

THE SPOTTED SHAGS OF THE COROMANDEL COAST

Acting on the good news from Miss Anthea Goodwin (*Notornis* 13, 220), a launch party consisting of two visiting ornithologists from U.S.A., Dr. and Mrs. Dryer, and the writers, visited Motu Kahaua Is. (Happy Jack Islands) to see the new nesting place of this shag (*Stictcarbo punctatus*) and to show the visitors the nesting Gannets. A.G. had found some nesting still in progress on 28/2/65; but on 30/1/67 no nests were seen to be occupied. All except a very few birds were out of plumage and from the launch it was not possible to distinguish the number of immature birds among the faded adults. G.K.McK. took his launch as close as possible, but the whole flock panicked and flew off before we were close enough to check the colour of the feet. It was thought that many were young.

The number of Spotted Shags at the place described by A.G. was estimated at c.800 and a further 300 or so were seen on the nearby groups of islands. This number was unexpected, but G.K.McK. recollected that a very short time before this he had noted that the Spotted Shags of Anita Bay, on the outside of Waiheke Is., were down to a count of 20 where H.R.McK. and P. A. S. Stein used to see from c.60 to 150 or more. On the same day he had noted that there were only 100 to 150 at Tarakihi Is. where there were usually some hundreds. It is known that they have been badly shot up at these breeding places and this may have driven them to the islands just off the Coromandel coast. Even so this, and a very successful breeding season would hardly account for c.1100 birds. It is possible that many have moved across from The Noises, where they have also been persecuted.

That there has been a displacement is borne out by Miss Goodwin's account and the fact that she, H. R. McK. and other observers have seen parties of up to 75 resting birds on some rocks at Tarata Pt. on the Wharekawa coast on the western side of the Firth of Thames, from Aug. to Nov. 1966, where previously they had never seen more than eleven. An interested local resident, just before the above period, had noted several hundreds feeding and resting; and there was evidence of this on a rock face which had been used. They were scared also from there, though not directly molested, by holiday makers; so they may return this autumn. Of these a considerable number was in breeding dress, a fine sight from a car at c.100 yards.

Many Waiheke and Tarakihi birds have long used a roost on the N.E. corner of Ponui Is. and are still using it from the Coromandel side. These have another minor roost at Papanui Pt., Orere, Clevedon. A.G. has noted such roosts at Opopoto Pt., (Thompson's) and Te Whau headland, near Onetangi Bay, Waiheke Is. north, used no doubt also by the Noises colony. It has obviously been in this way that small numbers have been using the Coromandel coast for many years, perhaps for ages. A.G. has seen them there at odd times over a period of twelve years, one or two at a time and one group of nine. T. M. Roberts reported a party of what must have been Spotted Shags at or near Motu Kahaua Is. during or before 1942 and, on 5/1/44, saw a party of c.30 feeding in Coromandel Harbour.

It would be interesting to know if these Spotted Shags have returned to an ancestral breeding-place or if they are colonising new territory.

— G. K. McKENZIE
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