

DANGEROUS MARINE ANIMALS

Fire fish, sea snakes, bluebottles and moray eels are just some of the creatures featured in the Dangerous Marine Animals exhibition at Perth's Underwater World, adjacent to the Marmion Marine Park at Hillarys. The display, which runs until May, brings together many feared and often misunderstood creatures that inhabit Western Australia's coastal waters.

The outstanding beaches and cool waters of the Indian Ocean are a favourite retreat for Western Australians, especially during the warmer months. The ocean is also home for numerous animals, some of which are potentially dangerous.

Dean Lee, Underwater World's Education Officer, describes the dangerous marine animal exhibition as a window into the lives of these often maligned and poorly understood creatures. "Many people have an innate fear of the creatures that inhabit the sea. Much of this stems from the sensationalist manner in which marine animal injuries are presented in the media," he said. "There is no doubt that some marine creatures are potentially dangerous to us, but this danger needs to be put into perspective. More people die each year from bee stings than from shark attacks!"

Many of the deadlier marine animals, such as the fish-eating cone shells, stone fish and box jellyfish, inhabit the northern waters of our State, away from major population areas. Others, perhaps less deadly, are more widely distributed. Cobblers, one of the catfishes, are commonly caught in the Swan

River. The venomous spines of these fish mean they should be handled with care. Sting rays, scorpion cods and puffer fish may also be found around Perth.

Although sharks and saltwater crocodiles are also dangerous marine animals, they do not feature in the exhibition. Sharks can be seen all year round as a permanent feature of Underwater World.

However, the blue-ringed octopus, perhaps the deadliest marine creature along our shores, is included in the exhibition. These small animals (they are rarely more than 150 mm across the arms) commonly hide in shells or discarded bottles and often turn up in lobster pots. Their bite is painless but the effects are staggering. Death can occur in minutes.

Many home remedies have been used to treat injuries from marine animals, occasionally with dire results. To ensure that appropriate first-aid measures are applied, a Red Cross information panel has been included in the display.

Increasing people's awareness and understanding is the prime aim of the exhibition. "Few of the dangers presented by the animals are directed at humans," says Mr Lee. "Instead, they represent unique adaptations effected by these animals to aid them in surviving in their environment."

The potential dangers are real, but few of us will ever be unfortunate enough to suffer injury from a marine animal. Perhaps the greatest danger to be found on our beaches remains - not so sensationally - sunburn.



Just three of the many fascinating yet potentially dangerous marine animals that live in our coastal waters. Top to bottom: moray eel; butterfly cod; shark.

Photos - Underwater World



Visitors from around Australia are discovering what those who live nearby already know - D'Entrecasteaux...C'est Magnifique. Turn to page 10.



Seabirds nest on Pelsaert Island in the Houtman Abrolhos by the million. See page 17.

LANDSCOPE

VOLUME SIX NO. 3 - AUTUMN EDITION 1991



There's more to invertebrates than slugs, maggots and spiders. Turn to page 28 to find out just why invertebrates are so important.



What has happened to Fitzgerald River National Park since the 1989 wildfire? See page 34.



Explore the Dampier Archipelago, a group of rocky islands with a violent past and a wealth of wildlife. Turn to page 48.

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C O V E R

Invertebrates play an important role in the ecosystem of WA's jarrah forest. Earthworms, termites and ants fragment leaf litter and mix organic matter. Some soil and litter invertebrates stimulate plant growth. Soil insects such as larval beetles feed on roots, stimulating the plants' growth rate. Our cover illustration is Philippa Nikulinsky's impression of this process at work in the jarrah forest.



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 Colour Separation by Prepress Services
 Printed in Western Australia by Lamb Printers

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 50 Hayman Road, Como, Western Australia 6152.