

Ngari Tales

News from the Ngari Capes Marine Park

No. 4: Spring 2014

Welcome to the fourth 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.

Navy helps out to remove marine rope hazard

A 150 metre long dreadlocked mess of long line fishing rope, known locally as "the rope", has been successfully removed from Wyadup beach in Ngari Capes Marine Park.

The Department of Parks and Wildlife, Department of Fisheries, Tangaroa Blue Foundation and Royal Australian Navy recently joined forces to conduct a clean-up on the beach.



Although the weather was wet and windy, this didn't dampen the spirits of personnel from *HMAS Stirling* and Fleet Support Unit – West and the submarine force, who made the journey south to lend their time, skills and muscle for the admirable cause of marine conservation.

To get to the rope's location was a reasonable trek along the Cape to Cape Track and then the rocky shoreline, with the nearest vehicle access more than half a kilometre away. The rope was cut into manageable lengths by cable cutters and angle grinders powered by a portable generator that was kindly donated by Bunnings in Busselton.

The rope was then bagged and carted up to the Navy truck waiting to take it away.

The final count was 106 bags of debris weighing a total of 1.329 tonnes.

At Wyadup you may notice a small amount of rope still tangled in rock in the wash zone. This unfortunately was inaccessible due to the large 4 metre swells on the day. With calmer summer weather the job will be completed!

10th Annual WA Beach Clean Up: October 11 and 12

If you haven't yet been involved in the annual Tangaroa Blue WA Beach Clean Up, this is the year to do it. In October 2014 the Tangaroa Blue Foundation is celebrating 10 years of outstanding community effort to remove and record marine debris from beaches all around the state.

The information gathered during the clean-up is used to find ways to cut down marine debris in our oceans, which will help reduce impacts on marine life and seabirds. To register your involvement or for more information visit www.tangaroablue.org or email info@tangaroablue.org



The Great Migration

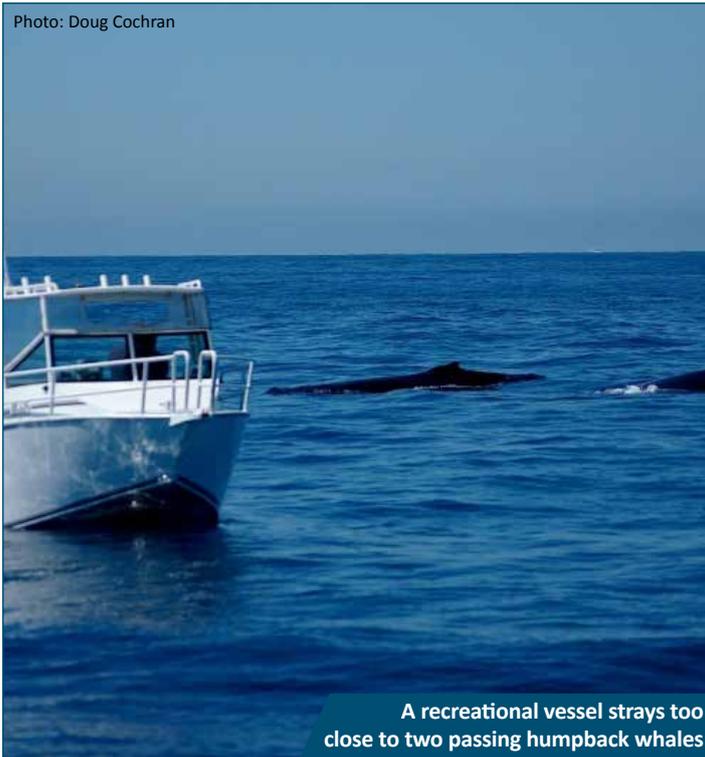
As well as the annual ngari (salmon) migration, Ngari Capes Marine Park is host to another of nature's most inspiring migrations – that of the humpback whale. Humpback whales migrate a greater distance than any other mammal on earth. The great wildebeest migration of Africa and the caribou migration of North America are surpassed by the 7,000 km journey taken by the humpback whale between the breeding grounds in the Kimberley and their feeding grounds at the edge of the sea ice in Antarctica.

The whale migration reminds us of the interconnectedness of the many different habitats within our oceans.

Along with the humpback whales, southern right whales and blue whales are likely to be observed in the winter and spring months in Ngari Capes Marine Park.

There are several large tour vessels taking customers out on Flinders Bay and Geographe Bay to observe these giants up close. Shore-based whale watching is also very popular from Cape Leeuwin Lighthouse, Cape Naturaliste Lighthouse and Point Picquet.

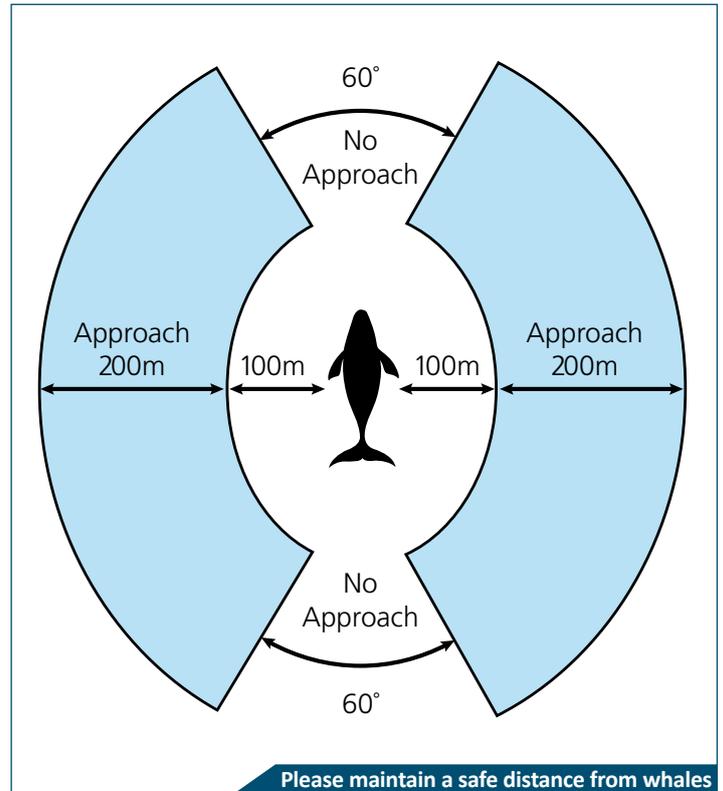
Photo: Doug Cochran



A recreational vessel strays too close to two passing humpback whales

Vessel owners are reminded to approach whales respectfully and lawfully. The most important thing is not to approach within 100 metres of a whale – this is for the safety of people on board and for the animal. If a whale approaches your vessel, either place your motor in neutral or move slowly away from the animal, at a speed of less than five knots. Those in smaller boats or on surfboards or kayaks could put themselves at risk if they stray too

close. Whales are large, powerful creatures and they may react violently if feeling threatened. Boaters should leave the area if a whale exhibits behaviours such as diving for prolonged periods or swimming evasively. This means that the animal may be distressed or disturbed.



Please maintain a safe distance from whales

If you would like further information on whale watching in Ngari Capes Marine Park, visit your local Parks and Wildlife office or tourism centre.

Whale app to help get the big picture on WA migration

A new app is now available to encourage users of Western Australia's coastal waters to assist with whale migration research, by reporting sightings on their smart phones.

Whale Sightings WA can be downloaded free from iTunes and it enables water users to submit their sightings of whales along the coast. An Android version is also being developed.

Department of Fisheries scientist Dr Jason How said the app had been developed in collaboration with the Department of Parks and Wildlife to help researchers learn more about whale movement patterns and assist in ongoing work to reduce the potential for entanglements with fishing gear.

"The new app provides a practical way that water users can support researchers in providing information to assist with the safe passage of whales," Dr How said.

“At present, there is little known about the details of where and when the many species of whales make their journeys through the State’s coastal waters.

“We ask boat users to observe the whale watching guidelines, but to use the app to report whale sightings they make along the WA coast.”

Parks and Wildlife Senior Marine Wildlife Officer Doug Coughran said it was currently estimated that more than 30,000 whales travelled along the WA coast each year.

“Some of these whales get entangled in fishing gear and it can be difficult to disentangle them. The public’s help through the app will greatly add to our knowledge about whale migration and enables users of the marine environment to play a role in protecting whales,” Mr Coughran said.

Federal Government funding was secured through the Fisheries Research and Development Corporation to help make this app possible, and to carry out further research on possible whale entanglement mitigation measures in WA.

Dr How encouraged water users to use the app to begin reporting whale sightings.

“This app has been designed to make it easy to log a whale sighting and if you are not sure what species it might be, there are photos and diagrams to assist you,” he said.



Parks and Wildlife is the lead agency for whale conservation in Western Australia and whale watching guidelines are available from their website at www.dpaw.wa.gov.au

People are urged to report any sick or injured whales to the **Wildcare Helpline** on **9474 9055**.

Spring fishing season dates in Ngari Capes

If you are going fishing this spring remember to take a note of these dates for the spring season:

Fishing season closure

Demersal finfish

Closed season:

**15 October to
15 December** (inclusive).



Fishing season commences

Abalone

Season opens:

1 October
(closes 15 May the following year).



Western rock lobster

Season opens:

15 October
(closes 30 June the following year).



Please remember: a recreational fishing licence is required if you are fishing from a boat or if fishing for abalone or Western rock lobster. For more information about licences, size limits and bag limits, visit www.fish.wa.gov.au

A reflection on winter inside Geographe Bay

by Sophie Teede, Busselton Underwater Observer Manager

Over the winter months in the southwest, the weather conditions produce quite a different environment for the local flora and fauna. The calm, clear waters of summer are replaced with rough, turbid seas and the beaches undergo a rapid change.

Pounding waves on the shore create a steeper incline of the beach as the sand is mobilised by the waves. As low pressure weather systems with cold fronts cross over the coast, the large associated swells bring up from the sea an abundance of seagrass wrack. Seagrass wrack serves an important part of the coastal ecosystem. It is mainly the dead seagrass that has been cleaned out of the meadows by repetitive wave action which ends up on the shore, although in severe weather, healthy seagrass can also be uprooted. The most common species observed in wrack inside Geographe Bay are wireweed (*Amphibolis griffithi*) and strapweed (*Posidonia australis*).

Huge mounds of seagrass wrack are evident on the shores of Geographe Bay from June until September. Here, it provides numerous benefits to the coastal

ecosystem. Firstly, it can help to counteract coastal erosion, protecting the sands of the beaches by providing a fibrous cushion on which the waves can impact. As the waves impact the wrack further, it is compacted into the sand and essentially holds piles of sand together, preventing it from washing away. Secondly, as the seagrass wrack decomposes it provides a nutrient source which benefits life on the shore. Crustaceans, including amphipods, isopods and crabs feed on the decaying leaves and flying coastal insects are often seen around a wrack mound. Nesting birds such as seagulls and terns will also use dead seagrass leaves to build and line their nests.

Photo: Sophie Teede



Seagrass wrack on winter beaches

Often the common fishes of seagrass habitats are also caught up in the wrack and include leatherjackets and boxfish and these may be found stranded on the beach. Occasionally yellow-bellied sea snakes are also observed and, as always on the beaches, care should be taken as these reptiles may still be alive after being stranded.

Sub-Antarctic fur seal pays a visit

Since the beginning of July there have been regular sightings of a sub-Antarctic fur seal in the Ngarì Capes Marine Park. The seal is distinctive in that it has a large injury on its back, possibly inflicted by a shark. Parks and Wildlife staff have been monitoring the welfare of the seal as it moves about the coast.

Sub-Antarctic fur seals are not resident in the marine park. They breed on the sub-Antarctic islands and those wandering to the Australian mainland are mostly juvenile males. They dive in shallow waters at night, feeding on fish and squid.

Photo: Alexandra Nichols



This seal is possibly from the Heard Island population of sub-Antarctic fur seals, almost 4,000 km from Cape Leeuwin. They were hunted for their pelts throughout the 19th century and their population is recovering in most areas, but the Heard Island population remains endangered.

Parks and Wildlife would appreciate any reports of sightings of sub-Antarctic fur seals. They can be distinguished from other fur seals as they have a pointier snout and a creamy-yellow chest and face.

Further information

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

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