

North Spencer Gulf



Photo Deb Allen

Blanche Harbour



The North Spencer Gulf bioregion encompasses upper Spencer Gulf including the marine and coastal fringing sections of its northern region. Geographically, its boundary is an imaginary line running from Victoria Point near Franklin Harbour on the Eyre Peninsula, to Point Riley near Wallaroo on Yorke Peninsula.

The Northern Spencer Gulf is known to have unique marine and coastal assets; containing both tropical and sub-tropical species as well as a number of endemic species (not found elsewhere). This region has a Mediterranean climate which means that the summers are hot and dry, and the winters are cool and moist.

Eco-tourism, dive operations, transport and shipping, aquaculture, industry, commercial fisheries and coastal development are the main activities in this bioregion.

Biodiversity and habitat

In this bioregion, you will see some of the biggest coastal saltmarshes in South Australia as well as mud flats, extensive seagrass meadows and mangrove forests; all which act as a nursery for many important commercial and recreational fishes.

Habitats in this bioregion also provide good roosting and feeding sites for waterbirds.

Some sea squirt species and algae found in the bioregion are not seen in any other marine bioregion in South Australia. Large numbers of red algae have also been recorded in the region and the region is also home to various endemic cnidarians (jellyfish, corals).





Photo Clay Bryce

Seagrass meadow

Threats

Threats to the North Spencer Gulf bioregion and its dependent species include:

- pollution by heavy metals from industry (fringing the coastline) impacting seagrasses, fish and other species
- marine traffic hazards (debris and shipping traffic) for dolphins and other species
- marine pests which can be introduced from ballast water (ships) and aquaculture
- removal of saltmarshes for development which disrupts ecosystems.

Whyalla is the only known place in the world where large numbers of the Giant Cuttlefish gather to mate.

Conservation

In False Bay, near Whyalla, there is a year round total fishing ban on cuttlefish, squid and octopus to protect the spawning grounds of the Giant Cuttlefish.

There is a strong community interest in conserving the mangroves of the North Spencer Gulf. Community groups help to protect the mangrove forests in the bioregion by building community awareness and constructing boardwalks.

You can help conserve the North Spencer Gulf bioregion and its dependent species by:

- finding out more about marine conservation issues and educate others
- organising a group of friends and family to pick up litter for a day and save our marine life.

For further information

Public enquiries

For more local information on any of the species in this resource please contact your nearest Natural Resource Centre office on:

Eastwood: (08) 8273 9100

Gawler: (08) 8523 7700

Lobethal: (08) 8389 5900

Willunga: (08) 8550 3400

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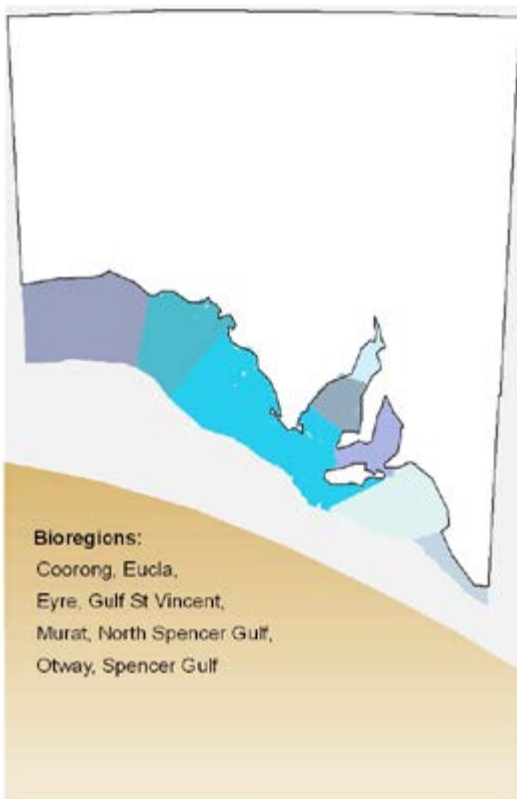
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Australian Sea-lion

Neophoca cinerea



Map courtesy of Mapping Unit, Customer and Commercial Services.

Map is not intended to indicate spatial distribution of the species, only the bioregions in which the species is found.

The Australian Sea-lion belongs to the Eared Seal family, Otariidae (they have external ears). They propel themselves through the water using their front flippers and are capable of walking on land on all four flippers.

Sea-lions are sociable animals and gather in groups, called colonies, of 10-15, to rest and sunbathe on rocks and beaches. Males (called bulls) are darker and larger than females (cows) and can weigh up to 300 kg. Pups are born with a dark brown coat and moult to look like an adult at three to four months old.

Diet

Unlike New Zealand Fur Seals that feed in the water column, Australian Sea-lions find most of their food on the sea floor. An adult female with an unweaned pup (baby sea-lion) will eat about eight to ten kg of food per day at sea.

Their carnivorous diet is opportunistic, eating squid, octopus, scale fish, penguins, rays, small sharks and some crustaceans.

Breeding

Their long life span (up to 25 years) means it takes a while for them to reach maturity (an age where they can reproduce). When they finally have pups they only have one every 17.6 months, and only about 30 per cent of pups from each breeding season survive to maturity.

Habitat

About 80 per cent of the world's Australian Sea-lion population occurs in SA. These animals travel large distances to find food but return to the same places to rest on land.

Threats

The Australian Sea-lion is one of the rarest seal species in the world. Only 10,000 to 12,000 remain in the world. Hunting decimated their population in the 18th and 19th centuries and they have been slow to recover.

Sea-lions are now protected in Australian waters, but there are still many threats to their survival in SA. Australian Sea-lions are killed illegally and accidentally. This is often a result of entanglement in nets (especially those used for gillnet fishing) and marine debris. Australian Sea-lions die from diseases related to parasites, are eaten by sharks, suffer from habitat destruction and clearance on coasts and are sometimes harmed by boat strikes.



In a 3 day foraging trip an individual makes 900-1200 dives!

Conservation

You can help the Australian Sea-lion by:

- putting rubbish in a bin, as litter makes its way to the ocean from everywhere and Sea-lions can die from eating it or becoming entangled in it
- taking any rubbish home with you after going fishing, including fishing line, hooks and nets as these can harm marine animals
- keeping your distance if you see Sea-lions in the wild, in the ocean, or on the beach and don't disturb them.

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Photo by Robyn Morcom

Australian Sea-lion



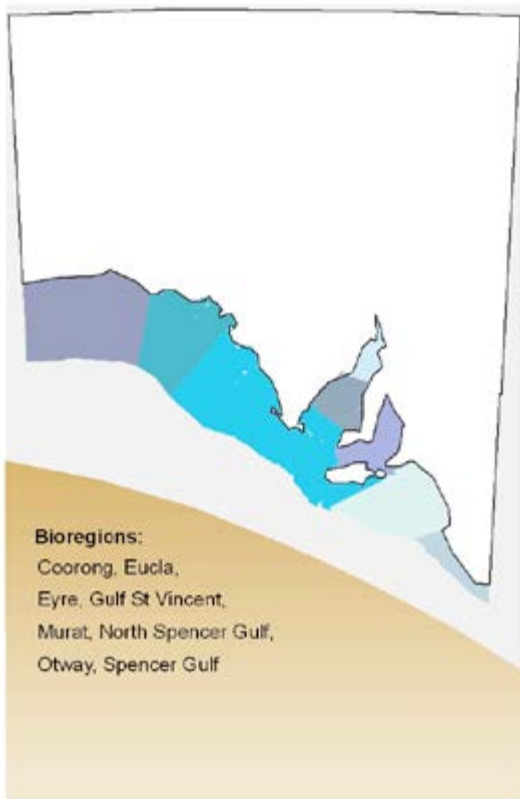
Photo by Simon Bryars

Australian Sea-lion



Giant Cuttlefish

Sepia apama



Map courtesy of Mapping Unit, Customer and Commercial Services.

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The Giant Cuttlefish is a cephalopod which is the same group name as for squid and octopus. Males can grow up to 60 cm long and weigh up to five kg. They have 10 tentacles; this includes eight regular ones and a pair of specialised hunting tentacles. The light, white cuttle-bone often found washed up on beaches is an internal structure used by cuttlefish to control buoyancy. They also have the ability to move backwards using jet propulsion. Giant cuttlefish live for one to two years and are usually solitary when they are not spawning.

Diet

Giant cuttlefish mainly eat small fish and crustaceans. When hunting, special tentacles shoot out from sockets near the eyes and pull prey into their mouths. They use their strong beaks to crush mollusc and crustacean shells.

Breeding

Giant Cuttlefish have the ability to alter their skin colour and texture for camouflage and, as a mating display. Spawning males are very cunning, using stealth, brilliant colour and light displays and deception to attract a mate. Small males sometimes disguise themselves as females to avoid competition with larger males, then sneak in and mate with the female closest to them!

The spawning of Giant Cuttlefish has become a significant eco-tourism attraction in South Australia. They gather at Black Point near Whyalla every winter to mate in great numbers. It is the largest gathering of cuttlefish known in the world and people travel a long way to see the spectacle.

Habitat

Habitat requirements of the Giant Cuttlefish include hard, rocky surfaces with crevices onto which females attach their eggs.

Threats

The last few years their numbers have dramatically dropped for reasons that are still unclear. A Government (across agencies) Cuttlefish Working Group is meeting regularly to determine research and management priorities.

Giant Cuttlefish are threatened by increased salinity levels which decrease the success of eggs hatching.

Disturbance by human activities is another potential threat. They are sometimes victims of bycatch from fishing and are vulnerable to pollution and general habitat degradation.



Giant Cuttlefish squirt a jet of black ink when threatened to confuse predators while they escape.

Conservation

The government has now placed a seasonal ban on cephalopod catches in the Black Point area.

You can help the Giant Cuttlefish by:

- not polluting. Anything washed down a stormwater drain goes straight out to sea
- organising a day at the beach picking up litter with your friends and family
- visiting and appreciating Giant Cuttlefish in the wild with your family
- Reporting any sightings of these cuttlefish on Redmap (<http://www.redmap.org.au/>).



Photo by Vicki Billings

Giant Cuttlefish



Photo by David Muirhead

Giant Cuttlefish

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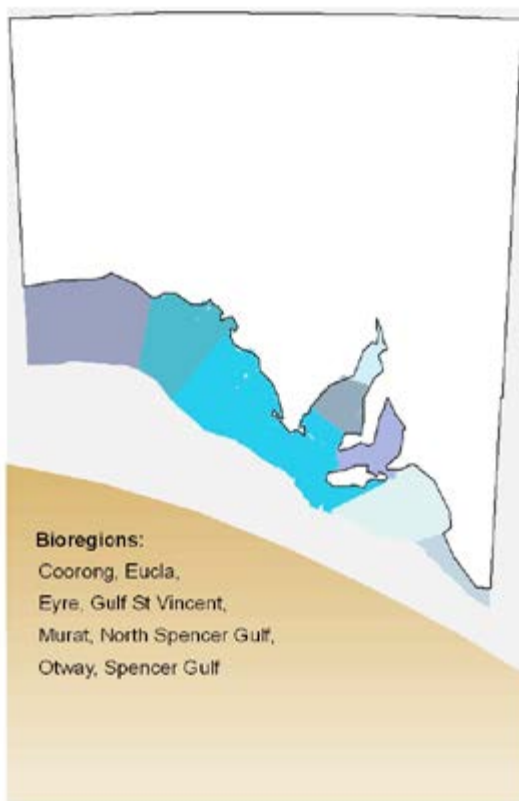
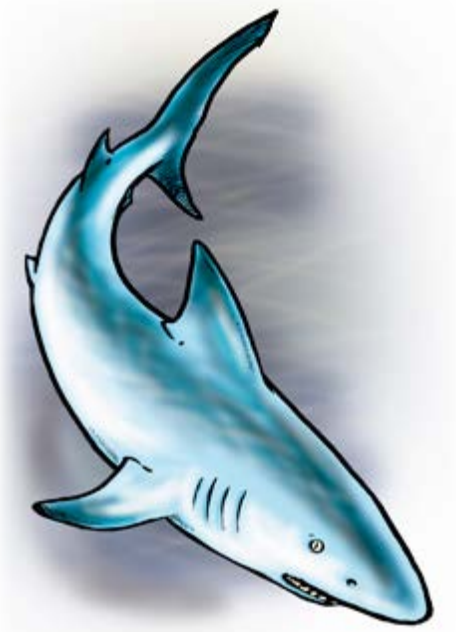
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Great White Shark

Carcharodon carcharias



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Great White Sharks (Great Whites) are large predators at the top of the marine food chain. They are in the same class as all sharks and rays (Chondrichthyes) – this group is different from other fish as their skeleton is made from cartilage instead of bone. They have an average length of four to five metres, but can grow up to seven metres.

Using their powerful tails to propel them, these sharks can move through the water at up to 24 km per hour. Their mouths are lined with up to 300 serrated triangular teeth arranged in several rows.

Diet

Great Whites are able to use electroreception (the ability to detect weak electrical currents) to find and attack prey without seeing it. This can be useful in murky water or when their prey is hidden under sediment. This gives them the ability to navigate by sensing the Earth's magnetic field. They have a strong sense of smell which is also useful in detecting prey. Contrary to some people's beliefs, they often only attack humans to 'sample bite' and do not usually choose to eat human flesh, preferring marine mammals such as seals and sea lions. They are also known to feed on dolphins, octopus, squid, other sharks, rays and lobster, fish, crabs and seabirds.

Breeding

Great Whites have a low reproduction rate that makes it difficult for species numbers to recover. Males mature at eight to ten years and females mature at 12-18 years. Females give birth to two to ten pups once every two to three years.

Habitat

Found in temperate and sub tropical areas around the world, Great Whites can migrate across oceans. In Australia, they are found from southern Queensland, around the southern coast to the north-western cape of Western Australia.

Threats

Great Whites are caught as bycatch in fishing nets by commercial and recreational fishers. They are also illegally hunted for their fins, and killed by 'trophy hunters' for their jaws and teeth. Habitat deterioration and the loss of food sources are continuing threats. Entanglement in marine debris and eating plastic and other litter can also harm or kill these animals.

There is increasing interest in first-hand experiences with this animal underwater. This industry is being tightly managed to minimise its impact on the sharks' natural behaviour.



Great White Sharks can detect 1 drop of blood in 100 litres of water! This means they can detect small quantities of blood up to 5 km away.

Conservation

The Great White Shark is a protected species in Australian waters.

You can help the Great White Shark by:

- keeping our oceans clean – don't leave your litter behind
- signing a petition to stop shark finning
- spreading the word – educate others about Great White Sharks and why they are so special and misunderstood.



Photo by Mark Conlin

Great White Shark

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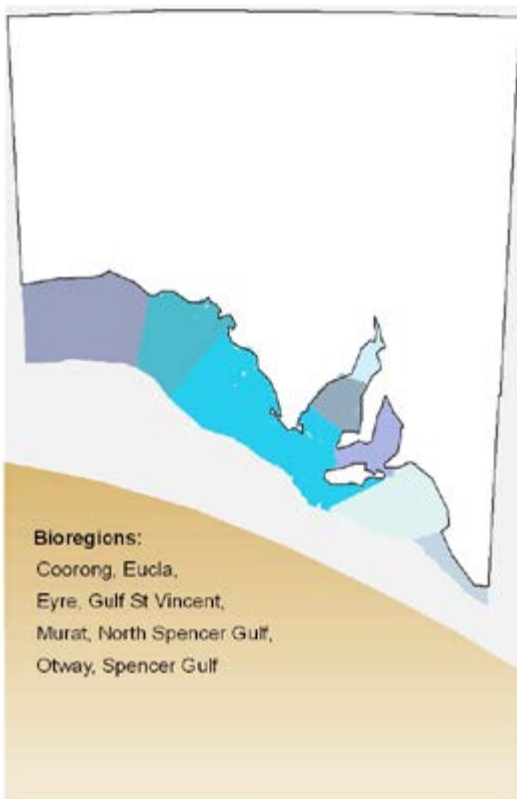
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Lacy Bryozoan

Phidoloporidae



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Lacy Bryozoans are lace-like structures made of colonies of small marine animals fused together. These animals are called zooids; they are each about one mm long and box-shaped. Millions of zooids can form a single colony, and colonies have a lifespan of 1-12 years.

The zooids have special purposes: to form joints, to be brood chambers for the young, and to clean or defend the colony with bristles or pincers. Zooids have U-shaped guts, simple nervous systems and skeletons but no respiratory or circulatory systems due to their small size. They secrete limestone (calcium carbonate) that forms an outer skeleton in which they live. Their skeletons are then cemented together to form colonies connected by gaps or pores in the body walls. When cemented together they look like lacy works of art. They can grow to more than a metre in height and width.

Also known as 'lace corals', Lacy Bryozoans can often be mistaken for corals but are actually more complex. Lacy Bryozoans come in pink, orange and other colours and a variety of shapes from flat sheets to coral-like forms. South Australia has over 500 recorded species of Bryozoans.

Diet

Most zooids have feeding tentacles to collect minute food particles from the water. Their diet consists of microscopic organisms including diatoms and other unicellular algae.

Breeding

They are hermaphrodites (have both male and female reproductive parts) and can reproduce sexually and asexually.

Habitat

Lacy Bryozoans are usually found in coastal waters but can grow at depths of 8,200m. They settle on hard surfaces such as rocky reefs, shipwrecks or jetty pilings and sometimes sand.

Threats

The zooids that make up Lacy Bryozoans are preyed upon by grazing marine animals such as fish and sea urchins. Pollution and other forms of habitat degradation are a threat to this species, as well as warming as a result of climate change.



Fossilised remains of Lacy Bryozoans dating back millions of years can be commonly found in South Australia! This is because of the strong outer skeleton that the zooids create.

Conservation

You can help Lacy Bryozoans by:

- not polluting. Anything washed down a stormwater drain goes straight out to sea
- looking, but not touching – marine life is often fragile and can be easily damaged
- picking up litter – plastic and other litter can hurt marine life and destroy habitats.

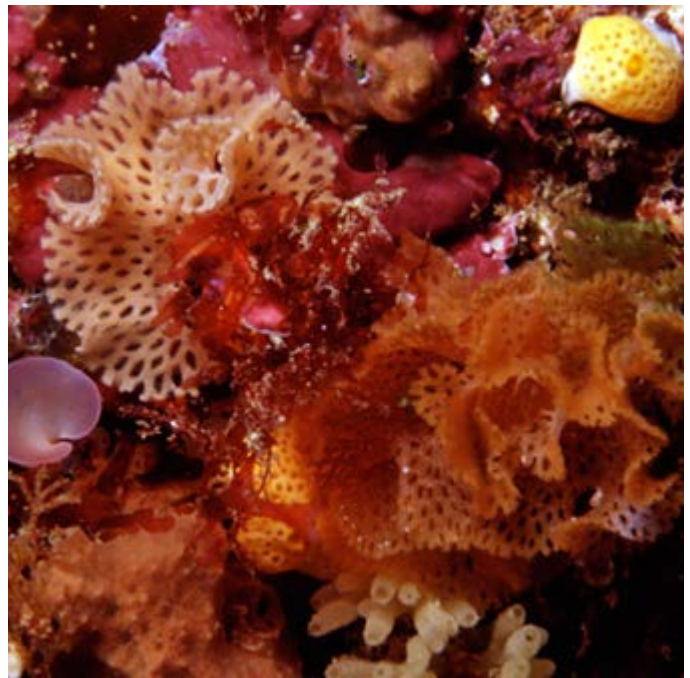


Photo by David Muirhead

Lacy Bryozoan

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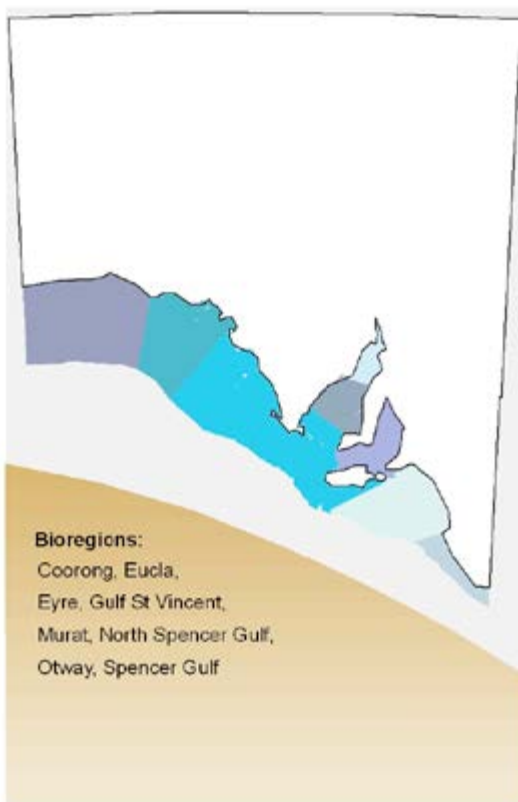
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Leafy Seadragon

Phycodurus eques



Map courtesy of Mapping Unit, Customer and Commercial Services.

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Leafy Seadragons are a unique species of marine fish known for their ability to camouflage themselves in weedy habitats. They are South Australia's state marine emblem and their name comes from the distinctive leafy appendages that are attached to their bodies. Closely related to seahorses and pipefish, Leafy Seadragons are in the family of animals called Syngnathidae and are a protected species under the *Fisheries Management Act 2007 (SA)*.

Instead of scales, their bodies are protected by bony plates. They are smaller than the Weedy Seadragon, which is the only other seadragon species and is also found in the waters of SA.

Leafy Seadragons are slow moving, and rely on their excellent camouflage to protect them from predators (they are well disguised as floating seaweed). They can also change colour depending on their age, diet, location, or stress level. Several long, sharp spines along the sides of their bodies can also help protect them from fish. They can grow to a length of 45cm but on average they are 30cm.

Diet

Leafy Seadragons have long, tubular snouts with small toothless mouths that suck up food. They feed on plankton, mysids and other small crustaceans and fish.

Breeding

They belong to one of the few groups of animals where males rear the young. Female seadragons deposit their eggs on a brood patch near the end of the males' tail where they are fertilised on contact. Males then carry them while they develop and release tiny seadragons after four to six weeks. Mature after two years, they have a lifespan of 5–10 years. Leafy Seadragons are completely independent when born, but they are vulnerable to predation as they are only 20mm long.

Habitat

They are only found in temperate waters of southern Australia and live in seagrass meadows, seaweed beds, rocky reefs and structures colonised by seaweed.

Threats

Illegal capture for display and as pets is a threat to the Leafy Seadragon. They are very sensitive to disturbance of any kind and will often struggle to survive sudden changes in water depth and pressure. Marine pollution, habitat loss and degradation are other threats that Leafy Seadragons face.



Homing beacons.....Leafy Seadragons are able to travel hundreds of metres from home and return to exactly the same place!

Conservation

Leafy Seadragons are protected in SA waters.

You can help the Leafy Seadragon by:

- not polluting. Anything washed down a stormwater drain goes straight out to sea
- picking up any litter you see, especially at the beach – fishing line and other litter can hurt LeafySeadragons
- keeping your distance and not disturbing Leafy Seadragons if you see them.



Photo © Paul Macdonald

Leafy Seadragon



Photo © Paul Macdonald

Leafy Seadragon

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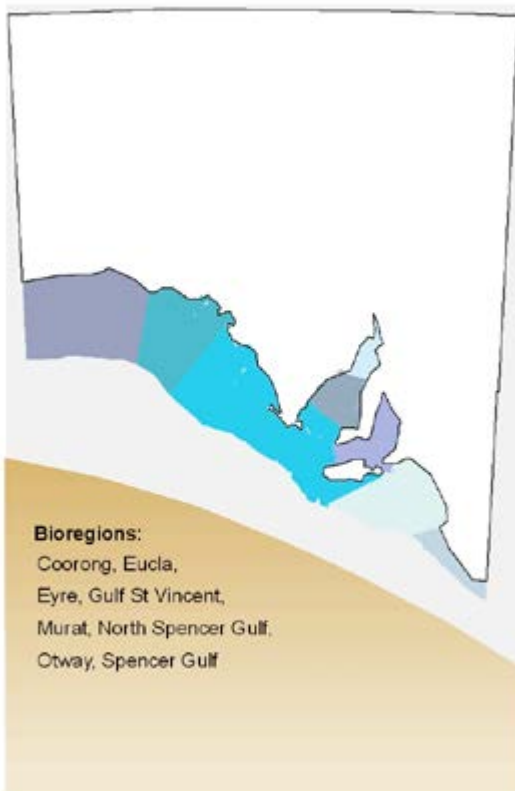
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Sea Squirts

Ascidians



Map courtesy of Mapping Unit, Customer and Commercial Services.

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Sea Squirts get their name from their ability to squirt out a jet of water if stepped on. They come in a wide range of sizes and colours. Some stand upright, while others spread out to cover the surface they are growing on. Some species grow as individuals, while others grow as a colony made up of hundreds or even thousands of individuals living together.

The body of a Sea Squirt is sac-like, with two holes called 'siphons' that have quite strong muscular openings. One siphon is used to draw water in (the 'inhalant siphon'), and the other expels it (the 'exhalant siphon'). Their outside skin is called 'the tunic'.

Sea Squirts date back at least 500–600 million years. They do not have a spine when they are adults, but their juvenile larvae (which look a bit like tadpoles) have features in common with vertebrates. Sea Squirts are the natural prey of a variety of sea creatures including molluscs, fish and rock crabs.

Diet

Sea Squirts are filter feeders which means that they draw water in and filter out the tiny plankton through their pharynx (like the throat in humans). The water then passes through their gills so they can breathe before it is expelled.

Breeding

Nearly all Sea Squirts are hermaphrodites (have both male and female sex organs) and eggs are fertilised externally.

Habitat

They can be found in the intertidal zone of rocky shores, but are more common in deeper water where they are not exposed at low tide. Sea Squirts can be found attached to rocks, jetties and to other hard surfaces.

Threats

Sea Squirts are threatened by marine pollution, much of which comes from coastal development. As they live on the shore they may also be threatened by climate change including warming water and sea level change.



South Australia is home to over 200 different Sea Squirt species. This is the greatest diversity of the species found anywhere in the world!

Conservation

You can help the Sea Squirt by:

- not polluting – anything washed down a stormwater drain goes straight out to sea. Sea Squirts are particularly vulnerable to pollution because they are filter feeders
- organising a day at the beach picking up litter with your friends and family
- doing your bit to stop climate change such as being wise with your energy use at home
- not stomping on them.

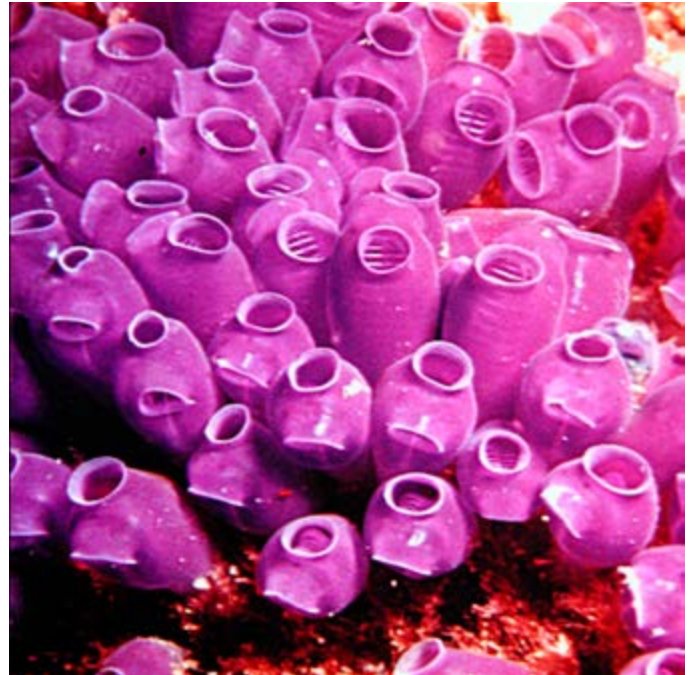


Photo by David Muirhead

Sea Squirts



Photo by David Muirhead

Sea Squirts

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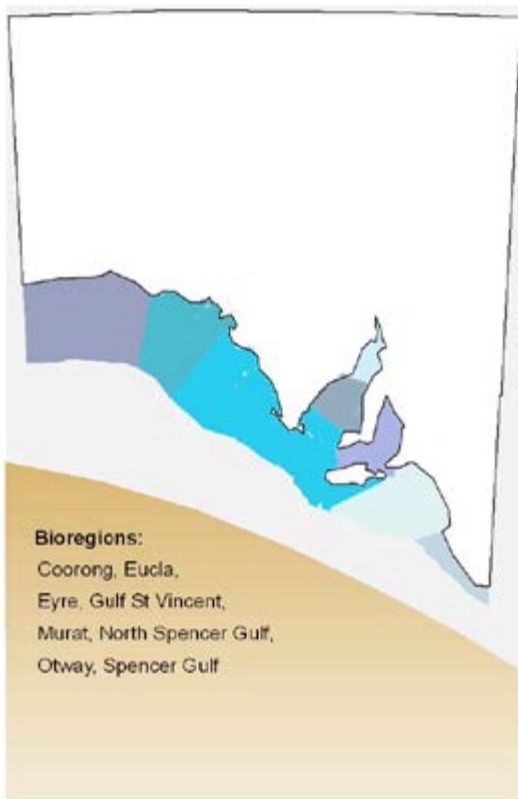
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Short-tailed Shearwater

Puffinus tenuirostris



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Short-tailed Shearwater are migratory ocean birds. They usually have a lifespan of 15–19 years, but can live up to 38 years. Each year they travel around 15,000 kilometres to the Arctic and then return to South Australia during summer. Large colonies of these birds rest on the sea in the late afternoon, and this is referred to as 'rafting'.

Diet

These birds feed on krill, small fish and other marine creatures. Food is usually caught on the surface of the water but Short-tailed Shearwaters sometimes dive down up to 12 metres to feed among the weed on the sea-bottom.

Breeding

Short-tailed Shearwaters mate and lay their eggs in burrows which are usually around one metre long. When they return to their breeding grounds in late September they usually reunite with the same partner of previous years and occupy their previous burrow or one nearby. The burrow is prepared during nightly visits and the couple is very noisy, possibly to announce that the burrow is occupied. Short-tailed Shearwaters rarely breed until they are five years old and it may take them longer than this to find a mate. They lay one egg from late November each year. All females in all the different colonies lay their eggs within the same 12 day period. The male and female take turns incubating the egg for around 53 days until it hatches. To feed their chicks they have been known to fly to Antarctica and back to collect good food. This means flying 1000km a day for four days at a time.

Habitat

Short-tailed Shearwaters migrate north in April each year to the Arctic region, where they spend the northern hemisphere summer. They travel in flocks, and return to southern Australia to breed on islands and promontories off the Australian coast.

Threats

Past hunting and egg collection has lessened the numbers of this species. Grazing stock have destroyed whole colonies in some places by trampling chicks and destroying burrows. Soil erosion after fire can make sites unsuitable for burrowing. Gillnet fisheries accidentally drown large numbers every year as they become entangled in the nests. Natural mortality of juveniles during migration due to exhaustion and starvation, and predation by feral cats, are other threats to this bird.



When sheep fly? Short-tailed Shearwaters are commonly referred to as mutton birds. They were once a common food source for early settlers. When a Naval officer referred to them as “flying sheep” the name stuck.

Conservation

You can help the Short-tailed Shearwater by:

- finding out more about the areas where these and other migratory birds breed and how important their conservation is. Then give a presentation to your class about it
- not disturbing nesting birds if you see them
- checking out a map to see how far these birds migrate each year. It's pretty amazing!

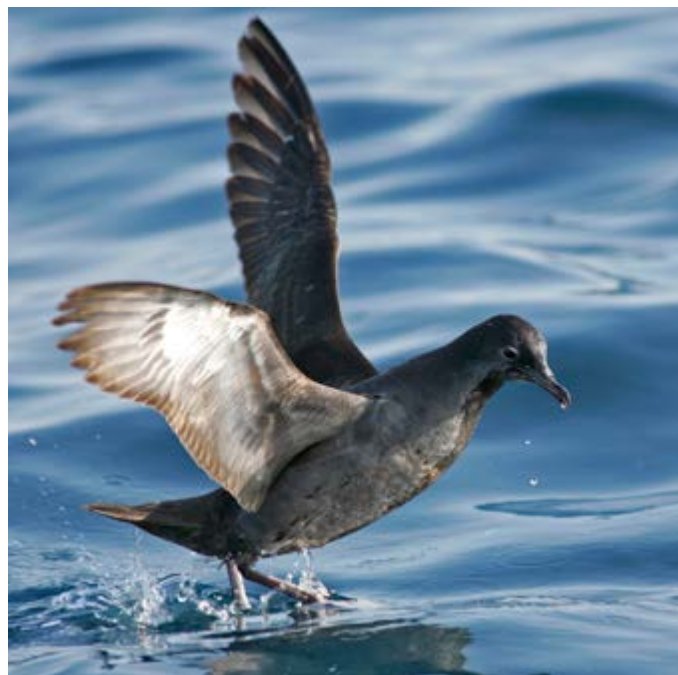


Photo by Paul Wainwright

Short-tailed Shearwater



Photo by David Paul Wainwright

Short-tailed Shearwater

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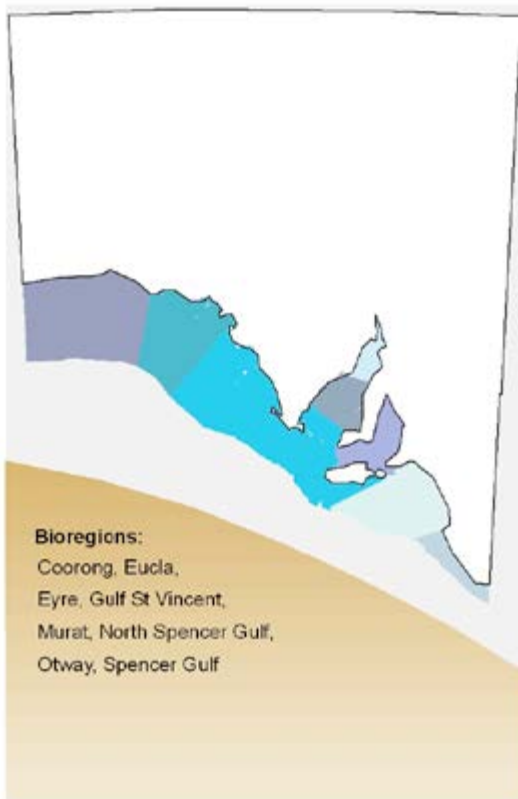
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Southern Bluefin Tuna

Thunnus maccoyii



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Southern Bluefin Tuna are large, fast swimming fish that are dark blue above and silvery white below. Up to 2.25 metres long, they can weigh up to 200 kg. Their shape is very dynamic (like a torpedo) which makes it easier for them to move fast. These fish have swim bladders which stop them sinking to the sea floor. However, they can still dive to at least 500 metres.

Just like mammals, Southern Bluefin Tuna have the ability to keep the temperature of their bodies warmer than the outside water. This is an ability that not many other fish have and is possible because they have an advanced circulatory system. They have a lifespan of 20–40 years and do not reach reproductive maturity until they are 8–12 years old.

The farming of Southern Bluefin Tuna is currently the most economically important aquaculture venture in SA. They are caught in nets in the Great Australian Bight and slowly towed back to shore. They are then fattened up in captivity and sold frozen or fresh, mostly to Japan.

Diet

They eat fish, squid and marine invertebrates.

Breeding

Southern Bluefin Tuna spawn in the northern, tropical waters between Indonesia and Australia.

Habitat

Southern Bluefin Tuna live in the open ocean. Juvenile fish travel from tropical waters down the Western Australian coastline, in the Leeuwin Current. As they grow into adults these tuna ride the current south-eastward along South Australia's coast.

Threats

Careful management of catch quotas is essential to the survival of Southern Bluefin Tuna populations. The fact that they reach sexual maturity at a late age and have a slow growth rate makes it harder for them to renew their numbers fast enough. Marine pollution is also a threat to their health.



The Porsche of the Sea! Southern Bluefin Tuna have earned this nickname as they can travel at up to 70 km/h over long distances. They can even form a film over their eyes and hold their fins against their bodies to make themselves more hydro-dynamic!

Conservation

The Australian Commission for the Conservation of Southern Bluefin Tuna is trying to manage the catches of this species and rebuild its stocks, but catches outside their control continue and the total population of this fish is decreasing.

You can help the Southern Bluefin Tuna by:

- finding out more about marine conservation issues and educating others
- not polluting – anything washed down a stormwater drain goes straight out to sea
- never wasting tuna, they are not as abundant as you think.



Photo by Adam Watkins

Southern Bluefin Tuna



Photo by AFMA/ASBTIA

Southern Bluefin Tuna

For further information

Public enquiries

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- Eastwood:** (08) 8273 9100
- Gawler:** (08) 8523 7700
- Lobethal:** (08) 8389 5900
- Willunga:** (08) 8550 3400

Education enquiries

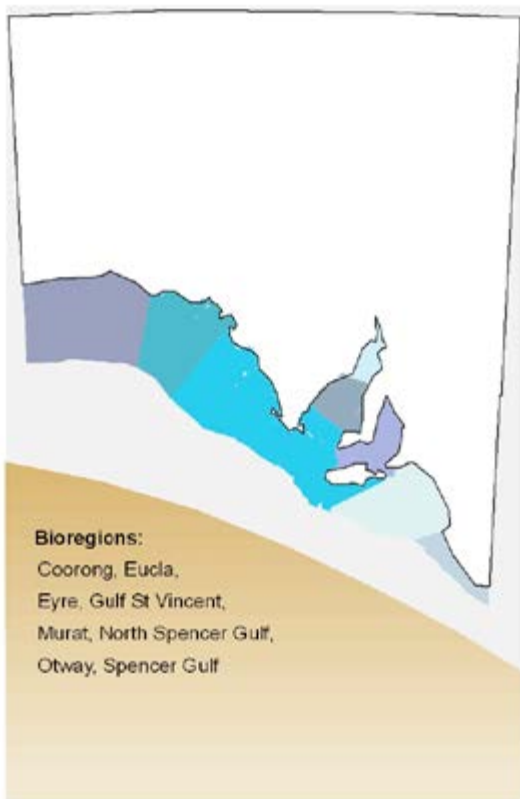
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Southern Eagle Ray

Myliobatis australis



Map courtesy of Mapping Unit, Customer and Commercial Services.

Map is not intended to indicate spatial distribution of the species, only the bioregions in which the species is found.

Southern Eagle Rays belong to the same class as sharks and other rays (Chondrichthyes) which all have skeletons made of cartilage instead of bone. A distinctive feature of the Southern Eagle Ray is their blunt snout. Their bodies are wider than they are long with pointed tips and eyes on the side of their heads. Nostrils and an internasal flap (this is a fleshy flap of skin between the nostrils that partly covers the mouth) are on their underside. They have three types of fins, and the small dorsal fin at the beginning of the tail is followed by a venomous stinging spine.

They are large animals, which can measure a total length of up to three metres and can weigh more than 50 kilograms. They have smooth skin without the thorns on their bodies that some other ray species possess.

Diet

They eat small fish and crustaceans such as crabs and molluscs as well as annelid worms. To make feeding easier their mouths are located on the underside of their bodies, with small plate-like teeth for grinding food.

Breeding

Southern Eagle Rays are viviparous (they give birth to live young). They have an average litter size of six but can have 2–15 babies at a time. Young are born in summer.

Habitat

These animals are found only in Southern Australia from Jurien Bay in Western Australia to Moreton Bay in Southern Queensland. The adults migrate south in the warmest months of the year. They are bottom-dwellers and are so flat they can cover themselves with sand at the bottom of the ocean for camouflage. It is partly for this reason that they prefer the shallow water near beaches and shoals and over sand-flats as habitat.

Threats

The Southern Eagle Ray is a common bycatch of commercial and recreational fishers. Unfortunately Southern Eagle Rays are increasingly kept and marketed for their flesh rather than being returned to the ocean. Marine pollution is another threat to this species, possibly leaving it with less food to eat. Currently they are classified as Near Threatened on the IUCN redlist.



Southern Eagle Rays have a pair of openings just behind the eyes called 'spiracles' that allow them to draw in oxygenated water from above. This helps them to breathe even when they are lying flat on the ocean floor!

Conservation

You can help the Southern Eagle Ray by:

- putting rubbish in its place as litter makes its way to the ocean from everywhere
- bringing a bag along for collecting rubbish when you go for a walk along the beach
- not polluting – anything washed down a storm-water drain goes straight out to sea.
- letting it go if you catch one.



Photo© MLSSA

Southern Eagle Ray

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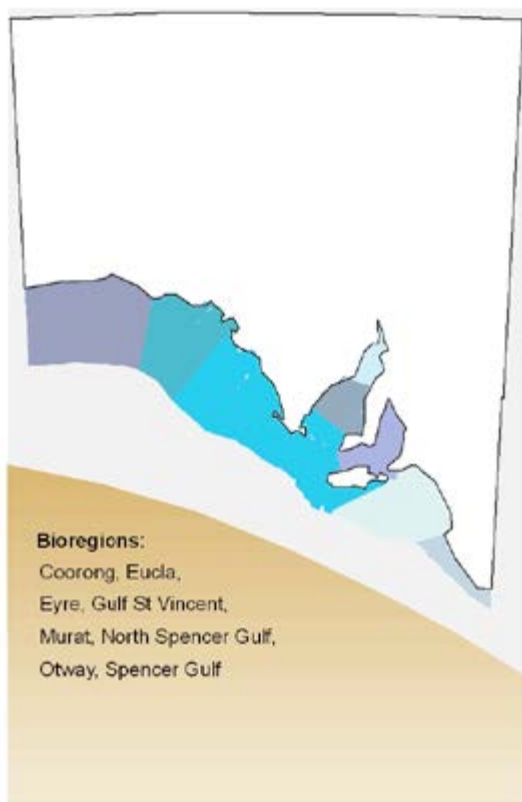
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Southern Right Whale

Eubalaena australis



Map courtesy of Mapping Unit, Customer and Commercial Services.

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Southern Right Whales are mammals, not fish. They breathe air just like humans do through nostrils called 'blowholes' located on top of their heads. All whales are cetaceans – a group of marine mammals which also includes dolphins and porpoises.

The raised whitish patches of thickened skin on Southern Right Whales are called callosities and are encrusted with marine lice and barnacles. They are present on calves from birth and can be used to individually identify whales throughout their lifetime (like unique birthmarks). A Southern Right Whale calf weighs about one tonne at birth, while adults can weigh up to 80 tonnes.

The story of Kondole, the whale, is one dreamtime story from Encounter Bay.

Diet

These giant mammals eat some of the smallest foods in the ocean in large quantities. Small crustaceans, like krill and copepods, make up most of their diet. A Southern Right Whale eats up to a tonne of tiny crustaceans per day in subantarctic waters. They strain their food from the ocean, catching it in their comb-like 'teeth' called baleen.

Breeding

Between 25 and 55 calves are born in Southern Australia each year in June and nursing continues in November. When a calf is born it has only a little blubber to keep it warm. To quickly build up some blubber it suckles up to 150 litres of rich, fatty milk from its mother every day. When doing this it can gain up to 90kg in weight each day.

Habitat

Every year, Southern Right Whales migrate from cold Antarctic waters to the warmer sheltered waters of southern Australia to breed and have their young (calves). The Head of the Great Australian Bight is an important calving ground for the Southern Right Whale, with more than 900 individual whales recorded in this area over the past 18 years.

Threats

Whaling (hunting) in the past drastically reduced their numbers from around 60,000 to around 7,000 globally. Pollution, habitat degradation, and predation by sharks are other potential threats to Southern Right Whales. Coastal development, human harassment and entanglement in fishing gear and ship strikes are other problems.



Adult Southern Right Whales grow up to 18 metres long – that’s as long as a bus!

Conservation

Numbers of Southern Right Whale are thought to be increasing since they were internationally protected

You can help the Southern Right Whale by:

- going whale watching and seeing Southern Right Whales for yourself
- not polluting – anything washed down a stormwater drain goes straight out to sea
- following the whale watching code if you are lucky enough to see a whale at sea: keep your distance and keep quiet.

For further information

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Photo by Aude Loisier

Southern Right Whale



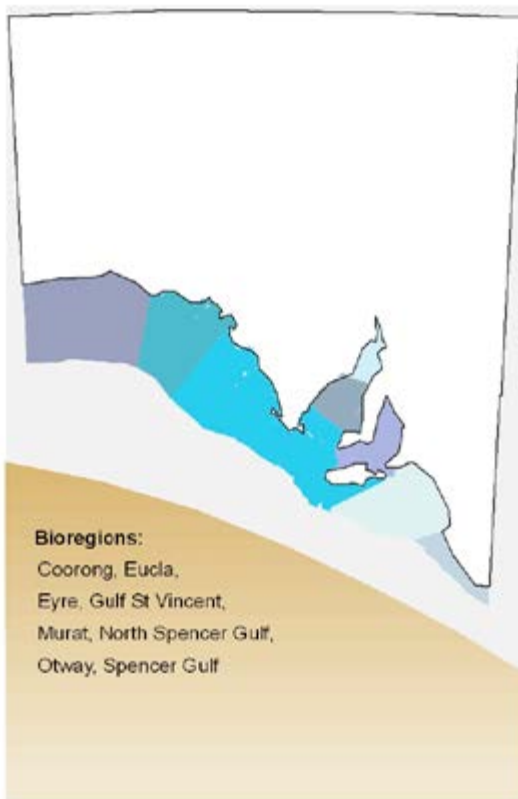
Photo by Aude Loisier

Southern Right Whale



Western Blue Groper

Achoerodus gouldii



Map courtesy of Mapping Unit, Customer and Commercial Services.

Map is not intended to indicate spatial distribution of the species, only the bioregions in which the species is found.

Western Blue Groper are large, long-lived slow-growing fish that are closely related to the Eastern Blue Groper (*Achoerodus viridis*). They are the largest bony fish species found on the rocky reefs of South Australia. Western Blue Groper can live for up to 70 years, and females do not reach maturity until around 15 years of age, and for males it takes even longer. They grow up to 1.7 metres long and are fully grown at around 30 years old. When fully grown they have few natural predators.

They live in small groups with one male, one or two females and several juveniles. The male is always the biggest fish in these groups and is blue, while the females are a greener colour.

They are an important species for maintaining the balance in their ecosystem by controlling the numbers of other animals such as crabs and sea urchins. If Western Blue Groper weren't there, these other animals might eat too much algae from the reefs, leaving them barren and unsuitable for other species.

Diet

When feeding, Western Blue Groper use their strong teeth to prise molluscs and crustaceans off the rocks. Adults are able to dislocate their jaw to bite off large pieces of reef algal mats and then suck off the tiny crustaceans that live in them.

Breeding

Western Blue Groper are sequential hermaphrodites, this means that they are all born female, and some females turn into males at around 35 years of age. They spawn between early winter and mid spring.

Habitat

These fish can be found around the southern coast from Geraldton in Western Australia to west of Melbourne. Smaller fish are found in sheltered reef areas, but larger ones migrate to deeper exposed waters. Adults are territorial and have a home range.

Threats

Overfishing is a major threat to the Western Blue Groper, especially as they are so slow-growing. This means it takes them a long time to replenish their numbers, and if young fish are caught they never get the chance to reproduce. Marine pollution is another problem as it limits the amount of food available to them.



Sex change! All Western Blue Gropers are born females, and some later change to be males! When they change sex they also change colour! If the male is removed from the small group the dominant female can change sex to take his place!

Conservation

Western Blue Gropers are very inquisitive when they see divers. This makes them vulnerable to spearfishers. Many divers are now aware of their plight and choose to enjoy their company rather than killing them.

You can help the Western Blue Groper by:

- putting rubbish in its place as litter makes its way to the ocean from everywhere
- bringing a bag along for collecting rubbish when you go for a walk along the beach
- not polluting – anything washed down a storm-water drain goes straight out to sea.



Photo by Simon Bryars

Western Blue Groper



Photo Female WBG, Simon Bryars

Western Blue Groper

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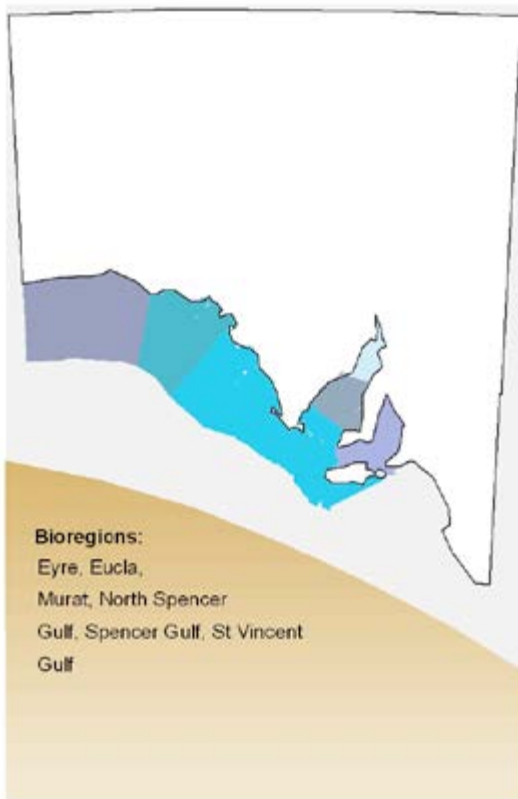
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Western King Prawn

Penaeus latisulcatus



Map courtesy of Mapping Unit, Customer and Commercial Services.

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Western King Prawns are decapod crustaceans. The only prawn fished in SA waters, they are caught at night as they are nocturnal feeders. SA's Spencer Gulf contains the largest known population of Western King Prawns in the world.

Western King Prawns are eaten by large fish and molluscs (e.g. squid and cuttlefish). To avoid predators, juvenile Western King Prawns either bury themselves in the sand or hide under seaweed during the day. They can live up to four years and become mature at six to seven months of age. As they grow, Western King Prawns moult. This happens often when they are juveniles (daily when they are very small), and every one to two months when adults. Their new exoskeleton hardens within a few days, and they usually stay buried during this vulnerable time.

The fishing of Western King Prawn is a valuable industry in SA, and careful management is needed to ensure it is sustainable for the future.

Diet

They eat molluscs, bryozoans, small crustaceans, plant material and detritus.

Breeding

When Western King Prawns spawn, fertilised eggs are released from small pores at the base of the female's third walking legs. Eggs float and usually hatch within 24 hours. When hatched they go through several stages of larval development over a number of weeks before they can settle onto the sea floor and turn into a juvenile prawn. They will only survive if they have landed in a suitable nursery area (shallow sand/mud flats).

Habitat

Western King Prawns live in the Indo-West Pacific region. Mangroves of the St Vincent and Spencer Gulfs, sheltered west coast bays and seagrass meadows provide important nursery areas in SA. After living in the nursery grounds for their first three to six months, Western King Prawns migrate into the open ocean in the summer and autumn of each year. They then live on soft sea floors in coastal waters to depths of around 80 metres.

Threats

Western King Prawns are a very popular food. Work is ongoing to identify critical steps to preventing their over-exploitation while still providing for ecologically sustainable harvesting. The degradation of their nursery habitats (seagrass meadows and mangroves) through pollution and development is also a problem.



Western King Prawns can spawn several times a year and 100,000 to 700,000 eggs are produced each time! Only around 2% of these will reach adulthood as they are eaten by a range of sea creatures.

Conservation

You can help the Western King Prawn by:

- visiting the St Kilda mangroves and learning more about how important they are for biodiversity
- not polluting – anything washed down a stormwater drain goes straight out to sea.

For further information

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Photo by D. Pearce

Western King Prawn



Photo by David Muirhead

Western King Prawn



White-bellied Sea-Eagle

Haliaeetus leucogaster



White-bellied Sea-Eagles are large birds of prey. They are graceful in flight and spend their time soaring over the surface of the sea, or perching on rocks or branches beside the water. They live for up to 30 years in the wild.

Diet

These birds hunt fish, tortoises, sea-snakes, waterfowl, reptiles, nestling birds, rabbits and also eat carrion. They are aggressive and skilled hunters both at sea and on the land. Their large talons and powerful curved beaks help them to grab and kill their prey. Thick scales on their legs protect them like armour. Excellent eyesight makes it easy for them to target their next meal. Occasionally, they harass other birds such as ospreys and terns until they drop their prey which the eagles then collect.

Breeding

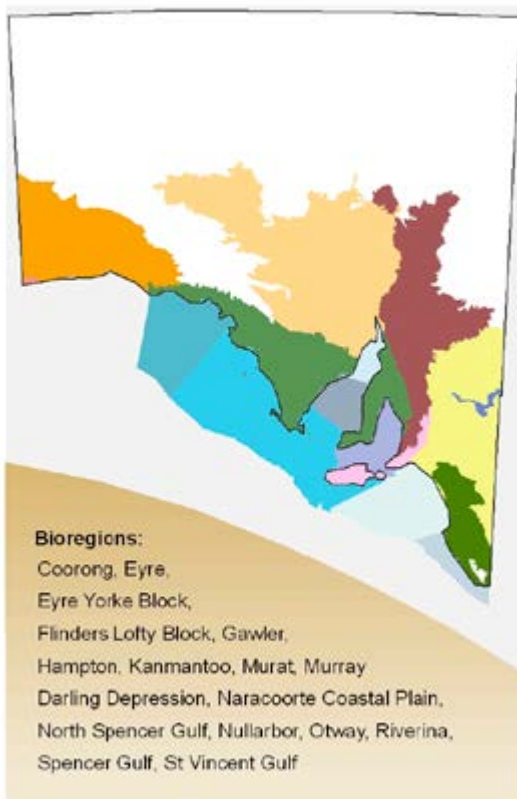
These eagles mate for life and share the same hunting range. In the morning and evening they roost and sometimes sing together. When breeding begins, sometime from May to October, White-bellied Sea-Eagles put on great aerial displays. They soar and call, loop-the-loop, drop fish from a height and then dive to catch it in midair. Nests are built on cliffs or in trees, and sometimes on the ground on treeless islands. Both sexes help with the construction and repair of a nest. Nests are made of sticks, and are huge structures up to four metres deep and 2.5m wide. Nests are lined with stems and green leaves and females lay a clutch of two eggs. Eggs are incubated for around six weeks, mostly by the female. One egg is laid several days before the other, and it is usually only the chick with the head start that survives because the parents feed the noisiest, most active chick first. If the first egg is infertile, or the chick is weak and dies, the second chick has a better chance of survival.

Habitat

White-bellied Sea-Eagles are found throughout Australia along coasts and beside lowland rivers and lakes. They also occur in south-east Asia and India.

Threats

The loss of nesting sites due to development is a major threat to the White-bellied Sea-Eagles. Disturbance of nesting pairs by human activity can cause them to abandon their nests. Deterioration of inland water sources and over-fishing in the ocean makes it harder for them to find food. Competition for food and nesting sites with Wedge-tailed Eagles (*Aquila audax*) is a potential problem.



Map courtesy of Mapping Unit, Customer and Commercial Services.

Map is not intended to indicate spatial distribution of the species, only the bioregions in which the species is found.



Big birds! White-bellied Sea-Eagles have a wingspan of up to 2.2 metres. Their home ranges can be up to 100 square kilometres.

Conservation

You can help the White-bellied Sea-Eagle by:

- always keeping your distance from eagles and their nests as they are easily disturbed by human activity
- protecting areas of native vegetation in your local area
- reporting anyone you see interfering with nests or disturbing sea eagles.

For further information

Public enquiries

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