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## Working together to protect the coast

Bundegi Coastal Park and adjacent Bundegi Sanctuary Zone within the Ningaloo Marine Park are highly ecologically significant areas of the Ningaloo Coast. The mangroves and shallow sand flats are a known nursery for a range of marine species including turtles, rays and sharks. While the shoreline provides resting and feeding habitat for many threatened migratory shorebirds including the critically endangered bar-tailed godwit (*Limosa lapponica menzbieri*) and endangered lesser sand plover (*Charadrius mongolus*). It also provides nesting habitat for resident shorebirds like the red-capped plover (*Charadrius ruficapillus*) and pied and sooty oystercatchers (*Haematopus longirostris*; *Haematopus fuliginosus*).

Members of the Exmouth community raised concerns about the damage to the area from increased visitation and four-wheel-driving on the beach along Bundegi Coastal Park in recent years. These recreational activities have led to an increase in disturbance, damaging coastal vegetation and the visual amenity of the area, as well as posing a threat to the migratory and resident shorebirds that call these shores home.

A small team of volunteers and Parks and Wildlife Service staff got together to help mitigate the impacts of recreational use in the area and to protect the mangrove and shorebird habitat. Over two mornings more than 90 bollards were installed (90 holes dug!) adjacent to the Bundegi Sanctuary Zone, formalising the existing track and creating parking areas and access points to the shoreline.

A big thank you to everyone who came out and assisted in protecting this unique and special part of the Ningaloo and Exmouth Gulf coastline.



**Above:** Parks and Wildlife Service staff and Exmouth community volunteers working together to formalise the access tracks along Bundegi Coastal Park. *Photos - DBCA*

## Small but going strong!

Surveys looking at the diversity of small vertebrates within Cape Range National Park continued through 2021. Over 60 species of reptiles were recorded and nine different mammals. Surveys this year confirmed the extension in the range of the desert skink (*Liopholis inornata*).

The high diversity of reptiles (over 60 for Cape Range) is exceptional in relation to other single area surveys. This suggests that management of threats including feral cats, foxes, weeds and inappropriate fire regimes is on track in protecting reptiles in this region.

Two surveys were conducted in autumn and spring with the effects of the years rainfall coming through in the survey results. Spinifex hopping mice (*Notomys alexis*) numbers increased tenfold with nearly 200 captures in spring compared with just 20 in autumn. With nearly 500mm of rain across most of the year it's not surprising the rodents fared well, which has positive flow on effects for plants and other animals that rely on these small ecosystem engineers!



**Top right:** Surveys confirmed extension in range for the desert skink (*Liopholis inornata*) Photo - Kimberley Paige.

**Bottom right:** Spring surveys underway in Cape Range. Photo - DBCA



## Ningaloo Turtle Program enters its 20th Year

The Ningaloo Turtle Program (NTP) has reached a major milestone this year, embarking on its 20th season of turtle monitoring along the Ningaloo Coast!

The NTP is a community-based turtle track monitoring program that involves walking the beaches in the early morning to record the turtle activity from the night before. Volunteers record which species made the track, whether or not the turtle nested, and any evidence of disturbance or introduced predators. This information provides population estimates and contributes directly to on-ground conservation and management of turtles along the Ningaloo Coast.

Over the past 20 years, volunteers have contributed more than 77,200 hours to the program. ! This season wraps up in late February and then we'll be recruiting for new local volunteers come October. Stay tuned for our 20th Anniversary celebrations next season!



**Above:** A female green turtle returning to the ocean after laying her eggs. Photo - Kalpa Vekaria

## Working on Country - Nyinggulu Ranger Program

Working on country is more than just a job for Traditional Owners, it is about taking care of the natural environment and looking after the lands of their ancestors and for future generations. An integral part of the Nyinggulu Indigenous Land Use Agreement (ILUA) between the Nganhurra Thanardi Garrbu Aboriginal Corporation (NTGAC) and WA State Government, which formalised the creation of Nyinggulu Coastal Reserves, was the catalyst for the development of the Nyinggulu Ranger Program. The program offers young traditional owners an opportunity to work on country as a trainee ranger. Through the program, trainee rangers undertake nationally accredited qualifications whilst being immersed in the Parks and Wildlife Service's operational programs including Marine, Nature Conservation as well as Parks and Visitor Services.

The Exmouth District is committed to providing a first-rate Trainee Ranger Program to honour the commitments given by the NTGAC Traditional Owners to jointly manage this exceptional place with the WA Government and preserve it for future generations to enjoy.



"Working on Country, caring for Country and making my Elders proud makes me happy" Cowan Ryan shared. Cowan successfully completed his Certificate II in Conservation and Land Management (CLM) in August 2021. He is now specialising in the Marine Program for his Certificate III which includes undertaking his Coxswains Grade 2 NC and overseeing the revamp of island nature reserve signage across the Exmouth Gulf and other Pilbara inshore Islands.



Alex Murphy is embedded within the Nature Conservation team for his Certificate II in Conservation and Land Management and has been involved in small vertebrate surveys in Cape Range National Park as well as cat trapping and weed management along the Nyinggulu Coast. Alex shared what it means to him being part of the Nyinggulu Ranger Program, "for me, working on Country I feel at home. Looking after native plants and animals is special. One of my goals is to learn the scientific names of animals."



Jarrid Cooyou has focused on operational park management throughout his Certificate II in Conservation and Land Management and has acquired a range of tickets relevant to that role including MR licence, compliance officer training and skid steer bobcat operator.

**Top left:** Cowan Ryan at work on the Pilbara inshore island nature reserves. **Middle left:** Alex Murphy checking pitfall traps in the September small invertebrate surveys. **Bottom left** Jarrid Cooyou on site during the Nyinggulu Archeology Project. *Photos - DBCA*

## Shorebirds and the community

Coming into summer, migratory shorebird numbers were starting to build in Exmouth Gulf. Over 25 Exmouth community members welcomed these long distance travelers as they joined in a shorebird workshop in November, hosted by Birdlife and Parks and Wildlife Service. Birdlife shared their expert knowledge on the importance of the Exmouth Gulf for both migratory and resident shorebirds and introduced participants to the methods of conducting shorebird monitoring.

Part of the workshop involved getting out in the field and learning tips to identify different species. Participants were treated to a good diversity of birds at Bundegi Coastal Park. Conditions were out of the ordinary for Exmouth with drizzle for most of the day and cooler temperatures, but this didn't deter the participants or the birds from being present. Twelve species of birds were recorded with over half of these being shorebirds.

Shorebird monitoring surveys are led by local Birdlife representative Grant Griffin who is welcoming anyone interested to get involved. If you would like to know how to get involved contact Parks and Wildlife Service Exmouth - [exmouth@dbca.wa.gov.au](mailto:exmouth@dbca.wa.gov.au)



**Top:** Rain didn't deter this eager bunch of bird enthusiasts. **Above:** A Common Green shank feeding in the shallows. *Photos - Lucy Clausen*

## It's hatchling time at Ningaloo

Turtle nesting season is well underway along the Ningaloo Coast and we are starting to see an increase in hatchlings emerge.

If you are lucky enough to witness these tiny creature's first run down the beach please remember to:

- Stay below the dunes to avoid trampling on nests and emerging hatchlings.
- Let hatchlings make their own way to the ocean.
- Do not use white lights or flash photography.
- Do not take your dog to turtle nesting beaches.



**Above:** Green turtle hatchlings emerging from their nest. **Photo -** Grant O'grady