

Ngari Tales

News from the Ngari Capes Marine Park

No. 2: Summer 2013/2014

Welcome to the second issue of the *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.

Ngari Capes – a wonderland of marine life

In establishing the Ngari Capes Marine Park, the Western Australian government has officially recognised the incredible range of marine life that occurs here, and the need to provide special care for this special place. Complex habitats combine with a mix of the warm Leeuwin Current and the cooler Capes Current to support diverse tropical and temperate plant and animal communities. Some examples of these important values include:

- A wide range of both tropical and temperate fish, including more than 150 species of reef fish.
- 13 whale species and three species of dolphins have been recorded. Migrating humpback and southern right whales pass close to the coast, providing excellent opportunities for whale watchers.

Photo: Sue Barstow



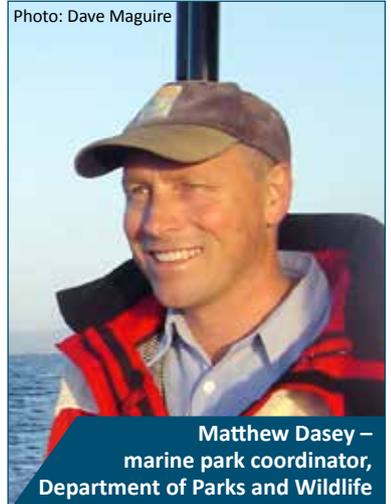
Red sea star (*Pentagonaster dubeni*), Busselton Jetty

- Invertebrate species are particularly diverse due to the wide range of habitats available. There are at least 100 species of echinoderms (sea urchins and sea stars) and 115 species of crabs, prawns and shrimp.
- Geographe Bay supports the largest temperate seagrass meadows in Western Australia and there are 13 species in the marine park.
- At least 26 species of marine algae are found on shallow reefs in the marine park.
- Small patches of coral are dotted throughout the park. There are 14 species, with five occurring at their southern limit at Cape Naturaliste.

Meet a marine park team member

Matthew grew up around the waterways and beaches of Sydney and studied marine biology in New South Wales. After many years of working in aquatic science studies, he progressed to working in marine conservation, firstly as a marine park ranger in Byron Bay then in WA's Mid West, where he was the coordinator of Jurien Bay Marine Park for several years.

Photo: Dave Maguire



Matthew Dasey –
marine park coordinator,
Department of Parks and Wildlife

When asked to summarise his initial observations of the South West he responded, "I'm utterly thrilled to be living in this incredible part of the world.

"I've lived in some amazing places and the marine environment of this area must rank as one of the most pristine in Australia. I'm pleased to be a part of something that's in place to protect it for the future. I'm looking forward to seeing the Ngari Capes Marine Park develop into something the community takes great pride in and ownership of over the next few years."

Blue marlin beachings a mystery

During the winter and early spring of 2013 an unusual number of blue marlin washed up on beaches along WA's south coast, including two within six weeks in Flinders Bay, Augusta.

One of the largest and fastest fish in the world, blue marlin is a tropical species not commonly seen in southern Australia or in nearshore waters. The frequency of reported marlin beachings last year sparked widespread interest, with many people asking why they travelled so far south and what could have caused their deaths.



Confirmed blue marlin beachings in 2013 include:

11/6/13 3.68 m Two Peoples Bay, Albany, weighing 540 kg

24/7/13 3.65 m Parry Beach, Denmark

3/8/13 3.48 m Augusta

18/9/13 2.5m (est.) Augusta

(Measurements from fork of tail to tip of lower jaw)

Distribution and movement patterns of marlin in waters off southern Australia are not well known, although in the Pacific they have a large range and may cross oceans on a yearly basis. Abnormally warm ocean temperatures off WA's west and south coasts in recent years have provided favourable conditions for tropical species to extend their distribution into southern waters.

There is no information to suggest any other cause of death of the marlin other than natural processes. When possible, the Department of Fisheries takes samples for laboratory analysis in an effort to determine the cause of death, but samples need to be very fresh to establish this accurately.

Redmap

The Redmap (Range Extension Database Mapping) project is collecting data in partnership with the community to help reveal whether marine species are extending their range due to extreme climatic events or climate change. The more reports the project receives the better.

Collecting long-term data on the presence of unusual or uncommon species through Redmap may help scientists better understand changes occurring in our oceans, including deaths of marlin in the future.

We know many people are still catching or spotting marine species that Redmap and its network of marine scientists would like to know about. We encourage everyone who is on or near the ocean to log any unusual or uncommon marine species they encounter.

Species can be logged through Redmap's website at www.redmap.org.au or via the new Redmap app for smartphones and tablets, downloaded free of charge from the iTunes and Google Play stores.

Concerns for Australian herring

A recent stock assessment of Australian herring has flagged concerns for this popular species. The findings of the study suggest that the Australian herring stock has been heavily fished over the past two decades and is now predominantly based on young fish entering the fishery each year.

Recruitment of herring has been low since 2000. This may be a consequence of high fishing pressure during a period of environmental change that has been unfavorable for herring.

Since 2000, the Leeuwin Current has been steadily increasing in strength and coastal waters around south-west WA have been warming. These changes seem to have been unfavorable for successful spawning by herring.

In 2011, extremely unusual oceanographic conditions occurred along the south-western coast of WA, including summer water temperatures greater than three degrees Celsius above average in some areas. Recruitment of juvenile herring in 2011 was among the lowest ever recorded.



Illustration © R. Swainston/anima.net.au

Australian herring

While herring occur between Shark Bay in WA around to the south coast and as far east as Port Phillip Bay, they only spawn on the lower west coast of WA between May and June.

Small juveniles settle during winter and spring in nursery sites along the south coast and as far east as Victoria. Some juveniles also settle close to where they spawn, particularly in Geographe Bay, which is thought to be an important source of recruitment for the west coast fishery.

Herring mature at the age of two to three years and migrate back to the lower west coast of WA to spawn. In years when the Leeuwin Current is strong the young adults do not migrate as far up the west coast, which in turn affects juvenile recruitment success.

The Department of Fisheries is consulting with WA's peak fishing bodies (Recfishwest and the WA Fishing Industry Council) to work through the science and formulate management responses to aid the recovery of the herring stock.

You can help researchers by donating herring frames (skeletons with head and guts intact), and in doing so, you could win a trip for two to the Montebello Islands, courtesy of Montebello Island Safaris. For more information, visit www.fish.wa.gov.au/frames.

Shore fishing in Ngari Capes

Interested in where you will be able to go shore fishing once zones for the marine park are in place? This is one of the most common questions being asked, yet shore fishers can be assured that they will have plenty of options.

Sanctuary zones or 'no take' areas that preclude all forms of fishing will occupy only 11 per cent of the marine park area. The impact of these zones on shore fishers will be even less since many of the sanctuary zones will not include the shore line at all, or will only include it in some places.

The net result is that 93 per cent of the shoreline of the marine park will be open to fishing. In addition, in two shore-based special purpose zones at Cosy Corner and Eagle Bay, fishers will be permitted to fish from the shore (while standing on the shore), but will not be allowed to fish from a boat or go spearfishing.

The maps (right) provide examples of different ways that the sanctuary zones will be located in nearshore areas of the marine park. For a complete map of the zoning scheme and locations of all sanctuary zones, pick up a copy of *Ngari Capes Marine Park Frequently Asked Questions* available at Department of Parks and Wildlife (DPaW) and Department of Fisheries offices in Busselton or at www.fish.wa.gov.au.



(Example A) The sanctuary zone will meet the shoreline. **No fishing** of any type will be permitted (including no shore fishing). Only the Wyadup, Yallingup and Cape Leeuwin sanctuary zones will meet the shore in this way.



(Example B) At Injidup Beach there will be a gap between the shoreline and the whole landward boundary of the sanctuary zone. Within this gap will be the general use zone. **Fishing will be permitted within this gap**, which includes the shore. **No fishing** will be permitted in the **sanctuary zone**. Fishers on a boat and spearfishers will need to be careful not to stray into the sanctuary zone area.



(Example C) The sanctuary zone meets the shore at Meelup. **No fishing** will be permitted in this area (including no shore fishing). At Point Picquet and Eagle Bay there will be a gap between the shore and the sanctuary zone. Within this gap will be the special purpose: shore-based activities zone. **Line fishing from shore will be permitted** in this area but **boat fishing and spearfishing will not be allowed**. Line fishers must be standing on the shore.

Beach clean-up turns up big items

It seems big wash-ups was a common theme in the marine park for the winter and spring of 2013.

One of the largest items found during the 9th annual WA Beach Clean-up in October was a section of rope at Wyadup Bay estimated to be up to five kilometres long! The rope is twisted and wrapped around itself to create a thick section about 150 metres long tangled along a rocky shoreline. Each metre of the twisted rope is estimated to weigh about 20 kilograms.

Coordinated by Tangaroa Blue Foundation, the clean-up had a strong contingent of volunteers removing marine debris and rubbish from beaches all over WA. As usual the beaches of the South West Capes had excellent coverage and hundreds of people turned out in force to collect, count and record debris.

Traditionally, DPaW staff have worked with Tangaroa Blue to remove items from the national park shoreline that are too large or heavy for volunteers to remove themselves.

This year the new marine park rangers are faced with an interesting logistical challenge. A number of options are being investigated for the rope removal, including the potential to use a helicopter to carry sections of the rope back to the Wyadup carpark. This is a big project that will need the help of small summer swells for success.

We will keep you posted on progress in the next issue of *Ngari Tales*. Members of the community are asked not to attempt removing sections of rope on their own to prevent the risk of it breaking up and washing away before removal.



Photo: Heidi Taylor, Tangaroa Blue Foundation

Rope washed up at Wyadup Bay

Show time

Locals and visitors attending the Margaret River and Busselton shows during October and November were treated to some fantastic underwater footage of the marine park captured during Department of Fisheries monitoring activities.

Marine park rangers from DPaW were kept busy working alongside Department of Fisheries community education officers at the events. Free fish-friendly tackle packs promoting lead-free sinkers, barbless hooks and circle hooks proved popular among local fishers, while kids loved the new DPaW show bags filled with fun marine park activities and a marine wildlife guide.

Further informaton

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

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Creature feature: weedy seadragon

Our feature species this edition is the weedy seadragon (*Phyllopteryx taeniolatus*). One of only two species of seadragons that occur worldwide (the other is the leafy seadragon), it is only found in southern Australia from the Abrolhos Islands in WA to the coast of Tasmania, up to Port Stephens in NSW.



Photo: Sandra Rennie

Weedy seadragon, Geographe Bay

Weedy seadragons are similar to seahorses, to which they are related, and have a bony-plated body, no scales, an elongated snout and leaf-like flaps of skin that protrude from their body on bony stalks.

They live along the edge of rocky reefs and in seaweed beds and seagrass meadows. These seadragons feed on plankton, sea lice, larval fish and small crustaceans.

While they are masters of disguise, looking and moving through the water just like drifting seaweed, they are not strong swimmers and are often found washed ashore after storms.

Weedy seadragons have an amazing life history. The female lays eggs directly on to the male's tail, where they are fertilised. Dad then carries these eggs for two months before babies 2.5 centimetres long hatch and disperse. The young seadragons double in size in just three weeks and by two years they can reach their maximum size of about 46 centimetres.

Weedy seadragons live for up to 10 years and their populations are vulnerable to habitat damage.

Weedy seadragons are a protected species in WA along with most other states in Australia, although some commercial operators are licensed to collect them for the aquarium trade.

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