

## Broughton Island field studies: May 11-13 visit

A larger than usual contingent of club members were involved in the autumn 2019 visit to Broughton Island although some of the focus of the activities went beyond birds. Eight people accompanied the park's Ranger Susanne Callaghan on the Saturday morning and three others joined us for a day's visit on Monday 13 May. Sea conditions were dreadful on Saturday so Susanne organised a helicopter instead. What wonderful views some of us had firstly of Port Stephens and then Broughton Island from the air!



*The chopper crew, preparing to board* (photo: Rob Colbert)



*Approaching Broughton Island by chopper*

Due to the windy conditions and time of year, the Golden-headed Cisticolas and Tawny Grassbirds kept a low profile the first two days although they were a bit more active on Monday when the wind had dropped. Raptors more than made up for the gap. There were White-bellied Sea-Eagles patrolling all over the island. Other raptors seen were Brown Falcon, Peregrine Falcon, Brown Goshawk, Collared Sparrowhawk, Osprey, Swamp Harrier, Black-shouldered Kite and Whistling Kite. The larger species of raptor seemed to be feasting upon the fat young shearwaters whose parents had departed leaving them to fend for themselves. Most of the young birds still had some downy feathers and could scarcely fly more than a few metres. A lot of them were hanging around outside their burrows wondering where their folks were and who would feed them.



*Golden-headed Cisticola*



*Tawny Grassbird*

As usual there were plenty of Sooty Oystercatchers on Broughton. Our estimate was 27 birds, with 20 or so of those seen often around the rocks along Providence Beach and a few extra ones scattered elsewhere around the island. We also saw Reef Egrets many times including there was a pair of them flying together at Esmeralda Cove on the Sunday afternoon. There were always 20 or more Australasian Gannets fishing offshore including

several young birds which often came in quite close and we had wonderful views of them spearing into the water.



*Sooty Oystercatcher*



*Eastern Reef Egret*

Broughton Island is well known for its rail population – we usually find many Buff-banded and Lewin's Rails during our visits. For our first two days of this visit, they were a bit elusive but on Monday we managed to see a couple of each species and also heard others.

As well as the regular bird surveys that we have been doing on Broughton since 2012, we have had a banding project underway for the past two years. Our aims for that project include learning the sizes of the resident populations and about movements of birds to and from the island. The results for Silvereyes epitomise how a banding study can shed new light. For example, we now know that in autumn and winter there is an influx of two of the southern races of Silvereye, *westernensis* and *lateralis*, supplementing the population of the *cornwalli* birds which are found on the island all year. The *westernensis* birds originate from Victoria and southern NSW, and the *lateralis* birds are the Tasmanian race.

During this visit, club member Michael Murray was along but his mission was to find out what bats or other animals were on the island. At least four species, it turned out. At night there were some Little Bent-wing Bats flying around chasing insects, and there were daytime records of three species of flying-fox: Grey-headed, Red and Black. We actually had one each of all three species in the same tree on one occasion.



*Little Bent-wing Bat*



*Black Flying-fox*

It was just another normal visit to Broughton really: i.e. expect the unexpected!

Alan Stuart (*and the photos too*)