IDIOT FRUIT One species in particular, ***Idiospermum australiense***, commonly known as the **Idiot Fruit**, is one of the rarest and most primitive of the flowering plants. Its discovery in 1970 was arguably Australia's most significant botanical find, greatly increasing scientists' awareness of just how ancient these forests really are. From a total of 19 primitive flowering plant families on Earth, 12 families are represented in the Daintree region making the highest concentration of these plants worldwide.

THE DAINTREE - THE JEWEL IN THE CROWN

These rainforests are botanically unique, the oldest continually surviving rainforests on Earth. Many rare, endemic and primitive plants and animals are found here across a variety of habitats - mangroves, rainforests, creeks, swamps, open forests, beaches and dunes.

THE FIRST FLOWERING PLANTS

Daintree Coast rainforests contain the greatest concentration of primitive flowering plants (angiosperms) in the world. Some plants found here are the only living representatives in their family or genus.

The Daintree Coast is also very rich in "endemics" – species that are found in one particular area. The abundance of so many endemics is thought by some scientists to be evidence of rapid and spectacular evolutionary change, making the Daintree an evolutionary hothouse.

1. Austrobaileya scandens. This rainforest vine is considered the most ancient of the world's surviving rainforest flowering plants.

2. Idiospermum australiense. The rare primitive ribbonwood tree is considered to be the sole representative of its family remaining today.

3. Gardenia actinocarpa is only found in a small area on the Daintree Coast.

4. Gymnostoma australianum is only found today in five populations in the Wet Tropics although 40-million-year-old Gymnostoma fossils have been found in Victoria. It is now in cultivation as the Daintree pine – a native Christmas tree.

5. Phlegmariurus dalhousieanus was thought to be extinct until a researcher discovered a specimen in the Daintree for the first time in 26 years in 2004.

6. Citrus inodora is only found in the foothills of the Bellenden Ker Range – Mount Bartle Frere area and around Cape Tribulation. Quite distinct from other native citrus, with larger leaves up to 15cm long and odourless flowers.

7. Endiandra cooperana is known to exist in only two locations in lowland rainforest adjacent to Cooper Creek in the Daintree Rainforest.

8. Lepidozamia hopei the tallest growing of all cycads, represents the closest modern counterparts to those found in the Jurassic fossil forests revealed in the Talbragar Fish Beds near Gulgong in New South Wales.

FASCINATING FAUNA

The Wet Tropics rainforests of north-east Queensland contain the richest fauna in Australia, including 30 per cent of Australia's frog, marsupial and reptile species, 65 per cent of Australia's bat and butterfly species and 20 per cent of Australia's bird species.

There are 70 animals endemic to the region, with many retaining characteristics of the creatures found during the age of the dinosaurs. Over half of Australia's invertebrate species are thought to live in these rainforests. That means over 200,000 different insect, spider, worm and snail species are at home here.

1. Bennett's tree kangaroo is rarely seen and is found only between the Daintree River and Mount Amos, south of Cooktown.

2. The endangered ***Southern Cassowary*** is a member of the ratite family, one of the most primitive groups of birds, which includes the flightless kiwi, emu and ostrich. Cassowaries are distributed, in Australia, along the east coast between Townsville and Cape York.

3. ***Boyd's Forest Dragon*** is endemic to the Wet Tropics rainforests of north-eastern Queensland and relies on its superb camouflage to escape predators.

4. ***Musky rat kangaroo*** is a primitive marsupial little changed in 20 million years and is thought to be a living link between possums and kangaroos.

5. ***Daintree River ringtail possum*** is only found at three locations, around Thornton Peak in the Daintree Rainforest, at Mount Windsor Tableland and Mount Carbine Tableland.

6. ***Amesthystine python*** has been recorded at a length of up to 8.5 metres, usually grow to between three and five metres. It is related to the Anaconda of South America.

7. ***White-lipped tree frog*** is Australia's largest native frog, with females growing to 13cm. Its mating call is similar to a dog's bark.

8. ***Ulysses butterfly*** is instantly recognisable with its iridescent electric blue wings.

RAINFOREST

The Daintree Rainforest is exceptional in many ways. It is the oldest continuous living tropical rainforest in the world - over a hundred million years old – and is home to a large range of plant and animal species that are rare or threatened.

It contains one of the most complete and diverse living records of the major stages in the evolution of land plants, particularly in the origin, evolution and dispersal of flowering plants. It also provides a glimpse into the history of marsupials and songbirds, containing species older than human life itself.

Added to the World Heritage List in 1988, this forest is home to the largest range of plant and animal species that are rare, or threatened, anywhere in the world and abounds with biodiversity: **30 per cent of all frog, marsupial and reptile species in Australia live here**, alongside **65 per cent of bats and butterflies species**. Approximately **430 species of birds** live in the Daintree Rainforest, including **13 species not found anywhere else in the world**.

REEF

The World Heritage Listed Great Barrier Reef is the world's most extensive coral reef system, extending over 2000km in a broken maze of around 2900 individual reefs, of which 760 are fringing reefs skirting the mainland or around islands.

UNESCO-listed in 1981 as an outstanding example representing major stages of Earth's revolutionary history, **the Great Barrier Reef supports the most diverse ecosystem known to man**. This unique ecosystem has evolved over millions of years. It provides habitat for many diverse forms of marine life such as an estimated 1500 species of fish, 360 species of hard, reef-building corals, 4000 mollusc species, 1500 species of sponges as well as anemones, marine worms, crustaceans, echinoderms, dugong, turtles and sea urchins.

The Great Barrier Reef is also a breeding-ground of world significance for several turtle species and for humpback whales which migrate from Antarctica to give birth in these warmer waters.

RIVERS

The Daintree is in the centre of the region bounded by the Mossman River in the south and the Bloomfield River 60km to the north. Through its heart flows the magnificent Daintree River and, a little further north, Cooper Creek.

The Daintree River is home to an amazing diversity of life-forms with more than 150 fish species, over 100 crustaceans and the prehistoric-looking Saltwater Crocodile. Thirty of Australia's 38 mangrove species are found along the Daintree River, more than half of the world's total of 72 species represented in this single estuary - perhaps the most species-rich mangrove estuary in the world.

Cooper Creek winds through the rainforest about halfway between the Daintree River and Cape Tribulation. Both systems offer a diversity of cruises with expert guides helping you spot crocodiles, countless species of birds and a variety of wildlife. The Daintree River offers amazing opportunities for photographers and is a paradise for fishing enthusiasts.

BEACHES

All the beaches on the Daintree Coast offer the visitor that "deserted beach" experience. Here, "where the rainforest meets the reef", a backdrop of tropical vegetation, majestic coastal trees and swaying palms line the beaches.

Here your footprints in the sand are often the only ones and it is possible to walk just a few hundred metres from the access point, claim a piece of sand, and sit for hours without seeing another person.

The Coral Sea's ocean currents deposit daily treasure troves of flotsam and jetsam on the high tide watermark and at low tide. Interspersed between the sandy stretches of beach, the fringing reefs become exposed providing refuge for myriad sea creatures.

"We can stand in awed silence in rainforests, feel their mystical antiquity and be humbled in the knowledge that their lovely green world predates the arrival of the humans on this planet by about 50 million years."

Mary White - Palaeobotanist