

Recherche Archipelago

Mr. T. Spence, Director, Zoological Gardens visited islands in this Archipelago during December 1969, together with Dr. D. F. Dorward, Monash University, Victoria. Mr. Spence has supplied the following observations.

1. Numbers of Cape Barren Geese.

Like Doug, I was impressed by the correspondence between the numbers of geese observed and Don Mackenzie's prediction of the numbers we would find. With respect to Doug, however, my estimate of the numbers would be a little more conservative than his.

2. Recruitment.

Although we did see one flock of about 25-30 birds, obviously unmated, I would not ascribe them to this years recruitment, But rather that they were the product of the 1968 breeding season. Although Doug saw a brood of five accompanied by their parents, I saw only two definite young birds. Apart from this none of the pairs were accompanied by young. I believe that this has been a very poor breeding season.

3. Carrying Capacity.

I believe that the present habitats, open patches of herbs and grasses in the scrub or goat-denuded islands are absolutely saturated and could carry no more.

4. Management.

I was impressed by the fact that Gull Island (Cull) which had been practically denuded of native plants by goats carried by far the greatest concentration of geese. A neighbouring island however had been grazed completely bare of herbs and yet held several pairs of geese, but to my mind it would have been impossible for them to have raised any young on the herbage present on this island. Accordingly, I recommend that the goats on this island be exterminated, and "controlled" on Gull Island. It occurs to me that native mammals might be more appropriate habitat-agents than goats and I recommend that a study be made of the role of the Rock Wallabies and Tammars in this connection, and that consideration be given to replacing the goats with wallabies transplanted from other islands. Don MacKenzie avers that the Rock Wallabies were abundant on Combe island and were "lousy" and in poor condition. This statement should be investigated and if proved true would indicate that Combe is overstocked and would benefit by the removal of some Rock Wallabies to islands not inhabited by them.

In view of the probable saturation of goose inhabitats in the Recherche and the extermination of the Cape Barren Goose on Bald Island (Albany) consideration should be given to taking excess young birds from Esperance for enlargement, wing-clipped, on Bald Island (and even Kottnest).

5. Illegal Hunting.

Although the geese seemed a little warier than my recollection of the birds in the Bass Straits Islands, I believe that there is very little, if any, shooting by local residents. It is possible, however, that visitors who bring their own boats from the goldfields, (and it is predicted that this will increase) may shoot at them. The seals seemed fairly tame and are

5. Illegal Hunting. (contd.)

probably not shot at. I received the following confidence, that one, Tommy Hann (Hand?) used to shoot "the odd goose" but that he is now aged and has probably not done so "this last year"!

6. Access and Tourism.

The seals are already a tourist attraction and parties are conducted to see them. The White-breasted Sea Eagles are also looked for and I believe that the geese could also be made into an attraction. I much regret, however, that the W.A. Sub-committee of the Australian Academy of Science Committee on National Parks Report, page 167, Opinion 2, sees fit to recommend that access be given to Gull Island. This island is the goose stronghold and access should be forbidden. Alternatively, I suggest that Sandy Hook with its little sandy bay and Frederick with its peak, be access islands with due warnings for fire and exhortations to keep away from the shearwater and petrel breeding areas.

7. Other species of birds.

Numerous burrows of Fleshy-footed Shearwaters and White-faced Storm Petrels were seen and accidentally broken into. Peregrines and White-breasted Sea Eagles were observed including one eagle which had learned to respond to Don MacKenzie's summons for hand-outs of fish. Brown Quail with a brood were observed on Gull Island. Rock Parrots were abundant on Gull and some other islands, while small numbers of Sooty Oystercatchers, Pacific Gulls, Black Cormorants and Black-faced Cormorants were seen. The only passerines seen were Singing Honeyeaters, Golden Whistlers and Welcome Swallows.

8. Public Relations.

I feel that films of the Cape Barren Geese taken at Lara or elsewhere must be available and a public showing in Esperance might increase the local interest in the species and explain the need for their protection. I believe a resident ranger is to be appointed for Cape le Grande National Park and believe he could usefully oversee the islands.

9. Capture of Goslings.

One fully-fledged young bird was captured and released. At a later date your permit to take young birds, for which I thank you, will be exercised. In view of the probable saturation of available habitats I believe this will not adversely affect the population.