

Birds of Gabo Island, Victoria

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A description of Gabo Island, Victoria, appeared in the Seabird Island series in *Corella* (Reilly 1977). As there is little else in the ornithological literature about this island, its avifauna is described, together with additional details of the seabirds.

During visits to Gabo Island on 5-15 December, 1975, 22-27 January 1977, 20-27 January, 1978, and occasional subsidiary visits, listing were made of all birds both on land and offshore.

We were surprised at the small number of species, 55, despite the proximity of the island to Mallacoota where more than 220 species were recorded by the Bird Observers Club (Robinson 1965). With the exception of the grassland/heathland adapted species and aerial feeders (three of which are summer migrants), there are only four that are wholly insectivorous. These four—White-winged Triller, Brown Songlark and two cuckoos—are most likely vagrants and certainly form only a very small component of the migratory species present on the island. There is adequate cover for scrub and ground-foraging birds but the lack of Eucalypts, with consequent less diversity of habitat, may partly account for their absence.

Blackberries *Rubus vulgaris* which are widespread are patronised by Silvereyes and three species of honeyeater, all more abundant perhaps than had there been purely indigenous vegetation.

Lightkeepers have reported seeing Galah, Eastern Rosella, Crimson Rosella, black cockatoo, lorikeet and Blue-winged Parrot. We hope to confirm their observations during visits in other seasons.

Numbers of all species were lower in 1978 than in previous years, both on land where conditions were dry, and offshore. There was an almost total lack of breeding success among Little Penguins apparently caused by food shortage, and was presumably also the reason why foraging seabirds were not attracted to the area.

LIST OF SPECIES

- Hoary-headed Grebe** *Poliocephalus poliocephalus*
Remains of one found near lighthouse, December, 1977.
- Little Penguin** *Eudyptula minor*
Abundant breeding species but population varies widely from year to year.
- Wandering Albatross** *Diomedea exulans*
Two sightings of a single bird flying offshore 1975.
- Black-browed Albatross** *D. melanophrys*
Several sightings of a single bird flying offshore 1975, 1977.
- White-capped Albatross** *D. cauta*
One flying offshore 1975.
- Short-tailed Shearwater** *Puffinus tenuirostris*
Abundant breeding species; in rafts of 2 000 offshore but fewer in 1978.
- Fluttering Shearwater** *P. gavia*
In 1975 in rafts of about 2 000 birds offshore with *P. tenuirostris* (specimen confirmed observation); fewer in 1977; none in 1978.
- White-faced Storm-petrel** *Pelagodroma marina*
Reported by lightkeepers to arrive exhausted at night. Remains of two found 1978.
- Australian Gannet** *Morus serrator*
Always offshore, up to 20 in 1975.
- Pied Cormorant** *Phalacrocorax varius*
About ten on rocks, all years.
- Little Pied Cormorant** *P. melanoleucos*
Two on rocks 1978.
- Black Cormorant** *P. carbo*
Twenty on rocks, all years.
- Little Black Cormorant** *P. sulcirostris*
One on rocks 1977.

White-faced Heron *Ardea novaehollandiae*

Up to three in boggy areas watered by springs and on inland swamps.

Black-shouldered Kite *Elanus notatus*

One most days during 1975 and once only 1977.

Whistling Kite *Haliastur sphenurus*

1978 only, flying low over penguin burrows. Once, when disturbed, flew off with penguin but dropped it; not known whether prey dead or alive.

White-breasted Sea-eagle *Haliaeetus leucogaster*

At least three birds including two immatures. Penguin and shearwater remains found at feeding places, specially in 1978. Whether prey taken alive is not known, though starving live young penguins moved on the surface in daylight in 1978. Lightkeeper reported one dropped by sea eagle was still warm.

Swamp Harrier *Circus aeruginosus*

Single sightings in all years.

Little Falcon *Falco longipennis*

One in 1977.

Brown Falcon *F. berigora*

Single sightings in all years.

Nankeen Kestrel *F. cenchroides*

Single sightings in 1975 and August, 1977.

Pied Oystercatcher *Haematopus ostralegus*

Pair once in 1975 and 1977, flying close to shore.

Sooty Oystercatcher *H. fuliginosus*

Up to five on rocks, all years.

Masked Plover *Vanellus miles*

Up to 11 together; in all open areas, all years; breeds on airstrip.

Common Sandpiper *Tringa hypoleucos*

Single sighting on rocks 1975 and 1977.

Japanese Snipe *Gallinago hardwickii*

One in 1977 in boggy area.

Silver Gull *Larus novaehollandiae*

Up to 30, all years.

Pacific Gull *L. pacificus*

One offshore October, 1977.

Common Tern *Sterna hirundo*

Five offshore on three days 1975.

Crested Tern *S. bergii*

Up to 26 on rocks, all years.

Brush Bronzewing *Phaps elegans*

In all suitable habitats, all years; breeding.

Fan-tailed Cuckoo *Cuculus pyrrhophanus*

One juvenile 1975.

Rufous-tailed Bronze-cuckoo*Chrysococcyx basalis*

Occasional records during 1975 and 1977.

Barn Owl *Tyto alba*

Spotlighted 1975. Reported to roost in thick tea-tree.

Spine-tailed Swift *Hirundapus caudacutus*

Flocks of up to 15 birds; all years.

Fork-tailed Swift *Apus pacificus*

Flocks of up to 50 birds, low down in 1977; one only identified in probable mixed flock 1978.

Sacred Kingfisher *Halcyon sancta*

Breeding pair 1977; at least two breeding pairs 1978.

Common Skylark *Alauda arvensis*

Two on airstrip 1975, one 1978.

Welcome Swallow *Hirundo neoxena*

Widespread; breeding.

Richard's Pipit *Anthus novaeseelandiae*

Everywhere in open areas.

White-winged Triller *Lalage sueurii*

One female only 1978.

Common Blackbird *Turdus merula*

Everywhere in scrub, specially in blackberries; breeding.

Golden Whistler *Pachycephala pectoralis*

Two in 1975 and 1977; at least three pairs 1978; presumed breeding.

Clamorous Reed Warbler*Acrocephalus stentoreus*

One silent bird in reeds 1978.

Little Grassbird *Megalurus gramineus*

In areas of thick reed and rush, five pairs breeding 1975, observed all years.

Golden-headed Cisticola *Cisticola exilis*

In thick reeds, at least six pairs; breeding.

Rufous Songlark *Cinclorhamphus mathewsi*

One heard during heavy rain 1977.

Fieldwren *Sericornis fuliginosus*

One in banksia/tea-tree scrub with thick reeds 1977.

Yellow-faced Honeyeater*Lichenostomus chrysops*

Scattered throughout scrub; breeding.

New Holland Honeyeater*Phylidonyris novaehollandiae*

In large flocks throughout scrub and low heath; breeding.

Tawny-crowned Honeyeater *P. melanops*

Everywhere but mainly in open heathland; breeding.

Silvereye *Zosterops lateralis*

Most common bird on island except on rocks and grassland; breeding.

Common Starling *Sturnus vulgaris*

Everywhere; breeding.

Australian Raven *Corvus coronoides*

Up to 12 birds, often near fowlyard.

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References

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Observations on the Diet of a Fledgling Rufous-tailed Bronze-cuckoo

In August 1974, at 'Eden Vale', Sandy Flat, New South Wales a pair of individually colour-banded* Yellow-rumped Thornbills *Acanthiza chrysorrhoa*, (No. 012-22103 and 012-22113), was observed repairing an old nest 1 m from the ground in a Bunya Pine *Araucaria bidwilli*. Four eggs were laid but three disappeared during incubation. Some days after hatching it was discovered that the chick was a cuckoo.

A Rufous-tailed Bronze-cuckoo *Chrysococcyx basalis*, had been seen and heard in the vicinity for some days, usually early mornings, calling from power transmission lines or a *Pinus radiata* about 20 m from the nest.

Frequent observations were made of the nest during the feeding period, and it was noticed that green long-horned grasshoppers, (Tettigoniidae), and several species of smooth skinned caterpillar appeared to be the main items of food brought to the nest.

When the young cuckoo left the nest it spent the first three days fluttering about in the nest tree and in several fruit trees nearby, then it flew to the *P. radiata* and immediately began to supplement the ration brought to it by the thornbills

by eating hairy caterpillars which were abundant on the tree. It was then joined by the adult cuckoo, but was not seen to be fed by it.

The thornbills gradually stopped feeding the young bird, and in two weeks both cuckoos had disappeared.

This poses the question; was the nesting fed by its real parent unknown to the observer, or does the young cuckoo instinctively eat hairy caterpillars, as cuckoos have apparently become adapted to eating these caterpillars which are avoided by most birds?

During the whole period that the young cuckoo was being fed by the thornbills it made the same 'hissing' calls as young thornbills do. In December of the same year a group of Superb Blue Wrens *Malurus cyaneus*, was seen to be feeding another Rufous-tailed Bronze-cuckoo which made the same 'squeaking' calls as young wrens do. Apparently cuckoos are able to mimic the begging calls of the young of the species which is fostering them.

The following year the thornbills moved 300 m away and successfully reared their own young, as did an unbanded pair which took over the old nest in the Bunya Pine.

* Bands used were provided by the Australian Bird-banding Scheme, Division of Wildlife Research, CSIRO.