

# The Breeding of the Sooty Shearwater on Courts Island, Tasmania, and Montagu Island, N.S.W.

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The Sooty Shearwater, *Puffinus griseus*, which is the Mutton-bird of New Zealand, is by no means uncommon around the coastal waters of south-eastern Australia, and wave-cast specimens are often to be found on the beaches of New South Wales, Victoria, and Tasmania. It is, however, so similar in appearance to the Short-tailed Shearwater, *P. tenuirostris*, the common Mutton-bird of Tasmania and Victoria, that its presence is likely to be overlooked.

In reporting the breeding of the Sooty Shearwater on Tasman Island, off south-east Tasmania, Wood Jones (1936) suggested that, due to the confusion arising from the similarity of the two species, further breeding colonies may have been missed, and that assumption has been borne out by subsequent evidence of breeding pairs on Lion Island (Keast & McGill 1948; McGill 1954; Lane 1962), and on Broughton Island, N.S.W. (Hindwood & D'Ombrian 1960). The presence of *griseus* on Tasman Island was further confirmed by Sharland (1946) from a specimen lodged with the Tasmanian Museum.

No further reports of breeding on the islands around Tasmania have since been made but its presence is known to many local mutton-birders who recognise it by its size as the "King Mutton Bird", and Dr D. L. Serventy (personal communication) was informed in March 1947 by Mr C. Pitt, Surveyor General and Secretary for Lands in Tasmania, that the "King Mutton Bird" nested on Flat Island and Courts Island.

I visited Courts Island on November 28, 1961, to make a recording of the calls of the Short-tailed Shearwater. The island is situated off the southern tip of Bruny Island and can be reached by wading at low tide. It contains a large breeding colony of Short-tailed Shearwaters. Shortly after recording had commenced a Sooty Shearwater was heard and recorded and subsequently

TABLE 1

Measurements of adult *P. griseus* from Courts Island

	Sex	Culmen	Wing	Tail	Tarsus	Middle Toe and Claw
Bird A	♂	44.7	301(1) 298(r)	86	56	66(1)
Bird B	♀	39.2	285(1) 281(r)	90	53	62(r)

two birds were captured. Measurements of these birds are given in Table 1. An egg measured 73 x 47 mm.

Only four individuals were heard and recorded during the night and though only about one third of the rookery was investigated it seems unlikely that there are many nesting pairs in this colony. Calls were infrequent and of low intensity in contrast to the loud and continuous clamour of the numerically superior Short-tailed Shearwaters.

On March 25, 1962, whilst checking the identity of young Shearwaters in a mixed colony of Short-tailed Shearwaters and Wedge-tailed Shearwaters, *P. pacificus*, on Montagu Island, N.S.W., I found two young birds which were evidently Sooty Shearwaters. The legs of these birds were very dark on the outside, pink-flesh colour on the inside, and the feet dark under. Outer wing feathers and tail feathers were very dark and the tail was not wedge shaped. Both birds were still covered with down and feathers were not very well developed. Measurements are given in Table 2.

TABLE 2

Measurements and weights of nestling *P. griseus* from Montagu Island.

Burrow No.	Band No.	Culmen	Weight
40	160-14467	40 mm	3 lb.
52	160-14479	42.9 mm	4 lb.

Both of these birds were in marked burrows that had been occupied during the previous two years by Short-tailed Shearwaters. This particular breeding colony, which now contains three species of Shearwaters and several Fairy Penguins, *Eudyptula minor*, has now been under close observation for three successive years, and this is the first occasion that the Sooty Shearwater has been seen or heard on the island. Basset Hull (1912) reported only Wedge-tailed Shearwaters, and it was not until 1960 that a well-established colony of Short-tailed Shearwaters was found on the southern section of the island (Robinson 1962).

These three dark Shearwaters are very similar in appearance and easily confused, and it is possible that a further search may reveal more individuals of the Sooty Shearwater in one of the other Shearwater colonies on the island. Burrow examination is, however, a very time-consuming operation, and it is proposed to use the very distinctive calls of the three species to obtain a more extensive measure of their distribution throughout the island. A tape recording has been prepared and copies are available from

the Library of Animal Sounds of the Division of Wildlife Research, C.S.I.R.O., Canberra, for use by ornithologists wishing to use this means of identification.

## REFERENCES

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Manuscript received June 25, 1963.

**Breeding of water-birds near Mt. Isa, Qld.**—After a number of unsuccessful trips to Lake Moondarra (Leichhardt Dam) this year I discovered a small colony of Caspian Terns, *Hydroprogne caspia*, and Silver Gulls, *Larus novaehollandiae*, on December 8. As the dam level falls during the dry season small islands are uncovered; these are mostly stony knolls that quickly get a cover of low, fleshy-leafed weed.

On the above date there were 50 or 60 Terns on the dam, together with 10 or 12 Silver Gulls. Nests were found on a small island 100 yd from the shore, the island being about 50 yd by 20 yd in area and the highest point 3 ft above water level. A search revealed two nests, with two eggs each, of the Tern and three almost fully-feathered Silver Gulls. The Terns' nests were on open stony patches in the centre of the island and about 2 ft above water level. There was evidence of several other abandoned nests and one dried-out broken egg with an almost fully-formed chick and one dead fledgling.

On an adjacent island I discovered an old egg of the White-headed Stilt, *Himantopus leucocephalus*, and the number of Stilts in immature plumage in the area suggested that they had used these islands earlier. However, Stilts are still nesting in other sections of the dam as I found nests with eggs in late November and again on December 1.

A nest with two eggs of the Red-capped Dotterel, *Charadrius alexandrinus*, was also found on December 1, in the same area as the Stilts were nesting.—R. K. CARRUTHERS, Mt. Isa, Qld., 15/12/62.