

# Southern Oceans Seabird Study Association Inc.

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**David Cunningham**  
Ranger NSW NPWS.  
Ulladulla

5th November 2004

David,

A brief report on the results of the latest survey into breeding population of seabirds on the Murramarang Islands, November 1<sup>st</sup>- 4<sup>th</sup> 2004.

## **Team Members (SOSSA)**

Lindsay Smith (Leader), Janice Jenkin-Smith, Inger Vandyke, Robert Thorne.

## **NSWPS**

Micheal Jarman (Shorebird Co-ordinator), Dave Cunningham, Alan Norman.

The expedition was not as successful as we would have wished due largely to poor weather and unfavourable sea conditions.

## **Belowla Island:**

Tuesday November 2<sup>nd</sup> 2004

Team members, Lindsay E. Smith, Janice Jenkin-Smith, Inger Van Dyke.

Landing difficulties 7.5

Limited time on island due to approaching Lightning storm and strong NW winds 20-30 knots and landing difficulties.

Known nest sights of Sooty Oystercatchers were searched, only one nest contained eggs, this nest contained a single predated egg. There was little to indicate that any birds had eggs or chicks. There were White-faced Storm-petrel burrows in abundance. A few Little Penguins were located amongst the rocks on top of the island.

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## **Brush Island**

Wednesday November 3<sup>rd</sup> 2004

Team members, Lindsay Smith, Inger Vandyke (SOSSA).

Micheal Jarman (NPWS Shorebird Recovery team).

Landing difficulties 5

Strong NW winds 20-30 knots.

Lindsay (Boatman) Landed Michael and Inger onto the island to search for nest sights on foot. Then went on to search the shoreline for birds holding territories, from the boat. Conditions were very difficult in 20-30 NW winds in a 3.6mtre boat.

A thorough search of the island failed to locate any active nests of Sooty Oystercatchers, indicating that the birds had not yet attempted breed this season or had failed due to serve weather conditions. A further visit is to be planned over the coming weeks to confirm whether the birds will attempt to breed this season.

## **Island Beach**

Inger Vandyke (SOSSA) and Micheal Jarman NPWS (Shore-bird Recovery Team)

Went to Island beach later in the afternoon to check on breeding Hooded Plovers.

They were elated to see that this pair had successfully raised three chicks to fledging age. Inger was successful in photographing the parents and their brood.



**Hooded Plovers with Chicks. Island Beach Inger Vandyke**

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## Toll Gates Islands.



**Toll Gates Islands** Inger Vandyke

Thursday November 4<sup>th</sup> 2004.

Team members Lindsay Smith, Inger Vandyke (SOSSA)

Michael Jarman (NPWS Shorebird Recovery team).

David Cunningham (NPWS) Ulladulla. Alan Norman (NPWS) Ulladulla.

Landing difficulties 1

Strong NE wind 20-30 Knots. Seas rising to 3-4 metres.

A search of known nesting territories of Sooty Oystercatchers on the western side of both main islands indicated that 6 pairs were breeding on the islands. An additional pair were holding a breeding territory on the North Island and may also breed this season.



**Sooty Oystercatchers at Toll Gates Islands.** Inger Vandyke

Sea and weather conditions did not allow for a thorough search of the islands. Though White-faced Storm-petrel burrows were in abundance and several Little Penguins nests containing chicks were located on the western side of both islands.



**Little Penguin chicks at Toll Gates Island** Inger Vandyke

A Little penguin wearing band No 191-02628 found dead on the south island of the Toll Gates. This bird was originally banded as an adult, age 1+ by members of SOSSA at Big Island No1 in the Five Islands group off Port Kembla on November 5<sup>th</sup> 2000 as part of our banding studies there. The bird was a male and weighed 1425 grams at time of banding it was paired to female 19102629 also banded as an adult aged as 1+. Recovery information sent to the Australian Bird and Bat Banding Scheme in Canberra.

An immature White-bellied Sea eagle was also found dead on the beach of the south Toll Gates Island.

Other birds recorded on the Toll Gates Island:

Peregrine Falcon, White-bellied Sea Eagle, Osprey, Great Cormorant, Little black Cormorant, Reef Egret and Little Grass bird.

This is the first recorded sighting of Osprey at the Toll Gates Islands. Ospreys are considered very rare in southern NSW.

The Reef Egret is becoming rare in southern NSW and has previously been recorded breeding on these islands.

\* **Note:** Due to strong wind warnings and possible thunderstorms in the area forecast to continue, the expedition was called to an early end. A second SOSSA island team Dr Peter Milburn, Dr Mike Double Daryl McKay due to arrive on Friday to assist, were stood down.

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Unfortunately, Wasp and Grasshopper Islands were not surveyed on this visit.

At this stage it is unclear whether the birds had delayed breeding, or nests and eggs had been destroyed by high seas and heavy rains in the preceding weeks. A follow up survey is planned for early in December, to determine whether the birds would attempt to breed this year.

Wasp, Belowla and Brush Islands are to be included in the next survey. Date to be determined. These islands are easily accessed by small boat and can be surveyed by SOSSA should the NPWS be unable to assist at that time.

The table below shows the distribution of breeding pairs of Sooty Oystercatchers recorded during this survey.

The assistance of the NSWPS in this survey is both welcomed and appreciated. Many thanks, to all who have assisted in this project.

Yours sincerely  
On behalf of SOSSA.

Lindsay E. Smith OAM. President  
Southern Ocean Seabird Study Association Inc.



**David Cunningham at Toll Gates Island** Lindsay E Smith

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**SURVEY RESULTS OF SOOTY OYSTERCATCHERS BREEDING ON  
MURRAMARANG DISTRICT ISLANDS  
1st to 5th NOVEMBER 2004  
SOSSA / NSW NPWS**

	<b>Site</b>	<b>Comments</b>	<b>Notes<sup>®</sup></b>
	<b>Toll Gates Islands</b>	6 pairs with eggs 1 additional pair holding a known nesting territory	1 nest on north island contained two eggs. Two nests on rock stack mid way between main islands on western side contained two eggs each. Two nests on the south island contained 2 eggs. One nest contained 1 egg.
	<b>Wasp Island</b>	Not surveyed	Unfavourable weather and sea conditions prevented access.
	<b>Grasshopper Island</b>	Not surveyed	As above unable to land with safety
	<b>Belowla Island-south point</b>	No nests containing eggs other than a single nest on western end of island that contained 1 predated egg.	30 birds present on island, some appeared to be holding breeding territories. Recent very heavy rains and rough seas may have destroyed nests or delayed breeding attempts.
	<b>Brush Island</b>	No nests containing eggs were found during survey.	30+ birds present on island, some appeared to be holding breeding territories. Recent very heavy rains and rough seas may have destroyed nests or delayed breeding attempts.