

With the compliments of the author,

Ellen J. P. J.
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BIRD STUDIES ON MARION AND PRINCE EDWARD ISLANDS

by

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From January 1965 to April 1966 I enjoyed the fascinating, if often uncomfortable, experience of working on Marion Island as Ornithologist to the 1965-'66 Biological - Geological Expedition. In addition, I was fortunate enough to be able to visit the little-known Prince Edward Island on two occasions (March 1965, March 1966)

Previous papers on the avifauna of this group (Crawford 1952, Rand 1954 and la Grange 1962) have been primarily concerned with systematics. Thus the main objective of last year's work was to study the detailed breeding biology and behaviour of a few species. Most attention was given to the Gentoo Penguin (Pygoscelis papua), the Sooty Albatross (Phoebastria fusca) and to a lesser degree the Soft-plumaged Petrel Complex (Pterodroma mollis and P. Lugenis), the Light-mantled Sooty Albatross (Phoebastria palpebrata) and the Wandering Albatross (Diomedea exulans).

The special interest of the Sooty Albatrosses lies in the fact that the Marion and Prince Edward Islands are the only stations in the world at which both are known to breed together, and it was thus hoped that direct comparisons of their behaviour might throw some light on their species-isolating mechanisms.

Apart from the ethological work a constant lookout was kept for further additions to the systematic list. Twenty four of the twenty six species previously recorded were found breeding: twelve petrels, four penguins, four albatrosses, two gulls, one tern, one cormorant and the Shearwater, and observations were made on their ecology. In addition rings supplied by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Services (which are used throughout the antarctic and sub-antarctic) were used to band over 100 Skua chicks (Catheracta skua) and a thousand Wandering Albatross (Diomedea exulans) and Giant Petrel (Macronectes giganteus) chicks.

Most work was undertaken around the Base which is situated on the eastern side of the island but all areas along the coast were visited. At least one camping trip was undertaken every month, so as to investigate the whole coastal area thoroughly.

Apart from the ornithological work, monthly samples for testing salinity and for plankton records were taken for the Marine biologist. A watch was kept on the movements of the Elephant Seal (Mirounga leonina) throughout the year. These animals were abundant on most beaches during their pupping season in September and October. Fur Seals (Arctocephalus tropicalis) were scarce on the eastern side and only a few visits could be made to their two main beaches on the western side. Killerwhales (Orcinus orca) were frequent visitors. During the Seal pupping season they were seen almost daily somewhere along the coast.

A representative collection was made of all insects and other Invertebrata found. This collection is being distributed to specialist in the various fields all over the world for examination.

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