

MONTAGUE ISLAND NEWS

Newsletter 7
August 2010

small island - BIG experience

Winter 2010

Area Manager says....

The Island has been anything but asleep this winter, with much of our major work completed or well under way during the quieter tourism time:

- a new roof for the battery shed and the generator shed
- new solar panels on a new frame

- upgrading of the solar system
- replacement of rusted roof screws for the houses

- a new water storage tank

Still to come is the relocation of the communications tower to the area behind the solar panels.

The Seabird Habitat Restoration Program continued with 2009 (postponed due to rain) and 2010 areas both being treated this year. We will now have almost the entire western shoreline free from kikuyu!

Meantime our regular half-day tours & overnight tours continued with only minor disruptions.

Research has also continued, and you will see elsewhere in this newsletter that overnight tours will be involved in an exciting Little Penguin Nestbox Monitoring program.

All of this is thanks to our dedicated staff. Well done team!

Preston Cope - Area Manager Central

A treasure of a place!
Thanks so much NPWS!

Overnight Tour participants. June 2010.

Tour news:

Guided Overnight Tours - now featuring Penguin Nestbox Monitoring:



Marking a nest box for the monitoring program - S.Cohen

To assist with the ongoing monitoring of Penguin activity within our Shorebird Habitat Restoration Program (SHRP), our scientists have developed a data collection system to

be used by visitors on the Island for our Guided Overnight Stays.

Participants will be instructed in how to carry out a survey of over 120 nest boxes in various SHRP areas of the Island. Dr Amy Jorgensen will be analysing the data at the end of each breeding season.

We also successfully continued our "family friendly" tours, and these will now be a regular occurrence at least once during each school holiday, allowing families with children between 7 and 13 years old to come at a reduced "child" rate subject to conditions. Bookings for these rate tours can be made through our website.



Last year's legendary shot of the feeding whales right next to the boat! - Narooma Charters

Self Guided Tours:

Operating from February to August, and when possible outside these times, these tours are proving increasingly popular. Book the accommodation for a group of up to 15 people, self-catering. A guide

is with you for the first morning and then you stay for up to 4 nights with self-guided booklets helping you to experience the Island in its autumn and winter glory. Feedback has been excellent and we already have enquiries for next year.

Half-day Tours!

Our morning tours continued throughout the year, and by September evening penguin tours start up again when their breeding season begins and more birds come ashore at night. It also won't be long until the Humpback Whales

turn around and head south again. Our tours then become a real wildlife experience with whales, seals and other marine animals on the way out, followed by birds, birds and more birds on the Island when you land. A unique experience on many levels.

Wildlife news:

Seabirds:

Our interesting visitor for the summer - the Frigate Bird - disappeared some time in March, hopefully back to its more usual haunts much further north.

Little Penguins:

During the autumn setting-up phase of the Penguin Monitoring program, it was interesting to see a number of adult penguins spending the day inside their nest boxes. What were they doing there? Having a day off? Checking that "home" is still there? It's a mystery for sure. The first eggs were reported during survey in the last weeks of July, indicating an early start to the season. It is another mystery as to what actually triggers the breeding season, and the birds mate and lay each year... food supply, water temperature, currents?



Little Penguin Eye - A. Jorgensen

Seals:

Seal numbers are beginning to swell again on Montague's rocky points, as they do at this time of year. We now have seals spreading out from the far north-east corner right around to almost the "Gut" between the two ends of the Island. There are also quite a few on the southern end, around and south of Old Jetty Bay, with a couple of smallish seals happily swimming near the old wharf and the "beach".



Seal saying hello! - A. Vukovic

Gulls:

Already the Silver Gulls are flocking up on the northern end near the seals. Soon they'll move near to the Jetty for courting before eventually nesting in September.

The Mystery Marsupial:

No trace has been recorded of our mystery animal for many months, and there is still no sign of either mice or rabbits on the Island, proving the effectiveness of the eradication program in 2007.

Other news:

Seabird Habitat Restoration Program (SHRP):

This June, two areas were treated by spraying and burning, and August will see the plants go in. One area is north of the upper section of the main track, and the other area is at the southern end of the Island. The southern area should have been treated in 2009 but heavy rain prevented the burn. This was our second postponed planting, and meant all 15,000 seedlings had to be cared for over 12 months in in the Island's greenhouse nursery. This care involved removing them from their tubes and re-potting them into larger pots stored in trays.

Watering the seedlings became a concern in January when the Island's water reserves ran low due to the persistent dry weather and general drought conditions. Shearwater II took out several loads before 300mm of rain in February saved the day!

With these treated areas, the total area of removed kikuyu is 12ha, leaving just 4-5ha remaining circling the light station area in the centre of the southern Island. Over 60% of previous kikuyu monoculture areas has been treated! Spot spraying of smaller outbreaks along the eastern and northern sections will continue.



Montague SHRP continues - MW



New panels up on the frame, old panels below. - MW

Montague Power System Upgrade:

A scheduled upgrade of the power system has occurred over the first half of 2010, with a significant amount of work done to replace old and deteriorated components with new and more efficient parts, as well as an increase in the Islands power storage capacity. NPWS specialists and our local Field Staff, as well as local electrical contractors completed the work in late June.

A new array of batteries was installed in the original oil shed, effectively doubling the storage capacity. Thirty-six new solar cell panels replaced the older ones, and are now attached to a new aluminium support frame replacing the rusted galvanised one.

Inside the power supply room, within the generator shed, is a new inverter with highly efficient maximisers and controls.

Grey days will not be such a problem, and the more reliable power supply will make for for a much quieter and more peaceful Island.

We'll be back for sure.... what a place! What great work NPWS has done to allow us to stay.

Self-Guided Tour Group

A New Roof for the Sheds:

The oil shed and the Generator shed each received a new roof and guttering of stainless steel which should last for a very long time in the difficult maritime environment of the Island. Strong winds blow salt spray right up to the buildings, which caused the rusting of the old roof on each shed in under 10 years. Their life expectancy is possibly more than 100 years. This work was done by a local plumbing contractor.

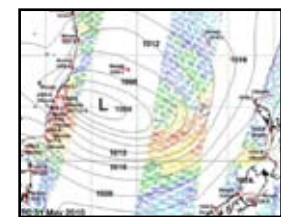


Oil Shed with new roof. MW

Our hard-working Field staff also took the opportunity to paint the eaves and barge boards while the guttering was replaced.

"Category 2 Cyclone" hits Montague - May 30 2010

On Sunday 30th May a low-pressure cell off the south coast of NSW generated wind gusts in excess of 130 kph around Montague Island and also heavy rain across the area. On the mainland there was extensive damage done to housing, boats and infrastructure. Flooding resulted for the Snowy and Bega rivers and heavy rain also fell across Victoria's Gippsland area.



East Coast Low on 31/5/10. coastalwatch.com

Here's some of the detailed readings from Montague's automatic weather station:

- 4.39 am - Wind gust to 95 km/h with peak gusts to 106 km/h.
- 5.00 am - Wind gust to 96 km/h with peak gusts to 120 km/h.
- 6.13 am - Wind gust to 120 km/h with peak gust to 135 km/h.
- 6.31 am - Wind gust to 100 km/h with peak gust to 132 km/h.
- 6.39 am - Wind gust to 98 km/h with peak gust to 113 km/h.
- 6.57 am - Wind gust to 76 km/h with peak gust to 102 km/h

Further wind gusts to 122 km/h occurred at 12.36 pm. Wind gusts exceeding 100 km/h occurred again between 10.30 am and 1.30 pm. Sustained winds of 100 km/h occurred between 12.36 pm and 12.58 pm. Finally another burst of 100 km/h winds occurred between 8 pm and 9 pm.

NPWS Field Officer Andy Young was on duty on the Island and fortunately received plenty of warning on the Saturday and was able to secure much of the Island's assets for the blow. He managed to secure some of the solar panels by placing drums of water on top of any that were exposed.

After the blow, Andy found the workshed door had been torn off, several of the old solar panels were flipped over, and the accommodation's outdoor table had been drawn out of its alcove and smashed on the rocks. Minor damage when you consider the ferocity of the wind!

Along the western trail, many of the Coastal Wattles were tipped over, but the rest of the Island seemed largely intact.

The Web site! www.montagueisland.com.au

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 www.wildaboutwhales.com.au

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