



## Penguin Island Conservation Park

*Located just 700 metres offshore from Mersey Point near Rockingham, Penguin Island is a wildlife haven for a raft of charismatic creatures, and a popular spot for day-visitors.*

**P**ick a good day and a visit to Penguin Island has all the makings of a perfect day out – riding the ferry, crystal clear water to swim in, an island to explore, wildlife to discover and all a short distance from Perth. And it seems 80,000 visitors each year agree.

After buying ferry tickets (make sure you get the package deal which includes

entry to the Penguin Experience) a quick coffee from the Mersey Point kiosk is a perfect way to prepare for the day ahead. A short trip on the ferry is made entertaining by a talk by the captain, who shares some of the fascinating history of the island and highlights some of the wildlife that visitors might hope to see once there. Before you know it, the mainland is well behind you and you've arrived at the eastern point of the 12.5 hectare island.

Once you've disembarked from the ferry with all the provisions you need for the day – a packed lunch, drinking water, and the usual necessities for a trip to the beach – you walk along a jetty and past the kayaks of the people who have chosen to paddle their way there.

### PENGUIN EXPERIENCE

A short stroll along the boardwalk past the research centre leads you to the island's picnic area. Here you can enjoy views across Shoalwater Bay back to the mainland under the shade of the Norfolk Island pines and Rottneest Island tea trees.

During the island's open season (mid-September to early June) the Penguin Experience – Island Discovery Centre runs three talks a day. A population of 10 little penguins (*Eudyptula minor*), for which the island is famous, delight and entertain visitors while a volunteer shares information about the penguins and the island's other native residents.

### A WILDLIFE HAVEN

While the island gleams its name from being home to Western Australia's largest colony of little penguins, it is also an important environment for more than 30 other species of seabirds that have been observed on the island. These include the bridled tern, silver gull, pied cormorant and the Australian pelican. It is also home to terrestrial species including the little eagle, singing honeyeater and buff-banded landrail. About 2,500 pairs of bridled terns, a tropical species, migrate to the islands of Shoalwater Bay in spring to breed. The birds leave the area in April to return to the north-west Sulawesi (Celebes) Sea.

**Above** Beautiful Penguin Island.

*Photo – Len Stewart/Lochman Transparencies*

**Above right** The island is popular for a range of recreational pursuits.

*Photo – Ann Storie*

*Opposite page*

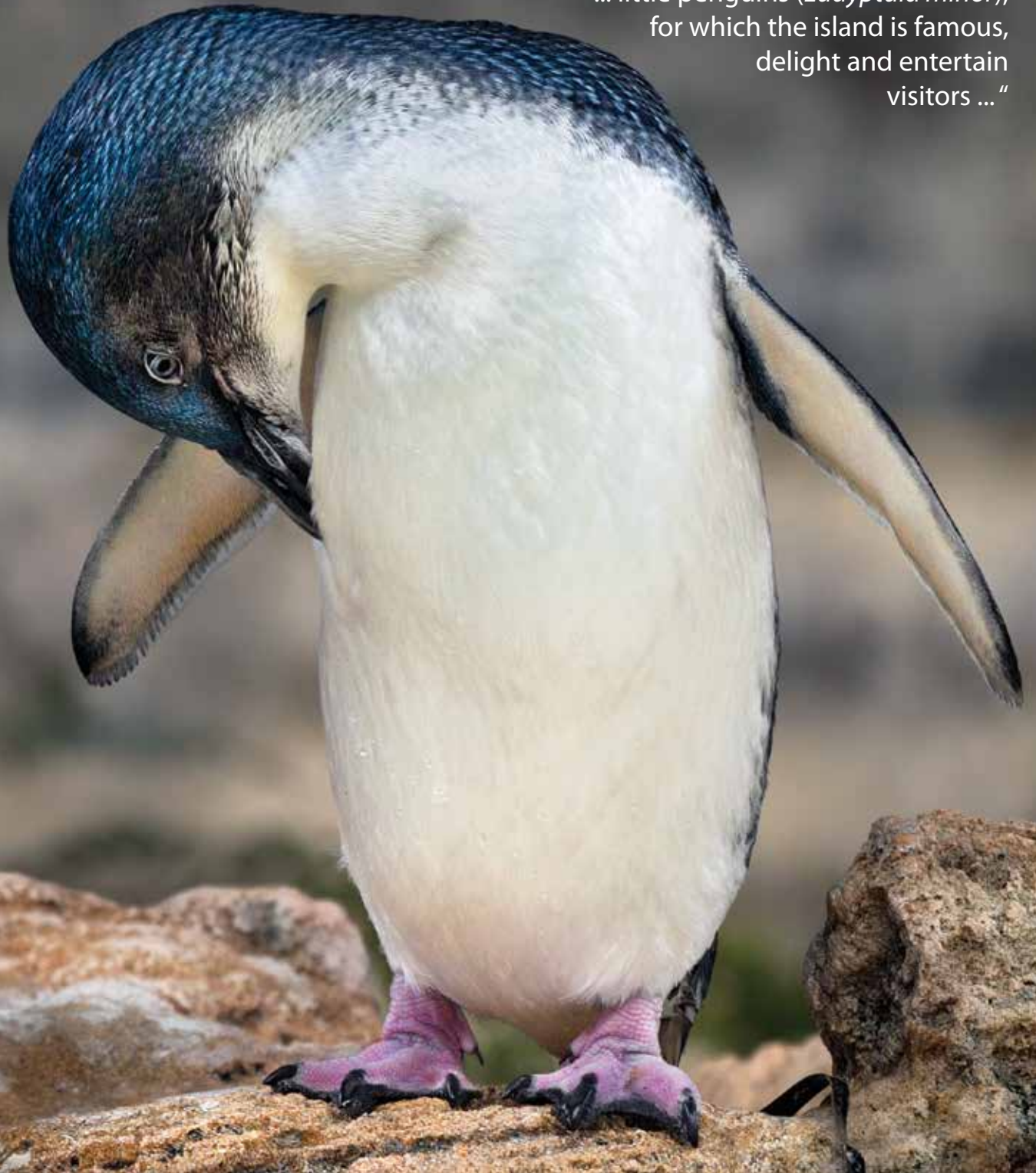
**Right** Little penguins can be seen up-close at the Penguin Experience – Island Discovery Centre.

*Photo – David Bettini*

**Below right** Aerial view of Penguin Island.

*Photo – Marc Russo*

“... little penguins (*Eudyptula minor*),  
for which the island is famous,  
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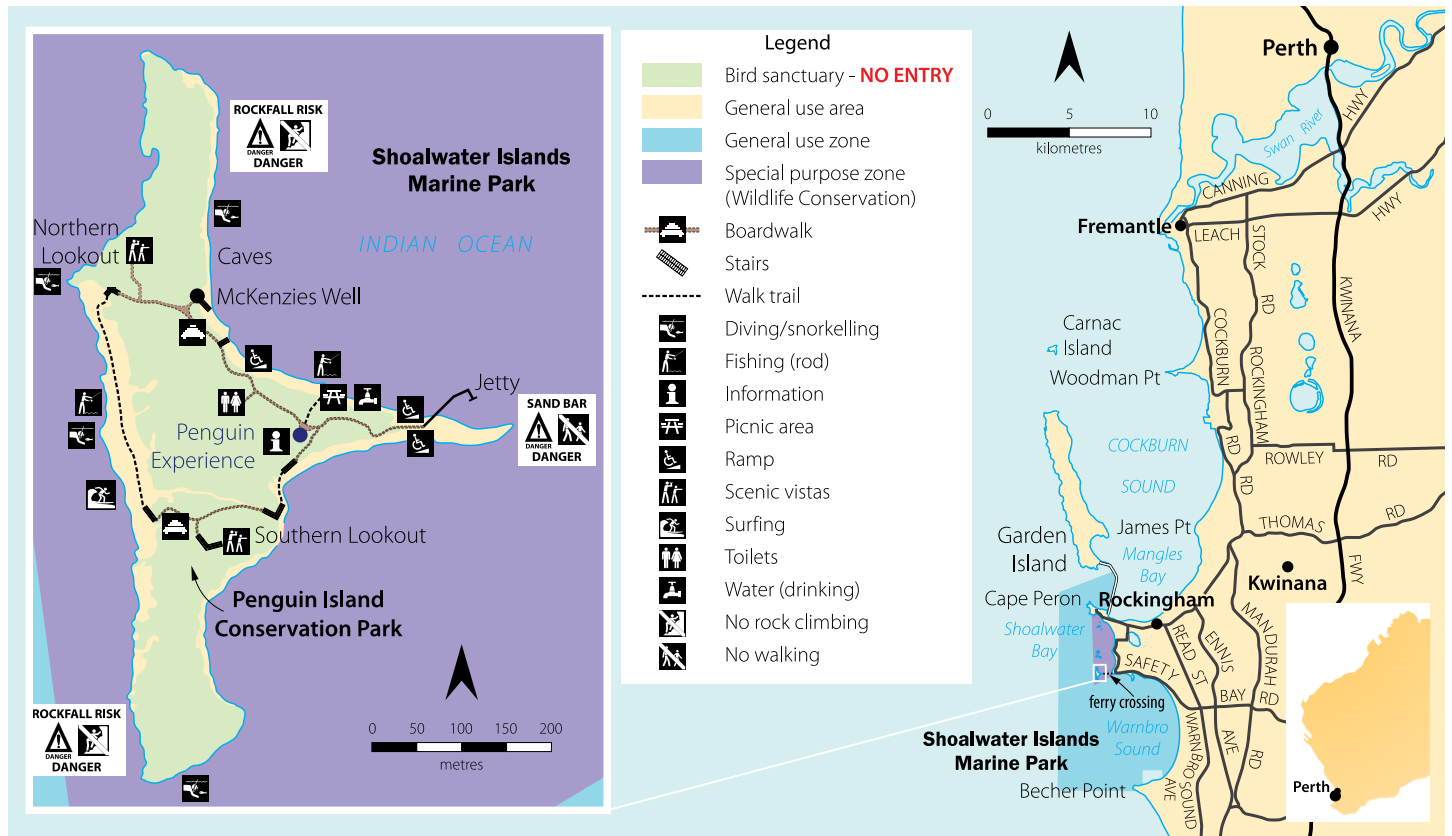


Learn more about  
little penguins

Scan this QR code or  
visit Parks and Wildlife's  
'LANDSCOPE' playlist  
on YouTube.







**TAKE A WALK**

These and other species can be spotted on a two-kilometre walk around the island. The journey starts at the Penguin Experience and follows a coastal boardwalk through seabird nesting habitat. It includes a walk along the western beach and takes in lookouts at the northern and southern ends of the island. From the northern summit lookout you can clearly see Shag Rock and Seal Island. While at the opposite end of the island you can climb to the top of the southern point, which is the highest on the island. From here, you can see the chain of islands that were originally a continuous land mass when the sea level was 130 metres lower 18,000 years ago.

As well as enjoying the magnificent scenery, the walk gives visitors an opportunity to spot some nesting birds, while minimising the impact on the natural environment. These nesting birds now have a better chance of survival since the island was declared rat-free in 2016 after 5,000 black rats were removed as part of a baiting and biosecurity program.

The program began in 2013 and aimed to control the rats which preyed on penguin chicks and other birds including their eggs, and native skinks. Extensive monitoring using motion sensing cameras and cage traps has not recorded a rat on the island in three years.

The walk also guides visitors past a series of caves that were hollowed out by the first known European resident of the island – Seaforth McKenzie, an eccentric Canadian who squatted on the island from about 1914 and was given a formal lease in 1918. McKenzie, who became known as the ‘King of the Island’, planned to make the island into a holiday resort and even held a ball in one of the larger caves and converted another into a library. He lived on the island with an Aboriginal companion until about 1929.

**UNDER THE SEA**

The waters around the island, which are part of the Shoalwater Islands Marine Park contain an abundance of treasures that can be explored by divers and snorkellers. The temperate and subtropical waters support invertebrates such as sea stars,



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urchins and shellfish, as well as numerous fish species. Bottlenose dolphins also visit the area and the islands provide a haven for Australian sea lions. A number of turtle species – loggerheads, leather backs and green turtles – are also sometimes seen in the waters around Penguin Island.

Another way to view the marine life is to take a cruise on the dolphin, penguin and sea lion-watching charter that leaves from Penguin Island at least twice a day. This experience can be included in your package when you're purchasing your ferry ticket.

A shipwreck – the *Belle of Bunbury* – that sits just offshore of Penguin Island can also be explored. The 42-tonne coastal schooner was wrecked in December 1886 after striking rocks near the island. Other water sports, such as windsurfing, kitesurfing, kayaking and surfing can also be enjoyed in the marine park.

So, no matter whether you're looking for a day of adventure, want to discover more about the island's wildlife or simply looking for somewhere different to explore near Perth, Penguin Island really is a perfect day out.

*Opposite page*

**Left** The island can be explored on a loop walk.

*Photo – Michael Clitheroe*

**Above** Shoalwater Islands Marine Park is a haven for sea lions.

*Photo – Peter Nicholas/Parks and Wildlife*

**Above right** The ferry runs throughout the day between the island and Mersey Point.

*Photo – Alex Steffe/Lochman Transparencies*

**Below** The bridled tern is one species that occurs on the island.

*Photo – Jiri Lochman*



## Do it yourself

**Where is it?** 50 kilometres south of Perth. Catch a ferry to the island from Mersey Point in Shoalwater Bay near Rockingham from mid-September to early June.

**Total area:** 12.5 hectares

**Facilities:** Penguin viewing facility, picnic facilities, toilets.

**What to do:** Nature appreciation, swimming, snorkelling, windsurfing, kitesurfing, kayaking, surfing, walking, picnicking, photography. Spearfishing is prohibited around the island.

**Nearest Parks and Wildlife office:**

Swan Coastal District, Safety Bay WA 6169, phone: (08) 9592 7802 or (08) 9592 9047 (10am–3.30pm).

**Safety information:** *Weather conditions can change quickly, making crossing the sand bar very dangerous. Parks and Wildlife strongly recommends against walking the sand bar between Mersey Point and the island. When you're visiting the island, remain on the boardwalks, walk trails and sandy beaches and stay clear of limestone cliffs, caves and overhangs as they may be unstable and prone to collapse.*

For information on ferry and tour services please contact Rockingham Wild Encounters on (08) 9591 1333 or visit [www.rockinghamwildencounters.com.au](http://www.rockinghamwildencounters.com.au).