

## The Seabird Island Series

PETER FULLAGAR and DURNO MURRAY

The Australian avifauna is moderately rich in seabirds, many of which breed on the numerous offshore islands scattered around the coastline. Despite the number of islands, varying in size from small coral cays, rock stacks, skerries and sandbanks to substantial oceanic outcrops such as the Lord Howe Island group, many have been visited at some time by an ornithologist. But little has been documented about what was found.

In recent years there has been an increased incentive to explore some of these hitherto remote and seldom visited islands. Very largely this has been due to the enthusiasm of bird banders, particularly those with an interest in the study of seabirds. In most instances there has been no way to readily present their findings. Banding schedules tell of numerous visits to islands, and of exciting discoveries, but give little or no details of breeding activity or size of the breeding colonies. What else occurred on the island? Was it easy to land and were the colonies of seabirds readily accessible? Are there any conservation problems from erosion, human disturbance or development? Such information needs to be brought to light.

The recently formed Australian Seabird Group\*, sponsored by the RAOU through their Field Investigation Committee, has as one of its three initial exercises—"the mapping of offshore island seabird colonies". It is to be hoped that this Group can encourage its members to get out and record in a suitable manner the facts needed to compile the seabird island accounts. The Australian Seabird Group will be making available forms and maps to assist the recording of the sort of information required, and will collect and house these records. The Committee of the Bird Banders Association of Australia has decided to assist this project by publishing in *The Australian Bird Bander* a new series to be entitled "Seabird Islands" and an editorial com-

mittee of three has been appointed to assume responsibility for its production. The members of this committee are P. J. Fullagar, S. G. Lane and M. D. Murray (chairman).

A main objective of this series is to produce an account of every Australian island on which seabirds breed. It is intended to move as swiftly as possible, tackling examples from each State and Territory within Australia, to show the way. Once the series is well on its feet it is intended to fulfil another objective by bringing together the available accounts region by region, and reproducing them in a single, updated, and readily accessible form which may be slightly expanded and will include photographs. Thus guides to the seabird islands of particular stretches of coastline can be produced.

A formal layout will be followed to simplify the compilation of each account, and to ensure quick reference to the information. The accounts will appear island by island as completely separate self-contained notes on the status of knowledge. Authors will be invited to contribute their special knowledge to the series and we are sure of their willing co-operation. Much is already known but these data require to be collated from scattered private notes and unwritten collective experiences.

It is to be hoped that "Seabird Islands" will serve to stimulate further work. It will not matter

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\* For further information write to the Secretary, Australian Seabird Group, P.O. Box 235, Civic Square ACT. 2608.

that in many instances information is at first sketchy. It is important to publish what is known and see that this is made more generally available. In fact, it will be a deliberate editorial policy to present incomplete accounts for those islands which are rarely visited and have been examined only briefly. This provisional information should enable subsequent visiting parties to make best use of their time by directing their efforts towards checking and adding to what they can see has already been done. The series should give impetus to those wishing to study further the biology and ecology of seabirds.

The need to record this information grows with increasing public demands for environmental conservation and for decisions on the wisest land use and natural resources management. Islands change naturally both biologically and physically, sometimes with amazing rapidity, and offshore islands are no less vulnerable to man's impact than other habitats, indeed some are certainly more vulnerable to irreversible change. It is necessary to know the facts before decisions can be made in the best interests of Man and wildlife. The purpose of this series is to present concisely and accurately these facts for the seabird islands of Australia.

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## Editorial

'Seabird Islands' is a new series (see page 14) which will be published regularly in *The Australian Bird Bander*. Its purpose is to provide concise accounts of the many coastal seabird islands of Australia. These accounts will provide a base from which future changes may be measured—an essential if the causes of future fluctuations in bird numbers are to be understood. Also, as stated in the introductory article (see page 12) 'it is necessary to know the facts before decisions can be made in the best interest of Man and wildlife'.

Dr Peter Fullager, who has been entrusted by the RAOU with the general guidance of the Australian Seabird Group, Durno Murray our President, and myself form the 'Editorial Committee' for this series.

There are several ornithological societies and groups in Australia whose interests are complimentary and this series is evidence of growing co-operation in such matters. The decision of the Committee of the Association to publish the series also reflects the policy to support where possible, the endeavours of the members.

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## Colour-banded Terns

During December 1972, 300 breeding adult Crested Terns *Sterna bergii* were colour-banded on West Island near Victor Harbour, S.A. Banded juvenile Crested Terns of this population (banded on Stonywell Island) have been recovered on shores from Spencer Gulf, S.A. to south Queensland with many recoveries from South Australian shores east of the Fleurieu Peninsula, from the Melbourne area, and from the Sydney-Newcastle area.

The aim of this colour-banding project is to determine whether breeding adults disperse similarly after the breeding season.

As the success of the project depends on reports of observations of these colour-banded birds would you please report all such observations to me. A numbered C.S.I.R.O. metal band will be on one leg and the colour band on the other leg, and it is important to record the colour of the band and the leg on which it is placed. The colour bands are clearly visible on standing birds.

Details of observations should be forwarded to: *Dr D. H. Close, 30 Diosma Drive, Coromandel Valley, S.A., 5051.*