



## Francois Peron National Park

The rolling red sand dunes and dense acacia shrublands of Francois Peron National Park provide four-wheel-drive visitors with a wilderness experience.

**Above** The Cape Peron cliffs at sunset.  
**Above right from top** Woylies have been reintroduced to the Peron Peninsula, in the Francois Peron National Park.  
*Photos – Jiri Lochman*  
An Aboriginal mia in the Francois Peron Visitor Centre.  
**Far right** Bottlenose dolphins.  
*Photo – Jiri Lochman*

**D**eclared on 8 January 1993, Francois Peron National Park had its tenth anniversary this year. The park lies 10 kilometres from Denham, in the Shark Bay World Heritage Area, and is adjacent to the Shark Bay Marine Park. It covers some 52,500 hectares of the Peron Peninsula.

### Taste of pastoral life

Francois Peron National Park was once a pastoral station, and you can visit the old homestead to experience how life was on a remote sheep station. The road to the old homestead is accessible to two-wheel-drives for much of the year, but you should check road conditions with the Department of Conservation and Land Management office in Denham before your visit.

The old overseer's quarters at the homestead has been converted into a visitor centre. A large wall mural at the visitor centre depicts local indigenous people, French maritime explorers, early pastoralists and fishers through to the conservation managers of today. Two sections of the display show how Project

Eden, a plan to restore much of the native fauna to the Peron Peninsula, is changing Francois Peron National Park. One depicts the area before it became a national park, when old bottles, goats and other feral animals were prevalent. The other shows the native animals that are being reintroduced.

Now used to pump water into a recreational spa, the hot artesian bore was once essential to the survival of the former Peron Station. The homestead artesian bore was drilled between September 1922 and July 1923 and the water was pumped from the reservoir tank by three windmills to nine watering points for livestock. Today, as well as being able to enjoy a dip in the hot water, visitors can often see the emus and other birds that flock to drink in the overflow from the 'hot tub'. A nearby grassed area boasts barbecues and tables and is a great place for a picnic.

### Venturing into the wilderness

While you can reach the homestead by two-wheel-drive vehicles for much of the year, you need a four-wheel-



drive (low clearance four-wheel-drives are unsuitable) to visit the park's scenic coastline, with its dramatic contrasts of red cliffs, blue water and white beaches. From the cliffs of Cape Peron, visitors may see bottlenose dolphins playing, dugongs feeding, green and loggerhead turtles surfacing for air and large manta rays gliding past just beneath the surface. The park and the rest of the peninsula is interspersed with gypsum claypans known as birridas. Most birridas were landlocked saline lakes when sea levels were much higher, and gypsum was deposited on the lake floors. In some places, such as at Big Lagoon, the sea has invaded the claypans to form a shallow inland bay. The area was used by pearlers in the late 1880s and old pearlshells can be found on many of the area's beaches.

Bush camping, four-wheel-driving, walking, beach fishing and swimming are popular in the park. There are bush camping areas with few facilities (toilets and gas barbecues) at Gregories, Bottle Bay, Herald Bight and Big Lagoon.

The best time to visit the park is between April and October, when winds are generally lightest and the temperature is in the mid-20s (degrees Celsius). Temperatures can be extremely hot in the summer months,

## Restoring Eden

While several threatened mammals survive on Shark Bay's offshore islands, a large number of species have disappeared from arid parts of Australia. This is largely because of predation by introduced foxes and cats and competition from introduced grazing animals such as rabbits, goats and sheep. The Department of Conservation and Land Management's Project Eden is attempting to bring back threatened wildlife to Francois Peron National Park and other parts of Peron Peninsula.

As well as widespread baiting to remove feral cats, foxes, goats and rabbits from a 1050-square-kilometre area of the Shark Bay World Heritage Area, a 3.4-kilometre fence has been built to keep the ferals out. Foxes have virtually been eradicated and around 50-70 per cent of feral cats have been removed.

Bilbies and malleefowl are thriving since their release, and malleefowl chicks are commonly seen in summer. Despite Shark Bay being on the arid edge of their historical range, woylies are still holding on, five years after their first release. Unfortunately, the banded hare-wallaby and mala have suffered predation from remaining cats. However, Project Eden continues to be at the forefront of ecological reconstruction research and is

continuing to develop new techniques that may soon allow other species such as the red-tailed phascogale, golden bandicoot, western barred bandicoot, stickneet rat, and chuditch to be returned to the national park. Project Eden is set to make the Shark Bay World Heritage Area one of the wildlife wonders of the world.

## park facts

**Where is it?** 10 kilometres from Denham, 340 kilometres from Carnarvon and 410 kilometres from Geraldton. Entry fees apply.

**Total area** 52,529 hectares.

**What to do** Walking, picnicking, taking a dip in Peron's artesian bore or 'hot tub', four-wheel-driving, fishing, bush camping.

**Walks** The Pastoral Lifestyle Walktrail, a 45-minute trail from the Peron homestead, takes visitors through the homestead and outbuildings of the former pastoral station.

**Must see sites** Cape Peron, Big Lagoon.

**Naming** The park was named after eminent French zoologist François Péron, who visited Shark Bay in June 1801 and March 1803 aboard the *Géographe*, describing many plants and animals for the first time.

**Nearest Conservation and Land Management Office** Knight Terrace, Denham. Telephone (08) 9948 1208.

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