



The Tasmanian Naturalist

No. 32

February 1973

Registered at the G. P. O. Hobart, Tasmania, for transmission by post as a periodical

Supplement to the Bulletin of Tasmanian Field Naturalists' Club

Editor : D.G. Thomas

Annual Subscription \$1.00

EDITORIAL

ON reading this issue it may seem to many that the Tasmanian Naturalist is biased towards ornithology as a matter of editorial policy. This is not so. An editor can only publish the material that is submitted to him.

It is a matter for conjecture just how long an eight page issue can continue to be published every three months. It may appear that, as editor, I am using the Naturalist as a vehicle for my own writings. Again, this is not the case. I am having to produce articles or reduce the number of pages in each issue. This state of affairs cannot continue for long because I am rapidly running out of material.

It is in the hands of subscribers to reduce the balance between the various branches of natural history and to ensure the continued publication of thirty-two pages a year. All contributions, dealing with any aspect of the natural history of Tasmania will be considered for publication.

David Thomas

A LARGE NATIVE COCKROACH (Polyzosteria oculata)

Alison Green

AN interesting addition to the Tasmanian Museum's collection of insects was made during a visit by a party from the Hobart Walking Club to the Friendly Beaches, on the East Coast of Tasmania. On the 10th December, 1972, the group walked southwards along a vehicular track, about one-quarter of a mile inland from the shore. Suddenly, Miss Aina Miezitis drew my attention to a large cockroach which was perched precariously on a twig of a tea tree bush beside the track. When I tried to seize it, the insect dropped to the ground and was nearly lost, but Aina managed to capture it for me in spite of its fast movements.

The specimen found at the Friendly Beaches is a male. A check of the Tasmanian Museum's collection produced one female example, collected at Eaglehawk Neck, in March, 1941, by D Colbron Pearse. These cockroaches are larger than any others which I have seen in the Tasmanian bush, both specimens being 29 mm long, with a maximum breadth of 19 mm for the male and 20.5 mm for

for the female. The upper surface of the body is dull black with a hint of bronze, while the cerci (a pair of appendages at the posterior end) are black with an orange border.

The species has been identified as Polyzosteria oculata Tepper, 1893, following a comparison of the two specimens with a description given by Mackerras (1965, p.860). The distribution of P. oculata listed by Mackerras includes only South Australian and Victorian localities. An examination of the Zoological Record (1893 - 1967) has confirmed that this large native cockroach has not previously been recorded from Tasmania.

Reference: MACKERRAS, M. J. (1965). Australian Blattidae
(Blattodea).

I. General remarks, and revision of the genus Polyzosteria Burmeister. Aust. J. Zool. 13 : 841 - 82, pls. 1-2.

SEABIRD MORTALITY ON KING ISLAND 1971-72

M. T. Templeton

THIS is a continuation of reports on Sea-bird mortality on King Island 1969 (Tas. Nat. No. 21 May 1970) and 1970 (Tas. Nat. No. 28 Feb. 1972). Patrols were maintained over the same area, with an extension in 1972 to occasional visits to rocky foreshores near Currie and also specimens collected by several people on other beaches. Specimens were forwarded to R. H. Green at the Queen Victoria Museum, Launceston for determination and preservation when suitable.

The winter of 1971 was free of beach washed birds except for a very occasional Little Penguin Eudyptula minor and two sea-bird species, one of which is a local breeder.

Species:-

Macronectes giganteus Giant Petrel

One desiccated at Porky Estuary on 1 May and one collected by T. Clemons on Porky Beach 3 June.

Pachyptila turtur Fairy Prion

On 1 May the remains of 30 killed by feral cats and rats were counted on Grassy Island. This small island of about one acre has been joined to the mainland by a break water to form the new port. A rookery of about 200 pair were found, but between September 1971 and January 1972 they were nearly exterminated. One dead bird was found on Porky Beach on 1 June.

Species found in 1972 :-

Eudyptula minor Little Penguin

Suffered heavily all along the west coast. In one patrol in July over 50 were counted on the patrolled beach and the wreck was continued all along the coast.

Eudyptes chrysocome Rockhopper Penguin

Specimens were collected at Half Moon Bay on 21 July, and Porky Beach on 23 July and 31 July.

Eudyptes pachyrhynchus Fiordland Penguin

One was collected by R. Drake at Badger Box on 28 July and another on 24 August. One at Currie on 29 July, one was collected by G. Clark at Badger Box on 25 August and one at Porky Beach on 20 September.

Pterodroma macroptera Great-winged Petrel.

One at Currie on 12 July and one at Porky Beach on 20 September.

Pterodroma-sp.

A dessicated specimen with only head and wings intact on Porky Beach on 9 July.

Daption capense Cape Petrel.

Dessicated specimens at Porky Beach on 9 July and two at Porky Estuary on 10 July.

Halobaena caerulea Blue Petrel

One at Porky Beach on 16 July and another on 20 September.

Pachyptila turtur Fairy Prion

Five at one point on Porky Beach on 23 July and another five at the same point on 30 July, one at Half Moon Bay on 27 July and one a kilometre inland at Loorana on 14 August.

Pachyptila desolata Dove Prion

One on Porky Beach 23 May

Pachyptila belcheri Thin-billed Prion

One was collected by D. Meech at Whalebone Bay on 2 April, and four from Porky Beach in July.

Pelecanoides urinatrix Diving Petrel

One was collected by D. Meech at Burgess Bay on 16 April, a dessicated specimen at Porky Estuary on 10 July and another below Wickham Lighthouse in Sept.

Diomedea exulans Wandering Albatross - One at Currie on 12 July.Diomedea melanophris Black-browed Albatross.

One immature specimen at Currie on 12 July.

Diomedea chlororhynchos Yellow-nosed Albatross.

One dessicated specimen on Porky Beach on 21 August.

Puffinus gavia Fluttering Shearwater

One dessicated specimen was found below Wickham Lighthouse on 1 January.

Ardea pacifica Pacific Heron

The first record of this species for King Island was a dead bird found at Porky Estuary on 23 July. Subsequently six were found at Yarra Creek in July, remaining until September, with one still present at Yambacoona in November.

STARLING ROOST ON THE TASMAN BRIDGE, HOBART

L. E. Wall

FOR many years the Starling (*Sturnus vulgaris*) has been very numerous about Hobart and, until recent years, the winter flocks have roosted in the trees in and about Salamanca Place on the Hobart waterfront. The gathering of these flocks in the late afternoons and their incessant chattering preceding their settling down for the night was well known.

In 1964 the erection of the Tasman Bridge spanning the Derwent just up-river from the port was completed and the old floating bridge which it replaced was removed except for the western approach and the pylons holding the lift span which have been allowed to remain. For reasons unknown the Starlings deserted their roosts in Salamanca Place and found the pylons and the lift span of the old bridge a suitable alternative.

At about sunset flocks used to gather just on the up-river side of the Tasman Bridge and spend maybe half an hour circling, often at a considerable height, and all the time being augmented by smaller flocks newly arrived, until well into the dusk they suddenly went to roost on the pylons and lift span. I don't know that anyone attempted an estimate of the numbers but there were many thousands of them and they covered the lift span and the pylons after settling. The sight of the wheeling flock became a common-place to people using the Tasman Bridge and a press photographer featured a picture in the local newspaper, but a close scrutiny showed this to be a composite picture.

On 7th May 1972 I visited the bridge at 5 p. m. and found the flocks beginning to gather, but not forming a flying mass as in past years. Instead, they were resting in some trees and on electric power lines near the western approaches to the bridge. A quick estimation of the number on the power lines yielded 3,000 birds. After about five minutes these birds moved to the pylons and lift span and a few minutes later moved directly from there to roost on the beams under the spans of the western end of the new bridge. Further small flocks arriving from the north and west replaced the earlier gatherings on the power lines, then moved to the pylons and lift span and finally to the beams under the bridge, and so the pattern repeated itself until all birds had gone to roost by 5.40 p. m. It was noticeable that the earliest arrivals chose the westernmost span for their roost and as the beams there became fully occupied the later arrivals had to roost under spans further out in the river. The number of birds was estimated to exceed 15,000.

On 27th May another visit was made, this time using a dinghy which left the eastern shore at 4.45 p. m. and crossed the river slowly, keeping close to the bridge all the way. Many flocks of up to 300 birds were seen flying from the eastern shore directly to the roosts under the western end of the bridge, some flocks coming from the north-east and others from the south-east. These birds did not perch on the overhead wires or the lift span before going to roost.

Having reached the western side of the river we watched many flocks come from the western shore, alight for a few minutes on the left span and then go to roost

on the bridge beams. Caps were occupied first and then the beams, and as each span was filled so the roosts extended eastwards towards the centre of the bridge. At 5.20 p.m. a gunshot on the lift span did not disturb more than about 200 birds. This was a device installed by the National Parks and Wildlife Service to scare the birds away from the lift span - obviously not very effective. By 5.30 p.m., although the dusk was not well advanced and the full moon had risen in the east, all birds had gone to roost. A torch was shone on the beams of the bridge but comparatively few birds were disturbed by this. Those which did move returned to roost further along the bridge and none was seen to go to the lift span. We visited this before rowing across the river and found only about fifty birds on the lower rails.

As we returned to the eastern shore Starlings were found occupying beams under all spans up to the 11th from the western shore (there are 21 spans in all). Silver Gulls in some hundreds were roosting on the bases of the piers just above water level from the 7th span eastward, except for the last four, and with these were about 100 Pacific and Dominican Gulls and about 20 Little Pied Cormorants.

From the western approach of the bridge I watched the roosting of the Starlings again on 15th July.

- 4.40 p.m. First flock (about 500) was circling north of the bridge with other groups (c. 100) joining them at short intervals.
- 4.51 Went to roost under 6th span.
New groups (50+) arriving all the time.
- 4.56 2 flocks (c. 1000 each) arrived from N.W. & W. and other small groups (c. 50)
- 4.59 1000 from N. & 1000 from W. arrived. Still small groups arriving and all circling.
- 5.01 1000 from W. Some thousands on the lift span - none on the pylons.
- 5.04 500 from W.
A continuous movement from the lift span to the bridge, going to roost close to the western shore.
- 5.08 Still thousands on the lift span.
- 5.09 500 from N.
- 5.10 500 from N. and 1000 direct to the bridge.
- 5.12 100 from N.
All the lower rails of the lift span now clear of birds.
- 5.15 50 from N. to lift span.
- 5.16 Only 2 left on lift span.
- 5.17 These transferred to the bridge.
- 5.19 40 from N. - direct to the bridge.
- 5.22 25 from N. - direct to the bridge.
- 5.25 12 from N. - direct to the bridge.
- 5.30 Roosting appeared complete and I left.

My conservative estimate of the number of birds coming from N. & W. (i.e. the western shore of the river) was 15,000:

A further visit was made on 12th August, this time to the eastern shore

to watch the birds coming from this direction. There had been a heavy snowfall on Mt. Wellington the previous day and there was a very cold S.W. wind.

5.02 p.m. Observations commenced.

5.05	2,000	fr	N. E.	5.18	100	fr	S. E.
5.08	1,000		S. E.	5.19	20		N. E.
5.09	200		N. E.		20		N. E.
5.10	300		S. E.		20		S. E.
5.11	150		N. E.		20		N. E.
5.13	30		N. E.	5.20	20		N. E.
5.14	30		N. E.		200		S. E.
	2,000		N. E.		20		N. E.
5.15	20		N. E.	5.21	20		N. E.
	30		S. E.	5.24	100		S. E.
	10		N. E.	5.25	1,000		S. E.
	100		N. E.	5.28	200		S. E.
5.16	50		N. E.	5.29	20		S. E.
	1,000		S. E.		20		S. E.
	100		S. E.	5.30	30		S. E.
	50		N. E.		10		S. E.
5.17	50		N. E.	5.31	50		S. E.
	30		N. E.				

Observations ceased at 5.40 p.m. During this visit no birds from the eastern shore were seen to visit the lift span and it is assumed that they all went direct to their roosts under the bridge. However, I was more concerned to keep records of the birds passing by rather than to follow their behaviour at the roost, and it may well be that some did go to the lift span. The number estimated to come from the eastern shore on this evening was 9 - 10,000.

It is natural that the birds should choose the western part of the bridge for their roosts because the prevailing wind in Hobart is from the west and the birds would therefore gain most shelter there.

On the basis of these counts the number of Starlings roosting under the Tasman Bridge last winter was about 25,000, which is believed to be one of the largest congregations of these birds in Australia. R.H. Green (1965) undertook an extensive banding programme at a communal roost at Oatlands between 1959 and 1964 but he did not make an estimate of the number there. In 1960 he visited a roost at Mt. Pleasant, about 10 miles east of Oatlands and estimated the number there to be 10,000, but he considered these to be independent of the Oatlands roost. H.F. Thomas (1957) visited 14 roosting sites during an investigation of Starling congregations near Mildura. Of these only three exceeded 3,000 and one of these was estimated to contain over 50,000 birds.

References:-

- Green R. H. 1965. Mass Banding of the common Starling.
 "The Australian Bird Bander", vol. 3 : 27 - 31.
- Thomas, H. F. 1957. The Starling in the Sunraysia District, Victoria.
 "The Emu", vol. 57 : 269 - 284.

YELLOW-NOSED ALBATROSS (Diomedea chlororhynchos)

IN TASMANIAN WATERS

L. E. Wall

IN "Tasmanian Birds" Sharland indicates that this species cannot be considered common round our coasts, and "The Handbook of Australian Sea-birds" (Serventy, Serventy & Warham) 1971, states that "off the eastern and south-eastern coasts and Tasmania the species is much less numerous than D. melanophris" (the Black-browed Albatross).

Two dead specimens have been collected on King Island in recent years - see Tas. Naturalist May 1970 & Feb. 1972 - and another has now been collected from Saltwater River, Tasman Peninsula. On 2 Jan. 1972 A.M.D. Hewer secured a bird which had been shot by two youths and it has been added to the collection of the Tas. Museum (Reg. No. 0990).

Measurements of this specimen (a mature male) are :-

Length	733 mm.	Wing	450 mm.	Wing span	1900 mm.	Tail	197 mm.
Culmen	111 mm.	Tarsus	83.5 mm	Middle toe & claw		110 mm.	
Weight	1814.4 grams.						

LARGE FLOCK OF DOMINICAN GULLS

D. G. Thomas

ON 11 March 1972 I was driving along the eastern shore with Mr. & Mrs. P. Balmford of Melbourne in the vicinity of East Risdon. In one small cove we came across a concentration of gulls. The birds were sitting on the water and were evidently sheltering in the cove from a very strong wind. The unusual feature was the large number of Dominican Gulls Larus dominicanus, of which there were at least 40. Birds in juvenile, all stages of sub-adult and adult plumages were present.

There were many Silver Gulls L. novaehollandiae, but no Pacific Gulls L. pacificus were present.

WADERS IN TASMANIA

D. G. Thomas

SINCE the third edition of Michael Sharland's well-known book "Tasmanian Birds" was published in 1958 some 16 additional species have been added to the Tasmanian 'list'. The occurrence of two others has been confirmed and additional knowledge has been gained about the status of other species. The notes that follow bring Sharland up to date.

Of the 43 species recorded for Tasmania, seven breed in the State, six are occasional visitors from mainland Australia and the remaining 30 are migrants which breed outside Australia. Of the migrants, one breeds in New Zealand, one in Japan and the rest in Siberia and, possibly, Alaska.

The name 'wader' is not wholly appropriate because some species occur mainly in dry situations and rarely wade. Other groups of birds, such as the herons, wade but are not classed as 'wadlers'. Many species of waders occur in flocks, often large, at favoured places around the coast. The best Tasmanian wader areas are

Circular Head, Port Sorell, the Tamar Estuary (Kelso - Green's Beach, George Town - Low Head), Cape Portland, Mussel Roe Bay, Anson's Bay, St Helens, Swan River Estuary, Blackman Bay, Pittwater and the Derwent Estuary. Large numbers could occur on north-western coasts from Montague to the Robbin's Passage area but the district has been studied little. No species that has occurred in Tasmania cannot be identified in the field by an experienced observer under good conditions. However, wader identification presents many traps for the unwary because many species have similar non-breeding plumages. In addition, many have different immature, breeding and non-breeding plumages, all of which may be seen within a single flock.

PAINTED SNIPES - Rostratulidae

1. Painted Snipe Rostratula benghalensis

A rare vagrant from the mainland. There do not appear to be any records in the last 15 years.

OYSTERCATCHERS - Haematopidae

2. Pied Oystercatcher Haematopus ostralegus

Common, breeding in sandy areas around the coast. Large flocks form during the winter at Stanley, Port Sorell, St. Helens, Swan River, Blackman Bay, Carlton River, Sorell, Barilla Bay, Lauderdale, Pipeclay Lagoon, South Arm, Port Davey, various bays on Bruny Island and elsewhere. Rarely seen away from the coast (there is a record from Lake Pedder) and is not known to breed inland as it does in New Zealand, U.K. and elsewhere.

3. Sooty Oystercatcher H. fuliginosus

Common around the coast. Unlike the previous species it prefers rocky reefs, shores and islands during the breeding season. In winter it forms flocks of up to 50 birds in areas of tidal mud and sand when it intermingles freely with Pied Oystercatchers. The two species behave generally as if they were one species and instances of interspecific aggression are rare.

PLOVERS & DOTTERELS - Charadriidae

4. Spurwinged Plover Vanellus miles

Common. Breeds from June to October or November in open areas with short vegetation, particularly improved pasture. Forms loose flocks of up to 500 birds in wet places during the non-breeding season.

5. Banded Plover V. tricolor

Common, but less common than the Spurwinged Plover. Breeds from July to October in similar but drier situations (e.g. native pasture) than the preceding species. Nomadic outside the breeding season, when it occurs in small flocks. Rarely seen on the coast.

-- (Cont'd. next issue)