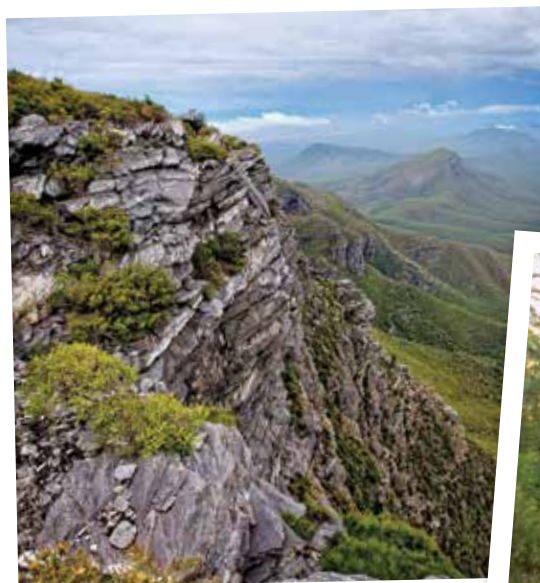


Experiencing the south-west edge



Western Australia's south-west is one of the most beautiful and species-rich places on Earth. With world-class visitor facilities and an abundance of magnificent landscapes to enjoy, there is so much to explore. But don't just take our word for it; Parks and Wildlife has compiled a set of itineraries that can be enjoyed as part of a series of weekend adventures or as one memorable trip.

by **Steve Crawford**



Stirling Range National Park



Bramley National Park



Nothing beats the feeling of setting off on a trip down south, when your car is packed, passengers are secured and your route is planned. Those blissful moments before the first 'are we there yet?' and the realisation that you've forgotten your toothbrush, hat or tent, are filled with the knowledge that you'll be enjoying time in some of the most beautiful places in the State. Of course, there are many ways to enjoy the south-west, and Parks and Wildlife has now made this easier by developing a series of travel itineraries that take in some of the most popular attractions while directing you to some of the best facilities along the way. These itineraries can be done as a short weekend break or all together as one long adventure.



Little penguin, Penguin Island

OUTWARD BOUND

In less than an hours' drive from Perth's CBD, you arrive at Mersey Point – the first stop on the itinerary. A five-minute ferry ride across Shoalwater Bay leads to Penguin Island, home to WA's largest population of little penguins (*Eudyptula minor*). A walk around the island will help you discover all the other bird species that occur there while you take in some of the beautiful vistas from the high northern and southern points. There's some fascinating European history to discover too, including stories about an eccentric island resident. Catch one of the talks at the Penguin Experience – Island Discovery Centre to meet some of the island's beloved penguins and learn

more about what's being done for their conservation. You can also get a cruise around Shoalwater Islands Marine Park to try to spot some of the area's dolphins and Australian sea lions (*Neophoca cinerea*). A picnic or cuppa from a thermos under the Norfolk Island pines is a perfect way to recharge for the next leg of your journey.

Sixty kilometres south of Mandurah, Yalgorup National Park is a narrow, coastal, Ramsar-listed lake system that is significant for the incredible variety of waterbirds that live in and visit the area. The park is also

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Main Fitzgerald National Park.

Photo – Ann Storie

Inset left Photo – Alice Gillam/Sallyanne

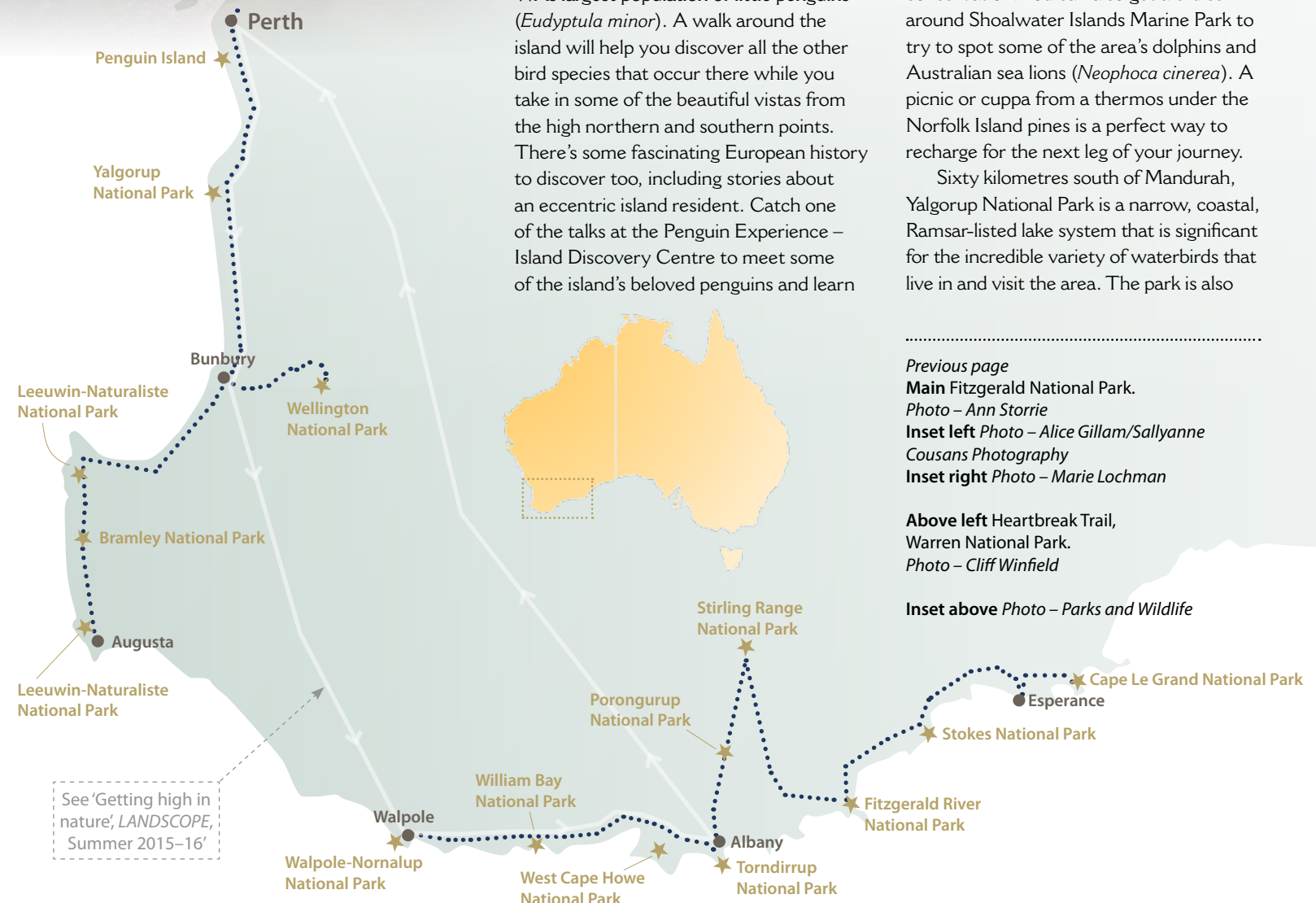
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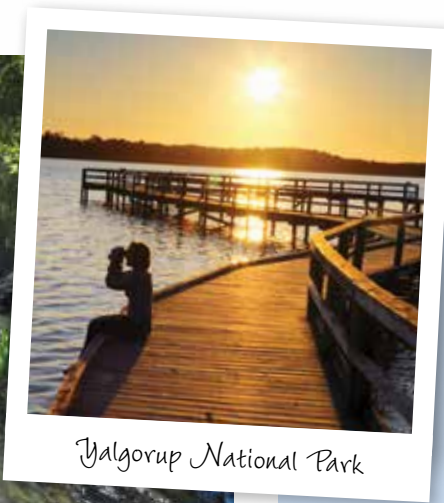
Inset right Photo – Marie Lochman

Above left Heartbreak Trail,
Warren National Park.

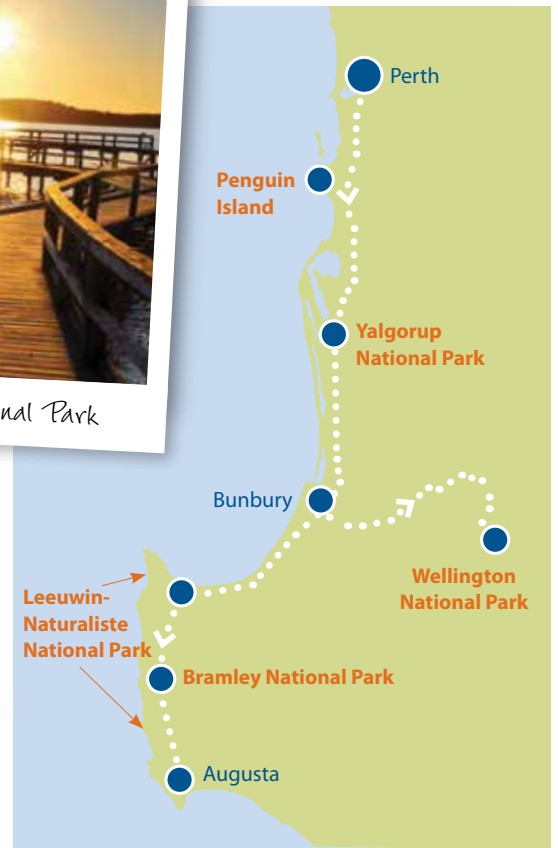
Photo – Cliff Winfield

Inset above Photo – Parks and Wildlife





Yalgorup National Park



famed for its thrombolites – fascinating structures that have been built by micro-organisms – which are showcased by a purpose-built walkway at Lake Clifton. Nearby, Preston Beach and Myalup provide perfect locations for fishing. If you're keen to stay overnight, you can set up camp at Martins Tank – a newly redeveloped campground which boasts 34 camp sites, a barbecue shelter and toilets. If you head out for a night-time walk, you might be lucky enough to see a western ringtail possum (*Pseudocheirus occidentalis*) or a chuditch (*Dasyurus geoffroii*).

The next suggested stop is the Dolphin Discovery Centre in Bunbury. Here, you can join a guided tour where you can swim with the wild dolphins in the open waters of Koombana Bay and take some time to enjoy all Bunbury has to offer.

A FORK IN THE ROAD

Now you have two choices – continue onto Leeuwin-Naturaliste or take a 40-minute-drive side trip to Wellington National Park. A trip to Wellington National Park is well worth it in spring when the landscape comes alive with colour as wildflowers bloom among the stands of jarrah, marri and blackbutt. The park's bushwalking and cycling trails are the best way to explore the area or go fishing and canoeing. And a trip to the Wellington Discovery Forest will provide an educational experience for visitors of all ages. Then, when you're ready for a break, laze about the water's edge of Wellington Dam and the Collie River. You can grab

drinks, lunch and other refreshments from the Kiosk at the Dam, while enjoying the stunning views (see 'Too posh to pitch', *LANDSCOPE*, Summer 2016–17). If you're planning to stay the night, you can camp at Honeymoon Pool (Gelcoat and Stones Brook) and Potters Gorge.

After you make your way back to Bunbury, continue along Bussell Highway towards Leeuwin-Naturaliste National Park. This spectacular stretch of coast boasts wild scenery, stunning white beaches, superb fishing and some of the State's best surfing breaks. Conto campground, nestled within the shade of the peppermint woodlands, has been the subject of a recent upgrade and is the perfect base from which to explore the surrounding area, including Ngari Capes Marine Park. You can also explore limestone caves or walk part of the Cape to Cape Track – a 135-kilometre walk connected by historic lighthouses at Cape Naturaliste and Cape Leeuwin. An hour and 40 minutes in the car will get you from Conto to Augusta.

A stop at Bramley National Park will add another attraction to enjoy. Mountain bike enthusiasts will have a ball on the trails in the park, including one that has been dubbed the most difficult in the area. Those who are keen to immerse themselves in Aboriginal culture can take part in one of the cultural experiences run out of Wharnccliffe Mill. While those who want a completely different experience of the bush can do a blindfold and explore the sensory trail.

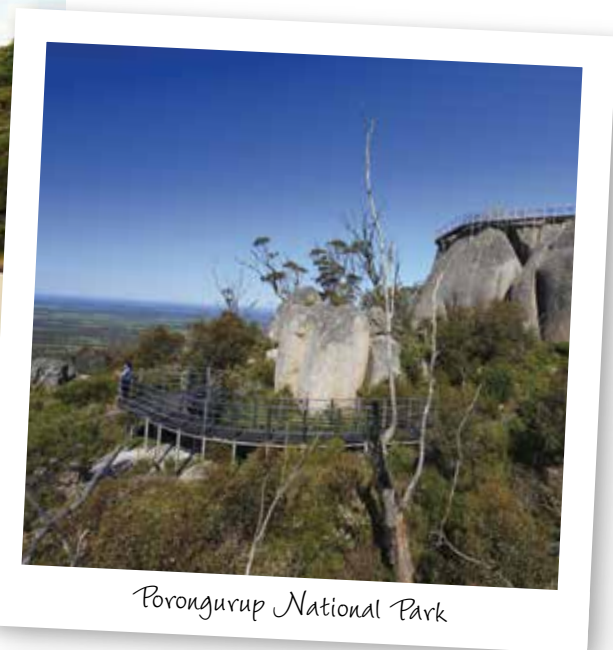


Leeuwin-Naturaliste National Park

Above left Honeymoon Pool, Wellington National Park.
Photo – Neil Wallace

Inset top Photo – Andrew McInnes

Inset above Cape to Cape Trail.
Photo – Tourism WA



Porongurup National Park



EXPLORE THE SOUTHERN COAST

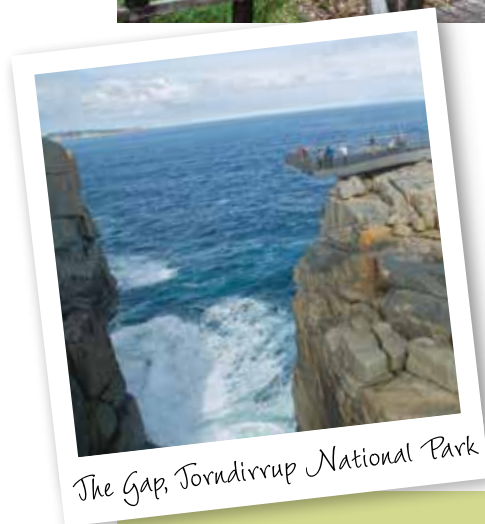
From Augusta, you can make your way to Walpole and journey along the southern edge of the State on a stunning drive through the karri and jarrah forests. Picnic and camping opportunities are available in Shannon National Park. Walpole-Nornalup National Park provides a range of attractions and opportunities including the world-renowned Valley of the Giants and Tree Top Walk, an innovative structure that enables you to walk high among the giant 400-year-old tingle trees, or you can traverse the hollowed trees of the Ancient Empire along a purpose-built boardwalk. Fernhook Falls provides a beautiful place to camp with boardwalks and a stairway to the river for easy accessibility, while Circular Pool – a raging river in winter and a tranquil pool in summer – provides a stunning stop-off point. Swarbrick provides a fascinating insight into the local history through a 500-metre forest sculpture loop.

Next, journey east to William Bay National Park where its turquoise green waters, stunning white beach and giant

granite boulders await. A snorkel in the calm, sheltered water of Greens Pool is a magnificent way to explore the marine environment, while a scenic walk to Elephant Rocks is a wonderful way to enjoy nature at its most picturesque. Keep your eye on the water if you're in the area from June to October for passing southern right whales (*Eubalaena australis*) as they complete their annual migration.

Further east, West Cape Howe National Park boasts dramatic granite and dolerite cliffs, isolated sandy beaches and an abundance of flora. It is a great spot for abseilers and is known as one of Australia's best cliff faces for this sport.

Further along the coast you can visit Torndirrup National Park, where fantastic new facilities showcase the spectacular Natural Bridge and The Gap. The Southern Ocean crashes underfoot as you stand on an award-winning, state-of-the-art viewing platform that extends almost four metres out over the granite rocks providing a truly breathtaking nature-based experience.



The Gap, Torndirrup National Park





For another adrenalin-inducing experience, carry on to Porongurup National Park, where you can climb the Granite Skywalk, which spirals around the huge granite outcrop of Castle Rock and rises 670 metres above the ground all the way to the summit.

After these hair-raising experiences, a visit to one of the region's gourmet stores and wineries might be in order!

Then, 70 kilometres north, a visit to Stirling Range National Park will lead you to a variety of wildflowers, birds and reptiles. A 3.1-kilometre trek up to the top of Bluff Knoll – the second highest peak in Western Australia – will give you exceptional 360-degree views of the Stirling Range.

Just over 150 kilometres away lies Fitzgerald River National Park, where rugged inland beauty meets stunning coastal vistas. More animal species live in this park than any other reserve in the south-west and it is one of the largest and most botanically significant national parks in Australia. Recent upgrades to roads, walk tracks and campgrounds make it an extremely worthwhile destination.

Two hours further (and the last stop before reaching Esperance) is Stokes National Park where Stokes Inlet, Skippy Rock and Shoal Cape are popular destinations. The inlet is abundant with black bream, Australian salmon, mullet and King George whiting.

The final destination on the itinerary is the glorious Cape Le Grand National Park, characterised by stunning bays, rocky headlands, heath-covered sandplains and an impressive chain of peaks including Mt Le Grand and Frenchman Peak. It's highly likely that you'll share the white sandy beaches with kangaroos lazing in the sun, so keep your camera handy. Hellfire and Lucky bays both provide fantastic picnic spots and the park can be explored as part of a 15-kilometre (one way) hike or enjoyed in smaller sections. Lucky Bay campground offers an idyllic site to stop for the night.

GO ON. GET OUT THERE

No matter how you approach these itineraries – whether in smaller trips or as a big journey – you're sure to take home with you some amazing memories and an appreciation for WA's natural environment.

STAY CONNECTED

The Parks and Wildlife *ParkFinder WA* mobile app is a great way to plan your trip and stay on route while you're away. The app contains information about 150 parks and reserves in Western Australia, including photos to inspire your journey and park alerts to keep you up-to-date with the latest park news.

Another great app to have on hand is *CampingMate* which helps people plan what they need for their next camping trip, including lists of useful items as well as the opportunity to save your lists for next time.

These apps can be downloaded for free from the App Store.

The *ExploreParks WA* website will give you all the information you need to start planning your trip – see parks.dpaw.wa.gov.au.

Trails WA website provides information about many of our most popular trails.

BOOK AHEAD

Visit parkstay.dpaw.wa.gov.au for more information about camp sites you can book before your visit.



Opposite page

Top left Green Pool, William Bay National Park. Photo – Andrew McInnes

Far left Valley of the Giants, Walpole-Nornalup National Park.

Photo – Marie Lochman

Insets Photos – Parks and Wildlife

Inset above left Photo – Sallyanne Cousins

Inset above right Photo – David Bettini

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WA Naturally's The best of the South West is a collection of our favourite LANDSCOPE stories from around the south-west. It is available for \$14.95 from *WA Naturally Publications* by calling (08) 9219 9071, online at shop.dpaw.wa.gov.au or from good book shops and tourist centres.

