

## NESTING OF THE SOOTY SHEARWATER IN AUSTRALIA

The first recorded breeding of the Sooty Shearwater *Puffinus griseus* in Australia was reported by Rohu (1914). He collected a specimen and "eggs" on 29 December 1912 on Broughton Island, NSW. A check of the H.L. White Collection in the National Museum, Melbourne, revealed that a "clutch of one egg ..." was collected. Since that first report a number of published records have appeared; all refer to islands off New South Wales and Tasmania.

In New South Wales, the Sooty Shearwater has also been recorded breeding on Lion Island (Keast & McGill 1948), Little Broughton Island (Hindwood & D'Ombra 1960), Montague Island (Robinson 1964), Bird Island (Lane 1965), Boondelbah Island (Morris *et al.* 1973), Bowen Island (Lane 1975a), Tollgate Islands (McKean & Fullagar 1976) and Cabbage Tree Island (Fullagar 1976).

In 1979, the recorded breeding islands for the Sooty Shearwater in New South Wales were summarised (Lane 1979) and a breeding population of 250 pairs was estimated. The species may breed on other islands. It was found on the surface at night on Mutton Bird Island in 1969 (Lane 1970) and one, found there in a burrow by G. Holmes in 1975 (in Rogers 1976), "had well developed brood patches but no egg was present". Birds were also recorded in burrows on South Solitary Island in 1974 (Lane 1975b) but again no eggs were located. Some publications incorrectly record the species breeding on the Five Islands (Lane 1979).

Keast & McGill (1948) indicated, from perusal of pertinent literature "...that the species usually selects the higher and more secluded parts of an island for its colonies...". Although most burrows on Lion Island were on the high, eastern end, over 100 m above the sea, for some years one pair had a burrow on the scree slopes below the cliff, probably less than 10 m above the water. On Bowen Island the burrows are located around the lower western shore line about 3 to 7 m above the high water mark.

In Tasmania, the Sooty Shearwater breeds regularly on Courts and Tasman Islands in the south-eastern part of the state. Specimens from these islands have been lodged with the Tasmanian Museum. Details of the records were published by Wood Jones (1936), Sharland (1946), Robinson (1964) and Brothers (1979a). Also, Brothers (pers. comm.) recorded a pair nesting on Hippolyte Rocks during the 1980-1981 breeding season. These constitute the only confirmed Tasmanian records at this stage.

Additional breeding islands were given by Serventy *et*

*al.* (1971) who listed Little Witch Island (Flat Witch Island in the Maatsuyker Group), Flat (Mutton Bird) Island, Breaksea Island and Green (Hobbs) Island as breeding stations; these locations were published on information received from C. Pitt, a former Surveyor-General and Secretary for Lands in Tasmania, in March 1947. Pizzey (1980) also listed these locations except that he recorded Maatsuyker Island as the breeding station apparently instead of Flat Witch Island in the Maatsuyker Group. No doubt his source of information was that already published.

The additional locations supplied by Pitt all occur in south-western Tasmania and, at the time of his report, very little was known about the distribution of these birds in this area. In those days, most reports originated from fishermen, or lighthouse-keepers stationed on Maatsuyker Island. Sharland's record (Sharland 1981) that the Sooty Shearwater is "known to breed on Maatsuyker Island" was passed on to him by local fishermen J. Davidson and T. Geeves in February 1963.

However, surveys conducted since then have failed to substantiate any of the records from this area although all of the islands concerned were visited by at least one of a number of observers including Brothers (1979b), R.H. Green (Green & Mollison 1961), D.R. Milledge (1972, in White 1981, and Milledge & Brothers 1976) and by one of us (White 1979a, b and 1981).

The observations carried out, particularly on Maatsuyker Island and Flat Island were very extensive. In addition, Denison King, a keen ornithologist who has spent all but a few years living in south-western Tasmania since 1933, is also unaware of any nesting in the area by this species.

Accordingly, there must be some doubt about the recorded nesting of the Sooty Shearwater in south-western Tasmania. Nor has nesting been reported on the numerous islands through Bass Strait, despite extensive surveys on the Short-tailed Shearwater *P. tenuirostris* in that area. However, sightings can be expected as far as south-western Australia (Fullagar & van Tets 1976) as these birds are known to travel long distances from their nesting islands in search of food.

There is little doubt that the Sooty Shearwater will be found nesting on other islands in Australia in the future; this is possible in New South Wales but more likely in Victoria and Tasmania where less survey work has been done so far. At present there are no records from Victorian islands, but Gabo Island and some of the islands off Wilsons Promontory are likely possibilities.

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# AN EARLIER DATE FOR THE ARRIVAL IN AUSTRALIA OF JOHN GOULD'S "A SYNOPSIS OF THE BIRDS OF AUSTRALIA AND THE ADJACENT ISLANDS".

The Queensberry Hill Press published in 1979 a beautiful facsimile of John Gould's "A Synopsis of the Birds of Australia". My good friend and Gouldiana colleague, Allan McEvey, contributed a detailed "Note on Synopsis". Under McEvey's reference note 5, is the following statement: "Part 2 of the Synopsis appeared in April not January 1837 as printed on the contents issued with bound sets after 1840. Apart from the date printed in the wrapper, John Gould wrote to Sir William Jardine on Feb. 27, 1837 commenting "The Beagle is commissioned and will sail in a month or so. I am preparing a few copies of the 2nd part of the Synopsis purposely that they may be taken out with them" ... The Beagle under Captain J.C. Wickham arrived in Australian waters in December, 1837. (*Aust. Dict. Biog.* Vol. 2 p. 489). It is probable therefore that Gould's first illustrated plates of Australian birds arrived in the Colony before Gould himself". (The February 27, 1837 let-

ter from Gould to Sir William Jardine is in the Newton Library, Zoology Department, Cambridge, Mr Ron Hughes, Librarian).

In the University of Kansas Spencer Library-Ellis Collection is item Ellis Aves E62 which is the "Synopsis" in the original four parts as issued. Part I is dated January 1937 on the wrapper, Part II is dated April 1837, and Parts III and IV are both dated April 1838. The dates of issue are the same as McEvey stated.

The aspect of McEvey's note that is of interest, is the final sentence "It is probable therefore that Gould's first illustrated plates of Australian birds arrived in the Colony before Gould himself".

In the process of compiling material for my book on the life of John Gould (1804-1881), I have accumulated