

Seabirds of Norman and Wattle Islands, Wilsons Promontory, Victoria

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In November and December, 1978, visits were made by us (Lane 1979) and by officers from the (Vic.) Fisheries and Wildlife Division to islands off Wilsons Promontory. Circumstances, mostly due to unsuitable weather conditions at the time, prevented visits to either Norman Island or Wattle Island and these remained almost unknown ornithologically.

D. F. Dorward (1967) recorded Cape Barren Geese *Cereopsis novaehollandiae* on each — five pairs on Norman and three pairs on Wattle Island while D. L. Serventy *et al.* (1971) listed Norman Island as a breeding station for the Short-tailed Shearwater *Puffinus tenuirostris*. This information appears to be all that has been published to date on the bird life of these two islands.

The following information resulted from visits by us in November, 1979.

Norman Island

Norman Island is a typical granite island of the area, about 1.4 km long and 0.9 km at the widest part; the longer axis is aligned north-south. There are two peaks, the one on the larger, northern end rising to over 100 m while the smaller one on the southern end is about 75 m in height. The peaks are connected by a low saddle which is the narrowest part of the island.

On 7 November, 1979, we visited Norman Island accompanied by Peter Thomas, National Parks Service, Vic., and spent from 09:30 hours to 15:00 hours ashore. Short-tailed Shearwater burrows were found wherever burrowing was possible. The burrows had been recently attended but, as expected, most birds were absent from the island at that time. Only six adults were found in burrows and they were banded. A very approximate estimate of the number of burrows was made on the basis of an average of two burrows per square metre for the 40 ha, less 25% for bare rock areas. This gives a figure of some 600,000 burrows.

Cape Barren Geese were numerous and 70 were counted including many almost-flying young. Seventeen of these were captured and banded.

Seventy-four Pacific Gulls *Larus pacificus* were counted but probably the number present over the whole island would have been in the vicinity of 100-120 birds. Nests were found on the western side of the saddle with a second area nearby on the south-western end of the northern section. Excluding old nests, there were seven on the saddle and nine in the other area; eleven contained from 1-3 eggs each while five were ready for eggs.

A small breeding colony of Silver Gulls *L. novaehollandiae* was forming on the south-eastern end of the saddle. About 20 nests were under construction; one contained a single egg and four contained two eggs each.

Although no special effort was made to search for Little Penguins *Eudyptula minor*, four adults were seen in burrows and another was incubating two eggs. Two small downy chicks and two almost-fledged nestlings were also seen. However, from a casual observation of burrows, particularly around the lower parts of the island, it was considered that possibly 400-500 pairs could breed there.

Two nestling Common Diving-Petrels *Pelecanoides urinatrix*, found in burrows among *Carpobrotus* and *Poa* near the Pacific Gull colony on the south-west side of the northern end, were banded. In the same area the remains of a large nestling and two adults were also found, most probably killed by the gulls. Feathers and wings of Fairy Prions *Pachyptila turtur* were found at the entrances to burrows in the same area but none was found occupying a burrow. Breeding probably occurs on the island.

Sooty Oystercatchers *Haematopus fuliginosus* were also breeding on the island; two nests, each containing two eggs, were found in the area of the saddle.

Wattle Island

Off South Point, the southern-most tip of the Australian mainland, this island consists of a rocky, granite ridge extending about one kilometre in an east-west direction. The highest point of the ridge is towards the western end and rises to about 80 metres. A steep saddle separates a small, lower and likewise rocky granite knoll at the eastern end.

Accompanied by Bruce Robertson, we visited this island on 11 November, 1979, from 08:00 hours to 09:15 hours. When we arrived, at about 07.00 hours, the conditions were excellent but, even so, it took nearly an hour to adequately secure the launch off the steeply-sloping rocky shore-line. Unfortunately, a sudden, unpredicted weather change necessitated a rapid departure due to the strong winds endangering the anchorage.

We found numerous Little Penguins in burrows or cavities and one large nestling was banded. Freshly-activated burrows, obviously belonging to Short-tailed Shearwaters, were well-distributed over most of the island wherever soil depth permitted burrowing. There were thousands of burrows but no estimate was made of the number. One pair of geese was seen with four large, almost-fledged young; another pair had two young somewhat smaller while two half-grown goslings were seen elsewhere. Four Pacific Gull's nests contained two or three eggs each and three others were ready for eggs.

Thirty adults were counted on the island, but it was estimated (by B. R.) that about 40 pairs could have been nesting.

Again, shortage of time prevented a thorough search of areas considered likely places for prions and diving-petrels. A quick search of the slope near our landing site on the north side near the western end, revealed the remains of three Common Diving-Petrels and Fairy Prion feathers in small cavities. Both species probably nest on the island.

Other birds seen during the visit were Black-faced Shags *Leucocarbo fuscescens*, Sooty Oystercatchers, Silver Gulls, Welcome Swallows *Hirundo neoxena*, Blackbirds *Turdus merula*, White-browed Scrubwrens *Sericornis frontalis* and Forest Ravens *Corvus tasmanicus*. One Australian Fur Seal *Arctocephalus pusillus* was lying on a rock near where we landed.

A second attempt was made to visit Wattle Island on 14 November, but weather conditions were much worse than expected. After a slow, wet trip from Tidal River to South West Point, it was obvious that it would be impossible to secure a safe anchorage. In fact, the weather deteriorated further during the return trip.

Other Islands Visited

Seven other islands were visited during the period we were at the Promontory. These were:

Rabbit Rock	6.11.79	1 hour
Rabbit Island	6.11.79	2 hours
Great Glennie Island	8.11.79	2 hours
	10.11.79	1.5 hours
	11.11.79	4.5 hours
	13.11.79	2.5 hours
Shellback Island	10.11.79	2 hours
Dannevig Island	13.11.79	2.25 hours
Citadel Island	13.11.79	1 hour
McHugh Island	13.11.79	1 hour

References

- Dorward, D. F. (1967), 'The status of the Cape Barren Goose *Cereopsis novaehollandiae*', *Bull. int. Comm. Bird Preserv.* 10: 56-57.
- Lane, S. G. (1979), 'A visit to islands off Wilsons Promontory, Victoria', *Corella* 3: 29-30.
- Serventy, D. L., V. N. Serventy and J. Warham (1971), *The Handbook of Australian Sea-birds*. A. H. and A. W. Reed, Sydney.

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