeks.

During my dry-season visit, Jongedyk's son Kurt leads me and other guests on a dawn walk through the 48ha property, past old boabs inscribed with the names of drovers. There are birds, clear skies and, of course, crocodile stories. Kurt takes us past the camping spot where an American couple went swimming in the creek unaware that a very big crocodile had been seen there days earlier. "We freaked out when they told us," says Kurt.

He shows us the clothes line near the homestead where he says a caretaker was hanging washing when a saltie (the one now imprisoned at Wyndham) shot into view and grabbed a dog. The croc whacked the poor animal against a tree a few times before disappearing with it into the creek, Kurt tells us casually.

At Home Valley Station, 120km from Kununurra, Cedric, one of the oldest and biggest crocodiles in the Kimberley, shows up about once a year. Apparently other crocs get out of his way as Cedric cruises the waterway.

Station workers refer to Cedric with a mix of reverence and affection; it helps that Cedric has never killed anyone's horse or pet. I'm told that when Cedric is not in residence on the station, he is somewhere down the Pentecost River eating cattle.

In 2007, members of a Dutch television crew filming at Home Valley Station were so fearful of Cedric they had station workers keep an overnight vigil with a shotgun as they slept a few hundred metres from the water. He never showed up and workers had no intention of shooting him if he did, which is why they took a couple of long naps during the night.

The Dutch series of the dating show Outback Jack was a financial windfall as well as brilliant publicity for the indigenous-owned Home Valley Station, once exclusively a cattle property and now carving a niche in the tourism market. This is the place to stay in the Kimberley for those who want to learn about the land and indigenous culture from Aboriginal guides. The station has luxurious cabins known as grass castles, eco tents, homestead guesthouse rooms and budget camping.

[parrycreekfarm.com.au](http://parrycreekfarm.com.au)

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