



## Shark Bay Marine Park

Shark Bay Marine Park—an integral part of the Shark Bay World Heritage Area—boasts the world's largest meadows of seagrass, a population of more than 10,000 dugongs, large marine creatures such as marine turtles and humpback whales, and of course the famous bottlenose dolphins of Monkey Mia.

**Above** Dugongs.

*Photo – Doug Perrine/Innerspace Visions*

**Far right** Seagrass and sand banks.

*Photo – Kevin Crane*

Shark Bay was named in 1699 by William Dampier who noted that 'The sea fish we saw here are chiefly sharks. There are an abundance of them in this particular Sound and I therefore give it the name of Shark's Bay'.

While Shark Bay is not a well-known destination for divers and snorkellers, it is a wonderful place to explore the underwater world and provides a diving experience unlike any other. Dugongs, whale sharks, sea turtles, humpback whales, massive Queensland groper, sharks, curious sea snakes, coral bobbies, seagrass and shipwrecks—this spectacular marine park has it all.

Non-divers can have just as much fun, with an array of marine or boat-based adventures on offer. These adventures include tours of a working pearl farm, boat cruises, fishing safaris, sea kayaking, whale watching and much more.

### Aquatic life

The many bays, inlets and islands in the Shark Bay region support

a profusion of aquatic life. Turtles, dolphins, prawns, scallops, sea snakes, fish and sharks are common. In some areas communities of corals, sponges and other invertebrates support a unique mix of tropical and temperate fish species. The wide intertidal flats on the shore of Shark Bay support a unique community of burrowing molluscs, hermit crabs and other invertebrates. But the very foundation of Shark Bay's ecosystem is the seagrass—meadows and meadows of it!

Shark Bay has the largest area of seagrass and the largest number of species ever recorded in one place in the world. Elsewhere, one or two species cover large geographic areas. But in Shark Bay there are 12 species and, in some places in the bay, nine can easily be identified in a square metre. The most abundant is wireweed (*Amphibolis antarctica*), covering nearly 3700 square kilometres of the bay's sandy bottom. Ribbon weed (*Posidonia australis*) is the other large seagrass which grows in large meadows, which



## The wreck of the *Gudrun*

The *Gudrun*, the biggest wooden shipwreck found off Western Australia, sank at Shark Bay in 1901, carrying a load of jarrah from Bunbury to England. It was deliberately scuttled with more than a metre of water in its hold, after being sabotaged by the ship's carpenter. He admitted drilling a hole through its bottom. The wreck was rediscovered in 1989, when Paul Anderson, a Canadian studying dugongs in Shark Bay, found it on the sand flats north of Cape Peron. Today, the wreck lies in about six metres of water. A special sanctuary zone extends for 500 metres around the wreck to protect the site. Artefacts can't be removed and line fishing and spearfishing are not permitted.

The wreck is 65 by 20 metres, with another 20 by eight-metre section nearby, making it one of WA's largest untouched wrecks in shallow waters. The hull is buried largely intact up to a metre in the soft sands, but anchors, fastenings, deck knees and so on are visible. The remains, however, do not project much more than a metre from the seabed. Because of its relatively untouched wreckage, stunning marine life and remote location and history, Maritime Museum archaeologists rate it as one of the State's best wreck dives. It is now home to a rich variety of fish and marine animals, including turtles, giant groper and stingrays.

cover about 200 square kilometres of Shark Bay. The ribbon-like leaves provide a handy attachment point for many plants and animals.

One of the features of Shark Bay Marine Park is the abundance of large aquatic animals that are easily seen from boats and vantage points on land such as at Eagle Bluff and Skipjack Point. The shallow marine environment of Shark Bay has one of the largest and most secure populations of dugongs in the world, with an estimated 11,000 animals. Although they are very shy, dugongs can often be seen from boats. Green and loggerhead turtles are also common in Shark Bay all year round and congregations of turtles can be seen from the end of July. From July to October numerous humpback whales visit the area. If you cut the engines of your boat and they are in a playful mood they may be encouraged to approach of their own accord. Between January and April, whale sharks can be seen around Cape Inscription and the top of Dirk Hartog Island.

## Diving the bay

Shark Bay offers a quite different experience to diving on the coral reefs of the tropics, or on the temperate limestone reefs further south, but is equally enjoyable. Corals are present, sometimes in large patches, at places like Broadhurst. Monkey Mia, out from Steep Point in about six to 18 metres, is one of the area's most renowned dive sites.

Dive charters are available (by request) and are recommended as the best way to dive in Shark Bay if you don't have good local knowledge, as currents can be quite tricky (and dangerous) due to strong tidal movement. Always dive or snorkel on a slack tide.

If you do plan to dive in Shark Bay make sure you check out the books *Dive and Snorkel Sites in Western Australia* and *More Dive and Snorkel Sites in Western Australia*, which contain mud maps and descriptions of a number of good dive sites in the park. Divers and snorkellers should be wary of dangerous marine animals such as stonefish.



## park facts

**Where is it?** Denham is 330 km from Carnarvon and 400 km from Geraldton, and Monkey Mia is 23 km from Denham.

**Total area** 8240 square kilometres.

**What to do** Dolphin interaction, watching wildlife such as dugongs and marine turtles, snorkelling, diving, fishing and boating.

**Nearest DEC office** DEC's Shark Bay District Office is in Knight Terrace, Denham 6537. phone (08) 9948 1208.

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### Publishing credits

**Executive Editor** Kaye Verbeon,  
**Editors** Rhianna King, Samille Mitchell,  
Carolyn Thomson-Dans

### Scientific/technical advice

Kevin Kenneally, Paul Jones, Keith Morris

### Design and production

Maria Duthie,  
Natalie Jolakoski, Tiffany Taylor,  
Gooitzen van der Meer, Grant Fuller,  
David Abel

### Illustration

Gooitzen van der Meer

### Cartography

Premaco Geodraft

### Marketing

Cathy Birch

**Phone** (08) 9334 0296 **Fax** (08) 9334 0432

### Subscription enquiries

**Phone** (08) 9334 0481 or (08) 9334 0437

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