

Coral coast parks update

December 2011

Volume 1, Issue 3

Ningaloo Coast news

Welcome to the third edition of the *Coral coast parks update*. As the season changes and the weather starts to heat up, it is interesting to watch the changes to the environment and its inhabitants in and around Exmouth. The waters start to warm up and the lands begin to brown under the harsh sun.

The whales have already headed south for the summer (as have many tourists) and whale sharks too have moved off to areas unknown. While some creatures move away, others such as the turtles are being seen in massive numbers along the coast, indicating a busy nesting season ahead.

As it warms up expect to see more emus, kangaroos and other wildlife coming into town looking for water and food in our gardens. Enjoy the spectacle of having wildlife in our midst, but please avoid the temptation to feed or provide water to these animals as it can influence their natural behaviour and in some cases cause them to become aggressive.

The wonderful world of whale sharks – 2011 Ningaloo whale shark season

Emily Wilson, Whale Shark Conservation Officer

Swimming with the mysterious whale shark is a thrill that everyone should experience. 2011 has seen a record number of visitors interacting with whale sharks in Ningaloo Marine Park, with more than 17,000 people taking part in whale sharks tours this year compared with just 1,000 in 1993.

2011 has also been another lengthy season, with whale sharks being encountered from mid-March to mid-September, just falling short of last year's record season when whale sharks were still being sighted in early October.

Whale sharks at Ningaloo reef are typically juvenile males and 2011 figures reaffirmed this with four metres being the most common size encountered and the aggregation displaying a four to one male to female ratio. Whale shark size in 2011 ranged between two and 15 metres.



Whale shark interaction in Ningaloo Marine Park

With the assistance of Ningaloo whale shark operators—who provide data on passenger numbers and whale shark contacts through an electronic monitoring system—the Department of Environment and Conservation (DEC) is able to monitor the pressure placed on the whale shark aggregation by increasing visitor numbers. Through this, we aim to ensure that whale sharks continue to visit Ningaloo Marine Park for many years to come.

Inside this issue

The wonderful world of whale sharks

Jurabi Turtle Centre

Sanctuary zone awareness

Doole Island Nature Reserve golden bandicoot release

Interference with breeding turtles on the Ningaloo Coast



The Jurabi Turtle Centre

Jurabi Turtle Centre

Jamie Campbell, Education Officer

The warmer months are upon us again which means the three species of turtle that visit our area—the loggerhead, hawksbill and green—are mating and nesting along the Ningaloo Coast. The Jurabi Turtle Centre is an interpretive educational facility located just past the lighthouse and Hunters Beach car park. It provides a focus for marine turtle conservation and education and throughout the summer months DEC conducts turtle nesting information nights with a guided tour.

During these guided tours our staff will demonstrate the turtle watchers' code of conduct. This code of conduct was developed to minimise disturbance, enabling nesting turtles to lay their eggs successfully. People viewing this nesting process are reminded that no artificial light or flash photography is permitted and that by being quiet and observant you have a far greater chance of watching this amazing natural spectacle. Keeping your distance and allowing your eyes to adjust to natural starlight has been proven to be the least intrusive method of viewing turtles at night.

So for an informative and enjoyable night out with family, friends or visitors please come along and experience one of the area's unique phenomena.

For tour dates and information on the Jurabi Turtle Centre and taking part in a guided tour contact the Exmouth Visitor Centre on (08) 9949 1176 or DEC Milyering Visitor Centre on (08) 9949 2808.

Sanctuary zone awareness

Matt Smith, Senior Marine Ranger

DEC would like to remind recreational fishers to be aware of the different zones before heading out to the marine park.

Sanctuary zones ('look but don't take zones') may be marked with yellow in-water buoys or land-based reference posts, both of which should be used as a guide only.

When boat fishing, the best way to determine your position in relation to the nearest sanctuary zone is through the use of a GPS. It is important to ensure your GPS/chart-plotter has the most up-to-date boundary coordinates as some non-government publications and electronic charts (even recent versions) may be incorrect.

You can contact DEC or the Department of Fisheries for current zone boundary coordinates, or check the boat ramps for brochures. These coordinates can be entered into your GPS/chart-plotter to determine the nearest sanctuary zone boundary relative to your position when fishing.



Sanctuary zone marker

This will mean you'll have a great day on the water, knowing that you are fishing for the future and helping to protect the marine park.

Doole Island Nature Reserve golden bandicoot release

Matt Prophet, Nature Conservation Coordinator

During September this year, 92 golden bandicoots were released onto Doole Island Nature Reserve located in Gale's Bay within the Exmouth Gulf. The bandicoots were translocated from Barrow Island as part of environmental offset programs for the resource development project on the island. This is one of many translocations taking place across the state and is an attempt to establish new and secure population of these threatened animals in a range of areas that offer ongoing protection from threats such as feral animals.

Golden bandicoots once roamed the North West Cape in healthy numbers, but have long disappeared from its landscape. They are now confined to certain predator-free islands in the Pilbara such as Barrow, Hermite and now Doole, as well as a mainland stronghold in the Kimberley.

Recent monitoring on Doole Island revealed 13 new bandicoots among those recaptured micro-chipped individuals. This is good sign as it shows recruitment into the population. Golden bandicoots rely on healthy spinifex grasslands, which are found on Doole Island, and all the animals trapped were in good condition.

Doole Island and the other islands in the Exmouth Gulf are classed as nature reserves. These unique reserves enable DEC to carry out translocations, providing safe havens for rare and endangered species.

If you plan to visit any of the islands in the Exmouth Gulf, contact DEC's Exmouth Office for more information about what areas you can visit and the 'dos and don'ts'.

Future trips are planned and the population will be monitored closely during the next year.

Interference with breeding turtles on the Ningaloo Coast

Matt Prophet, Nature Conservation Coordinator

As the weather heats up along the World Heritage-listed Ningaloo Coast, so does the marine turtle mating season. During this time, visitors are reminded to refrain from interfering with the animals and allow them to behave naturally.

The breeding season is now underway and it is common for female turtles to drag themselves onto beaches to avoid unwanted attention from male turtles.

While many people think they are helping the turtles by trying to encourage or push them back into the water, they are actually moving the females back into the very situation they are trying to avoid.

The ability for female turtles to rest on the water's edge gives them a well-earned rest and a chance to recover and build up their energy before re-entering the water and dealing with the aggregating males.

Therefore we ask beachgoers to keep away from all turtles when they're on beaches along the Ningaloo Coast. Additionally, boat users should slow down to less than eight knots in shallow waters to help reduce incidents of injuries or death of turtles from boat strike.

We also encourage people who wish to view nesting turtles to join an informative turtle tour run from the Jurabi Turtle Centre (see article on page one).

The large numbers of turtles already along the Ningaloo Coast is an indication of another busy nesting season.

Once female turtles fertilise their first clutch of eggs they start coming ashore to nest, and usually lay between three and five clutches during the summer season.

For more information visit the Jurabi Turtle Centre or contact DEC's Exmouth Office on (08) 9947 8000.



Mating turtles in Ningaloo Marine Park

If you would like to receive a copy of this newsletter electronically please email exmouth@dec.wa.gov.au with your contact details.

**Department of Environment and Conservation
Exmouth District**

22 Nimitz Street, Exmouth, WA, 6707

Phone: (08) 9947 8000

Email: exmouth@dec.wa.gov.au