

Additional Visits to Islands off Wilsons Promontory, Victoria

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From 26 to 28 November 1980, additional visits were made to six islands off the southern and western coasts of Wilsons Promontory. The islands visited were Wattle and Kanowna on 26 November, Shellback and Norman on 27 November, and McHugh and Dannevig on 28 November. We were accompanied by (Mrs) L. F. Lane on all visits and by J. W. Hardy for the first two days only.

Primarily, the purpose of the visits was to endeavour to obtain further information on the breeding of Fairy Prions* and Common Diving-Petrels. The limited time spent on the islands was directed mainly towards searching for these birds in habitats which appeared suitable. No specific or systematic searching was made for other species.

There are 15 islands off Wilsons Promontory and three within Corner Inlet — Benison, Granite and Doughboy — on which seabirds have been recorded breeding. There is one other, Cleft Island or Skull Rock, on which breeding undoubtedly occurs. Cleft Island is a granite monolith in the Anser Group which rises almost perpendicularly to a height of about 113 m. There are two large caves on the western side; the roof of the smaller cave is some 25 m above the sea which forms its 'floor'. That roof is also the floor of the other, larger cave; soil and vegetation cover its surface. From the launch, burrows, probably belonging to Short-tailed Shearwaters, were visible among the more open parts of the *Poa* and *Carpobrotus* which comprise the dominant vegetation. In addition to the shearwaters which probably breed on the island, Black-faced Shags have been reported breeding on the south-eastern side (Lane 1980). The island was circumnavigated on 26 November 1980 but there was no visible evidence of their recent breeding.

Prior to 1978, few ornithologists had visited Wilsons Promontory islands except to study the Cape Barren Geese. Published information on seabirds breeding on these islands was sketchy.

In 1978 we visited six islands (Lane 1979), and nine islands were visited in 1979 (Lane and Battam 1980), and with those visited in 1980, a total of 27 visits was made to 14 islands. We were unable to visit the Seal Island Group —

Seal, Notch, Clifffy and Rag Islands — due to bad weather, and, of course, Cleft Island. We approached close to Cleft Island on two occasions and, although landing would have been possible onto a rock shelf, further progress would have been out of the question except for properly equipped rock climbers.

The Fisheries and Wildlife Division (Vic.) also conducted surveys on these and other Victorian islands in 1978/79. Results from these surveys were published in the Seabird Island Series in *Corella* Vol. 4, no. 4, November 1980.

The information from our most recent visits (in November 1980), obtained after publication of that issue of *Corella*, and comments on breeding seabirds and other selected species for each island visited follow. The dates of our visits to each island are given in Appendix 2.

Wattle Island

Visited 07:00-11:00 hrs on 26.11.80.

LITTLE PENGUIN — Well distributed and breeding. Some burrows contained two adults, some an adult and two eggs, some an adult, with two small chicks, and some had one or two large chicks; 16 large chicks were banded.

FAIRY PRION — A few nest sites were found along the centre of the northern coast. Four birds were located in cavities but could not be extracted; one other, brooding an egg, was captured and banded.

SHORT-TAILED SHEARWATER — Burrows were well distributed over most of the vegetated areas except where soil depth was insufficient. The majority of burrows had been freshly acti-

* Appendix 1 lists the scientific names of all species referred to in the text.

vated but only about 50 per cent of those checked contained a bird. Seventeen adults, eight incubating an egg, were banded.

CAPE BARREN GOOSE — Four 'adults' were sighted; two almost-flying young were caught and banded but a third escaped.

WHITE-BELLIED SEA-EAGLE — One adult was seen flying over the island. The nest, built on rocks on the highest point of the island, had been found on 12 December 1979 (Norman *et al.* 1980). It was substantial and contained the remains of numerous penguins and some shearwaters; it appeared to have been in use for a number of years.

SILVER GULL — A colony of 31 nests was situated towards the eastern end of the northern side. Seven nests were new and 24 contained eggs (9 x one egg, 11 x two eggs, 4 x three eggs). One "runner" was also found.

Other Species Seen

Black-faced Shag	Welcome Swallow
Marsh Harrier	Blackbird
Buff-banded Rail	Little Grassbird
Sooty Oystercatcher	White-browed Scrubwren
Pacific Gull	Forest Raven
Crested Tern	

Kanowna Island

Visited 13:00-15:30 hrs on 26.11.80.

LITTLE PENGUIN — One or two adults were found in some burrows; a few burrows contained an adult on two eggs and some an adult with small chicks.

FAIRY PRION — Feathers of these birds were found in or at the entrance to burrows or cavities as though a predator had taken the bird. Almost certainly Pacific Gulls would have been responsible. One adult, found incubating an egg, was captured and banded.

SHORT-TAILED SHEARWATER — Burrows were well distributed among *Poa* and about 200, all freshly activated, were examined. A total of 37 adults, 15 incubating an egg, was caught and banded; about 80 per cent of the burrows examined were empty.

SILVER GULL — Viewed from the sea, about 100 pairs appeared to be nesting in a colony near the south-western end of the island, but lack of time on the island prevented closer examination.

PACIFIC GULL — Some 150 birds were counted from one observation point during the

visit. Five nests, four with two eggs and one with a single egg were seen.

Other Species Seen

Cape Barren Goose — 6	Welcome Swallow
Sooty Oystercatcher	Forest Raven

Australian Fur Seals *Arctocephalus pusillus*, estimated at about 1 000 in 1978 (Lane 1979), had increased to at least 2 000.

McHugh Island

Visited 08:30-12.00 hrs on 28.11.80.

LITTLE PENGUIN — Some burrows contained an adult on eggs or small chicks; eight large nestlings were found and banded.

FAIRY PRION — Three adults, each incubating an egg, were caught and banded. Over 50 small burrows or cavities around the southern end were empty.

SHORT-TAILED SHEARWATER — Twenty-two adults, 19 incubating an egg, were caught and banded.

COMMON DIVING-PETREL — Two dead nestlings, found on the southern end, were the only evidence found of nesting. However, most of the small, empty burrows on the southern end may have belonged to these birds as their nesting season could have concluded prior to our visit.

CAPE BARREN GOOSE — Seven 'flying' birds were seen; two small 'runners' were caught and banded.

Other Species Seen

Black-faced Shag — 3	Crested Tern — c. 100
Sooty Oystercatcher — 3	Welcome Swallow
Silver Gull — 1	Blackbird
Pacific Gull — 18	Silvereye

Dannevig Island

Visited 13:00-15:00 hrs on 28.11.80.

LITTLE PENGUIN — One or two adults, and adult on eggs or an adult on small chicks were found in a few burrows; two large nestlings were banded.

FAIRY PRION — Over 100 small burrows or cavities were found, mainly among *Carpobrotus* on the eastern side near the northern end. Most of these, or the entrances to them, contained one, two or more feathers but no bird. Thirteen others contained an adult incubating an egg; these were banded. (It is possible that some or many of these burrows/cavities may be used by Common Diving-Petrels breeding earlier. On 24

November 1978, an 'adult' was found in a burrow, and on 10 November 1979, four nestlings, all "starting to feather", were found near the centre of the east coast in similar habitat).

SHORT-TAILED SHEARWATER — Ten adults, each incubating an egg, were caught and banded.

BLACK-FACED SHAG — None was seen on the island during the visit. There was no sign that nesting had occurred recently in the location of the 1979 colony (Lane (1980)).

PACIFIC GULL — No count was made but birds were seen sitting on vantage points along the eastern coast. One nest, ready for eggs, was found near the prion colony.

Other Species Seen

Sooty Oystercatcher	Blackbird
Silver Gull	Forest Raven
Welcome Swallow	

Norman Island

Visited 12:00 hrs on 27.11.80.

LITTLE PENGUIN — Some burrows contained one or two adults, some contained an adult with small chicks, but no large nestlings were seen.

FAIRY PRION — One adult, incubating an egg, was caught and banded. About 50 small burrows/cavities examined were empty. They may have belonged to prions or diving-petrels.

SHORT-TAILED SHEARWATER — Burrows were well distributed and most of those seen and examined had been recently activated; about 15 per cent of those examined contained a bird. Twenty-six adults, each incubating an egg, were caught and banded.

SILVER GULL — From the sea, about 50 pairs were counted in a colony on the northern end; they appeared to be nesting. About 60 pairs were nesting on the north-western side of 'South Knob'. This colony contained new nests, nests with eggs and nests with small chicks.

PACIFIC GULL — Five nests were seen; three contained two eggs and two contained one egg.

SOOTY OYSTERCATCHER — One nest with two eggs was found.

Other Species Seen

Black-faced Shag	Welcome Swallow
White-faced Heron — 1	Blackbird
Cape Barren Goose — 13	Olive Whistler
Peregrine Falcon — 2	Forest Raven

About 120 Australian Fur Seals were lying on a flat rock at the north end of the island. From its appearance the location looked as though it was used regularly, possibly for breeding.

Shellback Island

Visited 07:45-10.45 hrs on 27.11.80.

LITTLE PENGUIN — Some burrows contained one or two adults, some an adult on eggs and some an adult on small chicks. Two large nestlings were banded.

FAIRY PRION — About 100 burrows or cavities were examined. They were located along the southern side and in the re-entrant on the western end. A bird was found in only two of the cavities and both were unable to be extracted. In most cases, prion feathers were found about the entrances and it appeared that there might be considerable predation of these little birds by the Pacific Gulls. The large colony of gulls was close by the prion colony.

SHORT-TAILED SHEARWATER — Burrows were well distributed over most of the island wherever soil depth was sufficient. Nearly all burrows seen appeared to have been recently activated. Twenty-nine adults, 13 incubating an egg, were caught and banded.

CAPE BARREN GOOSE — Twenty-three 'adults' were counted at one time and three runners were caught and banded. While we were on the island, another runner was seen taking to the water but, instead of returning, it commenced swimming away from the island. By the time we had returned to the launch, it was nowhere to be seen. As we departed from the island, we headed in the direction the young bird had taken and eventually it was sighted about 1 500 m from the shore, still swimming towards the mainland some two or three kilometres further on. While endeavouring to catch it, we were astonished at its ability to dive and swim under water. It was eventually captured, banded and returned to the island, though somewhat exhausted from its experience.

SILVER GULL — A small colony was seen on the north-western corner but it was not checked. One nest containing two eggs was seen nearby.

PACIFIC GULL — Over 200 adults were counted in the air at one time. Thirty-five nests were counted, all but one being in the colony on the south-western corner. (Nest status — 16

new, 2 x one egg, 11 x two eggs, 1 x three eggs, 2 x one chick, 2 x two chicks, 1 x three chicks). All chicks seen were in or close to the nest and were only recently hatched.

Other Species Seen

Black-faced Shag	Welcome Swallow
Sooty Oystercatcher	Common Starling
Peregrine Falcon — 2	Blackbird
Crested Tern — 20	Forest Raven

Acknowledgements

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APPENDIX 1

Species referred to in text

Little Penguin	<i>Eudyptula minor</i>	Silver Gull	<i>Larus novaehollandiae</i>
Fairy Prion	<i>Pachyptila turtur</i>	Pacific Gull	<i>Larus pacificus</i>
Short-tailed Shearwater	<i>Puffinus tenuirostris</i>	Crested Tern	<i>Sterna bergii</i>
Common Diving-Petrel	<i>Pelecanoides urinatrix</i>	Welcome Swallow	<i>Hirundo neoxena</i>
Black-faced Shag	<i>Leucocarbo fuscescens</i>	Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>
White-faced Heron	<i>Ardea novaehollandiae</i>	Olive Whistler	<i>Pachycephala olivaceus</i>
Cape Barren Goose	<i>Cereopsis novaehollandiae</i>	Little Grassbird	<i>Megalurus gramineus</i>
White-bellied Sea-Eagle	<i>Haliaeetus leucogaster</i>	White-browed Scrubwren	<i>Sericornis frontalis</i>
Marsh Harrier	<i>Circus aeruginosus</i>	Silvereye	<i>Zosterops lateralis</i>
Peregrine Falcon	<i>Falco peregrinus</i>	Common Starling	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>
Buff-banded Rail	<i>Rallus philippensis</i>	Forest Raven	<i>Corvus tasmanicus</i>
Sooty Oystercatcher	<i>Haematopus fuliginosus</i>		

APPENDIX 2

Dates of visits to islands off Wilsons Promontory by S. G. Lane and H. Battam.

Doughboy I.	20.11.78				
Granite I.	20.11.78				
Benison I.	20.11.78				
Rabbit I.	6.11.79				
Rabbit Rock	6.11.79				
Wattle I.	11.11.79	26.11.80			
Anser I.	25.11.78				
Kanowna I.	25.11.78	26.11.80			
McHugh I.	24.11.78	13.11.79	28.11.80		
Citadel I.	24.11.78	13.11.79			
Dannevig I.	24.11.78	10.11.79	24.11.80		
Great Glennie I.	24.11.78	8.11.79	10.11.79	11.11.79	13.11.79
Norman I.	7.11.79	27.11.80			
Shellback I.	10.11.79	27.11.80			