

FLORA AND FAUNA SURVEY—COFFIN ISLAND

By Wildlife Officer R. Sokolowski, Ranger, Two Peoples Bay

On May 1, 1976 a successful landing was made on Coffin Island using an inflatable rubber dinghy floated off from the patrol vessel *Phillip King*.

Dr G. Smith, C.S.I.R.O., and I were safely ashore by 0830 hrs and we both completed a circuit of this island in opposite directions. The island is very small (approximately 1 300 m x 440 m) and is entirely exposed to the four winds and heavy pounding seas. Consequently, only the western end affords an opportunity to land, providing the sea swell is very slight.

There are no sandy beaches, therefore great care must be exercised when landing as all rock areas carry dangerous and sharp crustaceans which can penetrate and cut fabric and skin instantly.

I have observed this island from the mainland quite often during the last 3 years, and the hazardous area and land dangers virtually ensures that illegal usage would be very limited. My views on this matter have been re-enforced by this landing on May 1, 1976 when in such a slight swell I was tipped out of the dinghy.

The island terrain is quite flat and a variety of flora flourishes. I collected 15 specimens which will be identified by the Herbarium, South Perth. Some of the plants were new to my own collection on the mainland and it is probable that we shall have some new plants to show in the Reserve herbarium. I also took photographic plates of each species collected.

The entire island is riddled with burrows of the Great-winged Petrel *Pterodroma macroptera* and chicks were found in the burrows. In addition large numbers of King's Skink, *Egernia kingii*, were seen; one specimen being 35 cm in length and in speckled form; no doubt these skinks play havoc with the nestlings and eggs.

A large number of Australian Sea Lions were found basking on the island and 29 specimens were counted. In a boat off the island I have counted over 50 of them.

The bird population was small and four Rock Parrots, *Neophema petrophila*, were observed in flight; presumably there would be a large movement of various birds across to the island from the mainland which is 200 m distance.

No fresh water pools were found but the rocky terrain would, no doubt, catch some water in the crevices.

A great area of the island was covered in a succulent plant (as yet unidentified) growing to a height of 1 m as well as a vigorous growth of Common Pigface, *Carpobrotus aequilateralis*, on the edge above high water mark. This covering became reduced on the exposed Eastern and South-Eastern end of the island.

It was unfortunate that very few species of flora were in bloom and if a further opportunity presents itself I will make another visit later in the year.

There were no signs of any landings by other persons. This would be an area of total wilderness throughout the year protected by the elements which, in our winter months, can be very severe.

Dr G. Smith and I vacated the island at 1230 hrs, May 1, 1976, returning to Two Peoples Bay.



Coffin Island from the mainland.

PROPOSED LEAD SHOT BAN

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has proposed that the traditional lead shotgun shell be banned for waterfowl hunting in the coming season in America.

Steel shot would be the only type permitted to be used for hunting waterfowl in specially designated areas.

The purpose of the proposed ban is to stop the further building up of lead in areas used by aquatic birds. Some species are routinely eating spent shot while foraging for food and are being poisoned. The lead is ground down in the gizzard and absorbed and deposited in tissues; then when the poisoning sets in a few days later the birds become lethargic and die. In North America, an estimated 2-3 million waterfowl die from lead poisoning every year.

While the U.S. game fraternity far outnumbers our own, it is estimated that at 30 shots per person, 372 kg (730 lbs) of lead shot was deposited in Lake Mears and Quairading on the Western Australian game seasons' opening weekend.