

MONTAGUE ISLAND NEWS

Newsletter 4
May-July 2009

small island - BIG experience

Our Autumn newsletter!

Area Manager says....

It's May already and the seasons roll by.

Autumn is traditionally a bit quieter around Montague, with most of the bird species finished their breeding cycles and visitor numbers decline as the cooler months set in.

But as this newsletter shows, there's still a lot happening out there!

Congratulations to the 9 volunteers who participated in the 50th Annual shearwater Survey on Montague in March. What an achievement to keep this data collection going for all that time!

The Seabird Habitat Restoration Project continues thanks to "Caring for Country" funding, and this year should see most of the Island's western fringe kikuyu-free!

Excellent publicity for our work and our tours has been gained through a media trip held in conjunction with Eurobodalla Tourism showing how much of an icon Montague is within this area.

Enjoy the newsletter.

Max Beukers,

Acting Area Manager Central

Those seals really stink!

Joyful tour participant, March 2009.

Wildlife News

Bird life: **Little Penguins** have well-and-truly finished moulting and are mostly out at sea foraging to recover lost weight before the harder winter months. Moulting can see them drop to less than half their weight as they convert their energy into a whole new suit of feathers. It's even more energy-expensive than raising chicks!



Moult - A. Harris

Sea Eagles, a **Whistling Kite** and the **Kestrels** are still seen above the Island, but no sign of the **Peregrine Falcons** for quite a while.

Just a few **Gulls** around the waters now, and virtually none on the Island itself. **Crested Terns** around and about inshore and back at Narooma, where their young, born on Montague most likely, still exhibit their immature plumage and their immature voice. A pair of **Caspian Terns** is a regular feature opposite the Town Wharf at the moment.

The **Shearwater** adults have left the area and would be well to the north, returning to their feeding grounds - with the Short Tailed Shearwaters migrating as far as the Bering Sea! Around the Island there is still evidence of their chicks being about, with footprints around the burrows. Coinciding with the chicks heading off north we may expect to see some mortalities evidenced by many of them washing up onto beaches. Please see our feature on the **50th Annual Shearwater Study** for more on these birds.



Short-tailed Shearwater - MI Partners

Albatrosses are around in big numbers since early May. They have come away from breeding sites and are feeding extensively on the schools of bait around the Island. Mainly Mollymawks (as distinct from the Great Albatrosses) around at the moment, they can be seen sitting on the water in flocks as well as diving and feeding. Shy, Yellow-nosed and Black-browed are the species we most

commonly see. Effortless flight, spectacular dives and sheer size make them a majestic creature to observe. The more wind the more birds you see, with their white plumage making them easily visible soaring off in the distances.



Albatrosses mid-May - M. Westwood

Australasian Gannets are common at this time of year, with many of them being juveniles. Adults gain their distinctive yellow cap and white body plumage after perhaps 6 years of age. Up until then they have various shades of brown eventually turning white over most the body. At the moment you can see fledglings from this season's breeding colonies - most likely in Bass Strait or south of there - with their mottley colours and clumsier flight.



Spectacular divers, they spot a fish and plunge from great heights into the water, capturing the fish and swallowing it on their way back to the surface. They have cushioning sacs of air in their faces and chests to soften the impact of these express-speed dives.



Gannets mid-May - M. Westwood

Cetaceans: Dolphins are around quite often, and locals have reported seeing one or two whales out wide heading north. It's about the right time for the Humpbacks to start going past as they head to breeding grounds up north. We don't have an official "whale-watching" season until September when it's their southward migration, but for the next month or two we'll be keeping our eyes out for the northern-bound Humpbacks.

Seals: It's been amusing to head off on tours and have a seal swimming around next to the boats by the Town Wharf!

Wildlife News, continued

There's been a couple of seals regularly lolling around inside the breakwaters all summer and autumn, and they often venture further up the inlet.



A. Vukovic

Out at the Island there are still more than 250 seals on the rocks, and our little pups have melded into the pack as they grow, and are now quite difficult to see. Fortunately the New Zealand Fur Seal pups are still in their little bay, and one or two can still be observed suckling most trips.

Unusual Sightings and Events:

How lucky were the trip participants who saw, no matter how briefly, a Green Turtle in one of the bays at the Island! It seemed to linger for a few weeks before heading away, probably back north with the currents.

Water, water, every where, Nor any drop to drink...

Long Dry Spell:

February ended up with 59.2mm of rain, but since then it's been grim! March had only 20mm, 10.2mm being the biggest shower. April had 29.8mm but all falls were less than 10mm. May has so far had only 7.6mm in the Montague gauge and even the kikuyu is looking sad, and the lomandra is curling up. Some of the tracks have turned to sand as the grasses shrivel.

Seabird Habitat Restoration Program (SHRP)

Re-vegetation continues:

Spraying of the next area to be treated, down at the south-western corner, is occurring now, with burning planned for June 20 or thereabouts, weather permitting. Completing this area will give the western side of the Island a virtually continuous kikuyu-free zone from the water's edge extending 100-200 metres inland.

"Caring for Country" funding was secured to continue this project for the next two years.

Mice and Rabbit Eradication Ongoing monitoring... no mice so far!

The work to eradicate mice from the Island is still being monitored using foot-print traps to check for mice. This will continue until July 2009 when it will be 2 years since treatment, and formal monitoring will cease. We hope to report in the August Newsletter that the Island is "Mouse (and rabbit) Free"



Blurry shot of Montague's Goats in 1963 or so.



Sunset, March
M. Westwood

Tour News

Autumn Half-day Tours

Numbers have dropped a little compared with previous years mainly due to lengthy periods of heavy swells preventing access for sometimes days at a stretch.

Thank heavens for the emergency supplies in the big house!

Stranded Shearwater Survey Volunteer,
April 2009

With less visible wildlife around on the Island, our tour guide team concentrates more on the world of the lighthouse keepers and the history of the Island.

Overnight Tours

Although it is our quieter time through from February to August, our recent trips have included a media visit which proved successful as articles appeared in Rex Airlines Inflight Magazine, May "Country Style" and major newspapers with more to come.

March 27th 2009 - the 50th Annual Shearwater Survey on Montague

That's half a century of data gathering by an intrepid team of volunteers who stay on the Island for a week or so to keep this project going. Headed by MI Partners (short for Montagu Island Partners), a non-profit group formed in 1991 with the purpose of contributing to species and habitat conservation through research and providing data for decision makers and managers, nine persons volunteered this year to count, weigh and check the Shearwaters in established test-plots around the Island.



Peter Fullagar blows out the candles! - M. Westwood

To help celebrate, DECC and Montague Tours sponsored a commemorative poster set and a factsheet series (factsheets available to download from the Montague Island website). Stuart Cohen, Senior DECC Public Affairs Officer, convinced the ABC's Geoff Simms to fly down and film a segment which later aired on the National ABC TV news and ABC radio ran an audio version.

Peter Fullagar (CSIRO Fellow), who has actually been present for almost all of those 50 surveys, was awarded the task of blowing out the candles of the celebratory cake in difficult windy conditions.

A postscript to the story is that two of the team returned to Narooma on the Friday, but the seven who stayed on were stranded for an extra 4 days as a heavy swell rolled in and cut all boat access off! All endured this trial and will most likely be back for the 51st survey next year. Their survey results can be seen on their website: <http://mipartners.blogspot.com> in the near future.



Geoff Simms talks to M. Crowley
- M. Westwood

New on the Web site!

If you haven't visited for a while, 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

DON'T FORGET!

2010 - the 20th Anniversary of Declaration of Montague Island Nature Reserve

January 2010 will see this anniversary marked with various activities. Keep your eye on the Montague website!

Any photographs or items for our newsletters welcome:
news@montagueisland.com.au

NEXT NEWSLETTER - AUGUST 2009