

# **The Flora & Fauna of Shark Bay**





Across Shark Bay's diverse land and seascapes, there are thousands of unique species of plants and animals. Of these, many are considered endangered with some species being endemic to the region. Much of Shark Bay's natural ecology has been harmed in the past centuries due to the introduction of pastoral and invasive species by European settlers, and some irreversible damage was done which is still being dealt with today. However, conservation and restoration efforts have been initiated, and hopefully Shark Bay can return to the diverse and natural area that it used to be.

# UNIQUE SPECIES

Over 800 plant species can be found throughout Shark Bay, 53 of which are endemic to the region and 56 of which are priority species for conservation efforts. One unique plant habitat is the tree heath community, which is home to many of the flowering endemic plants. It consists of scattered trees, large shrubs, grasses, and other plants. The area is also known for sandalwood trees, which are harvested for timber, aromatic oils, and edible fruits. Sandalwood found within Shark Bay specifically easily resprouts after being cut down, leading to a strong commercial industry from the late 1800s until 2000.

Shark bay is also home to thousands of species of different types of animals. There are many endangered and threatened species found in the area, including the loggerhead turtle, green turtle, dugong and five species of land mammals, some of which aren't found anywhere else in the world. The bay's unique and diverse habitats allow for a variety of both marine and land species to thrive including plains, tidal flats, salty hollows, and seagrass beds. The surrounding waters see migratory populations which can be seen at Shark Bay such as humpback whales, as well as consistent populations of bottlenose dolphins, and 28 species of the bay's namesake, the shark.



Dugong



Humpback Whale



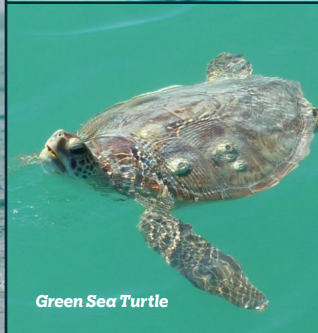
Sandalwood Tree



Tiger Shark



Bottlenose Dolphins



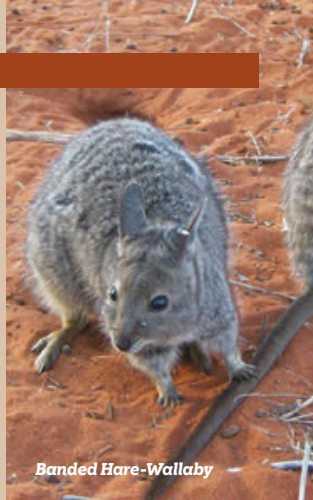
Green Sea Turtle



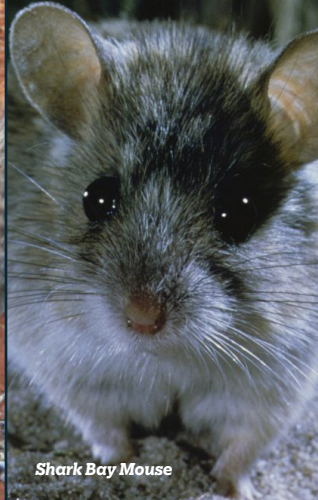
# DORRE & BENIER ISLAND

Between 8,000 and 10,000 years ago, rising sea levels separated the Dorre and Benier Islands from the mainland, and animals began to evolve into distinct subspecies. Since the mid 1800s, multiple devastating fires occurred which destroyed flora and harmed wildlife. Since then, the islands were used for a variety of purposes including as pastoral land and sandalwood cutting.

**Currently, the islands house five critically endangered land mammals, four of which don't occur anywhere else on Earth** (the Shark Bay mouse, Shark Bay bandicoot, banded hare-wallaby, and rufous hare-wallaby). Dorre Island is closed to the public, and Benier Island has restrictions against camping, wildfires, and other precautions. In addition to preservation efforts, research is being done about the species on the islands and aid in conservation through captive breeding programs and understanding the needs of the species.



*Banded Hare-Wallaby*



*Shark Bay Mouse*



*Rufous Hare-Wallaby*



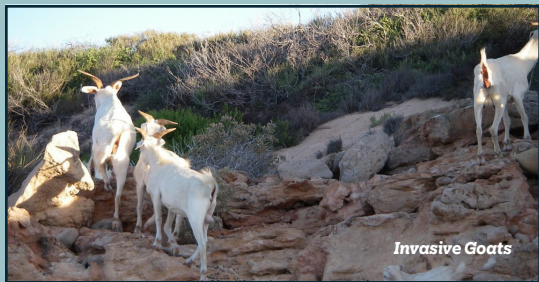
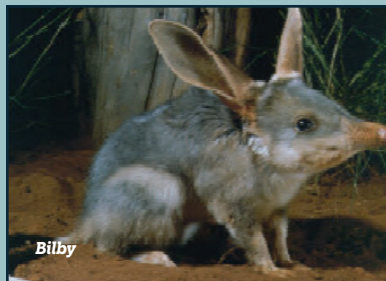
*Shark Bay Bandicoot*



*Dorre & Benier Island Nature Reserve*

# CONSERVATION PROJECTS

When European settlers came to Shark Bay, they brought with them goats, sheep, cattle, rabbits, foxes, and feral cats. Of the 23 recorded mammal species in 1801, over half were lost by 1990 due to competition and habitat loss from these invasive species. In 1990, the government of Western Australia bought the pastoral lands, and reconstruction efforts began with Project Eden launching in 1995. Many pastoral animals were removed, and baiting programs were introduced to control feral cat and fox populations. After the invasive species were removed or under control, captive breeding programs were implemented to reintroduce native species. Six species were reintroduced, but only two established substantial populations due to residual feral populations: the Malleefowl and Bilby.



In 2012, the Dirk Hartog Island National Park: Return to 1616 restoration project was started, with the goal of returning the land to its original state when Dirk Hartog, the first European to explore the area, experienced it. By 2016 all sheep were removed, and by 2017 all goats were removed as well. Feral cats were also removed by 2018, which was a large barrier in reintroducing species. Then, native animals started to be transferred to the park in 2018 with a total of eight being introduced by early 2023.

# LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

It is crucial to acknowledge that the land of Shark Bay is the traditional land of aboriginal groups, including the Malgana, Nanda and Gnulli peoples. The region — known as Gutharraguda in the Malgana language — contains about 130 registered heritage sites which are protected by the Aboriginal Heritage Act. It is illegal to disturb these sites.

European occupation has destroyed and harmed the ecology and people of the area, and cannot be ignored or dismissed. Today, aboriginal groups collaborate with the Parks and Wildlife Services to work towards research and conservation projects.



***“Nhanganha Gutharraguda, Wula guda nyinda.”***

— Malgana —

***“This is Shark Bay. You come this way.”***

— English —