

## FISH HABITAT PROTECTION AREA AT COTTESLOE



In December 1998, a group of people concerned about the depletion of marine life on the Cottesloe Reef formed the Cottesloe Marine Protection Group. Spearfishing, indiscriminate collecting of marine life and nutrient outflow as a result of stormwater discharges were targeted as having the biggest impact on the marine life.

Thanks largely to their efforts, Cottesloe Reef was proclaimed a Fish Habitat Protection Area by the Department of Fisheries in September 2001. It extends from North Street to 300 metres south of the artificial reef at Cable Beach, and seaward from the high water mark to 800 metres offshore. Spearfishing, commercial fishing and aquaculture are banned, but recreational anglers may use a rod and line from the shore, groyne and boats. Boats cannot anchor south of the main groyne.

The Cottesloe Fringing Bank, as it is known locally, stretches for approximately four kilometres from North Street, north of the main Cottesloe groyne, to the Cable Station at its southern end. It consists of limestone reef which, in places, can be

found just a few metres offshore. Limestone pinnacles, ledges under raised platforms, and limestone outcrops harbour a myriad of marine life. Colourful gorgonian corals, sponge and sea cucumber gardens, feathery hydroids and delicate white telesto soft corals are just a few of the reef's many attractions. Extensive seagrass meadows and kelp make this area an important breeding ground for fish, including the weedy seadragon.

Weedy seadragons occur only in southern Australian waters. They are related to seahorses and pipefish, but have many leaf-like appendages on their head and body. They are well camouflaged as they sway back and forth in the weed. Unlike leafy seadragons that have larger appendages, weedy seadragons are not protected, and their numbers have declined due to their appeal as aquarium fish and for Asian medicines.

Luckily, weedy seadragons are still often sighted in the Cottesloe Reef area. During



spring and summer, males bearing eggs may be found. Like all members of the Family Syngnathid, the seadragon males carry and incubate the eggs. The male seadragon develops a brood pouch under its tail to which the eggs are transferred from the female. Here, they receive oxygen from the father's body until they hatch about four weeks later.

The red-striped cardinalfish also uses the Cottesloe Reef area as a breeding ground. During summer, the male cardinalfish gobbles up the eggs after they are liberated from the female and fertilised by his sperm. He doesn't swallow them, but holds them in his mouth to incubate them. Even hatchlings stay within the male's mouth for a couple of days until their chances of survival in the wild have improved.

The Cottesloe Marine



Top left: Cottesloe Beach.

Top right: Prickly leatherjacket.

Above: Cardinalfish with eggs.

Photos – Ann Storrie

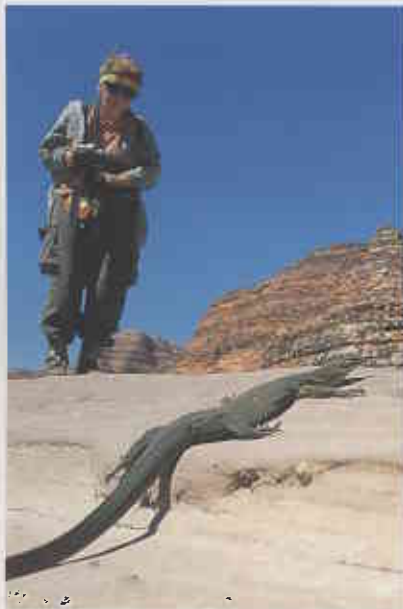
Protection Group and the Department of Conservation and Land Management are working to increase public awareness of the scientific, educational and economic value of conserving the reef and its biodiversity. The community is monitoring the area very effectively, and studies of the marine life are ongoing, with many people giving their time voluntarily to the projects.

Winner of the Alex Harris Medal for excellence in science and environment reporting.

# LANDSCOPE



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During the past decade more than 500 people have contributed to science projects in WA by joining a LANDSCOPE Expedition (see page 34).



Since the 1960s Barrow Island's animals have shared their island paradise with the oil industry. Read how the mammals are being monitored and protected. See page 18.



Georgiana Molloy made a major contribution to the early botanical knowledge of the south-west. Read about this remarkable woman on page 43.



The Goldfields Woodlands National Park protects the region's best examples of eucalypt woodlands (see page 28).



Collecting seeds is one way in which we are helping to conserve biodiversity. Join the 'Hunters and Gatherers for Conservation' on page 49.

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## COVER

There's something going on in our schools. Students are voluntarily taking an active interest in conserving their local environments. They are visiting forests, beaches and wetlands to study native wildlife. And they are having fun! What is happening and why? See 'EcoEducation—winning over school communities' on page 10.



Cover illustration by Ellen Hickman

