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BIRDS OF HUNTER AND ITS OFF-SHORE ISLANDS

D. Pinner and L. Bird

INTRODUCTION

HUNTER ISLAND lies in the western approaches to Bass Strait, approximately three miles off the north-western tip of Tasmania and some 15 miles from Smithton. Hunter is the largest island in the Hunter Group, being some 14 miles long and with a maximum width of four miles. Its area is 21,000 acres. The highest point is a small conical hill of 250 - 300 feet in the centre of the northern half of the island.

Regarding the vegetation, the island is split roughly in two. The southern half consists mainly of undulating pastoral land. The island is leased to a Mawbanna pastoralist, Mr. P. Maguire, who runs some 700 head of cattle on it. There is a homestead and some outbuildings which are occupied for a few days each month. Scattered on the hills are stands of Banksia marginata and in the gullies thickets of Melaleuca and Leptospermum spp. Most gullies contain patches of rushy swamps which support many small mammals such as wallaby. There are three large lagoons, one in the southern part of the island which supports numerous waterfowl. Many other small water holes are attractive to wildlife. Black Currawongs Strepera fuliginosa and Forest Ravens Corvus tasmanicus nest in the trees surrounding these water holes.

Hunter Island has an equitable maritime climate with few frosts and an average rainfall of about 30 inches which is distributed throughout the year. The prevailing wind is westerly and many of the Banksias on the hills have an easterly lean. There are some fine beaches on the eastern side and rugged stretches of coast on the western side. The northern half of the island and a strip down the eastern side of the southern half are covered with thick scrub, heath and moorland. Part of the western side of the northern half is a large swamp containing two large lagoons. The larger of the two lagoons is surrounded by thick scrub and an attempt to reach it on horseback proved unsuccessful.

Over the past ten years we have made regular visits to Hunter Island. We have landed also on Black Pyramid and Albatross Rock where we have banded

Australian Gannets Morus serrator, Diving Petrels Pelecanoides urinatrix, Fairy Prions Pachyptila turtur and White-capped Albatross' Diomedea cauta.

As far as we are aware little has been published on the birds of these islands. We do not claim that the following lists are exhaustive but believe that they will form a basis for future study.

ANNOTATED LIST OF SPECIES

- LITTLE PENGUIN Eudyptila minor Common, more so on the southern end and the eastern beaches.
- WHITE-CAPPED ALBATROSS Diomedea cauta Because of the nearness of Albatross Rock these birds are a common sight off-shore.
- SHORT-TAILED SHEARWATER Puffinus tenuirostris Many thousands breed on Hunter Island. Two large colonies were found, one at each end of the island. Both are commercially exploited each season.
- WHITE-FACED STORM PETREL Pelagodroma marina Although we did not see any we were told by the late Mr. G. French that they breed on the northern tip.
- AUSTRALIAN PELICAN Pelecanus conspicillatus A small colony breeds on Penguin Island between Hunter and Walker Islands. This colony has existed for at least 80 years (Le Souef 1920).
- AUSTRALIAN GANNET Morus serrator Breeds on Black Pyramid. Common off-shore.
- BLACK-FACED CORMORANT Phalacrocorax fuscescens A small breeding colony was found on a rocky outcrop just above high water mark on the western side of the island.
- HOARY-HEADED GREBE Podiceps poliocephalus Several pairs were seen on the large lagoon in the southern part of the island which appears suitable for breeding but this could not be proved.
- BLACK SWAN Cygnus atratus Several pairs with nests and young have been seen on the large lagoon in the southern part of the island.
- BLACK DUCK Anas superciliosa Large numbers seen at most of the lagoons and water holes.
- CHESTNUT TEAL Anas castanea As for the previous species. A nest with c/11 was found in a tussock.
- MUSK DUCK Biziura lobata One pair seen on the last two visits on the large lagoon in the southern part of the island.
- WEDGE-TAILED EAGLE Aquila audax An occasional bird seen in the past two years.
- WHITE-BREASTED SEA EAGLE Haliaeetus leucogaster At least three pairs nest on the island, two on the eastern and one on the western side.
- SPOTTED HARRIER Circus assimilis A bird fitting the description of this species was seen by three members of the party in November 1973.
- SWAMP HARRIER Circus approximans Fairly common over most of the island. One was seen disputing ownership of some prey with a pair of Peregrine Falcons.
- PEREGRINE FALCON Falco peregrinus One pair has been seen on numerous occasions. They appear to work the southern half of the island and to have a favourite perch on top of a tall rock column on the eastern coast.

- NANKEEN KESTREL Falco cenchroides One seen on the eastern side of the island by two members in November 1973. R. H. Green saw one a week later.
- BROWN QUAIL Synoicus ypsilophorus Fairly common in parties up to eight, particularly in heathy areas.
- LEWIN WATER RAIL Rallus pectoralis One collected by R. H. Green in November, 1973.
- SPOTLESS CRAKE Porzana tabuensis One collected by R. H. Green in November, 1973.
- SWAMPHEN Porphyrio melanotos Common round the edges of marshes and flats. One nest in a ti-tree clump was 12 feet from the ground.
- PIED OYSTERCATCHER Haematopus ostralegus Very few seen and only on the eastern side.
- SOOTY OYSTERCATCHER Haematopus fuliginosus Common all round the coast.
- SPUR-WINGED PLOVER Vanellus miles Several pairs have been found breeding in the semi-pastoral areas.
- BANDED PLOVER Vanellus tricolor Occasional pairs have been seen flying over the island.
- HOODED DOTTEREL Charadrius cucullatus Fairly common. Found on the beaches on both sides of the island.
- RED-CAPPED DOTTEREL Charadrius alexandrinus Although not plentiful they are to be found on the eastern beaches. One pair nested in the middle of the airstrip.
- JAPANESE SNIPE Gallinago hardwickii Flushed from the marsh flats on every visit.
- SILVER GULL Larus novaehollandiae A small nesting colony was found close to the cormorants on the western side of the island.
- PACIFIC GULL Larus pacificus Several nests found and mature and immature birds seen feeding on the beaches.
- COMMON BRONZEWING Phaps chalcoptera Numbers seen at the northern end of the island where there are considerable areas of light Eucalyptus forest. The dominant species is E. simmondsii.
- YELLOW-TAILED BLACK COCKATOO Calyptorhynchus funereus In 1972 seven were seen feeding on Banksias. One pair has nested for at least ten years in a hole 50 feet from the ground in a dead Eucalypt.
- GREEN ROSELLA Platycercus caledonicus Common in most parts of the island but more so on the eastern side where they appear to favour rock-strewn gullies.
- GROUND PARROT Pezoporus wallicus A pair flushed in heathy moorland in the northern half of the island.
- PALLID CUCKOO Cuculus pallidus Fairly common.
- FANTAILED CUCKOO Cacomantis pyrrhophanus Fairly common.
- GOLDEN BRONZE CUCKOO Chalcites plagosus Fairly common.
- BOOBOOK OWL Ninox novaeseelandiae Heard calling from a thick clump of Melaleuca on most visits.
- SKYLARK Alauda arvensis Common.
- WELCOME SWALLOW Hirundo neoxena Several pairs nest in some of the old dwellings and small caves.
- AUSTRALIAN PIPIT Anthus novaeseelandiae Common in the more open parts and semi-pastoral areas.
- BLACK-FACED CUCKOO-SHRIKE Coracina novaehollandiae Has been seen in lightly timbered areas at the northern end of the island.

- BLACKBIRD Turdus merula Fairly common.
- SUPERB BLUE WREN Malurus cyaneus Occasional small groups have been seen on the edges of clearings.
- BROWN THORNBILL Acanthiza pusilla Although not numerous, a few have been seen in the vegetation on the edges of waterholes.
- BROWN SCRUB-WREN Sericornis humilis Seen and heard in the thick undergrowth along some of the creeks.
- WHITE-FRONTED CHAT Epthianura albifrons Numerous pairs with young have been seen among the tussocks in the semi-pastoral areas.
- SCARLET ROBIN Petroica multicolor Common in some of the more heavily wooded areas and along some of the creeks.
- FLAME ROBIN Petroica phoenicea As for the previous species.
- GREY FANTAIL Rhipidura fuliginosa Numbers seen hawking insects on all visits.
- GOLDEN WHISTLER Pachycephala pectoralis Fairly common. Often heard calling in the thicker vegetation and wet areas.
- OLIVE WHISTLER Pachycephala olivacea One heard calling in a heavily timbered gully on the eastern side of the island for the first time in 1972. Several were heard in 1973.
- GREY SHRIKE-THRUSH Colluricincla harmonica Although not numerous, several have been seen in different parts of the island.
- SPOTTED PARDALOTE Pardalotus punctatus Fairly common in most parts of the island.
- YELLOW-TIPPED PARDALOTE Pardalotus striatus As for previous species.
- GREY-BREASTED SILVEREYE Zosterops lateralis Although not common, a few seen foraging in the foliage in different parts of the island.
- BLACK-HEADED HONEYEATER Melithreptus affinis One bird seen by several observers in 1973. The first record for the island.
- STRONG-BILLED HONEYEATER Melithreptus validirostris Two immature birds at northern end and several adult birds in the centre of the island are our first records for the island.
- CRESCENT HONEYEATER Phylidonyris pyrrhoptera Fairly common, particularly in thicker vegetation.
- TAWNY-CROWNED HONEYEATER Gliciphila melanops The commonest honeyeater on the island. It is found in similar habitats to those it occupies on the Tasmanian mainland. Several nests with eggs or young have been found. Nest sites range from ground level to three feet above it.
- EASTERN SPINEBILL Acanthorhynchus tenuirostris A few have been seen and heard but it is by no means common.
- BEAUTIFUL FIRETAIL Emblema bella Fairly common during earlier visits but on later visits only occasional pairs have been seen.
- HOUSE SPARROW Passer domesticus Uncommon.
- GOLDFINCH Carduelis carduelis Common.
- GREENFINCH Chloris chloris Uncommon.
- STARLING Sturnus vulgaris Common.
- DUSKY WOOD-SWALLOW Artamus cyanopterus Numbers seen flying across the island and hawking insects on most visits.

BLACK CURRAWONG Strepera fuliginosa This species, along with the Forest Raven, is the commonest passerine on the island. They are found in most parts of the island and, with flocks of ravens, feed on Bull Kelp on the western side. They are very regular in their nesting times as most nests inspected on each visit contained eggs but no young. Some nests are as low as eight feet from the ground.

WHITE-BACKED MAGPIE Gymnorhina hypoleuca One bird was seen several years ago but we have not seen any since although we have been told by Mr. P. Maguire that there is a pair near the house.

FOREST RAVEN Corvus tasmanicus Very common. Breeds in most parts of the island. Because most trees are less than 40 feet high the birds nest low down, some nests being only ten feet above the ground. All nests contained young and the breeding season appears to vary little from year to year.

BIRDS OF SOME OF THE SMALLER ISLANDS

On 7 December, 1968 a small party visited two of the smaller off-shore islands, Bird and Penguin Islands. Bird Island lies about two miles south of Hunter and Penguin Island lies midway between Hunter and Walker Islands.

Birds seen on Bird Island were : Black-faced Cuckoo-Shrike, Chestnut Teal, Brown Quail, Sooty Oystercatcher, Silver Gull, Pacific Gull, White-fronted Chat, Golden Whistler, Yellow-winged Honeyeater Phylidonyris novaehollandiae, Starling Black Currawong and Forest Raven. Most species had either eggs or young. One Chestnut Teal nest had c/10 and four nests of the Brown Quail were found.

Birds seen on Penguin Island were : Little Penguin, Fairy Prion (six pairs each with c/1), Short-tailed Shearwater, White-faced Storm Petrel, Australian Pelican (8 pairs), Black-faced Cormorant, Sooty Oystercatcher, Silver Gull, Pacific Gull and Caspian Tern Hydroprogne caspia (with young).

DISCUSSION

Birds of 71 species, including introduced species, were identified on Hunter Island and an additional three species on the off-shore islands. Six are endemic to Tasmania. There was one species of thornbill which we could not identify and did not fit the description of either the Brown or Tasmanian Thornbill Acanthize ewingi. There were some doubtful species of ducks which are not included.

On 21 November, 1966, on Hunter Island, we saw a large number of Black Currawongs and Forest Ravens gathered round the nesting burrows of Short-tailed Shearwaters. They were there for the full time of our stay (three days). Upon further investigation it appeared that the birds were enjoying an easily obtained meal in the form of eggs. Apparently, in the confusion of the start of laying, a number of eggs were dropped outside the burrows and, consequently, eggs were readily available to opportunistic foragers such as Black Currawongs and Forest Ravens.

REFERENCE

BIRDS OF THE AUSTRALIAN NEWSPRINT MILLS CONCESSION -
FLORENTINE AND STYX VALLEYS (continued)

B. C. Mollison

- BLACK-FACED CUCKOO-SHRIKE Coracina novaehollandiae Prefers part-cleared areas such as Junee and the buttongrass fringes of Tim Shea. Occasionally overwinters.
- GROUND THRUSH Zoothera dauma Common in rainforest. A common food is the large native snail Caryodes dufresni.
- BLACKBIRD Turdus merula Common in the Maydena area. Has penetrated to the Rasselas Valley and gullies on Tim Shea. Most numerous in areas of blackberries.
- SUPERB BLUE WREN Malurus cyaneus Common on forest fringes, roadsides and cutovers throughout the area. Occurs in family groups of up to seven birds.
- TASMANIAN THORNBILL Acanthiza ewingi Common. Pairs and small groups occur throughout bracken areas and cutovers, and in wattle fringes. The Brown Thornbill may be present (it occurs at Kallista - Ed.)
- SCRUB TIT Acanthornis magnus Common in the same areas as the previous species.
- BROWN SCRUB WREN Sericornis humilis As for previous two species.
- FIELD WREN Calamanthus fuliginosus Recorded in Bauera rubioides and button-grass on the slopes of Tim Shea.
- SCARLET ROBIN Petroica multicolor Occasionally seen at Maydena.
- FLAME ROBIN Petroica phoenicea Very common in open situations and on cutover areas, forming quite large (30 or more) flocks, scattered over an area and often predominantly of one sex.
- PINK ROBIN Petroica rodinogaster Pairs, common in deep fern gullies and rain forest, rarely venturing far from the tree line.
- DUSKY ROBIN Petroica vittata Favours burnt coupe sites, most of which have a small population of Dusky Robins.
- GREY FANTAIL Rhipidura fuliginosa Individuals and pairs are common in open situations. It also occurs in tall eucalypt forests.
- GOLDEN WHISTLER Pachycephala pectoralis Common on forest fringes and at Junee.
- OLIVE WHISTLER Pachycephala olivacea Common in densely forested areas and fringes. Frequents the ground and understorey.
- GREY SHRIKE-THRUSH Colluricincla harmonica Common throughout the area.
- SPOTTED PARDALOTE Pardalotus punctatus Present all year throughout the eucalypt forests.
- YELLOW-TIPPED PARDALOTE Pardalotus striatus Common on coupes in the Florentine Valley in summer.
- GREY-BREASTED SILVEREYE Zosterops lateralis Variable in numbers, occurring in flocks of hundreds at times. They hunt insects in wattles and also frequent rain forest and scrub areas, feeding on insects and small berries such as the Native Currant Coprosma billardieri.
- YELLOW-THROATED HONEYEATER Meliphaga flavicollis Widespread in all but rainforest. Insectivorous, they probe knot-holes and bark and visit foliage.
- STRONG-BILLED HONEYEATER Melithreptus validirostris Travelling in flocks of

up to 70 birds, is plentiful in all sapling eucalypt stands and in mature forest. Groups visit all eucalypts on their territory, particularly those with rolls of bark hanging from the trunks (*E. regnans*, *E. obliqua*). Flocks break up somewhat for breeding (December - January) but reform in February.

CRESCENT HONEYEATER *Phylidonyris pyrrhoptera* The common honeyeater of the open areas such as Tim Shea and Kallista.

NEW HOLLAND HONEYEATER *Phylidonyris novaehollandiae* Present in tea tree and sedgeland at Kallista and Tim Shea but far less common than the previous species.

YELLOW WATTLEBIRD *Anthochaera paradoxa* Not numerous. Occurs in the Kallista area and in National Park. A party of six was seen at the Settlement (November).

BEAUTIFUL FIRETAIL *Emblema bella* Occasionally seen at Maydena and Junee.

HOUSE SPARROW *Passer domesticus* Plentiful at Maydena.

GOLDFINCH *Carduelis carduelis* Penetrates all logging roads, small flocks can be seen through the forested areas and around Maydena from March to September when they return to the lower Derwent Valley to breed. Flocks rarely exceed 20.

STARLING *Sturnus vulgaris* Winter flocks of 400 occur at Maydena and strays are seen over sedgeland. A few are resident at the Settlement.

DUSKY WOOD-SWALLOW *Artamus cyanopterus* Plentiful at Karanja in summer. My only other record was of one bird at John Bull (November).

BLACK CURRAWONG *Strepera fuliginosa* Common throughout the area.

CLINKING CURRAWONG *Strepera arguta* My records all refer to small numbers (2 to 5) around the depot at Maydena, at Kallista and on the Junee Valley road.

GREY BUTCHERBIRD *Cracticus torquatus* I have only two records from near Maydena (Kallista in April and Junee in July).

FOREST RAVEN *Corvus tasmanicus* Common throughout the area. Flocks gather on pasture near Maydena in winter (maximum 45).

Logging roads and cutover and burnt areas will present an increasingly variable habitat for birds, and it may be expected that bird numbers will increase rather than decrease as logging operations expand. However, the destruction of certain habitat types may affect adversely certain species. This list may prove useful for later comparison.

REFERENCE

- Gilbert J. M. 1965. "Forestry", in Atlas of Tasmania : 66 - 67.
Ed. J. L. Davies, Hobart : Lands & Surveys Department.

RELATIONS BETWEEN STRANGE BROWN HAWKS

N. Brothers

USUALLY when a strange bird is released in a new area its presence is resented by the normal territory-holders of that species and open attacks may take place. I have to report an apparent incident of quite contrary behaviour in Brown Hawks *Falco berigora*.

On 29th October, 1973 a landholder at Kingston caught a Brown Hawk and a Brown Goshawk *Accipiter fasciatus*, in a crow trap. He communicated with the National Parks and Wildlife Service, suggesting that these birds be released elsewhere as, though they had been attacking his poultry, he did not wish to kill them.

I was deputed to release them at Moulting Lagoon, 120 miles distant, which I did two days later. The Goshawk, when set free, quickly disappeared into the bush. The Brown Hawk settled on a nearby dead Acacia in a grove of live trees. Though it appeared to me to be well hidden, within five minutes it was joined by another Brown Hawk, which flew directly to it, screeching loudly as it approached. It sat on the same branch as the bird from Kingston and very close to it. It "chattered" to the newcomer and made apparently caressive movements with its beak at the head of the other bird, which remained silent and motionless. After 2-3 minutes the local bird flew off but returned 10-15 minutes later and rejoined the new bird. They then both flew off together. Brown Hawks are plentiful in the Moulting Lagoon area.

A KERGUELEN PETREL AT MT. FIELD NATIONAL PARK

L. E. Wall

ON 22 July 1974 a "muttonbird" was reported having been found injured near the ranger's house at Mt. Field National Park. It died soon afterwards and was sent to National Parks Headquarters in Hobart. It should be recorded that a heavy south-westerly storm had raged for the two days before this bird was found.

The general description is :- dark grey above; grey below (including underwings); marginal coverts of the ulnar region whitish; bill black, deep and laterally compressed; legs and feet grey, webs dark grey. Measurements - length, 380 mm; culmen, 27 mm; tarsus, 41 mm; mtc. 51mm; wing, 248 mm; tail, 115 mm.

In Canberra during August I was able to examine two specimens at the C. S. I. R. O. Division of Wildlife Research and to discuss this bird with Dr. P. Fullagar and with Mr. F. C. Kinsky of the Dominion Museum, Wellington N. Z. The latter made the comment which I have not seen quoted in the literature that this species has a very high forehead which is a useful feature for identification. A subsequent check of the specimen in Hobart showed this quite clearly. In the "Handbook of Australian Seabirds" by Serventy, Serventy and Warham, the other diagnostic feature, which is most noticeable in this Tasmanian specimen, is the pronounced white ulnar margin to the wings.

This is the third Tasmanian record of the species.

A ROYAL PENGUIN AT SAFETY COVE

NATIONAL Parks and Wildlife Service reported that a Senior Ranger, Mr. Rex Gatenby, had found this bird on Safety Cove beach on 19 March 1974. It was just beginning to moult. The following description and measurements were supplied, - approx. body length, 660 mm; approx. bill length, 80 mm; back and head, blue-black; throat, white; crest, yellow-orange; bill, reddish-brown; upper surface of feet, flesh pink; under surface of feet, black. The crest was continuous from both sides of the head over the bill.

This description fits the species well except that the bill length is too great. Mr. Gatenby was questioned on the method of measurement and he indicated that his measurement was the gape rather than the exposed culmen. A check of specimens in the Tasmanian Museum showed that his gape measurement was consistent with them, and it can reasonably be accepted that the identification was correct.