



Off-the-Grid

Photo: Rod "Caveman" Goonan

Kanga & the Koala

Here's couple of islanders, not quite sure what to make of each other. They went round in circles, getting a good look at each other. Obviously different, a little dubious, each probably wondered how the other fits in around here. In the end they both got on with things and left each other alone.

Comment

It was easy to think we were safe here on the island, till Cowes suddenly became a COVID hotspot. That is one short ferry trip away. Not only that, we've recently seen characters, from Frankston or thereabouts, flaunting lockdown rules with the aim of visiting our island. It's a time to be vigilant and call out misbehaving. Stay positive, get the jab, help make it safe for all and protect this haven. We can do it. Many are not so lucky.

Welcome to Off-the-Grid.

Battle of the Boats

Competition between the Barge and the Ferry is hotting up. It's no longer just about how you get to the island, or what you can carry, e.g. cars on the barge, bags on the ferry. Recently both have included cetaceous encounters, as part of the trip.

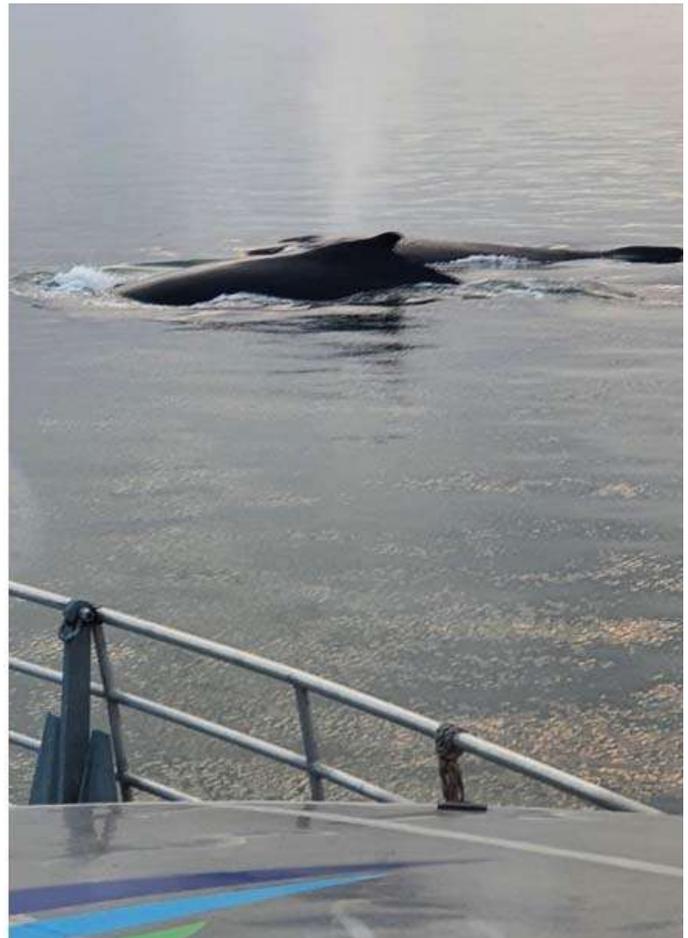


Photo credits: Brad Michelini (dolphin), MJ Johnston (whales)

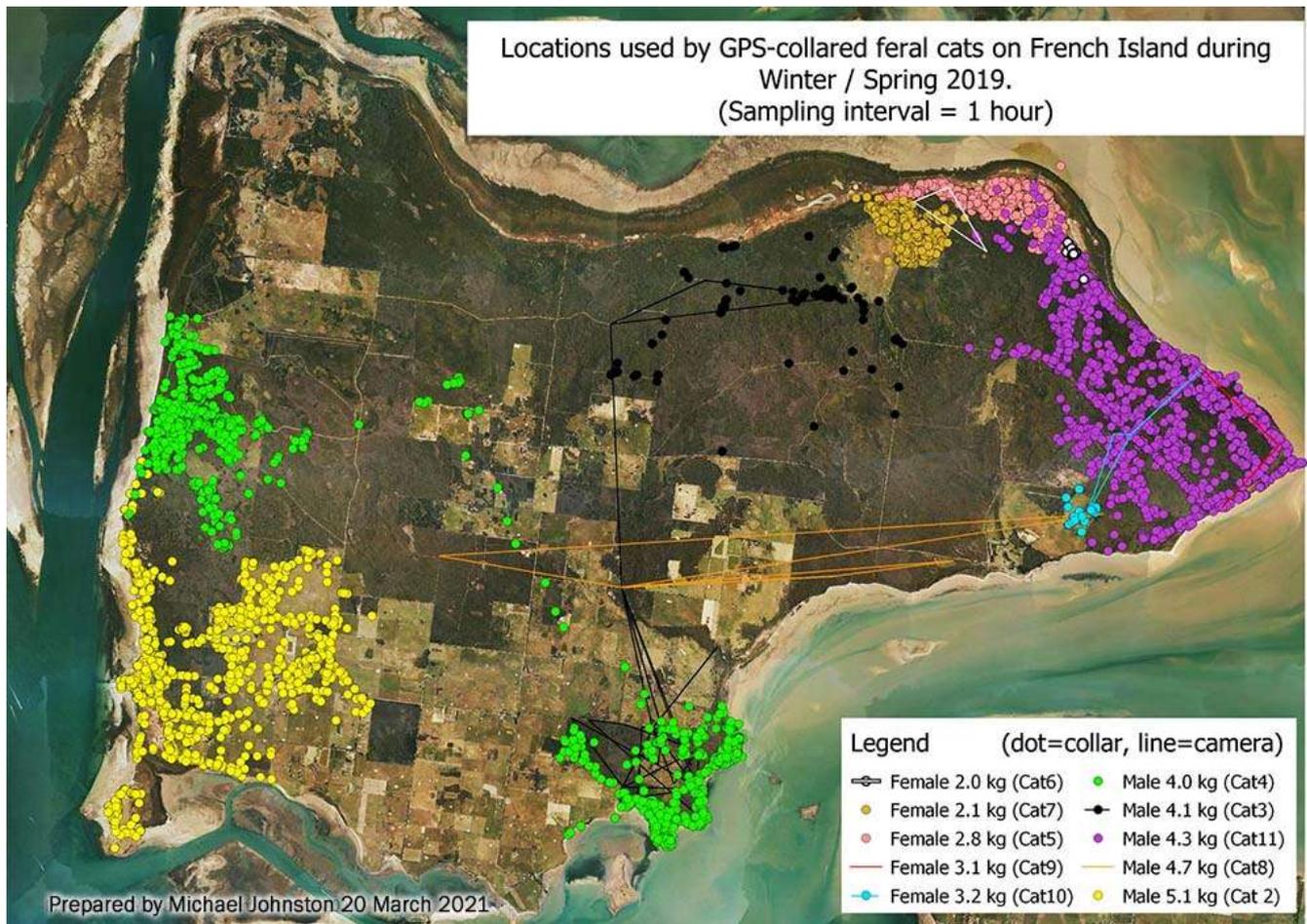
The ferry started with some impressive humpbacks off the bow, then the barge hit straight back with teams of dancing dolphins, up close and personal.

It's been a good year for cetacean sightings, but where will this competition end... swimming seals? sinking submarines? giant squid? Stay tuned!

How to avoid a Catastrophe

Here's some background information that has contributed to the design of the current feral cat eradication program. A key challenge is the mobility of the feral cats that must be removed for the program to succeed.

This work is a complex and, at times, emotional issue for many people. Cats have lived with humans since ancient times. We can gain comfort and emotional support from each other. We usually make a good team, but it is a relationship that needs to be managed. That is our responsibility.



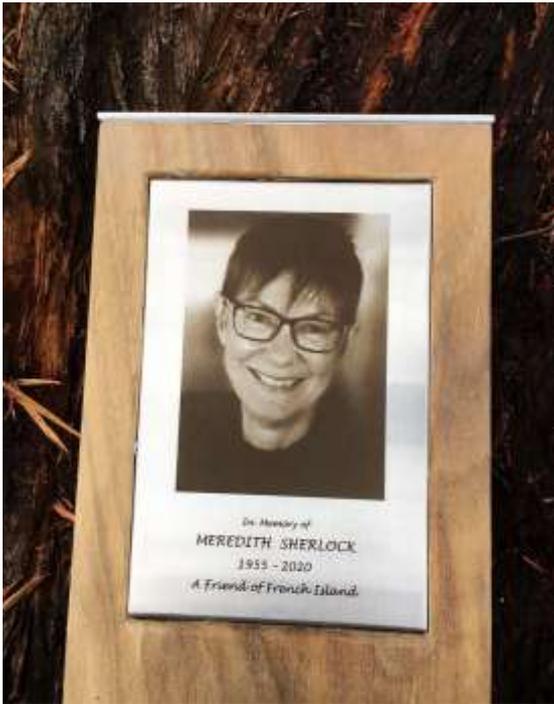
There is a lot of information and detail in this diagram - but some summary points to note:

- Adult male cats are typically heavier than females.
- In one day, a female may travel 3.6km while males can travel up to 12km
- Males roam and hunt over large areas, while females tend to remain in one discrete area
- Feral cats hunt along the coastline, over saltmarsh, through paddocks and into the bush.

Domestic cats on French Island are not seen as a great problem to local wildlife, which is largely due to the community's valuable support for pet sterilisation and containment. Feral cats do impact the range of native species on island. Recent studies identifying items in feral cat stomachs, as well as our wildlife cameras, show that insects, mammals, birds, reptiles, etc are all consumed. If it is small(ish) and moves, then feral cats will eat it.

Preserving the ecological values of French Island, and Western Port more broadly, led to the rejection of AGL's Gasification plant. In a similar way, feral cats contribute to reduction of the island's ecological value. This is an impact where we can take responsibility. Removing the feral cat population will be a challenge, but it's worth it.

Meredith's Memorial



Meredith Sherlock was Secretary and a founding member of the Friends of French Island (FOFI). It's a group passionate about preserving the ecological values of the island. Each month they come to pull out weeds, such as blackberry and sea splurge, monitor endangered bird populations, plant natives to restore the landscape, and in all sorts of weather. They are a dedicated and practical group, who have made a valuable, voluntary contribution to the island over many years.

Sadly Meredith passed away last November after a cancer battle. Her active contributions to FOFI and other diverse community organisations are greatly missed.

One friend John Dore has created a wonderful marker on hardy eucalypt, with her picture etched into stainless steel – as a long-term memorial.

This marker will be placed where her ashes are to be spread, a site dedicated to Meredith within the French Island 5000 Trees planting project, as recognition of her generous support.

A holiday of dreams

I spent a couple of the months at the beginning of this year feeling pretty ordinary. Could not do a thing without needing a lie down, not keen to start big jobs, and no amount of yelling could get me to work faster. Seemed like the aging process was catching up at a rate of knots. I was spending many sessions working in the paddock, beating off mosquitoes, and getting exhausted.

I rarely get sick so it's hard to justify a day, or even half a day in bed just relaxing, reflecting on life and recharging the batteries (what bliss). This time I thought I really did need a good rest, a holiday even, in a luxury resort. But how was that possible? Then I heard of some other islanders who were taking it a bit easier. I thought that's exactly what I want to do.

Turned out they had a name for their situation... Ross River fever. Sure enough, when I got a blood test a few months later, the doctor said I'd had Ross River too.

I'd been visiting the Ross River Resort without even realising it, completely wasting the opportunity for a relaxing break.

The good news is I'm over the virus, but next time it comes around I'd like to spend a lot of time lolling around a pool, sipping pina colodas in a Hawaiian shirt. The bad news is you only get the virus once. Maybe that's good news.

Island

The charms of the city
can get you down
traffic gets crazy, people get loud
waiting at work, waiting for food
waiting in queues to the end of the world,
but we know a place away from those memes

You can go in your
head down the coast
walk out the pier, a ferry is waiting,
seems far but it's near.
Untying ropes, boat swings from the shore,
those people get small as we face to the sea
and the engines surge forward.

Water is dark, the line is clear
shorelines retreat as a new one appears
over the bow, there is hope, there is fear
you can touch, you can feel
a sense of relief as the boat edges closer
to the place where we sleep.

On the island
skies seem twice as wide
birds are more graceful, frogs sing at night.
Trees have koalas, the house has a fire,
it is warm and it's calm.

We harvest that wood
to burn through the night
rise in the morning, see a new light.

On the island
you can be what you seem.

On the island,
the island of dreams.





De la Hayes - pug, post and sapling house 1900 - Coast Road

One More Thing

Off-the-Grid is produced on the traditional lands of the Bunurong people.
We acknowledge their connection to this land
and pay respect to their elders past, present and future.

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