

## A Tasmanian Nesting Note on the White-breasted Sea-Eagle

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Notes relating to the repeated and continuous use of a fixed nesting site are not uncommon, especially with regard to the White-breasted Sea-Eagle (*Haliaeetus leucogaster*). Nevertheless I feel that the following detail is worth placing on record.

In the zoological collection of the late M. W. Harrison, now in the care of the Hobart Museum, is a set of two eggs of *H. leucogaster*, the accompanying data of which state that they were taken on Walker Island, north-west coast of Tasmania, by E. D. Atkinson, on 2/10/1892, and were received by Harrison through A. J. North.

During the first week in November 1957 Dr. Duncan McDonald, M.B.O.U., and I commenced an eight-day ornithological survey of the north-west coast and off-shore islands. On November 3 we landed on and set out on foot to circle Walker Island, which is situated near the north-west tip of Tasmania and consists of about eight hundred acres of low undulating country, covered, in parts, by dense coastal scrub, but completely void of trees.

On the circuit we obtained breeding records of Red-capped and Hooded Dotterels, Pied and Sooty Oyster-catchers, Little Blue Penguin, Pacific Gull, and on an off-shore rock, Silver Gull and White-breasted Cormorant.

The greatest thrill of all, however, was the finding of a nest of the Sea-Eagle, placed on a rocky outcrop on the north side of the island. The nest was first seen from a small beach about seventy-five yards seaward, and our excitement and anticipation were intense as we forced our way up through the thick coastal scrub to the summit of the cliff about one hundred feet above the sea, from where we could approach the nest with ease from the landward side.

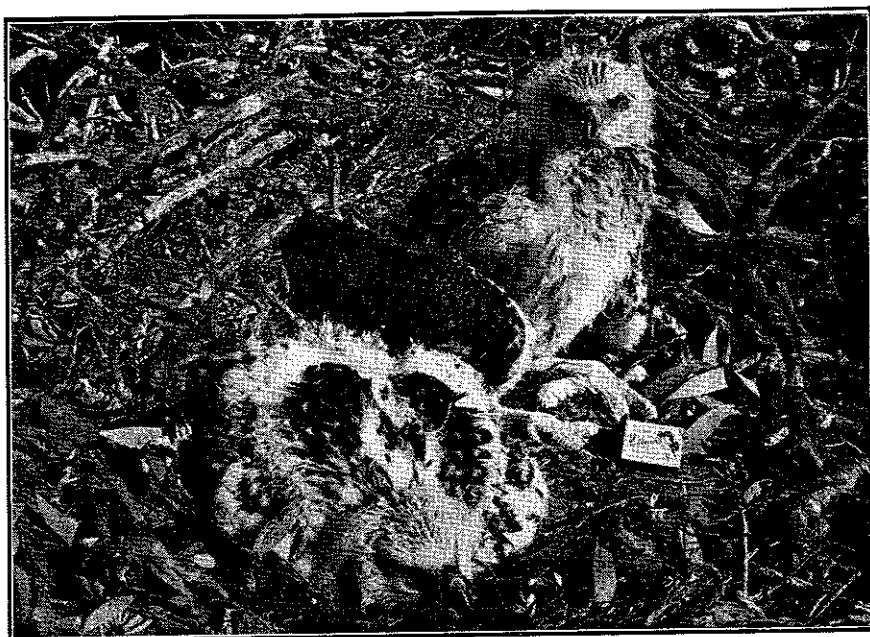
To our pleasure we found the nest occupied by two very handsome young, about three-quarters grown. One of the adults circled above and uttered its alarm calls, as we took photographs and hurriedly constructed a rough hide of green scrub about eight feet from the nest, before pushing on, with the idea of returning later to make further observations, etc.

Consequently, on the evening of November 5, we again landed, but this time with camping gear and sufficient food for several days, leaving instructions with the skipper of our boat to pick us up on the morning of the 7th, weather permitting.

After two hours of arduously hauling our gear from the nearest available landing site, over about a mile of very

rocky coast to the previously-constructed hide, we set up our cameras and settled in for the forty-hour stay, within the confinements and doubtful comforts of our five-foot-square hide.

At 6.30 next morning, as daylight broke, one of the adults returned to the area, but would not approach the nest, and contented itself by circling at about three hundred feet, calling to the young, which occasionally responded with a feeble call. During the next seven hours we recorded twenty similar visits, but on no occasion did the adult venture nearer than fifty feet.



Young of White-breasted Sea-Eagle in nest.

Photo. by R. H. Green.

At mid-day one of the adults approached with a Little Penguin in its talons and rested on a nearby rock. This, we thought, would mean a visit to the nest, and we set ourselves in readiness for photography, but to our dismay the bird departed, leaving the dead Penguin, which was collected by its mate and devoured on the spot. From mid-afternoon the visits became less frequent, and the adults were not seen in the closing hours of that day.

The following morning also proved unfruitful as far as photography was concerned, as we only received four scanning visits before packing up and departing for our pick-up point.

Both nights were spent in drizzly rain and we were continually assailed by mosquitoes; but the continuous squabbling of the Little Penguins, and the rustle of Quail in the

hours of semi-light, combined with the expectations of the morrow and unique experience of sleeping beside an Eagle's aerie, made the occasion even more memorable.

We noted the nest to be composed of dead sticks up to four feet long, and in some cases almost as thick as a man's arm. The centre of the concave structure held a rough lining of what had been green leaves. The whole structure measured five feet in height and was six feet across and was estimated to contain at least half a ton of timber. The foundation was noted to be very old and rotted, and had obviously been in use for many years. Local fishermen informed us that they had known of its existence and use in several previous seasons. Remains of food, in and around the nest, consisted of dried-up parts of fish, Penguin and petrels.

By reason of the topography of the island, we were of the impression that this was the only possible place for these birds to nest, and in view of the afore-mentioned record in the Harrison collection, it appears that it has in all probability been in use, at least intermittently, for something over half a century.

Unfortunately we were unable to band the young on this occasion as our prime object was Albatross Island, and the bands suitable for the Albatross were found to be too small for the Eagle.

## Stray Feathers

**Haunts of Pipit in the south-west of the North Island, Central New Zealand.**—My account of the habits of the Pipit (*Anthus novaeseelandiae*), *Emu*, vol. 55, pp. 104-107, mentions that thistles, bushes, ferns or rushes attract it in Makara County and environs in the south-west section of the North Island. Further observations carried out at other places in such area confirm that. They were made at Upper Hutt, Judgeford, and at Te Horo, Manakau and Ohau in the coastal plain of the south part of the Manawatu district. With some earlier observations these studies likewise show that the Pipit seeks open spaces, also, separately or collectively, according to locality, of short herbage such as grazed grass, dry sections of water-courses, boulder beaches, roads or tracks.

The following are sample observations. On 11/4/55, I walked four miles, through countryside devoted to sheep-farming and dairying at Manakau, where plants judged characteristic of the Pipit's typical haunts were not much in evidence. The only Pipit seen was foraging through desiccated, ungrazed grass by a road's edge. This transect was repeated in September 1955, when no Pipit was recorded. On 1/4/56, I made a slightly-longer transect which confirmed