



Shoalwater Islands Marine Park

Only a short distance south of Perth is an easily accessible marine environment, where penguins, sea lions, dolphins, seagrass and shipwrecks converge.

Above Jagged limestone along the western side of Penguin Island. The adjacent waters are in the Shoalwater Islands Marine Park.
Photo – Alex Bond

Facing page:

Top Australian sea lion.

Photo – Alex Steffe/Lochman Transparencies

Above Silver gull.

Photo – Jiri Lochman

Far right Bryozoan and sea star.

Photo – Ann Storrle

Picturesque submerged reefs inhabited by diverse plant and animal life in the Rockingham area form a remarkable ecosystem. Much of the underwater environment is protected in the Shoalwater Islands Marine Park. As well as having an incredibly rich and diverse marine environment, the marine park surrounds a chain of limestone islands such as Penguin Island, less than 700 metres offshore. These island nature reserves are significant in the ecology of a number of bird species. The park encompasses Shoalwater Bay, Warnbro Sound and the waters off Cape Peron.

Ferry tours operate from Mersey Point from mid-September to early June and feature a cruise around the waters and islands of Shoalwater Bay, with an opportunity to view the sea lions lazing on Seal Island, and to stroll around Penguin Island's network of boardwalks and walkways.

Seabird haven

The islands of Shoalwater Bay abound with seabirds, many of which are

seldom seen on the mainland. They are important seabird breeding sites. At least 14 species of seabirds use the marine park and adjacent nature reserves as foraging and nesting areas. Within the marine park there are breeding colonies of silver gulls, pied cormorants, fairy terns, bridled terns and Caspian terns. Crested terns are commonly seen, but don't usually breed on the islands.

The penguins that nest on Penguin Island feed in the adjacent marine park. The scientific name of the little penguin (*Eudyptula minor*) means 'good little diver' and these birds are adept in the water. The little penguin is the smallest of the world's 17 penguin species. Adults stand about 40 centimetres tall and weigh about a kilogram, but birds in the Shoalwater area are larger than those elsewhere in Australia.

The reef areas support a variety of temperate and subtropical invertebrates, including sea stars, urchins and shellfish, as well as numerous fish species. Bottlenose dolphins are extremely common in the park's waters.



Sea lions and seagrass

A colony of male Australian sea lions hauls out on Seal Island for most of the year (only leaving every 18 months to breed further north). These animals often fish and swim in nearby waters. This species is one of the rarest sea lions in the world and is given special protection under State legislation. Although they are one of our most attractive and interesting sea creatures, sea lions can deliver a nasty bite if aggravated. They are curious and may approach boats. To avoid disturbing the animals, which are territorial, visitors are asked not to land on the island.

Extensive areas of the sea floor are dominated by seagrass. These are important areas, since they provide nursery habitat for juvenile fish and help to stabilise the sandy floor.

Snorkelling and diving

The cavernous reefs surrounding the islands provide good snorkelling and diving. Just south of Penguin Island, for example, there is a shallow and very sheltered area that is an ideal place to

explore interesting underwater ledges and overhangs, lumps, low broken reef and seagrass areas. It is a good area for novice snorkellers, as it is only two to five metres deep and fairly protected.

The Sisters, a series of limestone reefs at the southern end of the Shoalwater Islands Marine Park, offer snorkellers and scuba divers an excellent opportunity to experience an area rich in marine life and First Rock, the first large rock to the south of Penguin Island, is almost completely surrounded by reef, which is undercut by ledges and caves. You should only dive these sites in good weather conditions. There are also a number of good snorkelling spots or shore dives around Cape Peron, in three to seven metres of water.

For further information on these and other dive sites in the marine park see the CALM publication *Dive and Snorkel Sites in Western Australia*.

park facts

Where is it? 50 kilometres south of Perth

Total area About 6545 hectares.

What to do Boating, commercial boat tours, fishing, swimming, windsurfing, diving, picnicking, surfing. Spear guns and hand spears (gidgees) are not permitted on Penguin Island.

Must see sites At the Penguin Experience Discovery Centre commented feeding of little penguins occurs daily at 10.30 am, 12.30 pm and 2.30 pm. Entry to the centre is included in the cost of the ferry ride or tour, which leaves regularly from the mainland.

Naming When John Septimus Roe surveyed and charted the coast and offshore islands of what is now Rockingham in 1839 he called the bay south of Cape Peron 'Shoal Water' (a shoal is an area of shallow water).

Nearest CALM office CALM rangers are stationed on Penguin Island and at Mersey Point in Rockingham, from which the ferry leaves.



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