



### **We wouldn't do that now!**

Do you recognise anyone in this picture? It was taken on 1 February 1914 at a Bird Observer's Club camp at Mud Islands. The birdos are Clarence Weber, Dr H Bryant, Mr Clancy, Dr Mattingley, AHE Mattingley and Dr Donald Thompson.

This picture is from *Birds Australia's Wingspan* and accompanies a story about early ornithologists' passion for egg collecting and bird shooting – for eating or for adding to collections.

While the people in the picture aren't being accused of these passions, the picture's caption in *Wingspan* claims that "on such outings the ornithologists often shot birds and collected eggs and nests".

In 1911, three years prior to the pictured expedition, *An Australian Bird Book* by John Albert Leach, D.Sc (one of whose various roles was "Colonial Member, British Ornithologists' Union"), was published. This

book has a couple of references to birds on Mud Islands

Leach writes about the Australian Storm-Petrel:

*"Many thousands of these birds still nest on Mud Island (sic), a sandbank just inside Port Phillip Heads. The presence there of a true ocean wanderer is a valuable piece of evidence to support the geographer in his claim that Port Phillip Bay once had a wide opening, which has been almost closed by the drift of sand across its mouth. The Storm-Petrels have probably nested there for many, many centuries. Long may they continue to do so!"*

Further evidence that early naturalists carried out practices that we would not indulge in today is found in Leach's book in the section about Terns:

*"One of the daintiest of these birds is the Fairy Tern, which was common on Mud Island while the 1909 Summer School was being held. Obedient to the call of the mother bird, which hovered threateningly overhead, the mottled and striped young*

one squatted on the shelly sand beach while bird-lovers hunted around for the material for a photograph. At length the dark eye revealed the beautifully-protected young bird.

*As the camera was being fixed, a different call from the mother caused the young one to run away. Three or four naturalists tried to catch the active little bird, which stopped for a moment and disgorged two whole small fish, with which its mother had evidently but recently fed it. Eventually a good picture was obtained."*

Interestingly, while Leach doesn't frown on chasing a young bird for a photo, he does not support the activities undertaken by the ornithologists mentioned in *Wingspan*. Leach believes that we should protect Australia's birds, and "even collectors, who, under the guise of scientific work, collect eggs, and kill birds to trade in their skins, should be supervised".

If any of our members have interesting anecdotes or historical mentions of Mud Islands we would be very interested in reproducing them in the Mud Islands Times.

### **November 2007 Excursion to South Channel Fort**

Despite being postponed, and the group changing from one trip to the next, the FOMI November day out was well worth the wait. The day dawned perfectly and continued with calm, mild weather all day.

Fifteen FOMI members boarded the regular "Reel Easy" boat as well as the nifty green Parks Vic "Sea Dragon" boat. After a swift trip to South Channel Fort, everyone helped offload the food and barbeques and quickly familiarised themselves with the small manmade island, from the era of 1888. Donna led the tour outside, describing the gun embankments and lookouts. Kate couldn't help herself and was pulling weeds out as she walked – Tree Mallow and Boxthorn abounded!

Then Parks Vic staff Graeme and Rodney unlocked the tunnels and led the torch-bearing group through the tunnels that were accessible. Graeme was surprised to come across a good sized Little Penguin hiding deep down one dark tunnel.

It was fascinating to think that a population of 100 men lived within the confined tunnels at any one time. There were gunpowder rooms and ammunitions rooms amongst the tunnels. A kitchen was evident with rusty remnants of the old stove and boiler still present in one of the tunnel's rooms. From the surface, air vents were visible, just like pipes leading down to the tunnels below.

Donna and Siggy cooked up a delicious BBQ lunch and everyone relaxed in the sunshine enjoying the solitude of Port Phillip Bay (although there were quite a few Silver Gulls and their chicks to keep us company and remind us why we were not at Mud Islands at this time of year – it would be deafening!).

After lunch a small party of three spent time snorkelling in crystal clear waters on the sheltered northern side of the Fort. There were tall kelp forests and a variety of colourful algae growing there.

On the trip home, the group visited the Australasian Gannets at Popes Eye and the Australasian Fur Seals at Chinaman's Hat. It certainly felt a privilege to be able to visit South Channel Fort and literally walk through history on such a glorious day. It seemed fitting to be at such a place on Remembrance Day.

### **Seagrass Monitoring**

Excerpt from a Coastal and Marine Protecting our Coastal Environment fact sheet, produced by Envirofund, 2007.

#### *"Protecting our Islands*

*... Dense seagrass beds act as critical breeding and nursery areas for an abundance of fish, which in turn rely upon animals living in the soft sediments for food. The Friends of Mud Islands are monitoring*

*the health of seagrass beds and protecting vital saltmarsh habitat for endangered and long-distance migratory birds... Volunteers are also monitoring the density and length of seagrasses to ensure any changes in health are detected early, so that information can be passed Parks Victoria."*

(The full set of 6 colour Fact Sheets "Protecting our Coastal Environment" are available from the Secretary to view).

With the impending Channel deepening project, data collected by snorkellers at Mud Islands will potentially provide crucial evidence of the health of the seagrass meadows around Mud Islands. The standardised monitoring system learnt last January will mean that data will be uniform, useful and comparable from one year to the next. The April 2007 *Mud Islands Times* issue provides an insight into the March seagrass monitoring trip ([http://home.vicnet.net.au/~fomi/html/documents/FOMI\\_newsletter\\_July\\_07.pdf](http://home.vicnet.net.au/~fomi/html/documents/FOMI_newsletter_July_07.pdf)). The seagrass monitoring trip during Coast Care week (Sunday 2 December) is the second for the year. During March earlier this year, it seemed that the seagrass was regenerating slightly in the shallow sections of the creek bed. Coverage and density were very good to a distance of 50 metres out from the Islands. If you're interested in seagrass monitoring, read the basic guidelines below and come out on the next trip to try your hand!

#### **10 Basic Steps to Seagrass Monitoring**

1. Set up a 50 metre transect lines from the shore (along predetermined directions).
2. Pairs of snorkellers follow the transect line and hover above the seagrass with clipboards, "wet paper", pencils, rulers and density guides.
3. Every 5 metres they place a quadrat (a plastic frame approximately one metre square with eight smaller rectangles roped off within it).
4. Pre-selected random sub-quadrats (3) within the quadrat are observed.
5. Identify the substrate on the bottom.
6. Estimate % cover of seagrass.
7. Identify any animals living there, mobile or sessile.
8. Identify the level of epiphyte growing on the seagrass (a whitish fuzz growing on the seagrass leaves-this is a bad thing).
9. Measure samples of shoot length of seagrass in the selected sub-quadrats.
10. Estimate seagrass shoot density.



#### **Orange Bellied Parrot (OBP)**

Excerpt by Chris Tzaros (OBP Project Coordinator at Birds Australia), from Issue 25 – October 2007 Newsletter of the Threatened Bird Network and Atlas of Australian Birds.

*"During this year's autumn-winter period, a conservative estimate of the total numbers of individuals detected on the mainland tallied 48 birds across 18 sites. This is in comparison to 67 individuals at 20 sites last winter. The shortfall in bird numbers can be attributed to lower flock sizes this year at most key sites (eg Western Treatment Plant – Werribee, Rutledge's Cutting, Lake Connewarre, Sea Elephant Lagoon). The reasons for this are unclear but it appears to be an ongoing trend that has been in operation for a number of years now, from the late 1990's onwards. Southwest Victoria is still a stronghold for the species (16 birds*

*this winter) but there are some encouraging results from The Coorong in South Australia, where nine birds were sighted this year, the most recorded in that State for some years.*

*...We now have a comprehensive database of the topographic and habitat attributes of all sites where OBPs have recently been detected. Beaded Glasswort still appears to be the most important food plant early in the winter period, and the birds progress on to other food sources later in the winter, such as Shrubby Glasswort and a range of salt-tolerant herbaceous weeds."*

Even though there have been no recent sightings of OBPs on Mud Islands, clearly the habitat and feed available there is still desirable, based on Chris' observations of suitable habitats and feed found elsewhere in South Western Victoria. This is all the more reason to keep the weed levels down on Mud Islands and allow the Beaded Glasswort and Shrubby Glasswort to flourish.



### **Happy Birthday, Marine National Parks**

16 November marked the 5<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Marine National Parks system and FOMI received this message:

Today marks the 5th anniversary of the proclamation of Victoria's Marine National Parks system. To all that have been involved along the way, from planning through to operational effort, and to the many community and agency partners,

thank you for your efforts and your contribution to the world's first truly representative system of marine protected areas.

These parks are now being recognised by the community as important parts of our state's protected area network and are seeing increased community interest in efforts to protect them from threatening processes.

Here's looking forward to the next five years of effective, integrated, and improving management of these special parts of Victoria's magnificent marine and coastal environment.

Happy Birthday Marine National Parks and Sanctuaries!!

Best wishes and Cheers!

### **Christmas Break Up 2007**

You are invited to the Friends of Mud Islands break up on **Thurs 13th December** at the St Leonard's Hotel (496 The Esplanade) at **6:30 pm** (the kitchen closes at 8) in the bistro - average price of the main meals is \$15. Please RSVP by Sunday 9 December. Call Felicity on 5258 2559 or email [fomislands@yahoo.com.au](mailto:fomislands@yahoo.com.au).

### **Dates for 2008**

17 February	Weeding & summer wader count
2 March	Clean Up Australia
30 March	Weeding & seagrass monitoring
27 April	Weeding
11 May	Weeding & clearing tern colony
25 May	Weeding
29 June	Weeding & winter wader count
27 July	Weeding & clearing tern colony
24 August	Weeding
25 August	AGM
28 September	Weeding
26 October	Alternate trip
23 November	Weeding & seagrass monitoring
11 December	(Thurs) Christmas breakup

For bookings please call Felicity on 5258 2559 or email [fomislands@yahoo.com.au](mailto:fomislands@yahoo.com.au). Keep up to date at: <http://home.vicnet.net.au/~fomi/>.