

Birds Recorded on 22 Tropical Islands of Western Australia

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An annotated list of 63 species of birds (excluding seabirds) is provided for islands adjacent to the north-western coast of Australia.

In May-July 1978 I visited and recorded the bird species present on 22 islands adjacent to the north-western coast of Australia. The time spent on the islands ranged from about 150 minutes to 8 hours, sufficient for me to traverse completely the smaller islands (with area 0.2-50 ha). Those islands, all with area exceeding 95 ha, that were not completely covered were (with the actual part covered) Lacrosse (southern half), Adèle (all but the SE), Cockatoo (western quarter), Caffarelli (western quarter), Legendre (between Cape Legendre and the light-structure), Rosemary (track from light-structure to landing), Trimouille (southern third) and Northwest (northern third).

The islands fall into three geomorphological groups. Lesueur, Browse, Adèle, East Lacépède, Cunningham and Bedout are sand cays situated on coral reefs. Lacrosse, Tanner, Cockatoo, Degérando, Caffarelli, Jarman, Legendre, Rosemary, East Goodwyn, Trimouille and Northwest Islands are rocky, and North Sandy, Beagle, Maryanne Reef, Anchor and Airlie Islands are composed of sand in most cases blown into dunes. These rest on a rock platform.

For a map of the positions of these islands and the dates of my visits to them, see Abbott (1979). The annotated list of birds in this paper excludes seabirds, which are treated in the above reference. Islands are listed in approximate order from north to south.

ANNOTATED LIST

All records pertain to islands, except those of two species (Budgerigar and Brown Songlark) flying aboard ship when at sea.

Darter *Anhinga melanogaster*

Lacrosse I., 1 ♀ high overhead; Lesueur I., 1 ♀ on beach.

White-faced Heron *Ardea novaehollandiae*

Degérando I., 6; Beagle I., 6.

Great Egret *Egretta alba*

Adèle I., 12 on edge of reef and 7 at south end; Caffarelli I., 1.

Eastern Reef Egret *E. sacra*

Lesueur I., 1 (grey phase); Browse I., total population of 34 birds, of which 28 were white phase. Old nests in *Scaevola taccada* bushes; Adèle I., numerous, 188 birds counted, of which only 47 were white. Why there should be such a difference in the representation of the white phase between Browse and Adèle Islands is inexplicable. Degérando I., 1 (grey); Tanner I., 1 (grey); Caffarelli I., 1 (grey); East Lacépède I., 1 (grey); Bedout I., 7 grey and 4 white birds on negroheads at high tide; Jarman I., 2 (grey); East Goodwyn I., 1 (grey); Trimouille I., 3 (grey); Northwest I., 4 (grey); North Sandy I., 2 grey and 2 white; Beagle I., 4 (grey); Airlie I., 3 (grey); Anchor I., 5 grey and 1 white.

Osprey *Pandion haliaetus*

Lesueur I., 4 sighted together. One old nest and one active nest were found. This last was on the top of a *Capparis* bush, 2 m above ground. Three eggs were present. Corpses of Bridled Terns *Sterna anaethetus* surrounded the bush. Degérando I., remains of two nests found, and 2 birds seen together; Tanner I., 1 pair and nest, unfortunately inaccessible; Caffarelli I., 3 seen together; 1 carrying a stick; Jarman I., 3 seen together, 3 disused nests found; Legendre I., a nest containing 2 eggs was present near the light-structure, an old nest was found near Cape Legendre; Rosemary I., 2; East Goodwyn I., 1 seen and remains of an old nest surrounded by the remains of Wedge-tailed Shearwaters *Puffinus pacificus* were found; Trimouille I., 2 adults around a nest, without eggs; Northwest I., 2 adults; North Sandy I., 2 adults and empty nest; Beagle I., two old nests found; Maryanne Reef, remains of nest of either an Osprey or Sea-Eagle; Anchor I., six seen together and 6 nests found; 3 of these were very old. The others each contained 3 eggs, 1 egg, or no eggs.

Black-shouldered Kite *Elanus notatus*

Dégérando I., 1; Trimouille I., 1; Airlie I., 1; Anchor I., 1.

Letter-winged Kite *E. scriptus*

Adèle I., 14 on radio beacon tower; their seats were plentiful at the base of both towers, and contained the remains of rats.

Black Kite *Milvus migrans*

Lacrosse I., 25 overhead briefly.

Brahminy Kite *Haliastur indus*

Lacrosse I., 1; Caffarelli I., 1; Jarman I., 2; Legendre I., 1.

Whistling Kite *Haliastur sphenurus*

Lacrosse I., 2; Lesueur I., 1.

White-bellied Sea-Eagle *Haliaeetus leucogaster*

Lacrosse I., 1 immature; Lesueur I., 1 adult and 1 immature; Dégérando I., 1 immature; Cockatoo I., 1 adult and 1 immature; Caffarelli I., 2 adults; East Lacépède I., 1 adult sitting on nest containing 2 eggs on top of light-tower. The nest was destroyed to allow maintenance of the tower to be carried out. Jarman I., 1; Trimouille I., 1 adult over lagoon; North Sandy I., 1 adult, briefly; Beagle I., nest with 2 eggs and 2 adults in attendance; Airlie I., 2 adults; Anchor I., 2 adults.

Spotted Harrier *Circus assimilis*

Lacrosse I., 1; Jarman I., 1; Legendre I., 2 perched on disused light-tower near Cape Legendre; Airlie I., 1 immature and 1 adult, catching dragon lizards *Amphibolurus* sp.; Anchor I., 2 birds seen together.

Brown Falcon *Falco berigora*

Lesueur I., 1; Jarman I., 1.

Australian Kestrel *F. cenchroides*

Lacrosse I., 1; Browse I., 4; Caffarelli I., 1; Jarman I., 1; Goodwyn I., 1; Trimouille I., 2; North Sandy I., 1; Beagle I., 1; Airlie I., 1; Anchor I., 3.

Brown Quail *Coturnix australis*

Lesueur I., over 15 birds flushed; Lacrosse I., 4; Dégérando I., 5; Jarman I., 1; Airlie I., common; eggs found; Anchor I., 8.

Pied Oystercatcher *Haematopus longirostris*

Adèle I., 11; Jarman I., 2; Legendre I., present; East Goodwyn I., 4; Trimouille I., 2; Northwest I., 1; Airlie I., 2; Anchor I., 2.

Sooty Oystercatcher *H. fuliginosus*

Lesueur I., 2; Dégérando I., 17; Jarman I., 3; East Goodwyn I., 2; Northwest I., 2; North Sandy I., 2; Beagle I., 2.

Large Sand Plover *Charadrius leschenaultii*

Lesueur I., 9; Adèle I., present; East Lacépède I., 5; Jarman I., 20.

Red-capped Plover *C. ruficapillus*

Airlie I., 1.

Inland Dotterel *Peltohyas australis*

Lesueur I., 1.

Ruddy Turnstone *Arenaria interpres*

Lesueur I., over 10; Adèle I., present; North Sandy I., 1; Beagle I., present; Airlie I., 8.

Bar-tailed Godwit *Limosa lapponica*

Adèle I., present.

Australian Pratincole *Stiltia isabella*

Lesueur I., 1, possibly 2; Browse I., 1.

Peaceful Dove *Geopelia placida*

Dégérando I., 1.

Bar-shouldered Dove *G. humeralis*

Lacrosse I., 1 doubtful; Dégérando I., common, 1 seen carrying a stick; Cockatoo I., 4 seen together; Caffarelli I., numerous; North Sandy I., common; Beagle I., at least 4; Anchor I., 2+.

Little Corella *Cacatua sanguinea*

Cockatoo I., abundant; Caffarelli I., about 20 in mangroves; Rosemary I., about 20; East Goodwyn I., about 80 on rocks by shore.

Varied Lorikeet *Psitteuteles versicolor*

Lacrosse I., common. Feeding in blossoms of *Eucalytus miniata*.

Budgerigar *Melopsittacus undulatus*

Buoy 3, Port Walcott, 3 flew on board at 11:15 hours on 27 May; Jarman I., about 50; Legendre I., about 10; Rosemary I., 1.

Horsfield's Bronze-Cuckoo *Chrysococcyx basalis*

Cockatoo I., at least 3.

Pheasant Coucal *Centropus phasianinus*

Lacrosse I., 2.

Blue-winged Kookaburra *Dacelo leachii*

Lacrosse I., 3 seen together.

Sacred Kingfisher *Halcyon sancta*

Lacrosse I., 1 in mangroves; Adèle I., 2; Cockatoo I., 1; East Lacépède I., 1 mummified corpse.

Rainbow Bee-eater *Merops ornatus*

Lacrosse I., common; Dégérando I., at least 10; Cockatoo I., 4; Caffarelli I., 2.

Welcome Swallow *Hirundo neoxena*

Legendre I., 1; Rosemary I., Trimouille and Northwest Is, common.

Tree Martin *Cecropis nigricans*

Lacrosse I., common; Dégérando I., flock of over six; East Lacépède I., 5 birds on 11 June but none on 13 June; These probably followed the ship across from Red Bluff. Cunningham I., 2.

Fairy Martin *C. ariel*

Browse I., 1 + 1 mummified corpse.

Richard's Pipit *Anthus novaeseelandiae*

Legendre I., 2; East Goodwyn I., 1; Trimouille I., 3; Northwest I., 1; North Sandy I., 2 together; Airlie I., 1; Anchor I., about 5.

Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike *Coracina novaehollandiae*

Lacrosse I., flock of about 20; Cockatoo I., flock of 10; Dégérando I., 2 adults and 1 immature in mangroves; Caffarelli, 3 immatures.

White-winged Triller *Lalage sueurii*

All birds seen were in female type plumage. Lacrosse I., several; Jarman I., 1; Legendre I., 1.

Rufous Whistler *Pachycephala rufiventris*

Dégérando I., several, including one adult male.

Broad-billed Flycatcher *Myiagra ruficollis*

Dégérando I., several in mangroves.

Grey Fantail *Rhipidura fuliginosa*

Dégérando I., 2 near mangroves.

Willie Wagtail *R. leucophrys*

Lacrosse I., several; Degérando I., about 5 seen; Cockatoo I., 1; Caffarelli I., 2; Legendre I., 3; Beagle I., 1; Airlie I., 1.

Tawny Grassbird *Megalurus timoriensis*

Lesueur I., common; Adèle I., numerous. Habitat on both islands is *Spinifex longifolius* grassland.

Brown Songlark *Cinclorhynchus cruralis*

20 km west of Leeman, at 08:15 hrs; 1 male flew aboard ship during a force 6 strong wind coming from the NNE. It left the ship a few minutes later.

Mangrove Gerygone *Gerygone ?laevigaster*

Lacrosse I., 1 heard in 4 m high mangroves (det. by R. E. Johnstone from my field notes).

Silver-crowned Friarbird *Philemon argenticeps*

Lacrosse I., common, feeding at blossoms of *Eucalyptus miniata*.

Little Friarbird *P. citreogularis*

Lacrosse I., common, feeding at blossoms of *Eucalyptus miniata*; Cockatoo I., 2 seen, doubtful.

Yellow-throated Miner *Manorina flavigula*

Cockatoo I., 3.

Singing Honeyeater *Lichenostomus virescens*

Legendre I., 5 seen; Rosemary I., common in *Acacia*.

White-throated Honeyeater *Meliphreptus albugularis*

Cockatoo I., several in *Eucalyptus* woodland.

Brown Honeyeater *Lichmera indistincta*

Lacrosse I., common in *Eucalyptus miniata* woodland and mangroves. Very aggressive to Rufous-throated Honeyeaters. Degérando I., common in *Acacia* and mangroves. Seen feeding at *Grevillea* flowers; Cockatoo I., very common; Irvine I., heard calling on this island when I was on Tanner I., which lies 500 m south of Irvine I. Caffarelli I., most numerous bird species on this island. Feeding on *Calytrix* flowers. Also in mangroves.

Rufous-throated Honeyeater *Conopophila rufogularis*

Lacrosse I., common, feeding at *Eucalyptus miniata* flowers.

Yellow or Orange Chat *Ephthianura* sp.

Lesueur I., common; feeding amongst *Spinifex longifolius* on ground and on beaches. All birds seen had a whitish venter, yellow rump and vent, grey back and a black sharp bill. Tail nearly black. One bird had a tinge of orange on the rump. The Western Australia Museum has an inadequate series of immature *E. aurifrons* (Orange Chats and *E. crocea* (Yellow Chats) with which to compare my description. However on distributional grounds *E. crocea* is most likely.

Mistletoebird *Dicaeum hirundinaceum*

Lacrosse I., several of both sexes seen. One male was carrying fruit. Degérando I., eating *Ficus* fruits, vigorously chased by Brown Honeyeaters.

Striated Pardalote *Pardalote striatus uropygialis*

Cockatoo I., several.

Yellow White-eye *Zosterops lutea*

Lacrosse I., in coastal bushes and mangroves; Degérando I., one in wattle but commoner in mangroves; Caffarelli I., very numerous in figtrees near beach, but eating insects; North Sandy I. Flocks of over 10 foraging amongst *Spinifex longifolius* and *Acacia* thickets; Beagle I., several flocks of 10-20 birds feed in litter under *Acacia* thickets; Airlie I., foraging

in litter under *Acacia* thickets and gleaning *Portulaca* leaves; Anchor I., in *Acacia* thickets. This species' dependence on mangroves is exaggerated in the literature.

Double-barred Finch *Poephila bichenovii*

Cockatoo I., flock of about 8 feeding on grass heads in village.

Australian Magpie-lark *Grallina cyanoleuca*

Browse I., 2. A temporary resident (G. Young) reported that 5 have been seen on the island at one time; Cockatoo I., 3 males and 1 female seen.

White-breasted Woodswallow *Artamus leucorhynchus*

Lacrosse I., 2; Degérando I., about 10; Cockatoo I., 1; Caffarelli I., about 6; Legendre I., about 20; Rosemary I., 1; North Sandy I., 5; Beagle I., 2; Airlie I., 3; Anchor I., 2.

Little Woodswallow *A. minor*

Cockatoo I., 2.

Pied Butcherbird *Cracticus nigrogularis*

Rosemary I., common as judged by song activity; East Goodwyn I., 2.

Torresian Crow *Corvus orru*

Lacrosse I., several heard; Rosemary I., 2.

Discussion

Only the landbird faunas of the islands that were completely or nearly completely covered are worth considering for further analysis. The species of landbirds that probably breed on such islands are: Tawny Grassbird on Lesueur and Adèle Is., the chat (species uncertain) on Lesueur I., Bar-shouldered Dove on North Sandy, Beagle, and Anchor Is., and Yellow White-eye on North Sandy, Beagle, Anchor and Airlie Is. Further visits to these islands will be needed to establish which landbird species are permanent members of the avifaunas, and how many are accidental.

Nonetheless, four islands have been visited several times prior to my visit. Comparison of the passerine species present (excluding vagrants suggests that there has been little change in species composition.

Browse I. (area 12 ha). No non-vagrant passerine species were recorded in 1949 (Serventy 1952), 1972 (Smith *et al.* 1978) or 1978 (this report).

Adèle I. (area 230 ha). Tawny Grassbird recorded in 1891 (Walker 1892), 1949 (Serventy 1952), and 1978 (this report).

East Lacépède I. (area 2 ha). No non-vagrant passerine species present in 1949 (Serventy 1952) or 1978 (this report).

Bedout I. (area 20 ha). No non-vagrant passerine species present in 1901 (Tunney 1902), 1949 (Serventy 1952), 1972 (Bush and Lodge 1977), 1975 (Kolichis 1977), or 1978 (this report).

In this respect, these tropical islands are no different from several islands in temperate Western Australia (Abbott 1978).

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Eye Colour of the Brown Thornbill

Disney (1976, Bird in the Hand, Bird Banders Assoc. Aust.) gave the iris colour of the Brown Thornbill *Acanthiza pusilla* as full red-brown in adults, in sub-adults chestnut surrounded by olive-grey. Juvenile birds were said to be chestnut brown iris with a grey outer ring. "As bird matures olive grey outer ring disappears and iris becomes full red-brown". A bird re-trapped recently does not seem to fit this pattern.

Alan Morris banded a Brown Thornbill at Munghorn Gap Nature Reserve near Mudgee N.S.W. on 1 February 1976. He recorded it as a free flying bird. I re-trapped the bird at the

banding place on 10 April 1982, over six years after banding. The iris was red-brown as in other adult birds, except it still retained the greyish outer ring. This bird had either taken an extraordinary long time to mature or is aberrant in some way.

Banders are advised to take notice of the colour of the iris of Brown Thornbills to see how long it takes to turn completely red-brown.

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