Attention editor/chief of staff **05 August 2025**

Treasure trove of local marine life published in new species ID Guide

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A recent research project led by the Western Australian Museum has unveiled a treasure trove of marine species, featured in a new guide which showcases the diversity of aquatic life in Cockburn Sound, south of Perth.

The Cockburn Sound Benthic Biodiversity Identification (ID) Guide took two years to develop and is a culmination of extensive research and fieldwork conducted by a team of taxonomists and marine biologists from the Western Australian Museum, Curtin University, Murdoch University and Edith Cowan University through the WAMSI Westport Marine Science Program (WWMSP).

It features 250 images of benthic marine species including sponges, hard corals, crustaceans, sea squirts, sea stars and other bottom-dwelling creatures, and is the first resource that illustrates what lives in the area, making it a useful tool for scientists, snorkellers, marine enthusiasts, and conservationists alike.

The specimens were recorded from soft sediments and hard seafloor sampling in Cockburn Sound, as part of a WWMSP project which aims to improve understanding about the biodiversity of marine invertebrates in the area.
The illustrated guide, features many of the species encountered over the project and showcases the rich and diverse ecosystem thriving in an area which has been highly urbanised.

Lead author of the ID Guide, Dr Zoe Richards Curator of Marine Invertebrate at the WA Museum and Associate Professor at Curtin University, said that prior to the project, the species diversity of marine invertebrates in Cockburn Sound was not well-documented, leaving significant gaps in scientists' understanding of the local marine environment.

"The research team's efforts have filled these gaps, providing a clearer picture of the ecosystem dynamics and diversity of benthic species within Cockburn Sound. The ID Guide highlights this incredible diversity and underscores why this region is so important for other species like the pink snapper which use the region as a spawning ground and feed on some of the species showcased in the guide."

Head of Aquatic Zoology at the WA Museum, Dr Lisa Kirkendale, noted that the guide also includes specimens just millimetres in size, a fraction often missing from traditional ID guides, but a very important component of marine food webs.

"Juvenile fish eat small prey, including micromolluscs and tiny crustaceans, both abundant in Cockburn Sound. Importantly, all animals featured have specimens vouchered for long-term

safe storage and access in the WA Museum's collection that will also benefit future taxonomic work and species discovery."

WWMSP project leader Dr James Tweedley said the ID Guide was an outcome of the incredible effort from the team behind the WAMSI Westport benthic communities project which had significantly enhanced understanding of the region's biodiversity.

"This ID Guide is not just a record of our findings, but a celebration of the incredible biodiversity that exists in this highly urbanised location. We hope it promotes responsible and informed use of the area and inspires people to learn more about the marine life in their blue backyard."

The Cockburn Sound Benthic Biodiversity ID Guide is freely available to the public and can be accessed through WAMSI and the WA Museum's websites:

- WA Museum: https://visit.museum.wa.gov.au/collections/aquatic-zoology
- WAMSI: https://wamsi.org.au/project/benthic-communities-and-habitats/

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