

The barbarians of Barrow Island

A recently published book, "Islands of Australia," by Douglas McGlin and Barbara Mullins, was an item which interested me particularly.

It showed a picture of the Barrow Island wallaby which "is used as a bait for fish traps as witnessed by the author."

When permission was granted for oil drilling at Barrow Island, which is a most important nature reserve, I suggested that certain conditions should be laid down.

One important one was

that a wildlife ranger should be stationed on the island and the cost of this should be borne by the exploiting company.

This was not done.

It is essential that a Government officer should be

on the spot to make sure conservation conditions are carried out.

This should be automatic for any exploitation of a reserve, when urgent necessity allows such exploitation to take place.

The result of not having a ranger is shown in the item I quoted.

RECENTLY I have been asked for comparative details of areas set aside as national parks in our various States.

The Australian Conservation Foundation has very kindly sent me the details.

The figures are for parks and reserves which can only be destroyed by Act of Parliament.

I am giving the figures in terms of the percentage of the State set aside — there is no indication of how many habitats are saved in this way, or how well managed each one is.

The international minimum suggested to be set aside is 5 percent of the area of a country. This is how our percentages compare:

Tasmania	6.7
Northern Territory .. .	3.5
South Australia	3.4
A.C.T.	1.9
New South Wales	1.3
Western Australia .. .	1.2
Victoria	1.1
Queensland	0.6
AUSTRALIAN	
PERCENTAGE	1.8

These figures are to the end of June, and I can let readers draw their own conclusions on the conservation position in Australia.

NATURE WALKABOUT
— Vincent Selwyn —

Sunday

WEATHER
(Details, Back Page,

Telegraph

Acacia species (wattles) and Pimelea species, growing on Barrow Island.

The pied oyster-catcher, Haematopus ostralegus, was featured in the first published pictures of Australian birds — in Dampier's account of his second voyage to Australia, in 1699.

The Barrow Island wallaby, Lagorchestes conspicillatus, is found only on the island. It is used as a bait for fish traps as witnessed by the author.



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SYDNEY
TELEGRAPH
14 MAY 1970

Barrow Is.

I DIDN'T get your paper with its provocative article by naturalist Vincent Serventy under the heading "Oil Search Threatens an Island Sanctuary" (D.T., 6/2/70) until recently.

While I agree in principle with his article I must take exception to his generalities regarding Barrow Island. My qualification to dispute these is that I am the naturalist/ranger mentioned in his article as being non-existent.

Following my report to the Explorers Club of New York, January 25, 1967, the oil company concerned (West Australian Petroleum Pty. Ltd. or WAPET) asked me to submit recommendations for total conservation of flora and fauna on the island. These were submitted and action taken in every case.

However, due to the major publicity in the area being about recovery of oil these excellent measures are not generally known.

In spite of the fact that the oilfield was increasing the wild life, by mid-1969 uninformed people were agitating again that the oilfield activities were destroying the island's unique fauna and fauna.

In November, 1969, a seven-man expedition from Fisheries and Fauna Department and Western Australian University Zoology Department went to the island to examine at first hand the situation.

My services were available to ensure that the party was given every assistance and on December 7, a statement by the Director of Fisheries and Fauna was published in a local paper, *The Sunday Times*.

Report

A formal report on the expedition is being prepared by Dr. A. A. Burbidge, Research Officer for Fauna and Fisheries and Fauna Department of W.A. and Professor A. R. Main, Professor of Zoology at W.A. University.

It is time that people were made aware that not all development is detrimental to wild life and that industry and conservation can be compatible.

Finally, I should stress that conservation on Barrow Island is not a policy of observation only. By necessity it involves active management over a wide range of the little understood factors which are the requirements of arid area fauna and flora.

As an internationally known naturalist and conservationist my work is accepted readily by the authorities responsible for conservation of wild life in W.A. and, as a personal friend of Mr. Serventy I feel he can have no argument with the action on Barrow Island. — Wm. H. BUTLER, Claverton Street, North Perth.



Oil search threatens an island sanctuary

Barrow Island, a fragment off the West Australian mainland rich desert flora and fauna in their natural state, is under a cloud of progress.

Lying 60 miles north of Broome, the island is about 80 square miles in area. It is a barren looking place, unimpressive from the sea and typical of the desolate central western coastline.

Scientists long ago realised that Barrow Island, 1500 miles off from the mainland, is a natural laboratory where desert animals and plants are unhampered by introduced species. In 1903 it was set aside as a Class A reserve, purely for the purpose of conserving the animals and plants. Class A means that only a State Parliament vote can change its status. In June, 1956, as mainland animals continued to appear under the white man's impact, the Barrow Island sanctuary assumed even greater importance.

Dr. Glen Storr, of the A. Museum, pointed out that Barrow was one of the richest areas for marsupials in Western Australia, outside the Kimberleys. There are seven kinds

of marsupials, four kinds of rodents and three bats. Most of the mammals have evolved into very distinctive forms on this island.

The small, dark bandicoot is restricted to the island and the cyno and boodie are distinct subspecies.

The latter, once widely spread on the mainland, is now known with certainty only on Barrow Island and the islands off Shark Bay.

Nineteen kinds of birds also live among the desert vegetation. The blue and white wren is known only from Dirk Hartog Island and Barrow Island. The spintex bird is also common here, but is much harder to find on the mainland. Presumably further research will reveal other interesting species.

Fifteen years ago there seemed little need to worry about the future of Barrow. Then came the search for oil. Oil was found to be in commercial quantities and now Barrow is to be developed as a commercial field.

Unfortunately for Class A Reserves, there are none in the Act of Parliament, which protects them.

At first sight the development of an oilfield should present no major difficulty to the wild life. The Barrow curlew, hare wallabies, bandicoots and other mammals should be able to survive, given proper protection.

By VINCENT SERVENTY

The obvious moves to protect the animal and plant life have been made, but destruction can come in subtle ways.

The Academy of Science sub-committee examining nature reserves in W.A. made the following recommendation for Barrow: "That no wharf or jetty should be built from the island to permit craft to moor alongside." This is to ensure that no rats or other animals get ashore

to threaten the native species.

Wapet, the exploring company, has given an assurance that cats, dogs and firearms will be kept off the island as has been done since 1903. No jetties would be built and landing barges would be used to bring stores ashore.

It was at the first landing of oil equipment on the West Australian coast and knew that Wapet personnel are genuinely interested in carrying out this promise.

However, naturalists would be happier if a little more effort was made to supervise the operation. After all, oil

An oil rig on Barrow Island

men have one dominating interest—to produce oil. A naturalist ranger is needed who knows of the danger to the wild life.

By interesting the public on the island in the wild life, he will get their active support in carrying out the protective measures.

Also, while on the island he will be able to carry on valuable surveys and the collecting work, best done on the island by naturalist Harry Butler.

Oil companies will make enough money from this oilfield for the State to demand that they pay for the expense of a ranger.

BRADY 1961
VINCENT SERVENTY

SWAMI Shivananda's teachings are easy to understand, especially when Swami Vankatesananda writes about them.



MINISTERIAL HOUSE, DEPARTMENT
CANBERRA. A.C.T. 2600

6 APR 1970

My dear Minister,

Senator Mulvihill has written to me on the question of the preservation of fauna on Barrow Island. His letter also raises the question of approval for an inspection of the island.

I enclose a copy of Senator Mulvihill's letter and would be grateful if you would advise the Senator on the matters, he has raised.

Yours sincerely,

(Sgd.) R. W. SWARTZ

(R.W. Swartz)

The Hon. A.F. Griffith, M.L.C.,
Minister for Mines,
Central Government Buildings,
PERTH. W.A. 6000

GOVERNMENT OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA

MINES DEPARTMENT

If telephoning or calling with reference to this letter please ask for

Mr. Berry
TEL. 23 0151

PERTH 6000 27th April 19 70
OUR REF. IRB/MEH 1002/70
YOUR REF. _____

*Reply sent M.D. 20/4
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EOP.
FHS*

Managing Director,
West Australian Petroleum Pty.
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*Please
the article
if you can
ES*

Dear Sir,

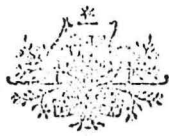
I attach copy of a letter received from the Minister for National Development respecting a letter written to him on the question of preservation of fauna on Barrow Island. I should be glad if you will let me have information regarding your Company's efforts to preserve the fauna on Barrow Island before I reply to the Minister for National Development.

Yours faithfully,

I.R. Berry
I.R. Berry.

UNDER SECRETARY FOR MINES





PARLIAMENT OF AUSTRALIA • THE SENATE

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18th February, 1970.

Hon. R.W.C. Swartz, M.B.E., E.D., M.P.,
Minister for National Development,
House of Representatives,
CANBERRA. A.C.T. 2600

My dear Minister,

I enclose a copy of a very thoughtful article by well known Australian Naturalist, Vincent Serventy, on the question of more effective preservation of fauna in the Barrow Island, off the West Australian coast.

You will note that Mr. Serventy makes the valid point that with the financial buoyancy being experienced by the oil companies concerned, they should be requested to provide a ranger to protect the fauna referred to.

In case you refer to Federal/State rights, I think it will be agreed that State Government generally, provided they would not have to meet the cost of the rangers salary, would welcome the innovation suggested by Mr. Serventy.

Consequently, I look forward to your representations to the oil companies concerned on them rightfully solving this burden which they owe to posterity.

Incidentally, in regard to the ownership of this island, what Commonwealth Department do I have to confer with to obtain permission to inspect the island concerned.

Yours in anticipation,

(J.A. MULVIHILL)
Senator for New South Wales.

Encl.