

OILING OF FAIRY PENGUINS

Honorary Warden Miss Lexie Nicholls of Dalkeith, whose comments on the treatment of oiled seabirds can be found on page 89 of this issue, has forwarded the following report:

"On Friday, November 3rd, 1972, while I was carrying out a survey of breeding Silver Gulls on Carnac Island it was discovered that a number of Fairy Penguins had been killed and others were dying from the effects of oil.

Several (about 8) Pied Cormorants had been seen earlier in the week, covered in oil and trying to "dry" their wings on the east Carnac beach. All evaded capture until one by one they died or disappeared. Three dead were collected and buried; all were in an emaciated state.

It did not occur to me that the Penguins might also be affected since no information had been issued that a spill of sufficient threat had occurred—some Cormorants had apparently been oiled from a recent spillage in Fremantle Harbour, but apart from receiving several of these birds for treatment I had heard no other news of this occurrence, either personally or through any of the media. I assumed that the oiled Cormorants on Carnac beach were other victims of this spill and that they had escaped the harbour and found their way across to Carnac where they were now isolated. At that time no thought was given to the Penguins since they do not normally swim in the Harbour (where, it was assumed, the recent unpublicised spill had been dealt with).

On November 3rd, however, I found 18 dead Penguins scattered in crannies and cavities around the northern "headland" of Carnac Island—almost all of these were so thickly oiled that no patch of normal colour was visible. Most had died from about 1 to 5 days before discovery.

Seven other Penguins were subsequently found alive in the crannies, at water level, all oiled, gaunt, emaciated and shaking with cold. These were collected and confined to my camp, where treatment was started. Being cut off from the mainland, however, and unprepared for such an emergency, I could do little for the very weak individuals and three died. The four others were later brought to the mainland where proper treatment was instituted. One has pneumonia, but all are expected to survive with continued treatment.

A check of the high cliff "caves" of the northern "headland" revealed several large Penguin chicks in down, and two healthy adult birds. A pair of chicks in down and two healthy adults were also found in the southern (lee) cliffs.

Several oiled Silver Gulls were also seen on the beach at Carnac, but were still mobile enough to evade capture when I left the Island on November 8th."