

Spring 2015

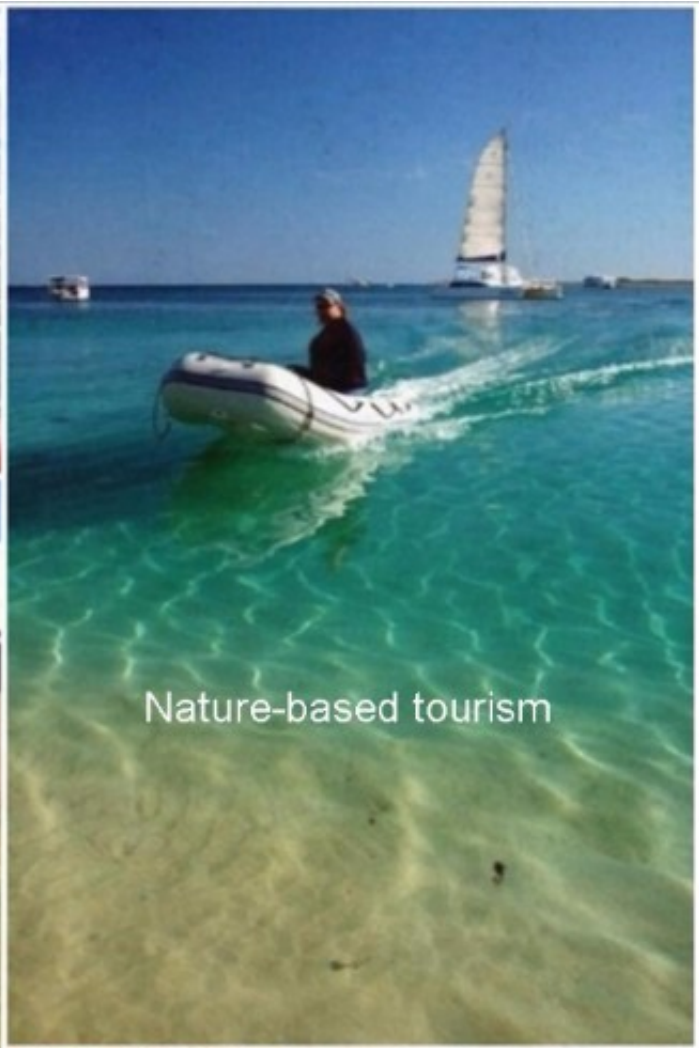
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In this issue



Ready to respond



Nature-based tourism



Look after our resident emus



Wedge-tailed shearwaters



Seasonal seaweed meadows

Ningaloo's seasonal seaweed meadows

Ningaloo Reef is famous for its spectacular array of coral and fish, however, seaweed meadows are also an essential part of the ecosystem. Seaweed covers huge parts of the Ningaloo Lagoon, flourishing during spring and summer when the water is warm, then breaking off and washing onto beaches during the colder winter months. These seasonal cycles of growth and decay provide a dynamic but important source of food and shelter for many species. Researchers from the Australian National University, WA Parks

and Wildlife and the Australian Institute of Marine Science have found that many juvenile fish make their first home in the seaweed meadows, especially those with the thickest and tallest seaweed canopies. This makes these meadows key nursery habitats for the next generation of many fish species found on Ningaloo Reef. So next time you see seaweed on the beach, take it as a sign of the many things that seaweeds do to help make Ningaloo a healthy World Heritage listed ecosystem! Thank you to Chris Fulton, Research School of Biology, Australian National University for his contribution to this article.



Divers surveying a seaweed meadow near Coral Bay. Photo - Mae Noble

Wedge-tailed shearwaters nest on Muiron Islands

The Muiron Islands offer many recreational opportunities such as diving, fishing and surfing. They also provide a safe home to nesting turtles and seabirds, including the wedge-tailed shearwater (*Ardenna pacifica*).

There are more than half a million wedge-tailed shearwaters on the Muiron Islands. The birds are believed to stay in the area yearround, but undertake significant flights away from the islands around May.

Returning around June, they nest in burrows on both islands spending several

months preparing and re-excavating the burrows. At about 1m long and not very deep, the burrows are subject to collapse by foot traffic. A single egg is laid around October and the chicks hatch in January.

The adults leave the island before dawn to spend the day feeding and return to the burrow after sunset to feed the chick. The chick remains in the burrow until it is ready to fledge around mid-April. As the only island nature reserve with the purpose of both recreation and conservation, visitors have a unique opportunity to explore the 100m wide recreation zone at the northern end of South Muiron Island.

Please be aware the rest of the island is a Special Conservation Zone, therefore the islands flora and fauna are protected. Please stay within the recreation zone on the beach.

For further information contact the Parks and Wildlife Exmouth office on (08) 9947 8000.



Wedge-tailed shearwater nesting in burrow, South Muiron Island.

Ready to respond

In May, local Parks and Wildlife Exmouth staff attended a specialised three-day Whale Disentanglement Response Course held in Exmouth.

The course provided participants with skills to safely disentangle large whales.

Techniques such as kegging were shown, which involves attaching large buoys to the entanglement to slow the whale down so it can eventually be cut free with custom made knives.

If you come across an entangled whale please keep a safe distance and do not attempt to disentangle the whale yourself. They are wild animals and potentially dangerous.

Please report whale entanglement sightings to Parks and Wildlife (08) 9997 8000 or Wildcare Helpline on (08) 9474 9055.



Course attendees get some on-water practice.

Nature-based tourism at Ningaloo

The Ningaloo Coast World Heritage area is renowned for its breathtaking views, unique wildlife and extraordinary marine biodiversity.

Over the years the area has become increasingly popular for nature-based tourism activities with many visitors enjoying organised tours.

Tourists interested in nature-based activities tend to spend almost twice as much time in an area, resulting in increased spending in the local economy.

Parks and Wildlife issues licences to commercial tour operators within Ningaloo Marine Park and Cape Range National Park. A variety of nature-based tours are on offer, including swimming with whale sharks, whale watching, snorkelling, coral viewing, scuba diving and water sports.

There are also several land-based activities including quad bike and safari tours. Tour operators play a critical role in assisting Parks and Wildlife with managing nature-based tourism.

They are able to convey important conservation and cultural messages and provide visitors with a unique opportunity to experience nature and all it has to offer!

For more information on commercial tour operator licences, contact Jutta Wildforster on 9947 8000.



Some of the nature-based tour operators within the Ningaloo Coast World Heritage area.

Look after our resident emus!

Spring has seen the arrival of new emu chicks. This coincides with the North West Cape drying and the days heating up. Exmouth has quite a number of resident emus who like to wander around the town.

There are not many towns where you can experience close encounters with these curious birds! You will often see a male emu crossing the street with his brood of chicks waddling behind him. Chicks will not get very far without their dad!

They stay with him for several months before they are ready to face the North West Cape on their own. Emus are protected fauna and should not be injured, harassed or chased.

Please remember they are wild animals and can inflict serious injury in self-defence.

Please do not feed emus and if you see them on the road please slow down! If you come across injured wildlife please contact Parks and Wildlife Exmouth (08) 9947 8000.



One of Exmouth's resident emu families wandering around Exmouth townsite

Range to Reef on display

The Milyering Discovery Centre (MDC) has been recently upgraded to include new colourful panoramas featuring the *Range to Reef* - the underground karst system, range lands, mangrove habitats and shoreline.

A highlight is the lagoon experience where you can walk around an enormous underwater coral formation. There is information about turtles and a large underwater panorama with whales, whale sharks and dolphins. The MDC is open seven days a week so come in and view these exciting displays.

For more information about Ningaloo Coast News contact the
Ningaloo Coast World Heritage Program Manager,
Department of Parks and Wildlife
Exmouth District
22 Nimitz Street, Exmouth, WA, 6707
Phone (08) 9947 8000
Email Exmouth@dpaw.wa.gov.au

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