

REPORT ON CARNAC ISLAND - RESERVE NO. 26646

During May 1969, the Department with the assistance of the Agriculture Protection Board's specialist research staff conducted a rabbit control programme on Carnac Island. This island, some 6 miles west of Fremantle, and just north of Garden Island, carries a number of the fauna species found on our off-shore islands. The rabbit control measures were undertaken at the request of the Western Australian Wild Life Authority which acted on the advice of the Reserves Manager, Dr. A.A. Burbidge.

The rabbits had to be severely reduced if not eliminated and to do this it was necessary first to burn the vegetation then lay poison baits. The reasons for these measures were:

- * The rabbit's food supply was already low due to the high population plus seasonal conditions which made autumn the best time to hit the rabbit population hard.
- * Most rabbits which survived the poison would die due to increasing environmental pressures - cold plus starvation.
- * Most natural fauna could escape the fire - birds by flight and reptiles by taking cover in holes in the ground.
- * The poison baits - carrots with 1080 - proved in control trials to be unattractive to the natural fauna.

Secondary poisoning risks have been lowered by Departmental personnel revisiting the island and disposing of all rabbit carcasses. There were of course risks to be taken in such a programme but the need to destroy the rabbits because of what they were doing to the habitat and indirectly to the natural fauna was so great that the risks were considered to be well worth taking and every effort was made to reduce them to a low level.

The programme appears to have been successful to date but the results will be assessed later in the year. The response of the island's vegetation is quite remarkable and many of the shrubs that had been browsed back almost to base wood have produced large numbers of new shoots.

During patrol of the island on July 16, 1969 by Cadet Fauna Warden D. Mell, a number of fauna observations were recorded. As the P.V. "Lancelin" approached a Wedge-tailed

Eagle was sighted over the island. Several dead Silver Gulls that had obviously been killed and eaten by an eagle were later located. Fauna present on the island included Australian Gannet, Silver Gull, Pied Cormorant, Hair Seal (16), Giant Petrel (3), Bridled Tern (1), King Skinks, Tiger Snake, Gecko, Willy Wagtail, Silvereye, Welcome Swallow, Great Skua and Fairy Penguin.

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