

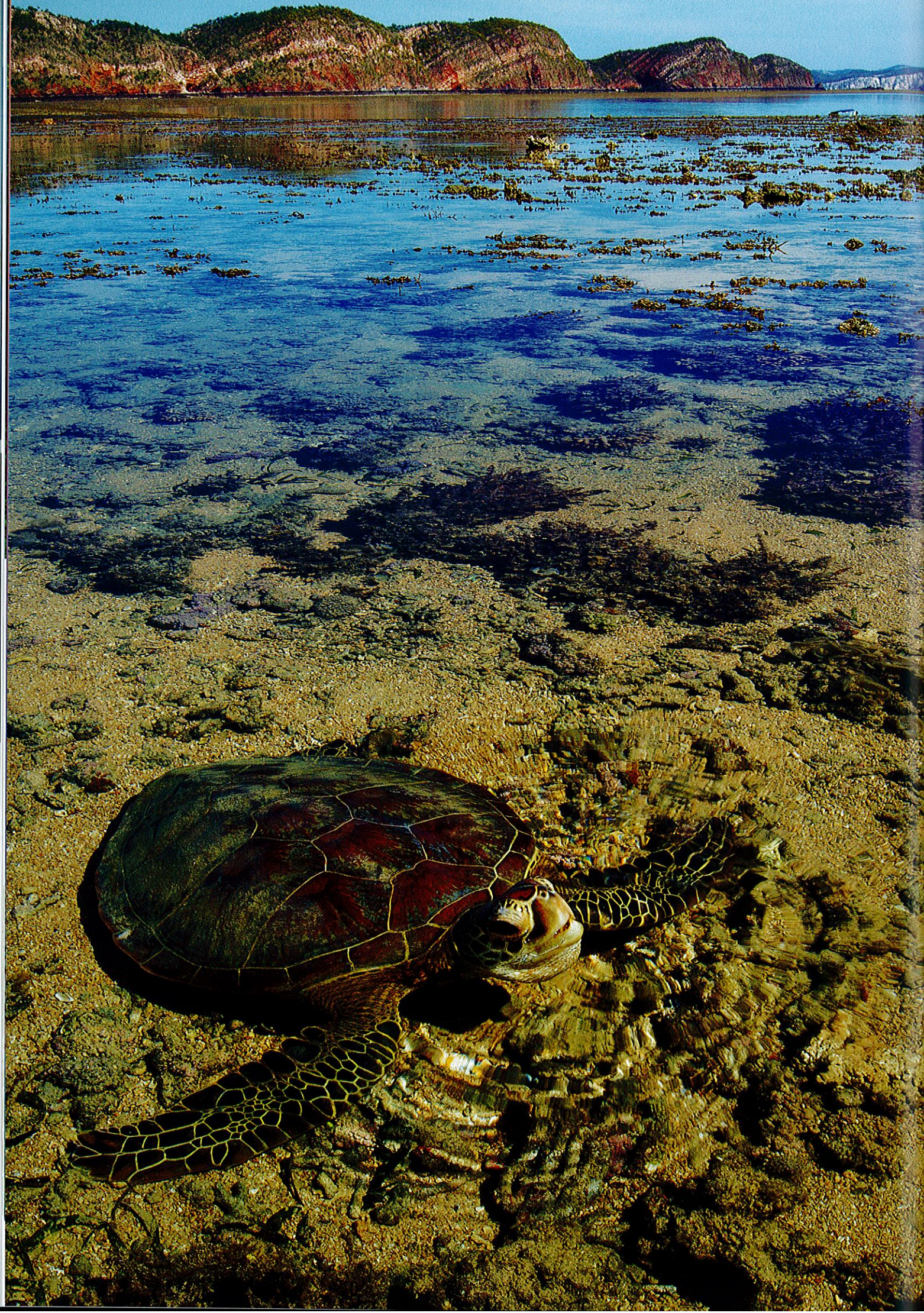
Saltwater country: Kimberley coast



The Kimberley region of Western Australia is one of the world's last great wilderness areas. The Kimberley Science and Conservation Strategy—a bold plan to conserve the region's natural and cultural values—was released in June 2011, and is facilitating Aboriginal involvement and employment in land management. The centrepiece of this strategy is the creation of the state's largest interconnected system of marine and terrestrial parks covering five million hectares. This photo essay highlights some of the many marine and coastal values that the strategy seeks to protect.









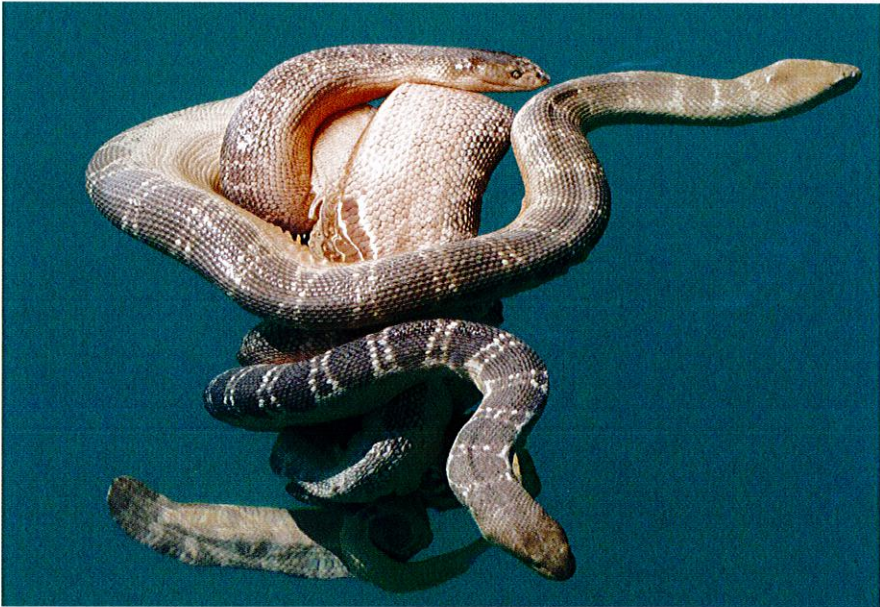
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Main Brown boobies in flight over Montgomery Reef. Montgomery Reef in Lalang-garram / Camden Sound Marine Park is a particularly outstanding, biologically diverse coral reef covering an amazing 300 square kilometres. When the tide goes out, water gushes from the narrow channels and off the edges of the enormous reef in powerful torrents, like fast-flowing rivers, until the reef emerges to stand metres above the surrounding sea at low tide. At high tide, the reef once again disappears beneath the sea.

Opposite page

Far left Sea turtles are visible and abundant wherever you go in marine waters of the Kimberley, with six of the world's seven species of turtle found in Kimberley waters, all of which are listed as threatened. Western Australia has the only large population of the hawksbill turtle remaining in the Indian Ocean. Green, loggerhead, flatback, olive ridley and leatherback turtles also occur in the region. Turtles may travel for thousands of kilometres between their foraging and breeding areas. They are long-lived and take decades to reach breeding age.

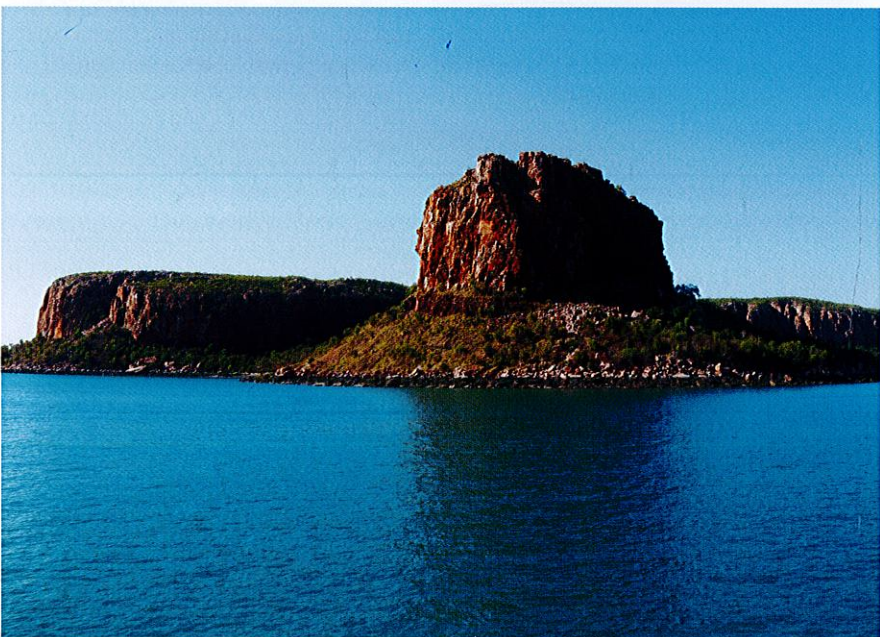
Photos - David Bettini



Top left Between June and September each year, humpback whales arrive in very significant numbers to breed, calve, and nurse their young in the warm tropical waters and protected embayments of the Kimberley coast and islands, after migrating north from their feeding grounds in the sub-Antarctic. The Lalang-garram / Camden Sound Marine Park is the biggest calving area for humpback whales in the southern hemisphere. It provides an ideal area in which calves can build up the blubber they need for the return journey and where they can hide from predators.

Centre left Looking somewhat like Medusa are these mating Stoke's sea snakes. Stoke's sea snakes feed at Montgomery Reef, in Lalang-garram / Camden Sound Marine Park, in high numbers and are frequently visible there at low tide. During mating season, several males may compete for the attentions of a female.

Photos - Tim Willing



Left Raft Point is home to the powerful stylised Wandjina art—a major attraction for the Kimberley coastal cruise industry. Kimberley rock art is a cultural treasure of international significance and scale. It is critically important to traditional owners that their spiritual significance is respected by visitors and the rock art remains in excellent condition.

Photo - Carolyn Thomson-Dans/DPaW



Above Sir Graham Moore Island, a large island at the entrance to Napier Broome Bay, has a World War II heritage site and is an important cultural site for the Balanggarra people, but a number of weeds are present. A weed survey by Department of Parks and Wildlife staff and Balanggarra rangers is planned for 2014 and weed control will start in the following wet season.

Photo - Carolyn Thomson-Dans/DPaW



Left This strange-looking dolphin, with a short stubby dorsal fin and a round melon-like head, was only recognised as a new species in 2005 and is endemic to northern Australian waters including the Kimberley. Previously thought to be the Irrawaddy dolphin (*Orcaella brevirostris*), DNA profiles and skull measurements by scientists showed conclusively that the Australian snubfin dolphin (*Orcaella heinsohnii*) was distinct. It occurs in rivers, estuaries and coastal waters, and is common in Roebuck Bay.

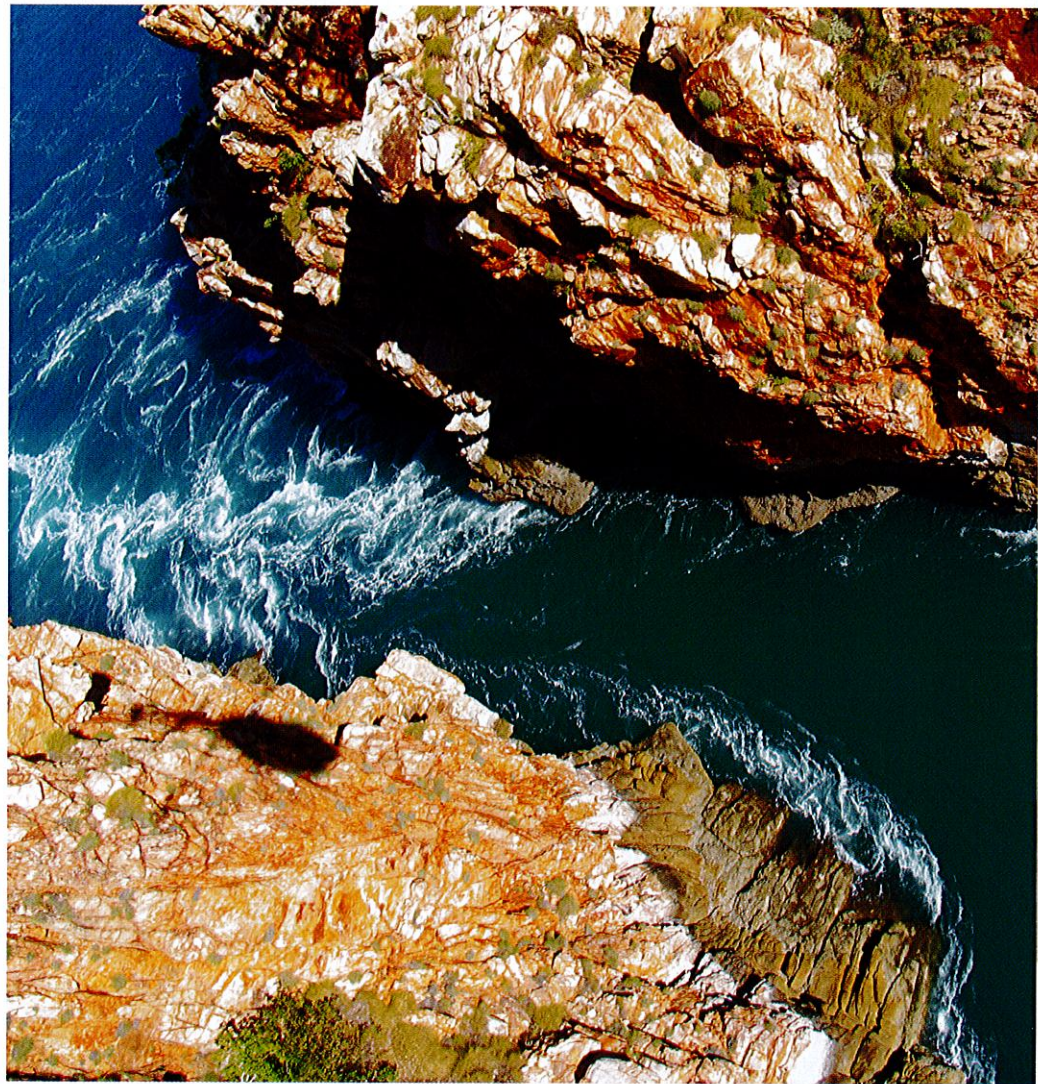
Photo - Deb Thiele

Right The proposed Horizontal Falls national park and marine park will protect an internationally renowned tourist attraction. Massive tides in the Kimberley of up to 11 metres have created the Horizontal Falls in Talbot Bay. When the tide turns, the water has to drain out of a wide inlet through a narrow gap between high sandstone walls. The tide falls faster than the water can escape, producing a 'horizontal' waterfall. By low tide the inlet has emptied, but with the turn of the tide it fills again, resulting in a waterfall in the reverse direction. Visitors get an adrenaline rush by powering over the falls in fast tour boats.

Photo – Alice Ralston

Below Roebuck Bay is an amazing marine area on the doorstep of Broome where millions of birds congregate. It is one of only a handful of areas in the world with huge intertidal flats rich in shorebirds. The dense mangroves that grow around the bay are habitat for hundreds of species of mollusc, crab and fish that are food for the shorebirds (or waders). Large flocks of waders stop here during annual migrations from as far away as northern Siberia. The state government is working with the Yawuru traditional owners to establish a marine park in Roebuck Bay that will be jointly managed by the Yawuru.

Photo – Bill Belson/Lochman Transparencies







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Top Only a few decades ago, saltwater or estuarine crocodiles had been hunted to virtual extinction in the Kimberley. Today they have made a resurgence and are ever-present in Kimberley waters, although usually lurking out of sight or lying in disguise camouflaged as a floating log. They have become an attraction for visitors, although you would be wise not to fish too close to the water's edge or go swimming in the sea or in major rivers.

Photo - Tim Willing

Opposite page

Bottom Some of the largest patches of mangrove in Australia occur along the Kimberley coast. They have a total area of approximately 140,000 hectares and are considered to be among the most pristine mangrove forests in the world. Up to 18 tree species of mangrove are found in the Kimberley and the fauna they support is rich and distinctive. Mangroves are important nursery areas for fish and other marine species and are important in stabilising coastlines.

Photo - Carolyn Thomson-Dans/DPaW

Above Prince Regent National Park is one of Australia's most remote and beautiful places. Spectacular features include Kings Cascades, Mount Trafalgar and Prince Regent River, which runs almost straight for most of its length, often between near-vertical cliffs. The waters of the river are marine and form part of the Lalang-garram / Camden Sound Marine Park Marine Park.

Above left Low Rocks Nature Reserve is a small island in the northern waters of the Admiralty Gulf. This remote, scenic spot is an important breeding area for the pied cormorant, bridled tern and crested tern.

Left The Kimberley region is one of the most pristine areas remaining in the world, and the state government has established new marine parks there at Camden Sound and Eighty Mile Beach, with commitments to establish three more marine parks at Horizontal Falls, North Kimberley and Roebuck Bay. The majority of the parks will remain open for fishing, with the lure of big barramundi one of the area's big attractions. *Photos - Carolyn Thomson-Dans/DPaW*

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Scientific/technical advice Kevin Thiele, Lachie McCaw, Keith Morris.

Design and production Gooitzen van der Meer, Lynne Whittle, Tiffany Taylor, Natalie Curtis.

Illustration Gooitzen van der Meer.

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Phone (08) 9334 0296 or fax (08) 9334 0432.

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