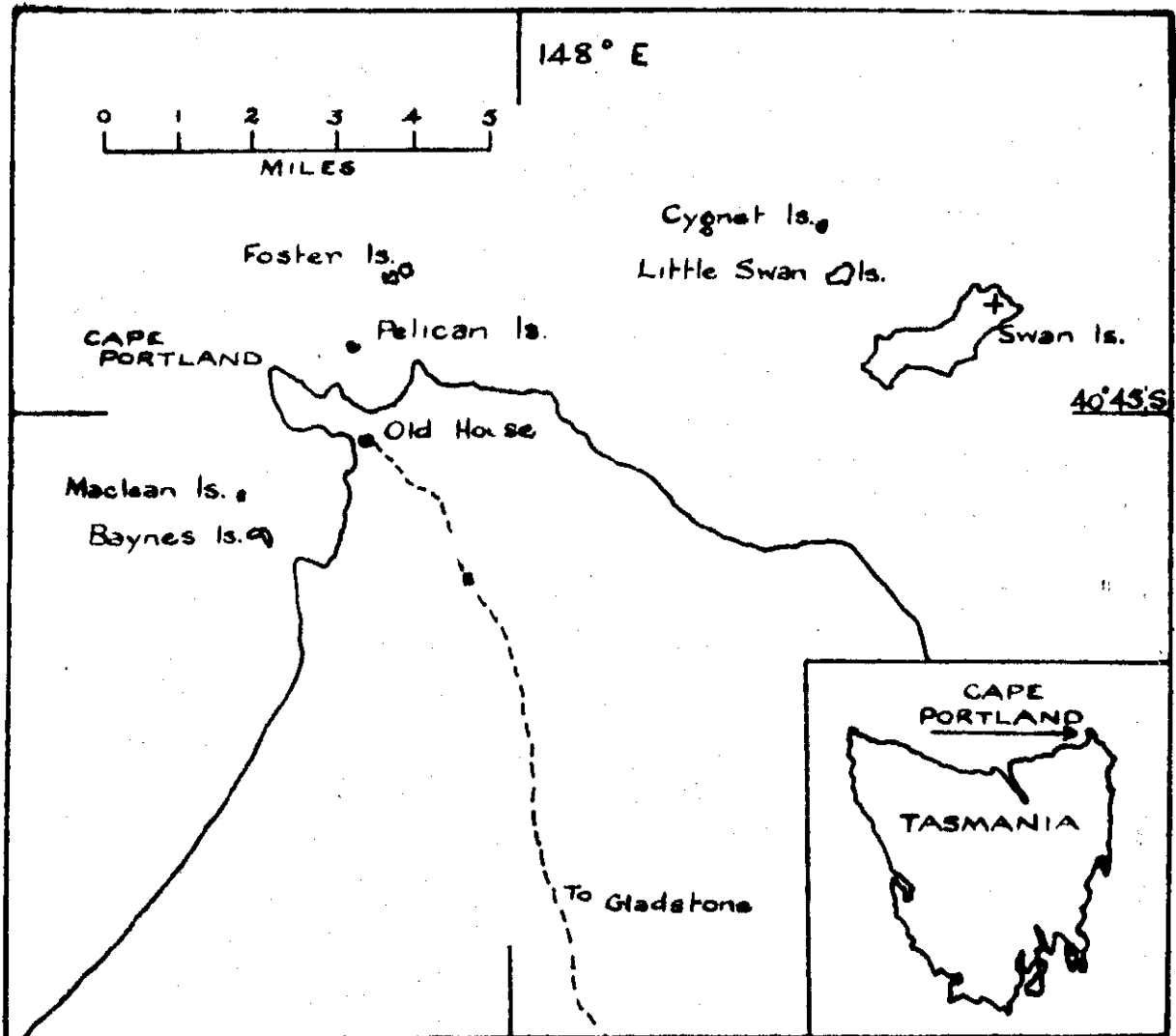


SEA-BIRDS AT CAPE PORTLAND, TASMANIA.

John Liddy, Riverside, Tasmania.

Cape Portland is the north-eastern tip of Tasmania, and there are four small islands a mile or so off-shore that are used by breeding sea-birds. The positions of the islands are shown on the accompanying sketch map. The islands are not sanctuaries.

The names of Baynes and MacLean Islands have not been officially assigned by the Nomenclature Board of Tasmania, but are found on the R.A.N. Hydrographic Chart, River Tamar to Bay of Fires, Aust. 151. 'Pelican' island is a local name, and the island appears on the above R.A.N. chart as an indefinite shoal. Foster Island is officially named.



Foster Island is the largest of the islands, and actually consists of two roughly equal islets divided by a narrow channel which can be waded at medium to low tide. Total area is about 10 acres, and maximum height is about 40 feet. There is a small beach on the south-east corner which provides a good landing place. The island is farther off-shore than the other islands and is far less accessible in an open boat such as we use. There is a strong and potentially dangerous current passing between the island and Cape Portland. Foster Island is a breeding station for Pelicans (Pelecanus conspicillatus), White-faced Storm-petrels (Pelagodroma marina), Short-tailed Shearwaters (Puffinus tenuirostris) and Silver Gulls (Larus novae-hollandiae), with odd pairs of Pacific Gull (Larus pacificus), Caspian Tern (Hydroprogne caspia), Sooty Oystercatcher (Haematopus unicolor), White-fronted Chat (Epthianura albifrons) and perhaps 100 pairs of Little Penguins (Eudyptula minor). One or two pairs of Cape Barren Geese (Cereopsis novae-hollandiae) probably breed there. Most breeding takes place near the north-east corner and the storm-petrels, pelicans and mutton-birds (Short-tailed Shearwaters) breed in close proximity. The Silver Gulls breed near the southern edge of the eastern islet. Very little breeding appears to take place on the western islet, except for penguins. The two islets are well covered with tussocks and small shrubs.

'Pelican Island' has no official name, and received its local name because pelicans bred there regularly until about 1950, when they transferred to Foster Island, probably due to excessive disturbance. At high tide the island is perhaps 100 yards by 30 yards, and about 5 to 6 feet high. It consists mostly of rocks, with little vegetation except Mesembryanthemum. It is a favoured breeding station for Crested Terns (Sterna bergii) and Silver Gulls, but is not used by both species every year. Odd pairs of Pacific Gulls, Caspian Terns and Sooty Oystercatchers also breed there. It is the only island of the four without penguins. There is no beach, access being onto rocks.

Baynes Island is a long narrow island, about 400 yards by 30-60 yards, and has a maximum height of about 20 feet. It consists of several hillocks connected by low ridges, and is well vegetated. There is a small beach which provides a good landing place. Silver Gulls and Crested Terns breed spasmodically on the south-eastern end of the island. Pacific Gulls nest consistently around the top of a hillock on the north-western corner. Pelicans in small numbers appear to breed irregularly on a small plateau on the western end of the island. Odd breeders include the Cape Barren Goose, Sooty Oystercatcher, White-fronted Chat and perhaps 100 pairs of Little Penguins.

Maclean Island is a small island of about half an acre, and is the least important of the four islands as a breeding station.

Odd breeders include the Pacific Gull, Caspian Tern, Sooty Oyster-catcher and perhaps 50 pairs of Little Penguins. There is a poor shingle beach, but we generally land onto rocks.

This season we (self, Athol and Viv Dawe, Keith and Max Targett) left Launceston after work on Friday, November 30th, 1962, arriving at Cape Portland about 9.30 p.m., where we camped in an old house there. Shortly afterwards we banded our first bird - a swallow (*Hirundo neoxena*) caught in a landing net as it fluttered around one of the rooms.

Saturday we were up at 3.30 a.m. and after a quick snack, had the boat in the water at 4 a.m. and set out for Foster Island. Surprisingly for this corner of Tasmania, the sea was dead calm, with no wind and, even more surprisingly, the weather held for the duration of our stay. As we passed Pelican Island we put to flight two Cape Barren Geese and several hundred Black-faced Cormorants (*Phalacrocorax fuscescens*). Pelicans were our main quarry on Foster Island. Here they are not often disturbed, although the colony was senselessly destroyed several years ago, and is probably always a potential source of crayfish bait.

This year we were lucky, and the colony consisted of 20 large young (which we banded), about 10 half-grown (but too small to band), about 10 nestlings and about 10 eggs, several of which were chipping. Pelican chicks can be herded quite easily into a compact group which can be controlled by several persons merely moving out a little from them. On this occasion there were five of us in the party, and on landing two of us ran along the beach and positioned ourselves between the colony and the sea. Twenty-five or so of the largest chicks were held in a group by three of the party, while a couple of strays were collected and banded. The chicks were then picked out one by one and banded (or released if too small to band), and they then lumbered back to the vicinity of the colony. I think that three people could readily control perhaps 60-100 pelican chicks in a group, but extra help to band would, of course, be useful. Young pelicans have a most offensive odour of stinking fish, and after banding a few, a lot of it clings to the bander and his assistants.

The clip on the No.17 bands for pelicans requires a strong pair of pliers, and I generally use engineers pliers. Young pelicans, and probably adults, can be banded by one person by tucking the head and neck under the left arm, pulling its body close and holding it between the left arm and leg, using the left hand to hold the pelican's leg and to manipulate the band, and using the right hand for the pliers. However they are more easily banded by two persons (if possible get someone else to hold the bird, as he then collects the pelican

odour). Young pelicans lunge with open beak, but are unlikely to do damage, unless the end of the beak connects with an eye.

During our stay on Foster Island, we also banded one Pacific Gull runner and one adult Storm-petrel (from about 10 burrows examined; no eggs found): we did not care to stay longer at the petrel rookery as the petrel and pelican rookeries are adjacent and we were anxious to let the adult pelicans return to the several naked nestlings in the colony. A recently dead half-grown Caspian Tern chick was found near the site where they nested last season. Silver Gulls appeared to have laid only recently and there were about seventy eggs, but no nestlings or runners.

Pelican Island was visited on the way back, and here we banded 140 Crested Tern nestlings. There were also some 1000-1500 eggs, which was most unexpected, as during the previous two seasons only some 250-300 pairs of terns had bred near Cape Portland. It would be interesting to know the source of the influx. Little Waterhouse Island, Swan Island and Georges Rocks all have tern colonies and are possibilities.

Baynes Island was next visited, and as we approached, we flushed seven Cape Barren Geese and about 100 Black-faced Cormorants. We had long suspected that a pair of Cape Barren Geese bred on this island, but had no proof. However, on this occasion we found four half grown goslings, and managed to block three of them in a small gully and duly banded them. The fourth escaped to sea, but three companions in the boat took up the chase. The gosling held its own for nearly ten minutes by diving every time the boat approached. It appeared to dive straight down, roll and somersault and then swim back in the opposite direction for about twenty yards. It appeared to dive blind, and seemed to have no idea of the position of the boat when it surfaced. Eventually it was becoming exhausted and was then recovered in a landing net and brought to the island with two large Pacific Gull chicks that had also taken to the water. The latter merely sit in the water while they are scooped up in the landing net. On the island we found and banded four more Pacific Gulls, and as we left the island we ran down another one swimming offshore about 50 yards, banded it and returned it to the island. Thus the total of Pacific Gulls banded was seven. This was far less than expected, as during the last two seasons about twenty pairs bred on the island.

On Baynes Island I also saw a male Satin Flycatcher (*Myiagra cyanoleuca*). This may be more than coincidence, as there was a female of the same species on nearby MacLean Island during the previous summer. As we eventually left the island, an adult Cape Barren Goose returned, and later we saw it lead-

ing the four goslings along the crest of the island.

MacLean Island was the last island visited. Only birds found were several penguins.

And thus ended a most enjoyable banding tour of the islands. We arrived back for lunch about 1.30 p.m., sun-burned, tired, very hungry and smelling like young pelicans. The rest of the week-end was spent fishing and cray-fishing with marked success. On the Sunday three skuas (species?) were seen harrassing Crested Terns as they fished for small sardine-type fishes. This is the first time I have been skuas near Cape Portland.

AUTUMN BANDING OF MIGRATING YELLOW-FACED HONEYEATERS

M. Murn, Canberra. A.C.T.

My field experiences during April 6th and 7th, 1963, confirm much of what Steve Wilson (1963) had to say on flight patterns and behaviour of migrating honeyeaters.

It is considered that the type of country had much to do with the following incident and that if somewhat similar terrain could be found elsewhere in the path of migrating honeyeaters, netting should be possible there.

Through much of the A.C.T. the Murrumbidgee runs in a deep valley through open rolling grazing country. A few isolated gums remain in the open country but along the river there are good sized gums and she oaks with a low scrub of dwarf wattles, grevilleas and teatrees.

The site of this incident was Pine Island, on the Murrumbidgee south of Canberra, and at the netting site a group of tall trees stands at one end while the next tall trees are 200 yards upstream. Here the river has a fairly high sandy bank about 50 yards wide which rises then into a steep bare hill. This flat and the base of the hill are scrubby with patches of grass.

On the morning of April 6th, accompanied by my wife, son and daughter, I was mist-netting in this area but results were poor and spirits took a real dive as flock after flock of Yellow-faced Honeyeaters (Meliphaga chrysops) passed overhead well clear of the nets. It was noticed however that the birds flew low along the sandy river bank, that is over the scrub and grass between the tall trees at each end of the netting area, and that