

**THE MASKED GANNET  
A SIGHT RECORD FROM  
GRANITE ISLAND, S.A.**

At about 0730 hrs on December 28, 1966 I noticed a few gannets about the seaward side of Granite Island, Victor Harbor. The weather at the time was rough with rain and strong wind. The gannets were viewed through 10 x 50 binoculars from a distance of about 50 yards. I identified the birds as the Australian Gannet (*Sula bassana*), except one which was obviously of a different species. The following field-marks were noted:—as large as *S. bassana*, almost the same colour, but head white, not yellow. Plumage mainly white; the upper parts appeared a little greyish in comparison to its companions. Bill yellow; naked skin on face and throat blue-black. Wing quills, greater wing coverts and tail black-brown. The colour of the feet could not be distinguished clearly, but appeared to be black.

At first sight I believed it was an Australian Gannet, but this species has the outer tail feathers white. I could not detect any white tail feathers in the bird under observation. The primaries only of *S. bassana* are blackish-brown, at least in the adult, whereas in this bird the secondaries were also noted to be blackish brown. The bill colour was also different. That of *S. bassana* is slate-coloured; in the Masked Gannet (*S. dactylatra*) it may be blue-grey, greenish-yellow, yellow or red.

W. B. Alexander in *Birds of the Ocean* states, in reference to the Australian Gannet (as *Sula serrator*), 'Its yellow head is the chief feature distinguishing it from the Blue-faced Booby,' i.e. *S. dactylatra*. The Masked Gannet could perhaps be confused with the Red-footed Gannet (*S. sula*), but according to Alexander, *S. dactylatra* is ". . . distinguished from the Red-footed Booby by its larger size and by having all the quill-feathers of the wing and the tail dark, appearing black. The feet vary in colour in different races, but are never red."

Alexander gives the following measurements:—

	Length	Wing
<i>S. serrator</i>	32—38.6 in.	18—19 in.
<i>S. dactylatra</i>	32.5—36 in.	16.4—17.8 in.
<i>S. sula</i>	26—29.5 in.	13.8—15.5 in.

The bird was under observation for 4-5 minutes before flying away to the south-east parallel to the coast.

From the above observations there seems little doubt that the bird seen was a Masked Gannet (*Sula dactylatra*), a species that has not previously been recorded for South Australia. Leach's *An Australian Bird Book* gives the range of the Masked Gannet as 'tropical seas to N.A., Queensland.' Alexander says '. . . on the Cocos Keeling Is., on islands off northern Australia and in the western and central Pacific.'

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