

SHORT-TAILED SHEARWATER COLONIES OF THE SOUTH-EAST

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In their assessments of the breeding distribution of Short-tailed Shearwaters *Puffinus tenuirostris*, Condon (1969) and Serventy *et al.* (1971) did not mention that they breed in the south-east of South Australia, although previously Condon (1942) mentioned the existence of a colony on an islet off Cape Northumberland. Besides this one, there is a larger colony on inner Penguin Island near Beachport. Possibly also the species formerly bred on the mainland at Douglas Point, eight km NW of Cape Northumberland.

The islet supporting the Cape Northumberland colony is separated from the mainland only by a 20 metre wide channel. Owing to the rough surge of water passing through this channel and the steep cliffs on either side, a recent attempt to land on the islet was unsuccessful. Nevertheless, the shearwaters were easily observed from the mainland; and at night the headlights of a vehicle driven to the cliff-top opposite the islet were used to illuminate the colony. On 27 October 1976 the shearwaters were watched excavating or clearing burrows in the sandy soil of the eastern slope. They were frequently calling and flying about the mainland cliff-tops as well as the islet, but subsequent searches of the headlands revealed one carcass and no sign of breeding. From the numbers of shearwaters seen on several nights in 1976 and 1977 it was tentatively estimated that less than 70 pairs breed on the islet. Many burrows are visible from the mainland, some clearly, but it is evident that most are hidden beneath the low covering of vegetation. About 30 pairs of Little Penguins *Eudyptula minor* were found breeding at the base of cliffs of a mainland cove east of the islet (May 1978). Cape Northumberland is probably the only locality in SA where breeding shearwaters and penguins can be observed from mainland cliffs.

On occasions at dusk Short-tailed Shearwaters were seen flying over inner Penguin Island from the mainland at Cape Martin. At low tide on 3 January 1977 N. C. H. Reid and the writer waded from Cape Martin to the island. We found many carcasses and burrows of Short-

tailed Shearwaters in the sandy, well vegetated central part of the island. Most burrows examined were occupied by shearwaters incubating eggs; but Little Penguins and rabbits also occur on the island, and although their burrows appeared to be sited outside the shearwater colony, some might be located within. Consequently we were only able to tentatively estimate that 3000 pairs of shearwaters breed in the colony.

Numerous very old bone fragments were found over a wide area on Douglas Point in 1976. Most were half buried, or had been exposed by the recent clearing of a track and car-parking area in the sandy tussock grassland atop the cliffs of the headland. Samples of the bone fragments, including pelvic fragments and attached vertebrae, fused clavicles and lower mandibles, but mainly leg (femur, tibiotarsus and tarsometatarsus) and wing bones (humerus, radius and ulna), were identified to be from Short-tailed Shearwaters by comparison with skeletal material in the South Australian Museum. The wide distribution of bones on the headland in soil suitable for burrowing indicates a possibility that Douglas Point was a former breeding locality of the species.

It is possible that Short-tailed Shearwaters breed at other sites in the south-east of SA, either on the mainland or on offshore islands. Two apparently suitable breeding localities for burrowing seabirds, outer Penguin Island and Baudin Rocks, were searched on 25 October and 27 October 1977 respectively by Ian May and the writer. We found no evidence that Short-tailed Shearwaters breed at these localities; but odd breeding pairs could have been easily overlooked amidst the numerous penguin burrows on the islands.

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