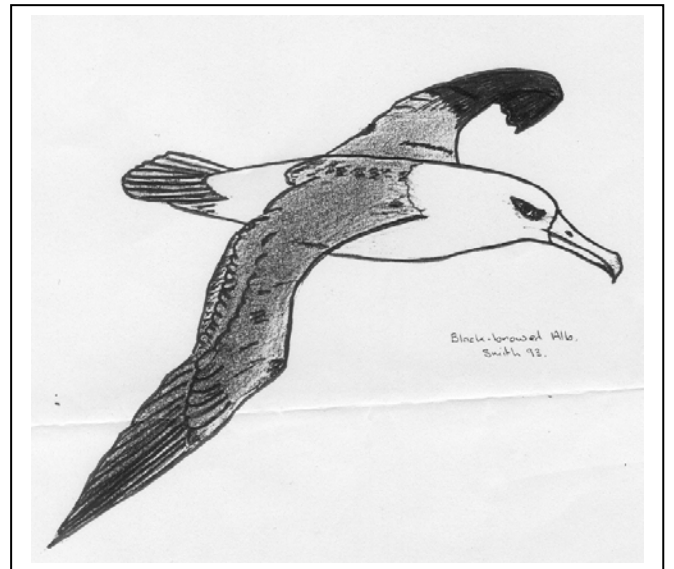


Southern Oceans
Seabird Study
Association Inc.

" Wildlife Studies "



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ISSUE - No. 29

“ ALBATROSS “
NEWSLETTER JUNE 2003
Issue No. 29



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A NOTE FROM THE EDITOR

Once again the newsletter is late! I am totally to blame for the delay. In addition to being “slack” I have had two lots of major surgery to contend with since February this year. So that has also set me back a bit. I am very grateful to those of you who sent ‘get well’ wishes, thoughts and prayers, gifts and made visits to the dreaded hospital!

Thank you for all the support.

In this issue Nicholas Carlile gives us an interesting insight in to some of the work being planned for the future and being currently conducted on the sea birds of the world heritage listed Lord Howe Island.

Of particular interest will be the results of the proposed population study of the Flesh-foot Shearwater. This species continues to be killed in unacceptable numbers by foreign and domestic long line fisheries in eastern Australia.

Chris Gray presents some information on disturbing trends in the mortality rate of Little Penguins in Victoria.

**Wedge-tailed Shearwater
At Sea Project**

As the season progressed we caught, banded and released several hundred Wedge-tailed shearwaters. While it is early days in the study, the rate of recapture of birds previously banded is very encouraging; 18 recoveries from 98 birds captured on 31 August 2002! Of these 15 had been previously banded at the Five Islands Nature Reserve, as part of our long term study of this, our most abundant locally breeding petrel.

This recovery rate early in the season suggests that it is predominately birds of breeding age that return to our region first in the (week 2 of August). The average age of the recaptured birds was 8.5 years (range 5+ to 15+ years).

As the season (August- May) progressed, the recovery rate of previously banded birds dwindled rapidly, perhaps an indication of a rapid increase in the large pool of Wedge-tailed Shearwaters foraging off our coast. Birds, which were thought to be largely non-breeding birds and birds from other breeding stations. Hopefully further studies, will show this to be the case.

As part of our “Petrels At Sea “ studies, Bruce Cantel and Peter Milburn are also capturing and

banding Wedge-tailed Shearwaters off Bateman's Bay in southern NSW

By catching birds at sea at two locations we hope to gain a greater understanding of these birds and their movements.

It is interesting to note that no birds captured during the period (August- May) birds breeding or non-breeding showed any sign of primary molt. Thought many of the birds captured late in the season had extremely worn tail feathers.

Interesting Recoveries From ABBBS

Brown Skua *Catharacta longbergi* (previously *Catharacta skua*)

Band Number : 121-38629

Banded on 29 September 1997, as a first year juvenile, at Tasman Sea east of Wollongong NSW (34° 25' Lat, 151° 00' E Long)

Observed on 1 November 2003 at Nuggets Beach, Macquarie Island Tas (54° 31' 50" S Lat, 158° 57' 10" E Long), by Mr R H Clarke School of Zoology Latrobe University Bundoora Victoria.

The time between banding and recovery is 6 years 1 months 3 days and distance between the two sites is 2318 km

Note : The bird was a Brown Skua *Catharacta longbergi* not *Catharacta skua*. This is the present accepted taxonomy used by SOSSA. Ed.

Southern Giant Petrel *Macronectes giganteus*

Band number 10741 recovered alive and well At sea off Bellambi NSW Australia on July 27th 2003. Lat: 34 deg 20 min 00 sec S; Longitude 151 deg 00min 0 sec E.

The bird was released alive carrying two bands.

The bird was also banded with band No 13212004

The bird was banded as a chick on March 15th 2003 at Potter Peninsula, King George Island, South Shetland Islands Lat 62deg 14 min 0 sec S. Long 58 deg 38min 0 Sec W.

It was banded by the ARGENTINE BANDING SCHEME.

The time between banding and recovery is 0 years 4 months 7 days. The bird moved a distance of 8,951Klm with a bearing of 204 degrees.

FIVE ISLANDS REPORT

Lindsay E Smith

For a number of reasons visits to the islands have been very limited over the past summer. Most of the time spent on the islands has been limited to installing the new solar electricity system, to supply the Consett Davis Hut. Some additional ongoing maintenance was also conducted by Harry Battam and myself. Our visitor from Ireland, Noel Linehan, conducted counts on breeding pelicans, Sooty Oystercatchers, Crested Terns and Sacred Ibis.

The latter had only begun breeding at the Five Islands last season and due to heavy rain the initial breeding attempt failed.

The current colony of 9 pairs appears to be flourishing.

Fortunately, Noel and I were able to get a quick survey of Sooty Oystercatchers breeding on Flinder's island in mid October. Damien Stanioch and I were able to return in December to band chicks.

The rest of the season continued in a similar down hill fashion . Due largely to logistical problems;, outboard motors, boats, hospital visits, people and weather it was impossible to get out to the islands to band this season's shearwater chicks. We have no idea what the breeding success was for the season. Once again several fledglings were rescued by wildlife carers from around the district, in late April and early May.

In all, a pretty poor season all round. Hopefully, things will improve for next breeding season.

Thankfully the Wedge-tailed Shearwaters at sea project has gone well so far. Ed.

NOKIA TO THE RESCUE

Thankfully Coastcare and NOKIA have come to the rescue. On hearing of our latest dilemma, (Out-board motor failure). Due to "plastic bag ingestion". John King from "Coastcare", arranged a grant from "NOKIA" to purchase a new Out-board motor! Unfortunately, on receiving the new motor, the weather turned bad and we were not able to get to the islands, before the chicks of the year fledged.

With many thanks to NOKIA and Coastcare, we have a new start for the coming season.

MORTALITY RATES OF LITTLE PENGUIN AT OCEAN GROVE VICTORIA 1991-2002

By Chris Gray

Past observations on a section of the Victorian coastline, from Phillip Island to Cape Otway, showed that this section of coastline had the highest incidence of beach caste Little Penguin carcasses (Dann *et al* 1992).

As part of the Birds Australia beach patrol scheme, a survey was undertaken over the period 1991 to 2002, on 5km of beach from Ocean Grove (38° 01' 26" S Lat, 144° 20' 00" E Long) to Collendina (38° 10' 27" S Lat, 144° 34' 00" E Long) Victoria. This site is located near the centre of the high incidence region of beach caste Little Penguin carcasses.

Yearly counts, summarised in Fig.1, indicate that there has been an alarming increase in the mortality rate of Little Penguins. An analysis of carcass counts for the survey period revealed a 25 percent annual increase in penguin mortality, which is clearly unsustainable.

Little Penguin mortalities appear to be linked to food shortages caused by changes to nutrient levels in coastal waters during El-Niño event years. Marine food webs follow regular seasonal patterns.

In years of below normal rain falls coastal waters would not receive essential nutrient enrichment, but along this stretch of coastline 24 waste water outfalls continuously discharge high levels of nitrogen/phosphorous rich effluent that could be expected to significantly alter the nutrient balance in the adjacent food webs.

The outfalls discharge into the foraging areas of Little Penguin colonies, which unlike sea birds with flight capabilities, are confined to coastal water environments.

High levels of nitrogen and phosphorous lead to toxic algae blooms (harmful algal blooms HABS) that have been reported in Bass Strait and surrounding waters since 1985

A world wide increase in HABS over the past 20 years has coincided with increasing reports of fish diseases and deaths of unknown causes.. HABS are associated with massive fish kills of both farmed and wild fish, birds and other sea animals dependent on the marine food webs affected (Paxinos 2000).

The massive die-off of pilchards in Bass Strait and surrounding waters in 1995 was linked to H.A.B.S and significantly depleted stocks of one

of the principal items in the Little Penguins' diet. Biologists now recognize that the taking of mature fish leads to depleted fisheries. It appears that with the breeding stock of pilchards depleted, recovery has been slow and Little Penguins have had to forage further and longer for food.

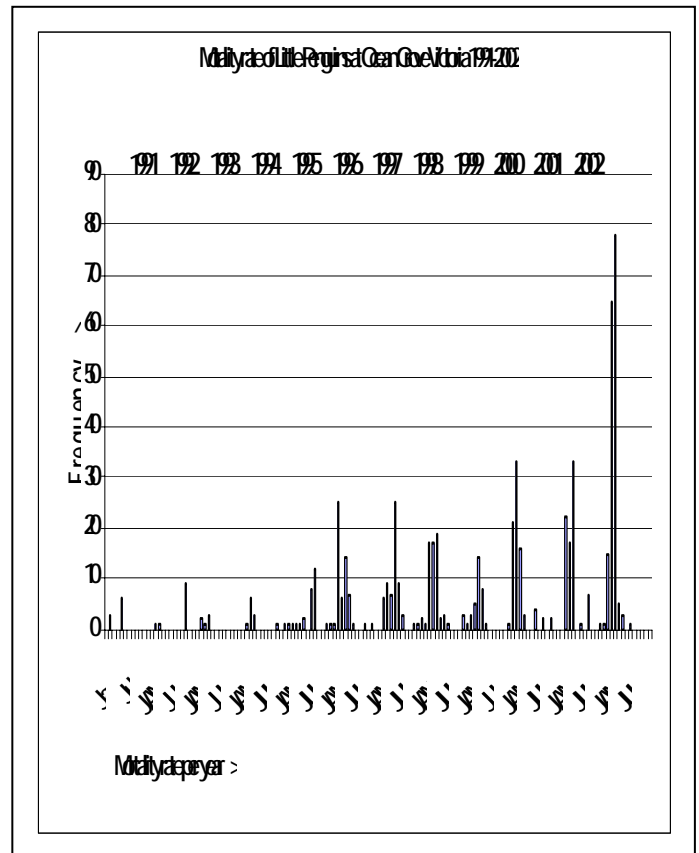


Fig.1. Little Penguin carcass count for Ocean Grove – Collendina coastline Victoria, over the period 1991-2002

A study of the breeding biology and feeding ecology, of Little Penguins at Phillip Island linked the decline in breeding success to changes in food web structure (Chiarada 2002).

This has serious implications for the tourist industry, as the Phillip Island penguin colony is one of Victoria's biggest international tourist draw cards (Ryan 1995).

Survey results show a good correlation between Penguin population declines and beach washed carcass abundance, and suggest that it is a useful tool for monitoring the health of Little Penguin populations in Bass Strait.

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Dann P., Cullen J.M., Thoday R. and Jessop R. (1992). Movements and patterns of

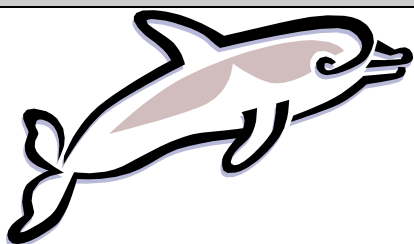
mortality at sea of Little Penguin *Eudyptula minor* From Phillip Island, Victoria. *Emu* 91:278-286

Chiarada.A. (2002). Breeding biology and feeding ecology of Little Penguin *Eudyptula minor* at Phillip Island – a basis for a monitoring Programme. Australian seabird Bulletin No.39: 46-47.

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Paxinos R. (2000) Harmful algal blooms. *Waves* 17.

WHALES, DOLPHINS SEALS AND OTHER SEA MONSTERS



Generally there have been very few sightings of cetaceans reported since the last newsletter. However Capt. Carl Loves of the Sandra K reports some interesting from the Central coast of New South Wales.

Saturday, 1 March 2003

32° 47' S Lat, 152° 45' E Long.

A pod, 12-15 individuals, of Pygmy Killer whales *Feresa attenuata* was sighted along the continental shelf break off Nelsons Bay.

32° 40' S, 152° 15' E Long.

A pod of approximately 70 - 80 Common Dolphins

Thursday, 6 March 2003

33° 15' 00 S Lat, 152° 13' E Long.

A pod of 15-18 Risso's Dolphins *Grampus griseus*.

Water temp 25.4°C.

Also a pod of 40-45 Oceanic Bottle-nosed Dolphins *Tursiops t. truncatus* moving north off Norah Head.

** GRANT ROBERT YOUNG **

02.05.1958 - 10.03.2003

In Remembrance Of A Dear Friend

BORN: Born on the 2nd Of May 1958.

AGE: Grant was 44 years of age



Photo 30/11/02

Adjusted By John Boness

Age really is not the most important aspect of life. Quality of life and fulfillment are of great importance in the end. Grant had a full life and we feel he would have been satisfied with what he gave. We have all benefited from the knowledge that he gave us. Grant was indeed a special person.

Sadly, on Monday evening at approximately 9.00pm, at his residence on May 10th 2003, Grant suffered a massive heart attack and passed away.

Grant was a man who was passionate about the natural world and fascinated by its inhabitants, their beauty and diversity. An extraordinary man with remarkable talents and enthusiasm.

He produced and directed surfing and other documentary films, video recordings, including an 8 part series on Australian parrots, a 10 part series on Australian birds including sea birds. He published Australasian Geo and Birds International magazines. Grant was a collector of natural history & rare books, a naturalist, ornithologist, photographer, orchid & carnivorous plant grower, collector of rare and beautiful things, a man who cared about others; he cherished his friends and valued their friendships.

**GRANT WILL BE SADLY MISSED
BY ALL WHO KNEW HIM.**

LORD HOWE ISLAND
SEABIRD RESEARCH UPDATE

By Nicholas Carlile

I was lucky enough to have a couple of trips out to Lord Howe Island (LHI) in October and November 2002 as part of ongoing seabird research carried out by NPWS's Threatened Fauna Ecology. Over the last few years David Priddel, myself and PhD students Adam Bester and Lisa O'Neill have been targeting a range of seabirds on the island.

The field component of a three year project on Providence Petrel ended late last year, principally carried out by Adam Bester, a PhD student from Charles Sturt University (under supervision of Nick Klomp and David Priddel). Petrels are usually a fairly easy group to work on, but the Providence Petrel has a few qualities that make it a little different. It is one of only two seabirds that are winter breeders in NSW (the other being the Little Shearwater). That in itself is not a tough call but when you consider that they breed mostly on the upper slopes of the two mountains of LHI it provides a few additional challenges. Working on these large petrels in often freezing, misty and muddy conditions was an experience for all involved. Adam spent over 120 days living on Mount Gower, ensconced in a fiberglass igloo which made up for its cramped conditions by being dry and warm! Satellite tracking in the second year showed that while feeding chicks, these birds forage as far afield as New Caledonia. The species appears relatively secure with a current population of 40,000.

In my recent visits to LHI, I was assisting Lisa O'Neill in her third and final year of field work on Sooty Terns (under the supervision of Klomp and Priddel through Charles Sturt University). These incredible birds spend almost their whole lives on the wing. Their adaptation to such a lifestyle means that their ability to negotiate a more terrestrial existence is fairly cumbersome, with short legs and small webbed feet, for such a large bird. Lisa's intensive work (more than a three month field season in each year) has shown that on LHI, the most southerly breeding grounds in the world, this species does very well in good years but really struggles when conditions are poor. Prior to the onset of this current El Nino the birds recorded 75% breeding success in the first year of studies only to see it drop to less than 10% last year as sea temperatures rose around

the island. SOSSA also recorded the struggles of this species last year as large numbers of adults were seen foraging off Wollongong in an attempt to feed their offspring. This current season appears to have many of the traits of last year but it is still too early to call.

Local LHI naturalist Ian Hutton and Lord Howe Island Board ranger Samantha Olson initiated a joint project with Threatened Fauna Ecology on Masked Boobies. Studies have concentrated on populations on Muttonbird Point and Roach Island. Last year banding studies confirmed that young Boobies disperse northwards from Lord Howe Island. Recently, a young Masked Booby that had fledged from Muttonbird Point less than 12 months ago was located in New Caledonia. In the current season adult birds nesting on Muttonbird Point were caught and each banded with a single metal band and a unique combination of three colour bands. This colour marking will allow their repeated identification at the nest site to gain information such as mate and nest site fidelity and whether the Boobies successfully relay after the loss of eggs. It appears that nestlings suffer occasionally from injuries due to rats but it is still too early in the research to determine fully the status of this, the island's largest, seabird.

A survey of the nesting grounds of Flesh-footed Shearwaters will be carried out on the island over the coming summer. This follows observations by island residents of a poor breeding season for the Muttonbirds last year and recent news that this species is falling foul of long-line fishing in waters off Eastern Australia. A comprehensive burrow survey was carried out on the Flesh-foots in 1978 by Peter Fullagar (from CSIRO) and this will provide an important bench mark from which to compare this summer's results. Other threats to the species will also be examined including chick starvation due to plastic ingestion.

It is hoped that a full-time project will be instigated next season in collaboration with a PhD student.

The possibility of a rat eradication program on the island is also being investigated by island authorities. The next few years will be a very interesting time for both sea and land birds on LHI. I will endeavour to keep *Wildlife Research* up to date on developments.

Nicholas Carlile

Revision of Conservation Status of Albatrosses

Comment by Harry Battam

After considering the information currently available, Birdlife International has seen fit to revise its classification of the 6 albatross species in Table 1 as shown. Just two species, Shy and Light-mantled, are now classified as not threatened.

A feature of a healthy ecosystem is an abundance of large predators, those creatures, known as top predators, that occupy the upper layers of the food web. This is a precarious position to hold where food webs are disturbed and even more so in the oceans where food chains are relatively long.

Along with the large sea mammals and fish, large seabirds are top predators, thus it would appear just from their troubles that the world's oceans are subject to unsustainable exploitation. Albatrosses rely on many processes to access forage, including activities of large fish, now almost a memory, and seasonal mortality of cephalopods (which have a short life, breed once and die). Megatonnes of these no longer get the chance.

A shortage of natural forage does nothing to reduce susceptibility of seabirds to the many death traps born of fishing vessels, perhaps one of the few occupants of the seas, whose abundance, unfortunately, continues to grow.

The perturbations now being observed in these seabird populations are transients, which, with few exceptions, we do not have the resources to quantify (and this in any case may take decades of research), nor identify causes. For some species it may ultimately mean population stabilisation (if there is such a thing) at significantly lower levels. Whatever, it seems that albatross population problems will be with us for some time.

	Old	New
Black-footed Albatross	Vulnerable	Endangered
Laysan Albatross	Low threat	Vulnerable
Black-browed Albatross	Vulnerable	Endangered
Atlantic Yellow-nosed Albatross	Not threatened	Endangered
Indian Yellow-nosed Albatross	Vulnerable	Endangered
Sooty Albatross	Vulnerable	Endangered

Black-footed Albatross	<i>Phoebastria nigripes</i>
Laysan Albatross	<i>Phoebastria immutabilis</i>
Black-browed Albatross	<i>Thalassarche melanophris</i>
Atlantic Yellow-nosed Albatross	<i>Thalassarche chlororhynchos</i>
Indian Yellow-nosed Albatross	<i>Thalassarche carteri</i>
Sooty Albatross	<i>Phoebetria fusca</i>

Note: The above table represents, only those species who's status has changed.

For further information see <http://www.birdlife.org>

Go to globally threatened birds.

NEW MEMBERS

Golo Maurer **Barry Bucholtz**
Simon Luckhurst **Jon Hall**
Max Dowling **Nancy Dowling**
Inger Vandyke

NEXT SOSSA MEETING

held at HQ. – 7.00 pm
10 Jenkins Street - Unanderra. NSW.
We only supply the Coffee or Tea!!!



SOSSA'S A G M

GUEST SPEAKER

Nicholas Carlile

In search of the Kacau ni Gau (Fiji petrel, *Pseudobulweria macgillivrayi*).

Nicholas Carlile and David Priddel, from NPWS, recently spent two weeks in the cloud forests of Fiji in search of an elusive petrel. Kacau ni Gau (Kathow ni Ngau) has only been seen by ornithologists twice in 150 years. What chance did a couple of blokes from Australia have of finding this rare seabird when even the locals on the island of Gau don't know anything about it. Come and find out when Nicholas presents a talk of the trip at the SOSSA AGM.

Hope you can join us

A.G.M.

**12.00 pm Sunday
24th AUGUST 2003**

held at HQ.
10 Jenkins Street - Unanderra. NSW.
We only supply the Coffee or Tea!!!

**SAUSAGE SIZZLE BBQ
AFTER THE MEETING,**

**SO YOU ALL WOULD BE ABLE TO GET HOME
AT A REASONABLE HOUR !!!**



**MEMBERS IF YOU ARE UNABLE TO
ATTEND**

The Annual General Meeting

**PLEASE SIGN & RETURN YOUR
PROXY VOTE FORM**

**ALSO YOU MAY HAVE NOTICED
2003 to 2004 Memberships are due
MEMBERSHIP FORMS ARE
ENCLOSED**

NEWSLETTER CONTRIBUTIONS

All are invited to contribute to our newsletter 'Albatross'. We do prefer electronic copies of any material. send it by email to

sossa@ozemail.com.au

Alternatively mail it to us on a disk, which we will return.

NEXT NEWSLETTER 2003

(providing there are no major hold ups)

Due to the fact that the membership fees are still unchanged, though SOSSA's cost have increased greatly across the board. We would really appreciate that little bit extra with your donation from those whom may be able to afford it.

Thanks again for your support!!

**SANDRA "K"
SEABIRD WATCHING BOAT TRIPS**

DATES OF NEXT TRIPS FOR YOUR DIARY

Tentative 2003 dates

26th July 2003	23rd August 2003
27th September 2003	25th October 2003
22nd November 2003	27th December 2003

BOAT TRIP CONTACTS AT AUSTRALIAN LOCATIONS

Wollongong	02 4271 6004
SOSSA Lindsay Smith	sossa@ozemail.com.au
or Peter Milburn	02 6249 4326(W) peter.milburn@anu.edu.au
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Eden	02 6495 7390 dbjones@acr.net.au
Newcastle	02 4959 0212 mobile 0412 540 212 randrbaxter@yahoo.com

Pelagic trip reports are available at

<http://users.bigpond.net.au/palliser>

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



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