

POTOROO SEARCH—A CONTINUING SAGA

Members of the Wanneroo Wildlife Research Centre have just completed an expedition to islands along the south coast of W.A. in search of the Potoroo. Funded by the Commonwealth Government and using the Department's patrol vessel the *Phillip King*, Bald Island (off Two Peoples Bay Reserve) and Mondrain, North Twin Peaks, Wilson, Corbett and South Twin Peaks islands of the Recherche Archipelago were visited. All these islands are wildlife reserves under the control of the Western Australian Wildlife Authority.

Members of the team were Dr A. A. Burbidge, E. D. Kabay, N. McKenzie, K. Youngson and A. Hopkins (Department of Fisheries and Wildlife), C. Bryce (Mollusc Department, W.A. Museum) who accompanied the expedition to collect shells from the Recherche islands and Dr A. N. Start (National Parks Authority).

Islands off the W.A. coast are extremely interesting as a large number of them harbour animals which are now absent from the adjacent mainland—Rottnest and Garden Islands being the classic examples. It was thought that as the two species of Potoroos (*Potorous gilberti* and *P. platyops*) were originally found along the south coast of W.A., possibly they could be on some of the south coast islands. None of these islands have been studied intensively or trapped but there have been reports of small animals occurring on some of them. A number of the islands have dense thick vegetation on them and are large enough to support at least two species of mammals.

From previous records, Gilbert's Potoroo would be expected to be on Bald Island and the Broad-faced Potoroo on the Recherche Archipelago.

Three to four days were spent on each Bald, Mondrain and North Twin Peaks while the other islands



North Twin Peaks Island.

were visited for a few hours only. In addition a trapping programme of one weeks duration was carried out by Ron Sokolowski and Mick Onus on the Two Peoples Bay Reserve. Landing on the islands was in most cases extremely difficult. A system was developed where a rubber raft was used to transfer equipment and personnel from the coast onto the most inaccessible islands.

On the three main islands, trapping was carried out using cage traps, breakbacks and medium Elliotts. All islands were searched extensively for any signs of the existence of Potoroos. In addition, reptiles and other mammal and plant samples were collected, and bird sightings were recorded.

Although no Potoroos were found, some extremely interesting observations and findings were made. A Departmental report is being prepared on the expedition but briefly the main highlights were:

At Two Peoples Bay Reserve live quokkas were caught in the gullies around Mt Gardner where previously, only dead specimens had been found. Two new bird species were added to the Reserve's bird list—the Spotless Crake (*Porzana tabuensis*), a rare species (this individual was trapped in a cage trap) and the Short-tailed Shearwater (*Puffinus tenuirostris*). If the identity of the skeletal remains of this bird are confirmed it will be the most western recorded locality. In addition, bones from the Dibbler (*Antechinus apicalis*) were found in the sand dunes of the Reserve.

On Bald Island, an extremely rare type of *Salmonella* was found. This is a disease-causing bacteria which was found to be living in the bodies of quokkas. As the vegetation was found to be extremely old, detailed measurements were made on the various plant communities on the island. Fragments of sheep bone and a large number of quokka skulls were collected. The quokka population was found to be still in good condition. No evidence of other mammals was found on the island.

On the Recherche Islands, specimens of Rock Wallaby (*Petrogale penicillata*) were obtained from Mondrain and Wilson, Tammar (*Macropus eugenii*) from North Twin Peaks, and Southern Bush-Rat (*Rattus fuscipes*) from Mondrain and North Twin Peaks (for the latter island, this is a new locality for the species). A large number of species of reptiles new to the islands were found. New bird records for the islands were made—Fan-tailed Cuckoo (*Cacomantis pyrrhophanus*), Barn Owl (*Tyto alba*), Black-faced Cuckoo-Shrike (*Coracina novaehollandiae*), and the Stubble Quail (*Coturnix pectoralis*). The rare Black-faced Cormorant (*Phalacrocorax fuscescens*) and Cape Barren Goose (*Cereopsis novaehollandiae*) were also seen.

Further expeditions to these interesting islands are planned by the Wildlife Research Centre to obtain reliable data for the formulation of more detailed management plans for the reserve and to continue the search for the Potoroo.



A Potoroo.
