

WIRRIYA JALYANU SEAGRASS FESTIVAL

CELEBRATING MALGANA LANGUAGE, ART AND SCIENCE OF
SHARK BAY'S SEAGRASS ECOSYSTEMS



Welcome to Country by Auntie Ada Fossa



Seagrass glass mosaic by Shark Bay Arts Council members

WHAT DID YOU LEARN ABOUT SEAGRASS?

FOR THOSE WHO WERE UNABLE TO JOIN US IN PERSON, HERE'S A SNAPSHOT TO MAKE SURE YOU DON'T MISS OUT IN 2022!

"Hey, Mum! I made a sea turtle cupcake!! Buyungurra is the name for sea turtle! Sea turtles eat seagrass," said a child attending the inaugural Wirriya Jalyanu Seagrass Festival.

Shark Bay residents and visitors attended this family festival held on April 8th at Denham Town Hall. It was the closing celebration for a two-year collaboration between the Malgana Aboriginal Corporation and the University of Western Australia supported through the Australian Government's National

Environmental Science Program (NESP), where a seagrass restoration program was developed in response to the 2011 marine heat wave.

Seagrass is an important element of the Shark Bay World Heritage Site. Meadows formed by several species of these flowering plants make up habitat for dugongs (wuthuga), turtles (buyungurra), and fish (djiljit).

The festival organisers aimed to promote greater understanding about the seagrass ecosystem with

activities based on topics in marine science and Malgana language, together with archaeology, cooking, visual art, dance, and land management.

Well attended public science talks were held in the Town Hall on Wednesday, 7th of April and provided a context for the festival events the following day. The three presenters spoke passionately about their research. UWA's Prof Gary Kendrick spoke about seagrass ecosystems: the foundation of Shark Bay's fragile marine environment and the impacts





Public science talks



Turtle cupcake enjoyed by young and old



Seagrass information displays

of heat waves. Malgana woman and artist Bianca McNeair spoke about turtle tagging fieldwork with Malgana women on Wirruwanna (Dirk Hartog Island), and UWA researcher Dr Ana Sequeira spoke about tracking the movements of turtles and dugongs, showing us just how far these animals can travel.

The festival was formally opened by Auntie Ada Fossa who welcomed all to Malgana Country, assisted by daughter, Patricia Oakley. Together with Amrit Kendrick as MC, Patricia lead the festival committee along with Dr Elizabeth Sinclair (UWA), Michelle Judd (Bush Heritage) and other key volunteers.

The Malgana language workshop for children was the first festival event. They learned to count and say the names of animals that live in the seagrass habitats. Kym Oakley and Kelly Osborne taught the words for turtle, mullet (mulgarda), shark (thaaka), dolphin (yinabuga) and dugong (wuthuga). The kids enjoyed colouring in the marine creatures. Their artwork

will be part of an upcoming dual language children's book in Malgana and English.

The Festival atmosphere was heralded by bright colourful banners of turtles and dugongs previously created by the Shark Bay Arts Council. They also facilitated a community glass-mosaic artwork. The 1500mm x 750mm creation was unveiled at the festival. Twenty members attended innovative skill-development workshops as a remote learning class

"The festival was a great mix of science, education, art, and creativity. There were many engaging stalls and presenters that brought wirriya jalyanu to the forefront. It was great to learn about a part of our country that we all take for granted and to see how locals are protecting and preserving this resource."



Nick Pedrocchi and Dr John Statton deploying a seagrass snagger for restoration





Shark bay school student's display

distributed between Denham, Carnarvon and Perth. Glass artists Sally Capewell and Sabrina Dowling Giudici facilitated the local workshops via Zoom with Shayne Thomson. 18 panels were patchworked into a large installation, featuring recycled glass. A permanent public viewing location is being sought for this mosaic artwork.

The festival introduced artwork of emerging local Indigenous artist, Tiahna Oxenham. Her 'Seagrass Seeds' artwork is featured in visual material representing the festival. Other artists who displayed sea-country inspired artworks were Nadjie Roelefs (felting), Kelly Osborne (jewellery), Sally Capewell (basketry) and Marta Sánchez Alarcón (mandalas), along with some great art and

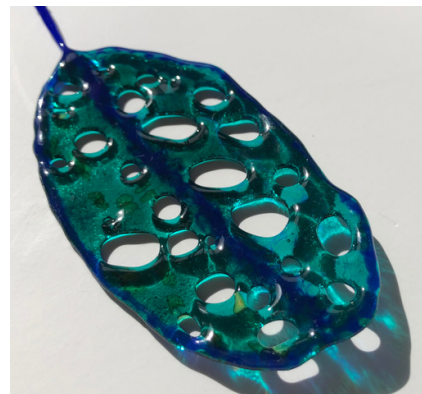


Seagrass inspired arts and crafts

seagrass stories by Shark Bay School students.

Seagrass information displays were staffed by Malgana Rangers Sean McNeair, Richard Cross, and Alex Dodd, together with UWA researchers Prof Gary Kendrick, Dr Elizabeth Sinclair, Dr John Statton and Dr Marion Cambridge, and DBCA staff Dr Simone Strydom, Kieran Cross, Dr Kathy Murray, and Marta Espinheira. They were kept busy sharing their knowledge about seagrasses, the impacts on them, identifying different species, and restoration methods.

Les Oakley from 2 Deadly Food & Fitness introduced festival goers to native bush foods. His cooking demonstration was well received as participants young and old made their own



Dugong-seagrass art glass

damper. Jade Pervan further delighted the festival children with archaeology activities.

Land management activities were led by Bush Heritage land managers, Michelle and Ken Judd from Hamelin Station. They demonstrated how pitfall trapping is one of the methods used to assess the diversity and health of small mammal and reptile populations. A mock pitfall trap was set up, so budding ecologists could learn how to trap and measure a toy goanna.

The Pundara Gantharri (Star Grandmother) dance troupe, led by Janine Oxenham, performed a beautiful original dance about seagulls (wilyaa). Janine also involved children in a dance workshop where they danced in front of a backdrop



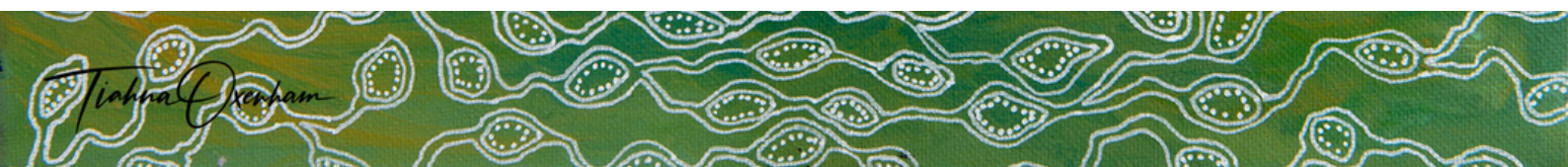
Getting acquainted with bush food



Pitfall trapping with Bush Heritage



Pundara Gatharri dance troupe





Restoring ribbon weed



Children's dance workshop



Enthralled festival goers

"Seagrass is so important in our lives.

No seagrass - no marine life,

No marine life - no fish,

No fish - no fishing,

No fishing - no tourists,

No tourists - Sharks Bay will not be anything like we know it now. Long live seagrass!"

of fish swimming in the Bay. This Baited Remote Underwater Video footage provided by DBCA showed an abundance of marine life in Hamelin Pool and other parts of Shark Bay. Music and videos were screened by local filmmaker and artist, Shayne Thomson, added to the festive atmosphere. All the activities were captured by Shauna Oakley.

For those who missed this years Festival, a short video documentary will be available soon on the festival webpage: www.seagrassresearch.net/festival

Excitement and discussion is already building for next years' Festival. Keep your eyes open for how to get involved in 2022. We look forward to seeing you all next year.

Of course, events such as this could not happen without the support of the local community and volunteers. Thank you to everybody who contributed:



National Environmental Science Programme



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