

THE BAUDIN ROCKS—A FURTHER REPORT

By MARK BONNIN

These rocky islands are situated off the south-east coast of South Australia at the northern end of Guichen Bay, six miles north of Robe and about two miles off the coast at Boatswain's Point. The islands and their bird population have been described in this journal by Morgan (1922) and more comprehensively by Brummitt (1934).

My first visit was made on January 4, 1924, in company with the late Dr. A. M. Morgan. On that occasion we collected eggs from the Black-faced Cormorant, Little Black Cormorant, Nankeen Night Heron, Little Penguin, Crested Tern; eggs of the Fairy Tern were collected at a later visit. The Crested Terns were present in "many thousands" (Morgan) in two rookeries and Little Penguins were present in hundreds.

In January 1935, during a second visit, I was impressed with the number of Nankeen Night Herons nesting.

More recent visits were made on January 22, 1965, in company with Dr. Allan Kerr Grant, and on January 4, 1968, in company with Dr. Roger Angove. On the former occasion only the southern island was visited and on the latter a landing was made on both.

The south island is the bigger and more interesting of the two main islands but there is no beach and landing has to be made on the reef, a proceeding which is only possible in fair weather and in the absence of a big ocean swell. It contains the "lagoon," a rounded area of flat rock about sixty yards in diameter, above sea level, and filled with salt water to a depth of a few inches. It is sheltered by rocks on all sides and is a favourite resting site for migratory duck, where, at one time, they were occasionally shot by passing fishermen. Some of the migratory waders shelter on the islands when high tide drives them off the mainland beaches.

Notes on the following species of birds refer to the visit made in 1965 unless specified otherwise.

Little Penguin (*Eudyptula minor*)

Burrows were plentiful on both islands and contained eggs or young birds in all stages of growth on all visits. There were a number

of dead, almost fully grown, birds in the vicinity of the burrows indicating a significant fledgling mortality.

Little Black Cormorant (*Phalacrocorax sulcirostris*)

A clutch of eggs was taken on January 4, 1924.

Black-faced Cormorant (*Phalacrocorax fuscescens*)

About sixty birds were perched on the rocks as we approached by sea. The rookery was visited. Only two nests were in use and each contained a clutch of two freshly laid eggs. All nests were empty in 1968 though adult birds were plentiful.

Pied Cormorant (*Phalacrocorax varius*)

One bird was on the south island in 1968. This species is known to nest on the islands later in the year.

Australian Gannet (*Sula bassana*)

A solitary bird flew over the islands in 1968.

Crested Tern (*Sterna bergii*)

Nesting colonies were present in 1924 and 1968. Between 400 and 500 pair had eggs or recently hatched young on high ground on the south island in 1968. In 1965 there were 30 immatures plumaged birds on the edge of the lagoon.

Fairy Tern (*Sterna nereis*)

Eggs were collected by Morgan in 1924. A solitary bird was seen in 1968.

Bridled Tern (*Sterna anaetheta*)

One nesting pair photographed in 1968. Because this species has not been recorded from South Australia previously an account of this pair has already been reported. (Bonnin, 1968.)

Silver Gull (*Larus novaehollandiae*)

Nests contained eggs in 1935. On the two recent visits some twenty immature birds were flocking with about the same number of adults.

Turnstone (*Arenaria interpres*)

In 1965 a few birds were flocking with fifty Golden Plover. In 1968 the flock numbered 70 and individuals were in various stages of loss of breeding plumage. This flock was feeding on the edge of the lagoon and was augmented by further arrivals during the two hours that they were under observation.

Sooty Oyster-catcher (*Haematopus fuliginosus*)

One pair stayed at the northern end of the island and, by their behaviour, were thought to be nesting. In 1968 three adult birds remained on the island during our visit.

Pacific Golden Plover (*Pluvialis dominica*)

These birds flew with the Turnstones when flushed, forming a flock which separated from the Sharp-tailed Sandpipers which flocked together. Fifty birds were flushed from the lagoon but always returned after circling the island. This species was not recorded in 1968.

Eastern Curlew (*Numenius madagascariensis*)

Three birds were observed.

Sharp-tailed Sandpiper (*Ereunetes acuminata*)

Some fifty birds were present on each visit.

White-faced Heron (*Ardea novaehollandiae*)

Six birds were seen on the lagoon.

Reef Heron (*Egretta sacra*)

One bird was present in 1965 while in 1968 three birds were flocking together, their behaviour suggesting that they were an adult pair with a mature offspring.

Nankeen Night Heron (*Nycticorax caledonicus*)

On approaching the island about fifty adult Night Herons were seen flying over the island and many striped immature birds were sitting motionless on nitre-bushes and dotted all over the scrub covered area. Several birds were flushed from nests which were relatively well hidden. One nest photographed contained one egg and two freshly hatched chicks. In 1968 these birds were not present on the island.

Little Grassbird (*Megalurus gramineus*)

Small numbers of this species were flushed from the dense taller bushes on both visits. They were not heard calling. Their presence was reported by both Morgan and Brummitt. There is no fresh water on the island making it an unusual habitat for this species.

Introduced Species

There were flocks of Rock Pigeons (*Columba livia*), all of a remarkably uniform colour pattern, and of Starlings (*Sturnus vulgaris*) on both occasions.

COMMENT

From personal observation and the reports of Morgan and Brummitt it would appear that the bird population of the Baudin Rocks has remained fairly constant over the past forty years. There is a persisting and flourishing colony of the Black-faced Cormorant, in spite of this bird not being a protected species. Penguins have been taken occasionally for use as bait for crayfish but such depredation has not appreciably affected their numbers. Crested Terns might have diminished in numbers. Morgan found "many thousands" nesting in colonies on each island whereas now there are approximately one thousand in a colony on one island.

The absence of the Nankeen Night Herons in 1968 was surprising, but they could well have nested earlier. If so, it would suggest that this species uses the islands only as a nesting area and not as a resting area by day in the non-breeding season.

Rock Parrots (*Neophema petrophila*), observed on each visit by Brummitt, were not flushed on either of my recent visits.

With the growing popularity of Robe as a holiday resort it is re-assuring to know that these islands have been declared a Fauna Reserve under the Fauna Conservation Act of 1964. Prominent notices to this effect were erected on the highest point of each island in December, 1967.

REFERENCES

1. Morgan, A. M., 'A Trip to the Baudin Rocks,' *S.A. Ornithologist*, 6 (1922) p. 133.
2. Brummitt, D. W., 'The Baudin Rocks,' *ibid* 12 (1934) p. 202.
3. Bonnin, Mark, 'The Bridled Tern Breeding in South Australia,' *ibid* 25 (1968) p. 18.