

MONTAGUE ISLAND NEWS

Newsletter 3
February 2009

small island - BIG experience

Area Manager says....

Our Summer newsletter!

It's a little late as it was worth waiting to see if Montague's Overnight Conservation Tours won the Australian Tourism Award for Ecotourism held at the end of February in Melbourne... and the great news is that we DID! Yes, for the second year in a row we have won this award competing against entries from each state in the country.

These tours have had their busiest year yet, almost completely booked out from September to January, and only one cancellation due to the weather.

Our partners, Conservation Volunteers Australia, put together the award-winning submission and are as thrilled as we are with the award.

Another NSW NPWS business received an award during the night - Lane Cove River Tourist Park - proving that NPWS is heavily involved in the sustainable ecotourism industry, bringing people into our parks and reserves to experience the state's heritage, wildlife and its diverse environments.

Enjoy the newsletter.

Cameron Leary,

Acting Area Manager Central

The house is magnificent, the views breathtaking!

Overnight visitor with the Barnes group from Cooma NSW, February 2009.

Wildlife News

Summer is the time for frantic raising of offspring for the seals and birds on and around Montague as the warm currents come in and the fishing is good:

Bird life: Little Penguins seem to have had not so good a season, with many abandoned chicks in late December and early January. This could be due to these being second clutches, or it could be due to a lack of food, or it could be some other reason. Evening penguin tours stopped in the second week of January as the birds stayed out to sea getting ready to moult. Since mid-Feb we have seen piles of feathers outside burrows as the occupants went into moult.

Sea Eagles, Swamp Harriers, and the Peregrines still around.

The Silver Gulls completed their breeding season and only the stragglers are left behind. This year we had research on their parasites being conducted on the Island and we will provide information on this when it becomes available.

The Crested Terns nested around the eastern side of the quarry but soon spread all over the rocks, setting up their "creches" even right in front of the houses for quite some time. We observed some personal tragedies for the Terns - a tern trying to feed a dead chick, standing over it for hours - but there were many that fledged and can be seen over in Narooma still hanging out with their parents.

Our rookery of Shearwaters have chicks and will be raising them for a few more weeks before flying off, some of them to the Bering Sea in the far north Pacific! The birds are feeding around the Island in big flocks.



A. Harris



M. Westwood

Seals: Well we wondered in Spring if there would be any seal pups this year and the answer is - more than ever! At least 6 Australian Fur Seal babies are still out there, and the New Zealand Fur Seals have at least 11 in their tight little bay! These numbers reflect the most seen at one time at but there may be more - if only they'd cooperate by staying in one spot, in view, it would help!

Our boat happened upon the extraordinary scene of a NZFS with her baby under her chin, and the afterbirth on the rocks - unfortunately the water was rough and the photo is blurred, but here it is!



M. Westwood

Cetaceans: On the Saturday of the Australia Day weekend, our tour boat was approached by a sad-looking young humpback, way out of season, covered in scratches and looking decidedly greyish instead of black. NPWS and Marine Parks vessels patrolled the following day but could not find it. No explanation for this one, as it should have been down at the ice feeding on krill with all the other humpbacks. No photo, sorry.

A February tour had a real treat... a large pod of Bottlenose Dolphins well out to sea, riding the bow wave and somersaulting around us. We usually see Common Dolphins.



M. Westwood

Unusual Sightings and Events: The first week of December an Australasian Gannet landed on the rock outside the northern house. It appeared to have some trouble with one of its legs, but took off again before anyone could get close enough to see. We often see them over the water, but landing on the Island is a rarity.

Wildlife News, continued

Unusual birds reported on or over the Island recently include Quail, Ravens, and a Channel Billed Cuckoo. Two racing pigeons rested on the verandah of the northern house and were captured and released into the care of a Narooma pigeon fancier who fed them up and released them to finish their race. The Sea Eagles or the Falcons would have fancied them as an easy meal otherwise!

Montague Dries Out!

Long Dry Spell:

Nearly 8 weeks of dry weather between December and February saw even the kikuyu turning brown, particularly around the granite tors where the soil gets shallow. In fact January had only a total of 9mm of rain. Some seedlings suffered, and many lomandras curled up their leaves and the paths were crunchy underfoot. The photo shows the view from the lighthouse.



M. Westwood

A solid 16mm fell on February 12th to break the spell, and greened up the Island within days.

Seabird Habitat Restoration Program (SHRP)

Re-vegetation continues:

Planting of 10000 seedlings was completed in the 2008 treatment area down at the southern end of the Island. A good strike rate resulted for the smaller shrubs but some of the larger ones did not make it through the dry period following planting. Time will tell. Well done to the volunteers staying on the Island who contributed many hours of work to the program.

Developments in the Program:

Funding has been received from "Caring for our Country - Open Grants". Work with follow-up kikuyu spraying in the 2008 and 2007 treatment zones will continue through autumn and into winter.

Penguin Entanglements:

Crystal Creek Meadows, winners of an Australian Tourism Award for Hosted Accommodation, stayed on Montague in early December. Unfortunately they found a Little Penguin chick entangled in kikuyu, which did not survive. Photo shows the swollen right foot.



Entangled chick
M. Westwood

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, hopefully, the Island can be declared "mouse-free".



Mouse monitoring station
S. Donaldson

**Hope the sea is too rough
to go home**

journalist Elizabeth Graham

Half-day Tour News

Summer Tours

December, January and February saw over 1000 visitors enjoy the half-day trips on board Narooma Charters vessels and accompanied by our excellent guide team.

With the economic gloom, no-one knew what to expect but these figures are on a par with previous years, though weather can play a significant role.

Hosted Overnight Conservation Tour News

Busiest season ever!

This year saw the season almost booked out from September to mid January. 21 trips were conducted, with visitors enjoying their stay on the Island while helping out with planting, weeding and penguin monitoring. A feature of the season was repeat visitors - such as the 4th visit by a group of Canberrans, who have already booked for their 5th next year!



National Tourism Award

After winning the NSW Ecotourism Award, Montague Island Tours went on to win the 2008 National Award on February 27th 2009 in Melbourne. We are also pleased



to announce that Lane Cove River NPWS & CVA celebrate the 2008 Australian Ecotourism Award.

Tourist Park won the Tourist and Caravan Parks category, giving two awards to NPWS businesses, and necessitating two acceptance speeches from Sally Barnes, DECC Deputy Director-General. Fantastic result for these unique products.

Thanks are due our guides, our field staff, our cleaner, our local food suppliers and Narooma Charters for their contributions.

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. Parts of the body of knowledge the participants have gathered over the years are now available on their website, Montague Island Partners:

<http://mipartners.blogspot.com>

The survey this year occurs for a week from March 24. Anniversary posters and fact sheets are already under production, and a ceremony during the week will be organised as well as media coverage. Check Montague's website for details or visit Montague Island Partners website as above.

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

It has been decided that the celebrations for the event should take place in early 2010, to coincide with the anniversary of the gazettal of Montague Island as a Nature Reserve under the NSW National Parks and Wildlife Act.

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

NEXT NEWSLETTER - MAY 2009!