

# ROYAL AUSTRALIAN NAVY

GARDEN ISLAND,  
WESTERN AUSTRALIA



“WHERE THE  
ROYAL AUSTRALIAN NAVY  
& NATURE  
LIVE IN  
HARMONY”



# Island of tranquillity

Picturesque and peaceful Garden Island is a carefully administered island, owned by the Commonwealth, of which 80% is available for the public to visit by boat during daylight hours. This island is the home of HMAS *Stirling*, the Royal Australian Navy's Fleet Base West which is located on the shores of Careening Bay on the south eastern section of the island.

This 1214 hectare island is regarded as an environmental showpiece for other authorities in the Australian Defence Force and exhibits how the Australian Defence Force not only protects Australia, but also its environment. Apart from its legislative obligations, it is Defence policy to develop management plans for all its properties having particular environmental significance or a pressing environmental problem. The Garden Island Environmental Advisory Committee monitor and advise on all aspects of the management of the island. Headed by HMAS *Stirling's* Chief of Staff, the committee includes a Commonwealth representative and a State representative and other members co-opted when required.

## PUBLIC ACCESS

Public access to Garden Island is by private boat. Vehicular access from the mainland via the Navy's causeway is restricted to Defence personnel and civilian contractors. Authorised tourist coaches regularly transit the causeway.

A CALM National Park Ranger, along with Naval Police

patrol the public access areas to monitor public use, provide assistance and ensure there are no wanton acts of vandalism or littering of this pristine island.

## LIVING HISTORY

One of the extraordinary things about Garden Island is that the environment you can see still remains much the same as it was before settlement. Garden Island is a piece of living history with which other areas can be compared.

Garden Island is covered with dense communities of flora including:

- Rottnest Island pine (*Callitris preissii*). Common to the northern end of Garden Island, this attractive tree can grow up to 10 metres tall, depending on the location. Individual trees growing in scrub have the characteristic 'pine tree' appearance with branches reaching to ground level. When growing in dense stands however, mature trees have only a closed canopy of foliage with few living branches below this level. The largest stand of Rottnest cypress in Australia are on Garden Island.
- Rottnest tea-tree (*Melaleuca lanceolata*). Widespread on Garden Island, it normally reaches heights of 10 metres and abounds on the northern end. Many fallen specimens can be seen on the east coast, undercut by wave erosion. Normally with a single straight trunk, they provide excellent shade for picnic areas.
- Chenille honeymyrtle (*Melaleuca huegelli*). Presents

as a small straggly tree on Garden Island, growing up to three metres tall. With very small triangular leaves growing tightly against the branches, it has pink buds which burst into white 'bottlebrush flowers' in summer.

- Acacia (*Acacia rostellifera*). This wattle forms a virtually impenetrable mass of vegetation, and is widespread over more than half of Garden Island. Giving a pleasing green appearance this shrub grows up to two metres tall or as a multiple-stemmed tree, up to four metres.

The east coast is normally protected from inclement weather and is safer for small craft, except during stormy conditions. A picnic area with gas barbecues and facilities is available in Buchanan Bay.

## SNAKES

There are two varieties of snakes on Garden Island, the highly venomous and hostile tiger snake and the more placid carpet snake. Both are protected species. The tiger snake (*Notechis scutatus*), regarded as one of the most dangerous in Australia is aggressive, black in colour with indistinct to prominent narrow and irregular bands, creamy to yellow, and bright yellow on its underbelly. They should be avoided if at all possible. Tiger snakes can grow up to a metre in length.

Although harmless, the carpet python (*Morelia spilota imbricata*), can still leave a nasty bite if provoked. Growing up to a length of three metres, it is easily identifiable by its large head which is noticeably wider than its neck. The colour is variable with the belly mainly yellow checked with black, and the back varying from tan, or yellow, to dark brown or black. The irregular patterns on the carpet snake are the

reason for its name.

## TAMMAR WALLABIES

The tamar wallaby (*Macropus eugeni*) is prevalent on Garden Island and is a protected species. It is nocturnal, usually emerging from the scrub around sunset and is generally grey-brown in colour with the male being larger than the female. They live in colonies and are able to survive for long periods without fresh surface water, and have been observed drinking sea water.

Tammars live both inside and outside the perimeter of HMAS *Stirling* naval base and are known as the Navy's "silent sentinals", emerging at dusk and scampering back to the sanctuary of the native bush at sunrise. Their young are born after a gestation period of 29 days with young tammars remaining in the pouch for eight to nine months.

## BIRDS

The untouched forests of Garden Island and its quiet rocky outcrops on the western side of the island are a haven for many varieties of local and migratory birds.

More than 90 different species of land and sea birds have been identified on the island and the Royal Australian Ornithological Union conduct regular counts and trappings.

Migratory birds include the Arctic tern (*Sterna paradisaea*) from the North Pole, the rainbow honey-eater (*Merops ornatus*) from New Guinea and around 20 species from Europe. Signs erected on the northern section of Garden Island ask visitors to take care as these birds breed in the area.

Among the varieties of birdlife prevalent on Garden



Little sunlight penetrates the heavily timbered northern end of tranquil Garden Island.



A majestic osprey fish hawk (*Pandion haliaetus*) with a large fish firmly in its talons returns to its nest to feed its well-camouflaged young on the western side of Garden Island.



The highly venomous tiger snake (*Notechis scutatus*) which abounds on Garden Island.



Open to the weather with the prevailing south westerly winds, the western side of Garden Island with its rolling swell offers a complete contrast to the heavily timbered northern and eastern sections.



*Peaceful Buchanan Bay on the sheltered eastern side of Garden Island.*

Island are singing honeyeaters (*Lichenostomus virescens*), welcome swallows (*Hirundo neoxena*), red-capped plovers (*Charadrius ruficapillus*), grey butcherbirds (*Cracticus torquatus*) and the cheeky little willy wagtails (*Rhipidura leucophrys*) which dart around the island.

If you are utilising the barbecue and picnic facilities at Herring Bay on the western side of Garden Island you might sight one of the magnificent osprey fish hawks (*Pandion haliaetus*) which nest in pairs here. Among the most durable structures in the world, their nests are a large compact pile of sticks and other debris gathered from beaches and located on high rocky outcrops and headlands from which the birds command a 360° view all round.

One reptile which is common on Garden Island is the king's skink (*Egernia kingii*), a greenish-brown lizard which grows up to 400mm in length. They will readily drop their tail if molested and live on a diet of insects, small mammals and silver gulls' eggs. They are often seen foraging in seaweed.

Located on the north eastern section of Garden Island is the *Royal Australian Navy Weapons and Explosives Depot* with its associated armament wharf which is in naval waters. This area is prohibited to the public and is clearly marked with warning signs.

#### **ENVIRONMENT ENHANCED**

HMAS *Stirling* was commissioned on 28 July, 1978 and since then many (non native) plants and trees have

been removed or eliminated. The island's environment has been enhanced with the planting of more than 50,000 indigenous trees and shrubs by the Navy's own native plant nursery.

The sandy soils of Garden Island are porous and the vegetation so dense that there are no wetlands. Because there are no introduced pests and no rubbish, and people are not allowed to feed the animals, Garden Island is free of the disease *Salmonella*. The aim is to keep it that way.

#### **INFORMATION FOR VISITORS**

If you comply with the following simple rules you can help preserve Garden Island in its present condition for future generations.

1. Camping overnight is not permitted.
2. The lighting of fires is prohibited. Gas barbecues are located in the picnic areas at Buchanan Bay on the eastern side of the island and Herring Bay on the western side. These barbecues are closed during periods of high fire danger.
3. All native animals and plants are protected.
4. For safety and security reasons, access to the south eastern and north eastern sectors is restricted and private boats are advised to remain clear of the waters adjacent to naval facilities.
5. Pets, exotic plants and firearms are prohibited.
6. Take care when bushwalking — snakes abound.
7. Please leave nothing behind other than your footprints.