

Wet Tropics Evolutionary Timeline

PRE-CAMBRIAN PALEOZOIC MESOZOIC CENOZOIC

3.5 Billion 545 Million 490 Million 434 Million 410 Million 354 Million 298 Million 251 Million 205 Million 141 Million 65 Million 54 Million 34 Million 24 Million 1.6 Million 1.2 Million 5 Million 10,000

4.6 Billion Years Ago

NOW

PRE-CAMBRIAN

CAMBRIAN
TRILOBITE
Since the beginning of life on Earth, some 3.5 billion years ago, the Wet Tropics World Heritage Area has supported countless species of animals and plants. Many still exist today & they represent an unbroken chain stretching back to the earliest life forms.

ORDOVICIAN
PERIPATUS Velvet Worms

SILURIAN
LYCOPODS Club Moss
Club mosses as big as trees dominate the swampy landscape. In comparison, today's mosses and tassel ferns are miniatures.

DEVONIAN
DRAGONFLY

CARBONIFEROUS
PSILOPHYTES Fork Ferns

PERMIAN
STROMATOLITES
These early life forms are still found in the waters off Western Australia.

TRASSIC
CYCADS
The first seed plants to colonise the earth. The world's smallest and tallest cycads are found only in the Wet Tropics.

JURASSIC
FROGS

CRETACEOUS
RIBBONWOOD *Idiospermum Australlense*
Of the world's 19 families of primitive flowering plants, 12 are found here in the Wet Tropics.

180 MILLION YEARS AGO
Gondwana starts to break into continents which gradually drift apart. Australia breaks away 50 million years ago. Our plants and animals continue evolving in isolation from the rest of the world.

AGE OF CONIFERS

AGE OF CYCADS

AGE OF FERNS

250 MILLION YEARS AGO
The land masses of the world were once joined into a super-continent called Pangea. They separate into two smaller land masses, Laurasia in the north and Gondwana in the south. Australia is part of Gondwana.

DINOSAURS *Muttaborrasaurus*
By the time Australia breaks away from Antarctica, the dinosaurs have disappeared.

CROCODILES

CRETACEOUS
SUNDEW

CRETACEOUS
PROTEACEAE
More than 700 dry-adapted species such as eucalypts, banksias and grevilleas evolve from rainforest plants.

AGE OF FLOWERING PLANTS

CRETACEOUS
GOLDEN BOWERBIRD
The first songbirds evolve in the rainforest and radiate throughout the world.

CRETACEOUS
CASSOWARIES
Cassowaries are members of the flightless ratites which include emus. They evolved separately from other birds more than 80 million years ago.

CRETACEOUS
PLATYPUS ANCESTOR
The egg-laying platypus and echidna evolve in the rainforests of Gondwana, but travel to a dead end in the path of evolution.

CRETACEOUS
KAURI PINE
The world's most ancient conifer lineages continue to survive in the Wet Tropics.

CRETACEOUS
GOLDEN PENDA *Xanthostemon*

CRETACEOUS
TREE KANGAROO
Kangaroos evolved from possum ancestors and colonised the plains. Tree kangaroos went out on an evolutionary limb and returned to the trees.

CRETACEOUS
FRUIT BAT

CRETACEOUS
POSSUMS
The ancestors of today's marsupials were giant possums, carnivorous kangaroos and marsupial lions.

CRETACEOUS
BANANAS
Bananas arrive from Asia, along with gingers, wait-a-while and new bats and rats.

CRETACEOUS
HUMANS

CRETACEOUS
20 MILLION YEARS AGO
The isolated land mass of Australia slowly moves north until it collides with the Asian plate 20 million years ago. Some plants and animals were able to move between the continents. Australia continues to move northward at the same rate our fingernails grow.

CRETACEOUS
120,000 YEARS AGO
During consecutive ice ages, sea water becomes bound in ice. This causes lower sea levels and the gap between Australia and Asia becomes narrower. The rainforest contracts and expands. Animals and plants either adapt to the conditions or disappear. The Wet Tropics become a refuge for ancient and unique plants and animals that can't survive anywhere else.

CRETACEOUS
EOCENE

CRETACEOUS
OLIGOCENE

CRETACEOUS
MIOCENE

CRETACEOUS
PLIOCENE

CRETACEOUS
PLEISTOCENE

CRETACEOUS
HOLOCENE

CRETACEOUS
QUATERNARY