

A valuable heritage

Western Australia's islands are an enormously valuable resource. They provide essential habitat for over one third of Australia's critically endangered and endangered species, many of which occur nowhere else in the world. Islands are important breeding and resting places for seals, migratory shorebirds, seabirds and turtles. Some islands have unique species, subspecies or populations of animals and plants, and remain largely unchanged from pre-European settlement times.

Australia has the highest rate of mammal extinctions in the world. Offshore islands have played a valuable role in minimising these losses, providing a refuge for several native species that have disappeared from the mainland. These species have survived because their islands are free of non-indigenous species like foxes, cats, black rats, house mice, rabbits, pigs and cane toads – even invertebrates like the yellow crazy ant have been responsible for extinctions on islands where they have been introduced.

More than 3420 islands, islets and rocks are found off the coast of WA; more than any other state or territory. About 530 of them are larger than 20ha and 220 are more than 100ha.

Most WA islands south of the Kimberley are nature reserves, conservation parks or national parks vested in the Conservation and Parks Commission of Western Australia and managed by the Department of Parks and Wildlife. Their reservation reflects their great importance to the conservation of biodiversity. Many Kimberley islands are Aboriginal reserves and approval to visit them is required from the Department of Aboriginal Affairs.

Threats

The establishment of non-indigenous species is the single greatest threat to island environments. Introduced predators can rapidly eradicate native mammals, birds, reptiles and invertebrates, while introduced grazers destroy habitat and compete with native species for resources. Weeds can overrun and eliminate native plants and alter habitats to the point where they no longer suit resident native species.

Eradicating non-indigenous species – where possible – is always expensive and time consuming. In some cases eradication is not possible without extreme damage to the island's biodiversity conservation values.

Left to right: Introduced species threatening WA's islands include buffel grass (Cenchrus ciliaris), black rats and yellow crazy ants. Photos – Nicole Godfrey, Parks and Wildlife and Ben Hoffmann/CSIRO



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Marine turtles use sandy island beaches for nesting. Photo – Parks and Wildlife

WA's islands are worth conserving. Please help protect them.

Leave nothing but footprints, take nothing but photographs and memories.



Crested terns nesting on a WA island. Photo – Holger Woyt/Parks and Wildlife

Introduced species cause extinctions on islands

How you can help:

- Minimise disturbance by observing wildlife from a safe distance
- Keep your boat clean of soil, seeds and living organisms
- Leave your pets at home
- Check your clothes and shoes, your passengers, and everything you're taking on your boat – including food – for soil, seeds and living organisms
- Bring all your rubbish home
- Use the sea for bodily wastes
- Only camp where permitted (check with the local Parks and Wildlife office).

For more information

Contact details for your local Department of Parks and Wildlife office can be found at www.dpaw.wa.gov.au

Front cover: St Andrew Island. WA islands represent a broad range of habitat types. Photo – Lesley Gibson/Parks and Wildlife



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Conserving Western Australia's Islands



Visitor guide



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RECYCLE

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Prevention is the best solution

Quarantine is vital

There is no way of predicting which species might survive and breed on islands if they arrived there, so the best method is to prevent their arrival. Some simple and easy to implement quarantine rules can help you to avoid introducing damaging organisms to WA's islands.

Please:

- **Keep your boat clean and check it before launching or leaving the mooring.** Ensure your boat is free of all soil, seeds, pests and native animals like geckoes and crickets. Maintain rat and mouse poison (wax blocks are best for damp places) in your boat and replace regularly, before it becomes unpalatable. Read and abide by manufacturer instructions for recommended replacement times and safe use of baits. Watch out for ant, wasp, bee and termite nests on boats and destroy them if found. Surface insecticide sprays in dry areas can be useful. If travelling by aircraft, the same rules apply.
- **Check your personal gear.** Before departing from your launch point, check your clothes (including trouser cuffs and socks), footwear, hats, towels, bags and any other gear you're taking for soil and seeds, and remove any found. Pay special attention to items that were put on the ground before being loaded. Check for seeds, spiders, cockroaches and other insects that often hitch a lift in camping gear, tools and other belongings.
- **Check your food.** Ensure your food is free from pests and diseases and store it in insect-proof containers. Avoid using cardboard boxes. Make sure that potential stowaways such as mice, cockroaches, crickets and spiders are not living in food containers. Separate bananas from bunches so that small animals can't hide in the nooks and crannies. Don't discard seeds from fruits and vegetables on islands.

Left to right: Native species found on WA islands include the giant slender blue-tongue, western barred bandicoot, red-capped plover, tropicbird and dibbler. Photos – David Pearson, Babs and Bert Wells, Stephen Breedveld/Parks and Wildlife and Susan Long



Tent Island. Photo – Carolyn Williams/Parks and Wildlife

- **Store fishing and other equipment in pest-proof containers.** Spray the container with household insecticide just before the trip. Use residual sprays in non-food areas, as they will kill bugs that walk over the treated surface for up to a couple of months, depending on exposure to weather (always abide by manufacturer instructions). Check that containers are free from soils and spider webs inside and out.
- **Bring all of your rubbish home.** Marine debris such as plastic bottles and bags, and discarded fishing gear are responsible for the deaths of millions of wildlife – birds, dolphins, turtles and so on – every year. Organic matter such as food waste often contains seeds and other materials that plants, fungi and moulds and even insects may grow from and should be taken home and disposed of responsibly.
- **Use the sea for bodily wastes** where possible (salt water and sunlight quickly destroy harmful bacteria). Otherwise dig a deep hole (more than 30cm deep) and cover completely.
- **Don't take pets to islands.** Dogs and other pets can disturb or kill native animals. Pets can be difficult to contain and control and should not be taken to islands. It is illegal to take domestic pets (other than guide dogs for the blind) into national parks and nature reserves. Companion dogs (medical reasons) are only permitted on the conservation estate with prior authorisation from Parks and Wildlife. Diseases and parasites such as ticks can be transferred between native species, pets and even human hosts.
- **Check** that your crew and guests are aware of and follow these quarantine rules.



Brachychiton viscidulus. Photo - Tricia Handasyde

Respect island conservation reserves

- Picnic on beaches or other naturally-cleared places.
- Fires are prohibited in nature reserves. Out of control fires can destroy entire island habitats, and collecting firewood destroys local habitat for reptiles, invertebrates and other species; please use portable fuel stoves.
- Leave sea lions and fur seals alone. Disturbing them may cause them to lose sleep and distress them. Seals are capable of inflicting a nasty bite and breeding seals can be extremely dangerous on land and in water.
- Respect seabird breeding colonies and observe from a safe distance – a good indicator that you are too close is that the behaviour of the birds changes from relaxing or feeding, to watching you, and then moving away as you approach. Disturbance can cause adults to abandon the nest which leaves eggs and chicks vulnerable to predation and death from exposure. Watch out for nesting burrows dug by shearwaters, little penguins, petrels and storm-petrels. They are easily damaged, and falling into them may result in injury to bushwalkers. Be particularly careful not to disturb bird nests on beaches; the nests may be almost impossible to see but if the adult birds use distraction displays they are likely to be nesting. Be aware of this behaviour and respond by moving to another area.
- Marine turtles nest on most island beaches from Shark Bay northwards. Females sometimes rest on the beach at the waterline during the breeding season to get a break from the males. Do not disturb nesting or resting turtles and do not use lights at night on or near turtle-nesting beaches – they can confuse hatchlings. Keep lighting on boats moored nearby to a minimum.
- Live on your boat. Camping is not permitted on islands that are conservation reserves unless approved as part of a management plan or with a special permit. Check with the local Parks and Wildlife office to be certain.



The northern quoll has declined in much of its mainland range due largely to the spread of the toxic cane toad. Photo – Lesley Gibson

Managing our islands

Parks and Wildlife has an enormous task managing the State's conservation reserves and natural biodiversity. This job can be made much easier with public support and assistance. You can help by:

- **Learning** more about WA's islands and informing your friends about island conservation values and how they can assist to protect these special places.
- **Reporting** sightings of introduced animals and weed establishment to the nearest Parks and Wildlife office. Photos and information such as location, date and a description of what you saw, potentially even boat name or registration for persons observed disregarding these guidelines, may aid the department in attending to damage such as new weed or rodent infestations while they are still manageable.
- **Asking** Parks and Wildlife for a more detailed quarantine protocol if you want additional quarantine advice or have approval to camp on an island.

Below left: Little penguin. Below right: Australian sea lions. Photos – Parks and Wildlife

