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**ORNITHOLOGICAL REPORT FOR
LACEPEDE ISLANDS
ADELE ISLAND
*Western Australia***

October 2002

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ENTRUSTED

ADELE ISLAND 4th to 5th October 2002

Bird taxonomy follows L Cristidis & W E Boles

INTRODUCTION/SUMMARY

Arrived at Adele Island 05:00hrs on the 4th October 2002. Departed Adele Island at 12:00hrs on the 5th October 2002. The weather was fine & hot. A prevailing North West breeze persisted throughout the visit to Adele Island.

1 Red-footed Booby was found incubating an egg, four other individuals were counted.

Common Noddys were found breeding and Bridled Terns displayed breeding behaviour.

Black Noddy *Anous minutes* were recorded in low numbers, the record is the first for Adele Island. Some migratory waders were counted in the vicinity of the lagoon entrance on the eastern shore of the island. No migratory waders or Silver Gulls were observed with leg flags.

A 3 metre Saltwater Crocodile was sighted in the lagoon as was Adele Islands "first" mangrove shrub *Avicennia marina*.

Humpback Whales were seen on several occasions about 4.5km to the south west of the island.

SPECIES**COUNT****BROWN QUAIL***Coturnix ypsilophora*

7

A total of seven birds were flushed from an area of (*Abutilon indicum*) at 15° 31' 36" 123° 09' 53".

MASKED BOOBY*Sula dactylatra*

No Count

Odd birds seen at sea at anchorage, numerous nest sites obvious to our survey party on the eastern shore. The western shore which was not surveyed is however more popular with this species perhaps being the windward side of the islands it allows for easy take off. Nest sights survey on the north eastern shore from the navigation light mast to the entrance of the creek revealed five nest sites all placed on the high tide mark. Each nest contained a juvenile of varying stages of growth; two downy one third grown chicks, two half fledged juveniles and one fully fledged juvenile. Attending adults at nest and adults flying about were seen over our one and a half day visit.

RED-FOOTED BOOBY*Sula sula*

5

A disappointing total count of this species however it may be because our visit coincided with a period between the main breeding cycle. Coates et al. recorded breeding in May but also recorded a large downy youngster in early June for which Coates suggested a commencement of breeding in late February early March. This fits in well with a visit by Swann & Willing on 24th and 25th February 2000 when several pairs of Red-footed Boobies were recorded sitting on their respective nest and single egg. A total of 18 Red-footed Boobies were recorded on that survey.

On the 5th October 2002 the site was surveyed, location 15° 31' 26" 123° 09' 53" at 10:00 hrs. The area of *Abutilon indicum* favoured by Red-footed Booby and Great Frigatebird looked very dry, some of these plants were still alive with the odd green leaf showing, the majority however were dead. The contrast between February 2000 (very green) and October 2002 was dramatic. Lesser Frigatebirds and Brown Boobies were utilising many of *Abutilon* shrubs with nests containing partially fledged juveniles. One breeding Red-footed Booby, intermediate morph was found sitting on a flimsy nest constructed of dead sticks and coiled up vine stems of *Ipomea macrantha*. The nest contained one egg. The other four birds seen included two adult white morphs, one adult White-tailed brown morph and one juvenile/immature bird with grey pink legs and feet. The juvenile/immature bird was observed regurgitating three 200mm long flying fish *Cypselurus* Sp. while it perched in an *Abutilon* shrub prior to flying off.

BROWN BOOBY*Sula leucogaster*

No Count

Small parties of Brown Boobies were encountered on our early morning approach to Adele Island with a total of fifty birds heading out to sea in a south easterly direction. The Brown Booby breeding cycle was basically over and old nest sites were everywhere. Some new nest sites had been formed but no eggs were seen. A few old nest sites contained partially fledged or fully fledged juvenile Brown Boobies. Adult and immature Brown Boobies were observed loafing on shore lines, and mudflats of the creek and on the super structure of the light mast. On Adele as on the Lacepedes Brown Boobies do not really show any preference for nest sites.

PIED CORMORANT*Phalacrocorax varius*

250

No evidence of breeding discovered and previous records by Coates et al. show that this species breed in the dry season. No juvenile birds were seen, a large 'raft' of these birds were counted on the sea south of the tidal lagoon entrance. Forty birds were also counted loafing on a beach on the south eastern point of the island.

SPECIES**COUNT****AUSTRALIAN PELICAN***Pelecanus conspicillatus***29**

Twenty birds were observed loafing on a sand cay to the north west of the island on our initial approach in dinghies on the 4th October 2002. Nine Pelicans were recorded on a slightly elevated area to the south west of the large *Abutilon* patch some of these birds appeared to be fledged juveniles showing browner upperparts. The location of this breeding area looks very similar to that illustrated in Corella 1997 Seabird Islands No 236 Kevin. Coate.

GREAT FRIGATEBIRD*Fregata minor***Est. 30**

No breeding activity was noted however the similarity between recently fledged juvenile Lesser & Great may have caused juvenile Great Frigatebirds to be overlooked. Adult male and female Great Frigatebird were sighted easily amongst Lesser Frigatebirds *Fregata minor* at the *Abutilon* shrub site. At this site Great Frigatebirds were outnumbered by Lesser Frigatebird fifteen to forty birds. Great Frigatebirds were also present at the lagoon entrance joining larger numbers of Lesser Frigatebirds. Only four adult male Great Frigatebirds were noted during the survey the majority of others all appeared to be adult females.

LESSER FRIGATEBIRD*Fregata ariel***Est. 1,000**

This is a conservative estimate, and the whole island was not covered by this survey. The breeding area that was surveyed showed Lesser Frigatebirds utilising the *Abutilon* shrubs with nests from 500mm above ground level up to 1500mm. The breeding cycle here was coming to an end with the majority of juveniles fully fledged. Approximately 400 nests were counted at this colony.

LITTLE EGRET*Egretta garzetta***1**

One bird was seen and its identity confirmed, however other birds of this species could have been overlooked. This species had been recorded previously on Adele on the 2 June 1990 and 8th July 1990 by Western Australian naturalists, K. Coates, LA Smith, L Fontanini.

EASTERN REEF EGRET*Egretta sacra***Est. 200**

Common resident one breeding record on this survey a nest located about 150mm above the ground placed on beach *Spinifex longifolius* and constructed of small sticks. The nest contained two pale blue green eggs. Both dark and white morphs were recorded.

GREAT EGRET*Ardea alba***2**

Two birds seen, this species has been recorded previously by Coate et al and by Swann & Willing again in low numbers.

NANKEEN NIGHT HERON*Nycticorax caledonicus***Est. 30**

Odd birds were seen on the shore line at the lagoon entrance and also flushed from vegetation close to the *Abutilon* shrubbery. The largest numbers were seen together on the southern shore on high tide loafing with waders and cormorants while investigating the area via dinghy between 25 and 30 birds were counted.

BAR-TAILED GODWIT*Limosa lapponica***100**

This count is conservative as it only includes one area of shoreline at the mouth of the lagoon where large numbers of waders were congregating on an incoming tide on the 14 October 2002.

| <u>SPECIES</u> | | <u>COUNT</u> |
|--|----------------------------------|--------------|
| WHIMBREL | <i>Numenius phaeopus</i> | 2 |
| Uncommon on this survey, however would occur in greater numbers when on passage, Swann & Willing counted forty five birds in February 2000. | | |
| EASTERN CURLEW | <i>Numenius madagascariensis</i> | 1 |
| Uncommon, one bird was seen amongst the large flock at the lagoon entrance. Six were seen by Swann & Willing in February 2000. | | |
| COMMON GREENSHANK | <i>Tringa nebularia</i> | 10 |
| A conservative count, if the island was surveyed thoroughly a higher count could be expected Swann & Willing counted twenty five birds in February 2000 and that survey also did not cover the island thoroughly. | | |
| TEREK SANDPIPER | <i>Xenus cinereus</i> | 32 |
| This count is similar to the count by Swann & Willing in February 2002 when 35 birds were counted. However if the whole island was covered, the count would undoubtedly increase. | | |
| COMMON SANDPIPER | <i>Actitis hypoleucos</i> | 4 |
| Odd birds seen about the shoreline and incoming tide at the lagoon. | | |
| GREY-TAILED TATTLER | <i>Heteroscelus brevipes</i> | 930 |
| By far the most numerous wader species on the island during this survey. However, it's interesting to see only fifteen were counted by Swann & Willing in February 2000. | | |
| RUDDY TURNSTONE | <i>Arenaria interpres</i> | 430 |
| A common wader which is to be expected with suitable habitat including extensive reefs and coralline flats. | | |
| GREAT KNOT | <i>Calidris tenuirostris</i> | 25 |
| Uncommon, larger numbers could be expected on north and southward passage, Swann & Willing counted forty four birds in 2000. However it has to be remembered neither of these counts are comprehensive for the whole island. | | |
| RED KNOT | <i>Calidris canutus</i> | Not recorded |
| SANDERLING | <i>Calidris alba</i> | 27 |
| Uncommon, populations would swell during passage, they were not recorded by Swann & Willing in February 2000. | | |
| RED-NECKED STINT | <i>Calidris ruficollis</i> | 409 |
| Common wader species, this count being part of a large flock recorded at the lagoon entrance on the 14 October 2002. | | |

SPECIES**COUNT****CURLEW SANDPIPER***Calidris ferruginea***90**

Common. And this count is again conservative and represents one count made at the entrance to the lagoon on the 14 October 2002.

PIED OYSTERCATCHER*Haematopus longirostris***5**

Two pairs seen on the eastern shoreline of the island and one single bird seen on a sand cay situated north of the main island.

BLACK-WINGED STILT*Himantopus himantopus***1**

One adult seen in the lagoon on an incoming tide.

PACIFIC GOLDEN PLOVER*Pluvialis fulva***20**

Common to uncommon, never very numerous on the NW coast of Australia, islands seem to attract good numbers ie Ashmore Reef and Lacepede Islands. Coates et al recorded forty on the 7th June 1989 at Adele most of them in full breeding plumage. Swann & Willing recorded only five birds in February 2000.

GREY PLOVER*Pluvialis squatarola***15**

Uncommon on this survey, Swann & Willing reported fifty five birds in February 2000.

RED-CAPPED PLOVER*Charadrius ruficapillus***9**

Not recorded by Swann & Willing in February 2000 recorded by Coate 7th June 1990 and 8th July 1990.

LESSER SAND PLOVER*Charadrius mongolus***15**

Always outnumbered by Greater Sandplover (*Charadrius leschenaultii*) but still in good numbers and this count possibly a little conservative, a comprehensive count over the whole island would reveal more of this species. Amongst its slightly larger cousin this species is easily overlooked as with Pacific Golden Plovers seems to like islands particularly West Island on the Lacepedes.

GREATER SAND PLOVER*Charadrius leschenaultii***90**

A conservative count for this common wader, with the suitability of habitat on Adele a much larger count could be expected with a comprehensive count of the whole island. The count of ninety birds included only birds found in the vicinity of the muddy sand flats at the lagoon entrance and in the lagoon itself. Both species of Sand Plovers were observed hunting two Fiddler Crab species *uca polita* and *uca mjoeberti* on sandy mud in the lagoon.

AUSTRALIAN PRACTINCOLE*Stiltia Isabella***1 Dead**

1 dead adult bird found on the high tide rack amongst *Sesuvium portulacastrum* on the north side of the lagoon.

SILVER GULL*Larus novaehollandiae***Est. 100**

An accurate count was not established although important. Silver Gulls appear to be increasing in numbers on the Kimberley Coast and its possible this has to do with increased human activity. Accurate monitoring of Silver Gull numbers on offshore islands is essential. Silver Gulls do pose a threat to nesting seabirds as they readily predate eggs and chicks.

SPECIES**COUNT****GULL-BILLED TERN***Sterna nilotica***30**

Both races recorded on this survey the Australian macrotarsus and the smaller greyer Asian race *affinis*. Eleven Gull-billed Terns were recorded by Swann & Willing in February 2000 and Coates et al. reported a flock of about twenty birds on 2nd June 1990 (Corella Seabird islands No 236).

CASPIAN TERN*Sterna caspia***18**

Common, Caspian Terns breed on Adele in numbers up to 200+? Coate et al.

LESSER CRESTED TERNS*Sterna bengalensis***1**

One bird recorded flying over mud flats at the lagoon entrance. This species may breed on Adele but the author is not aware of any records. This species has been recorded regularly on Adele by Coates et al, Swann & Willing recorded 30 Lesser-crested Terns in February 2000.

ROSEATE TERN*Sterna dougallii***25**

Roseate Terns were seen at sea 15° 29' 49" 123° 11' 51" 4.5 km south east of the Adele Island light mast on the morning of the 5th October 2002. The birds were accompanied by Common Terns *Sterna hirundo longipennis*, Bridled Terns *Sterna anaethetus*, Little Terns *Sterna albifrons*, Common Noddy *Anous stolidus* and Brown Booby *Sula leucogaster*. All these species were following hunting pelagic fish. Two Roseate Terns were also recorded flying over the large sand bay to the north of Adele Island on the 4th October 2002 location 15° 28' 06" 123° 07' 43". No Roseate Terns were observed loafing on Adele Island.

COMMON TERN*Sterna hirundo longipennis***41**

This species appears to winter in large numbers in the NW of Australia congregating around inshore waters and associating with White-winged Black Terns. The majority of birds seen at Adele were at sea, however odd birds were seen loafing on beaches at high tide. 50 per cent of these Common Terns seen well enough appeared to be retaining breeding plumage, black crown (bill to nape) complete tail streamers and a very slight sooty wash to belly and axillaries. The remaining birds were in various stages of moult showing obvious primary moult in some birds and white fore crown.

LITTLE TERN*Sterna albifrons***30**

Eight Little Terns were counted loafing on the beach close to the lagoon entrance on the East Coast of Adele on the 4th October 2002. The remaining birds were seen at sea at various spots off the eastern shore as far away as 4.5km from the island. All the Little Terns seen well enough showed non-breeding plumage.

BRIDLED TERN*Sterna anaethetus***3,000**

Common, presumably the reason Coate et al have rarely recorded this species at Adele is because the published visits that come to hand to the author are during the dry season i.e. May, June and July. Large numbers of Bridled Terns were recorded on Adele during the October 2002 survey and their behaviour indicated a possible start to a breeding cycle. Adults were seen performing synchronised flying displays and several pairs were observed performing courtship displays on sand flats. These displays included dropping the wings and pattering around a potential partner with their head lowered. Hundreds of these terns were observed flying low and hovering over Beach Spinifex; *Spinifex longifolius* and some birds disappearing amongst the vegetation in a similar fashion to breeding birds found on the Lacepedes. No eggs or nests were found, however very little time was devoted to searching for evidence of breeding.

SPECIES**COUNT****SOOTY TERN***Sterna fuscata**Unconfirmed*

Four terns observed briefly at location 15° 33' 30" 123° 13' 54" looked very like Sooty Terns but were not seen well enough to confirm their identity.

WHITE-WINGED BLACK TERN*Chlidonias leucopterus***3**

Three birds seen at location 15° 29' 49" 123° 11' 51" feeding with Common Terns, Bridled Terns, Little Terns, Common Noddy, Black Noddy and Brown Boobies. All three terns were showing as non-breeding adults.

COMMON NODDY*Anous stolidus***3,500**

Common on Adele during this survey and a confirmed breeding record with several nests found with adults incubating their respective eggs. Adults were also observed nest building using the top clumps of Beach Spinifex *Spinifex longifolius*. This species usually favour elevated areas close to the shore as found on the Lacepede Islands. Noddies were seen collecting nesting material and flying with it to partially constructed nests. The lower part of the nests were formed with Beach Spinifex and lined with seaweed. Large numbers of Common Noddies congregated in large "rafts" on sand flats at numerous locations on the eastern shore of Adele at low tide, at high tide birds would loaf along the high tide mark on the various beaches.

BLACK NODDY*Anous minutus***10**

The discovery of this species at Adele Island is a new record according to R.E. Johnson, W A Museum pers com. Black Noddies are regular breeders on Ashmore Reef situated several hundred kilometres to the north of Adele Island. R.E. Johnson sighted a single bird at Coulomb Point, 80km north of Broome in November 2001. Black Noddies are easily separated from Common Noddy *Anous stolidus* by smaller size, thinner longer bill, concolourous dark upperparts and bright white cap. Nine of the birds spotted during this survey were found loafing with Common Noddy on the eastern shores of Adele close to the lagoon entrance. With the aid of a telescope Black Noddies were spotted with Commons and distinguished by the field marks already mentioned.

One of these individuals showed very worn upperparts however all the other Black Noddies spotted looked like full adults with a smart clean looking plumage.

One individual was seen at sea with a mixed feeding flock showing the distinct size difference between it and Common Noddy.

SACRED KINGFISHER*Todiramphus sanctus***2**

Two Sacred Kingfishers were seen during the survey, both birds were found about the entrance of the lagoon. One of these birds was observed catching a fiddler crab.

RAINBOW BEE-EATER*Merops ornatus***1**

Seen hawking insects in the *Abutilon* shrubbery, discovered initially by its continual calling.

TAWNY GRASSBIRD*Megalurus timoriensis***15**

Common resident seen in Beach Spinifex and the *Abutilon* shrubbery, often scolding observers.

OTHER SIGHTINGS OF INTEREST

SALTWATER CROCODILE

Crocodylus porosus

1

One approximately 3 metre length individual seen in the lagoon on an incoming tide.

VEGETATION NOTE

A new plant species for Adele Island ?

One grey mangrove *Avicennia marina* sapling (1.4 metres high) situated on a mud bank in the lagoon.