

New South Wales Albatross Study Group

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NSWASG
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WOLLONGONG

Editor: Lindsay E. Smith

Hello again,

Due to popular demand or otherwise, we have assumed it is safe to circulate another newsletter, as **(we have had no complaints or letters to the editor)**. Yes we are surprised also, we can hardly believe it, two newsletters in one year.

The biggest problem we are faced with is where to start. We have had so much happen this season that we are pleasantly overwhelmed. It indeed has been a BIG year for us the NSWASG.

With the main concentration in the first newsletter being directed to the cuttlefish (*Sepia apama*), and a call for information, we shall start with that. The response to questioners has been quite reasonable considering the short period of circulation, partly from this we have been able to shed a great deal more light on our knowledge of this fascinating animal and its role in the biology of the albatrosses which visit our region here in Wollongong. Let me take this opportunity to thank those who have helped in the supply of information in this regard. Whether it has been sending in completed sheets or distributing them, or offering information and assisting in many ways, again thank you it really is appreciated. Please continue the good work, we still have a long way to go, with a great deal more to learn about the biology of *Sepia apama* throughout the coming year.

Should you require further information sheets PLEASE ASK, and we will forward them to you.

Since the last newsletter we were fortunate to make contact with Graig Sowden at the Sydney Aquarium at Darling Harbour. Craig was able to supply a great deal of information about *Sepia apama*. This helped to get the wheels in motion and gave the cuttlefish Study a great boost. We are looking forward to further discussions with Craig at the end of the albatross season, hopefully we will have some time then.

As part of the cuttlefish study, Harry Janice and I, have collected over 300 cuttle bones throughout the season, in an effort to determine the distribution and size of the animals. We have been using our newly acquired G.P.S. Unit (Global Positioning System) to give us the exact positions of the cuttlefish and their bones, Once we have plotted these, in relation to where we have been catching the birds ,it will save us a great deal of time in locating the birds next season, hopefully! This it is hoped will also give us a better understanding of the distribution of the Cuttlefish in our local area. In addition to this we have managed to enlist the services of two up and coming squid biologists from the University of Wollongong. We are very pleased to welcome Michael Jarman and Ross Vickery to the Study Group. It is hoped that Michael & Ross will be able to take over the cuttlefish study next season, so that we can get back to our work with the Albatrosses.

Dr. Lu (cephalopod expert) of the Museum of Victoria, in recently examined a sample of specimens sent to him at the end of last season 1992. This revealed some very interesting (but currently classified) information. It appears that we can add a great deal to the knowledge of *Sepia apama*, though this will take some time. We are well on the way to solving some of the mysteries.

We were indeed privileged to have **David Parer (internationally acclaimed film maker)** visit us here in Wollongong. David was here from the 24th of July for a short time, hoping to film a sequence of the albatrosses feeding on the Cuttlefish, to be included in his new film "**Mysteries of the Ocean Wanderers**", a follow-up to his epic "**Wolves of the Sea**". Much of the film was shot on location, at the Crozets Archipelago in the South Indian Ocean, the film is based on the work being carried out by the French, under the guidance of Henri Weimerskirch. It goes along way towards illustrating what has been discovered about these magnificent birds in the last few years. The photography as usual for David is *Par Excellence*, particularly the opening flight sequence. The film goes on to show the life cycle of a pair of Wanderers and their offspring. The film also gives us an insight to the other inhabitants of this very remote subantarctic island. There is some graphic film depicting the death of a Wandering Albatross at the end of a Japanese long-line. David, Liz and their crew are to be congratulated on an excellent film We can assure you that it too will become an epic. So keep your eye out for it.

IT'S A GREAT FILM. You can buy it from the ABC bookshops or ask your local video shop to get it in for you ,but whatever you do don't miss it!

As we mention in the last newsletter "**THE PRINCE IS COMING**", Peter Prince that is. Peter is a leading Seabird and Albatross research biologist with the British Antarctic Survey Peter has for many years worked on the remote Subantarctic island of South Georgia in the South Atlantic Ocean Peter's arrival coincided with that of David Parer, and they were delighted to finally meet as they both knew of each other, and their expertise, through their mutual friend Henri Weimerskirch. It's always nice to be able to put the face to the name.

Peter Prince had never been to Australia before, so let us tell you what we did to this poor man. Shall we put it this way, HE WILL NEVER FORGET HIS FIRST DAY IN AUSTRALIA.!!! To make it short, Peter's plane landed 05.30am at Sydney airport, we met him there, talked for a while drove for one and a half hours to Wollongong arriving home approximately 08.30am. We had Peter on the water at 11.10am catching albatrosses----But, let me tell you, he loved every minute of it, we think, maybe he's always nice when in the state of jet-lag???????

In the short time that Peter was here, he was able to teach us a great deal about the moult regime of the albatrosses and hopefully from this we may be able to gain a greater understanding of how we can better age the birds that we catch. Peter was able to update us further on what is happening in other parts of the world in regard to albatross research. From here Peter went on to Tasmania to catch up with Nigel Brothers and his crew. Having worked with us here he was far better able to convey to Nigel just what is happening here in NSW, and how we could best work together sharing our knowledge of the Albatrosses. In addition to the great work with the longline fishing industry Nigel has done a great deal of work on the White-capped albatross (shy albatross). Nigel and his team are presently working on satellite tracking of the Shy

Peter on his return to England was able to add substantially to our seabird library. Thank you Peter and your team for all your help, we look forward to seeing you again soon in the land down under

We feel privileged to have had a scientist of Peter's standing visit us and share his expertise with us. We feel that in Peter we have found a good friend and a strong ally enabling us to forge stronger links and lines of communication between ourselves and the "BOYS" AT BAS, The British Antarctic Survey
It was through Peter that we met Bill Buttemer and Lee Astheimer. Bill and Lee only recently arrived in Wollongong from Tasmania. Bill and Lee are at present settling in to their new positions in the biology department at the University of Wollongong. They are specialists in their chosen fields and have had considerable experience with seabirds, they bring with them a wealth of knowledge and expertise. Bill and Lee are now firmly entrenched in the N.S.W.A.S.G. and are already involved in several projects that we are presently undertaking, although not all of these projects are in regard to albatrosses, most involve seabirds of one type or another. We thank Peter for the introduction and welcome Bill and Lee to the group. We look forward to a productive and happy relationship with them.

* *INPUT FROM OUR FEARLESS? LEADER? HARRY BATTAM:

Australian Nature Conservation Agency report and analysis of NSWASG data

In 1992, we undertook a consultancy with the Australian Nature Conservation Agency to analyse and report on the albatross data held in the Australian Bird Banding Scheme database. This led to a substantial preliminary analysis of the Malabar and Bellambi results from 1956 to 1991. The report was finally completed in September 1993.

Analysis of the NSWASG data showed that when abattoirs waste was eliminated from the Malabar sewage in the mid to late 1960's after catering to wandering albatrosses for 50 years, wandering albatross numbers in NSW, including Bellambi, went into decline and have continued to do so to the present day. The longline fishing industry is also implicated in this decline.

The analysis also showed that the composition of the aggregation of wanderers, 3 races from several breeding colonies, had undergone some complex changes in both age and race components over the years. Subsequent to this report we have found that the race composition is still changing.

Longline albatross mortality and counter measures

Nigel Brothers, of the Tasmanian Parks and Wildlife dept, has developed a number of innovations, which should eventually be used extensively on longline vessels, that should result in a significant reduction in albatross mortality.

One of the significant changes in albatross populations noted at breeding islands and also Bellambi, was reduced survival in young birds. Young birds have almost disappeared from Bellambi. As young birds do not return to breeding islands for several years, we expect that mortality reduction in this age group, resulting from Nigel's work, will be apparent at Bellambi long before anywhere else. We are thus anticipating, with baited breaths (excuse the pun), the general adoption by longline boats of Nigel's hydraulic bait thrower and the use of high quality bait.

A Short Report on Bellambi Projects

Campbell Island black browed albatross

This year, 1993, we did intend to start a new project with the Campbell Island race of the black browed albatross *Diomedea melanophris impavida*. Due to some lack of knowledge we mistimed their arrival. We also used inappropriate bait and were not particularly successful in attracting black brows, which we find somewhat difficult to trap. In other words, we completely stuffed it up.

We believe that we now have the worst of our misconceptions and trapping problems sorted out, one in particular being the need to use a bigger boat. In 1994 we will use a 17 metre trawler instead of a 5 metre runabout!

Leading some info about the 17m trawler. We recently talked with Carl Love, owner/operator of the "Sandra K" vessel, from which the Wollongong Seabird Study Group has done many years research under the guidance of David Fischer and others, Carl has offered to take us with him on game fishing trips, during the Austral winter months. We will attempt to catch Albatrosses from his boat. Hopefully this will increase our success rate for catching Black-brows and Shys. We take this opportunity to thank Carl for his most welcome offer.

Carl runs regular seabird, Whale watching, and Game fishing trips from Wollongong Harbour. For more information you can contact Carl at P.O.Box 148 Fairy Meadow N.S.W. 2519 or Mobile Ph. -018-423555

Wandering Albatross

Bellambi 1992 and 1993 statistics and other info

	<u>1993</u>	<u>1992</u>
Number of Trips	23	14
Wandering Albatross - Encounters	158	125
Wandering Albatross - New Recruits	19	21
Wandering Albatross - Individuals	106	104
Black browed Albatross	3	3
<i>D. melanophris melanophris</i>		
Shy Albatross	2	2
<i>D.cauta</i>		
Southern Giant Petrel	9	7
<i>Macronectes giganteus</i>		

We aim to trap a sample of 100 wandering albatross individuals at Bellambi each year (we would love to get more but 100 is always a difficult target these days) and we put in whatever effort is required to achieve this number. However we are always at the mercy of the weather and due to changes in the wandering albatross distribution we are now working in an area 8-12 km from the coast. To get our sample we can therefore no longer work solely on weekends and holidays. This wreaks havoc with our social and occupational obligations at times and some people (including wives and bosses) seem to think that we have our priorities all wrong. Still, there are always divorce courts and dole queues to solve these minor problems.

In 1992, out of the 14 trips, we did not catch any wandering albatrosses on two occasions. In 1993, out of 23 trips, we caught wanderers on 19 of these. We started much earlier (2 weeks) in 1993 and finished later (2 weeks).

This year, for a number of reasons, we acquired a Global Positioning System (GPS), Satellite Navigation Unit. We found an unexpected benefit was a reduction in required effort. The GPS gave us a better knowledge of where to go to find wanderers and subsequently reduced our need to travel as far.

This saved us fuel and boat costs and gave us more time to actively process birds. At the same time it changed our sampling method, a factor to be included in future analyses.

Recoveries

We still get recoveries of Bellambi birds at breeding islands. Just in case some people get possessive, these albatrosses are really Australian birds that merely use someone else's lump of rock for breeding. In 1992/93 recoveries from breeding islands were as follows:

South Georgia	1992	3
Possession Island	1992	2
Marion Island	1993	3
Adams Island	1993	32
Disappointment Island	1993	1

Possession Island lies in the Crozet Archipelago in the Indian Ocean. Marion Island belongs to The Prince Edward Is. group in the southwest Indian Ocean. Both Adams and Disappointment Islands are in the Auckland Is. group to the south of New Zealand.

This summer, 1993/4, trips to Adams Island and Antipodes Island are planned. We expect more Australian bands to be found.

One of the problems encountered by the NSWASG is identifying the various wandering albatross races. Generally, there is some overlap in size and plumage colouration. The NSWASG has made considerable progress in the positive identification of wanderer races (recoveries, such as above, have been a great help) and has initiated some collaborative studies with the British Antarctic Survey and the New Zealand Dept of Conservation with an aim of acquiring the ability to positively identify and sex wanderer races in the hand. Positive identification in the field may be a different story. This will always be difficult and in the absence of detailed knowledge and experience may always be beyond even experienced observers.

A note about Peter Prince's visit.

This, apart from knowledge transfer, was quite a spirit-ual experience, to which both Lindsay Smith and Peter will attest.

"Well that's quite enough from Harry!!" Ed.

Some good news!

On a disappointing note. We regret that problems have arisen during the past two seasons in our association with the Albatross Research and Conservation Committee under the leadership of Mr David Nicholls. We have found ourselves in the position that we could no longer continue the association.

No satisfactory solution to the problems was forthcoming and we have formally resigned from the A.R.C.C.

We would wish David and his group every success in their future endeavours.

A.N.C.A. Seabird conservation workshop

On November 1st and 2nd the Australian Nature Conservation Agency conducted a two day workshop on seabird conservation and management. The main purpose of this workshop was to gain a greater understanding of the problems that face seabirds and what could be done to ensure that their numbers are maintained and that their breeding and feeding grounds remain relatively undisturbed, in the face of increased pressures brought about by the fishing, mining, petrochemical and tourist industries. Members of the N.S.W.A.S.G. attended this workshop and were able to put their ideas forward. The workshop also gave us the opportunity to catch up with some of our colleagues, from around Australia and New Zealand. It will be some time before anything substantial can be done, it is however a step in the right direction and we applaud A.N.C.A.'s initiative.

Articles

We have been very fortunate this year, in that we have had a fair deal of exposure in the press. There have been a number of good articles, in regard to our work, published. If you missed any of these copies are available by contacting us here at N.S.W.A.S.G. Head Quarters, (also known as home). Harry's second home.

Support from sponsors

In reply to our call for assistance, we have been successful in gaining assistance from a number of people and organisations. For which we are very grateful, we take this opportunity to thank the following, for their assistance and support.

Budd Stevenson:

Budd, kindly offered his services as a "Sign Writer", Thanks to Budd our boat now carries a very eye catching sign, running the full length of the boat !!!

Proclaiming to the world who we are and what we are about. Thank you Budd, for your most welcome and appreciated assistance. It's obvious this was done by a professional!! It looks great even though it is on an old boat.

Total Patient Care :

Les Mico. Les kindly donated Materials for the manufacture of an Albatross or large bird restraint. Versions of which maybe adopted by the Veterinary fraternity. Total Patient Care for all sorts of animals. We however will be using it to harness the Albatrosses and Giant Petrels, Comfortably enough, to weigh them. Thank you Les! We will keep you up to date on the results. of the " Restraint" next season.

Southern Pathology:

Ken Hutchinson. Ken has assisted with pathological supplies and services. Thanks to Ken and Southern Pathology, we are far better able to utilise the expertise of Bill and Lee.

Clown Fish Films

What can we say!!! Rory! has accompanied us on many trips to catch the Albatrosses. We in turn, were fortunate enough to accompany Rory and Rebecca, whilst they were filming a sequence on the Wandering Albatross feeding on the cuttlefish off Bellambi and Wollongong last season. This sequence will be part of a BBC Documentary **Life in the Freezer!**. A film of the natural history of the Sub Antarctic. Rory has donated a vast selection of slides of our work. Thanks to Rory we now have a good selection of photographs to display to the public and other interested parties. Hopefully this will help create a greater awareness to the plight of the Albatrosses and the work that we are doing to enable us, to gain a greater understanding of their needs and ours, someone has to keep the boat going!!

Pauls Photographics:

Paul and Gino have been helpful again as usual in the supply of our photographic needs with film and Hi8 video tape. Paul is at present approaching Kodak Aust, on our behalf, in an effort to gain assistance from them also. Thank you once again for all the help in the past. I can assure you that it has been most welcome and greatly appreciated.

Holt Lloyd Australasia P/L:

Simon Terrell. Simon and Holt Lloyd have assisted us this year in the supply of "FLURO" paint. Which we are now using to mark the birds. We have advanced a long way from the days of using "Dye Check " Red. The FLURO paint is far more durable and much longer lasting at sea than it's predecessor. The colours are indeed vivid, enabling us to see the birds on the water at a much greater distance. We are a bit worried, they may become a hazard to navigation, **Just joking!**. From the feedback of local fishermen, they are now noticing the birds more!! This may enable other sea going people such as Yachtsmen and Navy personnel to see the birds and note their locations. This would further add to our knowledge of the birds at sea also the distribution and movements of the birds. Thank you Simon / Holt Lloyd for your most valued contribution to our work

John Boness: John is our Nuts & Bolts man a gopher extraordinaire and part time pistol shooter. We put all our electrical and technical problems on him all the time. Fortunately for us, John is analytical and loves a challenge. The common saying here to John is, " I have a problem, but , we can fix it!!!!"). John will ponder on it for a while the say (" I CAN FIX IT"). He is not only our Nuts & Bolts man, he is also a good friend,(poor bastard) which makes it hard for him to say that he really hasn't got the time as he has several hundred friends like us! .

B.C.H. Printing & Design: at Unanderra: Paul Beckett the proprietor in his generosity has donated the printing of our envelopes, there were 2000 for him to do.. Please look on the front of your envelope, you can see the effort that has gone into this project.. Thank you Paul for your assistance -- we promise not to harass you again, at least not until next season??. Some Business cards would be handy though??? Would you believe the Paul is colour blind (this is true), and the envelopes were supposed to be royal blue print not black. As Paul palmed the job off onto someone else who couldn't read his mind we ended up with black print. Paul did make the offer to do another box of envelopes in the royal blue at the same price. We declined the offer, you just need to imagine that they are royal blue, ok.!. So now I can really put it on him for some business cards.

From the Editor

I should like to invite readers of this news letter to communicate with the other readers. If you have something of interest to say, or have any questions that you would like to put before the readers, then please let us know and we will do our best to seek a reply.

A special word of thanks to all that have assisted in this last season. There were quite a few of you, and I am sure that you are all aware of the great assistance you have been to the group and our endeavours. Thank you all so much!!

However, we will once again need further assistance, as we gear up again for next season.

If you feel that you can help in any way or be of assistance, we would like to hear from you. For it would indeed be a sad day that we could no longer see these magnificent birds of legend - "The Albatross"

Question: from a recent Talk.

After talking to a group of senior citizens, for over an hour, an elderly gent came forward, and put this question to me, Quite genuinely.

"How are you going to stop those Albatrosses, that sit on the light poles over Windang Bridge crapping on my car as I drive under them ??? "

Answer: That is a very good Question, for the Albatrosses that the gentleman referred to were indeed **Australian Pelicans!!!!**

Lindsay E. Smith
For and on behalf of the,
New South Wales Albatross Study Group
Harry Battam
Lindsay E. Smith
Janice G. Jenkin-Smith

**WE WOULD LIKE TO WISH YOU A
AND MERRY CHRISTMAS AND A PROSPEROUS
1994.**

Now we have done the good cheers part, it's
time to grovel.

WE HAVE HAD A POSITIVE RESPONSE FROM GOOD PEOPLE THAT
HAVE SHOWN GENEROSITY WITH THE SUPPLY OF GOODS AND
SERVICES AS YOU HAVE ALREADY READ ABOUT.

NOW YOU HAVE THE CHANCE TO BE INVOLVED.
PERHAPS YOU MAY KNOW OF SOMEONE THAT CAN HELP WITH THE
SUPPLY OF GOODS OR FUNDS FOR US TO BE ABLE TO OBTAIN SOME
NECESSITIES THAT ARE LISTED BELOW ON THE:

NSWASG - CHRISTMAS WISH LIST

Dear Santa,

- 1- Photocopier
2. facsimile machine
3. cellular phone.
4. new boat complete with motors
(As Betty the Beat-up Boat was Born in 1976 and has had a hard
17 years - she looks like a patchwork quilt, with all the repairs we
could nearly have built a new one!!)
5. laser printer
6. lap top computer
7. spring balances for weighing
8. money. (Contrary to peoples belief. We are a self funded
group and do not receive any Government Grants.)



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N.S.W. ALBATROSS STUDY GROUP