



Bare Sand Island Volunteering Manual



Project outline

Research at Bare Sand Island commenced in 1989. The project is a scientific study to examine the biology and ecology of nesting and foraging sea turtles. A large population of Flatback sea turtles (*Natator depressus*) and a small population of Olive Ridley sea turtles (*Lepidochelys olivacea*) nest on the island during the winter months (May to September). AusTurtle Inc. was formed in 2004 and since then, we have collected population data to monitor abundance over time and determine threats to survival. The waters around Bare Sand Island support significant numbers of foraging Green (*Chelonia mydas*) and Hawksbill (*Eretmochelys imbricate*) sea turtles.



The International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) nominates a set of criteria used to identify species at risk of extinctions. The criteria are used by both the Northern Territory Government and Commonwealth Government under the *Territory Parks and Wildlife Conservation (TPWC) Act 2006* and *Environmental Protection and Biodiversity Conservation (EPBC) Act 1999*. The table below lists each species and risk of extinction under international, national and state criteria.

Common name	Scientific name	EPBC	NT (TPWC)	IUCN
Flatback	<i>Natator depressus</i>	VU	DD	DD
Olive Ridley	<i>Lepidochelys olivacea</i>	EN	VU	VU
Green	<i>Chelonia mydas</i>	VU	LC	EN
Hawksbill	<i>Eretmochelys imbricata</i>	VU	VU	CR

CR – Critically Endangered (an extremely high risk of extinction in the near future)

EN – Endangered (a very high risk of extinction in the near future)

VU – Vulnerable (a high risk of extinction in the wild in the medium term)

LC – Least Concern (evaluation indicates the species does not qualify for any other category)

DD – Data Deficient (evaluated but inadequate data or knowledge to rank the status)

Location

Bare Sand Island is located approximately 50 km west of Darwin, the island is the smallest of eight islands within Fog Bay. Bare Sand Island has an approximate circumference of 1.8 km sitting upon rocky reef. As the name suggests the island is mostly sand, with low dunes sparsely vegetated with grasses, herbs and a single tree.

The island is subject to strong winds, a large tidal range of up to 8m and strong current, causing the island to be in a constant state of change. The closest settlement is Dundee Beach approximately 22km west, the camp is otherwise isolated.



Cultural significance

Bare Sand Island (Ngulbitjik) is part of the Kenbi Aboriginal Land Trust. This was the longest running Aboriginal land claim in Australian history. The claim was successful in 2016 after 37 years. The island has two registered sites and is recognised as a Cultural site as a whole. The island is a women's island and is believed the fresh water that pools on the island is attached to a water hole on the mainland. The island's night sky is also a dreaming site.



What to expect

Transport to the island is provided by Sea Darwin Eco Tours, taking approximately 1.5hrs by boat from Cullen Bay Ferry Terminal. The camp is isolated, with limited Telstra mobile phone reception. The camp has a communal kitchen, with three solar powered fridges. Cooking duties are shared amongst the volunteers with a set menu each week (please see Bare Sand Island Recipe Book). There are limited power outlets available during the day.

As the name suggests, Bare Sand Island has a lot of fine sand which gets into everything. Please keep this in mind when deciding what to bring, especially electronics such as cameras with moving lenses.

There is a composting toilet set-up on the island for volunteer use. There is a limited amount of fresh water for a 'sponge bath' as fresh water is mostly reserved for drinking and cooking. A lot of our volunteers opt to bathe on the beach on an outgoing tide and take the opportunity to wash their clothes at the same time. All rubbish, including sanitary items, are to be removed from the island on return.

Swimming is not permitted nor advised due to resident saltwater crocodiles.

Duties on the Island

Research duties depend on tidal movement. Beach patrols require you to be on the beach two hours prior to high tide in the evening. If you would like to see the tide times for your week, google search 'Fish Reef NT tide times' for a chart. The majority of duties are conducted at night and early morning. Research duties include:

- Beach patrols looking for nesting turtles
- Checking for turtle tracks
- Tagging (experienced people only)
- Measuring adult nesting females
- Counting and assessing hatched nests

Other duties, conducted during the day, on an ad-hoc basis can include:

- Maintenance of equipment
- Data Entry (your camp leader can help you navigate this)
- Compiling and populating the season's nesting and hatchling success data
- Tagging and measuring turtles
- Helping with specific studies on blood chemistry
- Diet analysis and movements
- Predation of hatchlings
- Hatchling vocalisation

What is included

- Boat transfer (to and from Darwin)
- Breakfast, lunch and dinner
- Drinking water
- 1 x Comfortable Dune 4WD single mattress per person
- 1 x three-person tent per person

What isn't included

- Food and accommodation in Darwin Prior to and after Bare Sand Island trip
- Transport to and from airport/accommodation to island transfer (Cullen Bay Ferry Terminal)
- Personal insurance (volunteers are expected to have their own travel and/or health insurance)

What to bring:

- Broad-brimmed hat
- Sunglasses
- Sunscreen
- Bathers
- Towel
- Long-sleeve sun protective shirt
- Head lamp with red light
- Personal water bottle (at least 1L)
- Personal toiletries
- Sand shoes (optional)
- Reef boots (optional)
- Thongs/Sandals
- Sleeping bag
- Sheet for mat
- Pillow
- Camera
- Battery pack/portable charger (optional)
- Books or activities to keep you entertained during down times (during the day when hot)
- Snacks



Drug and alcohol policy

Bare Sand Island is a remote location close to dangerous wildlife and inhospitable conditions. There is a high risk of incidents and or injury if not vigilant. Drugs and alcohol are not permitted.



Activities

Don't forget to bring your sense of adventure. There is spectacular birdlife and sights to see.

- Bird watching
- Reef walks
- Reading
- Beach walks
- Fishing (you will need to bring personal gear)

Skills and knowledge

- Gain experience in working remote locations
- Turtle monitoring and tagging techniques
- Nest success surveys
- Recording field data

For further information email austurtle@austurtle.org



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