

MONTAGUE ISLAND NEWS

Newsletter 5
Aug-Nov 2009

small island - BIG experience

Our Winter 09 newsletter!

Area Manager says....

2009's winter has been anything but quiet for Montague Island!

Our Seabird Habitat

Restoration Program was delayed for this year due to

heavy rain in June preventing us from conducting our scheduled burn at the far south end. More on this later.

Our new inverter (part of the solar power system) was severely damaged by lightning and we had to use the generator for several weeks (more on this in this newsletter).

Our winter overnight tours went well, with groups enjoying the cool weather and the winter seabirds, as well as many sightings of whales as they headed north.

Many people have inquired as to why we are not in the NSW Tourism Awards this year. It is due to our entry into the NSW Tourism Hall of Fame, we cannot enter the Ecotourism category for two years, so we are taking a short recess from the process.

A new feature of this newsletter is a "History" section where the people behind the scenes at Montague will share some of their memories with you.

Preston Cope,
Area Manager Central

Too much to see... which way do we look?

Tour participant, with whales, seals and dolphins around the boat.

August 2009.

Wildlife news:

Whales Arrive:



Close Encounter... D. Stuart

Humpbacks heading north provided many tours with excellent whale watching either from the boat or from the Island. Overnight tours were treated to some days of the Island being surrounded by pods wherever they looked.

Now it is August and it's hard to tell exactly when the whales started heading south, but we are seeing big numbers feeding on krill and fish in the vicinity of the Island. It is the editor's personal theory that many of the whales don't go all the way north, particularly the non-breeding juveniles, as these are the whales we are seeing at the moment.

On a sad note, a deceased 4m humpback calf washed into a crevice on the south end of Montague around August 8th or so. It was already decomposing, and had suffered some physical damage.

Little Penguins:

We are now seeing the beginnings of the breeding season, with more and more birds coming ashore for burrow preparation and courting. Their tracks are all over the Island and many of the boxes have signs of inhabitation.



Shy Albatross - MW

Evening Penguin tours should commence soon, and coupled with an hour or more whale watching makes them a real wildlife adventure!

Seabirds:

Albatross were spectacular during the cold months, with large flocks of Yellow-nose (*Thalassarche carteri*) often sitting on the water when the wind was absent. Amongst these were also Shy (*Thalassarche cauta*) and Black-browed (*Thalassarche melanphrys*).

Also a frequent sighting was juvenile Giant Petrels – huge almost black birds with a lethal looking beak. Readers may remember one of these pecking a snorkeller on the head in

2008! One of our tours once witnessed a Giant Petrel trying to drown a Gannet, presumably to eat, which is no mean feat as a Gannet is quite a large bird as well.

Seals:

There are 100s out there! And still have a few inside Wagonga Inlet, one of which was successfully untangled from the Bar Beach shark net... well done to our staff Andy and Cain!



Seals in numbers! - NPWS

The Mystery Marsupial:

An overnight tour in late June had an exciting sighting of our mystery marsupial - believed to be a Dusky Antechinus. However the animal moved so quickly that it was impossible to get an identification.

Seabird Habitat Restoration Program (SHRP):

As mentioned in the Area Manager's welcome, rain prevented this year's scheduled burn at the far south end.

Some 8000 seedlings will have to be potted-on into 50mm pots during the next few months, and then it will mean regular watering right through until next June when they can begin to be planted. With the lack of rain (see the weather section), staff are worried that water supply issues may arise.

Meantime, spot-spraying continues in the treated areas thanks to Caring for Country funding.

Some 50 nesting boxes will be distributed over the next few weeks to replace older boxes and provide temporary homes in the most recently treated areas.

And yes... we have a "Ralph" this year!



Ralph's Burrow - S.Donaldson

Half-day tours:

June-August is our usual quiet time, with only around an average of 10 trips per month. However things start hotting-up soon with the southerly migration of the humpbacks and the warmer weather.

Overnight Tours:

June had 2 trips, including one by a group from "Follow that Bird" www.followthatbird.com.au and all thoroughly enjoyed the Montague winter experience. We are now almost booked out for September and October, with just a few vacancies in November and December.

Solar Power System Upgrade.

During winter, 90 new batteries and a new inverter were installed on Montague to augment the solar power system.

Not long after installation, the inverter was severely damaged by a lightning strike and had to be taken ashore for a re-build. It was returned to the Island in early August and now the system is effectively doubled

Montague jetty upgrade:

The more than 50 year old jetty at Montague island has deteriorated to the point where it needs a complete re-fit – which is a major undertaking in terms of time, parts and labour.

Our tireless field staff has planned the refit for September 14-18 which will unfortunately mean that half-day tours will not be able to operate during this time. Overnight tours will not be affected.

New beams, fenders and a ladder will be installed in a logistically difficult operation that has to consider the height of the tides and the sea conditions.

Memories

Ross Constable, NPWS Ranger - Montague Island – part 1

Ross was involved in the earliest days of Montague Island coming under NPWS management:

In 1977 a Senate Standing Committee was charged with deciding on whether to "keep the keepers" and 174 lightstations were reviewed around Australia. It was recommended that 30 of the First Order lights should have a manned presence because of their historical and cultural value. Montague Island wasn't on that list!

Narooma's local community, led by Joy Stuart, jumped into action and successfully had Montague added to that list.

In 1986, a Commonwealth - State exchange of lighthouse land began as a direct result of the Senate report, and Montague Island was to be transferred to NSW.

An opportunity to savour - high quality presentation of buildings, a sense of generosity here and loved the Island.

*The Troedels from Bunyip Vic
Self-Guided Tour 2009*



"Follow that Bird" - MW



*The new inverter in place
R. Constable*



*Work on the jetty footpath
5 years ago -NPWS*



*Ranger Ross Constable
S.Donaldson*

Ross Constable was appointed Ranger – Montague Island to Narooma NPWS office in 1989 and shortly afterward took formal possession of the Island on behalf of NPWS and the NSW Government, and in 1990 it was gazetted as a Nature Reserve.

Possession of the Island included the two Department of Transport and Communication staff members, the island, the buildings, and the jetty - but not the tower itself, which still remains in Commonwealth Hands today, as does the light's solar panel.

NPWS now had an entire Island, with no budget, no boat and 2 non-NPWS staff members who became NPWS employees, with the houses powered by a thirsty diesel generator!

Eventually the work of a field officer was so different to that of a light keeper that the Island became staffed by NPWS employees from 1994 onwards.

A first priority was to minimise any further deterioration of the buildings. Successful applications for external funding followed, and over 2 years of works ultimately resulted in the stabilisation of the most deteriorated parts of the station.

The difficulty of getting materials and staff out and back was done by local charter boats until capital works funding allowed for the purchase of the Shearwater, an 8.5m boat, in 1990. This facilitated much greater management flexibility and the work on the Island really accelerated.

Eradication of the Island's introduced goats occurred shortly thereafter due to their negative environmental impacts, particularly for seabird burrows.

Back then, both sides of the main track to the jetty were littered with accumulated rubbish and in a major operation to remove it the Shearwater was used to backload it all to the mainland, with the assistance of a helicopter for the bigger and bulkier items. Part 2 next newsletter!

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

June had a handy 78mm of rain, but unfortunately the bulk of it fell on the 16th, cancelling the scheduled burn. July had only 19mm, and August has been even worse with only 1.6mm to the 27th, and warm, dry nor-westers drying everything out.

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

DON'T FORGET!

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

Any photographs or items for our newsletters welcome:
news@montagueisland.com.au
next newsletter - Early December 2009



*New batteries in place
R. Constable*