

Why Shark Bay is World Heritage Listed

Shark Bay was inscribed on the World Heritage List in December 1991, and was nominated on the basis of its natural values. In order to qualify for the World Heritage List, a nominated property must meet at least two of 10 natural and cultural criteria of outstanding universal value. Shark Bay is one of only a handful of places on the World Heritage List to satisfy all four natural criteria. These criteria and some of Shark Bay's values are:

Outstanding examples representing the major stages of the Earth's evolutionary history

Shark Bay contains, in one place, the most diverse and abundant examples of stromatolitic microbialites in the world. The living microbes still building stromatolites at Hamelin Pool are similar to the earliest life forms which dominated Earth for 3000 million years.



Stromatolites are outstanding examples of the Earth's evolutionary history.

Outstanding examples representing significant ongoing geological processes, biological evolution and human processes, biological evolution and human interaction with the natural environment.

Shark Bay's enormous seagrass beds are an impressive example of the role seagrasses play in modifying a whole marine ecosystem. These seagrass beds directly influence the physics, chemistry, biology and geology of the Bay. For instance, the accumulation of skeletons of marine organisms living amongst the seagrasses just north of Hamelin Pool has created the Fauré Sill. The sandbar effect of the sill in turn restricts tidal exchange in Hamelin Pool and sustains hypersalinity levels critical for the survival of stromatolites. The Shark Bay region is also a meeting point of three climatic zones and forms a transition zone between two major botanical provinces – the eucalypt dominated Southwest and the acacia dominated Eremean. With many species being at the end of their range, the area is significantly important in determining factors which limit species distribution and abundance. In the marine environment also, Shark Bay represents the northern extremity of many cold water species typical of the south, and the southern extremity of many tropical species.



The seagrass beds of Fauré Sill have a major impact on Shark Bay's ecosystems.

Contain unique, rare or superlative natural phenomena, formations or features of exceptional natural beauty.

The arid landscape of Shark Bay, combined with many peninsulas, islands and bays, creates a great diversity of landscapes and exceptional scenery. Notable areas include the Zuytdorp Cliffs, Peron Peninsula, Dirk Hartog Island, Herrisson and Bellefin Prongs. Other significant features include Shell Beach, the birridas and lagoons, and the contrasting colours of the dunes and cliffs of Peron Peninsula. To fully appreciate the beauty of Shark Bay, it is recommended that visitors take a scenic flight over the area. Shark Bay is one of the most significant terrestrial and marine ecosystems in the world containing phenomena such as the stromatolites, Wooramel seagrass bank, hypersaline environments and the Fauré Sill. The bay is also the only place in the world where a 'lek' mating system has been observed in marine mammals. Dugongs have been recorded gathering at a mating ground where each male defends a small area in which to carry out mating displays.

The most important and significant habitats where threatened species of animals and plants of outstanding universal value from the point of view of science and conservation still survive.

The peninsulas and islands of Shark Bay provide significant fauna refuge habitats. Of Australia's twenty six species of mammals which are threatened with extinction, five are found on Bernier and Dorre Island Nature Reserve. Though once widespread, four of these species now occur naturally nowhere else in the wild. Shark Bay also has thirteen threatened reptiles, three rare birds, ten percent of the world's dugong population and significant loggerhead turtle rookeries. It is also an important area for migratory species such as the humpback whale and wading birds from Siberia and parts of Asia.



The Shark Bay mouse is one of Shark Bay's threatened animals.

For more fact sheets visit www.sharkbay.org.