

Avifauna of Islands off Esperance, Western Australia

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The islands off Esperance, Western Australia, form part of the Archipelago of the Recherche. This archipelago extends from about 120°36'E. Long., some 23 km west of Esperance, to the western end of the Great Australian Bight, about 124°08'E. Long., some 240 km to the east. Termination Island, about 65 km roughly south of Esperance, is the southern-most island of the archipelago.

There are about 100 named islands in the group, many un-named ones, while reefs and rocks are too numerous to count.

The earliest recorded ornithological visits to the archipelago were made in 1904 by J. T. Tunney (Whittell 1938) who made further visits in 1906. In 1921, A. F. Basset Hull (1922), visited a number of islands. These early visits were summarised by D. L. Serventy (1947) who also recorded details of his visits in January 1944. In March 1947, J. M. Thomson and B. Shipway (1948) visited Goose Island. A further visit was made to this island by Shipway and D. L. Serventy (*loc. cit.*) on 13 July 1947.

In 1950, visits were made to some 20 islands by V. N. Serventy and others as part of the Australian Geographic Society's Expedition to the archipelago (V. N. Serventy 1952). The visits included Termination Island, probably the most difficult in the group on which to land.

Numerous visits have been made since that time. These were in January 1956 by E. Lindgren (1956), in 1975 (?) by members of the Wanneroo Wildlife Research Centre (Anon. 1976), and in the same year by J. Goodsell, A. Tingay and S. R. Tingay (1976), in 1976 and 1977 by I. Abbott and R. Black (1978) while A. Tingay and S. R. Tingay (in press) made further surveys also in 1976 and 1977.

In 1981, I visited ten islands in the archipelago, eight off Esperance and two in the vicinity of Duke of Orleans Bay, about 65 km to the east. The visits were made as follows: *near Duke of Orleans Bay* — Nares (2.11.81) and Lorraine Island (33°57'S., 122°34'E.) (2.11.81).

off Esperance — Ram (11.11.81), MacKenzie (9.11.81), Frederick (30.10.81), Remark

(28-30.10.81), Long (10.11.81), Cull (4.11.81), Observatory (24.9.81) and Figure of Eight (1.11.81).

The visits were made during daytime except for Remark Island where the stay extended over two nights. My wife accompanied me on all visits, W. J. Merilees was with us on Remark and Frederick Islands while A. K. Daw accompanied us to Nares, Lorraine and Cull Islands.

In many cases, the time spent on an island was not adequate to completely cover all likely breeding habitats. This applied particularly to Ram, Long and Figure of Eight Islands while parts of Remark and Observatory Islands were not searched. The islands off Esperance are mostly steeply-sloping rock and landing is difficult even in calm conditions. Some have very dense areas of vegetation which is extremely difficult to penetrate, and time-consuming while in the process.

There are no previously published records of birds on Lorraine, Ram and Frederick Islands.

Notes on all species recorded by me on, or directly over, the islands visited are given, with particular reference to breeding status of the seabirds.

SYSTEMATIC LIST

Little Penguin *Eudyptula minor*

Found in small numbers on all but Nares, Frederick and Long Islands; breeding on Ram, MacKenzie, Cull and Observatory Islands. A large chick, almost ready for departure, was found on Observatory on 24 September 1981, and three others of similar size, inaccessible under a rock, were seen on Cull Island on

4 November. All other breeding activity was in the early stages from new nests to adults on eggs or small chicks just hatched.

Great-winged Petrel *Pterodroma macroptera*

The only evidence of this species was found on Remark Island. The remains of a large chick, with flight feathers not quite fully emerged and with down still adhering, were found under vegetation and rocks on the most northern point of the island. Although the head was missing, identification was based on the experience from banding 43 large nestlings three weeks earlier on Coffin Island and Gull Rock near Albany. The identification was confirmed by comparison of the remains with museum specimens.

Flesh-footed Shearwater *Puffinus carneipes*

This is the common shearwater of the area and these birds were seen at sea during the trips to the various islands off Esperance. However, egg laying occurs towards the end of November, hence, at the time of our visits, few adults were expected to be present on the islands during daytime, and probably not great numbers at night. This proved to be the case. Birds were found in burrows on Ram, Frederick, Remark and Long Islands. Some small feathers presumed to belong to this species were seen in fresh burrows on MacKenzie (Round) Island where the remains of one bird and the old skull of another were found. Derelict remains of one bird were also found on Observatory Island. On Figure of Eight Island none was found, but again small feathers in or near some of the freshly attended burrows were thought to belong to these birds.

Short-tailed Shearwater *P. tenuirostris*

Nineteen adults were found in burrows on Figure of Eight Island on 1 November 1981 (Lane, in press). This island is some 1100 km west of the previously recorded western breeding limit for the species on St Francis Island, off Ceduna, South Australia.

Little Shearwater *P. assimilis*

Evidence of breeding was found on MacKenzie Island. Some burrows of the size made by these birds, were found in three places on the island. Five were old, but the remainder (eight in one group and fifteen in the other) obviously had been recently used. A skull found near the old burrows was checked with museum specimens and confirmed the identification.

White-faced Storm-Petrel *Pelagodroma marina*

Four fresh burrows and a few old ones were found on Nares Island. On nearby Lorraine Island one burrow out of 25 checked on 2 November 1981 contained an adult on an egg. Six days later, A. K. Daw (pers. comm.) found an adult on an egg in four of eight burrows checked. Fresh burrows were extensively distributed over the island and the number was estimated to be between 2000 and 3000. A similar situation existed on Frederick Island, where fresh burrows were found in most of the vegetated areas wherever the soil was suitable for burrowing. Frederick Island is much larger than Lorraine Island, but allowing for the areas of bare rock and unsuitable habitat, the estimated figure would probably exceed 5000 burrows. Remains were found near a nest of the Pacific Gull. Remains were also found on Remark, Long, Cull, Observatory and Figure of

Eight Islands and while it is possible that nesting may occur on some of these, in most cases predators such as the Pacific Gull probably were responsible for their presence on the islands concerned.

Black-faced Shag *Leucocarbo fuscescens*

Seen only on Nares (1), Figure of Eight (2) and the small satellite islet of Remark Island where they were breeding. I briefly visited this islet on 10 November 1981. Nesting, observed from Remark Island earlier, was still in progress. Two nests contained two eggs each, two nests were being built, three nests had been used recently, and one nest contained two well-developed chicks which took to the water immediately they were disturbed.

Little Black Cormorant *Phalacrocorax sulcirostris*

One was seen on the small satellite islet off Remark Island.

Cape Barren Goose *Cereopsis novaehollandiae*

Recorded on Lorraine (1), MacKenzie (3), Frederick (7), Long (3), Cull (30) and Figure of Eight (5). Non-flying young, included in these figures, were found on MacKenzie (1), Frederick (3), Cull (12) and Figure of Eight (2).

White-bellied Sea-Eagle *Haliaeetus leucogaster*

Seen on or over Ram (2), MacKenzie (1), Remark (1), Long (2), Observatory (2) and Figure of Eight (2). A large, recently used nest was found on Ram Island.

Peregrine Falcon *Falco peregrinus*

A pair had a nest with three well-developed chicks on Cull Island on 4 November 1981. The remains of White-faced Storm-Petrels and Silver Gulls, the latter predominating, were found in the nest. The tiercel (male) was seen plucking a Silver Gull when first seen. Only four live Silver Gulls were observed on the island!

Australian Kestrel *F. cenchroides*

A pair had young in a hole in a large rock on Ram Island and one was seen on Figure of Eight Island.

Brown Quail *Coturnix australis*

Two were seen on Figure of Eight Island.

Sooty Oystercatcher *Haematopus fuliginosus*

Recorded on all islands visited and nesting on MacKenzie Island where a pair was carrying food to a chick hidden under rocks.

Common Sandpiper *Tringa hypoleucos*

One seen on Nares and another on Lorraine Island.

Silver Gull *Larus novaehollandiae*

Recorded on all islands visited but only in small numbers as follows: Nares (1), Lorraine (14), Ram (2), MacKenzie (25), Frederick (2), Remark (2), Long (2), Cull (4), Observatory (1) and Figure of Eight (2). Nesting was recorded only on MacKenzie Island where an almost-flying chick was caught, and on Frederick Island where an old nest was found.

Pacific Gull *L. pacificus*

Recorded on Nares (4), Lorraine (2), Ram (5), MacKenzie (5), Frederick (4), Remark (2), Long

(2), Cull (4), Observatory (1), and Figure of Eight (5). Breeding was recorded on Lorraine, Ram, MacKenzie, Frederick and Cull Islands. On Remark (satellite) a nest appeared to have been recently used but no young were located; new nests were found on Ram and MacKenzie while nests on the others each contained two eggs.

Caspian Tern *Hydroprogne caspia*

Found breeding on Lorraine (2 eggs), Ram (2 eggs) and MacKenzie (2 chicks just hatched).

Crested Tern *Sterna bergii*

Rare on the islands visited. Remains were found on Nares and MacKenzie Islands and four were seen on Figure of Eight Island.

Brush Bronzewing *Phaps elegans*

Two birds were seen on each of Remark and Cull Islands.

Rock Parrot *Neophema petrophila*

These little parrots were seen on Nares (3), Lorraine (15-20), Mackenzie (15), Frederick (11), Observatory (1) and Figure of Eight (over 25).

Welcome Swallow *Hirundo neoxena*

Seen on all islands visited.

Richard's Pipit *Anthus novaeseelandiae*

Seen only on Frederick (5), Long (1) and Cull (1).

Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike *Coracina novaehollandiae*

One was seen on Figure of Eight Island.

Golden Whistler *Pachycephala pectoralis*

Found on Ram (3), Remark (2) and Long (2). On Ram Island a flutterer was being fed by an adult male.

White-browed Scrubwren *Sericornis frontalis*

Two were seen on Ram Island.

Singing Honeyeater *Lichenostomus virescens*

Recorded on all islands visited off Esperance in varying numbers up to 15 or 20 birds, except Cull Island where about double that number were seen, and on MacKenzie Island where at least 40 were noted. On Figure of Eight Island one young bird was barely able to fly. None was seen on the two islands near Duke of Orleans Bay.

New Holland Honeyeater *Phylidonyris novaehollandiae*

Recorded only on Nares Island where three were seen.

Silvereye *Zosterops lateralis*

A few were seen on Frederick and Remark Islands and two on Long Island.

Grey Butcherbird *Cracticus torquatus*

One was seen on Observatory Island.

Australian Raven *Corvus coronoides*

Recorded on Ram (2), MacKenzie (2), Frederick (4), Remark (3), Long (3), Observatory (3) and Figure of Eight (1). An old nest, thought to belong to this species, was found in a burnt Melaleuca on Frederick Island.

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