YELLOW-EYED PENGUINS BREEDING ON BANKS PENINSULA

By G. HARROW

INTRODUCTION

Richdale (1957) gives the breeding range of the Yellow-eyed Penguin *Megadyptes antipodes* as 45° 45′ S at its most northerly point, and he states that an unmarked fledgling was picked up at Birdling's Flat, immediately south of Banks Peninsula, which is 176 miles north of the nearest known breeding place. The Annotated Checklist of the Birds of New Zealand 1970, and the Field Guide 1966, both agree that Oamaru is the northernmost breeding place for this species of penguin, although the Field Guide does suggest breeding may have taken place farther north formerly. Oliver (1955) places North Otago Head as the northern end of the breeding range. The purpose of this paper is to report the establishment of Yellow-eyed Penguins breeding in the eastern bays of Banks Peninsula during the past five years. This is about 200 miles north along the east coast of the South Island from the previously known breeding place.

During the spring of 1966 a pair of these penguins was observed by campers and the local farmer 'keeping company' in Long Bay. They were described as being about two feet tall with yellow markings around the head but no definite crest. The campers and the farmer were quite definite that they had never seen this type of penguin in the bay before, although they had been closely associated with the area for many years. The pair of birds created much interest that year and were harassed by people and dogs; they finally left Long Bay in late December 1966 and were not seen again that summer. These penguins were likely to be two or three year old Yellow-eyed Penguins which had formed a pair bond and were looking for a breeding site.

The writer heard of these penguins late in the spring of 1967 and a careful search of the area revealed no trace of them that season in Long Bay, but reports were received that birds which could have been Yellow-eyed Penguins moulted in Stony Bay and Long Bay in March 1968. In November 1968 a pair of Yellow-eyed Penguins was seen 'keeping company' in Long Bay. One was an immature bird, in that the yellow band did not join behind the head; the other was in full adult plumage. This pair was observed regularly together that season usually in the late afternoon and sometimes early in the morning. They were most likely a two and three year old. Mutual display by this pair was noted. There was no evidence of breeding that summer.

A nest with one chick was found by the author during the second week in November 1969 attended by two adult Yellow-eyed Penguins in the same area of Long Bay where a pair had kept company the previous season. This nest was visited several times during the summer, and the breeding dates were similar to those found by

Richdale further south. The chick, when first seen, was showing traces of secondary down and had most likely hatched about the 7th of November. The guard stage ended on the 27th December and the chick entered the sea between the 15th and the 21st February 1970. A juvenile was seen several times in close proximity to the nest during the 1969-70 season, and feeling certain that this individual had not been raised in Long Bay, I made a detailed search in surrounding bays.

Little Fisherman and Big Fisherman Bays confirmed my suspicions, for a substantial population of Yellow-eyed Penguins was found. Five nests were located in a fairly superficial search, and there are most likely many more than this in these two bays. Mr. L. K. Muirson, a farmer of Fishermans Bay, told me that they first turned up about 1965 in small numbers, which have steadily increased each year, until in 1970 as many as a couple of dozen of these large penguins could be seen at one time at the landing places in the late afternoons. From the signs of excreta found in Little and Big Fishermans Bay I have no doubt that there could be a resident population of more than forty Yellow-eyed Penguins.

Farmers and fishermen were contacted by the author and it was found that penguins whose descriptions corresponded with those of Yellow-eyed Penguins had been seen regularly ashore in many Banks Peninsula Bays from Birdlings Flat to Hickory Bay. Several witnesses said that these penguins were seen quite frequently at different times of the year, which suggests that they are resident in these bays and likely to be breeding.

In the spring of 1970 the breeding pair in Long Bay shifted their nest site some ten feet from the place used in 1969. Two chicks were successfully reared but it was encouraging to record the increase in unemployed birds. This season besides the two breeding adults and their two chicks, another pair was present, one of which was a juvenile, and in addition an unattached juvenile, making a population of seven in Long Bay altogether, during the 1970-71 breeding period.

DISCUSSION

Richdale has shown that once Yellow-eyed Penguins establish themselves as a breeding bird at one site they usually become permanently attached to that area or fairly close to it, for the rest of their lives. He found that females up to two years old and males up to three or four years old had a very strong pattern for widespread wandering before finally fixing on a permanent breeding site. It is probable that the breeding colonies of Yellow-eyed Penguins on Banks Peninsula are the result of juveniles wandering from the Otago breeding sites further south and settling finally at the eastern bays of the Peninsula. Richdale also produced some data that suggests that fledging juveniles tend to wander north rather than south, although he did not find any evidence that there was a permanent northerly shift. Kinsky (1968), discussing the seabird mortality around the southern coasts of the North Island during the April 9 to 11 tropical cyclone, commented on the large numbers of immature Yellow-eyed Penguins found dead. He points out that this storm advanced from

the north with onshore southerlies washing the corpses onto the Palliser Bay beaches. Kinsky argues with good evidence that these young Yellow-eyed Penguins were most likely well into the Cook Strait area when they were overcome by the cyclone, and he was impressed by the northerly range of this sedentary species. However, in 1968 there were good numbers of Yellow-eyed Penguins already coming ashore on Banks Peninsula, and there may have been some breeding by that date. There is a possibility that some of the Yellow-eyed Penguins found after the cyclonic storm were from breeding grounds on Banks Peninsula.

The build-up in numbers of Yellow-eyed Penguins in the eastern and southern bays on Banks Peninsula has been quite rapid and it is interesting to speculate why this should be so, when during the same period there has been a marked decline in numbers of White-flippered Penguins *Eudyptula albosignata.* Feral cats have certainly been responsible for some mortality of chicks of White-flippered Penguins on Banks Peninsula and it is unlikely that these predators would be able to tackle the much larger Yellow-eyed Penguins. Another likely explanation might be human interference on the breeding grounds on the Otago coast further south where many of the colonies are adjacent to quite large cities and towns. Richdale mentions human interference on Otago Peninsula which resulted in a shift from the area of two to four year old Yellow-eyed Penguins. The small breeding colony at Cape Wanbrow, Oamaru, has almost been wiped out by human visitors and dogs.

Yellow-eyed Penguins usually prefer a rocky coast for their breeding grounds and apart from a few outcrops at Timaru which could hardly be considered ideal habitat, the next part of the South Island coast north of Oamaru suitable, is Banks Peninsula. What is surprising is that they have not established themselves here earlier.

REFERENCES

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SHORT NOTE

FANTAIL AND MOTH

Recently, while searching for Kokako in the Hunua Ranges, I saw a Fantail catch a moth about ¾" long. Obviously this was too big to swallow, so the Fantail held the moth in one foot, parrot-fashion, and devoured it in small pieces.

— HARRY WAKELIN