

## The Birds of Reevesby Island, Sir Joseph Banks Group, S.A.

By H. T. Condon.

From 4th to 16th December, 1936, whilst accompanying the McCoy Society Expedition, I noted the following species of birds on Reevesby Island, Sir Joseph Banks Group, in Spencer's Gulf, S.A. The island is about four miles long and from a quarter to half-a-mile wide. List of Birds seen (an asterisk indicates specimen taken):—*Eudyptula minor*, Little Penguin; *Coturnix pectoralis*, Stubble Quail; \**Pelagodroma marina*, White-faced Storm-Petrel; *Puffinus carneipes*, Fleshy-footed Shearwater; *Phalacrocorax ater*, Little Black Cormorant; \**Phalacrocorax fuscescens*, White-breasted Cormorant; *Phalacrocorax varius*, Pied Cormorant; *Hydroprogne caspia*, Caspian Tern; \**Sterna bergii*, Crested Tern; \**Sterna nereis*, Fairy Tern; \**Larus novae-hollandiae*, Silver Gull; \**Gabianus pacificus*, Pacific Gull; *Arenaria interpres*, Turnstone; *Haematopus ostralegus*, Pied Oystercatcher; \**Haematopus unicolor*, Sooty Oystercatcher; *Lobibyx novae-hollandiae*, Spur-winged Plover; *Zonifer tricolor*, Banded Plover; *Pluvialis dominicus*, Eastern Golden Plover; *Charadrius cucullatus*, Hooded Dotterel; \**Charadrius ruficapillus*, Red-capped Dotterel; *Numenius cyanopus*, Eastern Curlew; *Tringa nebularia*, Greenshank; \**Erolia ruficollis*, Red-necked Stint; \**Burhinus magnirostris*, Southern Stone-Curlew; *Noto-phox novae-hollandiae*, White-faced Heron; *Cereopsis novae-*

*hollandiae*, Cape Barren Goose; *Chenopsis atrata*, Black Swan; *Falco cenchroides*, Nankeen Kestrel; \**Neophema petrophila*, Rock-Parrot; \**Hirundo neoxena*, Welcome Swallow; *Epthianura albifrons*, White-fronted Chat; \**Zosterops halmaturina*, Grey-backed Silvereye; \**Anthus australis*, Pipit; *Passer domesticus*, House Sparrow; *Sturnus vulgaris*, Starling.

*Pelagodroma marina*, White-faced Storm-Petrel.

Description of a male.—Iris, very dark-brown (pupil almost invisible); bill, dull black; inside mouth and throat, pinkish; inside bill, black; legs (portion of tibia and tarso-metatarsus), black; toes, black from above, with outer margin of middle toe and inner margin of outer toes cobalt-blue; webs, straw yellow from above with several red veins, outer edge black (near claws); foot from below—toes, outer edge and a central strip in each web, black; remainder of web, yellow; the black stripe on the web shows through as bluish-grey from above; nails, black.

I visited the Storm-Petrel colony on the morning of 6th December. When first removed from the burrows these birds are rather stupid and bewildered, and shuffle about and poke their heads forward and crawl into the saltbush. After further handling they become much more lively and give little hops along the ground with both legs held together, and finally rise with a graceful movement and fly *silently* over the tops of the bushes about a foot above the ground. They alight after flying about thirty yards and hide in the low bushes and are very difficult to recapture, because they take to the wing again quite readily. They make a faint "chirp" occasionally when handled, and their movements are very weak.

Only one out of seven birds removed from their burrows and liberated flew directly out to sea, where it was lost to sight when scarcely more than 100 yards away. The other birds were recaptured and cast into the air in the direction of the sea, when they, too, flew straight towards the horizon and were lost to view.

One bird, killed immediately on removal from its burrow by compressing the thorax, ejected a "tomato-red" fluid, but whether through the nostrils or mouth it was impossible to tell on account of the rapidity with which the action took place. Actually, the fluid seemed to come from the widely-opened mouth, but on examination the opening of the nares showed definite traces of this fluid oozing out. Each burrow dug out contained one egg and a *male* bird. The eggs were all heavily

incubated, with complete embryos. The portion of the Storm-Petrel colony examined on 6th December was situated on the south-eastern corner of Reevesby Island.

On 11th December I visited the colony on the south-western side at 11 a.m. Two burrows were excavated and two eggs (heavily incubated) and one bird were taken. On dissection the bird proved to be a *female*. The other bird was liberated immediately the burrow was opened. It appeared to be very lively and flew about 100 yards before alighting on some rocks near the water's edge.

Three of the burrows opened on the eastern side of the first-mentioned colony contained crickets (*Neomobius* sp.).

Measurements.—Four males, total length, each 20.5 cm.; wing-spread, 43.5, 43.5, 43.0, 44.0 cm. respectively; and a female; total length, 20.7 cm.; wing-spread, 43.0 cm.

*Puffinus carneipes*, Fleshy-footed Shearwater.

A single dried body of this light-billed species was found high above sea-level on some rocks on the eastern side of the island on 11th December.

*Phalacrocorax fuscescens*, White-breasted Cormorant.

This species is the Cormorant generally seen in the vicinity of Reevesby Island, where it occurs in large numbers. It is a smaller bird than the Pied Cormorant (*P. varius*) and is easily distinguished from adults of this latter species by the dark-coloured skin in front of the eye, and by the striking bright green iris. On several occasions a large flock, which was perched on some rocks, was disturbed. The birds immediately flew out to sea and settled in the water almost 200 yards from land. After a time single birds would leave the flock and return to the rocks to see if the intruder had left. Several of these birds were shot on the wing and each proved to be a female. White-breasted Cormorants are expert divers, and when shot at while swimming in the sea, they dive with rapidity reminiscent of the Great Crested Grebe (*Podiceps cristatus*). Details of female obtained:—Iris, bright deep green; flesh in front of eye, blue black; bill, greenish grey; legs and feet, black; total length, 63.0 cm.; wing-spread, 105.0 cm.

*Gabianus pacificus*, Pacific Gull.

The Silver Gulls (*Larus novae-hollandiae*) are frightened of these birds, which are numerous in this locality. Heard from a distance the call of the Pacific Gull is wheezy and does not seem very strong, and may be rendered "ow gow gnou ow gow

gnow" (a nasal rendering with equal pauses between the three syllables). As the birds fly towards the observer the call changes to a quick "how how" uttered with the mouth open slightly. Occasionally the "h" is dropped and they utter a sharp "ow." There is also frequently uttered a short "wow," a quick repeated "ow wow," and a bark-like, quick "ow wow, wow-wow-wow."

From time to time one hears of an extensive collection of broken Turbo shells in localities where the Pacific Gull occurs, and not infrequently the local inhabitants' explanation that these shells have been broken by the Gulls is disbelieved. Extensive remains of Turbo shells occur at eight places on Reevesby Island, and on one occasion the writer had the good fortune to see two of these birds feeding on one of these animals after one of them had dropped it from a height of about thirty feet. On another occasion an adult Pacific Gull captured a large, living Sea Urchin (*Helicoidaris erythrogramma*). It flew from the rocky shore-line to a strip of sandy beach about thirty yards away, and when about twenty feet above the sand it dropped the Sea Urchin which broke. The bird quickly descended to the beach and ravenously ate the internals. I hurried to rescue the remains, which were still alive—and the bird flew off. An examination showed that it had been dropped squarely on the aboral surface. Dropped in any other manner it is very unlikely that the echinoid would break. Description of soft parts of adult male; iris, creamy white; fleshy ring around eye, yellow; bill, deep cadmium yellow, tipped scarlet, cutting edge for one inch at the tip blue black; feet, yellow; claws, black. Measurements—total length, 63.0 cm.; wing-spread, 149.0 cm.

*Burhinus magnirostris*, Southern Stone-Curlew.

These birds are numerous, comparatively speaking, on Reevesby Island, and they were always seen in pairs. They flush with a single musical "weeloo." The flight is absolutely silent, the head is held low and the legs straight out behind. There is a conspicuous white mark on the wing with a black spot in the middle of it. They are very curious and do not fly far from an intruder. On alighting they stand still, erect, watching. The white mark above the eye, which extends half-way down the neck, and the white stripes on the wing are very noticeable. After a few minutes they run along the ground in a sneaking fashion and then flush. At least one pair of these birds was seen on each day from 5th to 16th December, and on 11th December six pairs were seen. They were heard calling

on 6th, 7th, 10th December at about 9.30 p.m. No nests or young birds were seen. Description of an adult female.—Iris, deep yellow; bill, black; inside mouth, pink; legs, dull yellow, the lower front of the tarsus and toes tinged dark brown; entire upper surface of body (including tail) greyish brown ground-colour; longitudinal narrow black stripes on head, neck, and rump; large black markings on mantle region; tip of tail with a few narrow transverse barrings; lores and forehead white; a wide white mark above the eye extending to half-way down the neck; cheeks and ear-coverts black; throat, abdomen and under tail-coverts, white; breast and neck white with longitudinal black stripes; tail from beneath pale grey with grey transverse barrings and a black tip to each feather, except the two longest; wing-primaries one to three, five to seven, black with a white transverse bar in the middle; fourth primary pure black; inner web near the base and for half-way along white in the secondaries; wing from below—secondary wing-coverts and secondaries grey, those near the primaries tipped black; primaries from below as above, but grey instead of black, with black tips; total length, 57.0 cm.; wing-spread, 94.5 cm.

*Cereopsis novae-hollandiae*, Cape Barren Goose.

On four occasions (5th, 6th, 8th, and 11th December) a party of five of these birds was seen in a large paddock (under cultivation with oats) at the southern end of the island. On 11th December the writer stalked these birds and got within thirty yards of them. One bird was not feeding with the rest, but acted as a sentinel. On flushing, the Cape Barren Goose utters a harsh croak.

*Chenopsis atrata*, Black Swan.

Four birds flew over the island going eastwards at 8 o'clock in the evening on 10th December.

*Neophema petrophila*, Rock Parrot.

In the early morning and in the evening these birds came in to drink at the waterhole in dozens. They are very quiet and tame; also in the morning and late afternoon they are to be seen on the ground in among the saltbush and pigface (*Mesembrianthemum*), where they are feeding. Many of them have a reddish stain on the "chin" and breast caused by the juices from the plants on which they feed. These Parrots are numerous, there being actually hundreds on the island. They are in the pigface on the saltbush flats. When disturbed they do not fly, but run along the ground and hide behind a bush. They are in the "scrub" and may be seen perched on some of the

tall "boobiallas," Casuarinas, etc. They are in the crop near the homestead in numbers.

*Zosterops halmaturina*, Grey-backed Silvereye.

The Silvereyes are the most numerous species on Reevesby Island and they occur in hundreds in the "scrub." A number of old nests was found, and from the large number of young birds seen it was evident that they had finished nesting before we reached the island.

(*Hypotaenidia philippensis*, Banded Landrail; *Kakatoe roseicapilla*, Galah; *Grallina cyanoleuca*, Magpie-Lark; and *Megalurus gramineus*, Little Grassbird, were noted by members of the McCoy Society on this island.)

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