



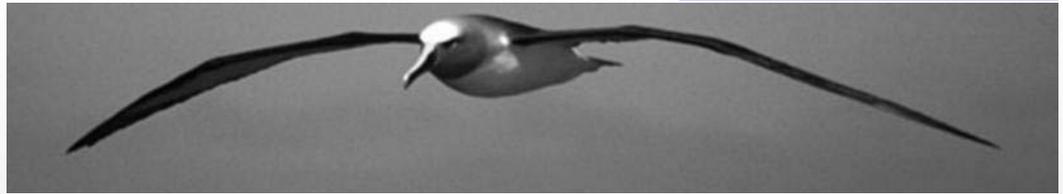
**SOUTHERN
OCEAN SEABIRD
STUDY
ASSOCIATION
INC.**

**Special points of
interest**

- SOSSA's French connection
- SOSSA's recent band recoveries
- A pelagic trip to Ashmore Reef
- NSW's beautiful Montague Island Nature Reserve

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The Albatross

Issue No. 33

April 2005

SOSSA's French connection by Lindsay Smith

Wedge-tailed Shearwater At Sea Project.

(French for penguin!) provided Kaye with endless amusement.

The Wedge-tailed Shearwaters Project received a major boost this season with the arrival of Pascal Castellazzi from the prestigious 'Institut Supérieur de l'Environnement' in France (<http://www.institut-environnement.org>).

On the islands Pascal was able to band the Shearwater chicks and see Little Penguins (*Eudyptula minor*) and thus experience first-hand how the data are generated. He also had the privilege of a night of in the famous Consett Davis

As part of his seven weeks of training in 'communication support' he chose to spend his time here in Australia with SOSSA.

We were able to convince Pascal to help out entering and analysing the Wedge-tailed Shearwater (*Puffinus pacificus*) data for the present (2004-2005) season.

During this time his 'Australian - English' improved immensely.

In order for Pascal to be understand how the numbers in SOSSA's databases represent real animals we took him to visit the Five Islands Nature Reserve here in Wollongong. Pascal just couldn't wait to get to the islands, as you can see by the photo!

There Pascal & Kaye Varlow worked hard and Pascal's 'Little PINGWYNs'



**Pascal keen to get to the Five Islands!
(Photo: J. Jenkin-Smith).**

Hut on the Five Islands Reserve. It was obvious that Pascal greatly enjoyed his time on the islands.

Unfortunately, the same cannot be said for his time on two SOSSA pelagic trips! These trips, up to 35 kilometres out to sea, also generate SOSSA's data and so we thought Pascal must also experi-

SOSSA's French connection continued...

ence the joys of data collection at sea. Pascal now understands for himself that our voluntary work can be very challenging at times!

Little is known of the structure of the flocks of Wedge-tailed Shearwaters at sea off their breeding grounds, but it is hoped that our unique at-sea studies off Wollongong will provide an important insight into the ecology of these amazing, locally breeding, seabirds.

The data analysis is still in its early days (see graphs below) but Pascal has developed an easily followed programme. He asked the following four basic questions:

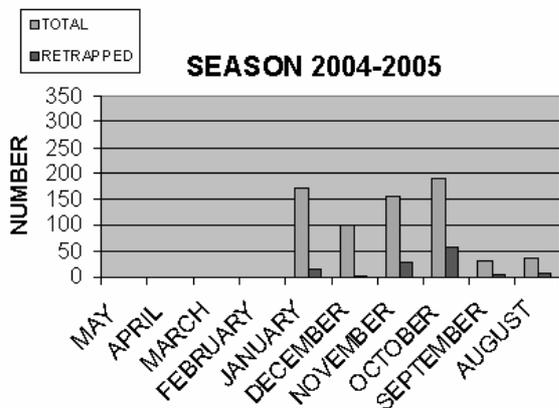
1. How many birds are banded each season and how many are re-caught?
2. How many are known to breed locally?
3. What is the age structure of re-trapped birds?
4. What is the breeding status of re-trapped birds?

His analyses have encouraged us to further investigate our datasets which go back to 1958. It is these birds that have been tagged and re-trapped since that time that have given us the opportunity to understand the age structure of the birds that occur on, or breed within, the Five Islands Nature Reserve.

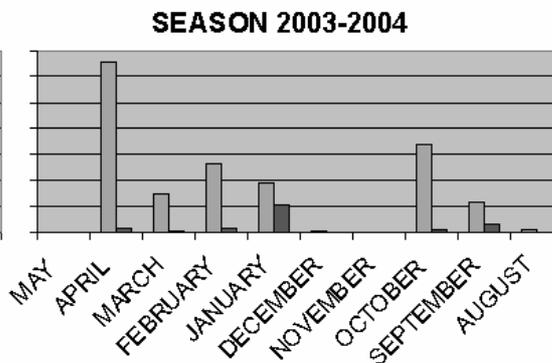
Pascal has completed the task assigned to him with great success and we hope that during his time with SOSSA Pascal has learnt a great deal about our precious local wildlife.



Pascal and Kaye with a Wedge-tailed Shearwater chick in Five Islands Nature Reserve (Photos: L. Smith).



Total number of birds: 888
Total number of re-trapped: 112
Percentage of re-trapped: 12.61%
Average age of re-trapped birds: 8.52 years
 Data shown to January 2005 only.



Total number of birds: 867
Total number of re-trapped: 88
Percentage of re-trapped: 10.15%
Average age of re-trapped birds: 9.87 years

Lucky Noddy by Capt. Ross Hunter

It was a sloppy day on the Tasman, powerful swells rolled from a deepening low forming out wide. We trolled for striped marlin but after 4 hours, no encounters but we are used to that, time and patience is what's required. My dear old Grandfather taught me that when I was lad of 6... I would fish with him in his beloved rowboat, he would tell me when I would get impatient "Sonny be patient, because good things come to those who wait". During my 40 years of marlin fishing his advice has held me in good stead many times when the fishing is tough... there is no place for impatience when you are a charter fishing boat Captain.

A lone bird flew low a few hundred metres to the south, it caught my eye... mainly because apart from my crew it was the only living creature we had seen. I watched it approach and realized that it was different ... I called out to me crewman Rob... "Mate have a look at this bird ". I yelled from the flybridge "I think that it's a noddy tern!"

The tiny bird flew past and disappeared. Rob did not see it.

The twin Cummins burbled in an almost mesmerizing manner as we continued on trolling, searching for that very elusive striped marlin. I glanced at the salt water temperature gauge, it read nearly 26 degrees, very hot water sometimes too hot. I silently thought to myself. In the cockpit sat my crew patiently talking amongst themselves... I was privileged to have a very young angler today Joe Roberts was only 10 years of age but had fished with his Dad Jamie many times on their own trailer boat and longed for the day when he may

catch his first marlin...he had raised fish but never actually landed one.. maybe today I silently thought... but finding one was like finding needles in hay stacks.



Above: An unusual visitor: a Common Noddy

A movement caught my eye from the top of the hardtop off the boat, it was a tail of a bird sitting there. Reaching up I cradled the tiny bird in my hands... low and behold a noddy tern joins the crew!

Many times spanning over to many years we have had visiting birds racing pigeons, parrots, cattle egrets, albatross

and terns but this was our first noddy. I dialled my good mate and bird mentor Lindsay "Birdbrain " Smith and the conversation went like this:

"Birdbrain.....Roscoe... How are you going mate?" Yeh! Good mate.... I've got a noddy on board as a non-paying passenger."

Lindsay then went on to describe to me the three basic species etc... He suggested the bird was maybe tired... to rest it up in a box somewhere quite... feed it if it would eat and let it go later.

I parted by saying thanks mate I will do that I hope our little visitor brings us a little luck on the marlin.

I am just about bid Lindsay goodbye when the proverbial hits the fan as deckie Rob Cox is yelling at the top of his lungs "Marlin up on the left...."

"Gotta go!" I tell Lindsay with great urgency, as the big striped devours the mackerel bait and leaps skyward taking two hundred metres of line with him. Rob clears the gear and based on the strike roster it turns out to be my 10 year

'Lucky Noddy' continued...

old angler Joe who leaps into the gamechair. I had my doubts as to whether a 10 year old could catch this magnificent 110 kg striped marlin that is rampaging all a round the ocean's surface.

The big stripy jumped high time and again to the delights of Captain and crew...the lad was doing a great job in the chair... my confidence grew stronger, this small boy was determined to tag and release his first marlin and nothing would stand in the way of that.

After a tough 40 minute struggle which had a win a and lose valuable line associated with it... and lots of grunting and groaning... the big fish was gently coaxed to the transom of BROADBILL.

Rob placed the fisheries tag in the shoulder of the marlin then as he held it by the bill I steamed forward forcing water through the fishes gills until he was fully recovered and then released a little shaken and certainly wiser for the experience... the fish would think twice before being lured into eating a bait this alone may save it from the certain death of a longline hook.

The lad had achieved his dream by catching and tagging his first marlin... He was my youngest ever angler to catch a marlin which leaves me with a most memorable milestone in my life.

The tiny bird had brought us luck!

I thought we had better check his progress as we lifted the towel off his makeshift recovery



Above: The Noddy takes a rest onboard the 'Broadbill'

shelter. It had eaten some of the food scraps and seemed a lot livelier than when first caught.

As we neared Botany heads we decided to set it free... it seemed right that young Rob should have that privilege. He opened his hands and the noddy

flew... we all yelled with delight as we watched as it soared back to the wake of the boat searching for food scraps... but then as though it liked our company it flew back and took up position again on the flybridge... it seemed as though we had acquired a permanent mascot.

Eventually the tiny bird flew off joining a bunch of little terns that were flossicking for white bait in the estuary. We had achieved much to day... a day that will be remembered by all on the

boat.

We all trust that our little friend is okay and maybe... just maybe... we may meet again.

Five Island Report

By Lindsay Smith OAM

Mike Jarman NSW PWS Shorebird Recovery
Darryl McKay SOSSA
Jillian Keating Shorebird Recovery Team
Cici Legoe NSW PWS
Nick Murray Field worker / assistant

The Ibis team lead by Cici, Darryl and Nick were successful in colour marking (using powder coated bands) 35 chicks.

The Sacred Ibis are a recent arrival at the Five Islands, first recorded as a breeding species on January 12th 2002 when 5 nests with eggs were discovered by Lindsay Smith and Damien Stanioch on Bitu bushes on the SW side of Big Island No 1.

A Penguin's Eye View of Montague by Inger Vandyke

Montague Island lies like a granite bastion, 9km east of Narooma on the South Coast of New South Wales. It's 82 hectares are recognised as both a significant natural heritage area and a prominent feature in the history of lighthouses in New South Wales. In 1990, the entire island with the inclusion of the lighthouse precinct buildings was nominated as a nature reserve.

Split into two sections by a narrow isthmus affectionately known as 'pinchgut', Montague Island is home to the largest colony of Little Penguins outside of Phillip Island. Currently about 6,000 pairs breed on the island and their life cycles and threats to their existence have been researched on the island under the direction of Nick Klomp and students from Charles Sturt University. Field researcher Amy Jorgensen has been working on Montague with the Little Penguins for a number of years and is currently surveying the moulting Little Penguins until this part of their yearly cycle finishes around the middle of March. Little Penguins may spend up to one month at sea in order to fatten themselves up in time to moult. During this period, they can sometimes almost double their body weight to survive the three weeks on land required to

renew their plumage. Surveying both nesting boxes and burrows revealed one of the largest pre-moult weights of a little penguin recorded on the island with one individual weighing almost a hefty two kilograms.



Above: The eye of a Little Penguin

Below: Amy Jorgenson at work on Montague



We also saw many different plumage phases and found a few chicks that appeared to have been abandoned by their adults in favour of the urgency to moult. One solo chick was quite emaciated weighing only about 450g which is about two thirds of

the weight of a normal almost fledged chick. Two others were seen at night to be calling out to adults who may or may not have appeared. Amy sat with these two who adopted her as their mother and became clingy. Amy's ongoing study of the Little Penguins on the island incorporates not only the research of the penguins, but threats to their habitat like overfishing in the waters surrounding the island and control of invasive weeds such as Kikuyu.

Over the last decade an active weed control program on Montague has been underway to rid the island of Kikuyu. This has involved both aerial spraying and burning. The principal aim is to replace the Kikuyu infested areas with native acacias, banksias and re-planted lomandra grass allowing the penguins

renew their plumage. Surveying both nesting boxes and burrows revealed one of the largest pre-moult weights of a little penguin recorded on the island with one individual weighing almost a hefty two kilograms.

'A Penguin's Eye View of Montague' continued...

and nesting shearwaters a less treacherous access to their key nesting sites. 17,000 of these plants have been replanted on the island since the program commenced. Kikuyu is the most damaging weed on Montague and was most likely introduced by settlers on the island over 100 years ago. Early lighthouse keepers planted kikuyu as a lawn grass and feed for their stock including goats and rabbits. Casuarinas, banksias and coastal acacia trees that once dominated the island have since been razed by either humans for firewood or by stock. These species provided shade areas which would have inhibited the spread of kikuyu. Since their disappearance, the kikuyu infestation has become so thick that it is almost 1.5m thick in some areas.

Kikuyu is also a major threat to the island's nesting shearwater population. In one of the longest standing bird studies in Australia, Montague's shearwaters have been monitored and researched by the CSIRO since 1960. The island is home to almost equal numbers of nesting short tailed and wedge-tailed shearwaters – approximately 7,000 pairs each. Nearly 300 nesting pairs of sooty shearwaters are present also. Montague is the southern most breeding site for wedge-tailed shearwaters on the East Coast of Australia and at the time of writing, many had mature chicks.



Montague Island's seals and lighthouse

Other nesting bird species on Montague include 13 pairs of Sooty Oystercatchers, a pair of Peregrine Falcons who capitalise on the island's large nesting Silver Gull population and it's chicks in order to sustain their own. Nesting Crested Terns are present during the summer months and, in an amusing display of parenting, use different parts of the island for different schooling of chicks in both flight and fishing skills. Australian Kestrels have also been seen using the lighthouse windows as a regular roosting site.

Montague is also an important haul out site for a permanent colony of Australian and another of New Zealand fur seals. The numbers of both vary with season and two Australian fur seal pups have been born on the island over this summer.

Since the rich waters surrounding Montague Island support most of the islands avifauna and sea mammals, staff on the island have been monitoring the area for both local and professional fishing vessels. The introduction of a marine park and/or an exclusion zone of 4km surrounding the island is being hotly contested by Narooma residents, professional fishermen from Bateman's Bay and environmentalists. The negotiations are ongoing.

Until an official announcement has been made to include Montague Island on the list of New South Wales' Marine Parks, different interest groups will continue to work on the island to ensure the sustainability of all of the islands species of plants, birds, mammals and fish life.

Ashmore Reef Pelagic Trip Report by Richard Baxter

The Ashmore Reef Pelagic for 2004 ran from the 24th to the 31st October and consisted of 5 days at sea and three days on Ashmore Reef with a brief visit to Scott Reef on the way north. A total of 70 species, including 32 species of sea-bird were also recorded over 374 Nm of observation during the five days sailing to and from Ashmore Reef.

DAY 1 - 24 October 2004

Departed Broome 8.30am. Headed into a north/west wind producing minimal spray. First non-bird was a **Golden (olive)Seasnake** not long after leaving Roebuck Bay. This was soon followed by **Stoke's Seas-**

nake, and **Olive-headed Seasnake** over the next 8hrs. The only cetaceans of the day were **Indo-pacific Humpback Dolphins** 2. Birds included **Brown Booby** (*Sula leucogaster*)167, **Lesser Frigatebird** (*Fregata ariel*) 4, **Roseate Tern** (*Sterna dougallii*) 130, **Bridled tern** (*Sterna anaethetus*) 2, **Common Tern** (*Sterna hirundo*) 200 and **Little Tern** (*Sterna albifrons*) 2. The water depth most of the day was less than 30m and we traveled within 20km of the coast all day, heading north. Of other interest were about 6 **Lesser Wanderer** butterflies and several small



Above: The yacht 'Willie'

Below: Juvenile Lesser Frigatebird



flying fish. A **Lemon Shark** came near the boat early afternoon as did three **Flatback Turtles**.

DAY 2 - 25th October 2004

Rose early to start an eventful day's birding, continuing on the course from Broome to Scott Reef. A full suite of petrels were sighted including **Wilson's Storm Petrel**

(*Oceanites oceanicus*), **Matsudaira's Storm Petrel** (*Oceanodroma matsudairae*), **Bulwer's Petrel** (*Bulweria bulwerii*)

and other highlights included a **Long-tailed Jaeger** (*Stercorarius longicauda*) and **Pomarine Jaeger** (*Stercorarius pomarinus*) within several minutes of each other.

A **Leatherback Turtle** in the morning also proved a 'first' for many and there were three sightings of **Spinner Dolphins**, including a close view of a group of about 45 animals including a number

breaching and spinning. A pleasant and exhilarating day made all the better for the hospitality of the crew of the 'Willie' and a welcome cold beer on a delightful sunset at 5:50pm.

DAY 3 - 26th October 2004 Sunrise was at Scott Reef and about 5.30am a small to medium, unmarked brown starling circled the vessel before heading off southwest. This caused great excitement but we were unable to ID it before it flew off towards OZ. Our best guess was White-shouldered Starling. Leaving Scott

'Ashmore Reef Pelagic Trip Report' continued...

Reef at about 08:30, the vessel was quickly in deep water over a steep drop off. A group of dolphins were approached and eventually identified as **Rough-Toothed Dolphins**. Highlights of the day included singles of **Leach's Storm Petrel** (*Oceanodroma leucorhoa*) and **Swinhoe's Petrel** (*Oceanodroma monorhis*), plus numbers of **Bulwer's Petrel** and a lone **Jouanin's Petrel** (*Bulweria fallax*). Shortly out of Scott Reef, three **Cuvier's Beaked Whales** were seen.

DAY 4 - 27th October 2004 Arrived Ashmore Reef at dawn in splendid conditions after a good nights sleep on deck. Soon after mooring, we were approached by an Indonesian Prau (fishing boat) and we spotted a passerine on the rear deck. It promptly took off and flew calling towards our yacht. It was a wagtail, quickly identified by Mike Carter as a **Grey Wagtail** (*Motacilla cinerea*). With anticipation therefore we headed to west island. Birding got off to a quiet start then a few **Oriental Cuckoos** (*Cuculus saturatus*) were found and at about 09:30 the group found two **Yellow Wagtails** (*Motacilla flava*). On the way back to meet the boat the **Grey Wagtail** was refound feeding on flies in rocks along the shore. A quick trip to middle island at high tide added another bird to the trip list - **Black Noddy** (*Anous minutus*) - as well as huge numbers of breeding seabirds such as frigatebirds, 3 x booby sp, common noddy and both tropicbirds as well as lots of turtles and reef sharks.

DAY 5 - 28th October 2004 A balmy night with a full moon and an extremely calm sea. In the morning, after a slightly delayed departure on a very low spring tide, we arrived on West Island. Only after about an hour, we discovered an **Island Monarch** (*Monarcha cinerascens*) and within several minutes, everyone got good views. If as is expected, this is accepted, this would be the 'first for Australia' that many of the group were hoping for. After this initial excitement, the group visited Middle Island and a sand spit just to the east of Middle Island with very large numbers of waders. Highlights included **Masked Boobies** (*Sula dactylatra*), **Black Noddies**, about 100 **Little Terns**, an **Asian Dowitcher** (*Limnodromus semipal-*

matus), **Lesser Sandplover** (*Charadrius mongolus*), **Great Knots** (*Calidrus tenuirostris*) and **Little Curlew** (*Numenius minutus*). On return to the vessel the group discovered a **Loggerhead Turtle** on a sandbar in the shallows. We returned to our yacht for lunch and our daily snorkel over the reef. Early afternoon we headed back to West Island and after about an hour on West Island Mark Taylor discovered an **Arctic Warbler** (*Phylloscopus borealis*)!

DAY 6 - 29th October 2004 A final morning visit to West Island yielded yet more rarities with two **Arctic Warblers** and two **Oriental Reed Warblers** (*Acrocephalus orientalis*). Whilst on the island the group also found two more nests of **Red-tailed Tropicbird** (*Phaeton rubricauda*) bringing the minimum number of nests to four. Departed Ashmore Reef about 8.30am.

DAY 7 - 30th October 2004 Awoke to a pleasant array of birds including an early **Tahiti Petrel** (*Psuedobulweria rostrata*) before the sun came up to begin birding in earnest. Though bird numbers were generally low, today offered some of the best sightings with close views of **Matsudaira's Storm Petrel**, **Swinhoe's Storm Petrel** and two sightings of **Jouanin's Petrel**. The day was ruled however by Streaked Shearwater. An early sighting in deep water was an early forecast of the vast numbers that would be seen later in the day. Over three hundred individuals were seen including a single raft of over 250 birds.

DAY 8 - 31st October 2004 Final morning on the Willie began about five miles west of the Lacapedes and continued into Broome, to arrive at about 3pm. As expected the day was dominated by sightings of terns, mainly **Roseate Terns** but also some **Common Terns** (particularly as we approached Broome) and **Little Terns**. Several feeding flocks early in the day yielded a few **Common Noddies** (*Anous stolidus*), **Sooty Terns** (*Sterna fuscata*) and **Bridled Terns**, **Streaked Shearwaters** (*Calonectris leucomelas*) and **Wedge-tailed Shearwaters** (*Puffinus pacificus*).

*Should anybody like a full list of species (and abundance) or the specific names of non-avian species please contact the author.
randrbaxter@yahoo.com*

SOSSA's recent band recoveries by Lindsay Smith

Black Petrel (*Procellaria parkinsoni*)

A Black petrel carrying band H33088 was captured by a hand held net. Location: Tasman Sea east of Wollongong on December 18th 2004 by the SOSSA Team. The band was originally placed on the bird at Great Barrier Island, New Zealand. The bird was banded as a nestling by the New Zealand Banding Scheme on April 20th 2002. The time between banding and recovery was 2 years 7 months and 28 days.

Kelp Gull (*Larus dominicanus*)

An adult Kelp Gull (Band No. 111-03802) was found washed ashore at Wollongong Beach on October 16th 2004. The bird was taken to the Wollongong Veterinary Hospital, where its condition was euthanased. The bird was banded as a nestling at Bass Island (Five Islands Nature Reserve) off Wollongong, on 9/1/88 by SOSSA. Since then, until its death (16 years 9 months 9 days later) the bird had been sighted on, no less than 45 occasions! Sightings ranged all over the Illawarra District from Shellharbour (in the south) to Wollongong harbour in the north.

Wandering Albatross (*Diomedea exulans*)

Band No.: 140-50093 was recovered on 19/01/2005 at Bird Island, South Georgia, Atlantic Ocean. This bird was banded by SOSSA at sea off Mossy Point NSW on 10/10/99. The bird was originally banded as a chick on 14/10/1997 at Bird Island South Georgia. Time between banding and recapture is 5 years and 3 months 9 days. The bird had moved a distance of 9990 kms with a bearing of 175 degrees.

Wandering Albatross (*Diomedea exulans*)

Band No.: 140-39018 was recovered on 10/03/2005 at Ile des Cochons, Crozet Group, Southern Indian Ocean, France. Latitude: 46deg 6min 0sec S; Longitude: 50deg 15min 0sec E. The female was caught by hand at her nest. The finder were the CNRS (French Banding Scheme) Centre D'Etudes Biologiques de Chiz, France. This bird was originally banded by Doug Gibson at Bellambi NSW on 14/8/71.



Above: A Black Petrel in the bag! (L. Smith)

Below: Another sighting of Kelp Gull 111-03802 (J. Jenkin-Smith)



Wandering Albatross (*Diomedea exulans*)

Band No.: 140-39044 was recovered on 10/03/2005 at Ile des Cochons, Crozet Group, Southern Indian Ocean, France. Latitude: 46deg 6min 0sec S; Longitude: 50deg 15min 0sec E. The male was caught by hand at his nest. The finder were the CNRS (French Banding Scheme) Centre D'Etudes Biologiques de Chiz, France. SOSSA placed a band on this bird on 21/8/71 at sea off Austinmer, NSW, Latitude: 34deg 18min 0sec S; Longitude: 150deg 58min 0sec E. The time between banding and recovery was 33 years 6 months 17 days. The bird had moved a distance of: 8067 km with a bearing of 226 degrees.



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We're on the web!
www.sossa-international.org

SOSSA Events...

Next SOSSA meeting 23RD APRIL 2005

held at HQ. – 7.00 pm, 10 Jenkins
Street - Unanderra. NSW.

SOSSA AGM 28th AUGUST 2005

Sausage Sizzle

Held at HQ. – 1.00 pm
Guest speaker to be announced.
10 Jenkins Street - Unanderra.
NSW.

We only supply the coffee or tea!

New Members...

WIRES
Tim Birch
Joan Dowes
Llyris Wood
Stan Wood
Robert Hughes
Michael Strumfeld
John Warham

SOSSA Trips...

Wollongong 2005

23RD APRIL
28TH MAY
25TH JUNE
23RD JULY
27TH AUGUST
24TH SEPTEMBER
22ND OCTOBER
26TH NOVEMBER
17TH DECEMBER

Other pelagics...

Contact details for other Australian
and global pelagic trips can be
found at:

<http://www.sossa-international.org/Pages/FrontPages/PelBirdingContacts.htm>

The Albatross - SOSSA's newsletter

The Albatross is published four times a year (Jan, Apr, Jul & Oct). The editor welcomes (is desperate for!) articles from members and friends on issues relating to pelagic seabirding, seabird research and marine conservation. Please advise the editor if you intend to submit an article and submit the piece at least two weeks before the start of a publication month. Thank you!



Campbell albatross by Brook Whyllie
(Wollongong, March 2005)

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To save SOSSA postage costs and receive 'The Albatross' as a colourful pdf or web file then please send your email address and current membership number to the current editor of 'The Albatross':
Mike.Double@anu.edu.au

Please help...

SOSSA membership fees remain unchanged even though costs have increased greatly across the board. We would really appreciate any donations from those whom may be able to afford it.

Thanks again for your support!!

