



A Survey of Colonially-breeding Birds on Mud Islands, Port Phillip, Victoria

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Mud Islands in southern Port Phillip, Victoria, provide important breeding habitat for waterbirds and significant feeding and roosting habitat for shorebirds. Because of these values the islands are included in the Port Phillip Bay (Western Shoreline) and Bellarine Peninsula Ramsar Site. Over recent decades there have been significant changes to the bird communities of Mud Islands but information about these changes has not been collated or comprehensively documented. This report attempts to achieve that, and also to provide a complete listing of the terrestrial vertebrate fauna of the islands, using information collected by the author during 64 opportunistic visits over 26 years and more systematically during 22 visits in 2008-2010.

Before the late 1950s only one species of colonially-breeding bird was known to breed on Mud Islands, the White-faced Storm-Petrel, although anecdotal reports suggest breeding by Australian Pelicans and cormorant species in earlier times. Silver Gulls were found breeding in small numbers in 1959 and Crested Terns in 1966. During the 1980s breeding colonies of Australian Pelican and Pied Cormorant were established, and in the 1990s Australian White Ibis and, surprisingly in a marine environment, Straw-necked Ibis formed breeding colonies. These have been followed in recent years by small colonies of Royal Spoonbill and Little Egret. Meanwhile the Silver Gull colony had grown exponentially to an unknown and perhaps unknowable size, probably several tens of thousands of nests at any one time between July and December each year. Similarly, the ibis colonies have grown steadily over the last 15 years.

Mud Islands now support the largest Victorian breeding colonies of White-faced Storm-Petrel, Australian Pelican, Straw-necked Ibis and Silver Gull, and significant breeding colonies of Pied Cormorant, Royal Spoonbill, Australian White Ibis, Caspian Tern and Crested Tern. Numbers of both ibis species were estimated by the analysis of aerial photographs which revealed that the Straw-necked Ibis colony is far larger than previously realised and contained over 50 000 nests in October 2010.

Mud Islands are also an integral component of the complex of shorebird habitats in southern Port Phillip. This complex includes Swan Bay and its islands, Lake Victoria and Lake Connemara, as well as Mud Islands. The number of migratory shorebirds using Mud Islands has declined over recent decades, reflecting a trend across most sites in Australia where shorebirds are monitored (Gosbell and Clemens 2006), including other sites around Port Phillip (Herrod 2010). Despite this decline in usage by some species, Mud Islands still supports significant numbers, at the State level, of Grey Plover, Double-banded Plover, Bar-tailed Godwit, Grey-tailed Tattler, Ruddy Turnstone, Great Knot, Red Knot and Sharp-tailed Sandpiper.

The main management issues for maintaining the bird breeding colonies on Mud Islands relate to ensuring that mammalian predators do not become established, and controlling the activities of human visitors to ensure that breeding is not disrupted at critical times of the year.

(Peter Menkhorst spoke about the birds of Mud Islands at the Swan Bay Environment Association's 2010 Annual General Meeting. We thank him for the wonderful talk and for giving us this article for our newsletter.)

(More information about Mud Islands and Peter's list of bird species observed there in Feb 2007 can be found in the MUD ISLAND TIMES on the internet.)

REVEGETATION ACTIVITIES

A large amount of re-vegetation work has been carried out in the Borough in the last few months, mainly using plants grown at the Queenscliffe Indigenous Plant Nursery by our volunteers. Walk along the Dog Beach in the Narrows to be impressed by the thousands of plants which have been planted there over the last few years in an effort to prevent further erosion. Work has also been carried out at other sites around Swan Bay, on Tobin Drive and on the sand dunes of Queenscliff and Point Lonsdale.

NEW BOROUGH STAFF MEMBER

Matt Crawley has just been appointed as the Queenscliffe Council's Foreshore Coordinator. Certainly Matt is new to the Borough's staff but he is not new to most of us, as he has spent the last few years working with the Bellarine Catchment Network where, with Sue Longmore, he has been caring for the Bellarine Peninsula and its coastline.

We are very pleased at the idea of having someone as enthusiastic and experienced as Matt caring for our local environment which of course includes precious Swan Bay.

LANDCARE CONFERENCE

Jill Warneke, the Newsletter editor and coordinator of the Queenscliffe Nursery, was recently subsidized to attend the Landcare Conference in Adelaide.

One of the field trips was a visit to the North Adelaide Plains where we were shown an interesting and exciting project run by the South Australian Research and Development Institute (SARDI) where companion planting was used on a grand scale. Native plants (mainly *Atriplex* and *Rhagodia*) were planted around the outside perimeter of a commercial tomato greenhouse where they created a buffer that supported colonization of natural enemy populations while eliminating pest-preferred exotic weed habitats. The owner had reduced use of pesticides to 5% using this method to eliminate thrips and wilt virus.

Atriplex (Coast Saltbush) and *Rhagodia* (Seaberry Saltbush) are two of the plants we

grow at the Nursery, so there is potential for such a system to be used locally.

Recognition was given by Tony Burke, the then Minister for Agriculture, to the importance of Community plant nurseries – Landcare, he said, could not do their work without us.

Nursery (at 79 Nelson Rd) working bees are held:
Wednesdays 9-12
Last Friday of the month 9-12
3rd Sunday of the month. 10-12
We are always happy to see more volunteers. Just come, or contact Jill Warneke on 5258 1716 or visit our SBEA website:
<http://home.vicnet.net.au/~sbea/>

ENVIRONMENTAL EFFECTS STATEMENT (EES) Submission from SBEA

Recently the Victorian Government established an inquiry into the EES process to which the SBEA made a detailed submission. We were critical of past EESs particularly those for the Channel dredging and the Stockland development. We felt the processes were not rigorous enough and that local knowledge and input was virtually ignored.

Our experience in these cases made us question the relevance of a process in which the developers often choose the consultants to prepare the EES and the public consultation does not seem to have much effect on the final decision, despite the amount of work and expertise involved by local groups.

Thus the SBEA's suggestions for the inquiry were that developers not be allowed to choose the consultants to undertake the EES process, and that prior to the EES process, initial community consultation take place so that a set of questions can be formulated which must be addresses through the process.

Also we suggested that the Minister take more notice of the community input in order to make use of important local knowledge.

WE STILL NEED COMMITTEE MEMBERS

*THE COMMITTEE MEETS ON THE THIRD
SUNDAY OF EACH MONTH, 10-11am, at the
NURSERY, 79 Nelson Rd.*

*If interested ring Bob Fuller (5258 1897) to
discuss the work of the committee.*