

Rediscover Perth outdoors

The health benefits of spending time in natural areas are well known. And with a vast network of national, marine and regional parks and reserves on their doorsteps, Perth locals don't have to travel far to immerse themselves in the great outdoors.

by Rhianna King

It won't come as a surprise to many Perth locals that, even on an international stage, their city is regarded as one of the most liveable. In fact, in 2011, the Economist Intelligence Unit ranked Perth the world's eighth most liveable city. Naturally, a number of criteria is used to determine these rankings but one Perth definitely has stitched up is its availability of 'green space'. No doubt the beautiful weather that enables these areas to be enjoyed year round helps too.

Natural setting

Perth has beautiful outdoor environments to its north, south, east and west, and along the Swan and Canning rivers that run through its heart. And many of these areas, and the diverse ecosystems they include, are protected by a network of national, marine and regional parks and reserves. On a broad scale, these areas benefit

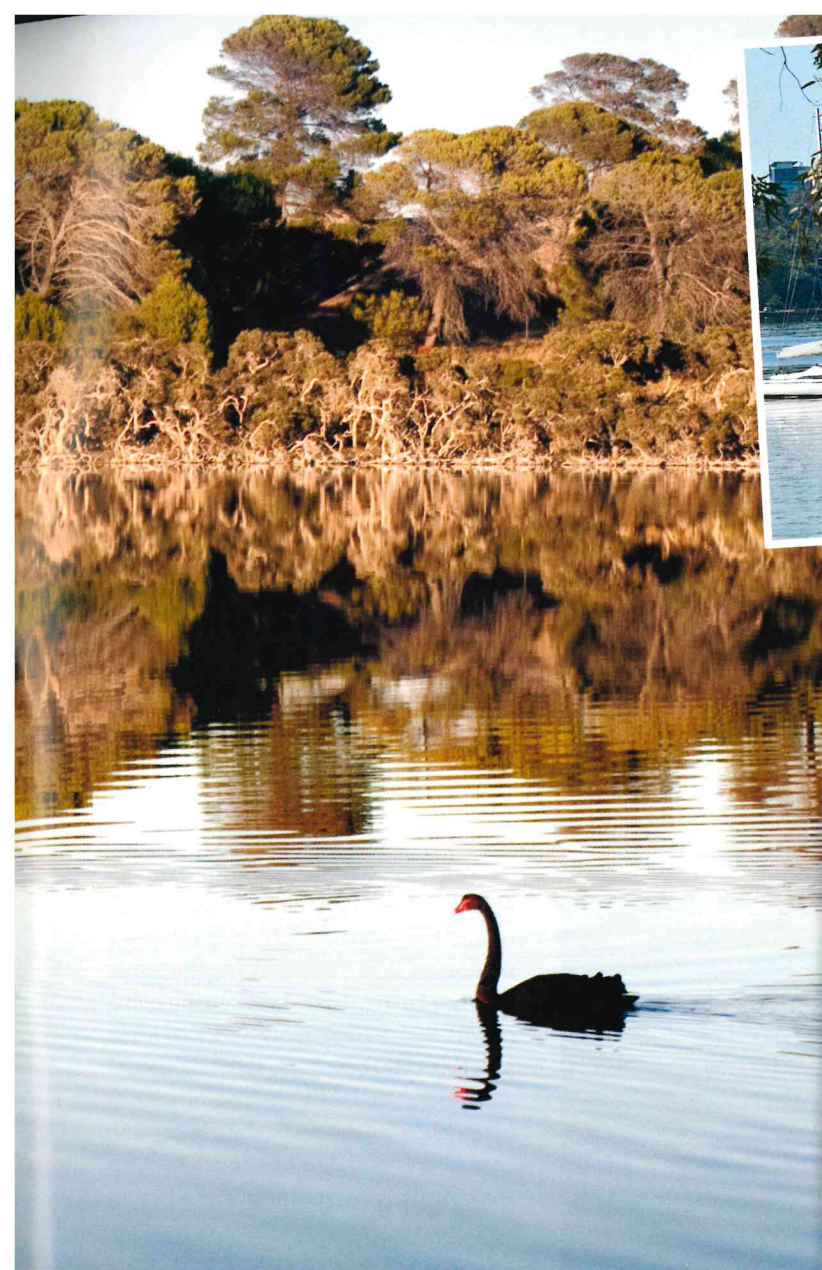
the environment as a whole. They provide habitats for plants and animals and play a vital role in maintaining clean air and water. At the same time, they provide settings in which humans can relax, recharge and contemplate. The associated health benefits are well documented, but in some cases can be felt more than seen (see 'Healthy Parks, Healthy People', *LANDSCOPE*, Spring 2007). Perth's natural areas cater for a variety of activities such as hiking, swimming, abseiling, photography, cycling, surfing, snorkelling, rock climbing and camping, or just a walk or a picnic in the park. For many Perth locals these activities are interwoven with an active, outdoor lifestyle, which they enjoy throughout the year. For visitors these outdoor pursuits are a big drawcard.

Of course, these activities are relatively recent additions to the landscape; Nyoongar people have held

a special bond with the land and its plants and animals for up to 50,000 years. They took cues from nature to guide their hunting and gathering. They recognised six weather seasons and these determined where they stayed and what they hunted. The Perth area also holds mythological significance to Aboriginal people who recognise the strong connection between the Swan and Canning rivers and the Waugal, or serpent.

City-siders

With its southern edge set against the Swan River and the western edge abutting Kings Park, 'Perthites' don't need to stray far from the central business district to immerse themselves in nature. At 4.06 square kilometres, Kings Park is the world's largest inner-city park. It has a variety of environments from large sections of native bush to beautifully manicured



lawns, and from water features to children's playgrounds. There are a number of walking trails on which to explore the park at your own pace, or on a guided tour if you'd prefer. There are also a number of special events held in the park, such as concerts, theatrical performances and ballets, and the ever-popular Wildflower Festival held each spring.

Travelling north-west into suburbia a short way takes you to Herdsman Lake Regional Park, with its rich wetland ecosystems, native vegetation and abundant birdlife. Black swans (*Cygnus atratus*), Eurasian coots (*Fulica atra*) and Pacific black ducks (*Anas superciliosa*), and more than 100 other species, including a number of migratory birds that travel from Siberia and China, strut around the park. It is also home to a couple of notable reptile species, namely the western tiger snake (*Notechis scutatus*) and the

long-neck or oblong turtle (*Chelodina oblonga*). This park is popular among birdwatchers and for its cycling and walking trails and picnic spots.

Closer to the coast, Bold Park is 437 hectares of tuart-banksia woodland and limestone heath which contains 300 native plant species. The area was once an important site to Aboriginal people who camped there and relied on plants and animals for food and medicine. These days, the park is popular for its 15 kilometres of walk trails, and for the views it offers of the coast and to the city with glimpses of the Swan River.

The Swan River offers an environment for marine life and a place for water sports and shore-based recreation. Three special areas of the Swan River are protected as part of Swan Estuary Marine Park to provide a haven for wildlife in an otherwise urban environment. In particular, the marine park provides protection for a

Main Coogee, Beeliar Regional Park.
Photo – Sallyanne Cousans

Inset top Matilda Bay Reserve.
Photo – Peter Nicholas/DEC

Inset middle Snorkelling at Shoalwater Islands Marine Park.
Photo – Michael James/DEC

Inset above Wandoo National Park.
Photo – David Bettini

number of locally and internationally significant shorebirds and marine plants and animals such as seagrasses, anemones, crabs and the beloved bottlenose dolphins (*Tursiops* sp.). While on dry land, barbecues and tables at Matilda Bay Reserve in Crawley make it a well-suited destination for picnics and gatherings.

The Canning River is a major tributary of the Swan River and its eastern end is protected by Canning River Regional Park, which straddles

the river and provides protection for the riverine ecosystems between the Shelley and Nicholson Road bridges. The regional park is an important habitat for a number of migratory birds including the greenshank (*Tringa nebularia*) and curlew (*Calidris ferruginea*), and the river waters provide a nursery for fish such as the Perth herring (*Nematalosa vlaminghi*), flatheads and yellow-eye mullet (*Aldrichetta forsteri*). There are a number of walk tracks to explore the park or you can launch a canoe from several spots along the river.

Heading for the hills

The hills that surround Perth's eastern range offer a number of opportunities to enjoy the great outdoors, and the network of regional parks means you don't need to travel far to enjoy spending time in nature. Beeliar, Jandakot and Wungong regional parks offer a range of eco-experiences on the edge of suburbia.



Left The quenda is one of the native species found in Beelu National Park.
Photo – Sallyanne Cousins

Below Golden View Lookout in Beelu National Park.
Photo – Rob D'Raine

In the north-eastern reaches, Avon Valley National Park offers several camping sites from where visitors can explore the park, which was infamous bushranger Moondyne Joe's hideout in the 1850s. In addition to its rich cultural heritage, the park teems with natural values and its undergrowth explodes into bloom in spring with a stunning wildflower display.

The fascinating history of Walyunga National Park dates back to more than 40,000 years ago. The

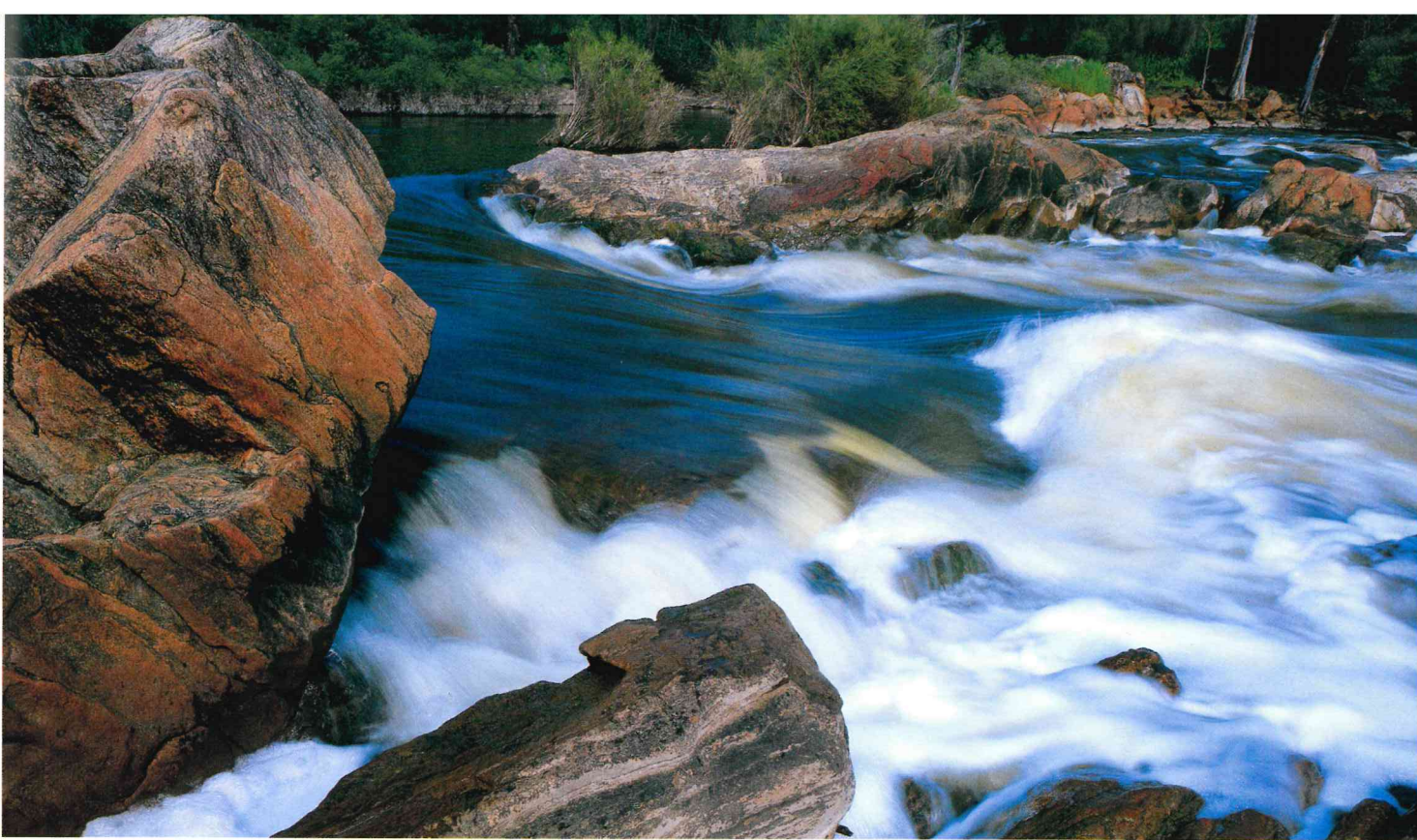
area was one of the biggest camp sites near Perth and was used by local Nyoongar people to meet, share stories and rekindle family ties. Nowadays, picnic areas and walk trails provide the setting for family and community gatherings.

Another popular area for families is Woorlooloo Regional Park, which includes Lake Leschenaultia—a recreation area managed by the Shire of Mundaring. Lake Leschenaultia has picnic and barbecue facilities, shelter, toilets, a café, beaches, grassy lawns and a camping area. Hiking and mountain bike trails surround the lake and canoes are available for hire. The area is particularly pretty in spring when its wildflowers come into bloom.

Another park that dazzles during wildflower season is Whiteman Park, when species such as the Guinea flower (*Hibbertia glomerosa*) and prickly Moses (*Acacia pulchella*) are in flower. But the park boasts more than wildflowers and contains seven frog species, 32 reptile species, 104 bird species and eight species of native mammal. It also houses the Birds of Prey Flying Display, operated by the Western Australian Birds of Prey Centre, and Caversham Wildlife Park, home to Australian animals including koalas (*Phascolarctos cinereus*), wallabies, possums, Tasmanian devils (*Sarcophilus harrisi*) and hairy-nosed wombats (*Lasiorhinus krefftii*). For a complete change of pace, visitors can visit the Tractor Museum, Motor Museum of WA and Revolutions Transport Heritage Centre.

One centre definitely worth a visit is the Perth Hills Centre. Located within Beelu National Park, it is open from 11am to 2pm during the week and by prior arrangement for group bookings on the weekend. It provides





Above The Avon River runs through Avon Valley National Park.

Photo – Dennis Sarson/Lochman Transparencies

Right Birds of Prey Flying Display at Whiteman Park.

Photo – Ann Storrie



information about the national and regional parks in the area and sells a range of publications, and refreshments. It is also home to the Department of Environment and Conservation's (DEC's) *Nearer to Nature* program and hosts *EcoEducation* activities. A number of trails are found in the park including the Bibbulmun Track, which starts in the adjoining Kalamunda National Park, and the Munda Bididi Trail. The Munda Bididi Trail also runs through Korung and Midgegooroo national parks to the south.

If riding is your thing, then visiting Greenmount National Park is a must. An internationally recognised mountain bike course is located in the park, which also provides rock climbing and abseiling opportunities. Rock climbing is also available in Gooseberry Hill National Park.

Wandoo National Park—named after the woodland that occurs there—has an animal-viewing hide which enables visitors to observe the birds and native mammals that occur there, including splendid fairy-wrens (*Malurus splendens*), western grey kangaroos (*Macropus fuliginosus*), brush wallabies

(*M. irma*) and brushtail possums (*Trichosurus vulpecula*).

Another park where native wildlife abounds is Lesmurdie Falls National Park. The park is home to 150 species of bird, mammal and reptile as well as many thousands of invertebrates. These animals live among the forests and woodlands of jarrah, marri and wandoo. Of course, as its name suggests, Lesmurdie Falls National Park is famed for its waterfall, which cascades 50 metres over the face of the Darling Scarp. These falls can also be viewed from afar from a number of walk trails located within Mundy Regional Park, which surrounds the national park.

John Forrest National Park—Western Australia's oldest national park—is also popular for its waterfalls which have been attracting tourists since the 1930s. There is anecdotal

evidence that the area was once used as a hunting place by Nyoongar people. Nowadays, visitors can drop into the tavern located in the park for a feed.

There are other parks in the Perth hills area which boast spectacular waterfalls. Serpentine National Park is renowned for the pretty flow of the Serpentine Falls, which tumble over 15 metres of sheer granite rock into the Serpentine River, while the spectacular Sixty Foot Falls is found within Banyowla Regional Park. Both these attractions can be explored by walk trails.

If you'd prefer to be on the water, then Lane Poole Reserve is popular for fishing, canoeing and white-water rafting. There are also a number of walk trails—ranging in length from two to 19 kilometres—and camping is available throughout the park.



Left Exploring the caves of Yanchep National Park.
Photo - DEC

Below left Three Step Track at Toms Crossing, in Lane Poole Reserve.
Photo - Travis Deane



network of walk trails guides visitors and provides glimpses into the habitats used by a variety of birds, including migratory waders that have travelled from as far afield as China and Japan.

South of Perth, Woodman Point Regional Park marks the northernmost part of Cockburn Sound and is popular for picnicking, swimming, diving, fishing, sailing, boating and walking. It also has parklands, playgrounds, jetties and caravan parks. The area has a rich history; the tip of Woodman Point was used as a disease quarantine station from 1829 and later housed returned servicemen. Then, in the 1950s, it was the gateway to Australia for thousands of immigrants before the site was used to store mining explosives. The buildings then came under the management of the Department of Sport and Recreation as a recreation camp. It became a regional park in 1997.

Further south, Rockingham Lakes Regional Park is a haven for plants and animals that are now uncommon in the metropolitan area due to urbanisation. It is also home to a threatened thrombolite community. A thrombolite community can also be found in Yalgorup National Park, located 50 kilometres south of Mandurah. Thrombolites are built by micro-organisms that resemble the earliest life forms on Earth and have helped scientists unravel the secrets of how life began on the planet. A walkway takes visitors to a vantage point to observe these fascinating structures without damaging them. The park's vegetation, which includes woodlands, heaths and herb fields as well as mixed eucalypt woodland of tuart, jarrah and marri, provides refuge for western grey kangaroos, brush wallabies, quenda (*Isodon obesulus*), chuditch (*Dasyurus geoffroi*), brushtail possums and echidnas (*Tachyglossus aculeatus*).

Coastal living

Perth is renowned for sweeping stretches of white beach that attract hordes of visitors and locals each year. Beneath the ocean surface lies an abundance of marine species, which delight snorkellers and divers, while marine mammals such as dolphins, sea lions and whales never fail to delight those who observe them from the shore. There are numerous areas along and near the metropolitan coast, and several offshore, that provide people with recreation opportunities and protect the natural values.

Fifty-one kilometres north of Perth lies nearly 3,000 hectares of bushland steeped in rich Aboriginal and other Australian history, and natural wonders.

Yanchep National Park is one of Perth's oldest tourism sites and continues to be popular for day trips and camping. Visitors flock to see the spectacular cave system and view the park's resident koalas. It is also rich in birdlife and native vegetation, with species such as tuart (*Eucalyptus gomphocephala*), jarrah (*E. marginata*), marri (*Corymbia calophylla*), grasstrees (*Xanthorrhoea preissii*) and kangaroo paws making up the landscape.

Back towards Perth, Yellagonga Regional Park protects some of the last remaining wetlands on the Swan Coastal Plain. The park stretches for about 13 kilometres and contains lakes Joondalup and Goollelal, and Walluburnu and Beenyup swamps. A

Right The Basin on Rottnest Island is popular with visitors.

Photo – David Bettini

Below Limestone cliffs and sandy beaches are features of Cape Peron in Shoalwater Islands Marine Park.

Photo – Sallyanne Cousans



Offshore, there are numerous opportunities to observe an array of marine life, including in the waters surrounding WA's beloved Rottnest Island. The turquoise waters, hidden bays and fascinating Aboriginal and European heritage draw thousands of visitors each year who cycle, walk and snorkel their way around the island. The island's most famous resident—the quokka (*Setonix brachyurus*)—freely roams around the scrub and even the most heavily visited tourist areas. The island is also renowned for its sea and waterbirds and for its abundant temperate and tropical marine life, which dazzles snorkellers and divers.

Another island that draws thousands of visitors each year is Penguin Island, a conservation park located within Shoalwater Islands Marine Park. Penguin Island is accessible by ferry from Mersey Point and its Penguin Discovery Centre provides the opportunity to see little penguins (*Eudyptula minor*) up close. The islands in Shoalwater Islands Marine Park offer important seabird breeding sites, and Australian sea lions (*Neophoca cinerea*) can often be seen at Seal Island.

Sea lions are also known to haul out at Carnac Island Nature Reserve during the non-breeding season. Carnac Island is also known for its

seabird populations and tiger snakes. Visitors to the island are restricted to a small section of the beach to ensure the sea lions are not disturbed.

Nearby, Garden Island provides a lovely setting for a day trip. Access to the island, which also houses HMAS *Stirling*—Australia's largest Royal Australian Naval Base—is by private boat only. The surrounding waters support seagrass meadows and the island is home to the native tammar wallaby (*Macropus eugenii*) and a number of seabirds. Picnic and toilet facilities are available, and visitors can enjoy fishing, sailing, snorkelling, surfing and swimming.

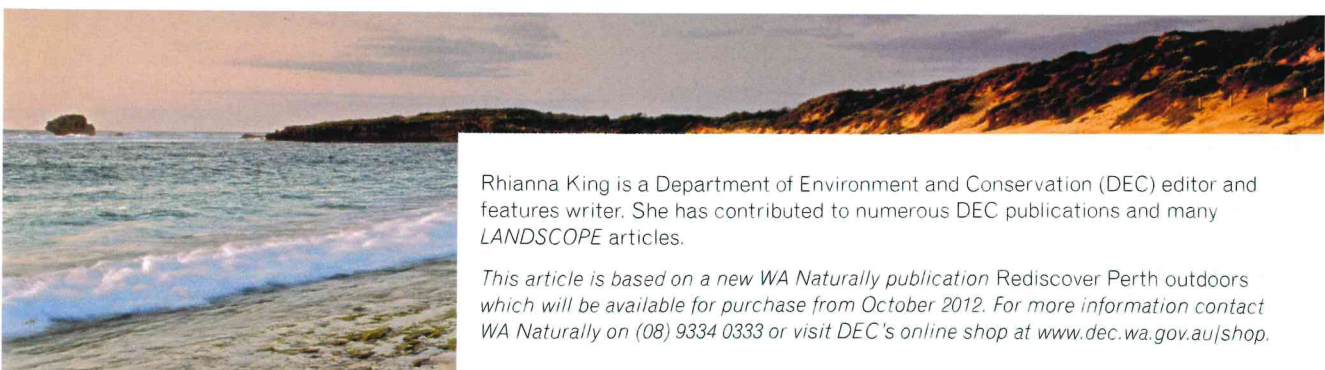
These activities can also be enjoyed in Marmion Marine Park, offshore from Perth's northern suburbs. The spectacular marine life of this park includes a variety of fish species including western blue devils (*Paraplesiops meleagris*), old wives (*Enoplosus armatus*), banded sweep (*Scorpiis georgianus*) and crested morwong (*Cheilodactylus vestitus*). Humpback

whales (*Megaptera novaeangliae*) pass through the deeper waters of the park during their annual migration from June to November. Bottlenose dolphins and male Australian sea lions can also be seen.

Get out

There's no doubt Perthites are spoiled for choice when it comes to natural areas to explore and DEC runs a number of programs designed to deepen people's involvement in nature by taking a more hands-on role in learning about the wonders of the natural world. *Nearer to Nature* caters to groups of all ages, while a number of DEC programs are targeted at students. These provide fun and interactive activities in natural settings. The department also offers volunteering programs that range from scientific research to community education.

So, whether you are a Perth local or a visitor to the city, there is no shortage of areas to discover and ways to get involved.



Rhianna King is a Department of Environment and Conservation (DEC) editor and features writer. She has contributed to numerous DEC publications and many *LANDSCOPE* articles.

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