

Penguin centre a boost for tourism and conservation

A NEW \$320 000 wildlife viewing centre opened on Penguin Island is set to become one of WA's major tourist attractions.

'The Penguin Experience' island discovery centre, on the idyllic conservation park just offshore from Rockingham, is a co-operative project that has enormous input from the local community.

The building was partly funded by a \$132 000 grant to the City of Rockingham from the Federal Government's Regional Tourism Development Grants program and \$8000 from Kodak Australasia.

Environment Minister Peter Foss, who officially opened the centre, said Penguin Island was unique in being a major natural attraction within the metropolitan area of a big city.

"The new penguin discovery centre will be an important nature-based tourism opportunity for the State, attracting visitors from overseas and interstate," he said.



Penguin Island is home to about 1200 little penguins, forming the largest breeding colony of these birds in Western Australia.

Visitors can see penguins that have become accustomed to interacting with people after they have been rescued and rehabilitated. The rescued birds, which would be unlikely to survive in the wild, are housed in an environment similar to their natural habitat.

This allows the public to see and learn about the animals without the island's resident penguins being disturbed by visitors.

Visitors will also receive fascinating information about the biology, be-

haviour and survival of penguins, giving them a fulfilling nature-based tourism experience not available anywhere else in Australia.

The new discovery centre has been designed to blend in with the surroundings and reflects the natural contours and colours of the island.

As well as the ferry fare, there will be a charge to visit the centre and see the penguins, to help offset the costs of operating the facility and assist with the development and management of the island and marine park.

A new Research and Management Centre is also being built on the island, with sponsorship from Western Mining Corporation, and when this is finished early in 1996, the two remaining asbestos cement buildings, remnants of past uses of the island, will be. The buildings will be removed and new boardwalks linking the new facilities to the jetty and picnic area will be built.

The areas occupied by these buildings will be rehabilitated, providing additional habitat for the wild penguin population.

New facilities, such as picnic areas and composting toilets, already built by CALM on the island at a cost of \$200 000, have been designed to accommodate increasing numbers of visitors while protecting sensitive vegetation, wildlife and dunes from people pressure.

The number of visitors to Penguin Island has already increased from 61 000 in 1991-92 to 81 000 in 1993-94, and are now set to increase even further.

CALM also launched a new book, *Discovering Penguin Island and the Shoalwater Islands Marine Park*.

This full-colour, pocket-sized publication is an excellent guide for visitors, and should inspire the general public and visitors to our State to take a greater interest in the island's natural environment and its inhabitants.

It is a practical field guide that will help visitors to learn about and discover Penguin Island's unique plants, animals and special features.

The book, which retails for only \$5.95, has been extensively checked by scientists and other experts, and beautifully designed by the creative award-winning team that produces *LANDSCOPE* magazine.



Environment Minister Peter Foss, (centre) takes a closer look at one of the penguins which now are part of a major new attraction in the new Penguin Island Discovery Centre. Keith Smith, left, from the WA Native Bird Hospital in Sawyers Valley and CALM's Swan Region marine operations manager Peter Dans look on.



Volunteers who make a difference Hillary Merrifield, left, with Eggy Boggs. (See story on page 2.) Photo by Neil Mulligan courtesy *The Bay Weekly*

New year brings fiery answer

CALMfire crews, wondering before Christmas where all the bushfires had gone, didn't have to wait long for an answer.

In the lead up to the end of the year, most CALM districts recorded a relatively quiet start to the fire season.

For example, Swan Region, which takes in the high fire risk areas in outer Perth such as The Hills Forest and Gnarara pines, in 1994 had more than 100 fires before Christmas Day. The comparable figure in 1995 was just 67,

but by the end of January, 1996, this had more than doubled to 137.

CALMfire manager Rick Sneeuw jagt said that this season the three forest regions had attended 172 incidents by the end of January compared with more than 280 last year. Statewide, CALM crews have turned out to 225 fires up to the end of January, compared with a massive 356 in the same period the previous year.

The most intensive incident was in the Stirling Range National Park, where

lightning strikes started a fire in steep and inaccessible country around Toolbrunup Peak.

Crews from Albany, Walpole, Pemberton, Harvey and Katanning spent four days trying to contain the fire, which eventually burned through 10 500 hectares.

CALM incident controller Kelly Gillen praised the efforts of the volunteers, SES, Salvation Army and CALM staff who worked long hours in difficult

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Jan 1996
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LAUNCH OF PENGUIN ISLAND WILDLIFE DISCOVERY CENTRE