

## Feral Cat scare in Shoalwater Bay

An inspection of island reserves in Shoalwater Bay, south of Rockingham, recently failed to find any evidence of a feral cat, signs of which were reportedly sighted on one of the islands by a member of the public.

Although the report had suggested the cat was on Bird Island, Wildlife Officers from the Department of Fisheries and Wildlife also checked nearby Gull Rock, and Seal Island and Shag Rock which lie further south.

The presence of a feral cat on one of the islands could have proved disastrous for the birdlife as the islands are important breeding grounds for several species including Little Penguins (*Eudyptula minor*), Bridled Terns (*Sterna anaethetus*), Caspian Terns (*Sterna caspia*), White-faced Storm Petrels (*Oceanites marina*), Silver Gulls (*Larus novaehollandiae*), Pied Cormorants (*Phalacrocorax varius*), Welcome Swallows (*Hirundo neoxena*) and Willy Wagtails (*Rhipidura leucophrys*).



▼ An Australian Sea Lion (*Neophoca cinerea*) on Seal Island. Photo D. Coughran.





▲ Access to many of the islands is difficult and care must be taken not to disturb nesting birds or Sea Lions which also visit the islands.  
Photo D. Coughran.

The islands lack fresh water but, if released on one of the islands, a feral cat would probably survive on the moisture from its victims. It is likely it would live as long as it had a continual food supply.

Most of these islands are small, Bird Island is the largest of the group covering an area of only 3.2 hectares, but are close to the mainland in sheltered water and are well visited

by the public during summer months. It is now thought that the sighting reported was not of a cat but someone's pet dog, taken to the island and left to roam while its owners explored the beach.

As the islands are Nature Reserves, dogs are forbidden on them but many people ignore signs on the islands unaware of the destruction their pets cause to

nesting birds and the habitat. Consequently patrols to the islands are being stepped up and anyone found contravening the regulations will be liable to prosecution.

Anyone visiting the islands is also requested not to leave the beach area because of the danger of disturbing nesting birds. Most nesting on the islands takes place between May and February.