

The Nostalgic Naturalist

by Old Timer

Got a call from an old mate the other day asking if I wanted to do a bit of fishing. It took me a while to find his flash new house in one of those northern suburbs (south Geraldton, I reckon) — the whole place has changed so much. Bill hadn't changed much, though, and it didn't take long before we were chatting away as I helped him hitch his boat trailer to the car.

Well, he took me down to the new Ocean Reef marina, and I could hardly believe my eyes. Last time I was up this way, in the sixties, there were only a few squatters' shacks scattered between Triggs and Quinns Rock.

The Marmion reef (which Bill tells me has recently become a marine park) was a favourite spot for reef fishing. Back in those days you didn't haul your boat and trailer up to a marina and launch it for a morning's herring fishing, instead you packed supplies for a week and headed for your beach shack. I can still remember Bill's joint — a neat little customised corrugated iron job camped neatly in the foredunes.

Bill was always fish mad, but he was a generous sort of bloke and he'd often invite us up for the weekend when the kids were young. A good time was had by all. Plenty of stories to be told from those days.

When Bill's in a good mood he still tells the one about the German's crays. The old man used to move up to the shack next door for three months every year, with his wife, dog and the kitchen sink. Every morning he'd get up, row out to his favourite spot on the reef, and dive for an hour. Every morning, without fail, he'd come back in with two beautiful, plump crayfish. The family would eat those that day, and the next day he'd do the same.

Eventually this became too much for Bill. He wanted to find out the source of those wonderful crays, so on the pretext of discussing the weather he sidled up to the German one morning.

'G'day, nice cray ...oops, day for it.'

The conversation ambled along until eventually he got to the point, and the answer wasn't quite what he expected.

The German replied, 'Every day I go diving at seven o'clock in the morning. Each day I get two crayfish. This I do for three months every year. This I have been doing for ten years. At the end of that three months I go home. I only take with me my last morning's catch of two crays. When I come back next year I will do the same thing, and probably for the rest of my life I will do the same thing. The place I get my crays from is the crays I don't catch.'

'I reckon that was the first time the penny dropped for me about looking after what you've got,' laughed Bill. 'I used to be a bit greedy in my younger days, 'specially about crays!'

A companionable silence fell as we settled down to our fishing, but Bill's words had set me thinking about need and greed and the changes we've made to our coastline.

Back in 1960 I was working on a ship moored to the steelworks jetty at Kwinana. As the midnight shift drew to a close, there was a bit of a lull. I was standing on the deck just as light started to show on the horizon, when I thought I saw a lot of movement on the beach. I jumped onto the jetty and walked down to take a closer look. Baby turtles! There must have been hundreds of them making their way back to mother ocean. It was a closed beach, you see, no dogs, no horses. A safe place for a turtle hatchery. Course, scientists haven't ever known them to breed south of Exmouth. Maybe it was a freak occurrence, but I definitely saw those turtles. I wonder if anyone else has ever seen them?

Some of my workmates came down for a look. One bloke picked up a couple for 'souvenirs'. I looked at the little creatures in his hand and told him to put them back because they would die in his pocket on the trip home. Few enough of the little beggars survive all the hazards of their environment without us adding to their troubles.

I'm glad we are starting to look after what we've got left, this marine park is a really smart move.

I was brought out of my reverie when Bill pulled in a fine pike. Smug with his prize, he suggested we call it a day.

'Sure,' I said, 'we've got a feed, and that's enough for me.' □

Seen a whale?

Remarkably little is known about the behaviour of whales, and the more we know the better we can plan their conservation. If you see a whale at any time, please contact:

Doug Cochrane
Wildlife Protection Branch
Murdoch House
5 The Esplanade
Mt Pleasant, 6153
Ph: (09) 364 9666

or your local wildlife officer.

Points to note are:

- How many whales?
- How often the animal/s surfaced?
- What part of the body was exposed?
- Was a fin visible?
- How many spouts/blowholes?
- Was the animal swimming fast or slow?
- Was it in deep or shallow water?
- Was there a calf?

All these points help us identify the whale. Reports of stranded whales, dead or alive, are also vital pieces of information.

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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.