
Urban Antics

Sting in The Tale

by Colleen Henry-Hall

Everyone has their favourite beach. Favourite beaches are SAFE. You know where the rocks are, where the rips develop, how the waves break on shore. But most importantly, you know there hasn't been a shark sighted on your beach for years, and you know that, in any case, lifesavers will sight the shark before it sights you.

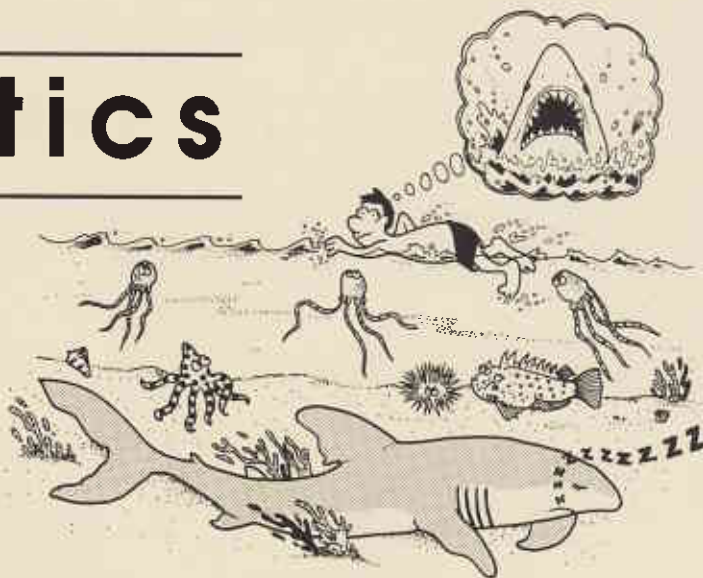
Fear of sharks, conscious or not, manifests itself in a number of ways: ocean swimmers who swim so close to shore they brush the sandy bottom on their downstroke; people who won't venture outside the clear, sandy patches along the shore; swimmers who do their laps in mask and snorkel, so they can see what's coming to get them. Saddest of all are those people who refuse to venture into the ocean at all.

Our fears of the unknown creatures lurking in the depths of the blue-green sea is probably as deep as those ocean waters. Nightmares **do** occasionally come true. The recent experiences of three men and a shark in a boat off Bunbury prove that. But you know the statistics: you're more likely to die in a car accident on your way to the corner shop. Knowing it doesn't make a bit of difference when all you can think of is the movie **Jaws**.

What many of us don't realise is that real dangers are posed by some smaller inhabitants of the sea. There are bitties and nasties that can cause us pain, and some that can kill us. Many marine animals have a poisonous venom to either catch their prey or protect themselves from predators. When left alone, they leave us alone; if disturbed, they fight back.

Imagine: a blockbuster thriller movie based on the exploits of a killer box jellyfish. It sounds ridiculous, but the box jellyfish, the sea urchin, the cone shell and the blue ring octopus are much more likely to hurt beachgoers than the fearsome white pointer shark.

The blue ring octopus is the deadliest sea creature on our southwestern coast. It is well-camouflaged with its brown coloring, but when angry, its small blue rings positively glow. You may come across the octopus living in discarded bottles or cans on the ocean floor. If you're collecting, look carefully, rinse the shell and look



carefully again. If you're walking on reefs in the northwest, nothing short of safety boots can keep out the spines of the deadly stonefish.

The small box jellyfish is a painful nuisance in the summer and autumn on sheltered beaches and coves along the coast. Called 'stingers' for very obvious reasons, they embed capsules of poison into your skin. The only way not to get stung is to stay out of the water.

Live cone shells look innocuous, but with 'harpoons' they use to paralyse prey they can inject a strong venom into an unwary collector. Sea urchins spines contain a small amount of poison and can embed themselves into skin easily. Handle them with care. Spines, harpoons, stinging capsules. These are the dangers of the deep you really should look out for.

Your major weapon against any jellyfish is household vinegar; it can neutralise even the sting of the box jellyfish in 30 seconds. If somebody has been stung by a cone fish or blue ringed octopus, they are unlikely to feel pain, but their lips and tongue will shortly become numb, and as paralysis increases they will cease breathing. It is vital for someone who knows the technique to keep up the victims' oxygen supply with Expired Air Resuscitation, while somebody else sends for urgent medical aid. Stings from fish such as stonefish or cobbler should be immersed in hot water - check the water temperature to avoid scalding. With stonefish stings, it may also be necessary to maintain resuscitation, but always send for urgent medical aid.

Oh, there is one other sea-going creature, much more dangerous than even the white pointer shark. With fast boats, spearguns and whirring propellers, humans should beware of other humans in the ocean.

*Note: More information on poisonous marine invertebrates can be found in : **Sea Stingers**, Loisetta Marsh and Shirley Slack-Smith, WA Museum, 1986.*

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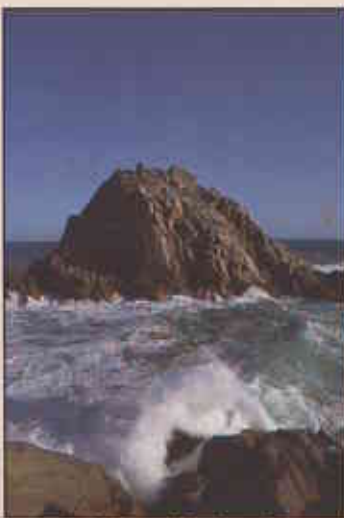
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EDITORIAL

The economic development versus environmental protection debate is a constant feature of our society today. No-one will disagree that our environment needs protection; there is also no doubt that Australia must improve its economic performance if we are to maintain our living standards and enjoy the natural environment which we are blessed with. This *Landscape* describes a project which combines environmental and economic advantages.

Australia's import bill for forest products is \$1.7 billion. Of this a considerable portion is paper which is made from eucalypt fibre. A Perth scientist was the first person to demonstrate that eucalypt could be made into paper, yet it is other countries that have capitalised on this discovery. For example, Brazil, Portugal, Chile, South Africa and Spain have established over 3 million hectares of highly productive eucalyptus plantations. Australia, home of the genus *Eucalyptus*, has only 40 000 hectares of eucalyptus plantations.

Despite our late start, there is no reason why W.A. cannot share some of the rewards which would come from capitalizing on the increasing world demand for high quality paper. We have the land and climate to grow the trees and the skills to do it competitively.

Widespread afforestation of the south-west is also an essential prerequisite to ameliorating salination and eutrophication of our waterways. It is unlikely that afforestation of the magnitude required could be achieved unless it is commercially driven. The production of trees for paper could provide the opportunity to carry out the afforestation program necessary for improving the environment at no cost to the State.

It would be ironic if the world demand for the much maligned woodchip provided the solution for what would arguably be two of the most serious environmental problems in south-western Australia.

Cover Photo

Trees loom out of the mist at Amelup near the Stirling Ranges.
Photograph by Robert Karri-Davies.