History

The island has been inhabited at various times by aboriginal people and a number of other groups. It is thought that the aboriginal people used the island for hunting, shelter and relaxation. The island was probably used by Aboriginal people, as suggested in the ‘Dreaming’ stories that relate to the area, for hunting, shelter and relaxation. The island was probably used by Aboriginal people, as suggested in the ‘Dreaming’ stories that relate to the area, 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 50 furnished caves.

Since 1935 a variety of organisations have managed the island for its plants and animals and for visitor education and recreation. Today Parks and Wildlife manages the island as a conservation class ‘A’ reserve and vested in the National Parks Authority. Part of Conservation and Land Management (CALM) in 1985, and in 1987 CALM negotiated the surrender of the private lease. 

The National Parks Authority became part of the Department of Parks and Wildlife in 1993. Penguin Island is one of the State’s premier ecologically sustainable tourism destinations.

Introduction

Penguin Island lies in the Shoalwater Islands Marine Park. Situated in the Shoalwater Islands Marine Park, just 42km south of Perth, Penguin Island is part of a chain of islands that boasts a history attractions, draw visitors of all ages to the island. They arrive direct by ferry or as part of a boat tour, with boats leaving opening times.

Information available in alternative formats on request.

For information about Penguin Island and the Shoalwater Islands Marine Park. Visitors have the opportunity to learn about the marine life at the Penguin Experience and are happy to answer questions. For more information, contact:

Visitor guide

More information

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

For more information, contact:

For information current at December 2014.
Penguin Island

Introduction

Situated in the 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 boats leaving on the hour from Mersey Point on the mainland during island opening times.

The Department of Parks and Wildlife 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.

History

The island was probably used by Aboriginal people, as suggested in the ‘Dreaming’ stories that relate to the area, although no evidence of their presence has been found. 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 park for its plants and animals and for visitor education and recreation.

The National Parks Authority became part of the Department of Conservation and Land Management (CALM) in 1995, and in 1997 CALM negotiated the surrender of the private lease. Today Parks and Wildlife manages the island as a conservation park for its plants and animals and for visitor education and recreation.

More Information

For more information, contact:

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


To order information or for assistance in accessing information in alternative formats please write to:

Penguin Island
Department of Parks and Wildlife
Swan Coastal District
PO Box 7002
Safety Bay WA 6169

Phone: (08) 9592 7802 or (08) 9592 9047 (10.00am–3.30pm)

The Penguin Experience and are happy to answer questions.

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 and is thought to contain as many as 600 breeding pairs. Penguins are nocturnal on land and make their landfall at Penguin Island in small flocks or rafts after sunset. Little penguins are thought to contain as many as 600 breeding pairs. Penguins are the most specialised of all birds for life in the marine environment. Their feathers have evolved into a dense 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.

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The National Parks Authority became part of the Department of Conservation and Land Management (CALM) in 1995, and in 1997 CALM negotiated the surrender of the private lease. Today Parks and Wildlife manages the island as a conservation park for its plants and animals and for visitor education and recreation.

Above: Visitors to the island once stayed in the caves.
The Penguin Experience

This unique viewing facility allows visitors to observe rescued and rehabilitated little penguins, which are normally quite secretive and rarely seen in the wild. Penguin commentaries and feeding times are at 10.30am, 12.30pm and 2.30pm during the island’s open season where visitors can discover the intrigue life of little penguins. The glass walls of the pool provide an unrestricted underwater view of these delightful birds and the centre has information panels and touch-tables to help learn more about the island’s inhabitants and history.

Guided interpretive walks, ‘The Penguin Island Waddle’, are conducted daily at 11.15am and 1.15pm during the island’s open season, departing from the Penguin Experience. These walks give visitors a rare insight into the island’s natural and cultural history as Parks and Wildlife guides describe the special relationships of the island’s plants and animals.

What to see and do

Access

Penguin Island is open during daylight hours, with ferries operating from mid September to early June. The island is closed for the rest of the year to minimise 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 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. Parks and Wildlife strongly recommends against walking the sand bar to reach the island. When you’re visiting the island, remain on the boardwalks, walktrails 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 please allow others the same experience and do not disturb the marine environment.

Spear guns or hand-held spears (gidgees) are not permitted on the island or in the surrounding waters.

Surfing and windsurfing/kitesurfing

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