

# URBAN ANTICS

Looking Out My Back Door by Andrew Cribb

Every year towards the beginning of winter, just as the sun begins to lose its warmth, and a chill creeps into the evening air, a number of strange visitors arrive on W.A.'s southern shores.

The Easter holiday often marks their first appearance. As the crowds from Perth swarm southward in their annual migration to the herring-rich seas of Leeuwin-Naturaliste, and thousands rediscover the romantic grandeur of karri forest from Boranup to the Porongorups, a few curious reports filter through to wildlife officers and national park rangers.

Here and there on rocky shorelines a startled angler or beachcomber will find a favourite haunt shared by an equally startled seal. Spotted like a leopard from head to tail, and with a set of whiskers the envy of any feline, these one-year-old Leopard Seals have just made the two thousand kilometre trip from Antarctica. Why? No-one knows. Leopard Seals neither breed here, nor as adults migrate to W.A.

Even if you stay in Perth and explore the reefs and islands of the coastal waters, you may have close encounters with marine wildlife such as family groups of Australian Sealions, basking in the winter sun or loafing about in the shallows.

Fisherfolk chasing a feed of herring, or hoping for a salmon, on the ocean side of the chain of reefs which follow the coast from Lancelin to Mandurah, are often entertained and delighted by the sight of a school of dolphin cruising the waters or surfing in the bow waves. If a huge brown shape surfaces nearby, start the motor and move out: White Pointers are not unknown in coastal waters. With any luck, however, you may be the one to spot a Humpback Whale coming inshore to check out the scene, on its way from Shark Bay to Antarctica.

Further south, in the incredibly blue and green bays of Cape Arid National Park, Southern Right Whales, once hunted to the brink of extinction, come inshore at the beginning of spring, and stay for nearly a month to calve, before heading for Antarctica and the krill feasts that await them.

What have all these creatures got in common? The answer is people. Perth's northern and southern suburbs are creeping further along the coastline, and the holiday crowds are getting larger. More people have more leisure, and more money to spend on it. Things are getting a little crowded.

This opinion appears to be shared by the Sealion who recently bit a fisherman's dog on one of the tiny islands off Marmion reef.



Australian Sealion (*neophoca cinerea*)

More and more people are visiting these islands, which the Sealions have been using for thousands of years as resting spots. Beautiful, and passive as they usually are, they are still very much wild animals. Feeding them by hand, getting between a bull and his harem, or attempting to stroke them is about as smart as trying to cuddle a Bengal tiger. People and Sealions can co-exist with the appropriate courtesy, but they definitely take a dim view of dogs running around their 'loungerooms'. So, for that matter, do the seabirds which roost on our offshore islands.

The sad thing is that slowly but surely, as their spots are invaded by people, the Sealions will move away. W.A. is one of the few places left in the world where such animals can be found on the doorstep of a major city. Elsewhere they've either gone, or areas have been closed to visitors so that they aren't disturbed when breeding and raising their young.

The most recent chapter from Marmion is the tale of the Pygmy Right Whale which appears to be doing its PhD in the study of human behaviour. The four metre whale was first sighted in November 1986 near Whitfords, and has appeared since on a regular basis up and down the coast from Marmion to Rockingham. The whale seems particularly interested in putting in appearances where there are groups of people in the water — which can be very disconcerting.

Let's hope this interspecies study can grow into mutual understanding, so we can appreciate how incredibly lucky we are to share our environment with these beautiful creatures before they depart our shores for good. □

# LANDSCOPE

Volume 2 No. 4  
Winter Edition/June 1987

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Published by Dr S. Shea, Executive Director, Department of Conservation and Land Management, 50 Hayman Road, Como, W.A. 6152.

Executive Editor: Sweton Stewart  
Editor: Liana Christensen  
Designers: Trish Ryder/Robyn Mundy

All maps by Department of Conservation and Land Management Mapping Section.

Offset plates by Photolitho-PM.

Typesetting by Printworks.

Printed in Western Australia by the Department of Services, State Printing Division. ISSN 0815-4465.

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## COVER PHOTO

Shipwreck at Broome (Jiri Lochman).

## EDITORIAL

For more than 100 years W.A. has recognised the importance of protecting significant areas of its natural heritage.

Today, about 4.5 million hectares of our State is classified as national parks, vibrant natural museums ranging from the hardwood forests of the south-west to vast inland deserts that represent our unique terrestrial flora and fauna.

Until now, however, there has been a missing element: the marine environment.

Clearly, its absence has made our park system less representative of W.A.'s environment, especially considering that the State has some 12700 km of coastline.

Recently a start was made to address this imbalance with the official opening of the Marmion Marine Park, W.A.'s first marine park.

The primary objective in establishing this park, which is located on metropolitan Perth's doorstep, is to conserve significant examples of our marine heritage, and to encourage public understanding, appreciation and continued enjoyment of the marine environment in ways which will leave it unimpaired for future generations.

These same values apply to the proposed Ningaloo Marine Park which is situated along 260 km of the State's coastline south of Exmouth. Ningaloo will be vested in the National Parks and Nature Conservation Authority as a marine park in July.

Both of these marine parks not only allow for the development of proper management techniques to protect the marine environment, but also to enhance recreation.

Marmion reef has long been a popular holiday destination for many Western Australians who fished for the huge groper and crayfish offshore, and swam in the protected lagoons.

Ningaloo might be less well known because of its isolation, but the tourist industry is expected to promote this area of our coastline and the adjacent Cape Range National Park and, as a consequence, it will become one of the State's premier tourist attractions.

The establishing of marine parks will provide many benefits.

Some intangible, such as the knowledge that future generations will be able to appreciate areas of unspoiled natural beauty.

Others more tangible, such as the enjoyment of visiting a marine park.

There will also be benefits in terms of jobs created and the expansion of a growing and viable tourist industry.

Furthermore, marine parks will provide ecological benchmarks for research into natural processes and into the relative effects of marine and coastal uses.

W.A. has a responsibility to protect special marine environments and to encourage public appreciation of these areas now and in the future.

Our marine parks will do this.