

Bird ringing at Gough Island, 1977-1982

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Bird ringing activities at Gough Island are summarised for the period December 1977 to November 1982. A total of 772 birds of six species was ringed during the period and 44 recaptures have been recorded at Gough Island since 1955. Two birds have been recovered or recaptured elsewhere during the review period. Only one foreign-ringed bird has as yet been recorded at Gough Island.

Voëlberingingsaktiwiteite op Gough-eiland vir die tydperk Desember 1977 tot November 1982 word opgesom. 'n Totaal van 772 voëls van ses soorte was gedurende die tydperk gering en 42 terugkrygings was op Gough-eiland vanaf 1955 aangeteken. Twee voëls was op ander lokaliteite gedurende die onderhawige tydperk teruggekry of herower. Net een uitheemse geringde voël is tot nou toe op Gough-eiland aangeteken.

Introduction

This report summarises bird ringing activities at Gough Island (40°21'S, 09°53'W), South Atlantic, between December 1977 and November 1982 and supplements and corrects information given by Morant (1977). A total of 772 birds of six species was ringed (Table 1). Two species, rockhopper penguin *Eudyptes chrysocome* and Gough Island moorhen *Gallinula nesiotis* (the only 'non-seabird' ringed) were ringed for the first time. The total number of birds ringed at Gough Island since 1935 (Morant 1977) is therefore 1 636 birds of 10 species (Table 2). M.K. Swales marked 'many' Gough Island buntings *Rowettia goughensis* in 1955-1956 with 'coloured celluloid bands' (Holdgate 1958, p.174) but apparently did not use numbered metal rings. For this reason they have not been included in the ringing total.

Table 2
Birds ringed at Gough Island, 1955-1982.

Species	1955-1977*		Dec. 1977 - Nov. 1982		Totals (1955-1982)
	Chick	Full Grown	Chick	Full Grown	
Rockhopper penguin <i>Eudyptes chrysocome</i>	—	—	—	26	26
Wandering albatross <i>Diomedea exulans</i>	16	210	280	97	603
Yellownosed albatross <i>D. chlororhynchos</i>	—	7	—	300	307
Sooty albatross <i>Phoebastria fusca</i>	—	9	—	47	56
Southern giant petrel <i>Macronectes giganteus</i>	4	1	—	20	25
Broadbilled prion <i>Pachyptila vittata</i>	0	1	—	—	1
Softplumaged petrel <i>Pterodroma mollis</i>	0	1	—	—	1
Great shearwater <i>Puffinus gravis</i>	523†	1	—	—	524
Subantarctic skua <i>Catharacta antarctica</i>	—	91	—	—	91
Gough Island moorhen <i>Gallinula nesiotis</i>	—	—	—	2	2
Total					1636

*Swales 1962, Morant 1977, South African Bird Ringing Unit (SAFRING) records, M.K. Swales *in litt.*

†522 according to British Trust for Ornithology records (R. Hudson *in litt.*).

Table 1
Birds ringed at Gough Island, December 1977–November 1982.

Species	Dec. 1977– Oct. 1978		Oct.–Nov. 1979		Oct. 1980		Sep. 1981		Oct.–Nov. 1982		Totals
	Chick	Full Grown	Chick	Full Grown	Chick	Full Grown	Chick	Full Grown	Chick	Full Grown	
Rockhopper penguin <i>Eudyptes chrysocome</i>	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	26	26
Wandering albatross <i>Diomedea exulans</i>	3	86	72	3	53	7	70	—	82	1	377
Yellownosed albatross <i>D. chlororhynchos</i>	—	—	—	32*	—	—	—	—	—	268	300
Sooty albatross <i>Phoebastria fusca</i>	—	—	—	31	—	—	—	—	—	16	47
Southern giant petrel <i>Macronectes giganteus</i>	—	20	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	20
Gough Island moorhen <i>Gallinula nesiotis</i>	—	—	—	2	—	—	—	—	—	—	2
Totals	3	106	140		60		70		393		772

*Two birds originally ringed in 1973 were re-ringed and are not included in this figure.

Discussion

A number of errors and omissions exist in Table 3 of Morant (1977). Only 200 and not 220 wandering albatrosses were ringed in 1955-56 (Swales 1962). The wandering albatrosses given as being ringed in 1974 were in fact ringed in 1976. The softplumaged petrel *Pterodroma mollis* was ringed in 1948 and not 1937. The softplumaged petrel and the broadbilled prion *Pachyptila vittata* were caught at Gough Island on 1 March 1948 but were ringed and released the next day at Tristan da Cunha. The five southern giant petrels *Macronectes giganteus* ringed in 1977 were incorrectly listed as northern giant petrels *M. halli*. Only the southern giant petrel breeds and occurs ashore at Gough Island (Voisin & Bester 1981). One adult great shearwater *Puffinus gravis* was ringed on 6 April 1956 (M.K. Swales *in litt.*). In 1968 C.C.H. Elliott ringed 523 and not 500 great shearwater chicks (Elliott 1971). However, R. Hudson (*in litt.*) reports the British Trust for Ornithology records show that only 522 great shearwater chicks were ringed by Elliott.

Swales (1965) states that 90 subantarctic skuas *Catharacta antarctica* were ringed between September 1956 and June 1957 with "Pretoria Zoo" (SAFRING) rings by (J.J.) van der Merwe. This ringing effort was not reported by Morant (1977) but it is now included in the total number of birds ringed on Gough Island (Table 2). All the skuas ringed were adults (J.J. van der Merwe *in litt.*).

Two birds have been recaptured away from Gough Island during this period. A wandering albatross (J-01317) ringed as a chick on 6 November 1979 was recaptured alive on 17 October 1981 at sea off the southwestern Cape, South Africa, at 34°18'S, 17°28'E, a movement of 2 510 km. This is only the second recovery of a wandering albatross away from Gough Island (Morant 1977).

A southern giant petrel (J-00745) ringed as an adult on 31 August 1978 was recaptured as a breeding female at Bird Island, South Georgia (54°00'S, 38°03'W) on 18 November 1980 (S. Hunter pers. com.). This represents a movement of 2 586 km. The bird was caught feeding at a culled Amsterdam Island fur seal *Arctocephalus tropicalis* carcass at Seal Beach, Gough Island (M.N. Bester pers. com.) and was therefore not necessarily a member of the Gough Island breeding population.

Two ringed wandering albatross chicks were found dead before fledging in 1956 (Swales 1962) and were not mentioned by Morant (1977). These are the only recoveries at Gough Island of birds ringed there. The only recovery at Gough Island of a bird ringed elsewhere is of an Antarctic tern *Sterna vittata* (502-01706) ringed on Dyer Island, southern Cape, South Africa on 31 May 1951, recovered over 18 years later on 21 December 1969. This represents a movement of 2 650 km. This record was not given by Morant (1977).

Swales (1965) individually colour-marked 115 subantarctic skuas with paint on legs and crown in 1955-56, but apparently did not ring them. One individual was seen at Nightingale Island (37°28'S, 12°32'W), 394 km away, "about a fortnight later" (Swales 1965). This record of a movement away from Gough Island by a marked bird was not mentioned by Morant (1977).

A total of 49 birds of 624 individuals ringed of four species (Table 3), are known to have been recaptured in subsequent breeding seasons at Gough Island since 1955, when ringing commenced (Swales 1962, Morant 1977). One recapture of exceptional interest is of a wandering albatross ringed as an adult on 22 December 1955 at Albatross Plain (Swales 1962),

Table 3
Birds ringed at Gough Island, 1955–September 1981, which have been recaptured on the island at least once in subsequent breeding seasons.

Species	No. ringed	No. recaptured	% recaptured
Wandering albatross	520	10	1,9
Yellow-nosed albatross	39	29	74,4
Sooty albatross	40	5	12,5
Southern giant petrel	25	5	20,0
Totals	624	49	7,9

and recaptured alive in the same locality as a breeding adult on 24 March 1978 (M.N. Bester *in litt.*), an interval of over 22 years. Of 34 yellow-nosed albatrosses *D. chlororhynchos* ringed or re-ringed near the Meteorological Base at Transvaal Bay (40°21'S, 09°53'W) in October/November 1979, 24 (70,6 %) were recaptured in the same months in 1982. The high recapture rates possible on the island and the very few recoveries away from the island confirm that bird ringing at sub-Antarctic islands is primarily of value for studies of birds during the terrestrial phase of their lives (Brown & Oatley 1982). Only ringing of very large numbers of seabirds can yield adequate information about their movements at sea.

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