



Sentinel



"FRIENDS OF ALTHORPE ISLANDS CONSERVATION PARK ARE COMMITTED TO THE CONSERVATION OF THE NATURAL AND CULTURAL HERITAGE OF ALTHORPE ISLANDS CONSERVATION PARK"

Dear Members,

The Committee have authorised the printing and distribution of a brochure to provide information about the FoAICP and to hopefully attract new members. We have copies of the brochure available to members on request. Your kind assistance in spreading our great conservation work efforts and expanding our membership base would be greatly appreciated. Please contact me by email: millsy10@adam.com.au or mobile: 0417815866.

Best regards, Andrew Mills (Treasurer/Membership Officer)



ALTHORPE ISLAND 1882 -1894 KEEPERS, WELLS, SMITH, PARKER & KERR

WRITTEN BY MICHIEL LUCIEER (FOAICP PRESIDENT)

Edward and Mary Parker and family arrived on Althorpe Island Lighthouse Station on June 1st, 1890, a month after the isolated island dwellers buried Julies Garbis, a foreman from the guano excavation party. Besides ensuring the light did not extinguish during his night watch, the Keeper's duty was also to help with the day to day operations of the station and provide his family of food as was the case on May 31st, 1892 with the killing of his pig.

Keepers Wells, Smith and Parker became involved in the rescue of the fishing cutter *Welling* after parting its anchor, with one crew member unsuccessfully getting on shore. Consequently, J. Montgomery began drifting up the gulf with '2 feet' of water' before his lucky rescue the following morning. The island community, 4.5 nm from the mainland, experienced summer dry conditions or winter gale force winds with sea foam blown across the plateau shaped island. One can easily imagine, the Keepers looking through the Lighthouse station's telescope scanning the horizon 90 meters above sea level. The views are as spectacular today as back then.

But living in such conditions in close proximity, differences can occur and such was the case on July 30th, 1892, when at 2:20 am the Head keeper was summoned by Keeper Parker. By the time he climbed the 66 steps and reached the tower's lantern room, Keepers Parker and Smith were quarrelling about the relieving watch. Smith had called Parker a liar and knocked him down, cutting and bruising his hand. Being the 2nd Head keeper and in his tenth year on Althorpe Island, T. Wells knew all about conflicts* and cautioned Smith for 'lifting his hands' and using such language.

Despite good intentions by Keeper Smith, Head keeper Wells eventually wrote: "As this is not the first time he has tried to break a disturbance on the station, I am compelled to say that he is a insolent, dis-constructed, self-opinionated quarrelsome fellow and that on several occasions I have had to reprove him for trying to break through the discipline of the station". Keeper Walter Smith finally was transferred to Troubridge Island Light house station on March 1st, 1893 and replaced by Keeper Kerr.



Lighthouse Keeper's houses from left, Smith and Kerr, Parker, and Wells.

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ALTHORPE ISLAND 1882 -1894

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For the next six months, Edward Parker was witness to many incidents between HK Wells and the newly appointed third keeper. It was the Head keeper's first priority to ensure a guiding light for mariners and each night he'd kept a keen eye on the light and its operations.



The duty Keeper was responsible of the intensity of the light and the 656 lens rotation. LK Parker was aware of the precarious relationship between other Keepers, given the frustrations being felt by the Head keeper due to the lack of interest and knowledge of maintaining the light and its apparatus by Keeper Kerr. It all came to a boil in late September of 1893, Head keeper Wells wrote to the Marine Board, "he is utterly useless, and as he is grossly insolent & abusive as well, I hope the Board will remove him from here as early as possible."

Keeper Kerr is eventually transferred to Cape Borda on February 28th, 1894. Eighteen months later Captain Edward Kerr dies at Cape Borda and is buried at the Harvey Return cemetery.

After 12 years and the longest serving Head keeper on Althorpe Island, Thomas Wells and wife with daughter and two grandchildren left the station on the SS Musgrave in route to Pt Lowly on February 21st, 1894. One month later, Mary Parker and two children arrive, joining her husband Edward and the new Head keeper G. Templeman and Keeper W. Rackett. (The Parker family eventually consisted of 9 sons and 3 daughters.)

It would appear all went well with Keepers being 'employed' cleaning the 656 prisms and the light's mechanism and jobs such as repairing the sleepers of the tramline. This stretched from the jetty across the bridge then through the vertical wall into the 'cutting' onto the plateau and eventually to the lighthouse, a distance of 230 meters. But before his permanent departure from the light station in 1894, Keeper Parker also assisted with the recovery of 5 sheep which had been accidentally dropped overboard during the transfer to the jetty from the Marine Board's Lighthouse tender, the SS Gov. Musgrave. (Keeper Parker died in 1907 from falling in the lantern room of Cape Jaffa light cleaning the windows.)

WRITTEN BY MICHIEL LUCIEER (FOAICP PRESIDENT)
Photo: Mary and Edward Parker.

ALTHORPE ISLAND - THE LITTLE PENGUIN

On our trips to Althorpe Island we complete field surveys to collect data relating to the Little Penguins. The friends then forward these findings to Dr Diane Colombelli-Negrol at the Flinders University who is undertaking major research into these cute creatures.

In South Australia, many Little Penguin colony declines have been identified across the state and in some cases, colonies have declined to extinction. It has been put forward as a theory that the long nosed fur seals (New Zealand fur seals) have been partly responsible for this decline, reportedly eating the crop and abdomen of the penguin. The Althorpe friends group is proud to report that the colony at Althorpe is still alive and well with 15 active breeding burrows on the island, possibly more. (Althorpe Island has its' own unique species of the Little Penguin.) The Penguins feed on small fish, especially sardines, and anchovies, but they can also hunt squid, krill, and small octopus. However, the kind of prey may change to adapt to the availability of food in their habitat.

Females lay two eggs, the first sometime between the middle of September to November and the second a few days later. The male is responsible for selecting the place for the nest and once the chicks are born, the parents make short trips for food, travelling only about 5 miles away from the coast. After 50-65 days the chicks moult and become independent after 60 to 80 days.

There are many threats to the Little Penguins such as fishing nets, plastics ingestion, loss of habitat due to humans developing coastal land, predation (cats, dogs, foxes and rats to name a few), and oil spills. Fortunately on Althorpe the only predators are sea eagles, osprey and the long nosed fur seals.

So hopefully our efforts at cleaning the coastline of plastics and other human made debris and with providing research data, the colony at Althorpe Island and beyond will continue.

WRITTEN BY JAMES VON DOUSSA

ALTHORPE ISLAND

THE SHORT TAILED SHEAR WATER (MUTTON BIRD)

WRITTEN BY JAMES VON DOUSSA

Being on Althorpe Island when the shear waters are there is one of the most intriguing experiences for me. I decided to figure out what time these smart birds left to go fishing each day and also when did they start rafting up at the end of the day in preparation for their return to the Althorpe refuge.

After a couple of early mornings I established they were socialising around 5:30am and squawking! Then by 6am on first light they had begun scurrying down the dunes and paths toward the edge or the plateau where they could run and jump into the morning breeze and off they streamed down the side of the cliff face to the flat open expanse of ocean and feeding grounds. By 6:30am they had all disappeared leaving half an hour before sunrise for pacific gulls and sea eagles to scope their flight path.

The short-tailed shear water, or mutton bird as it is often known, is a member of a group of 60 medium to large seabirds in the family Procellariidae. This family includes species such as petrels and prions. All members of the family have tube-like nostrils on the top of their upper beak and are believed to be one of the few bird families with a well-developed sense of smell. The shearwater is the most abundant Australian seabird. Approximately 23 million short-tailed shear waters breed in about 285 colonies in south-eastern Australia from September to April. It is estimated there are 23,000 birds (or 1%) nesting on Althorpe Island.

At the end of the afternoon if one is to scan the ocean to the north of Althorpe from the front of cottage 1 or from the flying fox lookout (binoculars help), a long dark streak can be seen morphing into abstract shapes. On closer focus one realises thousands of tiny dots are all splashing frantically trying to contain the urge to take to the sky as if waiting for the starter to fire his gun (or for the sun to drop enough that surely the white bellied sea eagle has gone to roost for the night.) I never managed to keep them in my scope for long enough to see them all finally ascend back to Althorpe after the days fishing. Perhaps they don't all take off at once but do a staggered relay up the hill.

A truly mystifying sight the "flotilla" of shear magnificence waters!!

Back up on top of the 90m plateau, the heli pad is the place to be, for around 20 minutes after sunset, one then two then seven more "over there", "down there, look", then around they come circling the entire Althorpe's plateau, twenty more, eventually counting becomes useless for the sunset is suddenly filled with an aeronautical display of brilliance as they give way to the clumsy land based limitation and crash land some where close to the homely comfort of a burrow in the sand "honey I'm home", "squawk squawks".



The Althorpe Island Shearwater (Mutton Bird)

These mutton birds travel 15,000 km after spending winter at sea in the northern Pacific, off Japan, Siberia and Alaska. They arrive in Australia to breed in colonies like the one at Althorpe Island around late September and then make the journey all the way back again in late April, wow that's 30,000 km a year, not including their feeding around the Antarctica. The young birds are abandoned and left in the nest to finish growing their plumage living on their fat stores for around a month. Miraculously they then set off to Alaska to find their flock and find it they do. Amazing indeed! Their migratory path is difficult to define because they don't come to shore during the months of the migration. Recent studies suggest the majority of birds merely fly north along the western part of the Pacific Ocean to the Arctic region and return southwards through the centre of the ocean. They have been known to fly this remarkable distance in six weeks!

When I reflect on the giant African Boxthorn hedgerow that I witnessed back in 1999 on one of my first trips to the island I wonder how dense they would have become if left. Would the shear waters be able to negotiate that level of thorny weed infestation upon gliding in to land? (Funded by DEWNR, the FoAICP have concentrated in removing the African Boxthorn to ensure breeding habitat can survive and expand.)

THE ECOLOGY OF ALTHORPE ISLAND

WHERE TO FROM HERE?

Possible directions for work on the ecology of Althorpe Island - 1. *What has been achieved so far?* 2. *What do we want to find out?* 3. *How can we find the answers and achieve the results we plan?*

- 1 It goes without saying that the plants and animals living in any area are in a state of constant change as a response to changes in their environment. This is particularly evident when these living organisms are confined to a very small island. Looking back over the history of Althorpe Island shows how true this is. Construction of the lighthouse was started 140 years ago. Human influence before that was limited to possibly mutton-birding Aboriginals, whalers and fishermen. Then in 1879 permanent occupation by up to three families of Lighthouse Keepers changed the dynamic drastically. First sheep, then goats were brought in and grazed for 109 years and gardens were planted for food and amenity. Inevitably weeds came as well along with plagues of house mice. (The last cat died in 2002/3). With no grazing the introduced boxthorn spread across the island along with many other grasses and weeds. Mallows have been a common invader.

The formation of Folks 20 years ago has fostered regular visits by many volunteers who have done surveys of plants and animals and then helped clear out boxthorn and other weeds. All this has been important to build up a picture of the Island's ecology. Now the question is what do we want to do with this information? How is it best recorded, communicated, stored and how do we then use it for further studies?

- 2 What do we want to find out? Is the purpose to just record the changes in vegetation and animal numbers? What is the future of the place as far as National Parks is concerned and do we accept the premise that it is a top priority Shearwater breeding site along with undisturbed breeding of Cape Barren Geese, Little Penguins, seals and raptors hectic? My proposal is that we could document the changes in vegetation types and try to understand how this affects the breeding success on the island? Then we could align this information with long term records of animal numbers to find out what the trends are.

THE FRIENDS OF ALTHORPE ISLANDS

For any comments or questions,
Please contact our President, Michiel Lucieer
Email: michiellucieer@hotmail.com

- 3 How do we do this? How can we use our necessarily limited Friends visits to best advantage? A comprehensive species list has been done and numbers of most animals have been recorded over the years. To follow on this work, Colin and I have started to put together a FIELD GUIDE using information from other plant books, of the native species but not the weeds at this stage. The plan is that this will help others identify plants and know which are naturally occurring and which are invaders. If a really decent book is required, which has greater scientific rigor and includes island photos and areas of where each plant is found on a map, it will require more help and time.

Another direction for research is to work on mapping vegetation types and how they may be changing over time. We do have some maps already on which to base further studies. To continue this work needs expert guidance at the very least. Perhaps regular aerial photographs would help? The wonderful work that has been done to tackle the weeds such as Boxthorn and Mallows could be followed up with evidence of what has replaced them and has this helped the breeding of Shearwater, Cape Barren geese or Raptors.

It is obvious that there are more questions than answers at this stage of our involvement. We wish to acknowledge the support of the National Parks rangers and value any ongoing help.

WRITTEN BY BARBARA COLCANNON. BASK. DIP. T.
AUGUST 2017

UPDATE ON FIRST AID COURSES

BY KATE FORREST

Royal Flying Doctor Service only provide courses for regional stations.

St Johns offer a CPR & First Aid course for \$175. Last minute specials are available for some courses and cost between \$99 and \$150. Courses are run all over the city, contact St Johns on 1300 360 455 to find out availability of courses near you, or through <https://www.stjohnsa.com.au/training/last-minute-special>

The committee will confirm if reimbursements are available for individuals at the next committee meeting and seek external funding to reimburse the group.