

SURVEY WILL HELP DUGONG CONSERVATION

The first comprehensive survey of dugong abundance and distribution to be carried out during the summer months on the Western Australian coast was recently undertaken in the Shark Bay World Heritage Area. All earlier surveys had been done in winter.

The aerial survey aimed to provide important information on dugong distribution patterns and habitats. Dugong distribution was known to be affected by water temperature and the availability of food (seagrass). However, the complete range of factors affecting seasonal movements of dugongs were not well understood. This survey should enable

scientists to gain a clearer insight into the movements of the animals and the relationships between their movements and their habitats.

Team members carried out the survey in a twin-engined aircraft, from which they recorded the number of adult and juvenile dugongs, and the weather and sea conditions under which they were found.

Australian regional populations of dugongs, including those in the Shark Bay World Heritage Area, form the largest and most secure populations of the species in the world. The survey recorded an estimated 12,000 dugongs in the Bay, representing more than 10 per cent of the Australian population.

This is the highest density per square kilometre known anywhere in the world where such surveys have been conducted.

The Western Australian Department of Conservation and Land Management is now better able to plan the future conservation of the species, balancing the needs of the dugongs against other demands on the area, such as aquaculture, nature-based tourism, fishing and any other activities that could disturb dugongs or their habitats. The survey was a collaboration between the department and James Cook University in Townsville, Queensland, and was partially financed by the Commonwealth World Heritage Fund.

Dugongs are found in

tropical and subtropical waters through coastal parts of the Indian and western Pacific oceans, where, in some areas, they have become perilously closer to extinction.

A mother dugong and her calf at Shark Bay.

Photo - Doug Perrine/Innerspace Visions



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

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An exciting range of recreational opportunities are being offered in some national parks, creating employment for locals. See page 28.



Declining water levels threaten a remarkable community of cave-dwellers in Yanchep National Park. Turn to page 34.



Native animals need tree hollows and people need wood. How are these conflicting uses managed? See page 20.



The search to find out the cause of a new tree killer known as Mundulla Yellows. See page 41.



Re-discovering the long-forgotten memoirs of a Kimberly pioneer. See page 48.

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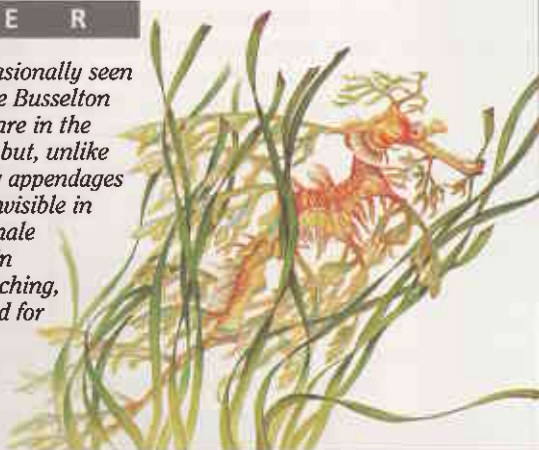
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COVER

Leafy seadragons are occasionally seen in the seagrass around the Busselton Jetty (see page 10). They are in the same family as seahorses but, unlike seahorses, they have leafy appendages that make them almost invisible in their surroundings. The male carries the eggs in the skin beneath his tail. After hatching, the young swim off to fend for themselves.

Cover illustration
by Philippa Nikulinksy



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