

An Ornithological Trip in St. Vincent and Spencer Gulfs.

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During the early part of this year Capt. S. A. White and myself had an opportunity of visiting some of the islands in St. Vincent's and Spencer's Gulfs. The trip was undertaken at the invitation of Messrs. A. G. and E. S. Rymill, who placed their motor yacht "Avocet" practically at our disposal, and did everything possible to further our aims. The objects of the trip were: To land on the Pages, three small islands at the southern entrance of Backstairs Passage, as yet, as far as we know, not visited by any ornithologist; to secure specimens of a skua, supposed to be the arctic skua; to secure specimens of a white-breasted petrel which neither of us had been able to identify; to investigate the food of cormorants; to take the temperatures of certain sea birds; and the study of the ornithology of isolated islands.

Port Adelaide was left on the afternoon of January 1st, and the yacht anchored for the night at the Outer Harbour. An early start was made next morning for the Pages, but on rounding Rapid Head, near the northern entrance of Backstairs Passage, a strong north-east blow was met, which put landing there out of the question, so a course was made for the Spit, near Kingscote. This is a low sandbank, between two and three miles long and a few feet only above high-water mark. It almost completely closes the entrance to the Bay of Shoals, and is covered with stunted bushes and sea grasses. The afternoon was spent here, and next morning a start made for the Althorpes Islands. These are two small and one large islands in Investigator Straits. The large one, about 300 feet high, has a lighthouse on it. We landed first on one of the small islands, where we found seals plentiful and tame. Several photos. were taken by Capt. White. I regret to say that numbers of dried carcasses were found on the higher parts of the island, the shell of a rifle cartridge showing that some miscreant had been amusing himself by shooting these interesting and harmless animals, and leaving their bodies to rot where they fell. We next visited the big Althorp, and climbed its almost perpendicular sides to visit the great mutton bird rookery on the summit. The next move was

to Pondalowie Bay, at the foot of Yorke's Peninsula. A day was spent here in the scrub of the mainland and on two of the small islands fronting the bay.

On January 6th we made over to Gambier and Wedge Islands, anchoring under the lee of the former, but a change of wind forced us to quit hurriedly, and make for the shelter of the Wedge. We were not subsequently able to make a landing on Gambier, which was regrettable, as mutton birds and possibly other petrels nest there. Wedge Island is about $3\frac{1}{2}$ miles long, rising from sea level at the north end to about 700 feet at the south end, which is a perpendicular cliff. It is inhabited by two brothers, Messrs. A. and W. J. Golley, both intelligent and accurate observers, who take an interest in the natural history of their island. They supplied us with much information concerning its bird life. On the afternoon of the 7th January we returned to Pondalowie Bay, and next day made a 60-miles run to Troubridge Island, where a few hours were spent on shore. Troubridge Island has had a lighthouse on it since 1855. Mr. Arthur Searcy (Chairman of the Harbours Board) has courteously informed me that in 1865 the island was reduced to 370 yards in length owing to severe gales shifting the sand. It has been growing slowly ever since, and is now 833 yards long by 292 yards broad. It is covered with scrub and sea grasses. On January 9th a good run, with a fair wind, to Port Adelaide, terminated a most enjoyable and instructive outing. Birds observed:—

1. *Dromiceius novahollandiae*—Emu.—Fresh droppings and feathers at Pondalowie Bay.

2. *Eudyptula minor undina*—Little Penguin.—Seen at the Spit, Little Althorpe Island, Big Althorpe Island, Pondalowie Bay, and Wedge Island.

All were moulting. No nests were found. These birds ascend the cliff of the big Althorpe Island up to 250 feet from the sea. They probably climb up the steep pathway, which has been made of recent years. The cliff is so steep that it had formerly to be ascended by a ladder. They also were found on the top of one of the Pondalowie Bay Islands, the sides of which are so steep and rugged that Capt. White and I had some difficulty in getting to the top at the easiest place we could find. The iris is grey, with a lighter ring round the pupil. These birds make a most dismal noise at night. At Wedge Island it sounded like the cries of babies in pain. The temperature of two were taken. No. 1, 108.8° F.; No. 2,

102.6° F. All temperatures were taken in the cloaca, with a Hicks 30-second clinical thermometer—the instrument being left in until the mercury ceased to rise.

3. *Coturnix pectoralis*—Stubble Quail.—A single bird seen at Wedge Island. The Messrs. Golley informed us that in some summers they are very plentiful.

4. *Cosmopelia elegans neglecta*—Brush Bronzewing.—Fairly common at Pondalowie Bay.

5. *Hypotaenidia philippensis australis*—Landrail.—A bird was seen amongst the granite boulders on the beach of a small island at Pondalowie Bay. The Messrs. Golley say that they live amongst the rocks on the beach at Wedge Island, and that they eat their hen and turkey eggs.

6. *Pelagodroma marina howei*—White-fronted Petrel.—A few birds seen skimming the water between Wedge Island and Pondalowie Bay.

7. *Noenectris tenuirostris brevicaudus*—Mutton Bird.—There is a great rookery of these birds on top of the big Althorpe. Every available piece of ground is burrowed right up to the lighthouse and the keepers' cottages, and many of the birds are compelled, for want of room, to lay under the bushes. The acting keeper (Mr. McLean) told us that his wife and children easily collected 16 dozen eggs from under bushes in the neighbourhood of their cottage. We noticed that some of the birds had burrowed beneath the sleepers of the tramline, used to bring stores from the cliff top to the light-house and we were told that last year a bird laid an egg on the top of the big pulley wheel of the "flying fox." The birds of this "rookery" are scarcely disturbed at all, as the light keepers do not use either the eggs or the young for food, so this island should be a haven for them for many years to come. All the birds at the time of our visit were sitting on heavily incubated eggs.

Soft parts.—Iris, dark brown; legs and feet, black. The nails are very sharp, as we found by experience when getting them out of their burrows. Temperatures (all sitting birds)—No. 1, 103.2°; No. 2, 101.2°; No. 3, 100°; No. 4, 101°.

8. Petrel (*sp.*).—The white-breasted petrel of which we were in search was seen only once between Backstairs Passage and the Spit, where a small flock rose from the water well out of range. No specimen was procured. I believe

this petrel to be *Cinathisma cyaneoleuco*, the new petrel lately described by Mr. Bassett Hull (*Emu*, Vol. XV., p. 205). I hope soon to have an opportunity of settling the point.

9. *Hydroprogne tschegrava strenua*—Caspian Tern.—Fairly common and breeding on the Spit. One nest contained three eggs and the other a chick and a chipped egg. These two nests were in the bare sand, within a few yards of one another. The old birds made a great clatter while the nests were being photographed.

10. *Thalasseus bergii poliocercus*—Crested Tern.—Seen at intervals throughout the trip. They had just started to lay on the Spit, one egg being seen on the bare sand.

11. *Sternula nereis*—Little Tern.—Seen at the Spit, Gambier Island, and Wedge Island. They were breeding in numbers on the Spit: on one end they had young able to fly, and on the other were sitting on eggs. The nests were arranged in parallel rows. All the clutches were of two eggs. Many of the old birds were seen carrying small fish for their young.

12. *Bruchigavia novae-hollandiae ethelae*—Silver Gull.—Not very common; only a few were seen throughout the trip. They were probably away nesting somewhere.

13. *Gabianus pacificus*—Pacific Gull.—Seen at the Spit and Wedge Island. A bird at the Spit behaved as though breeding; but no nest was found. The Messrs. Golley say they breed on Wedge Island in the tussocky grass. On the top of an island at Pondalowie Bay was a flat limestone rock upon which were great numbers of the shells of a large mollusc (*Turbo*, *sp.*), locally known as "Warrener." We concluded that they were brought up there and dropped by Pacific gulls. The Messrs. Golley confirmed this, as they had often seen the gulls so behave on Wedge Island. They said that the birds sometimes dropped the shells several times before succeeding in breaking them.

14. *Stercorarius parasiticus*—Arctic Skua.—A few birds were seen at intervals from Backstairs Passage to near the Outer Harbour. Two birds were secured near Trounbridge Island, one the light, and the other the dark phase. Both were females in a non-breeding condition. Birds, intermediate in plumage, were seen, but none secured. I have often seen these birds following the s.s. Karatta, and picking up any scraps thrown overboard. They also commonly chase

silver gulls. We saw two so doing on this trip. They afterwards descended to the water, but we could not ascertain if they secured any booty. The stomach contents were:—Dark bird—Remains of a small crab, one broken and one unbroken dead sea shell; Light bird—Small piece of crab's claw, one broken and one whole dead sea shell. The stomach contents seem to indicate that they go ashore at night to feed. I have never seen them do so in the daytime, in fact, when following a steamer they usually leave when about two miles from land.

Measurements.—Light bird—Total length, 40.5 c.m.; wing, axilla to tip, 48 c.m.; spread, tip to tip, 108 c.m. Iris, dark brown; legs and feet, black; nails, curved and sharp. Dark bird—Total length, 40.5 c.m.; wing, 50.5 c.m.; spread, 114 c.m. Weight, 1 lb. Soft parts as in the light form.

Temperatures.—Light form 102.4° F; dark bird, 106.2° F. The light bird was the younger, judging by the incomplete ossification of the posterior border of the sternum. The light bird had an extra pair of cervical ribs, making nine in all, to the dark birds's eight pairs.

15. *Haematopus ostraelgus longirostris*—Pied Oyster Catcher.—Seen at the Spit and Troubridge Island. They like mud banks and sand spits rather than rocky coasts. The Messrs. Golley say they rarely come to Wedge Island, where there is only one small stretch of sandy beach. They were not breeding.

16. *Haematopus niger fuliginosus*—Sooty Oyster Catcher.—Seen at the Spit, Althorpe Islands, Pondalowie Bay, Gambier and Wedge Islands. Much more common on rocky coasts than on flats. The Messrs. Golley say they breed on the rocks, at Wedge Island.

17. *Lobibyx novaehollandiae*—Spur-winged Plover.—Seen at Pondalowie Bay and Wedge Island.

18. *Zonifer tricolor*—Black-breasted Plover.—A small flock seen on Wedge Island.

19. *Lucopolius ruficapilla*—Red-capped Dotterel.—Numbers seen on the Spit and Troubridge Island. A few behaved as though nesting, but no eggs or young were seen.

20. *Charadrius cucullatus*—Hooded Dotterel.—Seen at the Spit, Wedge Island, and Troubridge Island. They were in pairs, but not nesting. They were not numerous anywhere.

21. *Numenius cyanops*—Sea Curlew.—A pair seen near the Outer Harbour.

22. *Limnocinclus acuminata*—Sharp-tailed Stint.—Seen at the Spit.

23. *Burhinus magnirostris*—Scrub Curlew.—Very common on Wedge Island.

24. *Notophox novaehollandiae*—White-fronted Heron (Blue Crane).—Seen in the Port River only.

25. *Chenopis atrata*—Black Swan.—A few birds seen on the Spit.

26. *Hypoleucus fuscescens*—White-breasted Cormorant.—This is an open sea bird. They do not seem to care for the calmer water of the upper part of the Gulf. The first birds were met with near Kangaroo Island, and after that at the Spit, Althorpes, Pondalowie Bay, the Wedge and Troubridge Islands. At the Spit, the Althorpes, and the Wedge it was much the commoner of the two species; at Troubridge it was the rarer, and it was not seen at all about the Outer Harbour.

Four birds were shot. They measured:—

	Sex	Total Length	Wing	Spread.
No. 1	♂	62.5 c.m.	48 c.m.	104 c.m.
No. 2	♀	61 c.m.	45.5 c.m.	99 c.m.
No. 3	♂	68 c.m.	48 c.m.	111 c.m.
No. 4	?	64.25 c.m.	47 c.m.	97 c.m.

No. 4 was an immature bird, the sex of which could not be ascertained. Two birds, Nos. 2 and 3, weighed respectively $4\frac{1}{2}$ lbs. and 3 lbs. The others were not weighed.

Iris, sea green; gular pouch, black, except in No. 3, in which it was dark grey; legs and feet, black in all; bare skin in front of and around the eye, black; bill, black.

As all the literature to which I have access gives the bare skin as purple I thought this might be a new sub-species, but to make sure wrote to Mr. F. M. Littler on the subject. He replied as follows:—"I have not handled a white-breasted shag in the flesh for some little time, and there are none about here, but from memory the bare skin is *black*. It is, of course, black in skins, but I have thought over the matter, and feel as sure as I can be that it is black also in the flesh. Mr. H. C. Thompson agrees with me. I asked him his opinion before I told him what I thought."

It would seem that Gould originally described the bare skin as purple in error, and that subsequent writers have copied him without verification.

Stomach contents:—

- No. 1.—Fish remains (unrecognisable).
- No. 2.—One leather jacket, parasitic worms.
- No. 3.—One weed fish, parasitic worms.
- No. 4.—One weed fish.

Nos. 2 and 3 had many white plumules on the back of the neck and sides of the rump. No. 4, a young bird, had a few; No. 1 had none. None was in a breeding condition.

27. *Hypoleucus varius hypoleucus*—Pied Cormorant.—This was the only species met, with in the upper part of the Gulf. They were present in smaller numbers than the preceding species at the Spit and Wedge Island. At Troubridge Island they were the more numerous of the two. None was seen at the Althorpes. Five specimens were examined. Measurements:—

	Sex	Total Length	Wing	Spread
No. 1	♂	81.5 c.m.	55.75 c.m.	124 c.m.
No. 2	?	71 c.m.	48 c.m.	106 c.m.
No. 3	♂	83.5 c.m.	58 c.m.	121.5 c.m.
No. 4	♂	78.25 c.m.	55.5 c.m.	114 c.m.
No. 5	♂	81 c.m.	53 c.m.	116 c.m.

No. 4 was an immature bird.

Soft part.—Adult—Bare space in front of eye, orange; bare skin around eye, blue; lower eyelid, green; gular pouch, flesh colour; bill, black; tip, horn colour; legs, feet, and nails, black; iris, sea green. Young—Skin in front of eye, orange; bare space around eye, light yellow; bill, grey; culmen, brown; legs, feet, and nails, black.

Mr. G. M. Mathews (Birds of Australia) describes the bill in the letterpress as dark horn colour, but figures it light blue. The bill in Gould's figure is much lighter than any we saw, except that of No. 4, which was a young bird.

Weights.—No. 3, 5½ lbs.; No. 4, 4 lbs.; No. 5, 4 lbs.

Stomach contents:—

- No. 1.—Two weed fish.
- No. 2.—Not examined.

No. 3.—One leather jacket, 8 rounded stones (7 granite, 1 sandstone).

No. 4.—One fish, with large black scales (unidentified).

No. 5.—One weed fish.

The stones in the stomach of No. 3 weighed $2\frac{1}{2}$ ozs. They had probably been swallowed deliberately for the purpose of helping to triturate the food; their number precludes the possibility of their being taken accidentally. Seals commonly have pieces of granite in their stomachs. No fish of a marketable species was found in the stomach of any of the birds of either species examined.

Temperature.—

No. 1. (seven minutes dead).—101.2° F.

No. 2 (ten minutes dead).—101° F.

28. *Morus serrator*—Gannet.—Seen at sea' at intervals after passing Backstairs Passage. They were mostly in immature plumage.

29. *Catoptropelicanus conspicillatus*—Pelican.—A flock of five seen at the Spit.

30. *Circus approximans gouldi*—Marsh Harrier or Swamp Hawk.—Several birds seen on Wedge Island.

31. *Trocatius audax*—Wedge-tailed Eagle.—A single bird seen on Wedge Island.

32. *Cuncuma leucogaster*—White-bellied Sea Eagle.—A pair were nesting on one of the Pondalowie Bay Islands. The nest was on a ledge near the top of an overhanging cliff, and contained a young bird almost able to fly. On top of the cliff above the nest were the remains of many penguins, a mutton bird, and a large crayfish, evidently the relics of the eagles' meals. An old nest was seen on Wedge Island in a similar position to the first, but the Messrs. Golley say it is now not used, and the birds breed on Gambier Island.

33. *Ieracidea berigora*—Striped Brown Hawk.—Seen at Wedge Island. A bird of the dark form was shot. Stomach contents.—Portions of lizards. Iris, brown; bill, slaty blue; legs and feet, grey blue; nails, dark brown.

34. *Cerchneis cenchroides*—Kestrel.—A bird flew from the light tower at Althorpe Island, and another from the unattended light at Wedge Island.

35. *Pandion haliaetus cristatus*—Osprey.—Seen at Wedge and Gambier Islands. The Messrs. Golley say they nest on both islands. We saw one hawking over the shallow water at Wedge Island, but unfortunately did not see the plumage. The Messrs. Golley say they sometimes disappear beneath the water when striking their fish. The flight when^o hawking is heavy and flapping.

36. *Spiloglaux, sp.*—A Brown Owl.—Is said by the Messrs. Golley to live in the bushes of Wedge Island, which has not the Boobook note. Capt. White searched for, but did not find it. These owls must nest in the rocks, as there are no hollow trees.

37. *Neonanodes petrophilus*—Rock Parrot.—Seen in small flocks of five or six on the Spit, Althorpes, Wedge, and Troubridge Islands. There are no rocks on either the Spit or Troubridge Island.

38. *Neochalcites basalis mellori*—Narrow-billed Bronze Cuckoo.—Seen at Pondalowie Bay and Wedge Island. A young bird was shot at the latter place, so they probably breed there. Iris, dull white; legs and feet, dark grey; nails, black; bill, olive brown.

39. *Hirundo neoxena*—Welcome Swallow.—Common wherever there were cliffs. It was also seen off the Grange, three miles out at sea, where they were catching insects blown out by the off shore wind. The Messrs. Golley say they stay at Wedge Island throughout the winter.

40. *Hylocheilidon nigricans*—Tree Swallow.—Seen only at sea off the Grange.

41. *Whiteornis goodenovii*—Red-capped Robin.—Seen at Pondalowie Bay and at Wedge Island.

42. *Melanodryas cucullata vigorsi*—Hooded Robin.—Seen at Pondalowie Bay.

43. *Leucocircus tricolor*—Wagtail.—Pondalowie Bay only.

44. *Drymodes brunneopygia*—Scrub Robin.—A specimen collected at Pondalowie Bay.

45. *Epthianura albifrons*—White-fronted Tin-tac.—Seen at the Spit, Troubridge Island, and Wedge Island.

46. *Poodytes gramineus dubius*—Little Grass Bird.—Common at the Spit and Troubridge Island. A single bird seen on one of the Pondalowie Bay Islands.

47. *Sericornis maculata* (sub sp.)—Spotted Scrub Wren.—Several specimens, secured on Wedge Island, where it is common. It differs from both the Eyre Peninsula and Kangaroo Island bird. Iris, white; bill, dark brown; upper mandible the darker; legs, feet, and nails, brown.

48. *Leggeornis lamberti assimilis*—Purple-backed Wren.—A male collected at Pondalowie Bay.

49. *Pseudoartamus cyanopterus*—Wood Swallow.—Common at Pondalowie Bay.

50. *Colluricincla harmonica victoriae*—Shrike Thrush.—Heard at Pondalowie Bay.

51. *Bulestes torquatus ethelae*—Butcher Bird.—A few birds seen at Pondalowie Bay.

52. *Oreoica cristata ethelae*—Crested Bell Bird.—Fairly common at Pondalowie Bay. A young male collected.

53. *Zosterops lateralis westernensis*—Silver-eye.—Common at Althorpes, Pondalowie Bay, and Wedge Island. Iris, brown; bill, upper mandible, dark brown; lower, grey; legs, feet, and nails, grey brown.

54. *Gliciphila melanops chandleri*—Fulvous-fronted Honey Eater.—A young bird collected at Pondalowie Bay.

55. *Meliphaga sonora*—Singing Honey Eater.—Common at Pondalowie, Wedge, and Althorpes Islands.

56. *Coleia carunculata tragellasi*—Wattle Bird.—Common at Pondalowie Bay.

57. *Acanthogenys rufogularis cygnus*—Spiny-cheeked Honey Eater.—Common at Pondalowie Bay.

58. *Anthus australis adelaidensis*—Ground Lark or Pipit.—Seen at the Spit, Pondalowie Bay, Wedge Island, and Troubridge Island. Common on all, especially Wedge Island. Iris, dark brown; bill, upper mandible, brown; lower, flesh white; legs and feet, yellowish brown; nails, brown.

59. *Corvus coronoides*—Raven.—Seen on Little Althorpe Island, evidently after the dead seals.

60. *Strepera* (sp.)—A bird of this genus was seen at Pondalowie Bay. They were very shy, and no specimen was secured.

Introduced Birds:—

The sparrow has established itself on the big Althorpe, and also on Wedge Island. The nearest point of land to the Wedge is 14 miles distant. The Messrs. Golley say that goldfinches have several times been seen there, but do not stay. On Wedge Island the sparrows have become so numerous as to be a serious nuisance to the barley crop. The starling has also established itself on Althorpe and Wedge Islands.
