

Further Notes on the Breeding of the Little Blue Penguin

By E. W. HURSTHOUSE, Wellington, New Zealand

These notes on *Eudyptula minor* are supplemental to those appearing in *The Emu*, vol. xxxix, p. 15. No opportunity was afforded for recording any facts relating to the moulting of adult birds, as I intended: it was not until the birds made their first appearance on April 23, 1939, that it was realized they had moulted. That was later established when it was discovered where they had retired for this purpose. It was expected that the birds would have used their recent nesting place, but, because of the fact that they immediately visited the old nest, I am wondering if it is their usual custom to moult elsewhere. Throughout May, June, July, August and part of September they made periodical visits, sometimes being absent for two weeks, but always going to the old nesting site.

On the assumption that eggs would be laid during August, a close watch was kept, but it was not until September 16 that the first egg was laid—in an unexpected place—which resulted in a somewhat unusual experience for the birds. It was owing to my constant attention, no doubt, that the birds decided upon another nesting site, and it was only by the merest chance that it was discovered. As the place chosen was most inconvenient for constant and regular observation, I decided that I would remove the female and eggs to the old nest as soon as the second egg was laid. However, the nest with its one egg was deserted on the morning after the laying of the first egg.

With the possibility of losing a year's records there was but one course to adopt, and that was to remove the single egg, place it in the old nest, and trust to luck. That was done. At 9 p.m. on the same day, as there was no sign of the birds, a search was made, and the female found. It was caught and placed on the egg in the old nesting site. Next morning there was a second egg—and the chicks were ultimately reared without mishap.

As on the former occasion, daily notes were made for the whole period of nesting. These have revealed several variations from my previous records, due, perhaps, to the late sitting.

The items confirmed are:—

Time required for incubation—38 days.

First signs of moulting down—38 days after hatching.

During the weeks of incubation there were no long periods of sitting as last recorded, the longest by either bird being six days. Often the bird that had been relieved would spend most of the evening near the nest.

An amusing—and perhaps unusual—incident occurred during the sitting period, and it would be interesting to know if any similar happening in the Penguin family has previously been recorded. As mentioned before, daily observations were made; the first in the early morning. It was during one of these visits that I noticed several pieces of coloured seaweed on the back of the sitting bird and wondered how they got there. On another occasion a large leaf from the garden was beside the sitting bird. Noting that this had occurred when the male bird returned, I followed it up and found that every time he came to the nest he brought a garland of some kind, including, on the last visit before the chicks were hatched, two sprigs of a lovely little blue flower plucked from the garden. This “devotion” ceased as soon as the chicks were hatched.

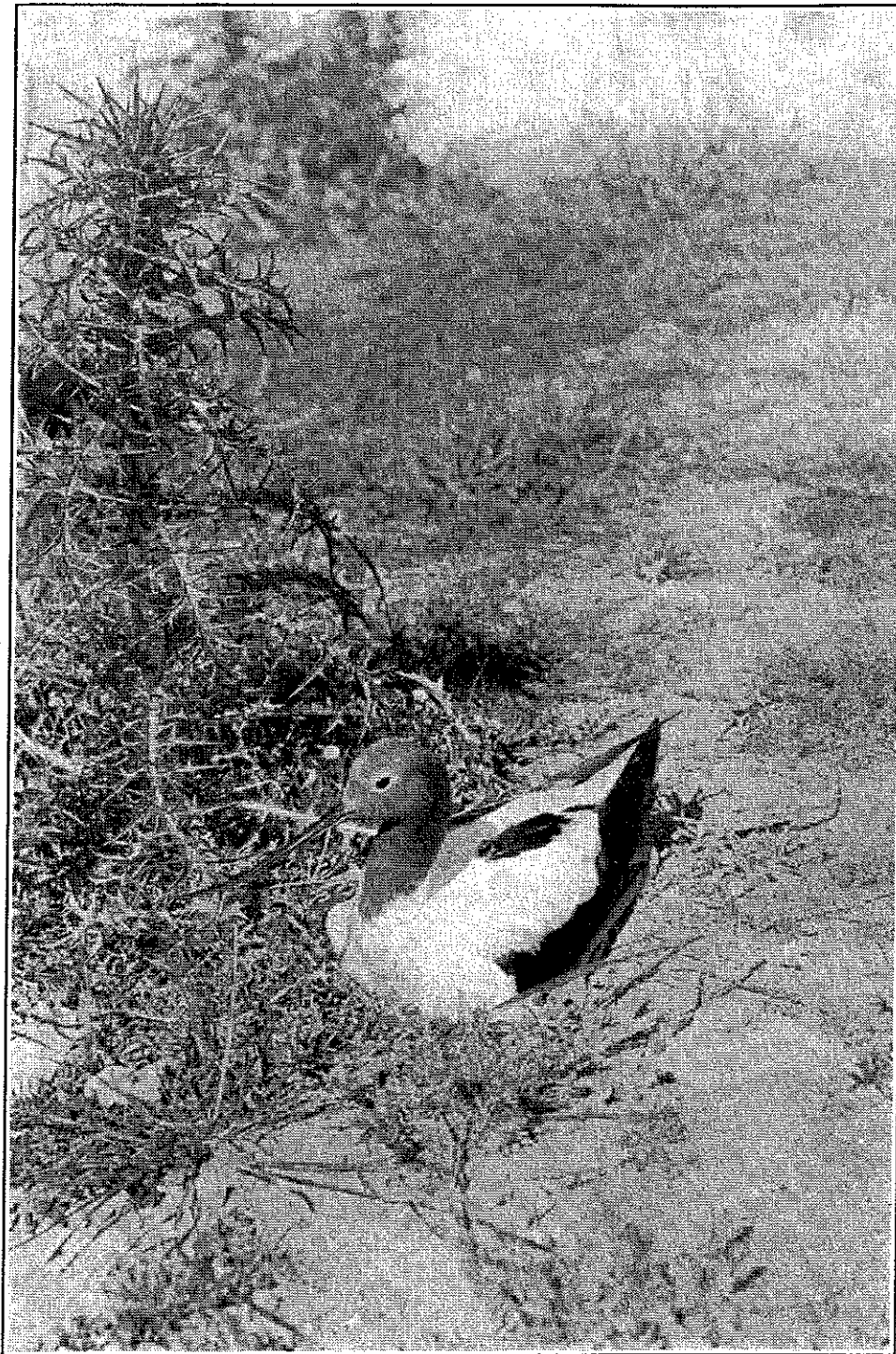
The only new item of interest to record in the life of the chicks is that during the first day, and possibly the second day also, they take their food from the *side* of the parent's bill. On the third day they put their heads inside the bill. No records were obtained on the second day.

All observations during this nesting period were made close up without the aid of electric light and reflector as before, although, of course, it was necessary to use an electric torch. No photographs of the feeding were obtained as the requisite flash-light was not available, but some photographs were taken in daylight.

One picture was taken, when the chicks were twelve days old, of the chicks and the male bird, but owing to the colour of the down on the chicks is not very clear. Another photograph which was taken the day before the chicks left and when they were 90 days old, shows that there was still a considerable amount of down not shed, and it was on that account that I did not expect them to leave for several days, so that I missed further photographs that I intended taking. In the former case that I recorded there was practically no down left when the birds went to sea.

As on the other occasion the parent birds did not come in to feed the chicks on the evening prior to their leaving. That may be their indication for the chicks to leave for the sea. This time both birds left on the same evening. My attention being drawn to an unusual call, I looked in at the nest and found that one bird had left. I immediately made an intensive search for it but without result. That was at 10.15 p.m., and the second bird left during the night.

There is no doubt that the Little Blue Penguin is a wily bird, as again this season I was never able to observe either adult bird coming to the nest. On several occasions I found them hiding in a culvert at the gate, where they would remain for hours before going to the nest. That may have been done to give them time to prepare the food for the



Avocet brooding.

Photo. by A. J. Elliott.

chicks, as late feeding did not happen until the chicks were three weeks old.

From observations so far made of the habits of the Little Blue Penguin, I am forced to the conclusion that not until these birds have been studied over a lengthy period will it be possible to establish definitely their general habits, particularly those relating to the rearing of their young.

Birds at Lake Midgeon

By A. J. ELLIOTT, Cambewarra, New South Wales

At the termination of the 1939 R.A.O.U. Camp at Leeton several of us proceeded to Lake Midgeon, near Narrandera. A number of birds was seen that had not been observed at or around the camp, and a brief account of such species follows. The party then returned to Leeton and revisited some of the swamps. A note or two on birds seen there are also included.

Hoary-headed Grebe (*Podiceps poliocephalus*).—A party of five (at least) frequented a small lagoon on Midgeon Station, but showed no indication of nesting during our stay.

Gull-billed Tern (*Gelochelidon nilotica*).—A pair was seen flying past at Tuckerbil Swamp, Leeton, on October 2, 1939.

Banded Plover (*Zonifer tricolor*).—One party of over twenty birds frequented the vicinity of one lagoon on Midgeon, and a few birds were noted elsewhere thereabouts.

Avocet (*Recurvirostra novaehollandiae*).—A few pairs were nesting on small islands in a lagoon near Lake Midgeon. On the closer to the shore of a pair of islets there were two nests with four eggs each, and also one stray egg. On the other islet there were three nests; the young hatched in one of these before we left, although laying had not been completed in another when first observed. A brood of young was also seen and photographed on the margin of the swamp, but we failed to locate the nest in which they had hatched. A further nest was a mile or more from these groups on an islet at the far end of the swamp. This bird resembles the Stilt in habits but is much more versatile, being equally at home in air, water or on land.

Australian Snipe (*Gallinago hardwicki*).—A solitary bird was observed on the edge of a lagoon on Midgeon Station on September 24.

Yellow-billed Spoonbill (*Platalea flavipes*).—Mr. Ellis McNamara located one nest near the margin of Lake Midgeon; it held well-grown young.

White-necked Heron (*Notophojx pacifica*).—A few nests, with eggs, were located in the lake close to the homestead on Midgeon Station.