

## A Trip to Seal Island, near Jurien Bay, W.A.

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On previous camping and fishing expeditions to the coast, I had noted numbers of Rock Parrots (*Neophema petrophila*) on the locally-named Seal Island, also numbers of burrows of a Petrel. In each instance, this was in either February or March, but even then an odd burrow contained a young Petrel covered in greyish down.

On this trip we left Moora on Sunday, November 23, 1930, a very hot day, with an easterly wind. During the afternoon the wind suddenly swung to the west, and blew strongly. We camped that night at a well 64 miles from Moora. A *Zosterops* was flushed from the thick, bushy end of a red gum bough as I went to the well for water. She was sitting on three slightly-incubated eggs. This is the latest I have found this species breeding. Next morning we woke to find it rough and inclined to drizzle. We ran on the remaining 24 miles to Sandy Cape, where we camped for a week.

The weather turned cold and stormy, with light driving showers for two days, and remained rough until the Friday. During the rough weather I scouted round near camp, and found to my surprise, a nest of a black and white Swallow (*Cheramæca leucosterna*) in a sandbank within 20 yards of the sea. In previous years a pair of Sacred Kingfishers (*Halcyon sanctus*) had nested there. In the scrub on the Coastal sandhills were Emu Wren (*Stipiturus*), Spotted Scrub-Wrens (*Sericornis maculatus*), Rock Field-Wrens (*Calamanthus montanellus*), (Sandplain Wren would be a much more suitable name), Blue and White Wrens (*Malurus cyanotus*), and one of the Chestnut-shouldered Wrens. Along the shore one sees Whimbrel (*Numenius phaeopus*), Grey Plover (*Squatarola squatarola*), Stints, Dotterels, both Gulls, Cormorants, and several varieties of Terns, Pied Oyster-Catcher (*Haematopus ostralegus*), Reef Heron (*Demigretta sacra*), Osprey (*Pandion haliaëtus*), and occasionally a pair of Sea Eagles (*Haliaeetus leucogaster*).

Saturday morning broke fine with an east wind, which calmed the sea down. After breakfast I set off for Seal Island, four miles south, and waded across the reef without any trouble. I tried my hand at fishing, but the sport was poor, so I explored the island. Gulls had nested on the south-west corner, and there were several nests containing broken egg-shells. Rock Parrots were numerous where the rock outcropped from the sand. The Rock is mostly covered with mesembryanthemum, and an indigenous

scrubby bush. Parrots came out from many places. I found four nests. The first contained one egg just chipping, the second four young almost ready to fly, the next two young in down, and the last three young about half-fledged. Numbers of young birds were following their parents and clamouring to be fed. While looking for Rock Parrots nests I put my arm into a hole in the solid rock, and felt around various tunnels. Suddenly a finger was seized, and withdrawing my arm as rapidly as possible, I found a Petrel adhering to the said finger. Examination proved it to be *Puffinus pacificus*. When thrown high into the air, it flew out to sea, just skimming the waves. I felt in again and found an egg which had been badly dented in the fracas. It was quite fresh. A few more nests were examined before leaving for camp, much to the annoyance of each occupant.

I returned next morning, and this time I went carefully over the island. At a rough estimate it is about three acres in area. It is mostly covered with a thick, scrubby, green bush, under which the Petrels burrow. On the north-west corner there is a small patch of saltbush. Wherever bushes were growing, the sand was honeycombed with Petrel burrows, and one was continually breaking through into them. Most burrows examined contained a bird sitting on its single white egg, but in about one-tenth of the burrows the bird had not laid. This was on November 30. In one instance, a burrow I broke into with one foot contained two birds. One rushed out, gave several peculiar hops, landed on a bush, and flew off. The other stayed inside uttering its peculiar call, and fought like the proverbial Kilkenny cat when I examined the burrow. It had not laid. In each instance that a burrow was opened out, I found that the nesting chamber was not at the end, but varied from 18 to 30 inches from the end, and from two to five feet from the entrance.

On the south side of the island is a very narrow gutter overgrown with bushes. In this I found several birds nesting under slabs of rock, with no pretence to a burrow. While examining this gutter a pair of Reef Herons flew over very low down. One was quite dark, but the other would have passed for *Notophox novae-hollandiae*, except for the absence of the white face. Several Petrels were thrown into the air. Odd birds flew off, but the others fell to the ground and scurried away under bushes and hid, but avoided going into other burrows. There is a small triangular-shaped promontory just north of the north-head of Jurien Bay, and on this the Petrels nested until recent years. It is connected to the mainland by a low narrow neck of sand, with its base facing the sea. On each corner of the base is an Osprey's nest, one of which was used last season. I was first on it in March, 1928, and then I found about 20 fairly fresh Petrel burrows, and the skeletons of

several Petrels. Possibly, they had been captured by a pair of White-bellied Sea Eagles, which are occasionally seen in the vicinity. It is now deserted by the Petrels. Foxes are now plentiful, and, no doubt, they have killed off the birds which nested there.

From the camp at Sandy Cape to the north head of Jurien Bay, a distance of seven miles, are the sites of eight Ospreys' nests, several however, are very old, and have not been used for years. Owing to the absence of trees close to the coast, several pairs of Ravens have built their nests on small ledges and crevices on the cliffs, both at Sandy Cape, and the North Head of Jurien Bay.

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**Notes on Cuckoos.**—An unusually large number of double Cuckoo combinations have been discovered by Sydney ornithologists during the breeding season now terminating (January, 1931). No less than five such combinations have been observed, some of which probably have the distinction of being unique. When seeking reasons for this curious phenomenon, there arise two questions: Is there a superabundance of Cuckoos about Sydney this season or, on the other hand, is there a comparative scarcity of suitable foster-parents?

My own observations suggest that the common passerine birds nesting appear to be less numerous (especially migratory visitors from the north), but the occurrences of all species of Cuckoos—with the possible exception of the Fan-tailed Cuckoo (*Cacomantis flabelliformis*)—are exceedingly rarer also.

The Yellow-throated Scrub-Wren (*Sericornis lathamii*) and the Fan-tailed Cuckoo furnish rather an interesting point in this respect, for, of over 50 nests examined during the 1929-30 season, only one contained the egg of a Cuckoo, whilst among the 30 nests examined during the current season, no less than five Fan-tailed Cuckoos' eggs were discovered. This may suggest that the Fan-tailed Cuckoo, finding that the more difficultly-located nests of the White-browed Scrub-Wren (*S. frontalis*) and Rock Warbler (*Origma rubricata*) were much scarcer than previously, has resorted more to the more openly-situated Yellow-throats' nests for its parasitic attentions.

The combinations previously referred to are as follows:—

(a) 2 Brown Thornbill (*Acanthiza pusilla*); 1 Fan-tailed Cuckoo (*Cacomantis flabelliformis*); 1 Golden Bronze Cuckoo (*Lamprolaima placens*).

NOTES:—(R. Gannon's), 21-9-30. Eggs were present; nest appeared to have been deserted. Entrance slightly larger than normally. 27-9-30. Nest deserted; nest and contents collected.