

MONTAGUE ISLAND NEWS

Newsletter 6
Nov-Jan 2009

small island - BIG experience

Spring/Summer newsletter!

Area Manager says....

Montague Island - spring and summer! Penguins, gulls, terns, shearwaters and even raptors breeding. Whales passing by, seals on the rocks - you know it's that time of year all right just by the noise and the smell!

People come in big numbers as well to experience the wonders of life on and around Montague at this time.

Our excellent team of Guides and our Field Staff on the Island have done their best to make visitors welcome and keep the standard as high as we can for these award-winning, sustainable tourism ventures.

Behind the scenes, there are our business partners - Narooma Charters and Conservation Volunteers Australia.

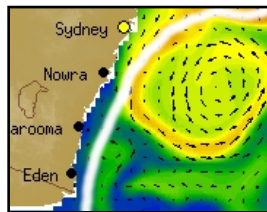
Also part of the team are our local support staff - our cleaners, our suppliers on Narooma's "Flat" and Eurobodalla Tourism.

Although this has been the "wildlife" time, the rest of the year offers much for the day or overnight visitor as well! If you haven't visited for a while... try Autumn or Winter for something different!

Preston Cope,
Area Manager Central

Wildlife news:

What a whale season it was!



The currents, September - MW

We knew it was going to be good when in August we had big whale numbers feeding on krill and fish in the vicinity of the Island. It is the editor's personal theory that the large body of cold water pushed up from Bass

Strait caused the whales to linger for much longer than previous years, feeding in our area. With new arrivals swelling the numbers daily it became a common sight to see more than 30 whales on the way to the Island, and on some days over 100 whales! This went on for weeks - right through till October. Last official "whale watch" tours finished around the 18th of November.

Visit our [website](#) for sounds, video and pictures of this remarkable season!

Seabirds:

Albatross were spectacular earlier but rarely seen since October. There were also frequent sightings of juvenile Southern Giant Petrels. A highlight this year was a call of "Snowy Albatross" during one trip, when a completely white Albatross-looking bird cruised by on the wind, not that far offshore. Fortunately Bill Leighton, one of our tour participants, snapped it and we were able to identify it as an adult Southern Giant Petrel! Very rare around here!



Giant Petrels - Bill Leighton

Making matters more interesting, during the same trip we saw a juvenile Giant Petrel eating from a chunk of dead seal!



Frigate Bird - P. Bourke

During January the Island has been visited by a Frigatebird - definitely a juvenile but is it a Greater or Lesser Frigate Bird? - usually found in tropical waters but reported *very* occasionally as far south as Merimbula.

Little Penguins:

Evening tours cease for a few months as landing penguin numbers decline when the

adults head to sea for weeks to recover from breeding and gain weight for moulting. Any late-hatched or second-clutch chicks will thus have to fend for themselves, and those with enough weight and condition will make it to the ocean.

Commenting in the local papers, Shorebird Coordinator Dr Amy Harris suggested that several young penguin corpses washed ashore locally were most likely second-clutch birds which didn't survive as they are generally lighter in weight than earlier-born fledglings.

Seals:

Last year Montague had at least 6 Australian Fur Seal pups before the end of December, and then at least 11 New Zealand Fur Seal pups in January. So far we have sighted 7 Australian pups, and around 10 NZ seal pups. Down at the southern end of Montague, the NZ seals are still there, and have spread around near Old Jetty Bay.



Classic male seal pose! - MW

Gulls:

Our spring influx of Silver Gulls arrived in early September. Beautifully spruced up, preened, well fed, white-as-white and bright red legs, beaks and eyes for the season! With nesting spread from near the wharf to the quarry, it's very hard to estimate the population, but more than 1000 pairs would be possible.



Gull pair courting - MW

Crested Terns

The count showed upwards of 700 pairs this year, settled in front of the solar panels in a very tight group. Great place to sit quietly at a respectable distance and watch the comings and goings, courting dances, exchanges of food and changing of incubation shifts.



Crested Terns nesting 2009 - MW

We leave today... we are considering mutiny.

Overnight Tour participants.
October 2009.

The Mystery Marsupial:

An overnight tour in October reported several sightings around the buildings, but one week of motion-sensing cameras and hair traps in late November did not reveal any sign of either mice or other marsupials. Perhaps one day the mystery will be solved.

Other news:

Seabird Habitat Restoration Program (SHRP):

Dry conditions have continued and we have unfortunately lost many plants in the 2008 treatment area on the southern end.

Other, more-established areas are doing much better, with a great deal of penguin activity along the western shore in the 2001 treated area and behind Old Jetty Bay..

Some 13000 seedlings have been transplanted into larger pots to be kept until next year for planting. This was due to rain preventing this year's burn and subsequent planting from occurring.

And how did "Ralph" go with breeding? We observed considerable nesting activity in this box this year, with a penguin pair using it as their breeding "burrow" for the season, and hopefully the 2 chicks raised in there fledged and we'll see them in a year or two.

Half-day tours:

With the whales come the people to watch them, and there's no better trip than our half-day tours with around 1.5 hours of whale-watching and then all the wildlife on the Island.

December and January then see the focus shift to the nesting birds - the terns and the gulls in particular - and then by February the Island goes quiet as the nesting birds with young progressively leave.

Our experienced Tour Guides shift focus again to the environment and the rich and varied geology, the indigenous history and the light station itself and those who manned it.

Overnight Tours:

Solid interest saw us almost totally booked out again this last season for September through to the end of November. Many were repeat visitors, and we had more "group" bookings this year as people organise friends and book out the entire house. A great way to experience Montague.

Only one trip had to be cancelled due to an east coast low (a "bomb" as they are nicknamed) when the sea and the weather prevented boats from getting out there.

Had the most amazing time, our 5th visit. We see something new each time...

*The Canberra Group.
October 2009*



*Eucalypt planted Sept 2006.
S. Donaldson*



*"Ralph's" nest.
S. Donaldson*



*Overnight Guide Louise
with tour participant.
S. Cohen*

2010 bookings are now filling. Be quick if you want our premium season September to November.

December and January had steady bookings, and included some *Green Ambassador* prize winners and their friends. The Commonwealth Bank *Green Ambassadors* program is a joint partnership between the Bank and Conservation Volunteers Australia. The program recognises and supports young people who actively assist or protect their local environment.



*The Refurbished Jetty
P. Bourke*

We also successfully introduced "family friendly" tours following repeated requests from intending visitors. These will now be a regular occurrence at least once during each school holiday and will allow families with children between 7 and 13 years old to come at a reduced "child" rate subject to conditions.

Montague Jetty Upgrade:

The more than 50 year old jetty at Montague Island had deteriorated to the point where it needed a complete re-fit which was done in September 2009. Timing of the work had to coincide with exceptionally low tides which would facilitate the drilling of low-level holes for supporting bolts.



*Close up of new ladder
& beams. MW*

This was a major undertaking in terms of time, parts and labour.

New beams, fenders and a ladder were installed. The beams are made of recycled plastic and should last for an exceptionally long time.

Their life expectancy, excluding mechanical damage, is more than 30 years as these recycled-plastic profiles will not warp, shrink, crack, rot, or splinter and are not affected by marine organisms.

Information on these recycled plastic products is from *Replas*.

Well done to our team of field staff!

Water, water, every where, Nor any drop to drink... and then there was February!

Things were getting crunchy out at Montague! September had 36.2 mm. October topped it with 76.6mm. November fell away with just 10.6mm over 8 days. December saw an improvement in the total falling - 37mm, but this spread over 9 days.

January had only 7mm - and this spread over 7 days. 2009 had a total of just 393mm!

Water storage was estimated at 30% capacity and we were forced to ship water out for the plants in the nursery.

Along comes February - 4-6th a whopping 111mm to break the drought! Then 13-16th an awesome 195mm to follow up! A total of 306mm - almost as much as the whole of 2009.

Amazingly, just 9km to the west, Narooma received 557mm for the same 2 weekends - almost double the Island's total!

The Web site!

Check the *downloads* page for a variety of our publications in pdf form. Also visit related sites:

mipartners.blogspot.com and
www.southcoastshorebirds.com.au

Any photographs or items for our newsletters welcome:
news@montagueisland.com.au next newsletter - mid-winter 2010