

NOTES ON THE BIRDS OF NORFOLK ISLAND

By JOHN L. McKEAN, OWEN EVANS and J. H. LEWIS

INTRODUCTION

Recent appraisals of the status of birds on Norfolk Islands can be found in Turner, Smithers & Hoogland (1968), Wakelin (1968), Smithers & Disney (1969), Disney & Smithers (1972) and De Raven (1975). Hull (1909) account provided an historical background against which modern accounts of status can be measured. Two of us, McKean and Lewis, visited the Island during November 1975. During our stay there we had the collaboration of Mr Owen Evans, an island resident, who, although mainly a specialist in the local flora, was able to provide data additional to that obtained by us. Notes were made on some 54 species but we propose to limit our remarks to those species for which we have new information.

Puffinus carneipes, Fleshly-footed Shearwater

Many Fleshly-footed Shearwaters were seen at sea between Phillip Island and Norfolk Island during November 1975. Although no previously published record is known to us the species is regarded as a regular visitor by some of the local residents with fishing interests. Norfolk Island could be expected to be within the normal foraging range of breeding birds from Lcd Howe Island (McKean & Hindwood 1965) or New Zealand.

Sula bassana serratator, Australian Gannet

A pair of Australian Gannets was noted nesting on Nepean Island in November 1961 by Mrs L. M. Marsh (*In litt.* to W. B. Hitchcock 21 July 1962). A colour slide of the incubating Gannet was sent to CSIRO by Mrs Marsh on 3 April 1963. It was examined by Hitchcock and McKean who agreed with her identification. Presumably the species has continued to nest in the Norfolk Island area since then, certainly two pairs bred on Phillip Island during the 1974/75 summer and we located three pairs with eggs during November 1975 on Phillip Island. A search of Nepean Island and Bird Rock failed to reveal any other nesting Gannets. This is apparently the first time the Australian Gannet has been recorded in breeding contact with another sulid species, in this case the Masked Booby (*S. dactylatra*). There appear to be no previously published records of the Australian Gannet from Norfolk Island.

Threskiornis molucca, White Ibis

A White Ibis was seen during November 1975 in the vicinity of Kingston. This would appear to be the first published record for Norfolk Island of this Australian breeding species but it has been

recorded as a straggler in New Zealand (OSNZ 1970) and also to Lord Howe Island (Fullagar *et al.* 1974).

Anas platyrhynchos, Mallard

Up to four Mallards were present during November 1975 at a swampy patch near Kingston. Although there are no previous published records for Norfolk Island the species is common in New Zealand and during November 1975 Dr P. J. Fullagar (pers. comm.) recorded about 20 Mallard on Lord Howe Island. G. Southwell (*in litt.* 2 January 1976) stated that he has seen the species on Norfolk on several occasions.

Rallus philippensis, Banded Rail

Apparently there have been no published reports of this species on Norfolk Island since the time of Hull (1909). On 19 November 1975 at dusk a Banded Rail was seen at the edge of the swamp below the Melanesian Mission (St. Barnabas Chapel). We spot-lighted the same spot on 26 November 1975 and glimpsed three Banded Rails as they scurried into thicker cover. It is relevant to mention that Banded Rails reappeared on Lord Howe Island during the latter half of 1975 (P. J. Fullagar, pers. comm.). They had not been noted there since about 1944 (Hindwood & Cunningham 1950).

Calidris acuminata, Sharp-tailed Sandpiper

A bird was present at a freshwater pool near Kingston during most of November 1975. It was examined carefully in case it might have been a Pectoral Sandpiper (*C. melanotos*) but its breast markings and bill colour excluded that possibility. Apparently there are no previously published records for Norfolk Island, however G. Southwell (*in litt.* 2 January 1976) reported that he has noted them annually in small numbers.

Sterna sp., Fairy or Little Tern

The remains of a small Tern, either *S. albifrons* or *S. nereis*, were picked up at Emily Bay, Norfolk Island, on 15 November 1975. This material, comprising two wings and a tail, has been lodged in the collections of the Division of Wildlife Research, CSIRO (Reg. No. 18241). New Zealand Little Terns could pass through the area on migration whereas any of the races of Fairy Terns could occur as occasional visitors or vagrants. The mummified remains of a *S. albifrons* were found on Gower Islet, Lord Howe Island, by J. Pickard on 15 December 1975 (CSIRO Div. Wildl. Res. Colln. Reg. No. 18253).

Turdus poliocephalus, Grey-headed Blackbird

We found two old nests of this species (identification based on bulkiness of nest, lack of mud in lining and egg fragments present) yet failed to find any birds despite many hours observation and mist-netting throughout the forest. The Blackbird (*Turdus merula*) and the Song Thrush (*T. philomelos*) were abundant. It is our opinion that

the Grey-headed Blackbird on Norfolk Island is on the verge of extinction and that the population has shrunk to the point of no return. The Norfolk Island population is the nominate race. The most recent sighting that we are aware of is of a single bird seen below the summit of Mt Pitt by Mrs Beryl Evans during September 1975.

Zosterops albugularis, White-throated Silveryeye

Our only sighting was a pair probing the branchlets and leaves of a tree in rainforest just below the summit of Mt Pitt on 16 November 1975. Our sighting, although not changing its status from that given by Mees (1969) or Smithers & Disney (1969), at least indicates that the species is still extant.

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