A Visit to Islands of Wilsons Promontory, Victoria

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During November 1978, six islands off the south-western end of Wilsons Promontory were visited. The visits were made to check breeding seabirds and were carried out in collaboration with the Fisheries and Wildlife Division and the National Parks and Wildlife Service (Vic.). I gratefully acknowledge their co-operation.

Unfortunately, in two weeks spent at Tidal River, the nearest launching place for a small boat, the weather was unsuitable for island visits on all but two days. On the first of these, after days of strong winds and rough seas, the wind and swell had abated considerably; however, a stiff breeze created an unpleasant chop, while rain squalls added to the discomfort. The surge made landings extremely difficult, except on Great Glennie Island, which has a small beach in a sheltered cove. The second day was ideal.

Initially, visits were planned to Shellback, Norman, Great Glennie, Dannevig, Citadel, McHugh, Anser, Kanowna and Wattle Islands. But conditions permitted only brief visits to Great Glennie, Citadel, McHugh and Dannevig Islands on 24 November 1978 with Messrs H. Battam, D. Gilks and my wife, and on the next day to Anser and Kanowna Islands with H. Battam and my wife. Shellback, Norman and Wattle Islands were not visited.

Little information has been published on the seabirds breeding on these islands. Dorward and Pizzey (1964, 1965) recorded details of Cape Barren Geese *Cereopsis novaehollandiae* on the Glennie and Anser Island Groups, while Gillham (1961) recorded the following seabird breeding stations:

Eudyptula minor Little Penguin — Dannevig, Citadel, McHugh.

Puffinus tenuirostris Short-tailed Shearwater — Shellback, Norman, Dannevig, McHugh.

Pelecanoides urinatrix Common Diving-Petrel — Dannevig, McHugh.

These are the only breeding stations listed by Serventy *et al.* (1971), which indicates the lack of published records and/or information available at that time. Additionally, Norman (1971) stated that Little Penguins and Short-tailed Shearwaters bred on Great Glennie Island.

Because of the difficulties of landing on all but Great Glennie and Anser Islands during our visits, and the problems involved in anchoring a small boat in the prevailing conditions, the visits were brief. Some three to four hours were spent on Great Glennie and the same on Anser Island, about one hour on Kanowna Island and between 15 and 30 minutes on each of the others. Accordingly, only hurried searches were made close to the landing place on Citadel, McHugh and Dannevig.

Despite these limitations the following species were recorded:

Little Penguin — Not numerous, but found on all islands visited; some adults were incubating eggs while chicks were at all stages of growth from recently hatched, almost naked nestlings to birds about ready to leave the islands, with little, if any, down remaining.

Fairy Prion *Pachyptula turtur* — Although not previously recorded breeding on these islands, Fairy Prions were found on Dannevig (three, each on egg), McHugh (two, each on egg), Anser (one on egg). A few burrows/cavities showing evidence of recent occupation and with breast feathers (in one case a tail feather) were found on Citadel Island and some on Anser Island. The burrows/cavities were all located among the steep, rocky sides of the islands in places where there was too little space for shearwaters to burrow.

Short-tailed Shearwater — A few were found, some on eggs, on Great Glennie, McHugh (one only), Anser and Kanowna. As expected, most of the birds were absent on the pre egg-laying exodus, but empty burrows had obviously been recently occupied. On Anser Island, burrows were in thousands, over most of the island. No doubt a few would nest also on Citadel and Dannevig, but none was located in the small areas searched during the short visits to these islands.

Common Diving-Petrel — One was found in a partly collapsed burrow on Dannevig Island, but neither egg nor chick was present. Ten or twelve small burrows or cavities on Kanowna Island contained small black or white body feathers attributed to this species, but no birds were found.

Cape Barren Geese — These were seen on Citadel (two), McHugh (one) and Kanowna (four), while on Anser 20 pairs were counted and two "runners" were found in two places. Undoubtedly geese would have been present on Great Glennie Island, but were not seen during the visit, which was restricted to the area of the isthmus close to the landing cove.

Silver Gull *Larus novaehollandiae* — About 12 nests were found in a small colony on Dannevig Island. Some nests were ready for eggs, a few contained eggs and some chicks had just hatched. Two large runners were seen.

Pacific Gull *L. pacificus* — These birds were seen on all but Great Glennie Island and they may have been present in parts not seen during the visit. Evidence of breeding was found on Citadel (four used nests and two birds behaving as if they had a nest or chick), McHugh (one nest with egg), Anser (at least 50 birds seen; four nests with eggs) and Kanowna (50 counted in one area; one nest with egg). From the launch a number were seen on Dannevig and no doubt some may have been nesting. Nesting may also occur on Great Glennie.

Another seabird breeding island in the Anser Group is Cleft Islet or Skull Rock, which rises precipitously out of the water to a height of 100 m. A large cave high on the western side has a soil floor covered with tussocks and some pigface among which burrows were clearly seen from the launch. Apparently rock climbers are the only people known to have landed on the rock. Mr Peter Muller, Ranger-in-charge at Tidal River, informed me that Black-faced Shags *Leucocarbo fuscescens* had recently nested on a high ledge near the top of the rock on the south-eastern side.

The Anser Group also maintains a seal colony. Dozens of Australian Fur Seals *Arctocephalus pusillus* were resting on Andersons Rocks, between Cleft Islet and Kanowna Island, as we approached, while hundreds were present on Kanowna. We circumnavigated Kanowna and estimated the number to be not less than 1 000, of which about half were young of the season. This number is a substantial increase on the estimated 300 recorded by Dorward and Pizzey (1964).

References

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