

## The Cat Island Gannet Rookery

It is with some diffidence that I presume to make suggestions concerning the above subject after paying only one short visit to the island, but the matter is one of some urgency if we desire to preserve the bird in anything like the numbers that have nested there in the past.

On October 24, 1935, Mr. Holloway took us out some 27 miles from Lady Barrow. It was calm weather and we had no difficulty in landing. After negotiating the somewhat difficult Mutton-bird and Penguin rookeries on the foreshore we came to the Gannets. I believe that the rookery was said to contain, in the past, some 3,000 to 4,000 birds and to cover an area of 2 to 3 acres. A rough calculation of the numbers there now would be between 800 to 1,000 birds nesting on an area decidedly under an acre. Clear evidence of the reduction in size was shown by the bare areas at the sides of the nesting section. Mr. Holloway states that the diminution has been during the last five years. Small as they were in numbers, the birds, before being disturbed, were a beautiful sight, and it seems a pity if they have to go.

Now comes the painful part. We naturally had permits to visit. As we walked around the margins many birds arose and called, and shortly, from a rookery of *Gabianus pacificus* some 600 yards away, there came a score or so of marauders. Swiftly the Gulls descended and devoured both eggs and young birds, and the Gannets seemed unable to defend them. A score of eggs or birds were lost in a few minutes. We retreated rapidly to try to give the Gannets every chance, but if each visit is to result in a like massacre then a change must be made.

I understand that certain fishermen have been killing Gannets wholesale in order to get bait. Two men are, I believe, on the larger adjoining island (Babel) to try and prevent the destruction mentioned. While it is doubtful if they could do much to prevent raiders, as they have only a small boat and frequently very rough seas would have to be crossed between the two islands, yet they may help to some extent. A resident on the island for two or three months seems more desirable.

I suggest also that as the Gull rookery is so close and is increasing in size, it would be desirable to sacrifice it in order that the Gulls may not be within hearing of any Gannet disturbance. The Gulls nest in many other places and would soon transfer elsewhere.

It is most desirable that visits to Cat Island be only allowed under strict supervision of one or more approved guides and that the rookery should only be viewed from a short distance—not traversed. As Gannets nest in the heaped-up accumulated guano any removal of it would endanger the existence of the rookery and should not be allowed.

There is a fine rookery of Cormorants on the north end of

the neighbouring Storehouse Island—but they do not appear to molest the Gannets. The Silver Gull rookery was not properly occupied at the time of our visit.—BRUCE ANDERSON, Launceston, Tas.

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I wish to support the plea for strict measures to be taken to ensure effective protection for Gannets on Cat Island, Tasmania. At a rough estimate I should say there was not much more than one-fifth of an acre covered by Gannets' nests, all occupied—less than 1,000 birds. The birds nest on cup-shaped mounds of guano. I do not know if nests have recently been destroyed by the taking away of guano but the area already cleared of guano is continuous with that now occupied by nests. There is general agreement among those who have seen this rookery during the last few years that it is getting rapidly smaller.

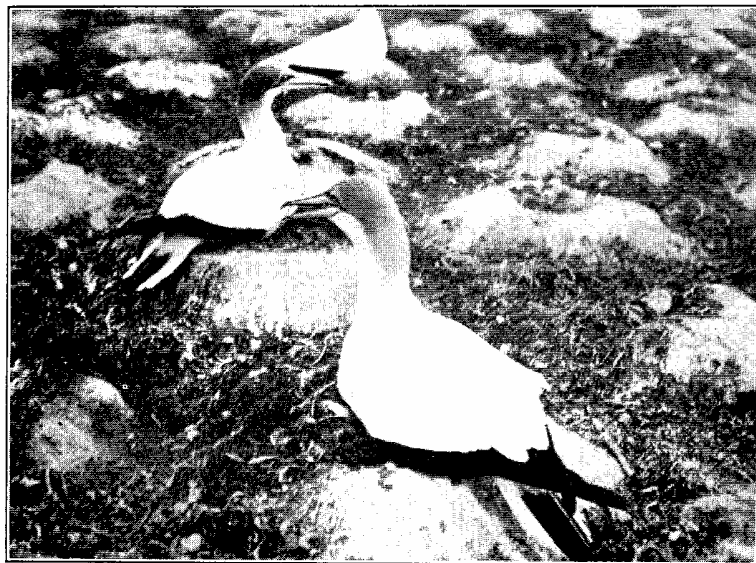
I agree that if the rookery is to be preserved it is absolutely essential that the menace of Pacific Gulls should be, as far as possible, removed, and it must be done at once, this coming season. Human beings should not be permitted to approach the nesting area nearer than 100 yards, or, better still, no landing on the island should be allowed excepting, of course, visits by the caretaker, in October and November each year. As soon as humans appear the poor "boobies," having just enough sense to know something is wrong, become disturbed, and the waiting Gulls, always on the lookout for an exposed egg or chick, then have their opportunity. Other Gulls flock to the prospective feast and the toll taken is enormous. The Gannets do not attempt to defend their eggs or young. If the vicinity of the Gannet rookery is prohibited to visitors in October and November and a caretaker lays poison for Gulls (I believe that is quite feasible with strychnine and soda) and destroys their eggs, the Gulls will probably soon abandon their rookery in the island. If something of this kind is not done the Gannets will certainly abandon theirs.—G. MURRAY ANDERSON, Hobart, Tas.

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**Chough's Unusual Nest.**—The White-winged Chough (*Corcorax melanorhamphus*), which usually builds its large basin-shaped mud nest on a horizontal branch, at times selects other sites for its nest. A not unusual thing is to find the mud structure built in the centre of a disused nest of a Crow or Currawong. On September 26, between Cliff Bore and Bell-bird Bore in the western Mallee, on climbing to a large stick nest, near which were nine Choughs, I found it contained seven eggs of this species laid on the usual fur and hair lining of a Crow's nest. The nest had apparently been previously used by Little Crows (*Corvus bennetti*) as a dead bird of that kind lay on the ground below the nest.—R. S. MILLER, Melbourne, 20/12/35.



Gannets on Cat Island. Babel Island in background.



Nesting Gannets.