

A DIVER'S DIARY

Every day thousands of people look at the clear, shallow lagoons, reefs and tiny islands that make up Perth's Marmion Marine Park. But where does its beauty really begin? Greg Pobar, the Park's manager, would say below the surface. He has the enviable job of diving there regularly to document and monitor marine life. What does he do and see on a routine dive?



Dick Bentley



G. Sauerbacher

Juvenile common scalyfin (above).

Moving towards our survey site, large numbers of western scalyfin charge at my mask making loud popping noises around my head, clearly displeased about the invasion of their territory. Where the sand meets the seagrass bed, a large snail-like bailer shell makes its way across the bottom. Unlike the western scalyfin, it is unconcerned at our presence and lumbers on. It is good to see this once heavily-exploited animal where it belongs, rather than on a lamp as a shade.

At the first major cavern in the reef we take time to absorb the spectacle. The red and white sponge is strikingly beautiful. Today it is a deep red. Deeper water or siltier conditions absorb the red light and the sponge would appear a dull brown.

I settle on the bottom to record the diversity of marine invertebrates. As usual, the difficulty of writing underwater wearing a mask and thick gloves is compounded by the pencil breaking. After sharpening the broken pencil with a diving knife, I wedge myself into a small limestone crevice and fill out the waterproof data sheets.

Diversity of marine plant communities and their distribution are recorded by glancing around, but recording the presence and dominance of members of each class of marine invertebrate takes thorough searching. It is always an adventure looking into crevices and caverns and rolling over rocks.



Greg Pobar

A reef crab feeds from brain coral (above).



Eva Boogard

A school of footballer sweep (above).



Dick Bailey

Cowrie shell (above).



Dick Bailey

A male white-barred boxfish (above).



Greg Pobar

Giant sea cuttle (below).

The local life begins to take an interest in me. A toothbrush leatherjacket hovers motionless, face to face, and when I raise the camera to photograph it, turns side on to show its body shape and colouring. No wonder they are easily speared.

The starfish family is well represented. A species of starfish which has colourful flower-like plates on its upper surface is a good indicator of starfish diversity. I take great pleasure in turning these slow-moving creatures upside down and watching the way each species manoeuvres to turn itself back again.

Half our air supply is used, so I turn to signal to Rick that we should return to the boat. To my surprise, a male sea lion is sitting right at my side, just where I thought my diving partner was. In

fact I even tap him on the shoulder before discovering my mistake.

The sea lion sits on the sandy bottom and stares at me, and his large brown eyes that never close underwater unnerve me with their continuous gaze. Questions; "How long has he been there? Does he mind me being here?" and "Where's Rick?" pass quickly through my mind. A quick calculation assures me that it is not breeding season, and I am further relieved when the sea lion pushes me away with his front flippers and takes a greater interest in the fins strapped to my feet. For the next fifteen minutes our diving team consists of three, and the animal fittingly escorts us around the reef.

Heading back to the boat, I notice a large cuttlefish under a small ledge and wriggle two fingers in front of its tentacles, enticing it to respond.

It does, hypnotised by my fingers, and freely swims out of its home, giving me the chance to place the closeup frame of my camera against its body. It is keen to linger and I have to push it back into its crevice before we leave. I suspect that it isn't well. Perhaps it is suffering from old age. A boxfish swims by, and I photograph it on the run. For a fish that only has a bony exoskeleton and no muscle, it certainly moves quickly, small fins generating most of the propulsion it needs.

Gorgonian corals and sponges dominate some crevices and caverns. I am surprised to see the polyps of soft-finger coral out and feeding during the day. During this time, schools of buff bream, sweep, herring, skipjack trevally, old wife, and roughies circle us. It is hard to tell whether the attraction is the bubbles we exhale, or whether we are stirring up morsels of food as we swim amongst the kelp and caverns.

We swim over the broken reef to the reef flat to record the dominant reef-top fauna of abalone and other molluscs. It is awkward being half out of the water with the heavy equipment on our backs, so we drop back to the bottom to take down notes in more comfort. The usual abandoned craypot, rusty anchor, algae covered rope, empty stubbies and drifting plastic are present.

Rick and I have dived together long enough to interpret each other's underwater grunts, and a passing glance sums up our views about this reef's condition. At this point, we ascend.

All in all, we are pleased with the condition of the reefs in the area, considering the large number of divers using it. It is encouraging to see that the majority of people appreciate and enjoy the area in a responsible manner.



Sea star (above).
Rick Allison and friend (below).



Yellow anemones (above).



Jiri Lochman

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EDITORIAL

A prerequisite for the successful management of land and wildlife is an understanding of the processes that drive ecosystems, and managers who can manipulate these processes.

In Western Australia, we are fortunate that we have a wealth of talent in different government agencies, tertiary institutions and private companies who can provide these research and management skills.

Of course, obtaining a perfect understanding of ecosystems and ways to manage them brings to mind the frog who wants to reach a creek, but can only jump half the distance every time.

But it is not the complexities of understanding or managing ecosystems which provide the greatest difficulty.

Social and political factors are far more difficult to accommodate.

All the scientific and managerial skills in the world are worth nothing if the community and, often more importantly, selected constituencies within the community do not support the management strategies.

Unfortunately, there is often an inverse relationship between a scientist's or manager's skills in his profession and his capacity to handle social and political factors in the community. This is not surprising, since most scientists and managers have received little training in basic communication skills, let alone community politics.

CALM is attempting to address this problem in a variety of ways. But the people who should know the most about how to obtain community support for public land management strategies are the public. *Landscape* readers are an important and influential constituency. If you have thoughts on this issue we would like to hear from you.



What a sterling idea! A new management plan for CALM's South Coast Region - page 28.



Are insects gradually eating away our jarrah forests? Turn to page 18.



What lies beneath the waters of Marmion Marine Park? See page 25.

COVER



A rose by any other name... Does its name detract from the beauty of the common eggfly (Hypolimnas bolina)? Photograph - Jiri Lochman

FEATURES

FIREWOOD - THE BURNING ISSUE

BY STEVE SLAVIN 4

KARRI FOR KEEPS

BY ROGER UNDERWOOD & BARNEY WHITE 6

OUT ON A LIMB

BY IAN ABBOTT 18

AUTUMN COLOURS

BY ROGER UNDERWOOD 22

DIVER'S DIARY

BY GREG POBAR 25

JEWEL OF THE SOUTH

BY JOHN WATSON 28

THE PRICE OF POPULARITY

BY CHRIS HAYNES 35

IN SEARCH OF...

BY BERT & BABS WELLS AND BRIAN HAY 40

IT'S A ... DOLPHIN !

BY ROSELYNN LANG 44

SWEET RETREAT


BY CAROLYN THOMSON & KIM WILLIAMS 46

PIECING TOGETHER THE REMNANTS

BY KEVIN KENNEALLY & NORM MCKENZIE 50

REGULARS

PORTFOLIO KIM PERRIER 13

URBAN  CS 24

BUSH TELEGRAPH 33

ENDANGERED THE LESSER NODDY 53

LETTERS 54

SPECIALS

PHOTO COMPETITION 16

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