

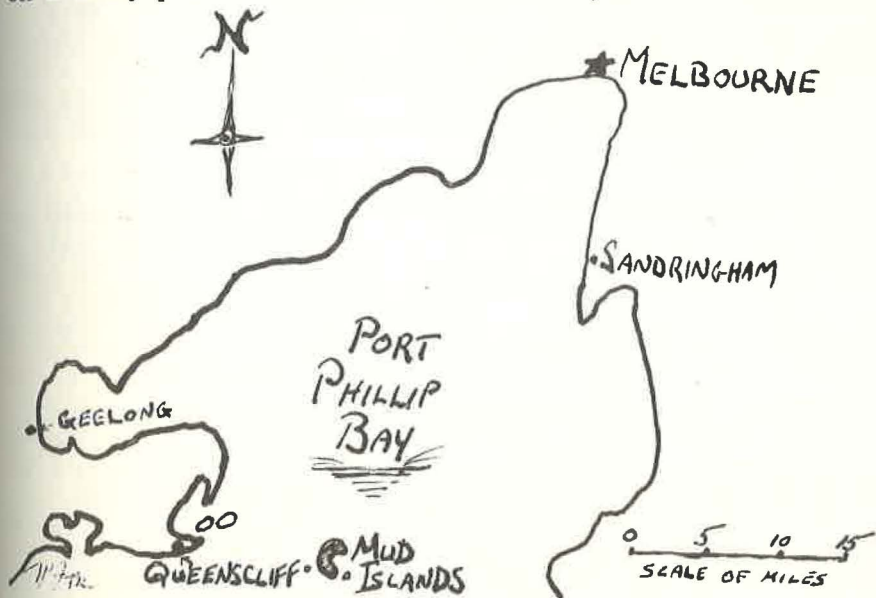
MUD ISLAND BANDING TRIP
BY THE ALTONA SURVEY GROUP

By Agnes North

The Mud Islands are located at the entrance to the Port Phillip Bay which leads to the harbor of Melbourne in Victoria, Australia (Lat. $38^{\circ} 17' S.$, Long. $144^{\circ} 46' E.$) They are comprised of three low islands on the crown of a large triangular sand bank known as Great Sand. The Mud Islands occupy an area of about 400 acres and are separated by tidal lagoons supporting much bird life. The western island is covered with Nanuka and dog-wood and the middle and eastern isles, on which there are deposits of guano rock, are covered with salt-bush. The middle island is reserved as a rookery for Storm Petrels. This group was formed by tidal streams and is thought to be not more than 3500 years old; there is no evidence of former occupation by the aborigines.

On the week-end of January 30-February 1, 1960, forty-one campers and banders assembled at Geelong (see map below), proceeded by bus to Queenscliff and thence by fishing boats to the Islands arriving about 11:50 in the morning. We had to wade ashore in water to our waists, which was quite a problem with our gear of tents, food, sleeping bags, canteens, etc. There were boys in their teens, young and older men and eight women. It was a beautiful day and quite warm.

On the way out we saw many Silver Gulls, Cormorants, Australian Gannets, Short-tailed Shearwaters and Fairy Penguins in the water. We landed on a sandy point of an island with the Bay on one side and a



large lagoon on the other. Tents were set up on each side of a sandy rise with trees on it. There was a large flock of Black Swans (72+) on the lagoon and we could see numbers of wading birds: Red-necked or Little Stints, Red-capped Dotterel, Mongolian Dotterel, Sharp-tailed Sandpipers, Curlew Sandpipers, Knots and Oyster-catchers feeding on the beach at low tide.

Most of this first afternoon was spent setting up our tents and gear - quite a lot of equipment for forty-one campers. My one-man tent was tied to a tree at one end and tapered to a point at the other end, kept down by wooden pegs. The campers cooked individually or in small groups. I shared my fire with an English girl who pitched her tent nearby. There was plenty of firewood handy as the sandy rise was covered with Leucopogon or Coast Beard Heath -- more like large shrubs than trees and quite picturesque. Unfortunately, many of these trees all over the islands are dying or dead - caused by the fact that the islands are losing sand which exposes the roots and the storms complete the destruction.

Later in the afternoon, wader traps made of wire were set up along the shore hoping to catch waders for banding. They were not too successful, perhaps due to tidal changes. It was planned to use mist nets if the winds were not too strong. We walked along the beach, which was covered with colored broken shells, across two or three inlets to look at a rookery where White-faced Storm Petrels were being dug out of burrows to be banded (or ringed - the term used in Australia). A little further on Fairy Terns were nesting. After returning to camp, we boiled our billies (tea) and had supper. When it was dark most of the campers returned to the Rookeries with nets on long poles hoping to catch the adult Storm Petrels returning to their burrows. It was quite cool and I was tired so decided to go to bed instead. We heard later that they had little success.

It took me quite a while to settle down in such a cramped space and sometime during the night I rolled out of the side of the tent; fortunately my box of eggs was on the upper side of the tent. The tent pegs were too short and would not hold in the sand. Between three and four in the morning I heard talking and saw lights; the younger campers were spear fishing and caught some very good fish.

On Sunday, January 31st we were up early to greet a beautiful sunny and warm day. Silver Gulls and Greenshanks calling "Chew-chew" were flying overhead. After breakfast we were divided into teams - two banders to each team - and walked to the rookeries to go to work. I found it quite strenuous on a hot day with the sun beating down -- in fact it reminded me of Operation Recovery at Island Beach, N. J. At the rookeries, one has to walk very carefully in order not to collapse the burrows, which would have suffocated the baby chicks. Some burrows were

short and shallow, others long and deep. The nest of twigs is always at the far end of the burrow and we found some chicks almost ready to fly, some too small to band, and in some burrows both the adult petrel and chick. That night it rained so long and hard I wondered if some of the chicks might drown in the burrows. We worked about two hours and then returned to camp and had a swim to cool off, which was followed by the billy tea and dinner.

Later in the afternoon we walked around the islands to make a bird count. It took about two and a half hours counting rest periods as the islands are about three miles in circumference. We did much wading across inlets and channels-- some quite deep. On one part of an island the Fairy Terns were nesting just above the high water line. We had to watch every step in order to keep from treading on the young as they were so well camouflaged. The adult terns were flying overhead and seemed disturbed but did not "dive bomb" us nor make the ugly sounds as did the Arctic Terns on Machias Seal Island off the Maine coast. The call of the Fairy Tern is really rather sweet. We passed small lagoons and saw Grey and Golden Plover, Straw-necked and White Ibis, White-faced Herons and Greenshanks, while on the beaches there were Knots (Lesser), Turnstones, Crested and Caspian Terns, Mongolian Sand Dotterel, Pied and Black Cormorants, Eastern Curlews, and a Grey-tailed Tattler.

There was plenty of cover for small birds in parts of the islands -- Salt-bush, Beaded Glasswort (*Salicornia*), Prickly Saltwort and Pig-faces. White-fronted Chats and Little Grass Birds lived in the low growth. Along the beach above the water mark we found two Red-capped Dotterel chicks which are very small but run off and care for themselves almost as soon as hatched. Flying all around us were the beautiful little Welcome Swallows.

By this time it was very stormy all around and blowing very hard. We returned to camp to find that the wind had created havoc with many tents including mine. Before I had finished repairing the damage, rain started -- a steady downpour. After a group meeting to complete our bird census everyone went to bed -- quite a disappointment, as the rain prevented further work in the rookeries. My tent was so small and crowded with my belongings there wasn't much room for me. I soon found that both my blankets and sleeping bag were very wet so I went outside and piled wet sand on the sides of the tent in an effort to keep the sides down. I stayed in my wet sleeping bag until early morning when it finally stopped raining. After rising, I was able to find some more or less dry clothes and built up a fire, had some billy tea and soon was comfortable again. Very few campers had been able to remain dry throughout the night, but at seven a.m. we all met at the Convener's (Ed. - Tour Director's) camp fire for tea and toast.

Meantime I had draped all my belongings around on the trees to dry. After breakfast we had a good walk and returned to camp to pack up to leave. Our fishing boat arrived early in the afternoon and sent a dinghy ashore to take us off. In spite of a few discomforts I would like to have stayed on the islands much longer -- so much to see and do there. We arrived safely back at Queenscliff about four p.m. and luckily I was offered a ride back to Melbourne as I looked altogether too much a wreck to travel on the train.

When the Convener's official report and summary arrived, I was amazed to discover that we had banded 1260 birds and had counted 7659 individuals of 48 species. Besides the ones already mentioned, we saw Bar-tailed Godwits, Marsh Sandpipers, a White-headed Stilt, Pacific Gulls, Australian Pelicans, Arctic Skuas, Swamp Harrier, Peregrines, Murre Ducks, Spine-tailed Swifts, a Narrow-billed Bronze Cuckoo, Australian Pipits, Ground-Larks, Skylarks, Goldfinch (these last are introduced birds), Starlings and House Sparrows.

(Editor's notes: The Above report was taken from letters from Mrs. North to Mrs. Stanley S. Dickerson of Spotswood, N.J. Many EBBA members will remember Mrs. North as an indefatigable worker for two years at Island Beach. In spite of her 72 years, she put "Island Beachers" to shame with her boundless energy and her faultless record-keeping. EMD)

"Bilati", 26 Tennyson St., Sandringham S 8, Victoria, Australia. ***

NET REPAIR MATERIALS

EBBA President Eleanor E. Dater, 259 Grove St., Ramsey, N.J. writes: "The export firm in Japan that supplies us with nets has graciously sent me two hanks of nylon transverse line for repairing or replacing broken lines. A friend of mine is making heavy, flat aluminum needles for weaving the line through the net. Anyone desiring line may have it free if a self-addressed stamped envelope is enclosed with the request. A charge of 25¢ will be made for the needle. State yardage needed." ***

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