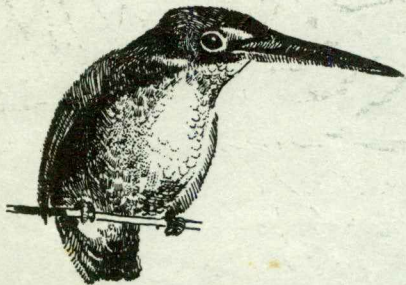


# AUSTRALIAN BIRDS



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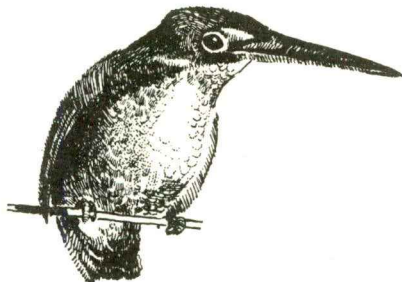
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# AUSTRALIAN BIRDS



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## SEABIRDS FOUND DEAD IN NEW SOUTH WALES IN 1973

ALAN K. MORRIS

### ABSTRACT

During 1973, 623 km of the New South Wales coast was patrolled by 52 members and friends of the Field Ornithologists Club and 2189 dead seabirds were found. Three large seabird wrecks were recorded, those in January and December containing mainly Short-tailed Shearwaters but the other in July included many seabirds, prions being the commonest group. Prions were recorded in the greatest numbers since 1954 when a similar wreck occurred. Rare specimens found included two Grey-headed Albatrosses, four Grey-mantled Albatrosses, three Blue Petrels and two Arctic Terns.

### INTRODUCTION

This paper reports on the results obtained by the New South Wales Field Ornithologists Club beach patrol scheme in 1973. The coastline of the State has been divided into 10 zones (See Fig. 1 in Morris 1972) each zone representing one degree south in latitude. Coverage was good in all zones except Coffs Harbour and Bega. A total of 2189 dead seabirds of 38 species was found in 355 patrols covering 623 km patrolled and 927 km travelled. ("Total km travelled" is the sum total distance of all walks, whilst "total km patrolled" represents the monthly total distance of beaches walked at least once in each zone). A mean mortality of 2.4 birds per km travelled was achieved which compares with

8.0 per km in 1970, 4.1 per km in 1971 and 5.7 per km in 1972. Table 1 indicates the number of dead seabirds recorded and kilometres patrolled in each zone in 1973.

Table 11 lists the coastal distribution of the seabirds found in 1973, whilst Table 111 provides details of the monthly distribution of seabird mortality. Table 1V gives details of unusual seabirds recorded.

93.3% of all seabirds collected were Procellariiformes, the remainder comprising 148 other seabirds of 11 species. Species names and the order in which they occur are in accordance with "An Index of Australian Bird Names" CSIRO Division of Wildlife Research, Tech. Paper No. 20, 1969.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION.

Results indicate that as the distance walked by members increases there is a corresponding decline in the number of seabirds found per km travelled. This is inevitable because in the past walks were only made following storms or at other times considered favourable for finding dead seabirds. Nowadays members make more regular walks and submit "nil" returns.

A feature of 1973 was the unusually large mortality in July. In typical years the mortality pattern is high in January then dropping away but gradually increasing towards the end of the year.

46 Little Penguins *Eudyptula minor* was the largest number recorded in the Scheme greatly exceeding previous figures. Most died in storms during March and July with the greatest mortality in the Mallacoota zone.

The only Wandering Albatross *Diomedea exulans* was found alive at Bondi on 9 July - it was an adult bird and had been banded at Malabar some years previously. The bird was looked after and released 11 days later. All the Black-browed Albatrosses *D. melanophrys* that were aged were immatures. Those found between Evans Head and Ballina in July were further north than normally recorded. The two Grey-headed Albatrosses *D. chrysostoma* were only the third and fourth records for the State and the first positively identified since 1952. Both were found on Patch's Beach near South Ballina, one on 14 and the other on 22 July, the finders being G. Fraser and W. Watson. The Grey-mantled Albatross *Phoebastria palebrata* has not previously been recorded in the State.



The heads of specimens found in July were taken to the Australian Museum for identification. All three were juvenile birds; with bill size less than that given by Serventy et al (1971); each exhibiting the diagnostic blue sulcus. The fourth bird found at Evans Head by G. Bryant on 7 October, had measurements comparable with adult birds. This bird was found alive, fed by local people and subsequently banded and released - see Rogers (1974) for more details.

Giant Petrels were found from June to December but predominantly during July storms. Six were identified as Southern Giant Petrels *Macronetes giganteus*, one at Ballina on 11 July having been banded previously off South America (Anon. 1974a). Another at Evans Head on 9 June was banded in Adelle Land, Antarctica (Anon. 1974b). A Silver-grey Petrel *Fulmarus glacialisoides* was again found in the Ulladulla Zone at Wairo on 16 June, the fifth record for the State. Specimens were also taken in Tasmania, South Australia and Victoria during the year (Morris 1974). A record number of Great-winged Petrels *Pteradroma macroptera* was found in 1973 - four in July being unusual although evidence is accumulating to suggest that the birds are present in New South Wales offshore waters throughout the year. Four White-headed Petrels *P. lessoni* died in the July storms. Two collected south of Ballina on 14 July were unusual in that this petrel has only been recorded north of Newcastle on two previous occasions, one on 10 July near Ulladulla was the first record for that section of the coast. Indications are that the White-headed Petrel is also present in offshore waters throughout the year. The Gould Petrel *P. leucoptera* and the Brown-headed Petrel *P. melanopus* records are in accordance with previously published data (Morris 1973). The Black-winged Petrel *P. nigripennis* found at Durras on 7 March was only the second State record. Blue Petrels *Halobaena caerulea* have only previously been recorded for this State in 1954 when a number of specimens were procured during the large Prion wreck at that time (Hindwood & McGill, 1955). The three specimens found this year were all from the Sydney region, one at Boatharbour on 14 July and the other two at Palm Beach on 13 July (Finch and Bruce in press).

During July exceptional cyclonic conditions occurred causing considerable seabird mortality. A remarkable feature of this washup was the incidence of tropical forms viz. Little Shearwaters and White-tailed Tropic-birds as well as many southern forms

occurring so far north.

The unusual storm conditions were caused by an intense low pressure system off the Queensland Coast and a strong high pressure system in the Tasman Sea. These systems caused south to east gales and strong winds in N.S.W. coastal and ocean waters from 5 to 10 July, bringing heavy to flood rains on the north coast (Anon 1973a). This unusual cyclonic situation over eastern Australia had a serious effect on our seabird populations causing heavy mortality particularly in the Ballina-- Evans Head area, although it did occur elsewhere throughout the State. At Ballina following the storm 146 birds of 24 species were found in 30 km travelled. The July seabird wreck was dominated by prions with the Dove Prion *Pachyptila desolata* the commonest seabird found dead. The 194 Dove Prions that died in July were the greatest number recorded since a similar storm in July 1954 when many were washed up between Sydney-Wollongong and 18 specimens were lodged in the Australian Museum. Most of the unidentified prions found in July 1973 were thought, based on the wing measurements, to have been Dove Prions. Dove Prions, Thin-billed Prions *P. belcheri* and Fairy Prions *P. turtur* were found all along the coast. These records extend the range of the Thin-billed Prion in this State because formally it was known to occur north to Newcastle. Only one Medium-billed Prion *P. salvini* was found on 7 July at Wreck Bay, Sussex Inlet. The last two species are rarely recorded in N.S.W. waters.

Hindwood and McGill (1955) discussed the July 1954 wreck when 260 prions were examined and the percentage of each species estimated. These figures are re-produced below and in parenthesis is the equivalent percentage of the 1973 prion mortality.

Broad-billed Prion	2% (1.5%)	Thin-billed Prion	6% (5%)
Medium-billed Prion	60% (0.3%)	Fairy Prion	15% (20.7%)
Dove Prion	17% (72.5%)		

Large numbers of prions were seen offshore in the Malla-coota zone in July (pers. obs) but few birds were found dead despite good coverage of the beaches. The remarkable similarity of the cyclonic conditions in July 1954 and July 1973 should be noted, the strong onshore winds causing the death of seabirds through exhaustion on both occasions.

There were no Wedge-tailed Shearwaters *Puffinus pacificus* found dead between May-July confirming the suggestions of Purchase



(1974) and Swanson (1974) that this species is migratory. Little Shearwaters *P. assimilis*, which are generally absent from N.S.W. waters in winter, were also a feature of the July seabird wreck. With the exception of the one at Wanda on 7 July the remainder were found from Evans Head to Ballina between 8 and 22 July. Fluttering Shearwaters *P. gavia* were found throughout the year confirming the previous pattern.

In contrast to previous years the percentage of Short-tailed Shearwaters *P. tenuirostris* at 67% declined considerably from the usual 92% to 97%. The decline was brought about by two factors - one being that the actual mortality of the Short-tails was less this year than in previous years, and the heavy mortality of other seabirds in July. Two large wrecks were found, the first in January as a result of storms in the previous December see Morris and Sawyer (1973). In this wreck 335 Short-tails were found in 9 km of beach on 4 - 5 January in Nadgee Nature Reserve, Mallacoota zone. All had been dead for 10-12 days. In December a small wreck occurred on the northern beaches of Sydney when 257 birds were found in 12 km on 13-14 December; smaller wrecks were also found in the Ulladulla zone. The weather conditions at this time appeared typical for that time of year. From 8 to 15 December an intensive high pressure system remained over the Tasman Sea, this was followed by a trough moving rapidly northwards up the coast (1973b). Such fast moving troughs often cause considerable mortality of mutton-birds. All winter records July (3), August (1), September (1) were dry remains found on beaches not regularly patrolled.

White-tailed Tropic-birds *Phaethon lepturus* also turned up in the July wreck near Ballina. All were immature and the circumstances were unusual in that until now the majority of records have been for the summer period (November - March) and have only been recorded on the central coast from Ulladulla to Buladelah. The Southern Skua *Stercorarius skua* at Ballina on 8 July was unusual as there are no records so far north in this State.

Until 1973 the Arctic Tern *Sterna paradisea* was only known in N.S.W. from a band recovery at Bega in 1966 (banded in United Kingdom) and a sight record at Newcastle (Holmes 1969). During the year two specimens were found; at Batemans Bay on 15 September and at Thirroul on 4 December. The first had been banded in the United Kingdom in July 1969 as a pullus (Anon 1974a). These two

band recoveries plus a number of recent sight records (Sawyer 1974) suggest that the bird is an uncommon summer migrant from Europe during the period September-May passing unnoticed in the flocks of the Eastern Common Tern *S. hirundo*. The number of Sooty Terns *S. fuscata* recorded this year is unprecedented and almost totals the previous known records 1892 - 1972. All probably perished in February and all but three were immatures. They were found from the Queensland border to Wollongong with a majority in the Coffs Harbour area. They were first recorded on 10 February following strong northerly winds ahead of strong squally southerly winds during 6 to 8 February and the development of a small depression off the north coast leading to strong south to easterly winds in the region from 12 to 14 February (1973c). The Common Noddy *Anous stolidus* at Dee Why on 10 January was only the eighth State record.

In addition to seabirds, 29 land or freshwater birds were found; 1 Black Duck, 1 Brown Quail, 8 Feral or Racing Pigeons, 1 Gang Gang Cockatoo, 1 Crimson Rosella, 2 Budgerigar, 1 Tawny Frogmouth, 1 Fairy Martin, 1 Red Wattle-bird, 1 Finch sp., 1 House Sparrow, 2 Starlings, 1 Indian Myna, 1 Raven and 3 Black-backed Magpies.

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During the year 52 members and friends took part in the beach surveys. All credit is due to them for the extensive and valuable results obtained.

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A.E.F. Rogers and Narelle Swanson read the draft and I am indebted to them for their helpful advice and suggestions.



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TABLE I  
NUMBER OF DEAD SEABIRDS RECORDED AND KILOMETRES PATROLLED ON EACH ZONE IN 1973

ZONE	Jan	Feb.	Mar.	Apr.	May.	June	July	Aug.	Sept.	Oct.	Nov.	Dec.	TOTALS
Tweed Heads	Km Birds 10.4 5	0.1 1	5.5 1	4.5 1	8.8 1	1.0 -	23.8 58	1.0 -	13.0 1	11.0 5	9.5 30	0.8 39	142
Maclean	Km Birds 6.0 5	6.0 5	2.2 1	2.8 1		1.0 1	11.5 90	12.0 -		0.1 1			9
Coffs Harbour	Km Birds 6.4 12	8 11											23
Hastings	Km Birds -							1.8 -	1.8 -				-
Newcastle	Km Birds 5.7 31	2.5 -	4.6 2	2.3 15	1.2 -	1.2 -	6.1 53	7.2 5		1.2 5	1.2 12	5.9 27	150
Sydney	Km Birds 14.2 40	27.0 35	23.8 10	5.8 -	6.9 2	6.4 -	23.2 149	8.8 2	16.4 7	13.4 26	19.1 70	13.5 293	634
Wollongong	Km Birds 7.8 13	10.6 6	15.6 17	7.3 1	9.9 2	5.6 1	10.8 16	4.7 1	12.9 2	7.2 20	13.5 95	13.8 103	277
Ulladulla	Km Birds 3.2 23		1.6 1	1.6 -		5.0 1	18.0 50	13.3 21	0.3 1	25.2 33	5.8 19	14.9 73	222
Bega	Km Birds -									1.0 5	3.0 2	12.5 137	144
Mallacoota	Km Birds 7.8 345				2.0 2	2.2 -	8.7 28	1.2 1	2.2 -	8.8 19	4.4 79	7.0 24	498
Total Km travelled (not listed)	83.2	66.7	81.2	27.4	35.6	23.1	135.0	50.6	53.9	119.1	119.9	132.4	927.3
Total Km patrolled	55.5	47.0	53.3	24.3	28.8	22.4	102.1	50.0	46.6	67.9	56.5	68.4	622.8
Total Seabirds recorded	469	58	32	18	7	3	444	30	11	114	307	696	2189
Birds/Km trav/month	5.5	0.9	0.4	0.7	0.2	0.1	3.3	0.5	0.2	0.9	2.5	6.0	2.4



TABLE II  
MONTHLY MORTALITY OF SEABIRDS IN 1973

Species	J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D	Total
Little Penguin	6		16	1			12	2	1	5	2	3	48
Albatross Sp. Unid.										1			1
Wandering Albatross							1						1
Black-browed Albatross							3				1	2	6
White-capped Albatross							1						1
Grey-headed Albatross							2						2
Grey-mantled Albatross							3			1			4
Giant Petrel Sp. Unid.							4		1	1		1	7
Southern Giant Petrel						1	4		1				6
Silver-grey Petrel						1							1
Cape Petrel							9	1		3			13
Great-winged Petrel	1		1				4			1			7
White-headed Petrel							4						4
Gould Petrel		1											1
Black-winged Petrel			1										1
Brown-headed Petrel											1		1
Blue Petrel							3						3
Prion Sp. Unid.							99	2		11	2	1	114
Broad-billed Prion							4						4
Medium-billed Prion							1						1
Dove Prion					1		194	5		3			203
Thin-billed Prion							14						14
Fairy Prion	3						43		5	7			58
Shearwater Sp. Unid.		5					5	1				2	13
Fleshy-footed Shearwater										1	1	3	5
Wedge-tailed Shearwater	2	10	4	6				16		3	1	5	47
Sooty Shearwater	1			1						2	5	6	15
Short-tailed Shearwater	446	10	4	9	3		3	1	1	64	280	652	1473
Fluttering Shearwater		8	1			1	2			5	1	2	20
Little Shearwater							9						9
White-faced Storm Petrel		6											6
Australian Gannet	1		1		2		2		1	2	1	2	12
Black Cormorant	1										1	1	3
White-tailed Tropic-Bird							4						4
Southern Skua							1						1
Silver Gull	5		2		1		11			1	7	13	40
Arctic Tern									1			1	2
Common Tern											1		1
White-fronted Tern							1						1
Sooty Tern		17	2	1									20
Crested Tern	2	1					1	2		3	3	3	15
Common Noddy	1												1
Total	469	58	32	18	7	3	444	30	11	114	307	696	2189

TABLE 111

## SEABIRDS FOUND DEAD IN DIFFERENT ZONES IN 1973

Species	TH	MC	CH	HS	NC	SY	WG	UL	BG	MA	total
Little Penguin	1				3	5	13	5	1	20	48
Albatross Sp. Unid.								1			1
Wandering Albatross						1					1
Black-browed Albatross	2	1				1			2		6
White-capped Albatross										1	1
Grey-headed Albatross	1	1									2
Grey-mantled Albatross		3				1					4
Giant Petrel Sp. Unid.	1	2				2		2			7
Southern Giant Petrel	1	3				1	1				6
Silver-grey Petrel								1			1
Cape Petrel	1	4				4	1	3			13
Great-winged Petrel	2	3					2				7
White-headed Petrel		2				1		1			4
Gould Petrel						1					1
Black-winged Petrel								1			1
Brown-headed Petrel							1				1
Blue Petrel						2	1				3
Prion Sp. Unid.					32	38	5	28		11	114
Broad-billed Prion					1	1		1		1	4
Medium-billed Prion								1			1
Dove Prion	39	57			24	70	5	8			203
Thin-billed Prion	1	3				6	1	3			14
Fairy Prion	4	5				28	10	4		7	58
Shearwater Sp. Unid.		2	2		1		1	7			13
Fleshy-footed Shearwater					3	1		1			5
Wedge-tailed Shearwater	2	1			4	18	3	19			47
Sooty Shearwater	1				1	4	5	3		1	15
Short-tailed Shearwater	71	2	13		72	402	201	123	138	451	1473
Fluttering Shearwater		2	1			8	5	3		1	20
Little Shearwater	4	4					1				9
White-faced Storm Petrel						6					6
Australian Gannet	5	1			1	1	3	1			12
Black Cormorant	1				1					1	3
White-tailed Tropic Bird	3	1									4
Southern Skua	1										1
Silver Gull					3	17	14	1	3	2	40
Arctic Tern							1	1			2
Common Tern							1				1
White-fronted Tern										1	1
Sooty Tern		2	6		1	10	1				20
Crested Tern	1		1		3	4	1	4		1	15
Common Noddy						1					1
Total	142	99	23		150	634	277	222	144	498	2189



TABLE IV

Details of the More Unusual Specimens Found in N. S. W. in 1973

Species	Date	Age/Sex	Wing	Bill	Measurements			Length	Locality	Collection	Collector
					Tarsus	Tail					
Grey-mantled Sooty Albatross	7/10/73	A ?	540	100	80	240	*	Evans Head	Released Alive	G. Bryant	
White-headed Petrel	10/7/73	? M	325	40.6	44.6	139	459	Bawley Point	AM 0.44723	C. Humphries	
White-headed Petrel	14/7/73	? M	310	*	45.7	138	447	Ballina	AM 0.44889	G. Fraser	
Black-winged Petrel	7/3/73	? ?	215	26	30	*	*	Durras	J. 7733	D. Bleach	
Brown-headed Petrel	3/11/73	? ?	286	34	43	139	*	Boatharbour	JW37311	F. Johnston	
Broad-billed Prion	8/7/73	I F	217	32.7	*	107	341	Cudmirrah	AM 0.44707	D. Sawyer	
Broad-billed Prion	11/7/73	I F	213	32.7	*	110	318	Botany Bay	AM 0.44708	R. Jones	
Thin-billed Prion	8/7/73	I F	180	25.0	*	79	263	North Avalon	AM 0.44709	D. Sawyer	
Thin-billed Prion	8/7/73	I F	177	24.4	*	82	285	Cudmirrah	AM 0.44710	D. Sawyer	
Thin-billed Prion	8/7/73	? M	180	25.6	*	75	288	Cudmirrah	AM 0.44711	D. Sawyer	
Fluttering Shearwater	23/6/73	? M	190	34.5	*	59	344	Wanda	AM 0.44713	D. Sawyer	
Little Shearwater	7/7/73	? ?	200	27	40	84	*	Wanda	J. 7737	F. Johnston	
Southern Skua	8/7/73	I F	441	56	90	169	565	Ballina	AM 0.44736	G. Fraser	
Arctic Tern	4/12/73	I F	255	28.8	15.5	135	*	Thirroul	GS 1.338	M. Crossland	
Sooty Tern	10/2/73	I ?	292	32	24	121	*	Bulli	GS 1.337	R. Draisma	
Sooty Tern	8/7/73	A F	291	44.5	21.8	*	405	Ballina	AM 0.44905	G. Fraser	
Common Noddy	18/1/73	? M	292	41.4	28	156	420	Dee Why	AM 0.44988	D. Sawyer	

KEY

\*..... Measurements not available.

AM..... Australia Museum Collection.

J..... F. Johnston's Collection.

GS..... Gibson &amp; Sefton's Collection.

## SEABIRDS FOUND DEAD IN SOUTH AUSTRALIA, TASMANIA, AND VICTORIA IN 1973

ALAN K. MORRIS

As the convenor of the beach survey section of the Australian Seabird Group, I received a number of beach survey forms from Victoria, South Australia and Tasmania for 1973. These reports have been summarised in the accompanying tables. However, it is hoped that in future years, separate reports will be prepared for each, particularly as it is beyond the scope of this author to comment on the importance or otherwise of the results obtained. No details of walks for the period January-May were received.

In Victoria beach survey forms were provided by Dr. K. Kerry (2) and Mrs. B. Temple-Watts (1). In line with previous practise, three zones have been recognised, each consisting of one degree of longitude. The zones are Portland ( $141^{\circ}$  -  $142^{\circ}$ ), Port Phillip ( $144^{\circ}$  -  $145^{\circ}$ E) and Mallacoota ( $149^{\circ}$  -  $150^{\circ}$ E). Nine seabirds of four species were found in 9 km travelled in Victoria.

In South Australia J.B. Cox (11) and Mrs. B. Temple-Watts (1) provided forms. Surveys totalling 116 km travelled were carried out in which 93 seabirds of 15 species were found. Three zones were patrolled viz Rapid Bay (Adelaide to Cape Jervis -  $35^{\circ}$ S -  $36^{\circ}$ S), Encounter Bay (Cape Jervis - Ewe Island  $138^{\circ}$  -  $139^{\circ}$ E) and Cape Banks (Beachport S.A. - Nelson Vic.  $140^{\circ}$  -  $141^{\circ}$ E).

In Tasmania, N.W. Shepherd provided details of 15 walks covering 52 km travelled during which time 73 seabirds of 8 species were found. Two zones are recognised viz Trial Harbour ( $41^{\circ}$  -  $42^{\circ}$ S) and Queenstown ( $42^{\circ}$  -  $43^{\circ}$ S). All the walks were carried out in the Queenstown zone with the exception of one in December in the Trial Harbour zone. The initials of each zone have been used in Table 1.

Table 1 lists the species found dead in each zone of South-east Australia whilst Table 11 gives details of the monthly mortality pattern. No birds found in the survey showed any degree of oil pollution. The high incidence of Silver-Grey Petrels *Fulmarus glacialisoides* being found dead in all south-east Australian States is of interest because of its rare status in this region (Serventy et al 1971 Handbook of Australian Sea-Birds pp. 86 - 87).



TABLE I

(a) List of Species Found Dead in Each Zone of South-east Australia.

Species	P	PP	M	Total Vic.	QU	TB	Total Tas.	CB	EB	RB	Total S. A.
Little Penguin					3		3		1	4	5
White-capped Albatross					2		2				
Unid. G. P.					1		1				
Silver-Grey Petrel			1	1	4		4	1		1	2
Cape Petrel		1		1							
Kerguelen Petrel										6	6
White-headed Petrel.										1	1
Dove Prion										17	17
Thin-billed Prion								1	4		5
Broad-billed Prion									1		1
Medium-billed Prion										20	20
Fairy Prion		1		1	7		7	1	2		3
Unid. Prion										6	6
Blue Petrel										1	1
Fleshy-footed Shearwater										1	1
Short-tailed Shearwater	6			6	28	20	48	3		14	17
Unid. Shearwater					7		7				
Common-Diving Petrel					1		1				
Pied Cormorant										1	1
Black-faced Cormorant										1	1
Silver Gull					1	1	2				

TABLE II

(b) Monthly Mortality of Seabirds in South-eastern Australia

Species	J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D	Total
Little Penguin						1			6	1			8
White-capped Albatross											2		2
Unid. G. P.									1				1
Silver-Grey Petrel								1	1	2	3		7
Cape Petrel										1			1
Kerguelen Petrel								1	5				6
White-headed Petrel										1			1
Dove Prion							1	14	2				17
Thin-billed Prion						1		3					5
Broad-billed Prion								1					1
Medium-billed Prion								17	3				20
Fairy Prion						1		2		4	3	1	11
Unid. Prion								2	4				6
Blue Petrel									1				1
Fleshy-footed Shearwater								1					1
Short-tailed Shearwater				11	3			1	2	4	19	31	71
Unid. Shearwater										7			7
Common-Diving Petrel.												1	1
Pied Cormorant									1				1
Black-faced Cormorant										1			1
Silver Gull											1	1	2
Monthly Totals	-	-	-	11	3	3	3	42	24	21	28	34	169

**BLACK TERN PHOTOGRAPHED IN INLAND NEW SOUTH WALES**

BEN MILLER AND CHRIS LALAS

In mid-May 1971 we were fortunate to inadvertently photograph the Black Tern *Chlidonias niger* at the Paroo channel in north-western New South Wales. The bird was thought when photographed to be a Whiskered Tern *C. hybrida* as scattered groups were feeding throughout the Paroo wetlands at the time. The photograph was taken through a 500 mm Hanimex lens at f8 - 125/second, hand held from a moving boat. This fact accounts for the indistinct "fuzzy" features caused by camera shake.

The Paroo channel is an inland stream which rises in the Moriarty Hills, about 126 km west of Charleville in south-west Queensland. It flows in a southerly direction, past the village of Hungerford (on the New South Wales/Queensland border) to lose itself in a series of swamps and lagoons in north-western New South Wales. In very wet years it continues past these to reach the Darling River near Wilcannia. During our visit the swamps were drying out following the flood earlier in the year. The photographs were taken near Wanaaring, 212 km west of Bourke.



A Black Tern near Wanaaring, May 1971. Photo - C. Lalas.

The bird appears to be a Black Tern in non-breeding or juvenile plumage, identified by the finger of black in front of the base of the wing. These plumages are very similar and differ only slightly in colour of back, bill, legs and degree of fork of the tail; all of which are indistinguishable in the black and white photograph.

The photograph was referred to Mr. D.I.M. Wallace, an editor of "British Birds" and Chairman of the Rarities Committee. Mr. Wallace is well known authority on *Chlidonias* terns. On 11 February, 1974, Mr. Wallace wrote -

"It is undoubtedly a *Chlidonias* tern and the plumage pattern shown is compatible only with *niger*. The shoulder mark is pronounced and the depth of the head cap is also indicative of *niger*. The bird is a sub-adult (and probably in *portlandica* \* phase plumage). The strong hint of black feathers on the flanks suggest a bird about one year old. The strongly marked under-wing is typical of *portlandica* in this species. The bill does look rather heavy but the angle of the photograph may be exaggerating this appearance, I do not consider that it bars identification of *niger*. There is no good reason to doubt that the bird is Australia's third Black Tern".

The Black Tern has a holarctic distribution, breeding in northern Europe, Asia and North America, migrating southwards to Chile in South America, Africa and South-east Asia. There are only two previous sight records of this Tern in Australia, one bird in nuptial plumage was observed by Bell (1959 Emu 59:62-3) on 18 September 1958 on a sandspit 90 km north of Sydney and another observed in non-breeding plumage near Newcastle on 13 January 1968 (Rogers, 1969 Emu 69:237-9).

Ferguson - Lees (1970 Birds of the World 4:1043) states that first and second year birds often summer in Africa instead of accompanying the adults that return to breed in Europe. This bird may have been overstaying in Australia although immatures of the very similar White-winged Black Tern *C.leucoptera* often do not depart northwards from the New South Wales central coast until May.

\* (Editor's Note: *Portlandica* phase plumage in *Sterna* and *Chlidonias* Terns is considered to be due to an uncompleted moult resulting in a contrast of old and new feathers. This may be the normal dress of terns during their period of breeding immaturity when the vast majority remain on or near the wintering grounds, at least during their first summer. See Scott and Grant (1969 British Birds 62:93-97) and Grant, Scott and Wallace (1971 British Birds 64:19-22).



We wish to acknowledge the assistance of A.K. Morris and D.I.M. Wallace in the preparation of this note.

MR. B. MILLER, *Zoology Department, University of Sydney, Glebe, N.S.W. 2006.*

MR. C. LASAS, *New Zealand.*

## THE FIRST SIGHT RECORD OF A WHITE-CAPPED NODDY IN N.S.W.

DAVID SAWYER

Hindwood (1970 *Emu* 70:32) recorded that I identified a White-capped Noddy, *Anous minutus*, dipping into foaming water near the outer rocks at Long Reef, 20 km north of Sydney on 8 February 1969. Since there were no previous records for these birds in New South Wales the record was held in suspense. On 15 March 1969 a specimen was collected by Mr. S. Goddard 10 km off Terrigal and was the subject of Hindwood's article. Subsequently, another specimen was taken at Forster on 3 April 1972 by Mr. J. Debert (Rogers 1973 *Birds* 7:99).

At the time of submitting the record I was only 16 years of age and lacked any experience in these matters. As time has proved me right and my observation could possibly have been the same bird that was collected by Goddard, notes on the observations are now submitted.

On 8 February 1969 the weather was unsettled with a north-east wind when I first observed this noddy at 1700 hours as it repeatedly dipped into foaming water at the eastern-most extremity of Long Reef. The bird was under observation for ten minutes using 8 x 40 binoculars at a distance of 10 m. Notes taken at the time describe the flight as very bouyant, constantly dipping to the surface. During the period of the observation no calls were heard. The white forehead and crown stood out very clearly from the rest of the plumage which was sooty blackish. The bill was black and the tail was of medium length for a tern and rather distinctly forked. The size of the bird appeared to be somewhat about that of a Common Tern *Sterna hirundo*, although it may have been smaller.

MR. D. SAWYER, *11 Perrey St., Collaroy Plateau, N.S.W. 2098.*

## A REVIEW OF THE RED-BACKED QUAIL IN SOUTH-EASTERN AUSTRALIA

M. D. BRUCE

The Red-backed Quail *Turnix maculosa* is represented by 14 subspecies from the southern Philippines, Celebes and Lesser Sunda Islands to eastern New Guinea and Guadalcanal (Sutter 1955). It has a disjunct range in Australia (two subspecies) mainly extending through the coastal areas of the north *pseutes* and east *melanota*. It is mostly found in the wetter coastal grasslands but its status is not well known. Storr (1973) noted that in Queensland it is rare south of the Herbert River.

In the south-eastern States it is also regarded as rare and the general southern limit of its range was considered to be the north-east of New South Wales, south to the Clarence River (McGill 1960). Since then four sightings have been recorded for N.S.W.: Broadwater-Wardell (Rogers 1972); Broadwater Beach (Hoskin pers. comm.); Tyagarah (McGill pers. comm.); and Diamond Head near Woolgoolga (Hobbs & Kaveney 1962). An enquiry by Mr. A.K. Morris (pers. comm.) has revealed some records for the Red-backed Quail from the Finley area, in the Riverina near the Victorian border, with two chicks taken and raised in captivity during early 1954 and subsequent sightings (Thomas in. litt.). It formerly occurred in the Sydney area with records for Botany, La Perouse and Randwick (North 1891; 1914) from 1864 to 1904 (Hindwood and McGill 1958; Hoskin pers. comm.). There are also two old records for Victoria: Mt. Dryden, near Stawell; and Dowling, near Ballarat (Wheeler 1967:10) where it is considered an accidental nomad. The Stawell record was of a nest (Howe 1928). An error in the type locality of the subspecies *melanota* lead to Tasmania being included in its range (Mayr 1938). The correct locality is Moreton Bay, Queensland and it apparently "does not occur in Tasmania at all" (Mayr 1944; cf. Sutter 1955).

I recorded this species along Hall's Lane, a turnoff about 12 km north-east of Braidwood, N.S.W. on 30 November 1973. A pair was flushed from thick grass cover and a clear, though brief, view was obtained of them. The distinctive and diagnostic rufous patch on the upper back of the female was unmistakable for this species. Also noted were, female:- contrasting blackish markings on the middle and lower back and rump, indication of small spots



on the sides of the upper breast (which has a pale rufous wash), whitish belly; male:- slightly smaller, no rufous patch and generally paler. Confusion with the Red-chested *T. pyrrothorax* and Little *T. velox* Quails is unlikely (cf. Morris 1971), as also with the larger Painted Quail *T. varia*, observed south of Braidwood (cf. Slater 1970). Previous field experience with *T. maculosa* in Timor, the study of captive birds in Taronga Zoo, Sydney and Adelaide Zoo and of specimens in the Australian Museum, Sydney, have confirmed my observations and notes for this record. I was accompanied by Dr. J.A. Broadbent at the time but he was not able to see the quails clearly.

Recent studies of the Red-chested Quail have shown that heavy summer and autumn rains result in large increases in their numbers. It was apparently during such times that Red-backed Quails were found in the Riverina area and the pair observed near Braidwood may have wandered from there. This species is undoubtedly more widespread than present records indicate. Its status in south-eastern Australia is probably that of a nomadic resident but normally in small numbers. The recent records for N.S.W., except one (July), cover November to January.

I thank Messrs. A.R. McGill and A.K. Morris for advice during the preparation of this note and Messrs. A.E.F. Rogers and G.D. Thomas for checking records of the species. Also, I thank Mr. H.J. deS. Disney for permission to examine specimens in the Australian Museum and Mr. E.S. Hoskin for consulting the records of the late Keith Hindwood.

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## THE WHITE-TAILED WARBLER IN THE SYDNEY DISTRICT

A.R. MCGILL

In my book (1970 Australian Warblers p.129) I remarked that the distribution of the White-tailed Warbler *Gerygone fusca* (probably better known as Western Warbler or Inland Warbler, although both names are erroneous and should be discontinued) occurred over most of that large part of Australia not occupied by the other eight Australian species of that genus and which are all limited to higher rainfall regions. However, there are still large gaps in its distribution, no doubt influenced by ecological factors, for small eucalypt growth seems essential to its requirements. Little has been recorded on its occurrence east of the Great Dividing Range in New South Wales.

Probably the first definite evidence in that area is for the upper Hunter River where it was found breeding by Hoskin (1957 *Emu* 57:289). However, on 3 March 1955, L.C. Haines, K.A. Hindwood and E.S. Hoskin, and over two years later, on 21 September 1957, Hindwood, Hoskin, S.G. Lane and R.P. Cooper saw a greyish plumaged

warbler near Plumpton which was thought to more closely resemble the Mangrove Warbler but could possibly have been a White-tailed Warbler. Full data on both records are given by Hindwood and McGill (1958 *The Birds of Sydney* p.111). J.N. Hobbs and M.T. Kaveney (1961 *Emu* 61:298) refer to records of it in the Belford National Forest near Branxton, first obtained in June 1959, and P.A. Bourke has since seen the species at Black Hill, close to Newcastle. On 8 December 1968, Wayne Longmore had a bird under observation for a few minutes "resembling the Inland Warbler with greyish plumage, white breast, white eyebrow and much white on the tail" at Scheyville.

The species can now be safely included in the Sydney bird records. On 16 January 1974 in company with Mrs. H.B. Gill of Innisfail, Queensland, a lone bird was kept under observation for a while in the Greendale area. The call-notes could be clearly distinguished and the amount and pattern of white on the tail were well seen several times in flight. E.S. Hoskin was in the same area a few days later and he took with him recordings of the White-tailed Warbler he had taped previously at Canberra. He did not hear or see the bird for a while after his arrival but very soon after playing the recorded calls one flew immediately to him from a patch of low eucalyptus growth a little distance away and at once became very agitated whilst the calls came over the recorder. Again good views were obtained and the call of the Greendale bird was clearly discernible.

I understand there is a recent Port Lincoln Peninsula (S.A.) breeding record, the first known occurrence in Melbourne has been published and it has bred at Canberra. So some extensions to the eastern and south coast of Australia indicates a "stretching out" in this normally "western" bird's range.

My appreciation to E.S. Hoskin for publishing his records and for forwarding required information from the "Keith Hindwood Bird Recording Service".

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