

The Mutton-Bird Rookeries on Phillip Island.

(Observations by the Council of the Aust. O.U.)

DURING the camp-out of the Aust. O.U. on Phillip Island last November, the following observations were made, and are thought worthy of record. Although the camp was pitched at the Narrows rookery, where continuous field observations were made for a week, all the other principal rookeries were visited by one or other of the members of Council.

(1.) Generally, there appears no decrease in the number of Mutton-Birds that annually visit the island. On the contrary, they seem to be on the increase—a statement some of the islanders are prepared to back by affidavit. For instance, there used to be a good interval of barren ground extending between the Cape (Wollomai) rookeries and that of the Narrows. Now the whole distance between these localities may be described as an intermittent rookery. Again, eggs were taken from burrows on the shores of Cat Bay, where the birds were not known to lay before.

(2.) In view of the island becoming a more favoured locality for eggging, and consequently for the increasing number of eggers, it is recommended—in favour of the landowners as well as the birds—that no opening of burrows to obtain eggs be allowed—*i.e.*, if the egg in any particular burrow cannot be withdrawn with an ordinary eggging crook, it be left, and not to open the burrow by removing sand. The displacement of sand or the uprooting of any vegetation about the burrows is liable to cause sand drifts, and drifts grow into dunes, which sometimes envelop everything before them, as is demonstrated on different parts of the coast. Where sand drifts are occurring from this or other cause, the Government—or, in case of private property, the landowners—might be induced to plant Marram grass, which grows well wherever already planted on the island.

(3.) The plan adopted by Mr. C. W. Maclean, Chief Inspector of Fisheries, of registering the names and addresses of eggers last season worked well. The very fact of having to “register” one’s name seemed to keep away the rough element that was reported to have visited the rookeries the previous season. Over 200 names of eggers and visitors were registered at either Cowes or San Remo. Next season a step further might be taken, and eggers be asked to furnish a return of their takings. Such a total return may be found useful for future reference if it were found necessary to regulate the traffic by not allowing persons or parties to take more than a prescribed number of eggs.

(4.) It is also recommended that eggging operations cease on the last day of November in each year. This will give eggers a week or 10 days to collect—ample time.

(5.) It was observed with satisfaction that the local police

(Constable Dunn, of Cowes, and Constable O'Shannassy, of San Remo) in plain clothes assiduously patrolled the various rookeries during egging time.

(6.) By way of conclusion, it may be mentioned that some consternation was caused among the visitors by the discovery on the west side of Wollomai of a vast number of old bird bones. It has been explained that many years ago Chinese were camped there, and were engaged in collecting Mutton-Birds for oil. Such an eventuality could not occur again without a permit.

On behalf of the Council,

D. LE SOUËF,

Hon. Secretary Aust. O.U.

Melbourne, 21/1/03.
