

The Tasmanian Naturalist

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NO MEETING IN AUGUST

BECAUSE the Club's August meeting would have clashed with an important meeting of A. N. Z. A. A. S. in Hobart, the committee decided that no meeting would be held this month. The next one will be on Thursday, September 16, at the Royal Society's room as usual.

However, the monthly field outing will be held on August 21. Its object will be to search for the Tasmanian Hair-streaked Butterfly on Gunners Quoin. Led by Mr. Hewer, in private transport, the party will leave the Prince Theatre, Macquarie Street, at 9.30 a. m.

ABOUT OUR CONTRIBUTORS

THIS issue of the Bulletin contains some interesting articles, and members might like to know a little about those who have written them.

A. M. HEWER is one of Tasmania's keenest naturalists, a stalwart of our club, a good camper and field observer. He places on record for the first time some facts on the distribution of a Tasmanian frog, a creature that quacks like a duck, and which has intrigued naturalists here in recent times. DR. D. L. SERVENTY, of the Wildlife Division of the C. S. I. R. O in Western Australia, writes from Perth on the birdlife of Fisher Island in Bass Strait, where he is carrying out an important project relating to the Tasmanian Mutton-bird; a top ranking ornithologist with many contributions to scientific journals to his credit, he also is co-author of The Birds of Western Australia, which sets a pattern for bird books. He comes to Tasmania a good deal. MAX MCGARVIE is a farmer on King Island and a first-rate observer. It was a happy thought that he should furnish a few notes on King Island birds, some species new to the Tasmanian region, to coincide with Dr. Serventy's article on Fisher Island, because we seldom read about Bass Strait birdlife, and here it is, quite a lot of it, from islands each end of the strait.

DISTRIBUTION OF THE SPECIES HYLA BURROWSII IN TASMANIA

TEN species of Tasmanian frogs are listed in A Synopsis of the Vertebrate Animals of Tasmania, published in 1924. Despite the doubts cast on some of these by the authors, Lord and Scott, it is now known that all the species listed except one do occur here. In recent years no specimens of Hyla peronii have been collected, in spite of an intensive search by B. C. Mollison and myself in all corners of Tasmania. It is thus reasonable to assume that this species probably does not occur here. However, the number known to occur remains at ten.

As recently as 1942 a new species of Hyla (tree frog) was described by Eric Scott of Launceston, from three specimens collected at Wombat Tarn by Miss Burrows, of Launceston. Scott named this Hyla burrowsii after the finder. Wombat Tarn is a small lake near Cradle Mt., and for some years it was thought that the species was confined to this particular mountain region.

The call of this frog is a very loud and penetrating honking which can be likened to sounds made by a flock of ducks when feeding. During a visit to Cradle Mt. with the late Allan C. Craike in January, 1955, I heard strange duck-like calls as we approached Wombat Tarn. We walked round the tarn and ultimately associated the call with a green frog sitting at the water's edge. I collected the frog, which was the fourth specimen

ever taken.

Persistent reports were received of similar calls being heard at night in many West Coast areas, but it was not until September 1960 that B. C. Mollison, at that time stationed in the Florentine Valley, was intrigued by strange loud calls heard during his night patrols. He was determined to find the owner of the voice. You can imagine his surprise when these were finally traced to a frog, only three inches in length.

His discovery confirmed the association of this call with *Hyla burrowsii* and extended its range many miles south of Cradle Mt. Calls heard at Lake Petrarch and Lake Tahune and many other places can only be ascribed to this species. The range was further extended to include Lake Dobson (Mt. Field National Park) in January of the following year when the species was observed by Mollison in one of the small tarns near Telopea Hut.

A year later specimens were collected from Hastings, in the south, and also from the Arve valley near Geeveston. The Hastings discovery proved very interesting as all previous records had indicated that *Hyla burrowsii* was a semi-alpine species; but we now had specimens from only a few feet above sea level.

In January 1964 specimens were collected near Waratah (North-West), and later that year from Cox's Bight and Port Davey in the extreme South-West. To date, the number of specimens taken exceeds one hundred. Strangely, however, only two females have ever been collected.

The South-West area was not unexpected as in the Tasmanian Museum at Hobart is a bottle of tadpoles collected at Cox's Bight and labelled *Hyla aurea*, but there is no doubt that these are in fact tadpoles of *H. burrowsii*.

Colour varies enormously. Many cryptic colour patterns occur. Bright green specimens could easily be mistaken for *H. aurea* unless examined in the hand, and this seems to be the case with the reports from Cox's Bight. Associated with rain-forest habitats, *H. burrowsii* usually breeds in pools on buttongrass plains. The cryptic colour and markings of some specimens would be excellent camouflage on the lichen-covered myrtle (beech), one of the common trees of its habitat. This is probably the reason why such a large and colourful frog escaped detection for so long. The practice of the Forestry Commission in constructing water holes for fire-fighting has provided many additional breeding sites. This undoubtedly has resulted in a large increase in the population of the species which previously was at least uncommon if not rare.

— A. M. HEWER

NOTES ON KING ISLAND BIRDS

KING ISLAND, some 40 miles long and 16 miles at its widest part, and 272,000 acres in extent, lies at the western entrance to Bass Strait, between the mainland of Australia and the island of Tasmania. Politically part of Tasmania, it is also within the Tasmanian avifaunal region, so that the birds there are regarded as belonging to Tasmania and are listed accordingly. Yet through being relatively close to the coast of Victoria, King Island also receives from time to time some continental species that have not been recorded in the actual island of Tasmania. In this regard the following notes by Max McGarvie, from near Currie, King Island's principal town, are of much interest since they serve to place on record some additions to the Tasmanian list —

EDITOR (editorial footnotes in brackets)

CATTLE EGRET: The Cattle Egret is still on my farm (Tas. Nat. Bull. May, 1965). There are apparently four others on the island, one near Naracoopa, on the east coast, and three near Rocky Cape in the north. All appeared around Easter last.

SILVER-GREY PETREL: One beach-washed specimen picked up by myself at Lavinia Point, north-east coast, in 1959; forwarded to National Museum, Melbourne. (A first positive record).

WHITE IBIS: One bird at Grassy in May, 1958

STRAW-NECKED IBIS: Three birds at Egg Lagoon in May, 1958, and another party of three in July, 1964. Residents say that during the summer of 1957-58 both the White and Straw-necked Ibis were here in large numbers. As I did not come here until April, 1958 I don't know if they mean dozens or thousands.

DUSKY MOORHEN: A party of from four to eight are permanent residents on a lagoon at Pass River; the landowners say they have been here for at least 40 years. (The only other Tasmanian record is for Flinders Island, at the eastern entrance to Bass Strait.)

WHISTLING EAGLE: One bird appeared here on May 18, 1964 and remained for an hour or so. Last Saturday (May 29) it turned up again, so I put a dead wallaby out where it had been perching on a post and it now appears that it is a permanent resident — at least, while the supply of wallabies lasts.

WHITE-BREASTED WOOD-SWALLOW: A ridiculous record, I know! Four birds seen on June 15, 1961. One specimen was sent to the National Museum. (This is a new Tasmanian Record).

WHITE-BROWED WOOD-SWALLOW: A fairly regular visitor, usually arriving in November with the aid of a strong northerly wind. Generally half a dozen or so, but I have seen up to 27. They usually go in the autumn, but I have records of odd birds for every month of the year.

MASKED WOOD-SWALLOW: First seen November, 1963, two, with a party of White-browed. In January, 1964 I found a party of nine, with three juveniles; they were last seen on February 9, 1964. (A new Tasmanian record).

YELLOW-FACED HONEYEATER: One bird seen by Graham Brown and myself in October, 1961, feeding on flowering melaleuca in an area known as The Nook, near the north-east corner of the island. This one was with numbers of Crescent and New Holland Honeyeaters. (A new Tasmanian record.)

MAGPIE-LARK: Just recently I have had two reports, which I have no doubt are correct, of a Magpie-lark being seen near Pass River, but I haven't seen it myself.

YELLOW-BILLED SPOONBILL: I just missed seeing a Yellow-billed Spoonbill which spent several days with a flock of Straw-necked Ibis on a property a few miles away. The owner of the place said he had been within a few chains of it and gave an accurate description; but although I did see it from a distance of about half a mile I could not be certain enough to claim it as a sight record. (This would be a new species for Tasmania.)

GANG-GANG COCKATOO: There are still a very few in one particular area near the south of the island. So far I haven't seen them, but I am told they are there.

— MAX McGARVIE, Pvt bag,
105 Currie, King Is. Tas.

FISHER ISLAND IN THE FURNEAUX GROUP

FISHER ISLAND is an islet of slightly over two acres lying hardly more than 200 yards from Lady Barron, the southern port on Flinders Island in north-eastern Tasmania. In 1947 it was selected as the site for joint field investigations on the Tasmanian Mutton-bird (*Puffinus tenuirostris*) by the C. S. I. R. O. Fisheries Division and the Tasmanian Fauna Board, and the following year a hut was built on it for the convenience of the observing teams. This was extended in 1956. The little field station there has been operated continuously ever since, after 1951 control being transferred to the Wildlife Section (now Division of Wildlife Research) of the C. S. I. R. O. Though not continuously manned through the year it can be considered the first permanent bird observatory to be established in Australia. An account of the station and its environs is given in the Papers and Proceedings of the Royal Society of Tasmania, 92, 1958 : 165, and a summary of its work on the principal bird being studied there in a paper, "Recent Studies on the Tasmanian Mutton-bird", Australian Museum Magazine, 12 (10), 1958: 327.

The Mutton-bird rookeries start just outside the door of the Hut. Within is a card index for every Mutton-bird handled on the island, with a terse summary of its annual status — its burrow peg number, its mate and its chick — if it succeeded in raising one. Mutton-birds nest on many of the neighbouring — and bigger — islands, where commercial mutton-birding takes place, an ancient industry by Australian standards

which began early last century.

The White-faced Storm-Petrel (Pelagodroma marina) occasionally flies over Fisher Island but does not nest there; it breeds on numerous small islets in the general area, the nearest to Fisher Island being Spence's Reefs, at the west end of Little Green Island, about 3/4 mile away. Curiously Mutton-birds and Storm-Petrels in this region do not breed on the same island, though elsewhere in Australia they may do so. The nesting of the Storm-Petrel in the Furneaux region is discussed by Dr. Mary Gillham in a paper in the Papers and Proceedings of the Royal Society of Tasmania, 97, 1963: 33

The Fairy Penguin (Eudyptula minor) only occasionally nests on Fisher Island, but is plentiful on most of the other islands. Silver Gulls (Larus novae-hollandiae) shift about in their nesting stations in this region and now and again Fisher Island is selected as the breeding site. On a little reef near Fisher a pair of Caspian Terns (Hydroprogne caspia) nest. Other sea-birds are only visitors to the neighbourhood — the Pacific Gull, Crested and Fairy Terns, three cormorant species, and now and again a food-prospecting Gannet.

Small parties of Musk Duck feed in the shallows near the island and often shelter under the lee of Fisher Island when a hard westerly is blowing. Now and again a Hoary-headed Grebe appears. Black Swans, Pelicans and other waterfowl feed a little distant from the island.

Of the waders a pair of Sooty Oyster-catchers (Haematopus fuliginosus) nest regularly on Fisher Island, and though laying two eggs never raising more than one chick, which is banded by the Fisher Island ornithologists. A pair of Red-capped Dotterels (Charadrius ruficapillus) also nest.

The only common land-bird nesting on the island is the introduced Starling (Sturnus vulgaris) which nests among crevices in the granite rocks. When the ventilators to the Hut were open Welcome Swallows (Hirundo neoxena) nested inside the Hut.

Quite a list of visiting land-birds could be compiled. The most impressive is the Cape Barren Goose which frequently lands and visitors enjoy good views of it through the Hut windows. Other species seen at times include the Black Jay or Currawong, Raven, Flame Robin, White-fronted Chat and Collared Sparrow-Hawk, and at night the Boobook Owl.

In calm weather, particularly on still mornings, the songs of numerous bush birds at Lady Barron come floating over the water — among them the Crescent and Yellow-throated Honeyeaters, cuckoos (particularly the Fan-tailed) and the introduced Black-bird.
— D. L. SERVENTY, Perth, W. A.

MISCELLANEOUS NOTES

Pumice on beaches: F. L. Sutherland, Geologist, Queen Victoria Museum, Launceston, Tas., writes :-

I was interested in reading the note on "pumice on beaches" in the Tasmanian Naturalist Bulletin (Supplementary No. 1) for May. I have been doing some research on the origin of the pumice. The pumice first started washing up in late 1963, and some was still washing up in early 1965. Mineralogical and chemical analysis of the pumice suggest it is derived from a large underwater pumice eruption that took place off the South Sandwich Islands in March 1962. Besides Tasmania it has also washed up along the length of the Southern Australian coast, on the south coast of New Zealand, and on Antarctic Islands such as Heard and Macquarie Islands.

I have enclosed a reprint from The Aus. Journal of Science, Vol. 26, No. 12, June, 1964, p. 397, of a preliminary note I wrote on the pumice. I hope shortly to publish a paper giving data on the drift of this pumice in southern Australian waters and its significance in respect to the ocean currents that operate in these waters.

New Subscribers: The first issue of this Bulletin in May was well received and we have gained new subscribers, who include:- Messrs. R. H. Brown, M. L. C., Glen Huon, Tas; J. R. Napier, St. Mary's, Tas; J. B. Thwaites, 4 Ellington Rd., Sandy Bay, Tas; Burn Widdicome, Bicheno, Tas. (£1 donation); K. A. Hindwood, 105 Middle Harbour Rd., Lindfield, N. S. W.; Roy Wheeler, 59a Upton Road, Windsor, Victoria; A. H. Chisholm, Nenagh, Milson Rd., Cremorne Point, N. S. W.; R. H. Westmore, 116 Hostein Drive, Ancaster, Ont. Canada; G. Binns, 14 Patrick St., Box Hill, Vic. (£1 donation); A. R. McGill, 119 Wollongong Rd. Arncliffe, N. S. W.; M. McGarvie, Private Bag 105, Currie, King Is. Tas; Brig. H. R. Officer, Olinda, Victoria.