

EGYPTIAN GEESE *ALOPOCHEN AEGYPTIACUS* WITH YOUNG IN SURF AT DASSEN ISLAND,
SOUTH AFRICA

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Most records of Anseriformes at sea along the coast of southern Africa make reference to calm conditions or to the occurrence of concentrations of waterfowl at freshwater close by (Baron 1977, *Cormorant* 3:19; Cooper 1977, *Cormorant* 2:24; Hall & Every 1979, *Cormorant* 7:33; Hockey 1981, *Cormorant* 9:43). Only South African Shelducks *Tadorna cana* have been observed feeding at sea (Ryan 1980, *Cormorant* 8:27).

Between the 31 October and 4 November 1988, I observed three broods of Egyptian Goose *Aloochen aegyptiacus* goslings with their parents in the sea off the shore of Dassen Island (33 25S, 18 05E), southwestern Cape, South Africa, consisting of two newly hatched young, six quarter grown young and six three-quarter grown young, respectively. When disturbed, the parent geese and their young entered the sea through waves breaking over rocks, allowing the surf to submerge them completely, in the manner of penguins. At Dassen Island and elsewhere, I have observed Egyptian Geese, when disturbed on the shore, flying out to sea and landing beyond the breakers. J. Cooper (pers. comm.) has observed similar behaviour at Schaapen, Meeuw and Marcus Islands in Saldanha

Bay, and at Dassen Island in 1971/72.

In addition, two clutches of six and 12 eggs were found. During a survey of the shorebirds of the island on 3 November 1988, 23 fully grown Egyptian Geese were observed on the rocky shore or at sea. There were several more geese in the interior of the island which were not counted during the survey. The headman of the island considered that numbers of Egyptian Geese on the island had increased during the last c. 10 years (J. Boonzaier pers. comm.).

The shore of Dassen Island is exposed, and the more sheltered bays with sandy beaches seem to be avoided by the geese. Standing freshwater is unavailable on the island, except after heavy rain. Whether Egyptian Geese take to the sea without being disturbed is not known; but it is the southern African anseriform most frequently encountered in a marine environment (for example, it has been recorded at all but one of the larger (area > 5 ha) islands of the southwestern Cape (Brooke & Crowe 1982, *S. Afr. J. Zool.* 17:49-58) and appears to be the only species capable of breeding independently of freshwater.