

MONTAGUE ISLAND NEWS

Newsletter, Volume 1
July, 2008

small island - BIG experience

Area Manager says....

“Welcome” to our newsletter!

We hope you enjoy this e-newsletter. Our aim is to provide a quarterly gathering of news, photos and items of interest for the tourism industry, visitors to the Island and interested persons.

Each issue will feature regular sections on the wildlife, the environment, special events and tours, as well as updates on the progress of our Seabird Habitat Rehabilitation Program and other conservation work on the Island.

We welcome contributions from anyone interested in sharing their views, pictures or experiences with our readers.

Our hope is to reach as many people as possible. Please feel free to direct anyone you think should receive this newsletter to the link on the website to sign up for the quarterly email.

Preston Cope, Area Manager Central

Wildlife News

Although winter is traditionally our quietest time for wildlife, we're discovering just how diverse the seasons are:

Birdlife: This year the winter has provided us with Giant Petrels, Prions, Albatross, Gannets and Skuas out on the water. On July 12 the Giant Petrel took a close look at one of our snorkellers as the photo shows..

On the Island the Kestrels and Sea Eagles, as well as an unconfirmed sighting of a Brown Falcon, provide aerial interest. One lucky tour group managed to be rushed several times by an unidentified owl disturbed while hiding in the shrubs on the western trail!

Seals: Haul-out sites have moved. The Australian Fur Seals are currently hauling-out back at the NE corner, with another group still on the NW corner. The New Zealanders have taken over Pebbly Bay and the creche of at least 6 pups is still in its little cove on the northern edge of Yakka Bay. The exclusive NZ group at the southern end are still hauling out on their lonely rock as well.

Whales: This year visitors have been impressed by the closeness of the northern Humpback migration to the Island, with many close encounters during boat trips and plenty of sightings from the Island itself. The southern migration in spring is Narooma's "official" whale-watching time, as the whales are usually further out in winter and in a hurry as they head north for their breeding season.



Little Penguins: Our overnight tour on July 12th witnessed 22 penguins coming ashore at the minor landing site next to the wharf. This is a large number for this time of the year. Many of the major landing sites elsewhere on the Island show evidence of the comings and goings of large numbers as well. Breeding season isn't far away!



Manta Rays: Early in June tour participants witnessed an extremely rare event when a school of manta rays - each about 2 metres across - passed between the Island and the mainland. A call to the Queensland University established they were most likely Pygmy Devil Rays.

Unusual Visitors: Early in July a large number of relatively rare Paper Nautilus *Argonauta nodosa* were stranded on the western shore after days of westerly winds. This event is usually thought to occur only every 6 or 7 years - however there was an event only 2 or 3 years ago. They are related to octopi. Unfortunately the individuals die during these events.



A. Vucovic

“Breathtaking wild beauty, perfect weather, excellent company, delicious food and wine - Wow! Thanks for having us in this treasure of a place.”

Sarah and Geoff Cains, overnight participants,
30th May 2008

Seabird Habitat Restoration Program

2008 works progressing on schedule

Spraying and burning

Our program to remove the kikuyu threat to little penguins continues with the June treatment of about 1.5ha at the extreme southern tip of the Island.

It was looking gloomy in early June when the rains came and dampened the area which had been sprayed the month before.

However, westerly winds dried it out and things improved so that the prescribed burn was conducted on June 25.

The burn proceeded smoothly and effectively and re-planting is scheduled for August and into spring.

This year, overnight groups will be doing most of the important job of planting the 12,000 seedlings.



NPWS field staff assisting with the 2008 burn



Aerial view of the area after the 2008 prescribed burn

Half-day Tour News

Winter Tours

Tours have continued throughout the cold months, and we are starting to realise that there is no "off-season" for Montague, rather a case of "changing seasons" as there have certainly been many and varied wildlife sightings to keep everyone wondering - birds, northward-migrating humpbacks, and even pygmy manta rays!

Price Increase

Regrettably, the price of fuel has impacted on our transport costs, and a price rise has become necessary for half-day tours - adults are now \$125 and children \$99.

Self-Guided Overnight Tour News

Successful Trial

In early June a successful trial was held of a self-guided overnight tour aimed at the quiet winter season. Participants provided strong positive feedback and indicated they would like to come back and repeat the experience. Another trial is due to be held in August. Check the details on our website.

It's just magic

NSW Tourism Minister Matt Brown, overnight participant, July 2008



Releasing a shearwater which had collided with the lighthouse tower

Hosted Conservation Overnight Tour News

Conservation Volunteers - Montague Island Tours Partnership

The successful and award-winning partnership between Conservation Volunteers Australia (CVA) and Montague Island Tours is set to continue into the future following a successful review meeting held in the CVA headquarters in Ballarat in June.



The Overnight Hosted Conservation Stays which are organised through this partnership have won 3 NSW Tourism awards as well as a National Tourism award. These awards have raised the profile of Montague Island, Narooma and Eurobodalla significantly.

The local community benefits considerably through participants staying in town before and after their tour, as well as through the employment created for guides, cleaners and the purchase of local produce for tour catering.

Bookings filling up

CVA report that bookings for the rest of the year are filling quickly. Anyone considering an overnight stay this coming spring should hurry to our website and book before it's too late.

Advanced Ecotourism Accreditation

A real feather in the cap for our Overnight Hosted Conservation Stays has been its recent accreditation under this national scheme. The Eco Certification Program is a world first. It has been developed by industry for industry, addressing the need to identify genuine ecotourism and nature tourism operators in Australia.



NSW Tourism Minister Visits Overnight

The Hon. Matt Brown, NSW Minister for Tourism and Housing stayed overnight in July and was amazed at the experience the Island offers. Despite cold winds and it being the "quiet season", the Minister was impressed with the richness of the experience, the wildlife, the accommodation and the tour product stating that "Montague Island is an outstanding example of how tourism and National Parks can work together."

Things to look forward to..

Land Bird Survey

October 7th 2008 will see a hardy volunteer bunch of keen bird-watchers and ornithologists head out the Island for a week to conduct a survey of the land birds on the Island. Lucky overnight tour participants will be able to help or observe these folk at work as they contribute to the body of knowledge of our fauna.

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. These remarkable long-distance fliers are known to many of us by their common name of "muttonbirds".

The survey is renowned as the longest continual survey in the southern hemisphere. To mark the occasion there will be several events, including the annual survey, and it is hoped to publish a unique set of factsheets on the Island's birds.