

**RECORDS OF BIRDS AND OTHER VERTEBRATES FROM
TASMANIA'S FAR SOUTH-WEST COAST**

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The following records of birds and other vertebrate species were collected during the course of an extended bushwalking trip undertaken by the author to the coastline of the South West Cape Region, in Tasmania's far south west corner. The visit was seen as an opportunity to gather such records from a part of the state which is relatively inaccessible and little visited by scientists or naturalists, although in recent years has become a popular bushwalking route. The duration of the bushwalk was of 10 days from 31st December 2003 to 9th January 2004. The start of the bushwalk was at the airstrip and settlement of Melaleuca on Bathurst Harbour. However, no records were taken in the vicinity of this site, partly because of the extensive history of visitation by wildlife management authorities and other people concerned with conservation of the orange-bellied parrot *Neophema chrysogaster*.

The route was from Melaleuca southwards to New Harbour, where the recording commenced. From here the track was taken westwards along the coast to South West Cape, then north westwards from Mount Karamu along the South West Cape Range to Window Pane Bay, and then further on to Noyhener Beach. Here a side trip was undertaken to Stephens Bay and Spain Bay. Finally the last leg of the journey involved going eastwards over the northern extension of the south West Cape Range and the Pasco Range to Horseshoe Inlet to join the Port Davey Track south of the Narrows of Bathurst Channel and returning to Melaleuca.

The habitat of the route and surrounding areas is diverse. The coastline consists mainly of exposed rocky and rugged quartzite rocky shores with intermittent bays of varying degrees of oceanic exposure and featuring beaches of fine whitish sand, and in some cases areas of pebble beach. Minor to moderate sized creeks enter the bays through these beaches. In two places the coast is more sheltered with tidal flats, these being Hannant Inlet (bypassed on this trip) and Horseshoe Inlet. South West Cape itself is comprised of granite. Offshore in places are a number of sea stacks, small islands and tidally exposed reefs. The vegetation of the hinterland is typical of the south west and west of Tasmania. This includes buttongrass moorland, characterised by the hummock sedge *Gymnoschoenus sphaerocephalus* and dominated by the families Restionaceae,

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Myrtaceae, Epacridaceae and Proteaceae; wet scrub with similar familial floristics; wet sclerophyll forest and mixed forest dominated by *Eucalyptus nitida*; and thamnic rainforest in which *Eucryphia lucida* was abundant. The buttongrass moorland occurs mainly on poorly drained flats, slopes and ridges and is the most abundant vegetation type while the wet scrub and forest communities occur mainly on more fire-protected slopes, gullies and old sand dunes at the back of beaches. A narrow band of littoral scrub occurs immediately in from the wash zone of the sea and is comprised of restricted characteristic species such as *Correa backhouseana*, *Exocarpos syrticola* and *Persoonia muelleri* var. *densifolia* as well as some widespread species being particularly abundant such as *Lep-tecophylla juniperina*. Mesophyllous scrubs dominated by *Anopterus glandulosus*, *Pittosporum bicolour* and *Pomaderris apetala* occur in more sheltered places behind the shoreline.

Records were collected incidentally because of the time taken to get around the region and therefore with birds, audio records make up the majority, particularly in the case of “bush birds”. Because most of the route can be defined as a series of bays and their hinterlands, separate lists were kept for each bay. The localities where the species were recorded are therefore listed as initials in brackets with each species, unless the species is particularly ubiquitous. The keys to the localities are as follows:

| | | |
|-------------------|------------------------------|----------------------|
| New Harbour (NH) | Mount Karamu (MK) | Noyhener Beach (NB) |
| Hidden Bay (HB) | South West Cape (SWC) | Stephens Bay (SB) |
| Ketchum Bay (KB) | South West Cape Range (SWCR) | Spain Beach (SpB) |
| Wilson Bight (WB) | Window Pane Bay (WPB) | Horseshoe Inlet (HI) |

BIRDS

Nomenclature follows the complete list of Tasmanian birds on the website of the Parks and Wildlife Service of Tasmania: <http://www.parks.tas.gov.au/wildlife/birds/tasbirds.html>.

Black swan *Cygnus atratus* – flock of 4 seen at HI.

Teal species *Anas* sp. – a flock of 5 were seen to fly up from the outlet of a small freshwater stream on NB. The distance of the sighting precluded positive identification to species level, but the impression was that they were likely to be Chesnut teal *Anas castanea*.

Great cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo* – (WB, WPB, NB) one individual seen at each locality either around rocky shorelines or on a stream.

Australasian gannet *Morus serrator* – several seen over the water at KB.

Goshawk species *Accipiter* sp. – one individual seen flying off through forest

with small prey in its talons, at NH. It was not ascertained whether it was brown goshawk *Accipiter fasciatus* or collared sparrowhawk *A. cirrhocephalus*.

Falcon species *Falco* sp. – a single bird seen briefly hovering on the updraughts above large sand dunes at SB. The impression was that it was a male peregrine falcon (*Falco peregrinus*), but the distance of the sighting precluded positive identification.

Pacific gull *Larus pacificus* – (NH, SWC, WPB, NB, SpB) recorded in small numbers at most bays as pairs or individuals, with the largest total, a flock of 5, being seen at NB.

Silver gull *Larus novaehollandiae* – seen in loose associations on the beaches at nearly all of the bays, with no populations numbering more than about 10 during the survey.

Caspian tern *Sterna caspia* – one seen at WPB and a pair at NB.

Pied oystercatcher *Haematopus longirostris* – (NH, KB, WB, NB, SB, SpB) occurs in one or two pairs on most of the beaches.

Sooty oystercatcher *Haematopus fuliginosus* – (NH, WB, WPB, NB, SpB) occurs on most of the beaches and adjoining rocky shores mainly as individuals or pairs. A flock of 20 was observed on NB, which is adjacent to a number of rocky offshore islands.

Masked lapwing *Vanellus miles* – a pair was seen on each of the beaches at NH and NB while an individual was seen on the beach at WB.

Hooded plover *Thinornis rubricollis* – (NH, WB, WPB, NB, SB) – seen in pairs or small parties, with a maximum of three pairs at NB.

Brush bronzewing *Phaps elegans* – heard at HB and HI, and one seen at WPB.

Yellow-tailed black cockatoo *Calyptorhynchus funereus* – recorded from the following places: a flock of 5 seen at KB; heard at WB; a flock of 3 at SWC; a flock of 9 seen at WPB; heard at NB and heard at HI.

Sulphur-crested cockatoo *Cacatua galerita* – one seen at NH, and heard at KB and HI.

Ground parrot *Pezoporus wallicus* – one seen north of WPB.

Green rosella *Platycercus caledonicus* – (KB, SWC, WPB, HI) – heard or seen in small numbers.

Southern boobook *Ninox novaehollandiae* – heard at KB; 2 heard in heathland at SWC; heard at NB.

Welcome swallow *Hirundo neoxena* – (WPB, SWC, NB, SB) – single birds only at each locality seen hawking over the beaches.

Tree martin *Hirundo nigricans* – (NH, KB, WB, WPB) – seen in small flocks or pairs, over the beaches or behind.

Bassian thrush *Zoothera lunulata* – recorded at HI.

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- Blackbird** *Turdus merula* – a male individual was heard singing at SB at a moist soak site and was seen subsequently flying off having been disturbed.
- Pink robin** *Petroica rodinogaster* – (NH, KB, WB) – heard in coastal scrub and forests.
- Olive whistler** *Pachycephala olivacea* – widespread and heard at most localities in coastal scrub and forest.
- Grey fantail** *Rhipidura fuliginosa* – individuals seen at HB and WB.
- Superb fairy-wren** *Malurus cyaneus* – (KB, SWC, WPB, SB, SpB) – heard or seen in coastal scrub. At SWC a pair were seen attending a nest in low wind-swept heath.
- Southern emu-wren** *Stipiturus malachurus* – heard in heathland at SWC and in buttongrass moorland north of WPB.
- Tasmanian scrubwren** *Sericornis humilis* – (KB, WB, SWC, WPB, NB, HI) – heard or seen in coastal scrub.
- Scrubtit** *Acanthornis magnus* – heard at HI in wet sclerophyll forest.
- Striated fieldwren** *Calamanthus fuliginosus* – (MK, SWCR, SB, SpB) – heard in buttongrass moorland.
- Thornbill species** *Acanthiza* sp. – (KB, WB, WPB, NB, SB, HI) – heard in coastal scrub and wet sclerophyll forest. Likely to be the Tasmanian thornbill (*Acanthiza ewingii*) but identification to species level could not be established.
- Yellow-throated honeyeater** *Lichenostomus flavicollis* – (HB, KB, WPB, NB) – heard or seen in coastal scrub and wet sclerophyll forest.
- Strong-billed honeyeater** *Melithreptus validirostris* – (KB, WPB, HI) – heard at the first two localities and a flock observed at the latter, all in coastal wet sclerophyll forest.
- Crescent honeyeater** *Phylidonyris pyrrhoptera* – (KB, WB, SWCR, WPB, HI) – heard in scrub and wet sclerophyll forest.
- New Holland honeyeater** *Phylidonyris novaehollandiae* – (HB, WB, MK, SWC, WPB, NB, SpB, HI) – heard widely in coastal scrub and buttongrass moorland.
- Eastern spinebill** *Acanthorhynchus tenuirostris* – (KB, WB, WPB, NB) – heard in coastal scrub.
- Silvereye** *Zosterops lateralis* – heard in coastal scrub at WB and NB.
- Beautiful firetail** *Stagonopleura bella* – heard at HB and a pair seen south of Noyhener Bay, both records being from buttongrass moorland.
- Black currawong** *Strepera fuliginosa* – heard or seen in small numbers at most locations, in coastal scrub and wet sclerophyll forest.

MAMMALS

Tasmanian bettong *Bettongia gaimardi* – an adult and immature animal were seen at WB in coastal scrub; one adult was also seen at SB. Scats were observed at WPB.

Common wombat *Vombatus ursinus* – scats were seen in scrub at SWC and in buttongrass moorland north of WPB and at SB. Burrows were seen in *Eucalyptus nitida* forest at HI.

Quoll species *Dasyurus* sp. – scats attributed to one of the species of this genus were seen on a rock at SWC.

Rodent species – pale scats were observed in buttongrass moorland south of WPB.

Seal species – a beach-washed skull (species not identified) was noticed at the NB campsite, having been previously collected by another visitor.

Baleen whale species – a skull of a small baleen whale (species not established) was observed on the beach at SB.

REPTILES

White-lipped snake *Drysdalia coronoides* – one seen on MK in buttongrass moorland.

Skink species – small skinks were seen in buttongrass moorland on MK and in heathy habitat with granite boulders on SWC. The region and habitat suggest they were species of *Niveoscincus*.

AMPHIBIANS

Brown treefrog *Litoria ewingi* – heard beside the main creek at KB as it enters the beach.

Tasmanian treefrog *Litoria burrowsae* – heard at a pond in buttongrass moorland near the southern end of the SWCR.

Moss froglet *Bryobatrachus nimbus* – dozens heard calling after rain, in buttongrass moorland on the highest summit of the SWCR at around 690 m altitude. One individual was also heard calling in rainforest inland from HB.

Brown froglet *Crinia signifera* – a chorus was heard at a pond, in *Melaleuca* – *Lepidosperma* swamp near HI.

Tasmanian froglet *Crinia tasmaniensis* – heard calling at a pond in buttongrass moorland near the southern end of the SWCR.

FISH

Galaxias species? – one small fish of about 14 mm length was seen in the main creek at WPB.

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DISCUSSION

From the author's extensive experience with the habitats of the western half of Tasmania, the vertebrate species recorded are typical of the region, and represent a significant proportion of what can be expected to be encountered on such a visit.

Some points of interest include the apparent absence of the endangered orange-bellied parrot *Neophema chrysogaster* which occurs at nearby Melaleuca Inlet roughly 20 km to the east, despite the presence of apparently suitable habitat in the study area. The falcon species at Stephens Bay, if it proves to be the peregrine falcon, may represent a resident bird. The presence of a number of inshore islands with sea bird colonies may provide a significant food source for this species.

Most beaches had populations of hooded plover and oystercatchers, which would indicate an important breeding refuge for these species, free from the high levels of disturbance on beaches associated with the settled areas of Tasmania. The record of the introduced blackbird from Stephens Bay indicates the spread of this species around coastal South West Tasmania, but from the author's experience, it has not penetrated inland beyond the damp coastal scrubs in this region.

The two records of the moss froglet at Hidden Bay and on the South West Cape Range represent apparently new localities for this localised and recently discovered species. The nearest known locality was recorded by the author previously at the base of Mount Brock west of Melaleuca.