

## Notes on Selected Bird Species on the South-western Coast of Tasmania, between Port Davey and Cape Sorell

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The south-western Tasmanian coast between Port Davey and Cape Sorell is typified by rocky shoreline, sheer in places, with scattered small beaches, numerous creeks and some wide river mouths. It is backed by dense scrub, rainforest and buttongrass plains. On most days the coast is cloaked in a mist of spray-laden air from the large swells breaking against the shoreline. The region has no roads, houses or other human habitation and there are no direct signs of human presence except perhaps for a crayboat working off the coast. Access is difficult, either by helicopter, boat if the weather is calm enough or by foot.

A result of the coastline's remoteness is that little information has been published on the avifauna present. White (1985) provided a summary of sightings made before 1985 in south-western Tasmania, including the Port Davey area north to Point Hibbs.

The authors had the opportunity of conducting a survey of the area's avifauna whilst traversing this remote stretch of coastline on foot between 9 February and 11 March 1993. In this paper we record some of the more interesting observations made during the survey.

### Selected systematic list

#### Little Penguin *Eudyptula minor*

A minimum of four used burrows was located on the shoreline adjacent to Trumpeter Islets (43°17' S, 145°49' E). Previously not recorded as breeding on the mainland in south-western Tasmania (White 1981, 1985; Marchant & Higgins 1990). However, this bird breeds on many of the islands off the south-western Tasmanian coastline (e.g. Marchant & Higgins 1990).

An individual was discovered beach-washed at Conder Point (42°39', 145°20') covered in Goose Barnacles *Lepas anatifera*. It is common to find cuttlebones, pieces of timber and man-made objects that have been adrift for some time with Goose Barnacles attached. However, it is unusual to find these barnacles attached to beach-washed birds (J. Slater, Dept Parks and Wildlife pers. comm.; Schulz unpubl. records). As a locally breeding species, it must have been adrift for some time moving in currents up and down the coastline.

#### Great-winged Petrel *Pterodroma macroptera*

One individual of the New Zealand race *P. m. gouldi* was located beach-washed on Mulcahy Bay (43°07', 145°43'). This species was listed as unconfirmed in south-western Tasmania by White (1985), from an injured bird thought to be of this species on Maatsuyker Island during the winter of 1977 (Brothers 1977). The Great-winged Petrel is common offshore throughout the year (N. Brothers pers. comm.; Schulz unpubl. records).

#### Black-faced Shag *Leucocarbo fuscescens*

A roost of over 300 individuals was recorded on the southern side of West Pyramid (43°18', 145°49'). Such concentrations of this species are rare away from breeding sites. This species has not been recorded breeding on West Pyramid (White 1981, 1985). Small parties of up to twelve birds were seen flying towards this roost site from up to five kilometres to the north off Sandblow Bay (43°15', 145°48') at dusk.

#### Great Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo*

This species was present along the coast in small numbers. Of interest were individuals observed foraging within the surf zone. For example, at Mulcahy Bay and Sandblow Bay (43°15', 145°49') single

individuals were seen foraging in shallow water over a sandy bottom. On both occasions sets of waves of two to three metres were forming and breaking in this zone. The cormorants surfaced during quiet periods between wave-sets. On the approach of a breaking wave the cormorants dived and then reappeared on the other side, thus avoiding the power of the frothing, collapsing wave. On the approach of a large wave-set, the cormorants took flight. Generally foraging was restricted to rip areas where wave action was reduced compared with elsewhere in the surf zone. At no time were cormorants observed on the surface within this zone with fish or other prey in their beaks.

**Little Pied Cormorant** *Phalacrocorax melanoleucos*

Surprisingly uncommon. Single individuals were observed in a tributary of the Giblin River (43°04', 145°41'), Hibbs Lagoon (42°34', 145°18'), Jones Creek mouth (42°03', 145°16') and Varna Bay (42°27', 145°15').

**Black Swan** *Cygnus atratus*

This species was formerly common in the Port Davey area (Lord 1927a). For example, in November 1966 over 350 individuals were recorded in Kelly Basin (Guiler 1966). In recent years numbers have declined (White 1985). The only Black Swans recorded during the entire survey were 18 individuals at the entrance to Kelly Basin (43°16', 145°54'). No swans were recorded at any river mouths, lagoons or quiet inshore coastal waters elsewhere.

**Collared Sparrowhawk** *Accipiter cirrhocephalus*

This raptor is regarded as uncommon in south-western Tasmania (White 1985). Single individuals were recorded at Birthday Creek (42°27', 145°15') and Pilot Bay (42°12', 145°12').

**Wedge-tailed Eagle** *Aquila audax*

The Tasmanian subspecies *A. a. fleayi* was listed by Garnett (1992) as endangered, and is listed as a vulnerable species in Tasmania (Dept Parks and Wildlife). White (1985) regarded this species as relatively common in south-western Tasmania. The following sightings were made during the survey: one at Quail Flat Beach (43°17', 145°50'), one at Spero River mouth (42°08', 145°20'), one close inshore off Whitehorses Beach (42°37', 145°18'), two in the Hibbs Lagoon area, and two at Pennerowen Point (42°31', 145°14'). No nests were located.

**Peregrine Falcon** *Falco peregrinus*

The only record was of a single bird chasing Common Starlings at the Trumpeter Islets (43°17', 145°49').

**Masked Lapwing** *Vanellus miles*

This species was scattered along the coastline, primarily occurring in areas of shingle or sand beach adjacent to extensive intertidal reef platforms, where large amounts of washed-up kelp were present. The largest congregations encountered were of 14 individuals north of the Trumpeter Islets (43°16', 145°49') and nine individuals south of Bottom Rocks (43°05', 145°40'). This species is also present in small numbers on the southern coast of Tasmania (Schulz & Menkhorst 1984).

**Hooded Plover** *Thinornis rubricollis*

The Hooded Plover was the most common shorebird encountered, even though it is listed as rare nationally (Garnett 1992). This coastline supported a total of 242 individuals (or 6.6 birds/km of beach) from an overall beach length of 36.9 km (Schulz & Kristensen 1993a, b). Such a density of Hooded Plovers is higher than the state average of 1.7 birds/km (Holdsworth & Park 1993). Schulz & Kristensen (in prep.) attributed this high density to the low amounts of predation from introduced mammalian predators and human disturbance, particularly from off-road vehicles.

In the Gorge Point area (42°22', 145°13') eight individuals were encountered on short (<0.2 km long) pebble beaches, with no sand present. It is unusual to find Hooded Plovers away from a sandy beach environment in south-eastern Australia (Schulz 1986).

**Red-capped Plover** *Charadrius ruficapillus*

Few records have been made of this plover in south-western Tasmania (Schulz & Menkhorst 1984, White 1985). This is surprising considering the abundance of this species on Strahan Ocean Beach and beaches to the north (Schulz 1993). The present survey found this bird to be uncommon, with only 24 individuals (0.7 birds/km of beach) recorded at four localities: two on a sandbar at the entrance to Kelly Basin, one on a shingle beach north of the Trumpeter Islets, 11 on Lagoon Creek Beach (42°23', 145°13') and 10 individuals in a mixed flock of shorebirds south of Tiddys Beach (42°13', 145°11').

**Double-banded Plover** *Charadrius bicinctus*

The only individuals of this species recorded in south-western Tasmania by White (1985) were from Lake Pedder. Schulz (unpubl. records) recorded two birds on Louisa Bay beach in April 1987 and 12 birds on Prion Beach in April 1992 on the southern coast of Tasmania. In the present survey a total of five individuals was recorded from four beaches: one on Towterer Beach (43°12', 145°48'), one on Birthday Bay Beach (42°25', 145°14'), two on Lagoon Creek Beach and one with a mixed flock of shorebirds south of Tiddys Beach. This species is common on Strahan Ocean Beach and beaches



**Collared Sparrowhawk *Accipiter cirrhocephalus***

Plate 43

Painting: David Noakes

further north on the western Tasmanian coast. For example (Schulz 1993) recorded 287 individuals or 6.2 birds/km of beach between Macquarie Harbour entrance and Bluff Point in April 1991. The low densities observed in the present survey may have been a reflection of the time of year.

**Ruddy Turnstone** *Arenaria interpres*

A surprisingly uncommon species, recorded from only two localities — one individual at Birthday Bay and a flock of 59 birds roosting at high tide south of Tiddys Beach. The low numbers present on this coast are in contrast to densities found on beaches north of Macquarie Harbour entrance. For example Schulz (1993) recorded 258 individuals or 2.4 birds/km of beach between Macquarie Harbour entrance and Bluff Point on the north-western Tasmanian coast.

**Common Sandpiper** *Tringa hypoleucos*

An uncommon species in Tasmania (Green 1989), this bird has been recorded at Recherche Bay and on the Gordon River in inland south-western Tasmania (White 1985). In the present survey, a single bird was observed in the company of two Hooded Plovers on a small beach and adjacent reef platform south of Gorge Point (42°22', 145°13').

**Latham's Snipe** *Gallinago hardwickii*

Surprisingly uncommon. During the present survey four single individuals were recorded: one south of Bottom Rocks (43°05', 145°40') in short bracken on the edge of a shingle beach, one north of Veridian Point (42°55', 145°28') on the edge of a clump of *Leptospermum* sp. in the middle of an extensive marsupial lawn, one circling over Stinky Creek (42°53', 145°27') at dusk calling loudly, and one south-east of Pennerowne Point (42°31', 145°15').

**Silver Gull** *Larus novaehollandiae*

This species is frequently regarded as being abundant only in the vicinity of towns and cities, where it feeds largely on human refuse (Smith et al. 1991). However, during the present survey it was commonly recorded along the entire coastline. The largest flocks encountered were 289 individuals at Jones Creek mouth, 215 individuals at the Mainwaring River mouth (42°52', 145°25'), 182 individuals at Varna Bay (42°31', 145°15'), 124 individuals south of Tiddys Beach (42°13', 145°11'), 79 individuals on rocky coastline north of Hibbs Lagoon and 78 individuals north of Nye Bay (43°02', 145°38'). All these flocks were roosting or foraging on extensive reef platforms in the vicinity of areas covered with large amounts of washed-up seaweed. In such areas individuals were observed feeding on the numerous flies attracted to the decaying kelp.

Night foraging was recorded on Hibbs Lagoon Beach (42°34', 145°17') and on a beach south of The Grandfathers (42°16', 145°12'). At both localities birds were observed high up on the beach in the storm-tide zone feeding on active sandhoppers (Amphipoda).

**Caspian Tern** *Sterna caspia*

Fourteen individuals were observed roosting on a sandbar at the entrance to Kelly Basin and a loose flock of 12 birds was recorded fishing off Bond Bay. Such numbers are uncommon in south-western Tasmania (White 1985). Elsewhere, single individuals were recorded off many beaches and rocky headlands.

**Sulphur-crested Cockatoo** *Cacatua galerita*

The largest flock recorded was of 16 individuals at Stinky Creek. This species was frequently encountered on the shoreline feeding on washed-up and decaying String Kelp *Macrocystis angustifolia* and the flowers and fruits of Sea Rocket *Cakile maritima*.

**Ground Parrot** *Pezoporus wallicus*

The buttongrass plains of south-western Tasmania are commonly regarded as the Ground Parrot's stronghold in Tasmania (Lord 1927b, Hindsby 1948, White 1985, Bryant 1991). However, this parrot was surprisingly uncommon on the buttongrass plains traversed during the present survey. No Ground Parrots were recorded on the extensive buttongrass plains between Bond Bay and Nye Bay, a surprising result. The only Ground Parrots encountered were: one south of Elliott Hill (43°00', 145°38'), seven at Low Rocky Point (42°59', 145°29') (also recorded here by Hume 1971), one east of Schist Point (42°58', 145°30'), one north of the Lewis River (42°56', 145°30'), one south-east of Veridian Point (42°55', 145°29') and one south-east of Sanctuary Bay (42°37', 145°17'). This species was not recorded in habitats other than buttongrass-dominated plains.

**Orange-bellied Parrot** *Neophema chrysogaster*

An endangered species with a breeding range entirely confined to the south-western Tasmanian region (Brown & Wilson 1981, Garnett 1992). The present survey recorded this species in several localities where it had previously not been located (P. Brown, Dept Parks and Wildlife, pers. comm.). It was recorded from: one at Bond Bay (43°15', 145°54'), one east of Sandblow Bay (43°14', 145°50'), two at Paradise Lagoon (43°15', 145°49'), one north of Paradise Lagoon (43°14', 145°49'), one east of Dennis Gulch (43°14', 145°48'), two south of Trepanner Creek, inland from Wreck Bay (43°11', 145°48'), one at Unmarrah Creek mouth (43°01', 145°38') and two at Jones Creek mouth.



Adult Caspian Terns *Sterna caspia*, Mud Island, Victoria, October 1993

Plate 44

Photo: Mike Carter

**Southern Boobook** *Ninox novaeseelandiae*

The Southern Boobook was the only nocturnal bird encountered while undertaking a total of 49 hours mist-netting for bats at 22 localities during the survey. Although listed by White (1985) as common, it was recorded on only three occasions: Bond Bay, the Wanderer River mouth (42°43', 145°23') and Hibbs Lagoon.

**White-throated Needletail** *Hirundapus caudacutus*

Although listed as a numerous migrant in Tasmania (Green 1989), this bird was regarded as uncommon in south-western Tasmania by White (1985). During the survey this bird was observed in flocks of 100 individuals on most days along the coast. South of Gorge Point a huge flock of 1000+ individuals was observed in warm, still, humid conditions wheeling higher and higher in a convection current above the shoreline and sea. Many individuals were so high that they appeared as small black dots against the blue sky. The birds were in this thermal for about 10 minutes and then disappeared from the area, flying in a southerly direction.

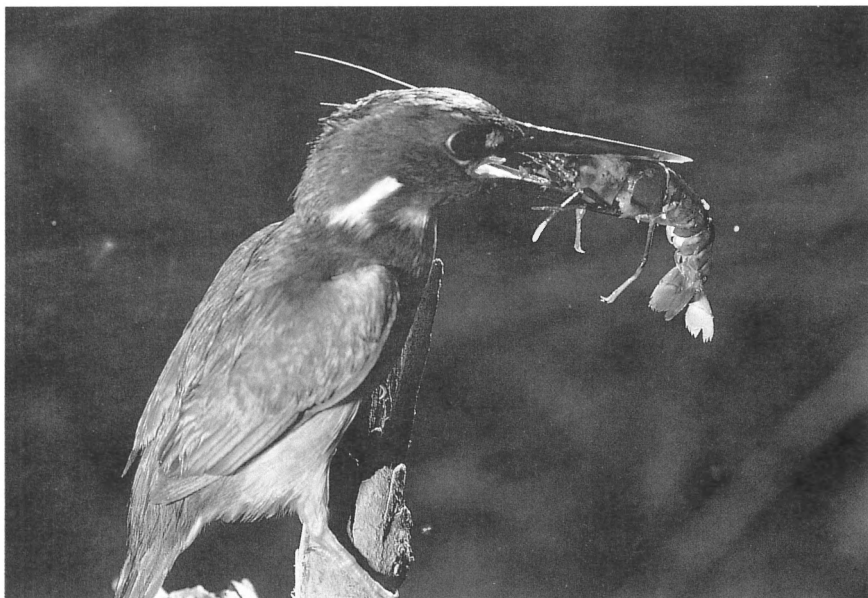
At night, in full moonlight conditions, between 2200 and 2300 h on 10 February 1993 single White-throated Needletails were spotlighted flying low (less than five metres) over sand-dune crests adjacent to Paradise Lagoon. These observations were puzzling because it has recently been demonstrated that the White-throated Needletail roosts at night (Tarburton 1993).

**Azure Kingfisher** *Ceyx azurea*

The endemic Tasmanian subspecies is listed as rare (Garnett 1992). Two individuals were observed along the Hibbs River (42°34', 145°18') on 2 and 3 March 1993. All other rivers flowing on to the western coast were searched for this species for 1-2 kilometres upstream from the mouth without success.

**Welcome Swallow** *Hirundo neoxena*

This bird was surprisingly rare south of Point Hibbs, with the only sightings being: two at Bond Bay, four at Paradise Lagoon, two at the Lewis River (42°57', 145°30'), four at Cypress Creek mouth (42°49', 145°25') and two at Whitehorses Beach. Disused nests were located under overhangs along the Lewis River and in deep sea caves at Cypress Creek mouth. In contrast, the Welcome Swallow was common from Hibbs Lagoon north to Cape Sorell, with the largest congregation observed of 14 individuals south of Tiddys Beach. Disused nests were located in a sea cave south of Birthday Bay and in buildings at Cape Sorell.



**Azure Kingfisher** *Ceyx azurea*

Plate 45

Photo: Neville Male

**Richard's Pipit** *Anthus novaeseelandiae*

A common bird on shingle beaches, extensive reef platforms, marsupial lawns and open dune vegetation from Cape Sorell south to Hibbs Lagoon. The largest flock observed was of 42 individuals on a reef platform and shingle beach south of Pennerowne Point. The only records south of Hibbs Lagoon were: 14 north of the Trumpeter Islets, four south of Bottom Rocks, two at Low Rocky Point, two at Sassy Creek Beach (42°55', 145°29'), four at Veridian Point (42°55', 145°28') and four at Stinky Creek. It was also observed on sparse buttongrass plains with extensive areas of bare ground and exposed quartzite rock on the Lower Hut Plains, south of Mulcahy Bay (43°08', 145°45').

**Blackbird** *Turdus merula*

Although recorded as fairly common along the southern coast of Tasmania (White 1985), no individuals were observed on the western coast during the present survey.

**Flame Robin** *Petroica phoenicea*

The only record was of a single male foraging on the edge of a steep marsupial lawn on rugged rocky coast south of Sloop Point (42°21', 145°12'). This bird is listed as uncommon in south-western Tasmania (White 1985).

**Dusky Robin** *Melanodryas vittata*

This robin was only recorded in stands of low vegetation to 1.5 metres high with numerous dead (burnt) shrubs adjacent to open areas such as marsupial lawns, extensive bare rock faces and unvegetated sand dunes. It was most frequently recorded between Pennerowne Point and Cape Sorell.

**Tawny-crowned Honeyeater** *Phylidonyris melanops*

Surprisingly uncommon, the only record being a single bird feeding on a Silver Banksia *Banksia marginata* on Cape Sorell.

**Eastern Spinebill** *Acanthorhynchus tenuirostris*

This species was particularly common in dense scrub on the edge of the shoreline between High Rocky Point (42°46', 145°23') and Endeavour Bay Beach (42°39', 145°22'). On this section of coastline it was the most frequently observed and heard honeyeater.

**Striated Pardalote** *Pardalotus striatus*

An uncommon species in south-western Tasmania (White 1985). The only record during the survey was of two individuals observed foraging in a mature Brooker's Gum *Eucalyptus brookerana* south of the Wanderer River.



**Richard's Pipit** *Anthus novaeseelandiae*

Plate 46

Photo: Neville Male

**European Goldfinch** *Carduelis carduelis*

Occasionally observed in south-western Tasmania (White 1985), and an abundant species along the coast north of Macquarie Harbour (Schulz unpubl. records). The only records during this survey were of one individual south of Gorge Point and four in recently burnt vegetation behind Tiddys Beach (42°12', 145°11').

**European Greenfinch** *Carduelis chloris*

Similar to the European Goldfinch, this bird is abundant along the coast north of Macquarie Harbour (Schulz unpubl. records). However, as with the preceding species it appears to be uncommon south of Macquarie Harbour. The only bird recorded during the survey was a single individual at Birthday Bay.

**Common Starling** *Sturnus vulgaris*

It was a surprise to find a colony of 60 birds resting on the cliffs of the Trumpeter Islets and a further 32 individuals foraging amongst large piles of kelp washed up on the rocky shoreline 200 metres north of the Trumpeter Islets.

Small groups were also encountered at the following localities: 11 individuals south of Bottom Rocks, two individuals at Unmarrah Creek mouth, two individuals at Veridian Point, two individuals north of the Hibbs River mouth and five individuals south of Tiddys Beach. In all cases these birds were encountered foraging on flies amongst clumps of decaying kelp washed up on a rocky shoreline with an extensive intertidal reef platform.

**Forest Raven** *Corvus tasmanicus*

Large flocks were recorded at the following localities: 76 individuals north of The Shank (42°54', 145°27'), 72 individuals at Birthday Bay and 53 individuals south of Tiddys Beach. Elsewhere this species was scattered in pairs and small parties of less than ten individuals.

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