Rottnest Island: Home of the Quokka

Located approximately 19km from Fremantle, Rottnest Island is 11km long and 4.5km wide (Chau, 2007, p. 91). The name Rottnest was given to the island by Dutch explorer William Vlamingh when he landed there in 1696. It means Rat’s nest and he named it after the small rock wallabies (quokkas) inhabiting the island which he thought were rats. He described them as “a kind of rat as big as a common cat” (Fremlin, 1986, p. 64).

Rottnest Island has an attractive coastline with many small bays and coves, white beaches and turquoise waters. Baker (2004, p. 28) lists swimming as the most popular pastime along with diving, surfing, boating, water skiing and fishing in the clear waters. Cycling around the island is the main form of transport as cars are not permitted on the island.

Quokkas were once found throughout the southwest region of Western Australia, originally occurring along the coast from Jurien Bay to just east of Albany (Hayward, 2004), but are now mostly confined to Rottnest Island. “It is believed about 10,000 quokkas inhabit Rottnest Island at a density of five animals per hectare, with numbers ranging from 4,000 to 17,000, depending on the availability of food and water in any given year” (Rottnest Island Authority, n.d.). Its diet of leaves, shoots and similar vegetation rather than grass, enables it to live comfortably in coastal areas. Constant interaction with people has made some of them quite tame so visitors have a very good chance of seeing them. However, it is important for visitors not to touch or feed the quokkas as the animals may become ill as a result of eating unsuitable food (O’Brien & Swaffer, 2005, p. 107).

The young are born in summer and are carried in their mother’s pouch until about August or September. The quokka reaches maturity at about two years of age, and lives to be about ten years old (Rottnest Island Authority, n.d.).
References


