

LAND-BIRDS OF THREE ISLANDS OFF THE WEST COAST OF EYRE PENINSULA, SOUTH AUSTRALIA: LILLIPUT, NICOLAS BAUDIN AND WEST WALDEGRAVE

PETER SHAUGHNESSY¹, TERRY DENNIS², DAVE ARMSTRONG³ and STEVE BERRIS⁴

¹South Australian Museum, North Terrace, Adelaide, South Australia 5000

Email: shaughnessy.peter@saugov.sa.gov.au

²5 Bell Court, Encounter Bay, South Australia 5211

³Venus Bay Conservation Park, c/o PO, Port Kenny, South Australia 5671

⁴RSD 107, Kingscote, South Australia 5223

Received: 17 May 2007

INTRODUCTION

This note provides information on land-birds of three small islands off the west coast of Eyre Peninsula: Lilliput Island near Smoky Bay, Nicolas Baudin Island near Sceale Bay and West Waldegrave Island near Elliston. These islands have important colonies of the Australian Sea-lion *Neophoca cinerea* and were visited primarily to monitor breeding activity and outcomes for that species. Information on land-birds recorded during visits to the islands reported here supplements that on seabirds presented in Corella by Shaughnessy (2007), Shaughnessy and Dennis (2007) and Shaughnessy *et al.* (2008).

STUDY SITES

Lilliput Island is in the Nuyts Archipelago, located at 32° 26'S, 133° 42'E, 700 metres north-east of the north-eastern end of East Franklin Island and 23.5 kilometres west of the mainland at the town of Smoky Bay. This island of 9.63 hectares has many granite slabs and boulders near the shore line, and a steep rise to a flat calcarenite plateau of about 2 hectares. There is little vegetation on the island. Its status is currently unallotted Crown Land but it has been recommended for inclusion in the Nuyts Archipelago Conservation Park (Department for Environment and Heritage 2006).

Nicolas Baudin Island is 600 metres west of Cape Blanche at the southern end of Sceale Bay and 25 kilometres south-south-west of the town of Streaky Bay. It is located at 33° 01'S, 134° 08'E. The island is about ten hectares in area and is surrounded by reefs on all but the landward (eastern) side. It is composed of large boulders and slabs of red-brown granite, as well as sandy areas and intertidal pools. Much of the island is low and partly inundated each high tide, with several elevated boulders forming the highest points. There is no vegetation on the island. It was incorporated into the South Australian reserves system as the Nicolas Baudin Island Conservation Park in January 2003.

West Waldegrave Island is 13 kilometres north-west of the town of Elliston and further offshore than nearby East Waldegrave Island. It is located at 33° 36'S, 134° 47'E and has an area of 32 hectares. The coastline comprises granite boulders and slabs, with a steep rise of about five metres to a flat calcarenite plateau covered with sandy soil which supports

Nitre bushes (*Nitraria billardierei*), African Boxthorn bushes (*Lycium ferocissimum*) and many smaller plant species. There are small caves and overhangs among limestone cliffs immediately inland of the granite boulders. The island is part of the Waldegrave Islands Conservation Park.

Access to each island was by rigid inflatable dinghy, launched from a larger vessel used for the 30–60 minute open sea crossings. None of the islands has a beach; landings are made on rocks, generally on the northern side, where there is some protection from southerly swells.

METHODS

Lilliput Island was visited four times in the period November 2004 to April 2005, Nicolas Baudin Island was visited 12 times between February 2001 and June 2007 and West Waldegrave Island was visited ten times between February 2001 and May 2006. During each visit, observers systematically searched the island and recorded notes on birds as well as seals. Each visit lasted three to four hours. Bird observations from three of the visits to Nicolas Baudin and West Waldegrave Islands (6 February 2002, 5 May 2003 and 4 July 2003) were submitted to the Birds Australia Atlas Survey Scheme by TD.

RESULTS

Pacific Black Duck *Anas superciliosa*

A few birds were seen close to the shore of Lilliput Island on 6 April 2005.

White-faced Heron *Egretta novaehollandiae*

At Lilliput Island, one bird was at the water's edge on 10 January 2005. At Nicolas Baudin Island, a single bird was seen during most visits in February, and one was also seen in May and July of 2003. At West Waldegrave Island, single birds were seen on 5 May 2003 and 4 July 2004.

Eastern Reef Egret *E. sacra*

At Lilliput Island, one bird was at the water's edge on 8 November 2004. At Nicolas Baudin Island, a bird was standing alone on 18 June 2007. At West Waldegrave Island, a single bird was foraging among rocks in the inter-tidal zone on 6 February 2002. Each bird was dark phase.

White-necked Heron *Ardea pacifica*

At Lilliput Island, one bird was at the water's edge on 10 March 2005.

Osprey *Pandion haliaetus*

Single birds were hunting over the reef channels and open sea between Nicolas Baudin Island and the mainland on 7 May and 2 July of 2003, and on 11 February 2005. There is an Osprey breeding site on the southern side of Cape Blanche (Dennis 2004).

White-bellied Sea-eagle *Haliaeetus leucogaster*

An adult and juvenile were seen over Lilliput Island on 10 March 2005, and an adult on 6 April 2005. They nest on nearby Franklin Islands (Dennis 2004). At Nicolas Baudin Island, an adult circled low overhead on 7 May 2003. There is a breeding site nearby on Cape Blanche (Dennis 2004). An adult seen over West Waldegrave Island on 5 May 2003 was most likely one of the resident pair, which nests on nearby East Waldegrave Island (Dennis 2004).

Swamp Harrier *Circus approximans*

At West Waldegrave Island, one or two birds were seen on most visits.

Peregrine Falcon *Falco peregrinus*

A single bird was seen over West Waldegrave Island on 9 November 2004.

Nankeen Kestrel *Falco cenchroides*

Single birds were seen over West Waldegrave Island on 6 February 2002 and 5 May 2003.

Common Greenshank *Tringa nebularia*

At Nicolas Baudin Island, one bird was seen at tidal pools on 5 February 2002.

Ruddy Turnstone *Arenaria interpres*

At Lilliput Island, several were seen on each visit, with a maximum of five birds on 10 January 2005. At Nicolas Baudin Island, several were seen on each visit, with a maximum of 12 on 5 February 2002. At West Waldegrave Island, small flocks were seen on 5 February, 5 May and 4 July in 2003.

Red-necked Stint *Calidris ruficollis*

Several were seen on each visit to Nicolas Baudin Island, with a maximum of 50 on 4 February 2003. At West Waldegrave Island, a few were seen on 4 July 2003.

Red-capped Plover *Charadrius ruficapillus*

Up to five birds were recorded on four of the visits to Nicolas Baudin Island.

Masked Lapwing *Vanellus miles*

Several were seen on West Waldegrave Island on 6 February 2002, 5 February 2003 and 5 May 2003.

Rock Dove *Columba livia*

Small numbers of Rock Doves were seen ashore at Nicolas Baudin Island on 11 February 2005.

Rock Parrot *Neophema petrophila*

At Lilliput Island, about fifty birds were seen during each visit. At West Waldegrave Island, more than fifty birds were seen on each visit. Breeding activity was recorded on 6 February 2002 when more than 200 birds were present including recently fledged young, and adults were emerging from nesting cavities in the limestone cliffs, which is typical nesting habitat for this species (Jarman 1974; Higgins 1999).

Sacred Kingfisher *Todiramphus sanctus*

A single bird was seen on West Waldegrave Island on 5 May 2003.

White-fronted Chat *Epthianura albifrons*

Several birds were seen on West Waldegrave Island on 5 May and 4 July of 2003, and on 15 May 2006.

Australian Raven *Corvus coronoides*

Two birds were seen on West Waldegrave Island on each of 5 May and 4 July of 2003, and on 9 November 2004.

Richard's Pipit *Anthus novaeseelandiae*

Small numbers were seen on most visits to West Waldegrave Island.

Welcome Swallow *Hirundo neoxena*

At Nicolas Baudin and West Waldegrave Islands a few were present on most visits in 2002 and 2003.

Silvereye *Zosterops lateralis*

At West Waldegrave Island, small numbers of Silvereyes were seen on several occasions.

Common Starling *Sturnus vulgaris*

A few were seen on most visits to West Waldegrave Island in 2002 and 2003.

DISCUSSION

Due to the difficulty of landing on these islands, human interference to the birds is unlikely. Furthermore, in the case of Lilliput Island it is much easier to land on other islands in the area (such as Eyre, East Franklin and West Franklin Islands), and in the case of West Waldegrave Island, it is much easier to land on East Waldegrave Island which is closer to the boat-launching ramp in Anxious Bay and has two sheltered beaches. Access to Nicolas Baudin Island requires a permit from the Department for Environment and Heritage as it has Prohibited Area status to protect the Australian Sea-lion colony. Landing can be particularly difficult and dangerous at Nicholas Baudin due to frequent and unpredictable swell and tide surges among surrounding reefs.

Of these three islands, most species of land-birds were seen on West Waldegrave, which is not surprising considering that it is the largest and has most vegetation. Waders were most prevalent in terms of species and numbers of birds at Nicolas Baudin, which is the island that encloses large tidal pools that provide suitable habitat for some species. The only wader seen on all three islands was the Ruddy Turnstone, which occurs seasonally on most islands of South Australia (Copley 1996). The only land-bird seen breeding was the Rock Parrot, at West

Waldegrave Island, in February 2002. No signs of breeding were apparent during three other visits in February and one in March in subsequent years. Rock Parrots nest in the limestone cliffs and their chicks would be susceptible to predation by snakes, but snakes have not been seen on the island (DA, unpublished observations).

Most islands on the west coast of Eyre Peninsula were visited during the biological survey conducted in the 1970s and early 1980s by Robinson *et al.* (1996). Their report included descriptions of the islands' avifauna. But neither Lilliput nor Nicolas Baudin Island was visited, and West Waldegrave was visited briefly. Other reports of birds on islands off the west coast of Eyre Peninsula (e.g. Jenkin and Waterman 1965; Eckert 1970; Parker and Cox 1978) do not refer to the three islands covered here, although that of Jenkin and Waterman (1965) refers to 'Waldegrave Island', which was most likely East Waldegrave Island, the inner and larger of the Waldegrave group.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Several visits to these islands were funded by the Commonwealth Department of the Environment and Water Resources. We thank many people who assisted with the surveys including Rebecca McIntosh and Jane McKenzie of La Trobe University, Melbourne, and Mel Berris and Cathy Zwick of the Department for Environment and Heritage at Kingscote and Ceduna, respectively. Transport to the islands was provided by Robbie Sleep of the Department for Environment and Heritage, Ceduna; Mat Guidera of Sceale Bay and Streaky Bay Blue Water Charters; Al Sedunary of Sceale Bay; Leigh Amey of Venus Bay Conservation Park, Department for Environment and Heritage; and by several boat operators in Elliston.

REFERENCES

- Copley, P. B. (1996). The status of seabirds in South Australia. In 'The Status of Australia's Seabirds: Proceedings of the National Seabird Workshop, Canberra, 1-2 November 1993' (Eds G. J. B. Ross, K. Weaver and J. C. Grieg). Pp. 139-180. (Biodiversity Group, Environment Australia: Canberra.)
- Dennis, T. E. (2004). Conservation status of the White-bellied Sea-eagle, Osprey and Peregrine Falcon on western Eyre Peninsula and adjacent offshore islands in South Australia. *South Australian Ornithologist* **34**: 222-228.
- Department for Environment and Heritage (2006). 'Island Parks of Western Eyre Peninsula Management Plan'. (Department for Environment and Heritage: Adelaide, South Australia.)
- Eckert, J. (1970). Birds of the Investigator Group with special reference to Flinders Island. *South Australian Ornithologist* **25**: 201-205.
- Higgins, P. J. (Ed.) (1999). 'Handbook of Australian, New Zealand and Antarctic Birds. Volume 4: Parrots to Dollarbird'. (Oxford University Press: Melbourne.)
- Jarman, H. (1974). The Rock Parrot. *Australian Bird Watcher* **5**: 237-245.
- Jenkin, C. R. and Waterman, M. (1965). An expedition to Eyre Peninsula and offshore islands. *South Australian Ornithologist* **24**: 45-48.
- Parker, S. A. and Cox, J. B. (1978). Notes on the birds of Pearson, Dorothee and Greenly Islands, South Australia. *Transactions of the Royal Society of South Australia* **102**: 191-202.
- Robinson, T., Canty, P., Mooney, T. and Rudduck, P. (1996). 'South Australia's offshore islands.' (Australian Heritage Commission: Canberra.)
- Shaughnessy, P. (2007). Seabird Islands No. 250: Lilliput Island (Small North-east Franklin Islet), Eyre Peninsula, South Australia. *Corella* **31**: 83-84.
- Shaughnessy, P. and Dennis, T. (2007). Seabird Islands No. 251: Nicolas Baudin Island, Eyre Peninsula, South Australia. *Corella* **31**: 85-86.
- Shaughnessy, P., Dennis, T. and Armstrong, D. (2008). Seabird Islands No. 252: West Waldegrave Island, Eyre Peninsula, South Australia. *Corella* **32**: 20-21.