



# The Albatross

**SOUTHERN OCEAN  
SEABIRD STUDY  
ASSOCIATION INC.**

Issue No. 50

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## All at Sea - Sea Dog Films By Lindsay Smith. Photos Janice Jenkin-Smith.

Special points of interest:

- William McInnes aboard the Sandra K.
- Westland Petrels.
- 30+ year old Wedge-tailed Shearwaters.

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On our regular pelagic/AGM weekend in August 2012, the SOSSA banding team were accompanied by the crew from Sea Dog films and well known Australian actor William McInnes.

The team were here to film sequences for an upcoming programme on bird watching and bird study. "Will's Big Twitch" is expected to be televised on ABC around September 2013.

It was a very interesting couple of days introducing William and the

team to our seabird studies. Albatrosses were of particular interest, capturing and banding, Black-browed, Yellow-nosed and Shy Albatrosses. The crew were surprised to hear that we had been studying our smaller albatrosses here since 1994 and great albatrosses since the late 1950s.

After a long trip out beyond the Continental Shelf we were followed by albatrosses and few shearwaters. Shearwater numbers were low as most shearwaters had not yet returned from their wintering grounds. With no Wandering Albatrosses in sight, we headed back to the upwelling and south flowing current in 85 fathoms.

Continued page 6



Lindsay Smith (L) and William McInnes talking seabirds.

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Fauna and Marine Parks Association Inc.



## Band Recoveries

### Band No 162-65360

Wedge-tailed Shearwater  
*Puffinus pacificus*

A fledgling from the local breeding population, possibly the Five Islands Nature Reserve, or further south. This bird was found ashore at Fairy Meadow, NSW, disoriented and well away from water on 29 April 2005. The bird was banded at SOSSA HQ and released near site of rescue 30 April 2005.



This bird was again found ashore disoriented in a suburban back yard a few streets back from the ocean, south of Wollongong, on 16 September 2012.

A Wedge-tailed Shearwater off Wollongong.  
Photo: Brook Whyllie

This bird has done very well to have been rescued and released on two separate occasions in seven years! All within 20 kilometres of the original banding site. The question is, where has it been since the initial encounter and its release?

We have studied the birds at the Five Islands Nature Reserve and at sea for over 50 years. The results of our studies would indicate this bird is now of breeding age. Hopefully it will stay to breed successfully this season before disappearing again to who knows where!

Rescues sometimes are successful.

Lindsay Smith

## DONATIONS

**Thank you to the people below for their very kind donations.**
  
**Donations are the only thing that ensures the continuation of the valuable work on our precious wildlife. So thanks again to:**
  
**2012 - 2013**
  
**Humane Society International**
  
**Michael Kennedy \$500.00**
  
**Daniel Mantle \$100.00**
  
**Mary Edwards \$100.00**
  
**Roslyn Hanson \$100.00**
  
**Alan Rogers \$100.00**
  
**Peter Crabtree \$100.00**

## WESTLAND PETREL's in the western Tasman Sea

By Lindsay Smith

The Westland petrel is considered rare in NSW and south-east Queensland waters. Most records are of birds in late spring and summer, October thru to March.

The Westland Petrel was first described *Procellaria parkinsoni westlandica* Falla, 1946, *Rec. Canterbury Mus* 51: 11 – Barrytown, Westland, South Island, New Zealand.

The first Australian record was from Corrimal Beach, NSW, on January 2<sup>nd</sup> 1956 J.D. Gibson and A.R. Sefton. *Notes on Some Seabirds Frequenting New South Wales Coastal Waters*. A.R. Sefton (*Emu* 59: 177-178). This was the first record of a beach cast Westland Petrel from anywhere in the world (outside New Zealand). (Falla in *Emu* 59: 177-178). *Westland Petrel: A Second Australian Occurrence* A.R. McGill *Emu* 59: 259-64

Since these early occurrences, there have been several more specimens collected, beach washed along the coast of NSW and south-east Queensland. Some of these have been lodged in museums, including three specimens lodged in the Museum of Queensland. The species has also been reported from the Southport pelagic trips. (Paul Walbridge pers com.)

Interest in pelagic seabirds and other marine fauna has increased greatly since the late 1960's. The numbers of observers has increased, as have the number and frequency of pelagic boat trips along the eastern seaboard of Australia.

This has enabled the collection of much new data on the numbers, distribution and movements of birds in the Tasman and Coral Seas.

(SOSSA web site)  
[www.sossa-international.org](http://www.sossa-international.org)



Westland Petrel Photo: Frank Valckenborgh

Improved and specialised "Field Guides", along with the development of the digital camera, has greatly assisted in the identification of seabirds. This allows a greater understanding of the plumage development and replacement which in turn assisting in ageing individual birds.

Banding studies have been conducted from the Sandra K since 1984 to present day. During this time the Westland Petrel has been recorded on numerous occasions. Most being reported in December (max of five together). (LES pers obs.)

Two Westland Petrels have been banded by the SOSSA banding team. The species appears to be rarely recorded from our region, though sightings have become more common in recent years.



The recent sighting and photographing of an individual off the Wollongong pelagic trip on 15th December 2012 was followed by another individual, beachcast at Port Kembla beach on Christmas Day. This individual was rescued by Australian Seabird Rescue (ASR) and taken to SOSSA HQ for identification and intensive care before being transferred to Taronga Wildlife Clinic in Sydney for rehabilitation.



Westland Petrel, on the water with a Flesh-footed Shearwater, Wollongong December 2012.  
Photo: Raja Stephenson

ASR at Ballina, on the North Coast of NSW, reported two Westland Petrels collected from local beaches into care in December 2012. Unfortunately both of these birds died in care. These two birds are being sent to the Australian Museum in Sydney to be housed in the Seabird collection held there (Rochell Ferris pers con).

This recent increase in sightings and strandings is unusual. It may be a result of more experienced observers, more pelagic trips or more

people reporting what they are seeing while walking beaches. An unusual season or perhaps it is an indication of a population increase, as suggested by Bartle *Notornis* 21.

**Size:** Medium

**Measurements:** TL 50-55cm; Wing 36.2-40; Wing span 135-140cm; WT 800-1200 grams. Males larger than females.

“Westland Black Petrels are quite variable in size. Few measurements are available, but the largest individuals handled were estimated to be 50% heavier than the smallest. These variations were also reflected in bill size. All birds examined appeared to be adult and comparable variation in size can be found among adults on the breeding colony.” (Bartle *Notornis* 21)



Westland Petrel in flight, Wollongong December 2012.  
Photo: Raja Stephenson



Photo: J. Jenkin-Smith December 2012

**Description:**

A large all black petrel with a pale bill.

**Field Characteristics:**

A solidly built all dark petrel, with a large head and thick neck. Large pale bill, with a dark unguis (tip). Legs and feet, black.

**Associated species:**

The Westland Petrel has been observed feeding with shearwaters, including Wedge-tailed, Short-tailed, Sooty and Flesh-footed, as well as Grey-faced and Black Petrels.

These species all occur regularly in summer in our study area. Westland Petrels have been sighted in mixed flocks of birds attracted to chum. All of the above species may be confused by the novice or casual observer.



Photo: J. Jenkin-Smith December 2012

**Breeding:**

Age at first breeding attempt 5-8 years (Bartle).

Birds return to their only known breeding area at Barrytown on the west coast of the South Island of New Zealand from February to March. Burrows cleaned out in April and eggs are laid in May. Chicks fledging November to December (Bartle).

From beach cast birds and birds observed and / or photographed at sea in December, it has been noted that parts of the plumage, particularly the upper wing coverts, belly and tail were extremely worn (See photos). Head and neck appear to be in fresh condition, dark and sooty black. Note the dark leading edge to wing (lesser coverts) contrasting with the worn grey coverts and belly. The bill was ivory and glossy though some flaking of the latericorn (bill plates) was noted.



Photo: Taronga Wildlife Clinic December 2007

Note: under parts, breast and belly feathers are heavily abraded. Possibly due, to entering and leaving the nest burrow? The abraded state of the plumage suggest that the bird was a successful breeding adult in this recent past season. Birds in such worn condition in summer should be readily separated from the Black Petrel *Procellaria parkinsoni*.





William McInnes with a few 'friends'.

'All at Sea' - continued from page 1.

A pod of Hump-backed whales was sighted frolicking in the water to south of us, so we cut the engine and started drifting their way. As we drifted we also managed to attract a small group of albatrosses and shearwaters. Soon we were surrounded by a pod of amorous Hump-backed Whales, 8 animals within 200 metres!

The Hump-backed pod was soon joined by a pod of 8-10 Oceanic Bottle-nosed Dolphins and a couple of clown-like Fur-Seals. These animals held us captive / captivated for over an hour. Spy-hopping beside the boat and at times swimming upside down under the boat!

Finally, they moved off allowing us to start the engines and head back in. Along the way we were escorted by a pod of 20 Common dolphins riding on the bow wave of the Sandra K.

All in all a truly awe inspiring day for me! One of the most exciting days at sea ever.

Wandering albatrosses were few and far between only appearing on Sunday with two birds inshore as we headed back to the harbour.

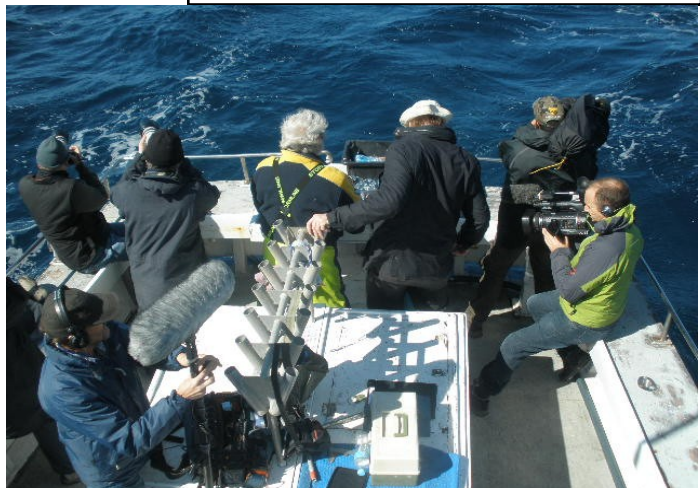
Thanks guys, we did have a lot of laughs and we must say they were a great group of professional men to work with!

Hopefully, the seabirds will get a bit of positive publicity they desperately need.

Thank you also to our other passengers on board those days for your support.

Cheers Lindsay

**Sea Dog Films crew**  
 William McInnes (Actor)  
**Film crew**  
 Leighton De Barros (Cameraman)  
 Randall Wood (Director)  
 Glenn Martin (Sound specialist)



The crew at work. Lindsay and William centre.



William and Janice on the Sandra K

## The Long Wait For The Over Thirties. Wedge-tailed Shearwater Recoveries on Muttonbird Island, Coffs Harbour 2012

By Narelle Swanson

What I enjoy about bird banding is the fun of a natural lottery. Finding a Wedge-tailed Shearwater that has carried a band for over 30 years has been a bit of a challenge. Provided they can be recaptured, banded nestlings give the best indicator of life spans. After monitoring a chicks growth from a downy ball to a healthy fledgling, I wonder will I see this bird again?

I was fortunate when I started my banding work on Muttonbird Island in 1969. There were already quite a few chicks banded from 1960 to 1968. There were 321 in 1965, which were starting to return in 1970. From these recaptures and later work, we learned that young birds mostly return in their 5th year, a few possibly in their fourth. Therefore, when breeding adult birds are banded they are at least 5 years old.

From 1960 to 1977 birds were banded with monel bands and many would have outlived the band, which wore thin after about 10 years. It has been since the introduction of stainless steel bands and the banding of at least 200 chicks a season that has resulted in many age recapture records. When we started to recapture birds over 20 years old that had been banded as adults, there was the assumption that they could be 30+ years. To date the longest elapsed time is 26 years for a breeding adult, which was banded in December 1978.

I was able to do a lot of chick banding in the 1980 and 1981 seasons, when I was again living in Coffs Harbour. Over the last 31 years these banded birds have produced interesting recoveries and now officially exceed the 30 year mark.



Wedge-tailed Shearwater. Photo B. Whyllie

Of the 100 chicks banded in April 1980, a total of 8 have been recovered. The first was recovered dead, just after fledgling in the local area. In their 5th year, two were recovered on the island, another was found dead in the Philippines. A further three individuals were recaptured between 9 and 14 years and the oldest, in its 26th year.

In 1981, five visits were made to band chicks from 4th to 27th April. To date, 14 of the 254 chicks banded have been recovered at least once. Six individuals were found by Bill Lane between 1987 and 1993, the first in its 6th year, incubating an egg.



Since 1997 (the season when we found just four chicks to band) our banding group has been making a lot of visits to Muttonbird Island over the entire breeding season. A further 8 individuals of the 1981 chicks have been recovered. The oldest are three recaptured this season, in their 32nd year. The most interesting is 16170421, a female recaptured nine times since 2001. She was found on the 28th August this year (2012) and last season (2011) on 16th September. In her 25th year, an unlaidd egg was detected indicating she was still breeding. Another bird 16170392 was first found in October 2009 and again this season, on 29th September 2012. Recaptured for the first time since banding on 14th September 2012, 16170226 is in front as the bird wearing the band for the longest time, but only because it was banded on the 4th April 1981, and the others were 27th.



Wedge-tailed Shearwater chick. Muttonbird Island. Photo: Y. Vaughan

The reason is not that there are more old birds, but more because there are fewer younger birds. The legacy of the last 15 years of poor breeding success caused most notably by the increasing numbers of rodents and blue tongue lizard living on the island.



Neil Belling, Narelle Swanson, and Neil Vaughan with the first chick of the 2012/13 season. They have been banding shearwaters on Muttonbird Island since 1996. Photo: Y. Vaughan

Prior to the 2011-12 breeding season the rodents and many lizards were removed. The improvements are obvious. In 2011, we found only 16 chicks to band. In 2012 we found and banded 52 chicks, the number we could find easily in just one visit back in 1981. Successful breeding in the past may help produce birds for the future and if we keep looking we may find

more and more of our "old chicks" because there will be fewer and fewer younger adults for many seasons to come.

Narelle Swanson

The proportion of old birds we now catch is increasing this season, 2012-2013. It is 6%, up from about 4% ten years ago in 2002-2003.



## Recent Seabird book releases



### Rare Birds: The Extraordinary Tale of the Bermuda Petrel and the Man Who Brought It Back from Extinction

By Elizabeth Gehrman

The inspiring story of David Wingate, who brought the Bermuda petrel back from presumed extinction

**RARE BIRDS**  
The Extraordinary Tale of the Bermuda Petrel and  
the Man Who Brought It Back from Extinction  
ELIZABETH GEHRMAN



Rare Birds is a tale of obsession, of hope, of fighting for redemption against incredible odds. It is the story of how Bermuda's David Wingate changed the world or at least a little slice of it, despite the many voices telling him he was crazy to try. This tiny island in the middle of the North Atlantic was once the breeding ground for millions of Bermuda petrels (cahows). But shortly after humans arrived here, more than three centuries ago, the cahows had vanished, eaten into extinction by the country's first settlers.

Then, in the early 1900s, tantalizing hints of the cahows' continued existence began to emerge. In 1951 an American ornithologist and a Bermudian naturalist mounted a last-ditch effort to find the birds that had come to seem little more than a legend, bringing a teenage Wingate, already a noted birder, along for the ride. When the stunned scientists pulled a blinking, docile cahow from deep within a rocky cliff-side, it made headlines around the world-and told Wingate what he was put on this earth to do.

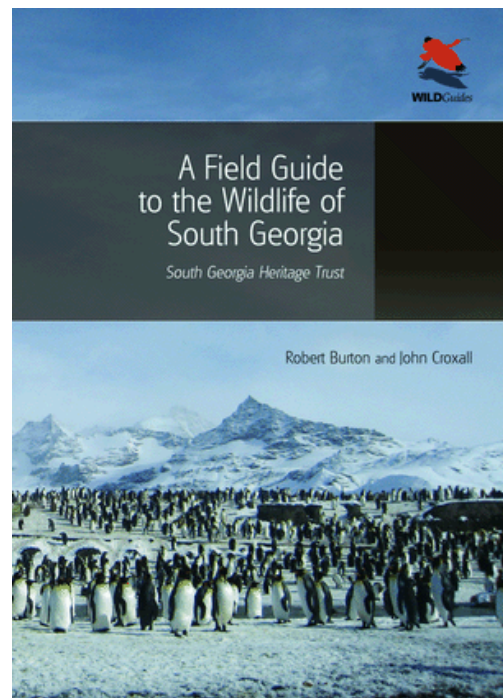
Starting with just seven nesting pairs of the birds, Wingate would devote his life to giving the cahows the chance they needed. It took six decades of obsessive dedication, but the cahow, still among the rarest of seabirds, has reached the hundred-pair mark and continues its nail-biting climb to repopulation.

### A Field Guide to the Wildlife of South Georgia

Robert Burton & John Croxall

South Georgia is rich in wildlife and spectacular scenery and it is a prime destination spot on most Antarctic tours. This beautifully illustrated field guide depicts the birds, mammals, insects, flowering plants, and other vegetation found in this unique part of the world. It features 368 full-color photographs of more than 180 species, including 65 species of birds, 20 species of sea mammals, nearly 60 species of insects and more than 40 species of flowering and non-flowering plants. Detailed species accounts describe key identification features, with information on status, behavior, threats, and distribution. This one-of-a-kind photographic guide also includes introductory chapters on South Georgia's geography, climate, ecology, and conservation.

- Features 368 photos of more than 180 species
- Covers birds, sea mammals, insects, and plants
- Provides detailed species accounts
- Includes chapters on geography, climate, ecology, and conservation
- The only photographic field guide to focus specifically on South Georgia





**SOUTHERN OCEAN  
SEABIRD STUDY  
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## New Members...

Michael Kearns  
Joanne Katsikaros  
Patricia Knight-Billingham  
Tim Billingham  
Lawrence Billingham  
Paul Nesbitt

## NEXT SOSSA MEETING

**Annual General Meeting -  
24th August (Saturday) 2013**  
held at SOSSA HQ. – 6.30 pm  
10 Jenkins Street -  
Unanderra. NSW.

We only supply Coffee or  
Tea!!!

## PELAGIC TRIP

### PRICES 2013

**Members \$ 80.00**

**Visitors \$ 100.00**

**Australian Dollars**

**Note: Some trips are  
strictly for research and  
will have limited num-  
bers!**

## WOLLONGONG PELAGIC BOAT TRIP DIARY DATES 2013

**\*Addition Dates will be added to the  
Website**

23rd March (Sat)	<b>WOLLONGONG</b>
27th April (Sat)	<b>WOLLONGONG</b>
25th May (Sat)	<b>WOLLONGONG</b>
22nd June (Sat)	<b>WOLLONGONG</b>
27th July (Sat)	<b>WOLLONGONG</b>
24th August (Sat)	<b>WOLLONGONG</b>

**24th August (Saturday)  
SOSSA AGM – 6.30pm HQ**

25th August (Sun)	<b>WOLLONGONG</b>
28th September (Sat)	<b>WOLLONGONG</b>
26th October (Sat)	<b>WOLLONGONG</b>
27th October (Sun)	<b>WOLLONGONG</b>
23rd November (Sat)	<b>WOLLONGONG</b>
14th December (Sat)	<b>WOLLONGONG</b>

**(December Trip will be the 2<sup>nd</sup> Saturday not  
the usual 4<sup>th</sup> due to Christmas)**

## Newsletter Contributions

All are invited to contrib-  
ute to our newsletter  
'Albatross'. We do prefer  
electronic copies of any  
material. Send it by email  
to

[sossa@tpg.com.au](mailto:sossa@tpg.com.au)

Alternatively mail it to us  
on a disk, which we will  
return.

The editor welcomes (is  
desperate for!) articles from  
members and friends on  
issues relating to pelagic  
seabirding, seabird re-  
search and marine conser-  
vation. Please advise the  
editor if you intend to submit  
an article and submit the  
piece at least two weeks  
before the start of a publica-  
tion month. Thank you!

To save SOSSA postage  
costs and receive 'The Al-  
batross' as a colourful pdf or  
web file then please send  
your email address and  
current membership number  
to : [sossa@tpg.com.au](mailto:sossa@tpg.com.au)

**We're on the web!**  
[www.sossa-  
international.org](http://www.sossa-international.org)



Brown Booby from the February 2012 SOSSA Wollon-  
gong trip. Photo: B. Whyllie

## **Please help...**

SOSSA membership fees remain unchanged even though  
costs have increased greatly across the board. We would  
really appreciate any donations from those whom may be  
able to afford it.

Thanks again for your support!!



# SOSSA - Pelagic Trip data - 2012- 2013

Fax: 02 4272 4626

PO Box 142 Unanderra NSW 2526

email: SOSSA@tpg.com.au

Speno	Species	Brisbane			Port Stephens			Sydney			Wollongong				
		Aug12	Nov12	Feb13	Mar12	21Apr12	22Apr12	Jul12	Nov12	Feb12	Jul12	17Aug12	19Aug12	Sep12	19Dec12
5	Little Penguin, <i>Eudyptula minor</i>				3			4			1			8	
929	Southern Giant Petrel, <i>Macronectes giganteus</i>							1			1		2	2	
937	Northern Giant Petrel, <i>Macronectes halli</i>								2		1	1	1		
984	Cape Petrel, <i>Daption capense</i>								4				2		
75	Great-winged Petrel, <i>Pterodroma macroptera</i>			121		4	3		24	5					
971	Providence Petrel, <i>Pterodroma solandri</i>	10	2			10	4	10					2	10+	
920	Tahiti Petrel, <i>Pseudobulweria rostrata</i>	1		23											
922	Kermadec Petrel, <i>Pterodroma neglecta</i>			2	1										
774	White-necked Petrel, <i>Pterodroma cervicalis</i>			4			1								
955	Black-winged Petrel, <i>Pterodroma nigripennis</i>			1						1					
78	Gould's Petrel, <i>Pterodroma leucoptera</i>			1			1		1	2+					
83	Fairy Prion, <i>Pachyptila turtur</i>							90			500+	40+	1000+		
917	Black Petrel, <i>Procellaria parkinsoni</i>		2	2					2						
73	Grey Petrel, <i>Procellaria cinereus</i>														present
853	Streaked Shearwater, <i>Calonectris leucomelas</i>						1								
69	Wedge-tailed Shearwater, <i>Puffinus pacificus</i>	174	57	423	250	100	80		260	300		30+	7+		
975	Buller's Shearwater, <i>Puffinus bulleri</i>				2				1						
72	Flesh-footed Shearwater, <i>Puffinus carneipes</i>			12	100	70	100		1	40					100+
70	Sooty Shearwater, <i>Puffinus griseus</i>								3	1	2				2
71	Short-tailed Shearwater, <i>Puffinus tenuirostris</i>		6		20	8	2		160	10				100s	present
68	Fluttering Shearwater, <i>Puffinus gavia</i>	33			5			120	15	5	400+	30+		100	
913	Hutton's Shearwater, <i>Puffinus huttoni</i>	11		2	1				12	2	20+	1	2+	2	11
1111	Fluttering/Hutton's Shearwater				10										
67	Little Shearwater, <i>Puffinus assimilis</i>							1							
86	Wandering Albatross, <i>Diomedea exulans</i>					1					2		1	1	
846	Antipodean Albatross, <i>Diomedea antipodensis</i>										2		6+		
847	Gibson's Albatross, <i>Diomedea gibsoni</i>							6	1					2	
88	Black-browed Albatross, <i>Thalassarche melanophrys</i>				1			12	30		20+	12	30	100	
859	Campbell Albatross, <i>Thalassarche impavida</i>								3		15+		2+	1	
931	Buller's Albatross, <i>Thalassarche bulleri</i>				3				1		2				
91	Shy Albatross, <i>Thalassarche cauta</i>								2+		2+	3	10+	10	
861	White-capped Albatross, <i>Thalassarche steadi</i>								2+					5	
89	Yellow-nosed Albatross, <i>Thalassarche chlororhynchos</i>				2										
864	Indian Yellow-nosed Albatross, <i>Thalassarche carteri</i>							35			3+	6	5+	6+	
90	Grey-headed Albatross, <i>Thalassarche chrysostoma</i>													1	
63	Wilson's Storm Petrel, <i>Oceanites oceanicus</i>	7	48		150	150	60							1	
65	White-faced Storm Petrel, <i>Pelagodroma marina</i>							1	2	1					

Speno	Species	Brisbane			Port Stephens			Sydney			Wollongong				
		Aug12	Nov12	Feb13	Mar12	21Apr12	22Apr12	Jul12	Nov12	Feb12	Jul12	17Aug12	19Aug12	Sep12	19Dec12
107	Red-tailed Tropicbird, <i>Phaethon rubricauda</i>			1											
104	Australasian Gannet, <i>Morus serrator</i>	47			30	30	20	30	9	1	9+	20+	5+	60	6
103	Red-footed Booby, <i>Sula sula</i>			1											
102	Brown Booby, <i>Sula leucogaster</i>		1												
100	Little Pied Cormorant, <i>Phalacrocorax melanoleucos</i>										3			6	1
99	Pied Cormorant, <i>Phalacrocorax varius</i>		1	6							1				1
97	Little black Cormorant, <i>Phalacrocorax sulcirostris</i>			7							7	present		20	1
96	Great Cormorant, <i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>										3	present		50	1
106	Australian Pelican, <i>Pelicanus conspicillatus</i>										100	present	2		6
980	Brown Skua, <i>Catharacta lonnbergi</i>							4	1)		3	present	2	3	
945	Pomarine Jaeger, <i>Stercorarius pomarinus</i>		7	1	10	4	2		7	12					8
128	Arctic Jaeger, <i>Stercorarius parasiticus</i>		2		2	3			2	2					3
933	Long-tailed Jaeger, <i>Stercorarius longicauda</i>		1			1			2	2					5
981	Kelp Gull, <i>Larus dominicanus</i>										6	present	4	6	
125	Silver Gull, <i>Larus novaehollandiae</i>	1	present	42	5	15	10	100	150	200	100+	60+		100s	present
112	Gull-billed Tern, <i>Sterna nilotica</i>			1											
115	Crested Tern, <i>Sterna bergii</i>	6	5	96	20	6	5	12	3	3	20+	20+	20		
114	White-fronted Tern, <i>Sterna striata</i>											2	4+	4	
953	Common Tern, <i>Sterna hirundo</i>		2											10	1
120	Sooty Tern, <i>Sterna fuscata</i>		2	25						2					
972	White Tern, <i>Gygis alba</i>						1								
	***Barau's petrel, <i>Pterodroma barau</i>									1					

\*\*\* to be confirmed