

Humpbacks Head South



At certain times of the year, large numbers of humpback whales (*Megaptera novaeangliae*) pass through Marmion Marine Park on their annual migration to polar feeding grounds.

Recently, Marine Park Manager Greg Pobar, and Ranger Rick Allison, on patrol along the western boundary of the Park, were rewarded with a magnificent display from these 30-40 tonne monsters of the deep.

Sometimes only a few feet from the vessel, the whales, blowing bubbles, would surface, showering the crew with their spray plume, only to dive and surface further afield, breaching and falling, splashing and tailing, rolling, scooping, finning or bursting out together in great backward somersaults as if for a grande finale.

The following day, Greg and Supervising Wildlife Officer Doug Coughran, spotted six humpbacks while on reef patrol.

"We could see them miles away launching themselves out of the water; they'd go straight up like rockets," said Greg.

They moved towards the whales for a closer view.

In line with the national whale watching guidelines, the boat was kept at least 100 m from the pod, but the whales' curiosity soon overcame them and they moved towards the boat to continue their antics.

Greg and Doug joined the whales in the water for over an hour.

"We were able to get some tail fluke photos which will be useful for research," said Doug.

"Whales can be identified by their tail flukes, as each one is different. The photos were sent to the W.A. Museum and the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority."

However, jumping in the water with the giant mammals is not recommended. The whales are so huge that they can be quite dangerous if they become upset.

"It was quite frightening at first," said Greg.

"You have to know what you're doing. If the whales had shown any sign of aggressive behaviour, such as tail flapping and flipper-slapping, we would have left the area immediately.

"Unfortunately, many people believe this behaviour means that they are playing."



Will they measure up? Greg and Doug are dwarfed by a huge humpback whale (above).

Three of the six humpback whales recently spotted in the Marmion Marine Park (left).

Photographs by Stephanie Powell

However, the whales seemed to welcome these intruders into their world. At times they rolled their flippers and tails over the divers, and floated face to face examining them.

"Being in the water with the animals was so awe-inspiring that our natural fear was forgotten," said Greg.

Few people realise that there are national whale watching guidelines:

- ◆ Boats should approach whales from a direction parallel and to the rear of them.
- ◆ They should stay at least 100 m away from the whales. If they approach any closer, engines can be put into neutral and the whales allowed to come to the boat of their own accord.
- ◆ Always avoid sudden or repeated changes in direction or speed and, when within 300 m, move no faster than the slowest whale.
- ◆ Abandon contact with the whales at any sign of them becoming disturbed.

So, if you are lucky enough to meet any of these gentle creatures, make sure you abide by the guidelines and keep any disturbance to a minimum.

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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 (Hypolimnastis 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  24

BUSH TELEGRAPH 33

ENDANGERED THE LESSER NODDY 53

LETTERS 54

SPECIALS

PHOTO COMPETITION 16

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