

BARROW ISLAND WILDLIFE

Barrow Island which has been reserved since 1910, when it was set aside under the Permanent Reserves Act of 1899, as Class "A" for the protection of flora and fauna, is home for a number of forms of Australian wildlife that are absolutely unique, and the preservation of the island's fauna and flora is of utmost importance.

Before commencing its drilling operations there West Australian Petroleum Pty. Ltd. (WAPET) agreed to take all possible precautions to protect and leave undisturbed the island's fauna. It also impressed on all employees and contractors the necessity to preserve this reserve as nearly as possible in its natural state. The effectiveness with which this company has put that policy into practice is commendable, and a letter expressing the Department's sincere thanks has been sent.

As the favourable situation existing at Barrow Island could well serve as a standard for others to emulate, some publicity was sought from the Petroleum Information Bureau, Melbourne. the following reply was received from Mr. D.M. Patcher the Bureau's director -

"We have already been impressed by the attitude taken by WAPET to preserve our priceless heritage on Barrow Island, which I had the good fortune to visit two months ago. When passing through Perth, I was given a description of the unique animals to be found on the island by Dr. David Ride, Director of the Western Australian Museum, and I incorporated this information in a short item in the September issue of the "Petroleum Gazette", copy of which is sent to you under separate cover, and later in one of our regular press releases, copy of which is enclosed. You will be pleased to know that the press release has been used by quite a number of papers throughout Australia, including at least one in your State."

The article appearing in the "Petroleum Gazette" reads as follows:-

Unique Wildlife

Barrow Island, which is situated off the north-west coast of Western Australia, 60 miles north of Onslow, is a place of great interest to naturalists as well as to oilmen. The island was completely unoccupied by man until the oil searcher's arrival.

Approximately 18 miles long by 8 miles wide, Barrow Island is a reserve for the protection of flora and fauna. Its interest to naturalists lies in the fact that it possesses a number of unique species of marsupials and other Australian wildlife, most of which have not yet been classified.

Animals of particular interest include a wallaby, which grows to a length of about 4ft. and is closely related to the euro or roan wallaroo, a hopping marsupial found on adjacent islands in the area. There is also a spectacled hare-wallaby which has orange rings around its eyes.

Exclusive to the island is a rat-kangaroo, about the size of a domestic cat. This is a new species at present being classified by scientists of the American Museum of Natural History and the Western Australian Museum.

Naturalists have found a unique species of bandicoot and a small marsupial mouse, rather like the species which exists in the MacDonnell ranges in Central Australia. Some interesting species of rodents have been discovered as well, notably a large water rat about 12 in. long, with lovely fur, which is similar to a species found in the Kimberleys.

The island was discovered in 1818 by Capt. Phillip King during an Admiralty survey. It was visited in 1840 by HMS Beagle in continuation of a hydrographical survey off the coast of northern Australia. Mr. Benjamin Bynoe, the ship's surgeon, and Lieutenant Stokes, soon to be commander of Beagle, were keen naturalists and in the course of their hydrographical studies they collected specimens for the British Museum.

West Australian Petroleum Pty. Ltd. (WAPET) is keenly aware of the great value to naturalists of the unique fauna which exist on Barrow Island. It has gone to great pains to ensure that the current oil exploration operations do not interfere with the natural life of the island.