

# Dirk Hartog Island National Park *Return to 1616* Ecological Restoration Project

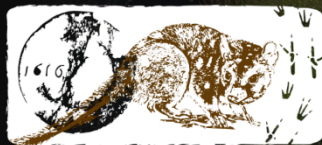


Education Package for Schools

Department of Biodiversity,  
Conservation and Attractions



Department of Biodiversity,  
Conservation and Attractions



DIRK HARTOG ISLAND  
RETURN TO 1616



# Background Information



## Dirk Hartog Island National Park (*Wirruwana*)

Dirk Hartog Island (*Wirruwana*) lies within Shark Bay, which is the traditional land of the Malgana people. They know the island as *Wirruwana* and call the Shark Bay area *Gutharraguda*, meaning 'two bays'.

The Malgana people are saltwater people, living around the water for the majority of their existence and have inhabited Shark Bay for more than 30,000 years.

Covering 63,300 hectares, Dirk Hartog Island National Park (*Wirruwana*) is WA's largest and most western island, and lies within the Shark Bay World Heritage Area, 850 kilometres north of Perth. The Shark Bay World Heritage Area was inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List in 1991 recognising the area for its special natural values.





# Return to 1616

## Background Information



### Dirk Hartog

On 25 October 1616, Dutch sea captain Dirk Hartog and the crew of the wooden-hulled, Dutch East India Company ship, Eendracht were the first Europeans to land on Western Australian soil when they set foot on the island. He nailed an engraved pewter plate to a post, leaving the first evidence of European landing in what would one day be called Australia. The pewter plate was inscribed with details of his journey. This was at Cape Inscription, also the site of an historic lighthouse and associated keeper's quarters.

The thin strip of land, dominated by scrub-covered sand dunes, is now named after the Dutch captain.

The island is about 80 kilometres long and varies between 3 and 12 kilometres wide. It was mined by Europeans for guano, used as a base for the pearling industry and was a pastoral station from 1860. In 2009, the majority of the land was purchased from the pastoralist by the Western Australian Government and declared a national park.





# Background Information



## Dirk Hartog Island Locals

The western side of the island is dominated by tall exposed cliffs while protected beaches and shallow bays comprise the eastern coastline. The low shrubby vegetation harbours a range of animal life including the Dirk Hartog Island black and white fairy-wren, which is found nowhere else, and the northern sandhill frog whose distribution is limited to the Shark Bay area and Dirk Hartog Island.

Seabirds abound along the protected eastern coast of Dirk Hartog Island with species nesting on islands close to shore. Wildlife in the waters close to the island can be observed from a boat or while snorkelling or diving – manta rays throughout the year, whale sharks around the northern coastline in May and June and humpback whales in September. Dugongs travel to warmer waters around the island when the rest of Shark Bay's waters are at their coldest.

Each summer thousands of loggerhead turtles return to Turtle Bay, the area where they emerged as hatchlings, to lay their eggs. Parks and Wildlife staff and volunteers have been monitoring this during annual surveys each January since 1994 and Turtle Bay is one of the most important loggerhead nesting areas in the southern hemisphere.







## *Return to 1616* Background Information

### Decimation of Native Species

The island has experienced significant changes since Dirk Hartog landed there on 25 October 1616. Sheep and goats changed the vegetation, their grazing habits and trampling reducing the food and shelter available for native species. Feral cat predation added to the pressures on native species and made it impossible for some to survive.

Ten species of small mammals and marsupials, and one small bird did not survive the changes to the island's ecology.



**Shark Bay  
bandicoot**



**Chuditch**



**Brush-tailed  
mulgara**



**Dibbler**



**Greater  
stick-nest  
rat**



**Desert  
mouse**



**Shark Bay  
mouse**



**Heath  
mouse**



**Woylie**



**Boodie**



**Western  
grasswren**

*The Return to 1616 Ecological Restoration Project  
brings hope for these species.*

# Return to 1616

## Background Information



### What is *Return to 1616*?

Welcome to the Dirk Hartog Island National Park *Return to 1616* Ecological Restoration Project.

When Dirk Hartog landed on the island in 1616, the flora and fauna was in pristine condition.

Since this time, the island's ecosystem has been degraded by:

- overgrazing by introduced animals such as goats and sheep, removing habitat and food for native animals
- the efficient hunting of native animal species by feral cats
- the proliferation of introduced weeds that smother native vegetation.

Their combined effect caused the extinction of many native animal species on the island.

In 2009, the majority of the island was purchased by the government and declared a national park. It is managed by the Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions (DBCA). *Return to 1616* aims to restore the island to a more natural state and involves the removal of introduced animal species, the reintroduction of native animal species and management of weeds. It has removed introduced grazing animal species and the native vegetation is rejuvenating. It has eradicated feral cats making the island safe for the return of native animal species. It is managing weeds and aims to prevent the future establishment of pest species.

Come on a journey to explore the project, discover how it's changing the face of the Dirk Hartog Island National Park and meet some of the native animals being returned.

Photo: Richard Manning







## Return to 1616 Background Information

### Help Arrives!

The exciting *Return to 1616* Ecological Restoration Project is now breathing life back into Dirk Hartog Island with the eradication of feral animals now complete. The reintroduction of species that became locally extinct on the island during its pastoral days began in 2018 and further translocations will take place over 12 years.

Habitats are recovering with sheep declared eradicated in June 2016 and goats in November 2017. The feral animal eradication program was completed in October 2018 with eradication of feral cats declared. Over the next twelve years the lost species and two additional marsupials are being translocated to Dirk Hartog Island.

Although fauna reconstruction officially began when feral cat eradication was declared, there was a pilot release of the two hare-wallaby species in August/September 2017. Twelve each of the rufous hare-wallaby and banded hare-wallaby were translocated from Bernier and Dorre Islands. Monitoring with the aid of radio and GPS collars fitted prior to release showed the hare-wallabies to be doing well and breeding, with eight joeys observed in May 2018, in addition to eight previously recorded.



The first full-scale translocation of hare-wallabies involved the release of 90 banded and 50 rufous hare-wallabies from Bernier and Dorre Islands Nature Reserve onto Dirk Hartog Island in October 2018 with another 49 rufous hare-wallabies the following year bringing the total number of translocated rufous hare-wallabies to 112. The total number of Shark Bay bandicoots translocated is 99.

Preview video (45 seconds):

<https://cdn-sharkbaywa.pressidium.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/Social-Media-video-MIN.mp4>

*In the spring of 2019, the hare-wallabies were joined by 26 dibblers, captive-bred at Perth Zoo and 71 Shark Bay bandicoots translocated from Bernier and Dorre Islands.*