

ST LUCIA DOCUMENT COLLECTION



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Title THE BIRD BREEDING COLONIES OF LAKE ST LUCIA,
ZULULAND JULY 1957 TO NOVEMBER 1958

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NB. Map cannot be traced.

Birds.

The Bird Breeding Colonies Of Lake St. Lucia, Zululand.

July 1957 to November 1958.

Report by J.M. Feely, M.B.O.U. etc., Lake Ranger, Lake
St. Lucia Game Reserve.

The outstanding event during the period under review was the exceptional flood of October 1957 which caused the death of all young of the species nesting at colonies 2 and 3. Two new colonial species were discovered nesting, namely the Great White Heron and the Black-winged Praticole. Of the species previously recorded two were not found at their old colonies, namely the Wood Ibis and the African Skimmer, and this is believed to be due to the altered conditions of their former colonies. The colonies are listed below and this is followed by a list of the species using them. The map shows the location of each one. The colonies of weaver species are not shown.

Colony No. 1.

A small clump of trees, Trichillia roka and Acacia sp., situated on the southern bank of the Hluhluwe river about 1 1/2 miles from its mouth. Abandoned after May 1958 owing to excessive interference by farming interests.

Colony No. 2.

Bird Island, in the northern portion of the lake. About 30 acres in extent at lowest water level and completely covered by water at highest water level. A mudbank which supports a pioneer plant community, including Salicornia. At no point less than 1 1/2 miles from the mainland.

/ Colony

Colony No. 3

Lane Island; very similar to No. 2 but with a sandy ridge at the N.W. tip and separated from the mainland by a minimum distance of 300 yards.

Colony No.4.

Three or four dead and dying Barringtonia trees ten to thirty feet in height, on the edge between the lake and a fringing swamp forest.

Colony No. 5. to No. 7.

Small clumps of pioneering mangroves in beds of Phragmites, three to six feet in height. No. 6 on the edge of reeds.

Colony No. 8.

A larger clump of mangroves, five to twelve feet in height, on the edge of the mainland.

Breeding Birds.

Phalacrocorax carbo, White-breasted Cormorant.

Main colony at No. 4, about 70 to 80 pairs. Small numbers at Nos. 5 to 7. April to September. Birds roost at No. 4 during non-breeding season.

P. africanus, Reed Cormorant.

Colonies 1 and 5 to 8. No. 1 now abandoned. November to February. About 100 pairs at No. 7, small numbers elsewhere.

Anhinga rufus, Darter.

As for Reed Cormorant. November to March. About 50 pairs at No. 1, 100 pairs at No. 7, 30 pairs at No. 8.

/ Pelecanus.....

Pelecanus onocrotalus, White Pelican.

Colony No. 3. First incubated eggs July 1957, June 1958. Colony wiped out October 1957. Last young off the islands end of November 1958. At least 800 pairs in 1958.

P. rufescens, Grey (Pink-backed) Pelican.

Colony No. 1. January to April. About 20 pairs. Now abandoned.

Ardea melanocephala, Black-necked Heron.

Colony No. 1. One nest with large young March.

Egretta alba, Great White Heron.

Colony No. 1 and No. 7. December to March. About 80 pairs at No. 1 and at least 6 at No. 7.

Platalea alba, African Spoonbill.

Colony Nos. 2 and 3. About 400 pairs 1958. July to November, may start earlier in years of low water level.

Glareola nordmanni, Black-winged Pratincole.

Colony No. 2; 1958 for first time. Eggs probably laid October, colony deserted end of December. 8 pairs. (see Fuly, Ostrich in).

Larus cirrocephalus, Grey-headed Gull.

Colony Nos. 2 and 3. July to November. About 100 pairs 1958.

Hydroprogne tschegava, Caspian Tern.

Colony Nos. 2 and 3. April to July. About 180 pairs 1958.

Rynchops flavirostris, African Skimmer.

Colony No. 10. Has not definitely nested for at least 8 years (see Garland, 1942). Recorded by Misheljohn, 1938 nesting at mouth of Mkuze river, northern end of main lake.

One or two pairs have been seen associating with Caspian Terns near their nesting place at colony 3. It is hoped that they may eventually breed there.

The following colonial weaver species breed in the reedbeds around the lake edge:

Ploceus velatus, Masked Weaver

P. intermedius, Lesser Masked Weaver.

P. spilonotus, Spotted-backed Weaver.

Xanthops. subaureus, Golden Weaver.

X. Xanthops, Larger Golden Weaver.

X. Xanthopterus, Brown-throated Weaver.

Amblyospiza albifrons, Thick-billed Weaver.

Last young off the islands at end of November. At least 800 breeding pairs in 1958.

Pelecanus rufescens, Grey Pelican.

Colony No.1 until April 1958 then moved to and started No. 5 in 1959. Eggs laid January, young off colony by end of April. About 20 breeding pairs 1958 and 1959. The new colony is fortunately well within the sanctuary and adequate provisions for their protection can be effected.

Ardea melanocephala, Black-necked Heron.

One nest at colony 1 in March 1958 with large young.

Casmerodius albus, Great White Heron.

Colony No. 1 and 8 in 1958, not discovered 1959. About 80 pairs at No. 1 and at least 6 at No. 8 December to mid-April. May also nest at suspected colony in Mkuze swamps.

Egretta garzetta Little Egret.

Colony No. 8 in 1958, about 20 pairs. Eggs in November, large young in nest February.

Ardeola ralloides, Squacco Heron.

Colony No 8 in 1958. Breeding period as for Little Egret.

Ibis ibis, Wood Ibis.

Formerly nested at colony No. 1, though not every year. Last nested in 1955, at same time as Grey Pelican. Nested July 1958 in Tongaland about 50 miles north of colony No. 1 (K.L. Tinley, unpublished report).

Threskiornis aethiopicus Sacred Ibis.

Colony No. 2 ,about 30 pairs August to mid December 1958.

Flamingoes have been reported to nest on Lake St Lucia Clancy 1954. They certainly do not do so now and no evidence that they ever did so has been gleamed. There are definately no flamingo breeding grounds anywhere in Zululand including the N.E. portion usually called Tongaland or Maputaland.

A heron may exist in the vast swamps of the lower Mkuze river. This has only been seen from the air, and it is not possible to reach the area by water since the channels are obstructed by Papyrus or Phragmites beds. The Purple and Goliath Heron undoubtedly nest in certain reed-beds but the nests have not yet been found, the first two species are often colonial breeders.

As can be realized from this brief account the Lake sanctuary is the refuge of an assemblance of colonial breeding water birds unequalled in Southern Africa.

/ For.....

For some of the species it is their only breeding ground. But it should also be realized that this sanctuary is threatened and will be destroyed if the pressure to turn it into a pleasure resort with speed boating and all modern pleasure amenities triumphs. This pressure exists and is growing, with the improvement of road communications. The policies of the Provincial Government to maintain the sanctuary in its natural state must be backed by public opinion, with bird watchers and ornithologists heading it. If this body of informed opinion is silent, it will be losing this natural resource by default. No law can last that is not supported by the majority of public opinion, and such a majority is determined solely by the number of voices actually raised, not by those that remain silent.

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Retyped
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