

Ngari Tales

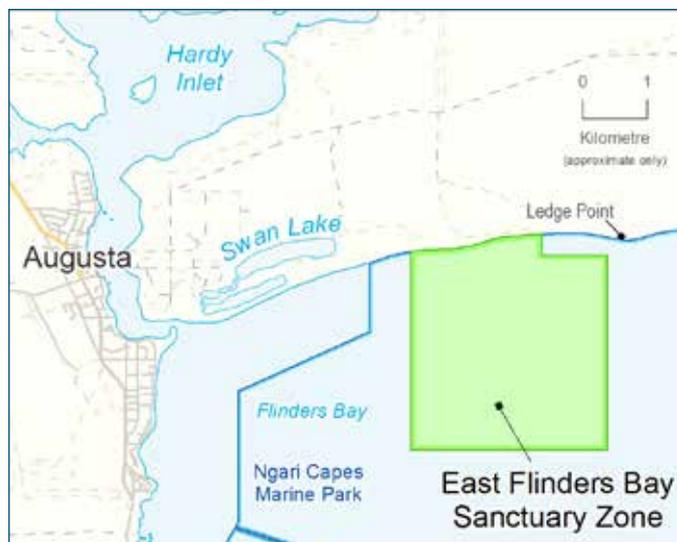
News from the Ngari Capes Marine Park

No. 7: Autumn 2016

Welcome to the seventh issue of *Ngari Tales*, a newsletter for everyone who wants to know more about the Ngari Capes Marine Park: one of Western Australia's most recently created State marine parks, located in the south-west of WA.

Proposed East Flinders Bay and Flinders Island Sanctuary Zones

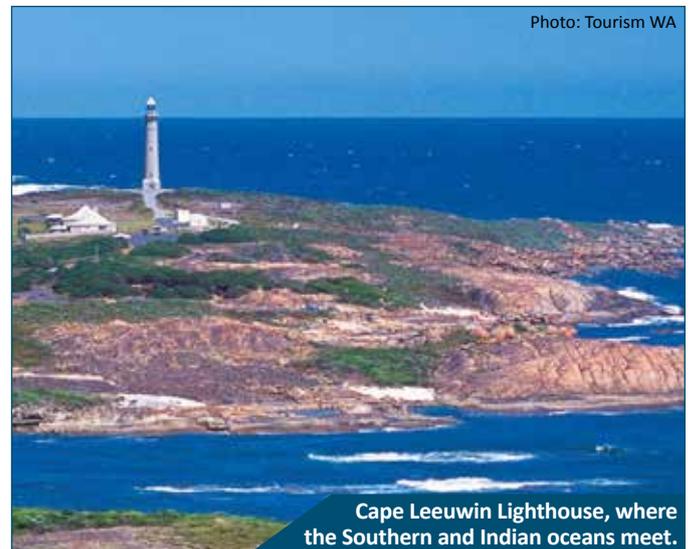
Flinders Bay is a crescent-shaped bay opening to the south between Cape Leeuwin and Black Point. The coastline on the western side of Flinders Bay is one of the only east-facing coastlines in southern Western Australia. Hardy Inlet opens into Flinders Bay, draining the Blackwood and Scott Rivers.



The proposed East Flinders Bay Sanctuary zone is the 5th largest sanctuary zone in the Ngari Capes Marine Park and will allow for shore-based fishing activities at the eastern (Ledge Point) end of the zone.

The habitats of the East Flinders Bay Sanctuary Zone are influenced by the Southern Ocean swells and the ocean is rarely calm. During autumn and winter, the eastward-flowing Leeuwin current combined with heavy swells and strong wave action move sediment eastwards within the bay.

The proposed Flinders Bay Island Sanctuary Zone provides a unique offshore habitat for many species and the islands host seabirds and New Zealand fur seal haul outs. The shallow reefs are perfect for foraging seal pups that can't yet dive down deep.

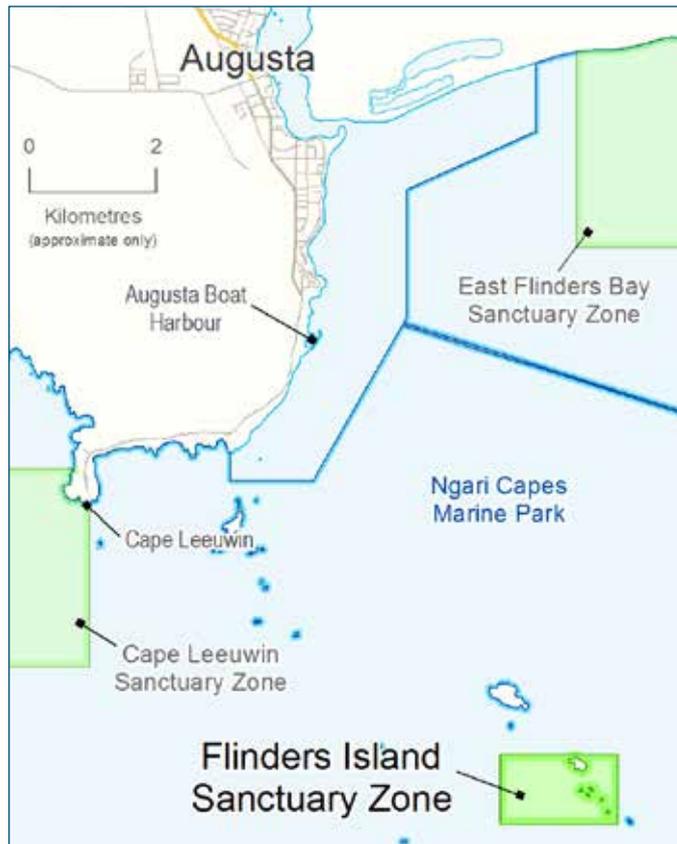


Whalers and sealers (American, British and French) hunted along this coast in the early 1800s. Whaling was an important commercial activity in the area during the 19th century. The Cape Leeuwin lighthouse, jetties and numerous cottages built here during this time reflect a strong maritime heritage.



Whales are still hunted in Flinders Bay but for a different reason. Commercial tourism is an important activity in the marine park, with whale-watching generating significant revenue for local businesses. People come from near and far to experience the wonder of seeing a humpback whale up close or watching southern right whale cows with their calves.

Flinders Bay is a calving and nursing ground for southern right whales, with approximately 10 per cent of the entire Australian population of southern right whales coming to the bay annually. The southern right whale is a flagship species for the South West region and is gradually recovering from past exploitation.

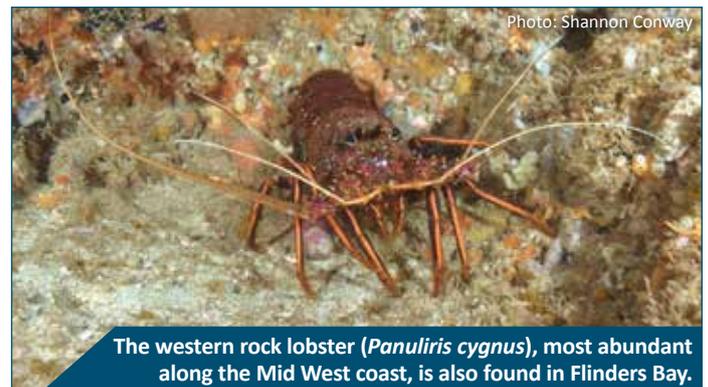


In Flinders Bay, seaweed (macroalgae) is more dominant than seagrass, with over 150 species recorded. Thirteen species of seagrass found in the bay form perennial dense-to-medium beds inshore, while offshore beds are ephemeral and sparse. This diverse range of algae and seagrass is home to a high abundance and diversity of marine invertebrates in the Ngari Capes Marine Park.



You can find ascidians, calcareous sponges, octocorals (which have eight-fold radial symmetry) and soft corals, crustaceans and gastropods. The most dominant and diverse invertebrates in Flinders Bay are abalone, seastars, sea urchins and sea cucumbers.

The commercially important western rock lobster (*Panulirus cygnus*) also lives in Flinders Bay. This large benthic invertebrate is an important part of the food web on the inner shelf as juveniles are prey for octopus, cuttlefish, baldchin groper, blue groper, dhufish, pink snapper and breaksea cod.



A diverse range of finfish lives in Flinders Bay. As well as those already mentioned, harlequin fish, Australian salmon, tailor, Australian herring and black bream are present in the bay. The white shark has been reported in the area, probably attracted by the young seals on Flinders Island. The bronze whaler shark constitutes a significant proportion of the catch for local commercial fisheries. Flinders Bay is also home to many seabirds, including rock parrots, little penguins, bridled terns, Pacific gulls, ospreys and albatross.

Salmon season in the Capes

The great Australian salmon spawning migration occurs between late February and late April most years. Mature salmon start their journey as far south as Tasmania, working their way up the WA coastline towards Cape Leeuwin, and most spawning happens between Black Point and Cape Naturaliste. The salmon larvae don't remain in this area for long, swept back by currents and strong winds to the southern regions where the migration began. When environmental conditions are right, migrating salmon will school near the shore, moving



along the beach, giving shore and boat fishers a chance to catch these elusive fish.

For those who want to catch one of these beauties, patience, common sense and restraint are a necessary combination for a successful and enjoyable experience. Not only are they hard to catch, the sudden run of fish may attract a lot of anglers into a relatively small area, all trying their luck at the same time and on the same school. Unfortunately, at peak times and at the start of the season, tempers can fray between shore-based fishers and boat fishers and even within each group. Simple etiquette - such as not casting your line or driving your boat directly into a school of fish, keeping your boat a safe distance from shore fishers, avoiding other people's lines and respecting others' space - goes a long way to ensuring everyone has a good salmon fishing experience. These guidelines will also help everyone get a 'fair go' at catching one.



Early morning salmon fishers in the Capes.

Salmon fishing can also take people to some of the most picturesque places along the coast, including National Parks and Reserves. Sometimes bins are not available, so fishers and coastal visitors will need to secure rubbish from blowing away in a lidded bucket or back pack and after fishing take their rubbish with them. It is encouraging to see that many fishers are doing the right thing by disposing of their rubbish and other material correctly.

Regrettably, there is a minority of fishers who leave fish waste and rubbish around popular fishing spots. Anything made of plastic, especially fishing line, is a serious threat to the environment as it can take decades to break down, entangle wildlife and choke marine creatures. It is important for all users to recognise that the coast is used by the whole community and a tourism draw card so we need to preserve its natural beauty for everyone to enjoy.

Creature Feature – marine gastropods

By Cindy Bessey, Department of Parks and Wildlife

Gastropods are a class of invertebrate organisms more commonly called snails and slugs. They are characterised by a well-defined head with sensory tentacles, a calcium carbonate shell, and a muscular foot, but some are more slug-like in appearance.

Although gastropods are often found in gardens, ponds, and woodland areas, they are also common in marine

environments, such as the intertidal zone, or even within the ocean at great depths. In fact, over one third of the world's 62,000 described living species of gastropods are found in marine environments. Limpets, abalone, periwinkles, and nudibranchs are all examples of marine gastropods.

The intertidal reefs of the Ngari Capes Marine Park host a plethora of marine gastropods. The granite reefs throughout the marine park are home to thousands of limpets attached securely to the rock surface. Limpets adhere to the rocks by secreting glue-like mucus and even when moving, they can stick to the rocks using suction. Limpets typically live in one place on the rocks, and commonly return home to the same spot after grazing on nearby algae.



Limpets attached to granite rock at Quarry Bay.

In contrast, the limestone reefs throughout the marine park are dominated by dove snails and beautiful jewel-top snails. These snails are small and active, and are commonly found on the fronds of algae.



A beautiful jewel-top snail seen on the limestone reef at Kilcarnup.

More than 50 species of marine gastropods were seen during a recent survey of intertidal reefs throughout the Ngari Capes Marine Park. Some of the more colourful, conspicuous, and charismatic species observed were bubble snails and nudibranchs. The common name of bubble snails comes from the thin bubble-like shell of many species within the Order Cephalaspidea, and the species *Hydatina physis* was seen over sand amongst the granite cobble fields in Flinders Bay.



Bubble snail (*Hydatina physis*) seen amongst granite cobble fields in Flinders Bay.

Nudibranchs lack a shell altogether, except in their larval stage. Their name is derived from the Latin words for 'naked' and 'gills', which describes the cluster of gills usually arranged on the back of the animal. Two nudibranchs from the genus *Jorunna*, which show purple tentacles on the head and exposed gills on the back, were observed on the limestone platforms at Gnarabup.



Photo: Matt Dasey

Nudibranchs (*Jorunna* sp.) seen on limestone platforms at Gnarabup.

Be aware of blue-ringed octopuses

Blue-ringed octopuses are tiny creatures that start their lives about the size of a pea, growing to around the size of a golf ball.

While resting, the blue-ringed octopus is pale brown to yellow in colour. It is not an aggressive animal and when disturbed, flattens its body out to hide. The blue rings on its body only light up as a warning when the animal feels threatened.

Although small, the blue-ringed octopus is one of the deadliest animals in the sea, producing an extremely toxic neuromuscular venom, similar to tetrodotoxin found in pufferfish and cone shells, if provoked. This venom, which paralyses muscles, is created by bacteria in its salivary gland.

Further information

For more information about the Ngari Capes Marine Park or to register to receive this newsletter electronically contact:

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If bitten, the severity of the bite and the levels of toxin injected determine the levels of response required, with the worst-case scenarios resulting in sudden paralysis and death if medical care is not provided. There is no anti-venom and the only treatment is ongoing cardio pulmonary resuscitation (CPR) until the poison dissipates. Despite the risks and many bites each year, there have been only three known fatalities in Australia in the last 100 years.

Blue-ringed octopuses occupy shallow coral and tidal rock pools and sheltered and moderately exposed reef and sand environments. They can also be found inside shells, discarded bottles, craypots and other debris on the sea floor.

Within the Capes region a number of these tiny octopuses have recently been reported hiding inside cray-pots and shells. Therefore, we advise always 'look but don't touch', wear gloves when pulling crab or cray-pots and seek immediate medical assistance if a bite is suspected.



Photo by Teguh Tirtaputra

Watch out for the tiny blue-ring octopus hiding in rocks and debris.