

Welcome to the first issue of *Ningaloo Coast news* for 2012. Formerly *Coral coast parks update*, the newsletter has been renamed to mark the listing of the Ningaloo Coast as a World Heritage area.

With this recent listing, many people have been asking what difference it will make and what the benefits are. While World Heritage listing will not change the way the area is managed or the activities you are currently able to undertake, one of the many benefits is the ability to use World Heritage status to attract more funds to the region.

Proof of this is already starting to show. The federal Department of Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities have recently directed more than a million dollars to the Ningaloo Coast to assist with its management, through its *Caring for our Country* program.

Some of these funds will go towards establishment of a World Heritage committee, made up of key community and expert stakeholders, to provide feedback and advice on promotion, presentation and management plans in the area. This committee will be developed through an advertised expression of interest – so keep an eye out for this opportunity if you would like to contribute to what is happening in the Ningaloo Coast World Heritage area.

A project officer will be employed to run this project and also to start developing new interpretive materials and products that will be used to highlight the natural values of the area to visitors and further promote the Ningaloo Coast as a must-see tourism destination.

Another great project that has been funded will see an increased focus on feral animal control in the Ningaloo area. This funding will look at ways of improving existing feral control programs with a focus on cats and foxes, which are currently considered a major threat in the region. As well as improving what is done on DEC-managed estate to improve the effectiveness of feral animal control, there is a strong desire to work with and support neighbours of the World Heritage area in their feral control programs.

The extra funding will allow an increased and improved effort to protect fauna including rock wallabies, nesting turtles and the unique array of reptile and bird species in the area as well as potentially helping to reduce impacts on stock on neighbouring pastoral leases.

Arvid Hogstrom
DEC Exmouth District Manager

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Cape Range campgrounds

Phil Arthur, Ranger

With the onset of the 2012 tourist season fast approaching, the Department of Environment and Conservation (DEC) has been working towards the ongoing improvement of campground facilities within Cape Range National Park. Several campgrounds have been upgraded over the summer months including the Yardie Creek camp, Osprey Bay camp, North Mandu camp, Kurrajong camp and Ned's camp.

Upgrades have included the construction of 15 new camp sites across the park, increasing the total capacity from 116 to 131 sites within 13 campgrounds. DEC has also widened, levelled and lengthened many of the existing sites to better accommodate caravans and motor homes. Other noticeable improvements include the construction of group tables and shared community areas – encouraging social interaction or just providing a place to sit back and watch the sunset.

The DEC online campground booking system continues to provide an opportunity for people to share the benefits of secured camping in Cape Range. Osprey Bay is the latest campground to go online in 2012, joining Yardie Creek, Kurrajong, Tulki and Pilgramunna camps. Get on board now and book your holiday dates by visiting the online booking system at www.dec.wa.gov.au/campgrounds.

Volunteer campground hosts arrive soon, officially kicking off the 2012 tourist season. They will stay from early April to the end of November. These dedicated volunteers provide DEC with an invaluable resource and help ensure a safe and family-friendly environment for all. Camp hosts assist by maintaining the park to high standards, providing up-to-date park information, collecting camp fees and providing a friendly point of contact for park visitors. DEC and its many volunteers will continue working hard to provide visitors with the best possible World Heritage experience.



Upgraded bays at Ned's camp

Ningaloo turtle program

Matt Prophet, Nature Conservation Coordinator

This year has seen the Northwest Cape's beaches the busiest in the 10-year history of the Ningaloo turtle program. The peak of the season started around the beginning of December and steady numbers of nesting turtles continued to emerge until the end January. More than 5,000 nests were recorded along the cape's northern beaches and on some mornings during the peak monitoring period deciphering the myriad of tracks proved challenging for the local and external volunteers who continue to make this program a success.

Green turtles are the dominant species along the coast, with smaller numbers of loggerhead and hawksbill turtles also using our beaches. Predation by foxes on recorded nests was low; well below the five per cent threshold we try to maintain. Above this percentage, predation levels become unviable for the nesting turtles.

Creating much interest this season was the large number of resting green turtles along the beaches in October and November. We encourage the public to avoid disturbing these turtles and let them rest – they are usually females trying to escape the competing males and need a break.

Last year's cyclone surges resulted in the loss of significant clutches all along Ningaloo, so the big effort by turtles this season will hopefully help offset this. The cyclone season is here for another month, however, so mother nature could play it either way for the turtles. All this aside, their longevity has enabled them to cope with these sorts of fluxes in recruitment over many years. The most important thing is that we continue to protect them as much as we can against human-induced disturbance.



Green turtle nesting at Ningaloo

Learmonth Cape Range fire

Jamie Campbell, Interpretive Education Officer

On Wednesday 22 February, a bushfire started South of Learmonth between Winderabandi and Minilya Exmouth Road due to lightning strikes. It burned out about 12,000 hectares of bushland south-west of the Learmonth Airport.

The incident brought together teams from FESA, Exmouth Shire, Exmouth volunteer bushfire brigade, DEC and Volunteer Fire and Rescue, some of which had come from as far away as Albany. These personnel were involved in assessing fire behaviour and implementing strategies to fight the fire in an area of the range which is extremely difficult to access.

In a first for the region, FESA brought in a type 1 Helitac helicopter to assist in water bombing operations. The helicopter is a Sikorsky S61N and can carry about 4,000 litres of water which it takes on board in 30 seconds via pickup hose while hovering. On-ground crew assisted in filling a collar tank (bladder) from which the helicopter replenished its water.

All eyes on 2012 coral recruitment

Heather Barnes, Marine Park Coordinator

Following the bleaching event in 2011, DEC staff at Exmouth will be tracking coral recruitment at long-term monitoring sites throughout Ningaloo Marine Park. Marine officers will be deploying terracotta panels at 30 sites in and around Coral Bay, Tatabiddi and Bundegi in order to examine what coral recruits 'settle' on these panels over the next few months as the corals spawn.



2009 coral recruits (or juveniles) collected on settlement panels at Ningaloo

Tracking this recruitment will enable the team to measure the recovery of coral over time at areas where high mortality was observed in 2011, such as at Bundegi Reef. Historical data sets indicate that in some locations, such as Bundegi, coral cover has a tendency to fluctuate more over time than at other locations.

Synchronised spawning events occur annually at Ningaloo across a wide range of coral species. This event can be observed seven to nine nights after the full moon in March or April. For more information on this event, or on DEC monitoring programs, please contact Heather Barnes.



Sikorsky S61N firefighting helicopter

During the fire, the helicopter was able to deliver four drops per hour (some 16,000 litres) which enabled firefighters to make good progress in an area where the application of conventional methods would have been impossible.

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

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