

Adventure out





A snorkeller's paradise

On a beautiful albeit 'fresh' morning I took advantage of the all-important easterly wind to venture to Mettams Pool in Marmion Marine Park to discover the captivating underwater world that exists just metres from the suburban shore.

by Rhianna King

As it had been several years since I last donned a snorkel and mask, I was excited but slightly nervous to be heading into the ocean to discover what lies under the surface of one of Perth's most popular beaches. I was comforted by the description of the snorkel trail that I had chosen from *Dive and Snorkel sites in Western Australia*, where author Carolyn Thomson-Dans describes the trail as being "ideal for the first-time snorkeller or for introducing children to snorkelling". Surely I'd be fine. Wouldn't I? For some extra reassurance, I was flanked by solo Rottneest channel crosser and experienced open-water swimmer Lynne Whittle, and highly regarded underwater photographer and former dive instructor Peter Nicholas.

SURBURBAN PLAYGROUND

The Mettams Pool snorkel trail starts at the northern part of a protected pool, which is surrounded by a 50 to 100-metre-wide platform calcarenite (limestone) reef. Inside the pool, the water depth is between one to two metres. On the other side of the reef the water depth increases up to three to four metres, which is

perfect for the more seasoned snorkeller or scuba diver with the necessary gear.

Mettams Pool, and how it came to be, has long been shrouded by rumour and folk law. Some believe that Frank Mettam blew up the reef to create a pool, in which his invalid wife could swim. While others recount that Frank and his family removed what was then known as Lennard's Pool piece by piece and renamed it in the 1940s. In any case, the pool, reef and the surrounding water became part of the Marmion Marine Park in 1987.

As well as being popular for snorkellers, Mettams Pool is also a prime spot for year-round early-morning swimmers, a site for VacSwim and popular among abalone fishers in season. Outside the reef, surfers, paddlers, surf skiers and long boarders can be found enjoying the swells. The activities undertaken at Mettams Pool can vary each day depending on the size of the swell and the amount and direction of the wind. Little to no wind, or easterly winds provide perfect conditions for snorkelling and swimming, while increased swells and high winds can challenge even the strongest of swimmers and is best avoided.



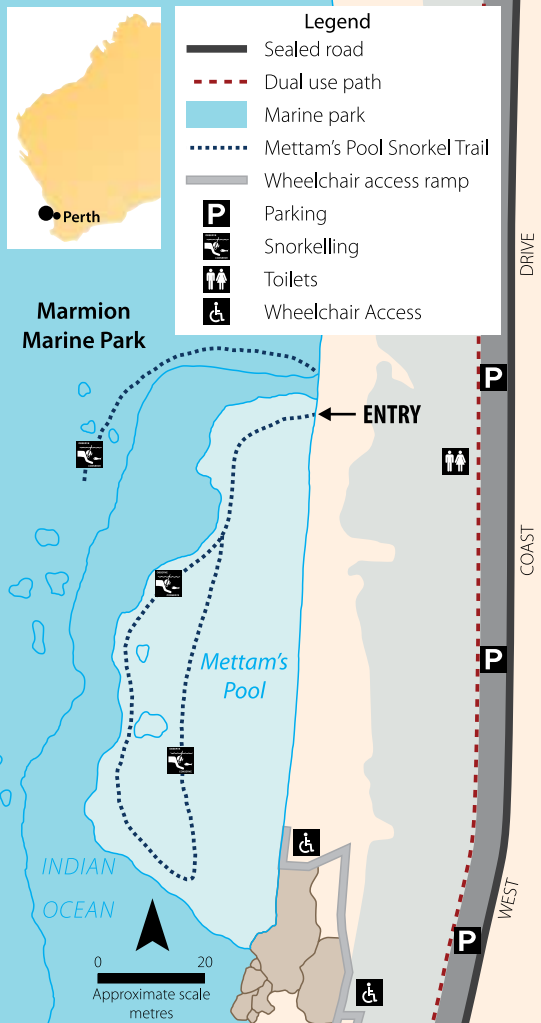
See more about snorkelling at Mettams Pool

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



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Top left Mettams Pool is a recreational site for beach lovers, swimmers and snorkellers.
Photo – Tourism WA

Left There is a range of species in Marmion Marine Park for snorkellers to discover.
Photo – Peter Nicholas/DBCA



Above Mettam's Pool is accessible to a range of users.
Photo – Rhianna King/DBCA



Right Investigating underwater yellow encrusting sponge is visible at Mettam's Pool.
Photo – Peter Nicholas/DBCA

Left Mettam's Pool trail as described by Carolyn Thomson-Dans and Peter Dans in *Dive and Snorkel sites in Western Australia*.

Colourful and delicate forms thrive in the shelter provided by these environments and it is well worth the effort to go searching for these secret gems. There are other treasures to discover if you're prepared to narrow your perspective from the conspicuous plants and charismatic animals you'll encounter and pay attention to the smaller, more cryptic but no less intriguing creatures like the nudibranch. And, for something really fascinating, you can witness photosynthesis occurring in the patches of seagrass that occur in the outer parts of the reef. Tiny bubbles that come from the leaves is oxygen being created.

As we turned back to where we started, past the ramp from the road that provides access for people with mobility issues, I basked in the opportunity to see these fascinating marine species so close to shore and in such close proximity to Perth CBD. I also vowed not to leave it so long between dips, and to bring my kids back!

turned south. Here, green, red and brown algae grow on rocks. These algae are not related to seagrass and they are anchored onto the rocks by holdfasts. Like so many species that occur close to the surface, the algae have developed to be able to withstand the energy of the waves and as such are hardy and robust. These species play an essential role in maintaining water quality, by converting sunlight, chemicals and carbon dioxides into proteins, fats and carbohydrates through photosynthesis, and they are an important food source for many fish and invertebrates. Two well-known species of brown algae that grow in the area are kelp (*Ecklonia radiata*) and Sargassum, while the sea lettuce (*Ulva* sp.) is bright green. As it was low tide, these species were only just covered by water.

In the southern part of the pool, holes and caverns provide refuge for fish species such as scalyfins, silver bream, sea mullets, herring and blowfish. They also provide an opportunity for some duck-diving and exploring what occurs deeper than what you can see at the surface. Unlike in the warmer waters of the north, where the colour of hard coral reefs can be spotted at the surface, the beauty of the limestone reef is hidden within these caves.

TAKING THE PLUNGE

With only a breath of an easterly blowing, I stood on the water's edge, opposite the steps that lead a short distance up to West Coast Drive, and finally gathered the courage to touch my big toe into the water. In doing this I discovered that a benefit of snorkelling when the ambient air temperature is 14 degrees Celsius is that the water doesn't feel as cold as you're expecting. To start with, anyway! Then, as I drew a deep breath (which was probably a combination of nervous excitement and the shock of the cold water, however relative), and submerged myself into the ocean, I was delighted to spot a school of Australian herring darting and weaving along the ocean floor. Just as I was marvelling that these fish were swimming less than a couple metres from the shore, I saw a red-lipped morwong, with its exaggerated pout, swimming underneath me.

I settled into a comfortable breathing pattern before we reached the reef and

Do it yourself

Where is it? Marmion Marine Park lies offshore from Perth's northern suburbs between Trigg and Burns Beach.

Total area: 9,500 hectares

What to do: Snorkelling, diving, swimming, boating, whale watching (in season), surfing, fishing (outside sanctuary zones) and windsurfing.