



KIMBERLEY MARINE

RESEARCH STATION • CYGNET BAY

APRIL 2013



A few words from KMRS General Manager James Brown

All good things must come to an end and today, Ali McCarthy, KMRS Research Officer extraordinaire, hangs up her mask and fins for the last time at Cygnet Bay... After two and a half years at the helm she will be relocating to Broome. Thankfully, it's not too far away and, whilst we wish her all the best, we look forward to continuing to have her involved in KMRS in the years to come.

As the inaugural KMRS employee, Ali leaves the Research Station in great shape after building it with her own two hands from my poorly conceived concept into an operation now being taken seriously by academia and government alike. So many goals have been achieved in such a short time that it's hard to know where to start, but to name just a few she has developed a range of media tools which have helped to raise awareness of KMRS across the country and the seas; hosted dozens of science teams as they became familiar with the facility and seascape on behalf of their Institutes; organised and overseen countless hours of field research; collected two years-worth of monitoring data for Sana Dandan's Oceans' Institute coral PhD and contributed to baseline documentation of near-shore coastal Kimberley coral spawning; secured the tender to undertake the field component for the new Kimberley Aquaculture Zone and managed the program hands-on from start to finish including 14 vessel-based trips to Cone Bay in 6 months; steered KMRS to shortlisting as a finalist at last year's WA Science Awards; created an ongoing relationship with the local high school kids through the Bushranger Program, developed a working relationship with the Bardi Jawi Rangers and earned herself a level of respect from the Rangers and broader Peninsula community which I have rarely seen before. Ali has exceeded everyone's expectations except her own and, in my opinion, will blaze a trail of excellence in whatever path she takes in life.

While we come to terms with Life-After-Ali (LAA as this period will be referred to by the Cygnet Bay community), I look forward to welcoming our new Head of Research to KMRS and Cygnet Bay, Dr Erin McGinty. With a PhD from James Cook University and senior level experience in commercial environmental science, Erin brings a fresh set of skills and experience to the Bay which we are very excited to have onboard. Beyond this, there's that one key element that must be kept alive; an uncontrollable passion for marine science and the Kimberley coast. For now, farewell Ali, and know that you have sealed your place in the Cygnet Bay legend.

What's been happening at KMRS in April?

April 1 – 30: MUCRU Kimberley dolphin research project continues at KMRS: Leading an eager troop of volunteers, Murdoch Uni Cetacean Research Unit PhD candidate Alex Brown returned to KMRS for his 3rd month-long field trip. His study, entitled "[Snubfin & Humpback Dolphins in the Kimberley](#)", commenced in 2012 and is already creating waves with truly remarkable baseline data being collected. Quoted from Alex; "In April, we had another excellent month on the water with the change of season period providing several weeks of magnificently calm seas (check out the glass-off in the photo!). All three species of dolphin known to frequent the area were encountered on an almost daily basis. This trip included several more fascinating encounters with socialising pods of snubfin dolphins and we are excited to see such interesting observations coming together to form valuable data on these otherwise poorly documented animals." The team was joined briefly by MUCRU colleague Simon Allen for a few days towards the end of the month and are now continuing their work along the western coast of the Dampier Peninsula at Beagle Bay. KMRS would like to thank Alex, Christy, Szusanna and Randal for a marvellous month onsite. Follow the team's online blog [here](#).





11 April: Bardi football jerseys presented to the Ejai family & ICEA crew: Cygnet Bay Pearls was proud to host Kevin & Donna Ejai and family from One Arm Point along with members of the ICEA (Indigenous Communities Engagement & Awareness) Foundation for dinner and sponsorship presentation of the new Bardi football jerseys. The group took the opportunity to discuss community aspirations including the role of marine science in a local context. The meeting also provided a welcome opportunity to catch up with ICEA Program Assistant Marlee Hutton who helped out at KMRS in January 2013 as a tertiary marine science work experience student. Thank you to all involved, we look forward to continuing to work together. ICEA is a not-for-profit organisation operating youth-focussed leadership programs and forums, aimed at better understanding, and subsequently addressing, the specific issues and challenges faced by Indigenous youths (iceafoundation.com.au).



April 19: Personnel transfer to Caffarelli Island: The newest addition to the fleet at Cygnet Bay, the *Cyclone*, was used for a WA Dept. of Environment & Conservation personnel transfer from KMRS to Caffarelli Island, a 35nm trip one-way across the mouth of King Sound. Conditions on the water were near-perfect and it took 2 hours for the *Cyclone* to reach Caffarelli Island where the DEC passengers were met by colleagues onboard the *Diversity II* en-route to Adele Island for annual seabird and rat surveys coordinated by DEC and Monash Uni. This is the 2nd year that KMRS has provided a transfer for the teams undertaking the surveys. Before steaming out, DEC's Russell Palmer set traps and explored target habitat areas at Cygnet Bay to assess rodent populations onsite, in particular looking for the *Ningbing Pseudantechinus* (right), a small marsupial endemic to NW Australia which is known to frequent areas of the farm during the dry season (photo thanks to B. Gibson, *Cygnet Bay*).



April 20-21: Expedition to recreate a Bardi raft: The team from Blue Cloud Spatial accompanied Bardi artisan and musician Albert Wiggan and family from Beagle Bay on board an expedition to document the recreation of a traditional Bardi raft. The trip led them south east of Long Island near Derby at the bottom of King Sound in convoy with the MUCRU team on board *Blue Steel* who were out scoping for dolphins in the area. Blue Cloud is a citizen-science oriented collaborative project to leverage social media for global conservation initiatives. Thanks to Albert and to the Blue Cloud team for sharing this special day. (Photos thanks to Blue Cloud Spatial)

April 24: Northern Australian Quarantine Strategy team drops in: As part of routine surveys of the Dampier Peninsula for exotic plant pests, diseases and weeds, a team from the Northern Australian Quarantine Strategy visited briefly to investigate flora communities onsite and provide feedback on effective weed eradication.



April 25 – A crowd gathers for a special ANZAC evening at Cygnet Bay

The community at Cygnet Bay came together on ANZAC evening to embrace a very special opportunity for appreciation and reflection. Alex Brown from the Murdoch University Cetacean Research Unit delivered a wonderfully informative presentation of his PhD study on Kimberley dolphins, including info on many of the pods that frequent the Bay. Alex wowed the crowd with snippets of amazing footage and exciting facts. Due to school holidays, the presentation will be re-run for the Ardyaloon Bushranger students and the Bardi Jawi Rangers in mid-May.



what's been happening in the water lately?

Ambient temperatures have ranged from as low as 16.7°C up to 35.9°C over the course of the month and

the first of the south-easterly trade winds have started to blow, signalling the shift in season as "the dry" approaches. An example of this early on in the month coincided with a brief period of heavy rainfall and the predicted April coral spawning window, making conditions in and on the water extremely unfavourable (pictured above left as seen from Cygnet Bay's front beach). As such, the KMRS team was unfortunately unable to collect samples for monitoring and were none the wiser as per traces of spawning activity due to the rough conditions. In the days following, however, a surge in marine life activity throughout the Bay was noted, as was the presence of numerous manta rays along Broome's beaches, all of which is indicative of a recent spawning event. Otherwise, conditions have ideal for spotting marine wildlife, including this green turtle and sea snake, both photographed by the MUCRU team in the Cygnet Bay area.



Topping off the wildlife spotting, a large pod of false killer whales (*Pseudorca crassidens*) was chanced upon in Escape Passage during a Thousand Island Tour on April 24, creating a spectacle with their wake-riding antics and agile manoeuvrability. The pod comprised almost 30 individual animals including smaller juveniles who frolicked right up alongside and underneath the vessel while the larger adults hung out in the background approximately 100m away. This amazing encounter comes almost a year to the day after a single pair was spotted for the first of numerous times within Cygnet Bay on April 22, 2012. Special thanks go to one of the incredibly lucky punters on board who kindly shared a copy of his footage of the pod with KMRS staff and the MUCRU dolphin team, stills from which are included here.



A message from the Bushrangers:



"The local Bushrangers are high school students from One Arm Point School. The group is really keen to get involved with any marine research in the area and would love to get some hands-on experience. Ali has talked to us about some of the KMRS research and we have been out exploring together to look at corals and other marine life exposed on the spring low tides. As a group, we are keen to hear from anyone visiting the area in the future and learn about ongoing research projects and studies. We would particularly enjoy the opportunity to assist with any data collection or project work including monitoring and other long-term programs. Please contact high school teacher and Bushranger coordinator, James Taylor, by email - james.taylor2@education.wa.edu.au to talk in more detail about the possibilities. We would love to help out however we can!"



Thanks & farewell from KMRS Research Officer Ali

Firstly, I'd like to take this opportunity to welcome Erin on board; I wish her the very best in the new role and have no doubt that we will all be hearing amazing things of KMRS in times to come with Erin at the helm!

For me, the past few years as KMRS Research Officer at Cygnet Bay have encompassed a spectrum of exciting, challenging and wonderfully special times. I count myself as extremely fortunate to have worked alongside such inspirational people and gained such magnificent marine experience in the process.

The vision that James and the Brown family have created for the KMRS venture is extraordinary and the opportunity that I have been given to play a role in that vision has been a remarkable one. Thank you; it has been an honour and a pleasure being part of your team.

Working first-hand with the range of scientific and community-based teams who have engaged with KMRS has been a real privilege and I am greatly appreciative of the wealth of knowledge that these marine experts have generously shared. Likewise, the opportunity to contribute to the development of our capacity at KMRS to communicate aspects of this amazing science with interested community members from all walks of life has been a highlight for me, including circulating these newsletters. Thank you all. I wish our teams and readers alike the very best and encourage everyone to embrace the opportunities represented by marine research initiatives, both for science and the broader community good.

And last but certainly not least, my truly heartfelt thanks go to the Cygnet Bay crew, past and present, who have wholeheartedly embraced KMRS as well as shared their laughter and love throughout life at the Bay. Our time together is indelibly imprinted.



Photo of the month

April 2013

Playful antics of the
Australian snubfin
dolphin (*Orcaella
heinsohni*) at Cygnet Bay

By Christy Harrington on
behalf of MUCRU - *Special
thanks to the team for
sharing their great photos.*



+61 8 9192 4999 ✉research@cygnetbaypearls.com.au

www.kmrs.com.au