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NORFOLK ISLAND BIRDS: A REVIEW 1985

By NEIL HERMES, OWEN EVANS
and BERYL EVANS

This report brings together recent knowledge on the birds of Norfolk Island, updates previously published notes and presents unpublished material.

In 1978 the Royal Australasian Ornithologists Union held its annual congress in Norfolk Island. As a result of a mini-atlas conducted at the same time, a publication was prepared which reviewed available information, published records and recorded the status of the birds of the island (Schodde *et al.* 1983).

Since 1978 significant interest has been focused on the birds of the island. In 1979 an officer of the Australian National Parks and Wildlife Service (ANPWS) was stationed permanently on the island. The OSNZ South-west Pacific Islands Record Scheme was instituted in 1981 and this scheme has gathered data collected by New Zealand ornithologists. Moore (1985) reported on the data available in this scheme to 1984. In 1984 the Flora and Fauna Society of Norfolk Island began publishing a monthly Newsletter which includes many bird observations. This society published a checklist of the birds of the island (Hermes 1985, revised 1986). An illustrated field guide to the birds of the island was published in 1985 (Hermes 1985). In addition the island has been visited casually by many ornithologists from Australia, New Zealand, Germany and Canada and by consultant ornithologists engaged by the ANPWS.

As with previous publications on the birds of Norfolk Island, the names follow the *RAOU Recommended English Names for Australian Birds*.

Schodde *et al.* (1983) listed 100 species recorded for Norfolk Island. Moore (1985) increased this to 107 species, and this report increases the total to 120 species.

We thank the Norfolk Island residents and visitors who have contributed to this report. Observations are based on the following people's unpublished records.

Residents: Neil Hermes 1983-1985; Owen and Beryl Evans;
Peter Coyne 1979-83; Helen Sampson; Angela
Guymer; Derek Greenwood; George Southwell
1969-72.

Visitors: C.A. Fleming, November 28 - December 4, 1971; Victorian Naturalists Group September 1983; Warren Hitchcock November 20 1976 - January 7 1977; R. B. Sibson; Ian Enersby January 1985; Harry Wakelin February 1984; John Tarr March 6-24, 1983.

We would like to acknowledge the valuable comments on drafts of this manuscript by Jim Moore, Richard Schodde and Peter Fullagar.

LAND AND FRESHWATER SPECIES

WHITE-FACED HERON *Ardea novaehollandiae*

During winter, flocks of up to 31 (OE, BE). Seen often on Philip Island coastline 1983-1985 (NH).

MALLARD *Anas platyrhynchos*

Of 100 adult and juvenile birds banded in 1982/83 season, four juveniles were recorded away from the island within one year - one in Vanuatu, two in New Caledonia and one in New Zealand. A fifth juvenile was recorded almost three years after banding, in New Zealand 1150 km from the banding place. All five birds were shot. This could indicate a regular north-south movement. Reports from Lord Howe Island are of fluctuations in numbers indicating possible movements (OE, BE). High level of apparent hybridisation with Pacific Black Duck (*Anas superciliosa*) and feral domestic ducks. Ducklings recorded in August and September (NH).

AUSTRALIAN KESTREL *Falco cenchroides*

Seen regularly and probably nesting on Philip Island (NH). Four birds on 9 April 1972 (GS).

FERAL CHICKEN *Gallus gallus*

Chicks late in August. Widespread and a potential problem if numbers build up in native forest and horticultural areas (NH).

SPOTLESS CRAKE *Porzana tabuensis*

Up to six came out to taped calls at Lower Cascade Creek in early 1980s (OE, BE).

PURPLE SWAMPHEN *Porphyrio porphyrio*

Adult and half-grown chick on 4 March 1983 (NH). Regular in Mission Chapel Swamp, Watermill and Cascade Creek (OE, BE).

FERAL PIGEON *Columba livia*

Regular on Philip Island. Sometimes large flocks of up to 50. Almost certainly nests on southern cliffs of Jacky Jacky (NH). Nesting on cliffs at Simons Water (OE, BE).

EMERALD DOVE *Chalcophaps indica*

Feeds regularly on olive seed. Nest in top of 3 m high pine contained two chicks on 11 February 1985 (NH). One nest with two eggs 2 m above ground on 17 July 1976 (OE, BE).

CRIMSON ROSELLA *Platycercus elegans*

Disease still prevalent. Breeding season appears to be extended. Flying juveniles observed in August and chicks in nest in November. Very numerous, especially in Norfolk Island National Park. One adult bird observed with extensive yellow on upperparts (NH).

RED-CROWNED PARAKEET *Cyanoramphus novaezelandiae*

Surveys since 1977-78 survey, which estimated the total population at between 17 and 30 birds, indicate a further decline in the population. In 1983 a programme was begun to breed this bird in captivity (NH).

SHINING BRONZE-CUCKOO *Chrysococcyx lucidus*

Active calling October to December 1983-1985 (NH).

LONG-TAILED CUCKOO *Eudynamys taitensis*

Rarely observed. Only recent record two single birds in 1982 (OE, BE).

NORFOLK ISLAND BOOBOOK OWL *Ninox undulata*

Regular censuses and casual observations between 1983 and 1985 indicated that birds call from April to December but are heard more frequently in June and July. One record from Burnt Pine in 1978. Records in 1983 came from Anson Bay, south-west corner of Norfolk Island National Park, and Mt Bates. The 1984-85 records all centred on the south-west corner of Norfolk Island National Park (NH, OE, BE).

SACRED KINGFISHER *Halcyon sancta*

Nests mainly in hollows in banks of road cuttings. Active at hollows in September. A large chick in one hollow on 13 January. Often observed on Philip Island 1983-1985 (NH).

WELCOME SWALLOW *Hirundo neoxena*

Records between 16 March and 10 October. Maximum 40 on 1 May 1983. Often seen on Philip Island. No local breeding records (NH, OE, BE).

GREY-HEADED BLACKBIRD *Turdus poliocephalus*

No records 1983-85 despite intensive searches and netting in Norfolk Island National Park. This species is almost certainly extinct on Norfolk Island (NH).

BLACKBIRD *Turdus merula*

Breeding records from 29 August (eggs) to 21 October (chicks). Nests in a variety of sites from fruit trees close to homes to native vines in thick forest. Partial albinism common, especially on wings and back. A few records for Philip Island 1983-1985 (NH).

SONG THRUSH *Turdus philomelos*

Breeding records from 13 September (chicks) to 21 October (chicks). Nests in *Meryta latifolia*, staghorn fern (NH) and garden plants. Also recorded on Philip Island and possibly nesting on Nepean Island (OE, BE).

SCARLET ROBIN *Petroica multicolor*

All observations 1983-1985 within the Norfolk Island National Park with the following exceptions: single observations near Melanesian Mission Chapel, Anson Bay, Red Road and Anson Road near Chapel (NH, OE, BE). Juveniles February 1984 (HW). Nest in *Dodonea viscosa*, Mt Bates Road, contained at least three chicks on 29 October 1978. Three males and five females seen on road on Mt Pitt on 16 March 1983. This species has declined since 1978 (OE, BE).

GREY FANTAIL *Rhipidura fuliginosa*

Nest with three eggs laid 12-14 September (OE, BE). In native forest it uses flowering palms as a perch to wait for insects (NH).

GREY GERYGONE *Gerygone igata*

Often feeds on the ground (NH). Bird caught in web of *Nephila* sp. spider (IE). Feeds on scale and flying ants (OE, BE).

SILVEREYE *Zosterops lateralis*

Often recorded on Philip Island in 1983-1985. In sample of 27 birds on Norfolk in October, average weight 12.1 g (range 10.5-13.5) and average wing length 62 mm (range 60-65) (NH).

WHITE-BREADED WHITE-EYE *Zosterops albogularis*

One bird observed 21 December 1979 feeding on lantana at the base of the cliff on the northern side of Mt Pitt (PC). No further observations despite extensive observation and low-level netting in Norfolk Island National Park in 1983-1985 (NH).

LONG-BILLED WHITE-EYE *Zosterops tenuirostris*

Recorded frequently in 1983-1985 but almost always in Norfolk Island National Park (NH) and Rocky Point (Hundred Acres) Reserve (NH, VN). Feeds in noisy small flocks on branches, trunks and ground. Recorded feeding on pawpaw fruit (NH) This species was found to feed on native plant species rather than on a mix of native species, as the Silvereye does (Gordon 1983).

EUROPEAN GOLDFINCH *Carduelis carduelis*

Juveniles recorded in February 1984 (HW). Large flocks on Philip Island (NH).

EUROPEAN GREENFINCH *Carduelis chloris*

Recorded in small flocks on Philip Island (NH).

HOUSE SPARROW *Passer domesticus*

Recorded in small flocks on Philip Island. Largest number 40 on 17 May 1983 (NH).

COMMON STARLING *Sturnus vulgaris*

Large roosting flocks, especially in *Eucalyptus* plantations at Arthur's Vale, Bullock Hut Road and Rocky Point (Hundred Acres) Reserve. A roosting flock of at least 50 000 birds was seen at Headstone on 4 June 1983. Nests in cavities in walls, hollows in banks, ceilings of buildings and hollows in white oaks. Nests from August to November. Very common on Philip Island (NH).

BREEDING SEABIRDS**PROVIDENCE PETREL** *Pterodroma solandri*

First observed on Philip Island on 3-4 July 1985. Nest found 15 July containing one infertile egg. Estimated number at least 20 birds and at least four in nest burrows (NH, DG *et al.*). A full account is in preparation (NH).

BLACK-WINGED PETREL *Pterodroma nigripennis*

Arrives in October, and all birds leave by late May. Eggs are laid in January and the last record of a chick is 2 May. All nests recorded were on Philip Island, where several hundred birds breed (NH). Some birds still unsuccessfully attempt to breed on Norfolk Island, where cats take adult birds (OE, BE, NH).

WEDGE-TAILED SHEARWATER *Puffinus pacificus*

Arrives 17-22 October, and all chicks leave by the end of May (NH, OE, BE).

LITTLE SHEARWATER *Puffinus assimilis*

Arrives in April and May. Earliest egg date 7 July; chicks from 2 September. Nests on Philip Island and islets along the northern coastline of Norfolk Island. Nesting on Norfolk Island is now rare and feral cats take many (NH, OE, BE).

AUSTRALASIAN GANNET *Morus serrator*

The following data are for the 1977-78 to 1984-85 seasons (OE, BE, NH, PC). Egg dates 30 August-1 February. Chick dates 13 November-11 March. Earliest fledgling 22 January. No records at nest site after 11 March. Records at sea in May (NH).

	No. Pairs	Max No. Fleglings
1977-78	3	2
1978-79	3*	1
1979-80	3	2
1980-81	2 or 3	1
1981-82	?	?
1982-83	2 or 3	1
1983-84	3	1
1984-85	3	?

* This is at variance with Tarburton (1981).

MASKED BOOBY *Sula dactylatra*

Three chicks photographed in December 1971 at Rocky Point Reserve (CF). Four juveniles banded on 6 November 1976. Some birds shot in 1977. No breeding on main island since 1978 (NH). The following numbers of young were banded on Nepean Island in spring of each year. Except in 1977, a determined effort was made to band all chicks on the island each year and fluctuations can therefore be interpreted to indicate fluctuations in numbers of young raised.

1977	168	1982	639
1978	549	1983	382
1979	527	1984	668
1980	672	1985	111
1981	483		

The following data are for Philip Island: egg dates 5 July-3 January; chick dates 5 September-29 March; earliest fledgling 2 January; peak of egg laying September. Four nests with eggs on Green Pool Stone 13 July 1984 (NH). Nesting seems earlier on Nepean than Philip Island (OE, BE).

RED-TAILED TROPICBIRD *Phaethon rubricauda*

Some birds are present all year but are more conspicuous in October and November. Eggs are laid in December-February and as late as 11 March. Chicks present 1 January-15 July. Birds nest on Philip and Norfolk Islands and the islets to the north of Norfolk Island. Schodde *et al.* (1983) underestimated nesting on Philip Island, where up to 1000 pairs breed (NH, OE, BE).

SOOTY TERN *Sterna fuscata*

The following data are from 1979 to 1985 (NH, PC). Birds arrive over Norfolk Island in late August and approach land only at night, when they are heard, not seen. From mid-September thousands descend on the nesting islands during the day and land occasionally. Laying starts in October but usually not until the second week. Because the eggs are harvested, laying continues. Protracted laying occurs to 30 November (the usual date of closure of the open season). The last egg date is 26 January. Chicks are present from 12 November to end of March but most chicks do not appear until January. Fledged young start to appear about the last week of January. In most years the birds leave in April and the latest records are late May.

The number of young produced on Philip Island in the 1984/85 season was estimated on 15 January 1985 to be about 8000 runners and flying young. Fullagar (1978) estimated more than 10 000 pairs in 1978 (NH).

COMMON NODDY *Anous stolidus*

The following data are for Philip Island. Adults arrive at the nest sites in October. Recorded laying dates 2 January-7 February; chicks 31 January-17 May. All leave in May. Nest sites are restricted to rocky ridges, e.g. near the Stool, above Moo-oo Beach, Jacky Jacky and some cliff sites. Several hundred pairs nest on Philip Island. This species also nests on Nepean Island and on islets north of Norfolk Island. The map in Schodde *et al.* (1983) does not show this species on Philip Island; however, this was an accidental omission (NH).

BLACK NODDY *Anous minutus*

Now breeds only at five discrete colonies on Norfolk Island and in small scattered groups on Philip Island. It may breed on islets north of Norfolk Island. Nest building starts in October and the first eggs are laid on 4 December. The peak of egg laying is over by the end of January, but some eggs are present until 11 March. Chicks are present 9 January-17 April. Birds are present all year in small numbers (NH).

GREY TERNLET *Procelsterna albigutta*

Nests on Nepean and Philip Islands and islets to the north of Norfolk Island. Probably nests on cliffs on Norfolk Island. Extended breeding season. Egg dates 1 October-3 January. Chick dates 1 October-11 March. Earliest flying young 2 January (NH).

WHITE TERN *Gygis alba*

Present all year but few in winter. Nests on Norfolk Island only. Pairing begins in August. Earliest egg date is 10 September and first hatching date 20 October. Incubation 35-36 days. Many hatchings in December and January. Birds fledge in March and April. Cold summer storms, heavy rain, 2-3 days of fog and drizzle in January can cause considerable chick mortality in some years (OE, BE, NH).

PREVIOUSLY RECORDED VAGRANTS**GIANT PETREL** *Macronectes* sp.

One seen in Philip Island Passage at a distance, 21 June 1985. Three birds present at Headstone rubbish outfall 14-16 July 1985 (NH).

CAPE PETREL *Daption capense*

Reported at sea in 1970s (GS), and reported by local fisherman on 8 August 1983 (NH).

LEAST FRIGATEBIRD *Fregata ariel*

A female seen regularly around Norfolk Island 1-8 January 1985. Observed at Emily Bay, Captain Cook Monument and Kingston Pier (NH).

CATTLE EGRET *Ardeola ibis*

Four birds in May-June 1982 (HW). One on 6 February-5 April 1983 (NH, JT). One on 5 April 1984 and two on 15 May 1985 (NH); 19 birds in 1984 (OE, BE). All observations at Kingston, Longridge, Watermill Valley or Headstone.

GREAT EGRET *Egretta alba*

One bird at Kingston in November 1976 (WH). Presumably same bird previously recorded March and July 1976 (Moore 1981, 1985) and three at Steeles Point in late 1950s (OE, BE).

LITTLE EGRET *Egretta garzetta*

One recorded in early 1970s (GS) and one at Kingston 17 March-15 May (NH).

ROYAL SPOONBILL *Platalea regia*

One bird seen irregularly at Kingston and Watermill Valley 24 June-18 December 1984 (NH).

AUSTRALIAN SHELDUCK *Tadorna tadornoides*

Adult female on Kingston Common and Watermill Dam from 29 November 1984 to 12 December 1985 (NH).

MARSH HARRIER *Circus aeruginosus*

Two present 4 May-30 September 1983 (DG, VN, NH). One record in July 1985 (OE, BE). Carcasses of Grey Ternlets found on Philip Island were certainly prey of this species. There has almost certainly been confusion between reports of this species and the resident Australian Kestrel.

EURASIAN COOT *Fulica atra*

Winter 1971, one at Watermill (GS); one on 28 May 1978 (OE, BE).

SOUTH ISLAND PIED OYSTERCATCHER *Haematopus ostralegus finschi*

Two recorded at Second Sands, Watermill and airfield in 1970 (GS). One at Watermill 15-30 September 1983. Photographs of this bird were sent to R. B. Sibson, who confirmed identification as a South Island Pied Oystercatcher (NH).

MASKED LAPWING *Vanellus miles*

In February 1980 one bird observed at Watermill (HW), probably the same bird as seen in November 1980 (Moore 1981, Schodde *et al.* 1983); also at Mission Chapel Swamp. This bird was hit by an aircraft on the airfield (OE, BE).

DOUBLE-BANDED PLOVER *Charadrius bicinctus*

Up to 60 in June 1983 at airfield (NH).

BLACK-WINGED STILT *Himantopus himantopus*

About seven in 1957 on Kingston Common (OE, BE). One in early 1970s (GS). Two on Kingston Common on 17 September 1983 (NH).

RUDDY TURNSTONE *Arenaria interpres*

Winter records: 13 June 1984 at Philip Island and 50 at airfield during stormy weather, 4 June 1983 (NH).

MARSH SANDPIPER *Tringa stagnatilis*

One in December 1969 (GS).

TEREK SANDPIPER *Tringa terek*

One in early 1970 (GS).

LATHAM'S SNIPE *Gallinago hardwickii*

A few at Kingston November 1976 (WH).

BAR-TAILED GODWIT *Limosa lapponica*

Two at Emily Bay 12 June 1983 (NH).

RED KNOT *Calidris canutus*

One at Watermill in early 1970 (GS). Two on Kingston Common, 12 October 1984 (NH).

SHARP-TAILED SANDPIPER *Calidris acuminata*

Up to 20 birds recorded in early 1970s (GS). Flock of 8 on Kingston Common February and March 1983. Two on Kingston Common, 12 October 1984 (NH).

SILVER GULL *Larus novaehollandiae*

In 1979 or 1980, about 11 birds for a period of a few months (OE, BE). Two birds 6 March-5 July 1983 (NH, JT), and three arrived March 1985 and one remained 21 June 1985. One of these birds was shot. In 1983 and 1985, single birds were recorded on coasts of Philip Island (NH). A few were present for a few years up to 1967. One pair on Philip Island had a nest with 3 eggs in late 1967 (OE, BE) (reported in Turner *et al.* 1968).

WHITE-WINGED TERN *Chlidonias leucoptera*

One at airfield 1 December 1971 (CF). One bird on Kingston Common, 18 December 1984-7 February 1985, but two seen 5 and 8 January 1985 (NH).

TERN sp *Sterna* sp.

A bird which was either a Little or a Fairy Tern observed by George Southwell at Slaughter Bay in early 1970s (GS). One record in 1980 (OE, BE).

BARN OWL *Tyto alba*

Resident in 1972 (GS), and one record 19 September 1977 (OE, BE).

WHITE-THROATED NEEDLETAIL *Hirundapus caudactis*

Many observed December 1968 (GS) and over Mt Pitt in November 1976 (WH).

NEWLY RECORDED VAGRANTS

SHY ALBATROSS *Diomedea cauta*

Single bird captured on land 22 October 1985; photographed and released (NH).

INTERMEDIATE EGRET *Egretta intermedia*

One on Kingston Common, 21 June 1985 (NH).

YELLOW-BILLED SPOONBILL *Platelea flavipes*

One record late 1960s (OE, BE).

BLACK SWAN *Cygnus atratus*

Two birds on Kingston Common, Watermill Dam and Cascade Dam on 26-27 August and one bird up to 18 October 1974. Island residents also report seeing one early this century (OE, BE).

HARDHEAD *Aythya australis*

Single unconfirmed record November 1971 (CF), and five on Watermill Dam in winter 1971 (GS).

COMMON SANDPIPER *Tringa hypoleucos*

One bird at Watermill Dam, 8 February-24 March 1983 (NH, OE, BE, JT).

CURLEW SANDPIPER *Calidris ferruginea*

Five birds in spring 1970 (GS), and one or two on Kingston Common, 23 September-12 October 1984 (NH).

KELP GULL *Larus dominicanus*

One record of dead bird on Kingston Common, March 1970 (GS), and one bird flying over Kingston Common, 17 September 1983 (NH).

WHITE-FRONTED TERN *Sterna striata*

One exhausted bird picked up in winter 1978 (OE, BE).

ROSE-CROWNED FRUIT-DOVE *Ptilinopus regina*

One bird found dead 13 September 1980 (now a specimen in the Australian National Wildlife Collection, Canberra), and two separate sightings were made one month later. No further records (OE, BE).

PALLID CUCKOO *Cuculus pallidus*

One bird at Steeles Point, 23 May and mid-June 1984 (HS).

MARTIN sp. *Cecropis* sp.

Several birds with swallows at Kingston 21 June-15 July 1985; possibly Fairy Martins (NH).

RICHARD'S PIPIT *Anthus novaeseelandiae*

Regular reports of pipits on the airfield from 1983 to 1985 were not confirmed by NH.

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- NEIL HERMES, *Australian National Parks and Wildlife Service, P.O. Box 636, Canberra, ACT, Australia*; OWEN and BERYL EVANS, *c/o Post Office, Norfolk Island, South Pacific 2899*

**SHORT NOTE****A Japanese Snipe at Mangere**

The occurrence of several snipe in Southland during the 1984-85 summer has recently been reported (C. M. Miskelly *et al.* 1986, *Notornis* 32:327) in an account which includes previous records of snipe in New Zealand.

On 13 October 1985, while visiting the AMDB Mangere ponds, DGB and MJT were observing an area of shallow rainwater pools within a site of new construction, having stayed in our car so as not to disturb a flock of about 300 Pied Stilts in the nearest pool. Also present were 15 Knots and 10 Bar-tailed Godwits, and close to these, walking along the water's edge, was another bird which we both exclaimed could only be a snipe. The bird moved behind a clump of vegetation, but it soon emerged, flying low, and after briefly hovering close to the godwits alighted in a patch of dead weeds.