



**SOUTHERN OCEAN SEABIRD STUDY ASSOCIATION INC.**

**Special points of interest**

- The rescue of 'Meg' the Wandering Albatross
- Are bananas bad luck on boats?
- Five Island's web cams
- Balloons and seabirds don't mix!

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# The Albatross

Issue No. 34

August 2005

## Team effort saves Meg the Wandering Albatross

Photos by Janice Jenkin-Smith

The Australian Navy were left scratching their heads when Meg the Wandering Albatross decided to pay them a visit. She spent the night aboard HMAS Gascoyne after colliding with the ship while it was on manoeuvres off Jervis Bay.

The next morning the crew of the warship decided to drop the stowaway over the side but confused the bird flew to shore instead of back out to sea. Thankfully NANA (Native Animal Network Ambulance) and Lorraine Toohey of WIRES were on hand and contacted SOSSA. Lindsay Smith told her to put Meg in the back of the car and bring her up to SOSSA HQ for a check up.

"What should I put it in?" asked Lorraine. "Oh, don't worry she'll be happy enough looking out the windows" replied Lindsay. Lorraine, rather confused, needed to check what she'd just heard, "You want me to drive around with an unrestrained albatross in the back of my car?!" "Trust me" Lindsay said confidently.

As members of SOSSA know, nothing phases a Wandering Albatross. And as Lindsay had predicted Meg was content watching the world go by as she was transported in the boot of the hatchback.

After being given the all clear Meg was taken back to sea courtesy of the Australian Volunteer Coast Guard and gracefully took to the air soon after release; a happy moment caught on film and relayed to the fascinated viewers of WIN News by Rob East and Peter Andrea.

A successful rescue and truly a team effort!

.....  
 Top: Meg content in transit  
 Upper middle: Janice and Lindsay escort Meg back to sea.  
 Lower middle: John Broadhead, Flotilla Commander Australian Volunteer Coast Guard  
 Bottom: Meg returns to her wandering ways.



## Bananas on Boats: bait or birding hazard? By Golo Maurer

The choice of provisions is a critical aspect of every sea watching trip and unsuspecting birders may consider the banana with its high energy content, environmentally friendly packaging and smooth texture ideal pelagic tucker. Alas, most birders that start the quest for an albatross incur a cost: the loss of their bananas!

This loss didn't upset me too much because, as a carnivore, I was always suspicious of fruit and vegetables in any form. However, I still felt the need to find out why bananas should not be allowed on boats.

Surely everyone agrees that culinary menaces like tomatoes, durian or persimmon deserve much more to be barred from a pelagic trip and any other mode of transport for that matter. Bananas in comparison seem harmless, yes even good-natured as illustrated by the tasty liaisons with far superior food groups that bananas are capable of; just think of Banana-Wheat beer, the South African specialty of banana and bacon pizza (highly recommended before joining a Cape Town pelagic) and ironically the "Banana Boat" ice-cream. So why is this friendly and nutritious heliotrope habitually denied the journey on a sea-going vessel? Rumour has it that bananas on boats mean bad luck. But how exactly does this affect pelagic birding? Instead of researching this question properly, I googled the abysmal plains of the internet to get to the bottom of the "banana triangle" of boats, birds and bananas.

First I tried to get the banana facts straight. The United Nations Conference on Trade and Development **1** knows a whole bunch of things about bananas, including that it is the most popular fruit of the planet and has been cultivated by man for longer than any other fruit. Maybe it is this long history of cultivation why early Christians and Muslims believed that the banana was the forbidden fruit of paradise. – Compared to this godly ban, bananas must consider the denial to travel on a boat as merely a minor hiccup.



But how did bananas grow so unpopular amongst watermen?

Probably the first sailors to ignore the prohibition of bananas on boats were the medieval Arab sailors and from all we know they did not suffer too much from this sacrilege. To the contrary they successfully introduced bananas from their native South East Asia to Africa and gained eternal fame by giving this giant *Musacea* its rather handy modern name – banana is Arabic for finger. The next big journey bananas embarked on was with the Spaniards to the new world. But instead of

being haunted the Spaniards conquered a whole continent and made it back to Spain alright too. Not an easy feat if your boat hardly meets the health and safety standards of the 16<sup>th</sup> century is filled to the rafters with Gold and the oceans are troubled by giant sea snakes, Godzilla and English pirates. Another great seafarer to take on the banana without harm was Captain James Cook **2**. In fact Cook travelled with bananas *and* plantains on board and has probably a longer list of pelagics than all of SOSSA put together, plus he has got a seabird species named after him.

Finally in 1870 the able Captain Lorenzo Dow Baker started took 160 bunches of banana on board in Jamaica, sailed them to Jersey City and sold them with a profit **2**. 30 years later the average US American ate a quarter bunch of banana each year and Baker had founded the economic basis for the banana Republics **3, 4**. By then giant sea-snakes and English Pirates had become extinct and sailors had time to worry about other things such as bananas or rather spiders hiding in bananas, creeping up to them in their sleep to deliver a painful bite that would make them die a slow and torturous death **5**.

A more sophisticated explanation of why ba-

## Bananas on Boats continued...

bananas were considered bad luck involves chemistry and here we get to the truly instructive bit of this little article **6**: Banana skins produce ethylene gas during their ripening process. This gas is a universal plant hormone that lets fruit ripen faster. So if bananas are stored with other fruit this fruit will perish much faster.



Putting bananas and other fruit in one boat or one bowl could be considered unlucky or unwise; I'll let the readers make up their mind about it but since the days of the banana trade the stigma of bad luck has stuck to the nutritious yellow crescent like a Chiquita sticker. The superstition grew particularly strong amongst American sport fishers who do not only refuse to take bananas on board but also exclude banana boat sunscreen and fruit of the loom underwear from boat travel. In fact the internet abounds with reports of futile fishing trips that suddenly came good once a banana was hauled over board. As a fishing layman, I have to admit that these stories read like advertisement for bananas on boats to me rather than a case against them. After all which other bait can turn a dull day fishing into a record haul in an instant?

If bananas are that good for fishing, maybe they can help attracting real birds, which, as we all know, eat fish? Information on the issue of pelagic birding and bananas is surprisingly scant. One of the few hits is SOSSA's very own report on the December 2002 pelagic. On that trip a banana skin attracted a light-mantled sooty albatross to the Sandra K, which was the author's one-thousand-and-second bird species

for the year and certainly not a stroke of bad luck. Generally bananas and pelagic birds seem to go together quite well. Sea birding near the banana bank off Oregon is very productive **8** and the Antarctic Banana Belt **9** (South Georgia and the South Orkney islands) holds quite a few species that I would be delighted to welcome off Wollongong. Maybe we need to get out the bananas to lure them up to the Sandra K.

- 1 <http://r0.unctad.org/>
- 2 <http://www.pangolin.co.nz/jetsam>
- 3 <http://www.mayaparadise.com/ufc1e.htm>
- 4 <http://www.demographia.com/>
- 5 <http://keywestcharterboats.com/>
- 6 <http://www.striper-csba.com/story6.htm>
- 7 <http://www.azinet.com/captjim/index.html>
- 8 <http://thebirdguide.com/pelagics/>



**Slender-billed Prion**  
(*Pachyptila belcheri*)  
photographed by Mike Carter on the  
Port Fairy pelagic on the  
5th of June 2005.

## Argentinean Southern Giant Petrel on Wollongong Pelagic by Inger Vandyke

“Hey Inger, did you manage to photograph any Southern Giant Petrels with large colour bands on them?” Lindsay asked me as I alighted from the Sandra K after the May pelagic “I dunno, I don’t think so, I’ll have a look when I get home...” I responded.

Not really knowing the reason why he asked at the time, I went home and had my usual

I decided to send an email off to Fabian with some low resolution images of this bird. Not knowing how fast or if I would get a response, I left it for a while, considering the large time difference between here and Argentina. On June 1<sup>st</sup> I received a detailed response from Fabian with some fascinating statistics. The SGP I had photographed was a female from the Isla Arce colony, Chubut, in the Patagonian region of Ar-



ritualistic post-pelagic glass of wine while I waited for my photos to download. Soon after I noticed a shot of a Southern Giant Petrel (SGP) with a white, darvic style band on it’s leg that we’d seen at our burley stop squabbling with a nearby Northern Giant Petrel over food.

I immediately advised Milburn and Mike who promptly sent a report off to the Australian Bird and Bat Banding Scheme to record the sighting. They then sent me the international flyer distributed by Aves Argentinas asking individuals to report banded SGP sightings across the globe and asked if I would like to contact Fabian Rabuffetti, the Buenos Aires based scientist who heads up the research project.

gentina. It was a female that had been banded only 2 months prior as a fledgling from this colony and had somehow made it to the east coast of Australia over this short period. Fabian’s official report stated that, since fledging, this bird had travelled a distance of 10424 kilometres in two months.

It was the first of Fabian’s birds to have appeared in Australian waters. Another had been sighted in New Zealand however this was a juvenile of about one year old.

Relaying this information to SOSSA and the Australian National University, everyone was surprised to hear how this bird could have come such a long way in it’s short period of life. As Milburn mentioned to me “That’s seabirds for you”.

## Eaglehawk Neck – The Wild Life of the Tasman Peninsula by Inger Vandyke

The Tasman Peninsula, south of Hobart, has a rugged coastline of astonishing natural beauty that belies the area's more gruesome colonial history. Eaglehawk Neck is the isthmus that separates the Tasman Peninsula from the Forestier Peninsula. Due to its narrow width, Eaglehawk was one of the reasons Port Arthur was chosen as Tasmania's first penal colony, as a military outpost was established here to capture any escapees from Port Arthur attempting to flee to nearby Hobart. The infamous "Line of Dogs", a group of mongrels tethered at short intervals spanning the Eaglehawk neck landmass to warn officers of approaching strangers and attack intruders, coupled with often treacherous seas, made any attempt to get past Eaglehawk virtually impossible.

What many visitors to this region fail to realise is the astounding array of southern ocean wildlife that regularly use this part of Australia as a winter foraging ground and seasonal breeding area.

On 25<sup>th</sup> and 26<sup>th</sup> June, 2005, a group of interstate birders chartered the "Coastal Explorer", the only vessel operated by Damian, the gregarious and enthusiastic proprietor of Tasman Sea Charters for a weekend of pelagic birding.

A large high, centred directly over Tasmania, flattened the ocean conditions and generated blue skies for our first day at sea. The edge of the Continental Shelf is only about six kilometres offshore from Eaglehawk so we reached it within half an hour from leaving port. On the way out we were joined by both Pacific and Kelp Gulls, Australasian Gannets and a lone Black-browed Albatross. Reaching the Shelf, a few Common Diving Petrels darted off heralding our entry into deeper water. We commenced burleying and were soon



**Southern Royal Albatross off Eaglehawk Neck  
(Inger Vandyke)**

joined by five Bullers Albatrosses and an increasing number of Shy Albatrosses who flew in to investigate. The slick failed to attract the large numbers of birds we had hoped for, but we did manage to see both Southern and Northern Giant Petrels, Cape Petrels, Wandering Albatrosses, Short-tailed

Shearwaters, Great Winged Petrels, Indic Yellow Nosed Albatross and a distant, probable Grey-backed Storm Petrel.

After a few hours at this location, some cetacean activity encouraged us to move about a kilometre to investigate the trademark spouting of Humpback Whales. We stopped and were joined by two adults on their way north. Unconcerned by our presence, the larger one passed eerily under our vessel and surfaced a little way north, its size dwarfing the 28ft size of the boat we were standing on.

Around 2pm, Michael Hunter spotted a large Southern Ocean fishing trawler in the distance so we carefully ventured out to see if their activity was attracting other birds. Suddenly Damian cried out "Can someone with binoculars please find out the name of this vessel so I can radio them before they start shooting at us?" Almost as he said this, the trawler had altered its course and was heading straight for us. Perhaps wary of a boat full of people carrying binoculars and expensive camera equipment, the captain of this vessel took a reasonably aggressive stance. Damian reassured him that he was carrying a boat load of people only interested in pelagic birds and that no fisheries inspectors were on board. A friendlier radio exchange followed and we were kindly allowed to follow this trawler from a distance where we could see a number of different birds waiting for its next haul.

## Eaglehawk Neck continued...

Among the assortment following this trawler were both Northern and Southern Royal Albatross, Wandering Albatross, Bullers Albatross, Yellow-nosed and Shy Albatross and the only Fairy Prion seen that weekend.

Several Common Diving Petrels were spotted on our return journey and we also saw three groups of Australian Fur Seals foraging in the open ocean. Each group entertained us by “porpoising” behind the boat, floating on their backs in the water and yawning, swimming under us or popping their heads up to look at us.

It was still dark the next morning when we woke for our second day at sea. The skies had been clear overnight and there was a real chill with the 15-20 knot wind that had developed since yesterday. Damian took us due south east to the Shelf that day. Our first pelagic birds were Black-faced Cormorants and both Pacific and Kelp Gulls. With the developing slick we were once again joined by Shy, Yellow-nosed, Black-browed and several Bullers Albatrosses. Common Diving Petrels were numerous all day but unfortunately, similar to the two White-headed Petrels that were seen, never came close enough to the boat to be photographed.

Slick visitors included a lone Northern Giant Petrel, a Great-winged Petrel, Short-tailed Shearwater, Australasian Gannet, and several Crested Terns. Five Cape Petrels held a longer interest in the burleying and associated slick. Normally silent at sea, Cape Petrels are rarely heard as opposed to seen. With their mottled black and white plumage, earlier mariners and seabird enthusiasts used to call them



**Black-faced cormorants on the Hippolytes (Inger Vandyke)**

“Cape Pigeons”. I watched and listened to this small group of Cape Petrels play fighting, almost jousting each other with their bills for food and making a sound more like a domestic chicken. After this trip, I christened them with a new common name – Cape Chooks!

We came back to port via a trip along the coast, visiting the Hippolytes

along the way. Named after one of D’Entrecasteaux’s assistants, the Hippolytes are granite islands that dot the coast around the peninsula. The largest of which appears from the distance to look like some odd Devonian Era Ayers Rock before the ocean subsided. This mass of granite is a regular haul out site for Australian Fur Seals and a couple of these casually glanced at us as we went past, not too worried about us disturbing their sunbathing sessions. We were also amazed to see how high the seals seem to get on the steep cliffs, a feat that is only surpassed by the nesting Little Penguins on the island. Other areas of the island are used by hundreds of Black-faced Cormorants as a regular roost, evidenced by the large amounts of guano dripping down the rocks around them.

After circumnavigating the Hippolytes we ventured along the contrasting coastline of the Tasman Peninsula. Characterised by Jurassic Basalt columns the cliffs are pock marked with numerous sea caves. The surrounding waters are also of glass like clarity and support large kelp forests and an abundance of sea-life. It wasn’t really until we ventured so close that we were fully able to appreciate the magnitude of our surroundings.

The first of three such arranged trips this year, Damian is already enthused about further birding groups visiting and learning more from them about the avifauna in his natural environment.

## Seabird course a success - Text and photos by Lindsay Smith

On November 20<sup>th</sup>-21<sup>st</sup> 2004 members of SOSSA in conjunction with the New South Wales Wildlife Information and Rescue Services (WIRES) held a two day introductory course to seabirds. Day 1 was spent in the class room discussing the basic seabird families Penguins, Petrels, Gulls, Terns, Cormorants and Pelicans, their adaptation to the marine environment and how the "true" seabirds, the Petrels, live their entire lives at sea returning to land only to breed! Indeed, it is when these birds are ashore they are most vulnerable and at greatest risk of contracting parasites, viruses and diseases.

Mike Cannon (Cannon & Ball Veterinary Clinic, Wollongong) explained how to gain an overall assessment of a seabirds physical condition. He explained how things function and what symptoms to look for - dehydration, faeces, blood and so on. He went on to describe what can be done in a modern veterinary clinic with a skilled surgeon and team.

Elizabeth (Libby) Hall (Veterinary and Quarantine Centre, Taronga Zoo) gave an excellent presentation on transport, handling and husbandry of seabirds. She shared her vast first-hand knowledge of sick and injured animals and emergency care. She described how best to



**Above: Mike Cannon with sick Kelp Gull**

**Below: Libby and black petrel**

handle, house and rehabilitate them before returning to the wild, fully fit. In nature an almost fit individual will not survive.

Harry Battam (University of Wollongong) gave an informative and most interesting presentation on the energetics of Petrels and where they fit in the ecosystems of the oceans. Harry went on to explain the many and varied threats that face seabird populations today! Unsustainable mining and exploitation of marine ecosystems by man is the major threat that seabirds face.

Day two of the course was at sea experiencing seabirds in their natural environment. For a report of that day by Peter Milburn see:

<http://www.sossa-international.org>

Many thanks goes to all the SOSSA people who supplied images and information to enable such a successful event that makes people more aware of our unique marine world. Many thanks go to the guest speakers and my colleagues, which I hold in the highest regard.



## Five Islands Report: Bridging the Gap

Text by Lindsay Smith, photos by Janice Jenkin-Smith

With the current breeding season now complete and very successful we are able to continue work on the Web Cam Project without disturbing the breeding birds of Wollongong's Five Islands. This project aims to beam images of breeding birds to the internet and the great news is that **ERICSSON** have now agreed to assist the New South Wales Parks & Wildlife Service and SOSSA in the setting up this innovative collaborative project.

An initial project meeting with Ericsson representatives at SOSSA HQ followed by a site visit to the Royal Volunteer Coast Guard Base at Hill 60, Port Kembla was conducted on Friday May 6<sup>th</sup> 2005. On Tuesday May 24<sup>th</sup> the installation team, with the assistance of the Royal Volunteer Coastguard Bellambi and Hill 60 headed out to the Consett Davis Hut on Big Island off Port Kembla.



The establishment of this Web Cam Link has taken a great effort on behalf of many people over many years. Sustained effort is required to ensure that this project and others, enable us to protect these Tiny Island Refuges.

These "Island Cams" will mark the ebb and flow of the tides and seasons of these precious places and their amazing inhabitants to classrooms around the globe.

By observing and recording images and data from a remote site we can monitor the islands and their inhabitants with the minimal of disturbance.

Q. How many people does it take to install a web-cams on a remote island?

A. LOTS!!!

Q. What will it show us ?

A. Islands of Life!! See over page

**Photos:**

Top left: The Ericsson crew: Andrew, Kaye, John, Dennis & Phil.

Bottom left: Island Shuttle. Coastguard Bellambi and Hill 60 Base.

Top right: Ericsson engineer Dennis arrives at the Five Islands Nature Reserve.

Bottom right: Installation begins at the Consett Davis Hut Five Islands Nature Reserve.



**Potential subjects for Five Island's web cam project...**

Top: Australian pelican chick

Middle: Crested terns

Bottom: Sacred (Australasian white) ibis chicks

All photos by Inger Vandyke

**Balloons & Seabirds by Lindsay Smith**

Case in point:

Sunday June 26<sup>th</sup> 2005. Wollongong pelagic trip.

During the morning on this trip we noticed an immature Black-browed Albatross *Thalassarche sp* with something red and white caught on it's leg. A quick check with binoculars indicated what appeared to be tape or deflated balloons. The bird followed the boat remaining at a distance. Later in the afternoon it was noticed to be still entangled with the tape or balloons and nylon or plastic twine.

Closer to shore the sea conditions abated allowing us to stop and lure the bird to the boat. It was soon captured by a hand held net and hoisted aboard where the entangled balloons and twine could be removed.

What started out as a day of great excitement at a sporting event, for an enthusiastic fan/supporter carrying two helium filled balloons in team colours tethered with plastic twine. Showing support and encouraging others to support their team, has turned into disaster for an unsuspecting immature Black-browed albatross from half a world away.

Once released the balloons have climbed high into the air, out of sight and out of mind.

Each year many marine creatures die a cruel and lingering death through the ingestion of lost or discarded balloons. Perhaps brightly coloured flags, which could be used season after season, may be a more responsible way of showing support for your favourite sporting teams!!!



**Black-browed albatross entangled in balloons  
Photo: Lindsay E Smith**



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**We're on the web!**  
[www.sossa-international.org](http://www.sossa-international.org)

## SOSSA's Next Meeting...

28<sup>th</sup> AUGUST 2005  
**SUNDAY – 1.00pm**  
Sausage Sizzle held at HQ.

Guest Speaker  
**AUTHOR: JAMES WOODFORD**  
**ENVIRONMENTAL WRITER**  
**FOR THE SYDNEY HERALD**

James thought it would be nice to talk about what it is like writing bird stories for the Sydney Morning Herald... from burnt penguins to what happens when sub-editors think that a petrel is a fossil fuel. There will be tales of how our feathered friends have allowed expense accounts to be pushed to the edge, watching wanderers off Patagonia, powerful owls eating pussy cats and more !!!!

### New Members...

Mary Macleod  
Barbra Macleod  
Damien Farine  
Bram Ferinande  
Robert Gosford  
Anthony Pell  
Elizabeth Ferguson

Tanya Bilaniwskyj  
Mal Bilaniwskyj  
Nathan Waugh  
Diane Murphy  
Elizabeth Field  
Pamela Saul  
Andrew Vossen  
Christine Vossen  
John Vossen

## SOSSA Pelagic trips...

SAT. 3RD SEPTEMBER  
(additional charter)  
SAT. 24TH SEPTEMBER  
SUN. 25TH SEPTEMBER  
(W.I.R.E.S. additional charter)  
SUN. 16TH OCTOBER  
(additional charter)  
SAT. 22ND OCTOBER  
SAT. 26TH NOVEMBER  
SAT. 17TH DECEMBER

Please Note: December Trip 2005, has been brought forward one week as it will fall on Christmas Eve.

Members: \$ 65.00  
Visitors: \$ 80.00  
These prices are on the web

## The Albatross

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!



**Australian Pelican in full nuptial colours on the Five Islands. Photo: Inger Vandyke**

### Please send us your email address

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](mailto: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!!