

## BIRD OBSERVATIONS — MACQUARIE ISLAND 1967

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While the author was stationed at Macquarie Island (54° South, 159° East) a number of interesting observations were made of the bird fauna. Previous accounts of the bird fauna of this subantarctic island have been presented by Falla (1937), Gwynn (1953), Law and Burstall (1956), Keith and Hines (1957), and Warham (1969).

### BLUE PETREL *Halobaena caerulea*:

*Field Notes*: 9/11/67: Langdon Point; "Found two skulls today, possibly Blue Petrel in Skua Regurgitations."\*

28/11/67: Langdon Point; "Blue Petrel remains numerous in and around dry peaty tussocks. (I) could not locate any active burrows or nests though an extensive search was made."

Law and Burstall (p. 21), reported this species under the title "species once native, but now extinct, or almost so," while Keith and Hines (p. 52) found them to be "very numerous at night" during September and October. Dirt in their feathers and enlarged ovaries led them to suspect breeding but this was not confirmed.

The area in question where these remains were located is near the small rectangular tarn about one hundred yards south west of the prominent rock face which drops down to the coastal terrace at Langdon Point.

The remains of many Blue Petrels were found in the regurgitations of the Skua *Catharacta skua lonnbergi*, particularly those found around the nest of the pair nesting near the tarn. These contained heads and feet primarily. Pectoral girdles with the wings still attached were found under the nearby tussocks (*Poa foliosa*). The greatest number being eleven at one location.

How these birds met their death is not certain as either cats (liberated by the early sealers) or Skuas could be the primary cause after which either the heads and legs could have been eaten by the skuas or the picked carcasses could have been pulled into the tussocks for a final cleaning by the cats.

Time did not permit a thorough search except for the area immediately surrounding the small tarn. However, from the number of mutilated corpses found (at least 47) in this area I would suspect a sizable population must be breeding somewhere in the vicinity.

Falla (p. 120), reports egg laying in progress early in November at Kerguelen Island which is close to the time when the remains of the Blue Petrel were very numerous at Macquarie Island.

\* Identification confirmed by Allan McEvey, Curator of Birds, National Museum, Melbourne, and Keith Hindwood, Honorary Curator, Australian Museum, Sydney.

GREY DUCK *Anas superciliosa*:

*Field Notes*: 28/11/67: "A family with at least six ducklings, two hundred yards North of Boiler Rocks making their way across the feather bed; just hatched."

Included here as this hatching date seems very early for Macquarie Island. Falla (p. 269) reports eggs being found in January by Hamilton in 1912 (?) and ducklings on the 28th. In the following year ducklings were noted on the 4th of February.

MALLARD *Anas platyrhynchos*:

*Field Notes*: Langdon Bay, "A pair flushed from small stream."

29/7/67: Langdon Bay, "Again flushed a pair of Mallards from small stream."

18/11/67: "Mallard Drake and Duck flushed — Langdon Bay."

The Mallard was first reported at Macquarie Island in 1949, (Gwynn p. 151) and other observations have been made from 1965 to the present. These observations indicate the species may now be resident, but as yet there is no evidence that they have bred.

EUROPEAN STARLING *Sturnus vulgaris*:

*Field Notes*: (selected): 17/5/67: "Green Gorge Roost; first birds arrived at 2.45 p.m. Total counted arriving 1377."

18/5/67: "Green Gorge Roost — roosting started at 3.00 p.m. Total in Roost 1378."

6/6/67 to 11/7/67: "Many flocks encountered on Plateau in flocks up to 75 individuals."

18/11/67: "Starlings in and around all rock stacks from Bauer Bay to the Base. At 'Catch me' one pair had cheeping young in nest. Around the Isthmus they are constantly foraging around Camp and Radio Beaches."

28/11/67: Langdon Point; "First family seen wheeling around today — six birds; four juveniles."

The Starling is well established on Macquarie Island with nests commonly found in rock fissures and crevices in the pillow lavas wherever these occur. Normally the species forages on the plateau and coastal terraces in small flocks but during the breeding season pairs are frequently encountered scavenging along the beaches.

In the late afternoon the species gathers to roost, often in the rocks immediately out from the beach in front of the Green Gorge Hut. They also roost in the crevices of the cliffs south of the Hut. Birds arrive at the Green Gorge Roost from the west and after a short "pre-roosting flight" alight and appear to seek out cavities between and around the heads of the Tussock Grass *Poa foliosa*.

During the non-breeding season the species appears more common towards the middle and southern end of the Island and very few individuals are seen near the Base. No birds were collected to determine what they were feeding on but they appeared to favour areas of the sub-glacial herbfield formation (Taylor, 1955), where *Festuca erecta* is dominant. At this time, February to October, the seeds of this species are being shed.

## SPECIMENS TAKEN

SOOTY SHEARWATER *Puffinus griseus* — One specimen ♀, taken 12/12/67 on the Isthmus.

Deposited in the National Museum of Victoria, Melbourne, Victoria, Australia. Number B 9352.

COMMON DIVING PETREL *Pelecanoides urinatrix* — One specimen ♂, found dead 14/5/67 by John Reid.

Deposited in the Museum of the Zoology Department, University of British Columbia, Vancouver, B.C., Canada. Number 13407.

DOMINICAN GULL *Larus dominicanus* — 37 specimens.

7 deposited as skeletons in the National Museum of Victoria, Melbourne, Victoria, Australia. Numbers B 9314 to B 9320.

26 deposited as skins in the National Museum of Victoria, Melbourne, Victoria, Australia. Numbers B 9321 to B 9346.

4 deposited as skins in the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery, Hobart, Tasmania, Australia.

WEKA *Gallirallus australis* — Two specimens, both ♂, collected on the Isthmus, 6/5/67.

Deposited in the Museum of the Zoology Department, University of British Columbia, Vancouver, B.C., Canada. Numbers 13408 and 13409.

SONG THRUSH *Turdus philomelos* — One specimen, ♀, collected 30/8/67 by John Evans on the Isthmus. Deposited in the National Museum of Victoria, Melbourne, Victoria, Australia. Number B 9351.

GOLDFINCH *Carduelis carduelis* — One specimen collected 5/5/67, on the Isthmus.

Deposited in the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery, Hobart, Tasmania, Australia.

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