

Bird-ringing at Heard Island during 1949

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In 1947 a research station was established at Heard Island (53°01'S, 73°23'E) by the Australian Government, and the authors spent twelve months at the island in 1949 as members of the Australian National Antarctic Research Expedition carrying out biological research.

Bird-ringing was one of the activities commenced. Southern petrels, for example *Pachyptila desolata*, the Dove Prion, *Macronectes giganteus*, the Giant Petrel, and *Daption capense*, the Cape Pigeon, are occasionally taken along the southern coast of Australia, and as large numbers nest on Heard Island, it was decided to ring them and find the extent of their migrations.

A thousand bird rings were supplied by Dr. D. L. Serventy (C.S.I.R.O., Fisheries Division). These rings were of flat copper on which were stamped 'Notify Fauna Board, Hobart, Tas.,' and a four figure number. The numbers ranged from 5000 to 5999. The rings were annealed before use, so that they could be easily rolled around the birds' legs.

Owing to the pressure of other biological work, only 148 birds were ringed during 1949. Of these, 59 were Dove Prions (*Pachyptila desolata*), one was *Pachyptila crassirostris*, 42 were Giant Petrels (*Macronectes giganteus*), 18 were Black-browed Albatrosses (*Diomedea melanophris*), 16 were South Georgian Diving Petrels (*Pelecanoides georgicus*) and 12 were Cape Pigeons (*Daption capense*).

Wherever possible, measurements were taken at the same time as ringing, although in the field lack of time or bad weather sometimes did not permit this.

Pachyptila desolata. Dove Prion.

Very large numbers of these nested in burrows in ice-free headlands (see later report on all Heard Island birds for details). Many burrows were close to the expedition camp, and in late March and early April, before the autumn migration, the birds were often attracted and dazzled by the camp lights when they came in from the sea at night. This seemed to happen more often on calm nights in drizzling rain. The birds were easily picked up by expedition members and brought to the biology laboratory to be ringed and measured. Of the 59 ringed, 58 were in adult plumage, whilst one had not completed moulting and still had a little down attached.

Pachyptila crassirostris. Thick-billed Prion.

These were much less common than *P. desolata*, as out of 60 prions taken around the camp, for ringing, only one was *P. crassirostris*. This adult was taken at night in the camp, ringed, measured, and released again.

Macronectes giganteus. Giant Petrel.

These were plentiful, but more difficult to ring. Chicks almost ready to fly were the most often ringed. In the spring some nesting adults could be caught, but their razor-sharp beaks made ringing difficult. The rings supplied were not made for such large birds, so a hole was drilled at both ends of each ring which was fastened around the leg by means of copper wire.

Thirty-two of the forty-two ringed were chicks almost moulted to the first dark juvenile plumage, but still unable to fly. Nine others were breeding adults, and the last was a young bird so gorged with seal meat that it was unable to fly.

Daption capense. Cape Pigeon.

These were less accessible, nesting generally in cliff ledges. Twelve breeding adults were ringed.

Diomedea melanophris. Black-browed Albatross.

Here again rings had to be extended to fit around the leg. When the only accessible rookery, 600 feet above the sea on cliff ledges, was visited on March 25, the chicks were sufficiently grown for the adults to spend most of their time at sea, so no adults were ringed. Chicks were in various stages of moult to first plumage, but none had completed moulting or were able to fly.

Only 18 could be reached for ringing.

Pelecanoides georgicus. South Georgian Diving-Petrel.

These nested in burrows, many of which were close to camp, so that they were often taken with *Pachyptila desolata* fluttering amongst camp huts at night in late March and early April. Sixteen adults taken this way were ringed.

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None of these ringed birds was taken again in 1949, but a crudely-ringed Giant Petrel (*Macronectes giganteus*) was shot while flying over Atlas Cove on January 22, 1950. Nine turns of copper wire had been wound around the left tarsus, 18 inches of wire being used, being wound too tightly, so that part of the flesh rotted away, exposing bone in front. Above and below the wire were large swellings. The foot was partially paralysed. The previous Heard Island A.N.A.R.E. party was consulted but had not ringed

this bird, so that the ringing must have been carried out elsewhere.

This bird was a mature male, weight 155 ozs., wing (carpal to tip of longest primary) 538 mm., tail 177 mm., culmen 98.2 mm. long (tip of unguis to base of culminicorn) and 33.7 mm. wide at maximum point. Tarsus 99 mm. Mid-toe with claw 140 mm. Plumage light brown except for white head and neck with a few flecks of brown on top of head.

Ringling of petrels on Heard Island is being continued during 1950 by the relieving biologists.

Should any of these ringed birds be found, it would be appreciated if the ring at least, and the bird if possible, with full notes including locality and date, were sent to the Fauna Board, Hobart, Tasmania, or to the Australian National Antarctic Research Expedition, Albert Park Barracks, Victoria. If the bird is released again, the ring number with the notes should be sent.

A record of the species, with the date and location of ringling, will be sent for the interest of the finder, if requested.

Rufous Song-Lark.— To-day (July 24) the Rufous Song-Lark is singing gaily. This is the first time I have heard this songster on the lowlands in July, though it is commonly heard when conditions are favourable in the warm, grassed, partly-timbered valleys a couple of miles distant. The Rufous Song-Lark is never more than a local migrant in this district and can be seen at most times throughout the winter months, usually returning to nesting sites in August. The Brown Song-Lark, on the other hand, leaves the district and is perhaps a true migrant, though the possibility that this bird also retires to warm valleys in other districts must not be discounted. Last year these birds were heard here early in August.

This is a remarkable season here (central-west New South Wales), with summer, autumn and winter rains assuming record proportions. Our annual average rain is 23 inches, but to date we have had 37 inches and 20 points. The comparative mildness of the weather to date has resulted in many species of birds building out of season. A Noisy Miner was observed yesterday brooding in a black wattle near the house, whilst Welcome Swallows were also observed beginning building operations.—GEO. W. ALTHOFER, Dripstone, N.S.W., 24/7/50.