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Summer 2016-17

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Department of
Parks and Wildlife



Summer News | 2016-17

In this issue:



Feral aquarium fish threaten native aquatic cave species

Beneath the surface of Cape Range lies a hidden complex limestone karst system, characterised by caves and sinkholes. It is home to more than 80 types of subterranean fauna, commonly known as cave dwelling animals. They include troglifauna, found within the dry parts of the cave and stygofauna, aquatic species found within the water. Many of these animals are unique to Cape Range and among some of the most diverse in the world. They are a key reason for the Ningaloo Coast World Heritage area listing in 2011. Subterranean fauna are protected under both Commonwealth and Western Australian legislation.



Above: *The blind gudgeon fish (Milyeringa veritas) grows to 4.5cm and has adapted to the isolated dark, humid cave life over time. Small in size, it does not have eyes and is white-pale in appearance, having long lost its colour.*

Aquarium fish, known as guppies, have been dumped into one of these caves and the feral population is unfortunately thriving. This is of great concern to the stygofauna that live within the cave, including blind gudgeon fish, blind cave eels and a number of different species of crustacea. The introduced fish can potentially invade the subterranean waters and displace the stygofauna population within the cave.

The long-term survival of subterranean cave animals within the karst system is highly dependent on the management of caves and the groundwater contained within. You can help protect these weird and wonderful cave dwelling animals by not dumping guppies and other aquarium fish or rubbish into sink holes and caves and by not disturbing groundwater habitats in the karst system. Parks and Wildlife is currently working with the Western

Australian Museum and Department of Fisheries to eradicate the guppies from the local karst system.

Fertile turtles feel the need to breed

The 2016–17 Ningaloo Turtle Program (NTP) season is now underway. Volunteers have arrived from all over the world to assist in monitoring turtle nesting activity along the North West Cape and so far are seeing plenty of turtle activity. Stay tuned for lots of exciting events happening this turtle season.

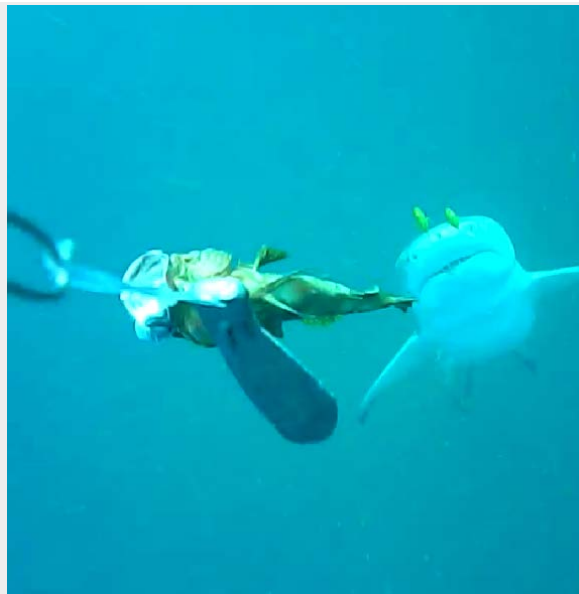


If you would like to get involved in this exciting opportunity to see turtles in their natural environment, please contact NTP Coordinator Keely Markovina on 9947 8000 or email ningalooturtles@dpaw.wa.gov.au.

***Above right:** One of the NTP volunteer's witnessing a Green Turtle (*Chelonia mydas*) returning to the water, after a busy night digging a nest and laying eggs.*

Shark bite-offs and recreational fishing at Ningaloo

University of Western Australia researchers have been investigating the occurrence and frequency of shark bite-offs – when a shark bites a hooked fish before it can be reeled into a boat. Shark bite-offs have the potential to impact fish populations as recreational fishers continue to fish to replace those fish lost to sharks. Sharks



can also potentially be injured or killed if hooks or lines are retained in their mouths or stomachs.

The study surveyed 407 recreational fishers at boat ramps within the Ningaloo Marine Park and Exmouth Gulf. Fishers were asked where and how frequently shark bite-offs occurred and how they may be influenced by depth, fishing methods and equipment used.

Ongoing research on charter vessels has used tiny underwater video cameras attached to lines to view bite-offs. The cameras identify the fish species being taken and the shark species responsible. The research also increases our understanding of shark behaviour.

The research is funded by the Jock Clough Marine Foundation in collaboration with Parks and Wildlife, Department of Fisheries and Recfishwest.

For more information, contact PhD student Jonathan Mitchell at jonathan.mitchell@research.uwa.edu.au.

***Above right:** A sicklefin lemon shark (*Negaprion acutidens*) approaching a hooked Chinaman rockcod (*Epinephelus rivulatus*) before eating it. Photo: Jonathan Mitchell.*

School holiday activities

Parks and Wildlife had another successful school holiday program within the Ningaloo Coast World Heritage area in October. One popular activity was the Rock Wallaby Ramble where families were able to view black-flanked rock

wallabies in their natural environment. They were treated to a close-up view of several young joeys with the added bonus of viewing some astounding bird life.



Above: The Ningaloo Coast World Heritage area contains the largest know population of blackflanked rock wallabies (Petrogale lateralis lateralis) in Western Australia.

Camping at Cape Range National Park

Camping during the peak April–October period was greatly enhanced this year with online bookings available for all sites within Cape Range National Park. With nearly full occupancy throughout the season, visitors were pleased with the opportunity to pre-book and secure their site.



Above: The Osprey Bay camp site overlooking Ningaloo's turquoise waters.

Bookings can be made at www.parkstay.dpaw.wa.gov.au up to 180 days before arrival. Bookings are not needed during the off-peak season (October to April) as there are plenty of sites available on arrival.

Camping on the Ningaloo Coast



Above: Camping on the Ningaloo Coast

The State Government is creating conservation and recreation reserves to secure the future of the Ningaloo Coast. As public reserves, the land will not be able to be sold to private interests and will guarantee continued public access. The land will be given protection under the Conservation and Land Management Act 1984 and managed in a coordinated way with the marine park to protect its unique values. Parks and Wildlife and the Gnulli native title party are preparing a draft management plan for the proposed reserves. An

online survey has been developed so you can help plan for the Ningaloo Coast.

The information obtained from the survey will be used to guide the preparation of the management plan and determine if visitor services or facilities should be provided or upgraded. To participate, [visit www.surveymonkey.com/r/W6K9WALH](http://www.surveymonkey.com/r/W6K9WALH).

Once complete, the draft plan will be released for public comment to provide further opportunity for input into how the Ningaloo Coast will be managed. You can find out more about proposed Ningaloo Coast public reserves at www.dpaw.wa.gov.au/management/ningaloo-coast.

Migratory shorebirds have arrived

Each year, migratory shorebirds make the epic journey along the East Asian–Australasian Flyway from their breeding grounds in Siberia and Alaska to their summer feeding grounds in the southern hemisphere. The Ningaloo Coast and Exmouth Gulf are popular stopovers for these long-distance travellers and provide important habitat for roosting and foraging. Here they build up fat and protein reserves to make the return journey. These migratory birds will fly nearly 13,000km back to their breeding grounds, so it's important they are allowed to rest undisturbed.



Above: A common sandpiper (*Actitis hypoleucos*) foraging in the intertidal zone, Exmouth Gulf.

How you can help these birds make their return flight:

- Keep your distance.
- Minimise four-wheel driving on beaches to avoid disturbing shorebirds roosting and foraging.
- Keep dogs on leashes while walking on the beach – they can cause unwanted stress to shorebirds.

For more information about Ningaloo Coast News contact the
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