

**CORELLA**

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**SEABIRD ISLANDS  
of the  
LORD HOWE GROUP,  
NEW SOUTH WALES**



Photo: I. Hutton



AUSTRALIAN BIRD STUDY ASSOCIATION Inc.



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## FOREWORD

Seabirds are creatures of the open ocean. Only when breeding do they come ashore to lay eggs. As Lord Howe and its associated islets are the only island group in the Tasman Sea, very large numbers of seabirds breed here annually.

Accounts of Lord Howe's seabirds date back to its discovery in 1788 by sailors on the First Fleet ship *Supply*. Regular visits by naturalists and scientists since that time have documented the birdlife for over 200 hundred years. Some negative impacts have occurred, particularly arising from introduced animals. Cats, pigs and goats were deliberately released onto the Island, while rats and mice were accidental introductions. Many noted Australian ornithologists could not resist visiting Lord Howe Island, including Basset Hull, Etheridge, Hindwood, all of whom helped document some of the drastic changes to bird populations, including the extinction of a number of local species.

In the 1970s, concern over the possible effect of the construction of an airstrip prompted the first detailed surveys of seabirds, conducted by Peter Fullagar *et al*. These surveys raised the alarm over declining Woodhen numbers and prompted the first major restoration project on the island - the captive breeding of the Woodhen. An essential part of the Woodhen's rescue was the removal of feral cats and pigs, followed by banning of domestic cats and tighter control over domestic dogs. Goats were removed from the North Hills in the 1970s, and from the southern mountains in the year 2000. Profound effects followed, with Island residents noting great increases in all bird numbers, including seabirds.

Commencing in the 1980s, Sooty Terns once again began breeding in areas on Lord Howe that had been cleared of feral animals. Red-tailed Tropicbirds, Brown Noddies, Providence Petrels and Black-winged Petrels also increased dramatically in numbers. Two seabird species even recolonised Lord Howe Island from the offshore islets – in 1990, the Black Noddy and Little Shearwater were both discovered breeding on the main island for the first time.

These current seabird surveys will reflect the benefits flowing from the eradication of cats, pigs and goats and the control of dogs on the Island. With external threats to seabirds worldwide (such as long line fishing, exploitation of bait fish, pollution and plastic ingestion), surveys of this type are needed at Lord Howe to monitor local seabird numbers. However, to ensure the best year round results, it is important to encourage and include local residents who observe the birds on a daily basis and have good local knowledge of them.

The increasing population of seabirds around the settlement area has once again been a great joy for island residents and visitors alike. Over the past 30 years, tourism - the lifeblood of the island economy - has become "eco focused" with more and more people coming to enjoy Lord Howe's natural abundance, and particularly the thriving seabird colonies.

It has been my great privilege to live on Lord Howe Island since 1980 to witness and document some of these changes to the Island's birdlife. With a current proposal to eradicate rats and mice from the Island being considered, there is the real prospect of even further benefits to the birdlife of this iconic World Heritage Group of islands.

Ian Hutton  
Lord Howe Island



- *Offshore Islands of the Lord Howe Group published in this issue.*