

THE BAUDIN ROCKS, 1968-1982

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The Baudin Rocks, also known as the Godfrey Islands, are situated approximately 3 km off the South-East coast of South Australia near the northern shore of Guichen Bay (37°50'S, 139°43'E). The geography and birds of the two main islands have been described previously (Morgan 1922, Brummitt 1934, Bonnín 1968a, b, 1969). On 4 January 1968 and in January 1972 I visited both islands but since then I have searched only the northern, which is also the smaller of the two. My visits were made on 29 December 1968, 27 January 1969, 4 January 1970, 2 January 1971, 2 January 1972, 28 December 1972, 4 January 1974, 3 January 1975, 20 January 1980 and 2 January 1982. This report describes some changes in the avifauna of the islands observed over the period of the above visits.

The predominant plant is Nitrebush *Nitraria schoberi*. This has gradually increased its range on the northern island and is now more luxuriant than ever. In 1980 a colony of Crested Terns occupied almost the entire unvegetated area. Further encroachment of this site, also a nesting area, by Nitrebush could reduce the size of the colony. Scattered sparsely among the Nitrebush are Native Spinach *Tetragonea implexicoma* and Seablite *Suaedia australis*. A low ground cover plant *Frankenia* sp. occurs in small clumps on the otherwise bare area and is also increasing in extent. This does not appear to have interfered with the nesting Terns. Pig-face *Mesembryanthemum* sp. was not seen on the north island.

LITTLE PENGUIN

Eudyptula minor

Morgan (1922) reported hundreds breeding. In 1968 most nesting sites examined were in use. In 1974 numbers were recorded as diminishing and in January 1982 only seven nests were found in an hour's search by two people. Five of these contained nestlings a few days old and two each contained a solitary unattended, almost adult bird. In July 1981, I. A. May (pers. comm.) found 12 birds, two of which were each incubating one egg. Earlier nesting could account for the declining numbers seen in visits since 1974. It is interesting that many Feral Pigeons *Columba livia* were flushed from nests on the ground under Nitrebush *Nitraria schoberi* but only a few were found in unused Penguin nests.

BLACK-FACED SHAG

Leucocarbo fuscescens

These birds have been customarily observed to congregate on the beach on the northern island in the mornings but they are dispersed by people landing boats. Approximate counts made in 1968, 1970 and 1972 were 2-300, 160 and 2-300 respectively in this area. In 1982, the birds had evidently dispersed but 27 were noted perched on prominent rocky points on both islands surrounded by Feral Pigeons. In July 1981, I. A. May (pers. comm.) estimated 240 to be present with 100 nests and eggs. This population appears to be static.

PIED CORMORANT

Phalacrocorax varius

Occasional birds were seen on most visits. This species was nesting on the islands in January 1922 (Morgan 1922) but in more recent years nesting appears to have commenced earlier. I. A. May (pers. comm.) estimated that 60 were present in July 1981 and some of these were nesting on the southern island.

LITTLE PIED CORMORANT

Phalacrocorax melanoleucos

Occasional birds were seen on or in the vicinity of the islands on most visits. The eggs collected by Morgan and the present author in 1924 (Morgan 1924) were probably of this species, as judged by the description of the nest and size of the eggs, and not of the Little Black Cormorant *P. sulcirostris* (S. A. Parker, pers. comm.). The latter species has not been observed by the author on the islands on any visit.

WHITE-FACED HERON

Ardea novaehollandiae

Only seen once, in 1976.

EASTERN REEF EGRET

Egretta sacra

In 1968 three were encountered and in 1974 five were present.

RUFIOUS NIGHT HERON

Nycticorax caledonicus

Brummitt (1934) reported several hundred nests on the south island. In 1967, fifty, including immature birds, were seen but only two in 1971. Occasional birds have been seen on the north island including one immature in 1981. I. A. May (pers. comm.) counted 54 in July 1981, a number which he thought more than seen on his other visits.

SILVER GULL

Larus novaehollandiae

Present on every visit with old nests and many immatures, dead and alive, seen.

SOOTY OYSTERCATCHER

Haematopus fuliginosus

Morgan (1922) reported one pair. This species has been seen on every visit, the largest number seen being three. One bird with a broken leg trailing in flight was present for five years from 1967-1972.

BRIDLED TERN

Sterna anaethetus

Bonin (1968, 1969) has reported the only breeding records of this species in South Australia. A broken egg shell of this species collected in 1969 is now in the South Australian Museum. In January and December 1972 one was seen by the author and four were seen by David Close in November 1972 (pers. comm.). A solitary bird was seen by the author in 1975 but none have been seen on subsequent visits.

FAIRY TERN

Sterna nereis

A small nesting colony was present in 1924 (clutch of eggs in South Australian Museum). No nesting has been observed by the author in recent visits. I. A. May (pers. comm.) found 12 birds two of which were each incubating one egg in July 1981.

CRESTED TERN

Sterna bergii

Nesting colonies were found in 1967-1969, 1971, 1974 and 1977-1979. No nesting occurred on the other years or in 1981. The number of birds present during nesting has been estimated each time as approximately 1000 in addition to some 500 eggs or immature birds. High mortality of the young was reported in 1978 and was

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possibly due to human interference. The large number of immatures seen in 1980 suggested very successful breeding then.

FERAL PIGEONS

Columba livia

Not recorded by Brummitt in the five years to 1934 (Brummitt 1934). In 1968 I counted 30 and these were all of the same strain as judged by their uniform colouration. Numbers have steadily increased since then and the birds are now present in thousands. Flocks now contain birds of various colouration indicative of further colonization from the mainland. Every ledge on all cliff faces and fissures are occupied by these birds. In 1982, two flocks of 100 each were seen simultaneously and birds were seen on the wing all over the island. Many were going in and out of Nitrebrush to and from their nests. The late J. B. Hood (pers. comm.) had seen a Peregrine Falcon *Falco peregrinus* take a pigeon from the main island. These pigeons breed throughout the year (I. A. May, pers. comm.) and could lead to the decline and disappearance of some native species from the islands through competition for nesting sites.

LITTLE GRASSBIRD

Megalurus gramineus

Seen on most visits in small numbers.

COMMON STARLING

Sturnus vulgaris

Observed every year in small numbers and including immature birds.

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