

# MONTAGUE ISLAND NEWS

Newsletter 2  
November, 2008

small island - BIG experience

## Area Manager says....

### “Welcome” to our second newsletter!

We hope you enjoy the spring e-newsletter.

Things have been very busy with our continuing Seabird Habitat Restoration Program on the Island, with another plot treated and re-vegetated. November included a 2-day “sharing” workshop sponsored by the NSW Environmental Trust, and attended by other Island Managers from around NSW and Victoria.

Our half-day tours have been extremely busy during the southward humpback migration with people coming out to enjoy whale watching combined with all the spring wildlife on the Island - a great variety of experiences in one 4 hour trip!

Overnight Conservation Tours have been almost booked out from September through to December and have featured many groups re-visiting after previous years to see how their conservation work is progressing and to renew their bond with the Island.

Whatever your connection with the Island, enjoy this glimpse of Montague’s spring of 2008.

Preston Cope, Area Manager Central

**Beautiful place. Weather was excellent as well as accom and staff. Penguins and gulls, many walks, definitely coming back!**

Emma and Michael from Newman in WA  
Overnight tour participants.

## Wildlife News

Spring is wildlife time on Montague with the urge to breed dominating the seabirds nesting out there. Whales were passing south and maximum seal numbers around the rocks.

**Bird life:** Little Penguins have been nesting with some clutches already fledged and more still hatching. Early indications point to a fairly good season. The 2 chicks in most burrows seem to be around the same weight when checked, meaning food is plentiful. Some recent counts at the jetty site were of over 75 penguins.



S. Cohen

The Peregrine Falcons have fledged a chick which is now flying with the parents - a magnificent sight for us humans but a thing of fear if you are a gull or a tern who must dread the approach of these lethal predators.

The Silver Gulls nested in September after weeks of courtship around the Island. Their nests are sprinkled over the hill up from the quarry and around the quarry.

Shortly after the gulls came the Crested Terns, with the first group nesting just east of the quarry and more joined them later. The track east from the quarry has been closed to allow them to nest in peace.



M. Westwood

Shearwaters arrived in huge numbers and have readied their burrows. The amazing synchronous egg-laying of Short-tailed Shearwaters will occur over just 3 days at the end of November. This synchronised laying happens wherever the birds nest - in all their millions from Montague south round into Bass Strait and beyond - the same 3 days are “laying” days.

**Seals:** This year the seals steadily gathered numbers throughout October, perhaps later than usual, with the peak being in mid-

November when over 800 were counted on just one of the three main haul-out sites. There are still around 20-30 seals down at the south end as well.

“Will they have any pups at the Island this year?” is the big question, after some 10 pups were born last year and the year before. The Australian Fur Seals pup in November-December, while the New Zealand Fur Seals pup in January.

**Whales:** The southward migration of the humpbacks

provided everything watchers could want - individual antics, mothers and calves, huge whales, multiple pods within sight, some spectacular whale feeding action and the curious ones who “mug” the boat for more than 30 minutes doing some “people watching” of their own.



K. Armstrong

A feature this year was the amount of vocalisations through our hydrophone, including an incredibly loud “song” from a male wooing a passing female near the boat with her calf. We sent this recording away for checking with the



Narooma Charters

University of Queensland. You can hear a segment of this on the Montague Island web site. The hydrophone is dropped over the side if conditions permit and adds an extra dimension to whale watching.

## Unusual Sightings and Events:

In October we were blessed with hundreds of Albatross feeding west of the Island. Mostly Mollymawks (medium-sized Albatross) - the Shy Albatross was one confirmed identification - resting on the water in large flocks of more than 50 birds, with others in the air nearby.

## Wildlife News, continued

A tour group also spotted an entangled humpback dragging some long rope and some buoys. The tour boat tracked the whale south at around 3 knots, but NPWS efforts to re-locate it further south failed. Hopefully the ropes will break or slip off.

The first Sunfish *Mola mola* of the season was sighted recently. These animals are most unusual in shape and behaviour, and their sheer size can be awe-inspiring. They are the largest boned fish in the world but oddly enough feed on jellyfish, including bluebottles!

## Seabird Habitat Restoration Program (SHRP)

### 2008 works

#### Re-vegetation continues:

The treatment of about 1.5ha at the extreme southern tip of the Island continues with tour groups doing the re-vegetation of the plot. Over 9000 plants have gone into the area. With still some to plant, the work should be completed by December.

Little Penguins have been successfully nesting in artificial nesting boxes in the area, as well as in natural nests in small caves between the granite boulders.

#### Sharing the good news:

Around 25 persons with an interest in Island management from NSW and Victoria attended a successful "Dissemination" workshop sponsored by the NSW Environmental Trust, with the aim of sharing the successes of the work on Montague, and to learn from each other about issues facing the management of Islands along our coast.

Presentations included a history of over 50 years of bird research on the Island; the SHRP research; management principles; the role of ecotourism; and the mice eradication project. The group spent the second day on the Island examining first-hand the impact of the project. Feedback from participants was strongly positive. View the case study (pdf) [HERE](#)

## Mice and Rabbit Eradication

### Successful program removes pests from the Island:

A project going back to July 2007 to eradicate mice from the Island has been declared a qualified success after 12 months of monitoring using 73 footprint recording stations. Monitoring will continue until July 2009 to make sure of the success of the project.

A small number of rabbits on the northern Island were also eradicated.

## Half-day Tour News

### Spring Tours

Despite the price rise, Montague Island Half-day Tours have proved their popularity with over 1400 passengers this spring.

**Great few days - treasured memories.**

*The Youngers - Overnight Tour participants*

At this time of year all trips have included a session of whale watching. We believe our tours provide the right mix of on-water whale action (usually around an hour or so) and then a "rest" ashore on the Island where the nesting gulls and terns provide the action up close. The guides then provide a good dose of Island heritage including the lighthouse and the buildings.

## Hosted Conservation Overnight Tour News

### SCOOP!! 3rd CONSECUTIVE NSW TOURISM AWARD! HALL OF FAME ACHIEVED!



*NPWS & CVA Officials celebrate the 2008 NSW Ecotourism Award.*

For the 3rd time NPWS and Conservation Volunteers Australia (CVA) have won a prestigious NSW Award for Ecotourism. The award was announced at the annual presentation night at Star City in Sydney on 20th November, and followed the winning of the South



Coast Regional Award in October.

Winning 3 times in a row triggers automatic entry into the NSW Tourism "HALL OF FAME" - up there with attractions such as Bridge Climb. [LINK HERE](#)

Winning also means automatic entry into the 2008 National Tourism Awards held in February 2009. The Tours won this award in 2007.

Benefits of entry and winning include publicity, logo use and considerable profile raising.

NPWS was represented in several other categories on the night as well. [LINK HERE](#)

**Thank you...** to the Cains for sending a box of fiction books to add to the Montague Island library! Much appreciated! ...to all those who send us their pictures after their trips - Thanks!

### Things to look forward to..

#### 2009 - the 50th Anniversary of Shearwater Surveying on Montague

Since 1959, without missing a year, scientists and volunteers have been conducting a survey of the Shearwaters on the Island. These remarkable long-distance fliers are known to many of us by their common name of "muttonbirds".

The survey is renowned as the longest continual survey in the southern hemisphere. To mark the occasion there will be several events, including the annual survey, and it is hoped to publish a unique set of factsheets on the Island's birds.

#### 2009 - the 20th Anniversary of Montague Island Nature Reserve

Yes it's been almost 20 years since NPWS took over management of Montague Island.

In those few years of Island history NPWS has invested much time and energy into improvements on the Island.

Celebrations for the event are yet to be decided, but are sure to showcase the achievements gained in restoration of the buildings; cleaning-up of the Island; access for the public; and ongoing conservation and research projects.

NEXT NEWSLETTER - FEBRUARY 2009!



*Conservation Tour workers organising seedlings for planting. S. Cohen*



*Planting way down the south end. A. Vucovic*