

KIMBERLEY ISLANDS EXPEDITION



During May and June 1972 the Department organised an expedition to examine the flora and fauna of the islands off the North Kimberley Coast.

It is well known that some species of wildlife which formerly existed in the Australian mainland now survive only on islands. Some examples are the Boodie (*Bettongia lesueur*) which occurs on Barrow, Bernier and Dorre Islands and the Banded Hare Wallaby (*Lagostrophus fasciatus*) which occurs on Bernier and Dorre Islands. There are a large number of islands in the Kimberleys and almost nothing is known about the wildlife on them.

Efforts to increase knowledge of the area commenced last year when Departmental Research Officers and Museum staff were attached to a mapping team from the Royal Australian Survey Corps. At that time the Army was surveying the Kimberley coast and its associated islands so it was possible to visit about fifteen islands by helicopter.



Patrol vessel "Dampier" in inlet at Augustus Island

This year the survey was based on the Department's patrol vessel "Dampier". Two three-week trips were made using Koolan Island as a base. Biologists from the Department of Fisheries and Fauna, the W.A. Museum and the W.A. Herbarium took part. Some of the islands visited were Augustus, Champagne, Heywood, Bigge, Wollaston, Katers, the Coronations and the Osborne Group, as well as a number of smaller ones. (A report on the visit to Adèle Island can be found elsewhere in this issue).

Although most of the flora and fauna collected has still to be identified, the trip was a great success and a number of interesting observations were made. A number of mammals were collected including the Little Rock Wallaby, Northern Native Cats, an Antechinus, the Sugar Glider, the Golden Bandicoot, the Golden Back Tree Rat, at least one species of Rock Rat, a native mouse, a flying fox and a number of bats. The Little Rock Wallaby



Native rodent, yet to be positively identified (Augustus Island)

was found on no fewer than five islands and native cats on at least three islands. Interesting birds collected included the Torres Strait Pigeon and the Green Winged Pigeon, both of which are rare in Western Australia. A Jungle Fowl was also collected from one island.



West side of Augustus Island from air

The last extensive plant collections from this area were made by Allan Cunningham from 1819 to 1821, so that the collecting done during this trip was breaking almost new ground. Many species have still to be identified but already a number of the plants have been found to be new to the State.

As well as plants and animals, members of the expedition found a number of aboriginal rock arrangements and paintings. Information on these will be made available to the W.A. Museum.

While in the area, the opportunity was taken to enter the St. George Basin at the mouth of the Prince Regeant River. The Basin contains extensive mangroves swamps and is a well known haunt of the salt water crocodile.

When all the information has been collated a case will be prepared for some of the islands to be reserved for the Conservation of Fauna and Flora. Much work is still to be done and it is hoped to work in this area again next year.

The Department would like to thank all those who assisted with the expeditions, especially the Dampier Mining Company, Pearls Pty. Ltd., and the Royal Australian Survey Corps.



Camp on Augustus Island