

Atypical habitat for an Australian Pelican colony

Alan Stuart¹, Greg Crisp² and Brian Crisp²

¹81 Queens Rd, New Lambton, NSW 2305, Australia almarosa@bigpond.com

²PO Box 139, Taree, NSW 2340, Australia admin@mcglashancrisp.com.au

The Australian Pelican *Pelecanus conspicillatus* is a common resident of the Hunter Region of New South Wales (Stuart 2011). There are several breeding records from Wallis Lake (centred at 32° 15'S, 152° 29'E). Between 1994 and 2000 inclusive, there were regular reports of >100 nests on islands within the Lake (Stuart 1995-2001). There are no other known breeding records for the Region, although birds with young were seen near Pacific Palms, on the southern end of the Lake, in June 2006 (Stuart 2007).

Most breeding records have been at Pelican Island, a small flat low island about 1.5km west from Green Point and ~500m south of Yahoo Island (Figure 1). However, 25 nests were found on Snake Island in 2000 (Stuart 2001).

Visits on 8 August and 23 November 2011 found >100 Australian Pelican breeding pairs on Snake Island and none on Pelican Island. The colony, in

the north-west section of Snake Island, had nests with eggs in August (Figure 2), and chicks of varying age in November.



Figure 2. Snake Island colony on 8 August 2011. Photo G. Crisp.

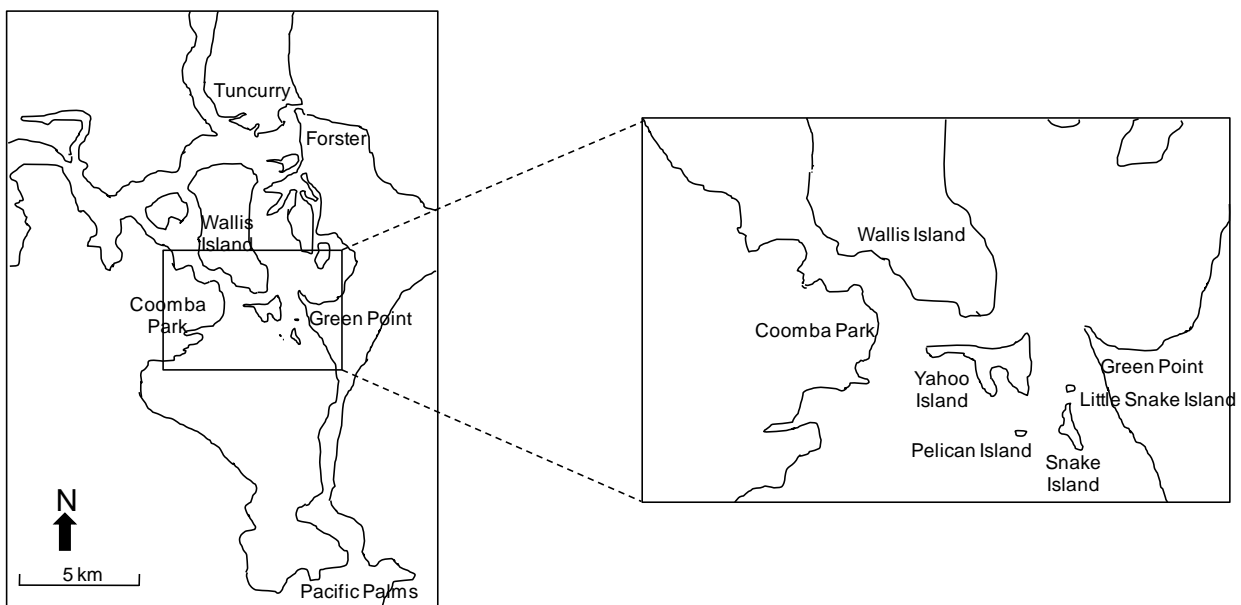


Figure 1. Wallis Lake NSW showing main locations.

Australian Pelicans typically breed colonially in simple pairs, utilising low islands or spits of sand, shell grit, mud clay or rocks, nesting on bare ground or among low vegetation (Marchant & Higgins 1990). Pelican Island fits this description well. However, the habitat where the colony is located on Snake Island is quite different.

Snake Island is fringed by a 5-10m wide belt of mangroves. The island is completely tree covered, for example *Casuarina* spp and Cabbage Palms *Livistona australis*, and has an understorey of shrubs across much of it. The Australian Pelican colony has formed in a 1-2 ha area lying directly behind mangroves. There are numerous trees throughout the colony. It appears that the birds may have trampled or otherwise removed the original understorey. The only way for birds to reach their breeding ground is to swim through the mangroves and then walk 20-50m.

There was no obvious issue about the ongoing suitability of Pelican Island for breeding. However, the colony has instead formed in atypical habitat on Snake Island.

REFERENCES

- Stuart, A. (1994-2011). Hunter Region of New South Wales Annual Bird Report Numbers 1-18 (1993-2010). (Hunter Bird Observers Club Inc.: New Lambton, NSW.)
- Marchant, S. and Higgins, P.J. (Eds) (1990). 'Handbook of Australian, New Zealand and Antarctic Birds Volume 1: Ratites to Ducks'. (Oxford University Press: Melbourne.)