

## AN EARLY BREEDING RECORD OF THE SOOTY TERN FROM KANGAROO ISLAND

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In Australian waters the Sooty Tern *Sterna fuscata* is common only off the north-western and north-eastern coasts, breeding on the Abrolhos Islands, Western Australia, and on islands in the Coral Sea, Torres Strait and off the north-east coast of Queensland south to the Cairns district. Further south, and along the northern coast it is known only as a straggler (Serventy *et al.* 1971: 225-227; Storr 1977: 45).

Records from South Australia are few. On 26 November 1906, Campbell (1907) recorded one among breeding Crested Tern *S. bergii* on the Baudin Rocks.\* In 1937 one was captured

\*It is worth noting that the Bridled Tern *S. anaethetus*, equally rare in South Australia, was found breeding on the Baudin Rocks by Dr M. Bonnin in 1968 (Bonnin 1968).—Ed.

in the coastal Adelaide suburb of Brighton on 28 March (Sutton 1937; specimen in S.A. Museum, B18721), while a few days later a second bird was observed in Christmas Cove near Penneshaw, Kangaroo Island (Rix 1938 and pers. comm.). In December of 1972, 1974, 1975, 1976 and 1978 one was noted among breeding Crested Tern on The Brothers in Coffin Bay (Gill 1973, 1976a, b and pers. comm., S. A. Parker & J. B. Cox pers. obs. 1976).

In the South Australian Museum there is an egg collection, of over 680 clutches, presented by William White (an uncle of the late Captain S. A. White) in 1921. This collection, formed by William and his sons mainly in the vicinity of Adelaide and on Kangaroo Island in 1884-1894, has not previously been critically exam-



Plate 1. *Top row.* Eggs of the Bridled Tern *Sterna anaethetus* from Houtmans Abrolhos, WA. *Bottom row.* Eggs of the Sooty Tern *S. fuscata*: from left to right, the two from Kingscote Spit, and one from Oyster Cay, northern Queensland. (The eggs of the Bridled Tern are included for comparison; this is the only species liable to be confused with the Sooty Tern).

ined, and promises to yield much useful information from this poorly-documented period of South Australia's ornithological history.

While working through this collection in August 1979, I came across two eggs, *i.e.* two clutches (reg'd nos B32277 a, b) of the Sooty Tern taken by William and his son John on Kingscote Spit in October 1884. An original card with the eggs reads 'Sooty Tern. Kangaroo Isl. on Spit [= Kingscote Spit] on bare sand. 1E. J & W White Oct. 1884.' Recourse to William's *ms.* notebook, also in the SA Museum, shows that he and John started for Kangaroo Island on 15 October and returned to Adelaide on 24 October 1884. The eggs themselves bear the pencilled inscription 'Large Black Capt Tern Kangaroo Isld 1 Egg', an inscription that appears also on an egg of the Caspian Tern *S. caspia* (B3839) collected at the same time. It is possible that these three eggs were gathered indiscriminately in and around a colony of Caspian Terns, the identity of the Sooty Terns' eggs only being realized by William afterwards. The two Sooty Terns' eggs are like eggs of the species in the SA Museum from Western Australia and Queensland. *South Australian Museum, North Terrace, Adelaide 5000.*

land, and differ from eggs of the similar Bridled Tern *S. anaethetus* (Plate 1); they measure 50.67 x 36.10 and 52.08 x 34.77 mm.

Given the known fluxes in distribution and abundance of certain species in Australia within historical times, it is an open question whether this instance of Sooty Terns breeding on Kingscote Spit in 1884 was an isolated or extremely unusual occurrence, or whether the species formerly bred regularly in South Australian waters. As for the possibility that it still breeds in this area occasionally, it is of interest to consider the case of the Coffin Bay records (1972-1978): if these are all of the one individual, then its fidelity to the locality may signify that it was hatched there.

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