

PO Box 316
KARRATHA WA 6714
Tel: (091) 868 290

Chief Research Officer

REPORT ON A RECENT VISIT TO THE MONTE BELLO ISLANDS

This visit took place between 23-27 May 1983. Transport to and from the islands was provided by the Lombardo Marine vessel "Armstrong Creek."

Personnel involved:

Bill Daniels	-	Department of Home Affairs and the Environment, Canberra.
Malcolm Cooper	}	- Australian Radiation Laboratories, Melbourne
Geoff Williams		
Keith Token		
Bill Toussaint	-	State X-Ray Laboratories, Perth
Gerry Allen	-	WA Museum, Perth
Keith Morris	-	Department of Fisheries & Wildlife, Karratha.

This trip was undertaken to monitor radiation levels on Trimouille and Alpha Islands, the sites of nuclear weapon tests in 1952 and 1956.

Fauna recorded:

During this visit, I inspected as many islands as possible (see attached map). These included South-East, Dahlia, Aster, Dandelion, Dot, Daisy, Epsilon, Flag, Alpha Islands, and major portions of Trimouille and Hermite Islands.

Thirty two species of birds were recorded, five of which had not previously been recorded (documented) from the Monte Bello Islands (*).

The birds recorded were:

Kestrel
Spotted Harrier
Bar-shouldered Dove
Welcome Swallow
Fairy Martin *

Australian Pipit
 Yellow Silvereye
 Zebra Finch
 White-breasted Wood-swallow
 Horsfields Bronze Cuckoo
 Little Button-quail *
 Wilsons Storm Petrel
 Wedge-tailed Shearwater
 Australian Pelican
 Pied Cormorant
 Little Pied Cormorant *
 Reef Heron (white and grey phase)
 Brahminy Kite
 Osprey
 Pied Oyster-catcher
 Sooty Oyster-catcher
 Sharp-tailed Sandpiper *
 Red-capped Dotterel
 Grey-tailed Tattler
 Turnstone
 Beach Stone-curlew
 Common Noddy *
 Crested Tern
 Caspian Tern
 Fairy Tern
 Bridled Tern
 Silver Gull.

Brown Quail

Wedge-tailed Shearwater burrows were found on Flag, South-East and Alpha Islands.

Silver Gulls had nested on Flag Island.

A nest containing seven medium sized eggs was found on the ground beneath a Salsola kali plant on Hermite Island. The nest consisted of a depression in the sand lined with a few pieces of vegetation. A pair of Little Button-quail were flushed from nearby, although the nest did not appear fresh. Two of the eggs have been sent to the WA Museum for identification.

Reptiles were not commonly seen, and only a few species were recorded.

Gehyra variegata
Gemmatophora gilberti
Ctenotus saxatilis?
Lerista bipes
Varanus gouldi
Hydrophis melanocephalus

Green Turtle
 Hawksbill Turtle.

Turtle nests were abundant on the sandy beaches on the north side of Trimouille Island.

The introduced rat (Rattus rattus) was common on Trimouille Island. Many fresh tracks were observed, predominantly on the beach and fore dune areas. Two rats were seen in concrete bunkers. Fresh grass nests and droppings were common in the limestone cliffs.

The rats seem to have disappeared from South-East Island. No tracks or nests were seen and the Decca navigation personnel had not seen any around their base.

A few rat tracks and some old nests were seen on Hermite Island. Only a small proportion (2 in 23) of the cat scats examined on Hermite Island contained mammal fur and bone material (presumably Rattus rattus). Samples of fur and a rodent mandible from a cat scat have been sent to the WA Museum for positive identification.

Cats still appear to be common on Hermite Island. Fresh droppings and diggings were seen and a recently dead cat found on the south end of the island. Most cat scats contained bird, reptile, and insect remains. Very few cat tracks were seen on Trimouille Island.

Fresh water rat (Hydromys chrysogaster) tracks were seen on Trimouille, Alpha and Hermite Islands.

Peerling operations (B40 "Andirina Pearle") were underway in Faraday Passage during this visit.

I believe that some recommendations regarding the transfer of at least some of the islands to State control were to be made by the Department of Home Affairs and the Environment following this visit.

Keith Morris

KEITH MORRIS
RESERVE MANAGEMENT OFFICER - ISLANDS
2nd June 1983

Attach:

cc CRMO