

The Minister said he was anxious that the principle of escape-gaps would be accepted by all fishermen and during the phasing-in period the aim would be education rather than prosecution. If a fisherman made an honest attempt to comply with the escape gap requirements, any device used by him, would be approved. Departmental inspectors had been instructed along these lines.

CAPE BARREN GEESE - BANDING

Advice has been received from the Animals and Birds Protection Board, Hobart, Tasmania, that a programme of Cape Barren Geese banding would be carried out this year.

In October a banding party, operating on Chappell, Goose and Badger Islands in the Furneaux Group in Bass Strait, banded 618 birds. Of these 605 have been banded with a red neck-band.

Field staff are requested to report any sightings of Cape Barren Geese, particularly any that might be observed carrying a red neck-band.

SUB-COMMITTEE VISITS SLOPE ISLAND

Since the development of an industrial salt undertaking in Useless Loop and on Slope Island in Freycinet Estuary, Shark Bay, considerable concern has been felt for a population of a dimorphic species of shearwater which has bred on the island in past years. This species of shearwater is of particular interest to science because of its dimorphic characteristics - some specimens have white breasts and underparts and flesh-coloured feet and legs - and because Shark Bay is the only known breeding area in the Indian Ocean. In fact the only other area where the dimorphic species has been reported is in the North Pacific Ocean.

It was known that considerable blasting and excavation work had been carried out to develop Slope Island as the terminal for stockpiling and loading salt. This development, it was feared, had destroyed considerable habitat and possibly endangered the very existence of the shearwaters. To gain first-hand knowledge of the damage caused to the habitat and to assess the status of the birds during their annual visit to the island to breed, a sub-Committee of the Fauna Protection Advisory Committee visited Slope Island on August 28 and 29 last. The opportunity was also taken by the sub-Committee to visit ten other islands in Freycinet Estuary which comprise the greater portion of Reserve No. 26004, set aside for the

protection of fauna and guano.

The party consisted of Committee members Mr. J. B. Higham and Dr. G. M. Storr, secretary to the Committee Mr. G. E. Dixon and Technical Officer Mr. N. E. McLaughlan.

The sub-Committee found that although some damage had been done to the breeding sites on Slope Island the population was considered to be in no danger providing no additional development is carried out. There was sufficient habitat remaining and the birds were found to be quite actively engaged in preparing their nests, ready for breeding. It was estimated that approximately two hundred pairs of shearwaters were nesting on Slope Island. Of those it was estimated that about one third had white characteristics.

During the inspection of the other islands in Freycinet Estuary the sub-Committee also found a small colony of shearwaters nesting on Baudin Island some twenty-seven miles south of Slope Island and a larger colony nesting on Freycinet Island. Specimens of shearwaters with white breasts and underparts were examined on both Slope and Baudin Islands. The presence of the species on Baudin Island dispelled previous beliefs that they were confined to breeding only on Slope Island. A larger colony of shearwaters, estimated at some five hundred pairs, was found to be nesting on Freycinet Island and although no evidence was found - possibly because no overnight stay was made at Freycinet Island - that the dimorphic species was common to Freycinet, it is reasonable to assume that they are, because a substantial population of a species is nesting there, and the island is situated in a direct line between Slope and Baudin Islands.

A species of bird found during the visit and which had not previously been reported on any of the islands of the reserve, was stubble quail. These were found on both Baudin and Salutation Islands.

INTERDEPARTMENTAL COMMITTEE

It will be remembered that in August last, as a result of representations made to the Premier for the proper protection and conservation of Western Australian wildlife, a special committee was appointed. The members appointed were:-