

Penguin Island



Introduction

Situated in Shoalwater Islands Marine Park, just 42km south of Perth, Penguin Island is part of a chain of islands that boasts breathtaking marine and coastal scenery. This 12.5-hectare island is home to the largest colony of little penguins (*Eudyptula minor*) on the west coast of Australia and has an array of wildlife that amazes its visitors. The significance of the island as a seabird breeding site also creates a focus for wildlife and scientific research.

Educational and recreational opportunities, as well as natural history attractions, draw visitors of all ages to the island. They arrive direct by ferry or as part of a boat tour, with ferries leaving on the hour from Mersey Point on the mainland during island opening times.

The Parks and Wildlife Service at the Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions (DBCA) is responsible for managing the island and has progressively undertaken work to enhance the natural environment and provide essential facilities to make it one of the State's premier ecologically sustainable tourism destinations.

Below Penguin Island lies within Shoalwater Islands Marine Park.



Above Visitors to the island once stayed in the caves.

History

'Dreaming' stories describe the use of the Shoalwater Islands and shallow coastal lagoons by Aboriginal people. In the 1800s the area was occasionally visited by whalers and sealers for hunting, shelter and relaxation.

The first-known occupant of Penguin Island was Seaforth McKenzie who lived in a shack he called his 'manor' as well as in hollowed-out limestone caves. McKenzie used the island extensively between 1918 and 1926 and encouraged visits by holiday-makers who camped on the beach or in the roughly furnished caves.

Since 1935 a variety of organisations have managed the island for a range of uses. In 1966 Penguin Island was gazetted as a class 'A' reserve and vested in the National Parks Authority. Part of the island was leased to a private company that operated a number of small shacks as a holiday resort.

The National Parks Authority became part of the Department of Conservation and Land Management (CALM) in 1985, and in 1987 CALM negotiated the surrender of the private lease. Today DBCA's Parks and Wildlife Service manages the island as a conservation park for its plants and animals and for visitor education and recreation.



Visitor guide



Department of Biodiversity,
Conservation and Attractions



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Above Caspian terns breed and raise their young on the island during summer.
Below Sea lions occasionally visit the island.

Other inhabitants

The 75 plant species of Penguin Island are adapted to the harsh coastal environment and provide the habitats needed by breeding colonies of seabirds. Ground covers such as sea spinach (*Tetragonia decumbens*) protect the coastal dunes, anchoring the sand against erosion and providing cover for the island's five species of reptiles – marbled gecko (*Phyllodactylus marmoratus*), king's skink (*Egernia kingii*), southern skink (*Hemiergis initialis*), fence skink (*Cryptoblepharus plagiocephalus*) and Gray's legless lizard (*Delma grayii*). On the leeward slope of the island's central dunes a low woodland of coastal wattle grows to 2.5m high.

More than 30 species of birds have been observed on the island. These include seabirds such as the little penguin, bridled tern (*Sterna anaethetus*), silver gull (*Larus novaehollandiae*), pied cormorant (*Phalacrocorax varius*) and the Australian pelican (*Pelicanus conspicillatus*). It is also home to terrestrial species including the little eagle (*Hieraetus morphnoides*), singing honeyeater (*Lichenostomus virescens*) and buff-banded landrail (*Rallus philippensis*).

About 2,500 pairs of bridled terns, a tropical species, migrate to the islands of Shoalwater Bay in spring to breed. The birds leave the area in April to return to the north-west Sulawesi (Celebes) Sea.

Although no native mammals live on the island, Australian sea lions (*Neophoca cinerea*) which occupy nearby Seal Island occasionally visit the beaches.



Above Rescued penguins can be viewed at the Penguin Experience daily.

The Penguin Experience

This unique viewing facility allows visitors to view rescued little penguins that could not be rehabilitated and released to the wild. Little penguins are normally quite secretive and are rarely seen in the wild. Penguin information sessions commence at 10:30am, 12:30pm and 2:30pm during the island's open season and provide visitors an opportunity to learn about the intriguing life of little penguins. The glass walls of the pool provide an unrestricted underwater view of these delightful animals. The centre also has information panels and touch-tables to help visitors learn more about the island's inhabitants and history.

Guided interpretive walks can be pre-booked during the island's open season and depart from the Penguin Island Discovery Centre. These walks give visitors a rare insight into the island's natural and cultural history and Parks and Wildlife Service guides describe the special relationships of the islands plants and animals.

What to see and do

Access

Penguin Island is open between 9am and 4pm, with ferries operating from mid-September to early June. The island is closed to the public during winter, unless you are part of a guided tour. This minimises human disturbance to the penguins during their breeding season. Pets are not permitted on the island in order to protect the unique wildlife. If you are visiting by private vessel, please set your anchor on the sand off the beach at Penguin Island and leave the jetty clear for ferries and management vessels.

Weather conditions can change quickly, making crossing the sand bar very dangerous. The Parks and Wildlife Service strongly recommends against walking the sand bar to reach the island. When you're visiting the island, remain on the boardwalks, walk trails and sandy beaches and stay clear of limestone cliffs, caves and overhangs as they may be unstable and prone to collapse.

Picnics

There are no barbecues or kiosk facilities available on Penguin Island, and gas or spirit cooking appliances are not permitted. Composting toilets, grassed picnic sites and tables, shelters and fresh water are available in the facilities area (see map).

Fishing

You are welcome to line fish from the general use areas of the island. Netting is prohibited throughout the marine park. Fisheries bag limits and size regulations apply and please be considerate of other visitors.

Diving

The reefs and seagrass beds around the island are habitats for a variety of marine life. Examine the underwater world first hand by diving or snorkelling but be careful not to disturb the fragile ecosystems.

Spear guns or hand-held spears (gidgees) are not permitted on the island or in the surrounding waters. For more information please see the permitted uses map in the *Shoalwater Islands Marine Park* brochure, or download the Marine Parks WA App, free for Apple and Android.

Surfing and windsurfing/kitesurfing

The waters of Shoalwater Islands Marine Park are ideal windsurfing/kitesurfing. The western side of the island can produce good surfing, but please take care.



Little penguins

Penguin Island gets its name from the colony of little penguins, the smallest of the penguin family, which nest in sand depressions under dense vegetation and in limestone caves on the island.

This is the largest colony of little penguins in WA. Penguins are polyphase on land and make their landfall at Penguin Island in small flocks or rafts after sunset. Little penguins are vulnerable to human disturbance, especially when in moult, so it is important they are not approached too closely.

Penguins are the most specialised of all birds for life in the marine environment. Their feathers have evolved into a dense covering of pin-like structures that resist water and maintain the birds' streamlined contours, while vestigial wings have developed into flippers for underwater propulsion.

The number of penguins that come ashore begins to increase in early March. The onset of noisy courtship activities signals the start of breeding season. Little penguins normally lay a clutch of two eggs which are incubated by both parents over about 35 days.

They feed on small-school bait fish and squid, and may travel many kilometres from the island on feeding forays.

Top left and right Penguin Island supports WA's largest colony of little penguins. **Below** Boardwalks allow easy access to Penguin Island while protecting the fragile ecosystem.



Above Visitors have the opportunity to learn about the marine life at Penguin Island. *Photo – Michael Clitheroe*

More information

For information on ferry and tour services please contact Rockingham Wild Encounters on (08) 9591 1333 or visit rockinghamwildencounters.com.au.

Parks and Wildlife rangers regularly patrol Penguin Island, other islands and waters of the Shoalwater Islands Marine Park. Volunteers are on duty daily during the open season in the Penguin Experience and are happy to answer questions.

For more information

Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions
Parks and Wildlife Service, Swan Coastal District
PO Box 459
Wanneroo WA 6946
Phone: (08) 9303 7700

For information about Penguin Island and the Shoalwater Islands Marine Park visit dbca.wa.gov.au.



Department of **Biodiversity,
Conservation and Attractions**

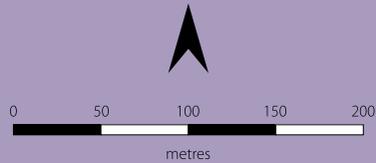


Top Shallow bays and beaches make the island an ideal location for snorkelling and swimming. *Photo – Michael Clitheroe* **Above** Timber boardwalks link the island's facilities and protect the environment. The boardwalks are suitable for wheelchairs and disabled access.

Information current at March 2018.
Information available in alternative formats on request.
Photos courtesy of DBCA unless otherwise stated.

Front cover Penguin Island is one of the State's premier ecologically sustainable tourism destinations. *Photo – Duncan Dodd*

ROCKFALL RISK



INDIAN OCEAN

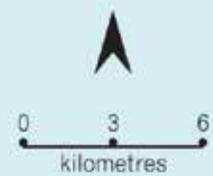
Shoalwater Special Purpose Zone

SAND BAR



Legend

- Bird sanctuary - **NO ENTRY**
- General use area
- General use zone
- Special purpose zone (Wildlife Conservation)
- Boardwalk
- Stairs
- Walk trail
- Diving/snorkelling
- Fishing (rod)
- Information
- Picnic area
- Ramp
- Scenic vistas
- Surfing
- Toilets
- Water (drinking)
- No rock climbing
- No walking



INDIAN OCEAN

