

As
the first winter chill bites the
air, people around the world
chase
the sun to distant islands,
seeking refuge from the cold
weather.

Many islands off Perth's
coast are sanctuaries to
visitors
of a different kind; an array
of birds and animals.

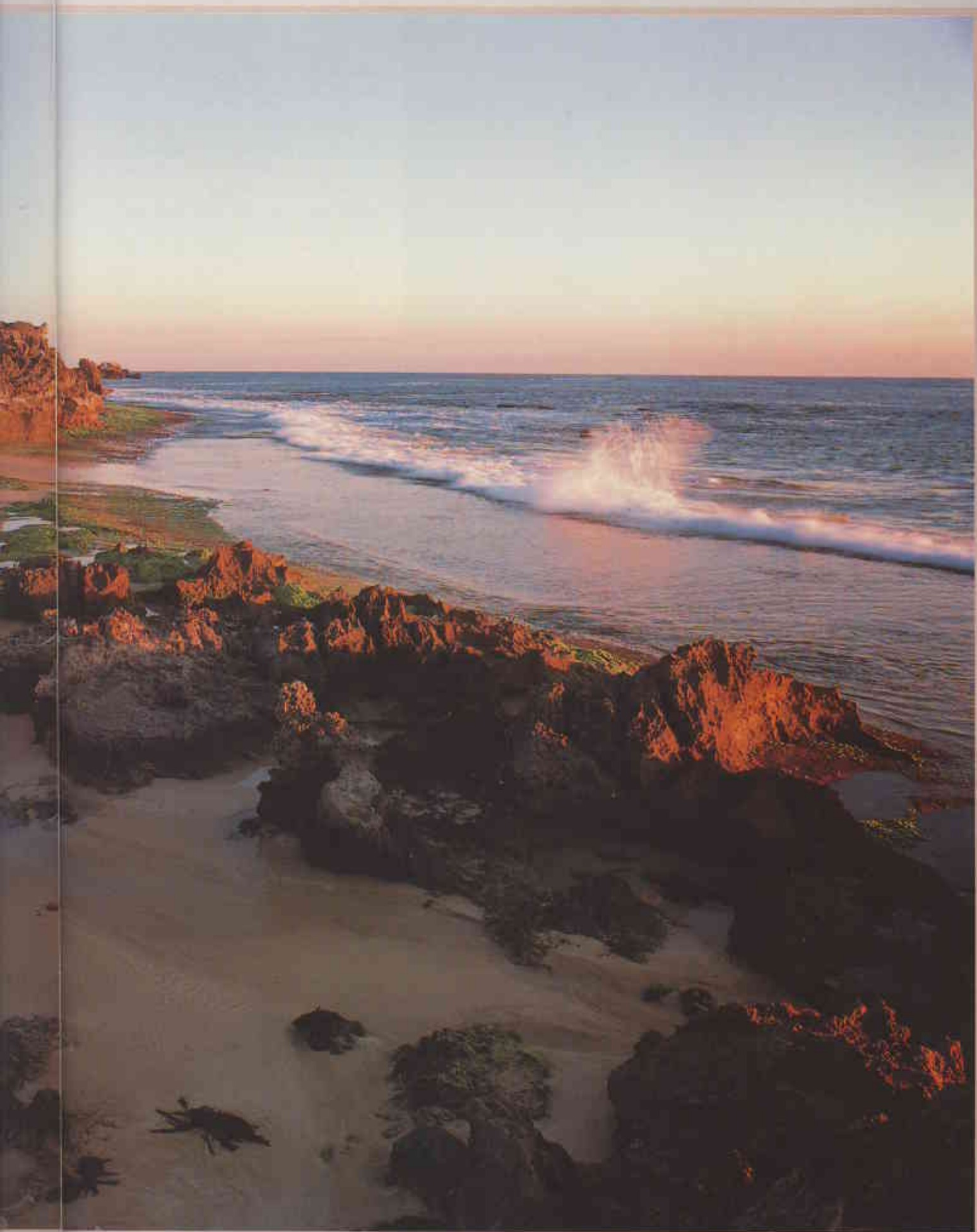
Some
stay, others return home
after another peaceful
season
at their winter island resort.

Kylie Byfield
takes
a look at these unusual
tourists and
their...



**Island
Interludes**





As the sun sets, squealing gulls wheel across the waves in search of food. Then night descends and hundreds of Little Penguins waddle ashore, heading back to sea again at dawn. As the day warms up, boats dot the sheltered bay and their colourful passengers spill onto the beach. By evening they have gone, leaving the animals in peace once more.

Such is the daily cycle of life on Penguin Island, one of a string of islands lying on Perth's doorstep. Its neighbours are Seal, Garden and Carnac Islands and several tiny 'rock' islands jutting out of the sea.

These islands are home to many animals. Some are permanent residents while others are travellers, pausing to

rest or breed before moving on with the seasons, perhaps to return again next year.

While each island has its own character, all are biologically significant and have high recreation, research and historical value. They are protected to ensure that they, and their flora and fauna, are cared for and respected.





More than 160 years ago, a navy captain on a voyage of exploration along the WA coast noted that Cockburn Sound possessed great attractions for a sailor in search of a port and a particular island had the potential to be developed as a naval base. Two years later, in 1829, the officer returned as Governor of the Swan River Colony and claimed the island as part of his land grant. Little did Governor James Stirling know then that, 149 years later, Garden Island would indeed become a naval base.

This 1214-hectare island is a gateway to history. Lying two kilometres off the coast at Point Peron, about 45 kilometres south-west of Perth, it was known to early Dutch navigators more than 300 years ago. In 1801, it was named Bauche by French explorer Captain Nicholas Baudin.

It was here that the first settlers arrived with Captain Fremantle and Governor Stirling in April and June 1829. They made their home at Cliff Head on the island's east side, sinking a well and planting the vegetable gardens that gave the island its name. Later that year, many of the settlers shifted to the mainland and founded Perth. Others remained on the island for several years, although the original settlement was destroyed by fire in 1834.

Since then, the island has served many purposes. During the First and Second World Wars, it was closed to the public and garrisoned by the army for coastal defence. It was also a training ground for the Services Reconnaissance Department ('Z Force'). Before and after the war, the island was a popular recreation site. Many holiday shacks were built on land leased from the Commonwealth and a ferry transported people to and from the mainland.

In June 1978, however, the HMAS Stirling naval base was commissioned and the island was handed over to the Navy.

The last holiday shacks were demolished in 1981.



Bottle-nosed dolphins (*Tursiops truncatus*) are often seen in Cockburn Sound near Garden Island.

Photo- Dick Beilby▲

During their nuptial period Crested Terns (*Sterna bergii*) develop complete black caps. After breeding the cap begins to moult and is replaced by 'eclipse plumage'.

Photo- Gerhardt Saueracker▶



Today, the island remains a popular recreation site. Although visitors cannot stay overnight for security reasons, they can enjoy about two-thirds of the island's coastline not used by the Navy. Some tourist coaches can cross the Navy's causeway, but most visitors can only reach the island by boat.

Daytrippers can laze on the peaceful white beaches, swim or sail in the bays or try to hook a fish. Toilets and barbecues are provided. The Department of Conservation and Land Management (CALM) plans to upgrade these in the near future. No walktrails are provided as visitors are not encouraged to roam the island because of the danger from tiger snakes.

Pillboxes and gun emplacements lie in dunes along the western shore. A memorial to the 'Z Force' has also been erected within the grounds of HMAS Stirling. Meanwhile, a memorial to the first settlers at Cliff Head maintains a quiet vigil over Buchanan Bay. From here, visitors can enjoy the view and peer down the settlers' original well.

Garden Island is covered in thick scrub which provides hidden homes for animals such as the rare tammar wallaby, the lined skink and the carpet snake.

Many species of birds, some of them rare on the mainland, also live here, including the Brush Bronzewing, which has disappeared from Rottneest Island and much of its former South-West range. Fairy Terns, Silver Gulls and Ospreys nest on the island and wading birds are occasionally seen.

The vegetation has high conservation values. Most of the island is covered in acacia, melaleuca, Rottneest cypress, Rottneest tea-tree and honey-myrtle. Most of the cypress and tea-tree grow on the northern half. One section has not been burnt for about 65 years and provides a valuable example of undisturbed coastal vegetation. The pure stands of Rottneest cypress on Garden Island are rare elsewhere.

Both the Navy and CALM have put a lot of effort into maintaining Garden Island's natural areas. The Navy has helped fund a number of protection programs for both fire management and noxious weed control. It has also funded research programs on the island's flora and the tammar wallaby.

Carnac Island

Carnac Island lies about four kilometres north of Garden Island and, like its nearest neighbour, played an important role in the early settlement of the Swan River Colony. It was named by the then Captain James Stirling after his First Lieutenant, John Rivett Carnac.

On 25 April 1829, the ship *Challenger* ran aground on a reef in the rocky passage between the islands. Several weeks later, Governor James Stirling arrived in the new colony with the first settlers on the *Parmelia*. Impatient to get ashore, Stirling decided not to wait for a heavy ocean swell to subside - and the ship promptly ran aground on a sandbank just off Carnac Island. It is believed the settlers had to disembark in order to free the vessel.

The arrival of the settlers marked the beginning of the island's chequered history. In 1832, the heroic Aboriginal leader, Yagan, and two others were imprisoned on the island for allegedly killing one of the European settlers. Prison warden R.M. Lyon had instructions to find out about Aboriginal culture so the white settlers could negotiate a treaty of peace with the Aborigines.

All went well for a time until storekeeper John Morgan, on a regular voyage to deliver stores, was stranded on

the island due to stormy weather. When he woke the next morning the storm had passed, but his boat and the prisoners were gone.

Lyon had learned much about the natives, however, and in March 1833, he published Lyon's Aboriginal Vocabulary in the Perth Gazette. The Aboriginal name for Carnac Island was listed as Ngooloomayup.

Its prison days over, the island became the site of a whaling station in 1837. The industry was short-lived and operations ceased the following year. The island's history in the middle of the century is sketchy but it is known that a timber house was built in 1851. The island was gazetted as a quarantine station in 1884, but was not used as such until 1905.

The Commonwealth acquired the island for defence purposes in 1916, but transferred it back to the State in 1961 for the princely sum of 500 pounds. Two years later, the 17.2-hectare island was gazetted as an 'A' class nature reserve for recreation and the conservation of fauna - and it remains so today.



Carnac Island is an important resting area for Australian sea-lions. More than 30 bird species also inhabit the island, which is the northern limit of the Little Penguin's breeding range and the southern limit for that of the Wedge-tailed Shearwater in Western Australia. Large nesting colonies of Silver Gulls and Pied Cormorants are established here while Pied Oystercatchers, Bridled Terns and Ospreys occasionally visit. Dense vegetation is home to King's skinks and a large population of tiger snakes, which prey on mice and seabird chicks.

People also find the island an ideal rest point and many boats anchor in its sheltered bay on weekends and holidays. Daytrippers spill out onto the island's eastern beach while the surrounding reefs are popular for diving and snorkelling. Visitors are encouraged to respect the island and its inhabitants. Sea-lions should be treated with care as they can become aggressive when disturbed.

There is an intriguing story that Carnac Island's tiger snakes were released there in 1929. In 1981, research scientist Andrew Burbidge received a phone call from a Mr Bydder of East Fremantle. He said that as a young man he had known a Richard ('Rocky') Vane, who was well known as the seller of "Vane's Goanna Salve". He also kept many snakes and had a sideshow with a snake pit at a place called White City at the bottom of William Street. Vane occasionally allowed the snakes to bite him and his wife, to build up their immunity, but on one occasion his wife died. As a result, the Police closed Vane's show and ordered him to get rid of the snakes. Bydder accompanied Vane in a boat to Carnac Island, where he released between 70 and 100 tiger snakes.

Although Mr Bydder's story has not been verified by research, current genetic studies on the tiger snakes could provide the answers.

Visitors to Carnac Island should not leave the beach- venomous tiger snakes (*Notechis scutatus*) are common.

Photo- Jiri Lochman ▲

In 1827 the *Parmelia* became stuck on a sandbar near Carnac Island and 29 of the first settlers to arrive in the Swan River Colony were beached on the island to lighten the load.

Photo- Margaret Langley ◀



Windsurfers sometimes visit Penguin Island but most visitors prefer to relax and soak in the island atmosphere.

Photo- Robert Garvey▲▲

Penguin Island has the largest breeding colony of Little Penguins on the west coast. ▲

Eccentric mining engineer, Seaforth McKenzie, lived on the island in the 1920s in caves he hollowed out from the limestone rocks.

Photos- Alex Bond ◀



The year is 1924. A tall man with a shock of white hair and a 'goatie' beard stands on a rock above the swirling surf, frantically waving a floppy old army hat to greet people approaching the island in a makeshift sailboat. He helps them ashore and welcomes them to his kingdom.

The man is Seaforth McKenzie - the first person known to have lived on Penguin Island. The island, lying less than one kilometre off the Safety Bay coast about 55 kilometres south of Perth, takes its name from the Little Penguins which breed there.

The Canadian-born mining engineer lived on the island from about 1916-1925. Apparently disillusioned with life,

Seaforth found his way to the 12.5-hectare island early this century and quickly made it his own private Utopia. He made his home in hollowed-out limestone caves, one of which was christened 'The Palace'. Here, a ball was staged after Seaforth was crowned 'King of the Island' at a ceremony attended by fishermen and prominent Perth people. A lover of literature, Seaforth would often invite his literary friends to lamp-lit poetry readings in the 'library' cave.

Ill-health eventually forced Seaforth, described as the "bearded man with gallant manners and a twinkling eye", to leave the island. He lived on the mainland for a short time before returning to his previous home, New Zealand. There he died in May 1947, aged 87.

Today, the only reminders of Seaforth are some nails in the cave walls, a few gnarled fig trees, and an old well. But one of his traditions lingers on; people still escape to the island for relaxation and good times.

At one stage, part of the island was leased to a private company - Penguin Island Pty Ltd - which built shacks to house holidaymakers. When CALM inherited the island from the National Parks Authority in 1985, it also inherited concerns about the condition of the buildings and the impact people were having on the island.

In 1987, CALM bought out the lease, which was not due to expire until 1993, and now manages the island as an 'A' class nature reserve for flora and fauna conservation and public recreation. The shacks are gone, soon to be replaced by a small information and education centre and improved recreation facilities.

The island is closed each year during the penguin breeding season, usually from June to about October, when hundreds of Little Penguins come ashore at night to lay their eggs. But for the rest of the year, visitors can enjoy the island's beaches and surrounds.

Reefs open to the sea whip up waves for surfers, whereas boardsailers prefer to ride the wind on the mainland side. Divers and snorkellers explore the underwater world while others enjoy more sedate pastimes such as fishing, swimming, birdwatching or exploring on foot.

Many families pack a picnic lunch and catch a ferry to the island while boat owners make the short voyage in private craft. Some people choose to walk to the island across a sandbar, although this is extremely dangerous. Visitors are encouraged to help protect the island environment by not disturbing its animal and plant communities and leaving their pets at home.

The Little Penguins, the smallest members of the penguin family, nest in burrows in the sand, under dense bush or in rock crevices. They live in harmony with more than 30 other bird species, including the Silver Gull, Little Shearwater, Pied Oystercatcher and Pied Cormorant. The tropical Bridled Terns also migrate to the island in spring to breed.

The island's vegetation includes ground covers such as sea rockets, which anchor the otherwise mobile sand dunes and provide habitat for reptiles and other small creatures. Coastal wattle grows on the island's central dunes.



Penguin Island caters for many recreation activities that don't harm the environment, including surfing, diving, snorkelling, swimming and beach walking.

Photo- Alex Bond ▲

Walktrails are provided on Penguin Island to ensure visitors don't walk on the fragile vegetation and disturb the small creatures it shelters.

Photo- Marie Lochman ◀



People visit Seal Island in tourist ferries and small boats but should watch the wildlife from offshore.

Photo- Alex Bond ▲

Visitors to Seal Island should take care to avoid the Australian sea-lions (*Neophoca cinerea*) that bask on the beach and swim in the nearby ocean.

Photo- Jiri Lochman ◀

Penguin Island's nearest neighbour is Seal Island, about one kilometre to the north. It is gazetted as a nature reserve for the conservation of fauna, primarily the Australian sea-lions that use it as a rest point almost all year round.

Seaforth McKenzie occasionally sailed to this two-hectare island during his years on Penguin Island, landing on a small beach. Today's visitors must also come by boat, but they are encouraged to watch the sea-lions from offshore. The island has no facilities and its coastal vegetation is fragile.

ISLAND TREASURES

All over the world, islands provide some of the most popular tourist destinations and wildlife conservation areas. But forget the up-market sales hype: some fascinating islands lie on Perth's doorstep. Just ask the thousands of visitors - some human, some not - who have already enjoyed such an island interlude. □

LANDSCOPE

VOLUME FIVE NO 1 SPRING EDITION 1989



Perth people were devastated when a fire tore through their favourite bushland retreat. But, with Spring, new life and colour is returning.



Rottneest isn't the only unspoilt island on Perth's doorstep- what about Penguin, Garden, Seal and Carnac Islands? They are steeped in history and provide a haven for some unique wildlife.



Algae has clogged the estuaries near Mandurah, killing fish and creating an eyesore. What is the solution?



Jarrah dieback- the word strikes fear into any forester's heart- but research is fuelling the fight against the killer fungus.



Explore the waterways of the South-West by canoe.

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COVER

What's new in Kings Park this spring? Artist, Susan Tingay, couldn't resist this magnificent collection of spring orchids. From left- cowlslip orchid (*Caladenia flava*), jug orchid (*Pterostylis recurva*), King spider orchid (*Caladenia huegelii*), donkey orchid (*Diuris longifolia*), rabbit orchid (*Caladenia menziesii*), and pink fairy orchid (*Caladenia latifolia*).
Back Cover: *Stimson's python* (*Morelia stimsoni*)
Photo-Jiri Lochman



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