

EXERCISE BOOBY

The Royal Air Force Ornithological Society Expedition to Ascension Island - November 1988

by John Hortop

Note: This is a general report for the Newsletter and will be complemented by a full report to be prepared by Hilary Nash for the Adjutant.

Prior to Op Corporate most people would have been hard pressed to accurately locate Ascension Island. Since 1982 we have all become familiar with its position as a staging post to the Falkland Islands, lying between Africa and South America, and some 700 miles north west of St Helena. Discovered in 1501, garrisoned by the Royal Navy in 1815; before that its inhabitants consisted of plague victims, but when Napoleon was banished to St Helena the fear was that the French would use Ascension Island as a base for a rescue attempt to remove Napoleon from exile. It remained garrisoned until 1922 when the Service Authorities withdrew, leaving the Island in the quiet care of Cable and Wireless.

It remained quiet until the outbreak of the Second World War when the airstrip was enlarged by the Americans to support operations in the Southern Hemisphere. It has had various peaks and troughs of occupation since then, and is now populated by the RAF, NASA, BBC and Cable and Wireless.

Why, however, was the RAF Ornithological Society (RAFOS) mounting an expedition to Ascension Island and why were there two pongos in the party? Whilst in Military terms the Island is significant in being a staging post, in ornithological terms it is valued for its massive sea bird colonies which assume international importance for many of the resident species. No formal survey of the Island had been carried out since the Storehouse British Ornithological Union (SOU) 18 month expedition in 1958/59.

The MOD Conservation Officer and ornithological societies of the 3 Services have been encouraged by international civilian bodies to mount a series of expeditions to re-establish census base lines following the increase in disturbance during and after the Falklands conflict.

Regular readers of the ABWS Newsletter will recall that for some years there have been regular calls for volunteers to go to Ascension Island the snag has always been the lack of space on air transport.

Now the go-ahead had been given and, after the usual painfully hard planning and administrative detail by RAFOS, 10 individuals assembled at RAF Brize Norton on a chilly November afternoon. We had been waiting with kit packed for many days and, receiving 5 hours notice to move in the final analysis, were delighted to be away at last and awaiting boarding instructions for our RAF Tri-Star which all followed smoothly. The RAF led party included the author and Major R H J Nash RE as the Army Bird Watching Society (ABWS) members RAFOS and RNBWS have reciprocal Arrangements for Joint Service expeditions. After an 8 hour flight as concessionary Non Farepaying Passengers, we landed shortly after dawn on Ascension Island and what did we see? At first sight a scorched and twisted landscape, much as one would expect from a volcanic island, but with Green Mountain rising to almost 3000 feet shrouded, as it was so often to be, in low cloud.

We were later to find that 'the low lying coastal volcanic landscape provided desperate going on basaltic lava flow varying from tedious through arduous to hazardous. The climate as much as one would expect 7 degrees south of the Equator; hot dry for three quarters of the island but Green Mountain could often be up to 5 degrees C cooler with mist, and heavy showers of rain. The southeast trade winds persistently blow at around 12 knots and the temperature during our stay averaged between 21C and 28C with unfortunately uncharacteristically cloudy weather and isolated showers. The wind took much of the apparent heat from the sun and most of the expedition suffered minor sunburn irritation.

Vegetation on the Island has been introduced, either deliberately or accidentally in the last 100 years and early botanists' lists were very short; one included a small spurge-like plant unique to Ascension Island and now rare there Euphorbia Originoides. There are some small weeds on the clinker, as the arid areas of the Island are known, but more easily spotted are Prickly Pear, the yellow flowered Mexican Thistle and another with yellow flowers called Cassia. It is very noticeable that as one climbs Green Mountain the vegetation density increases very quickly passing through tall Eucalyptus trees until on the summit there are banana palms, bamboo thickets and the going underfoot is very muddy.

There is also extensive greening around the inhabited areas of the capital Georgetown, the RAF domestic site at Traveller's Hill and Two Boats. Two Boats, the BBC village, is so called from 1826 when an old naval gig was sawn in two by the Royal Marines and the halves set upright by the track.

This provided shelter for wagon teams whilst the horses cooled off before the long ascent of Green Mountain to Dampier's Drip to fill barrels of water for the garrison. One Boat is of similar vintage and placed partway across the plain from Georgetown.

The ocean around Ascension Island is teeming with fish and none more so than the ubiquitous Black Fish: around 25 centimetres in length and, as the name suggests black, but with a very classy blue pin strip, these fish emulate the legendary piranha in action. It never failed to provide amusement for us to throw the odd scrap of cheese into the water, whereupon the water boiled as these fish rushed to the food and the lump of cheese disappeared within seconds, the mass of fish so tight that those underneath were pushing the ones on the surface clean out of the water in their attempt to get at the food. Shark are occasionally seen, dolphins quite frequently and we were extremely fortunate on one moonlit night to observe a Green Turtle 'coming ashore and laying her eggs. Turtle products formed a mainstay of the Island's economy from first garrisoning right up until 1920 it provided a lucrative trade to the extent that turtle ponds were constructed near the capital Georgetown where 2 of them may still be seen to this day.

The turtle ponds were used to store the turtles until a ship arrived to buy or barter this welcome source of fresh meat. This ceased in 1920 and almost all the occupants of the Island are now enthusiastically engaged in supporting this much threatened creature. It was certainly a privileged sight to walk along the beach in the strong moonlight and see firstly the tracks coming out of the sea and up the beach enormous tracks reminiscent of some strange wide tracked armoured vehicle, and then high up in the dunes at the end of the track a huge turtle digging a shallow depression and then hollowing out a small pit at the bottom in which to deposit 50 to 60 eggs. We were doubly fortunate as November is well outside the normal breeding cycle and most of the turtles do not come ashore until about February.

Land animals are few, all introduced with the usual crop of mistakes, miscalculations and misfortunes. Goats were probably the first animals deliberately put ashore in the manner of the time to breed and provide another source of fresh meat for mariners who called that way. The goats naturally multiplied and threatened to strip the entire Island until they were finally eradicated in 1944. Rabbits which had been introduced in 1820 were decimated by a subsequent rat borne infection and, although we saw rabbits from time to time, they were certainly not plentiful on the Island. Rats of course had escaped from ships calling ashore, shipwrecks and probably even came ashore with stores. The naval garrisoning of the town brought the bright idea to bring cats to keep down the rats; the effect of this was to last for the next 150 years and is still being felt on the Island. The cats declined to hunt the rats in any large numbers and instead turned their attention to the sea bird population; more of that later. A herd of donkeys live on the flat plains, the successors of those released by the Royal Marine contingent on the Island who used them for pack animals and strangely, although conditions must be very hard for them, they appear to be in the peak of condition. Land crabs abound on the clinker and there are also lizards, a very pale gecko, some scorpions and pseudo scorpions (it is very difficult to distinguish the pseudo!).

Now for the birds. The numbers involved are huge, but the variety of birds is very limited. Within a few days most of the party had seen 75% of the land birds on the Island (all introduced) Canary, Mynah and Wax bill. Yes there only 4 species of land bird, the fourth being the Red throated Francolin which proved quite difficult to find. The francolin is a red legged partridge and seemed to be quite thin on the ground around the lower slopes of Green Mountain. There are also only a limited number of species of sea bird, namely 11, but for many of them, particularly the Sooty Tern, or Wideawake as it is more commonly known, the population is many hundreds of thousands. These terns are to be found between the airport and Mars Bay at Wideawake Fairs. When we made our first visit, shortly after our arrival on the island, the population was still many thousands, but it thinned rapidly during our stay as the breeding season closed. The terns are also thinned by the feral cats and it was quite distressing to see in a small area 15-20 of these attractive birds decapitated with hardly an attempt to eat the flesh.

There is, fortunately, a self regulating procedure in that after breeding for 10 months, the population of terns moves out to sea for 3 months during which time most of the cats perish until the next breeding season when the survivors breed rapidly and the slaughter commences. The Ascension Frigate Bird is endemic and some concern has been expressed by the International Council for Bird Preservation to the status of this and other species. The primary aim of Ex Booby therefore was to carry out an ornithological survey of as much of the Island and its environs as possible. The expedition took counts of seabird movement, usually by mounting sea watches from 0600 to 0730 and 1800 to 1930 most days at North Point. This was not always a popular task at the end of a long hard day, but the collation of such data is invaluable for comparisons with previous sightings and for use by future expeditions as a base line. There are certainly compensations on sea watches, however, as who could fail to be thrilled by 397 Ascension Island Frigate Birds swooping in over the bay at dawn?

Our normal daily routine after the morning sea watch was to return to the accommodation where breakfast would be waiting thanks to the 2 members of the expedition who were duty crew that day. Our accommodation was in R&R huts at the northern tip of the Island, appropriately enough at English Bay. R&R accommodation sounds quite grand and luxurious, the accommodation is actually 2 huts, albeit air conditioned, in one of which we set up our beds and some very U/S. lockers, the other hut we used as a dining room and attached was a kitchen. We drew rations every other day and were on a completely self supporting basis. This had its advantages in that we could tailor meal times to suit our fieldwork requirements, but it did mean that at anyone time 20% of the party was engaged on administrative nouse. So, sea watch was followed by breakfast and then the party would split to work in various parts of the Island. We had an RAF minibus for this purpose, somewhat removed from its condition when issued from CVD Ashchurch 18 months earlier, but entirely adequate for our use. We all found the going very hard and expended much intense physical effort crossing rough and steep terrain. Each person had to carry sufficient liquid to replenish sweat loss and this proved to be as much as 2 litres during a 4 hour period. In the few areas of Ascension that are free from steep slopes, much of the ground consists of heaped piles of irregular sharp edged lava chunks which are difficult to traverse and all members of the expedition found the physical aspect very demanding.

On one occasion it took a party over 4 hours to traverse a particularly difficult 2 Km of broken lava flow from the Nike-Zeuss Site along the coast to English Bay .to check offshore stacks for breeding birds. Although the HMS Bonetta Cemetery at Comfortless Cove is well known for its yellow fever victims brought ashore in 1838, and later as the point where the Atlantic telephone cables came ashore, there is a stark contrast of ancient and modern at the Trident Cemetery near the Nike-Zeuss Tracking Site where there are three graves of yellow fever victims inside a low clinker wall. The exact year when they died is not known but HMS Trident was condemned and broken up at Ascension in 1857. The richest single ornithological point is Boatswain Bird Island, the small islet to the east of the main island. To reach this islet we hired the RAF launch complete with inflatable it took around 40 minutes to reach Boatswain Bird Island and that was the easy part because landing on the islet proved extremely difficult. A small uninhabited islet with many thousands of sea birds and covered in guano with a single broken rope ladder and the South Atlantic swell all combined to make landing hazardous. In fact only 3 agile members of the expedition managed to get ashore on this first visit to Boatswain Island, all subsequent visits were cancelled due to heavy sea conditions. This was a great pity, but the forces of nature cannot be negotiated with, even if it is on this one islet that the Masked and Brown Booby, Brown and Black Noddy, Frigate Bird and the Tropic Bird all breed and abound with almost complete lack of fear of humans making observations so rewarding. Some observations were rewarding for quite strange reasons and may give some clue to the makeup of a birdwatcher's mentality! A Bartailed Godwit that fed happily near the turtle ponds for days always aroused interest as a species not normally seen on the Island, and a few days later a Ringed Plover caused similar excitement. An even more unusual sighting occurred the morning of 29 Nov 88 when on our way to Wideawake Fairs, we spotted the Station Commander's car. As usual the occasion for a cheery wave, we noted on approach a stardecked red VIP plate and were informed later that the passenger was none other than our ABWS Vice President General Sir John Chapple. By the time we found out, the Tri-Star had departed for FI, but it did seem a pity that our involvement had not been requested as, even in the short time available, an ornithological brief could have been delivered.

Packed lunches were taken by those individuals working in remote locations and the minimum safety size for parties was always 4. At the end of the day after the evening seawatch came our main meal and this was then followed by call over, so it will be seen that preconceived ideas of birdwatchers languishing on a tropical island for 2 weeks was not quite how it was. We certainly had the sun, the sand and the cheap food and drink, but there was no motivation to find any night life after 10 o'clock, and after 11 o'clock the only sounds to be heard from the R&R hut were much R&R in preparation for the next days work! As well as being arduous many of the overland routes to sea stacks on the south of the island are along paths certainly not for those suffering from vertigo one aptly named The Goat Track to Powers Point caused just a little consternation amongst some members of the party.

It was surprising just how quickly our 16 days passed on Ascension Island. We felt that we visited more remote areas in that time than most people would during a normal tour. We took thousands of photographs and filled numerous notebooks with observations and, whilst it will be some months before all the data is analysed, we are generally sure that the breeding species encountered seem to Be present in healthy numbers. We all enjoyed our stay, the natives are friendly and we found Ascension Island to be an unusual and fascinating speck of land in the South Atlantic.

THE ROYAL AIR FORCE ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY
EXPEDITION TO ASCENSION ISLAND
15 - 30 NOVEMBER 1988

by David Osborn

(Editors Note: This brief report has been extracted from the original expedition report, held by the RAFOS Librarian)

INTRODUCTION

The RAFOS mounted an expedition to Ascension Island, from 15-30 November 1988, following a similar RAFOS expedition in February 1987, (see 1987 Report in RAFOS Journal No 19). The MOD Conservation Officer and the ornithological societies of the 3 Services had been encouraged by civilian organisations to monitor levels of change to the seabird colonies at this important site, after the influx of personnel during the Falklands crisis in 1982. These expeditions continue the trend of the military ornithological societies carrying out internationally important bird studies, wherever possible.

AIM

The aim of the expedition was to carry out systematic bird surveys on Ascension Island; in particular:

- a. Sea-watching surveys.
- b. Surveys of coastal breeding sites.
- c. Attempts at species counts on Boatswain bird Island, with particular emphasis on the only endemic species, the Ascension Frigate bird, *Fregata aquila*.

BRIEF GEOGRAPHICAL DESCRIPTION

A detailed description of Ascension Island was given in the account of the 1987 RAFOS expedition. Ascension Island is a volcanic island in the equatorial south Atlantic, lying approximately half-way between the Angolan and Brazilian coastlines. It is 88 sq km (34 sq miles) in area and has a maximum elevation (Green Mountain) of 2,817 ft.

TEAM COMPOSITION

RAFOS team members:

Sqn Ldr M F Magee (MM)	HQRAFSC Brampton	Team Leader
Fit Lt J P Orme (JO)	DT(G) Abingdon	Dep Team Ldr
Chf Tech C Holliday (GH)	RAF Wattisham	
Sgt S Heather (SH)	RAF Cottesmore	
Sgt I Mackenzie (IM)	RAF Brampton	
Sgt D Osborn (DO)	RAF Coltishall	Recorder
Cpl R Bayford (RB)	RAF St Athan	
Jnr Tech K Grant (KG)	RAF Boulmer	

Army Ornithological Society (AOS) Members:

Maj J M D Hortop (JH)	CVD Ashchurch	Field Leader
Mai R H J Nash (HN)	HQ 11 Engr Gp	

METEOROLOGICAL SUMMARY

During the expedition period, the maximum daily temperature varied between 26 and 28 C; the minimum night temperatures ranged from 21 to 23 C. The wind direction veered from 100 to 115,

with wind speeds from 10kts to 15kts. Light showers of rain were recorded on 8 days, with measurable amounts restricted to only 3 days: 1 mm on 22 Nov, 0.4 mm on 25th and 3 mm on 27th. Sunrise was at approximately 0645hrs (Local) and sunset at 1900hrs (L).

REFERENCES

J E Packer (Locally Produced Booklet)	Ascension Island, A Concise Guide
Peterson, Mountfort. Hollom (Collins)	Birds of Britain & Europe
Serle, Morel, Hartwig (Collins)	Birds of West Africa
P Harrison (Croom & Helm)	Seabirds, an identification guide
Tuck & Heinzel (Collins)	A Field guide to the Seabirds of Britain & the World
B Stonehouse (Hutchinson)	Wideawake Island

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

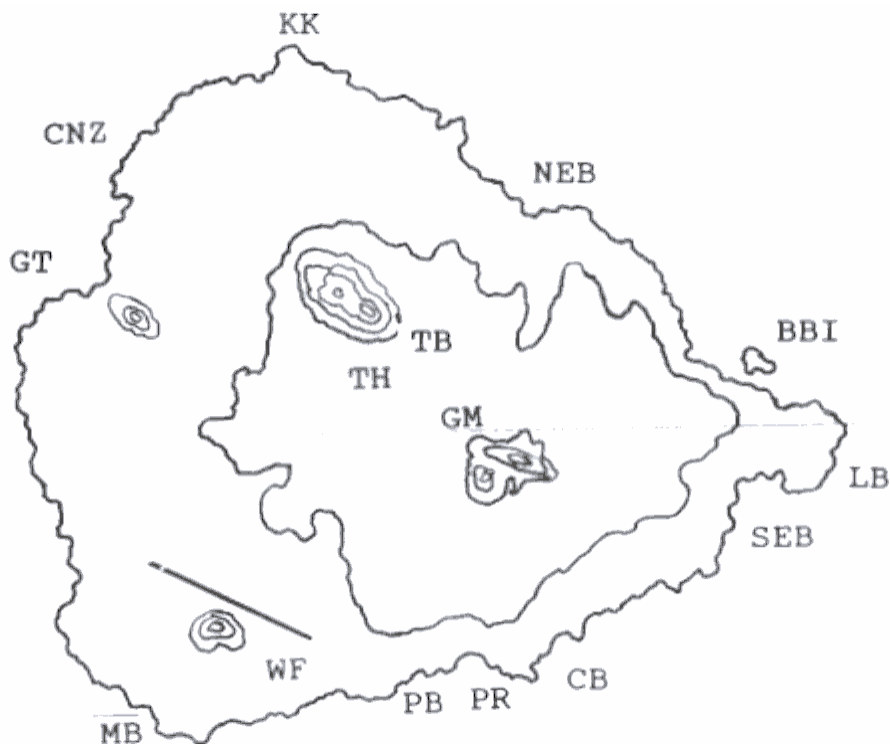
Much initial preparatory work was carried out by Wg Cdr R H Griffiths, the RAFOS Expeditions Officer and Sqn Ldr I W Thompson, the RAFOS project Officer. In addition, the following gave great assistance to the expedition:

Commander British Forces Ascension Island

Mr Michael Blick Ascension Island Administrator Georgetown

Mr Lonnie Higden Pan American Airlines

SKETCH MAP OF ASCENSION ISLAND



KEY TO ABBREVIATIONS USED IN THE REPORT

For convenience and brevity, the following geographical codes are used in this report:

- | | | |
|----|-----|----------------------|
| 1. | APC | Airport Camp |
| 2. | BBI | Boatswainbird Island |
| 3. | CB | Coconut Bay |
| 4. | CNZ | Cliffs, N Z Site |

5.	CP	Catherine's Point
6.	CV	Cricket Valley
7.	DA	Devils Ashpit
8.	DD	Dampiers Drip
9.	GC	Gygis Cliffs
10.	GM	Green Mountain
11.	GT	Georgetown
12.	KK	Klinker Klub, North Point
13.	LB	Letterbox
14.	MB	Mars Bay
15.	NEB	North East Bay
16.	NS	Nasa Site
17.	NZ + CNZ	N Z Site, and Nearby Cliffs
18.	PB	Pillar Bay
19.	PBE	Pillar Bay East
20.	PP	Powers Point
21.	PR	Pillar Rock
22.	PRE	Pillar Rock East
23.	PREM	Pillar Rock East Minor
24.	PRW	Pillar Rock West
25.	SC	Sharpe Cliffs
26.	SEB	South East Bay
27.	SEC	South East Cliffs
28.	S1, 2,3,4,5,6	Stacks 1 to 6
29.	TB	Two Boats
30.	TH	Travellers Hill
31.	WF	Wideawake Fairs

FIELD NOTES ON PREVIOUSLY UNRECORDED SPECIES ON ASCENSION ISLAND

During research prior to the expedition, and subsequently, no reference was found to the following birds as being recorded on Ascension Island before Nov 1988.

Bulwer's Petrel (*Bulweria bulwerii*)

Whilst sea-watching from KK a completely chocolate brown petrel was observed. A number of Madeiran Petrels had been seen during the afternoon and this bird was in a similar position to the coast, following a similar flight line and allowing reasonably good views for a reasonable amount of time. The bird was unmistakably a petrel, with typical flight. It was uniformly chocolate brown with a visible pale band on upper wing; only other distinguishable feature was a large wedge-shaped tail.

Cory's Shearwater (*Calonectris diomedea*)

Bird seen from KK flying in a westerly direction. First impressions were of a large brown Shearwater type bird, its flight riding the 'eddies'. The bird had long wings and was a medium brown colour above the wings and body with white underside. No cap colour or white rump were seen. The bird was seen initially by three observers all of whom are familiar with the species. Further observations were made during the expedition, verifying the sightings.

Sooty Shearwater (*Puffinus griseus*)

A bird was seen flying very close to the shore, from KK, in association with a flock of Black Noddies. The bird in question stood out immediately as being quiet different from the other birds. Very good views of the bird were had in good light; it was a uniformly chocolate-brown Shearwater with pale underside to the wings. No other distinguishing features were noted.

Arctic Skua (*Stercorarius parasiticus*)

Whilst sea watching from KK, at about 1500hrs, a different shaped bird was seen flying amongst the feeding flocks of Noddies and Brown Boobies in the distance. The bird seemed to have the appearance of a large dark tern with a strong deliberate wing beat. The bird was not plunge-feeding like the other birds, but was flying at about 20/30 feet above the feeding flock and occasionally swooping into it. Upon closer inspection a number of birds displaying similar characteristics could be seen. Fortunately the feeding flock was large,

probably a thousand plus birds in a long drawn out line slowing moving closer to the coastline; White Tern and Frigate birds were also noticed in with the flock allowing good size comparison to be made. As individual birds came closer into the middle distance, and into areas of good light, the following points were picked out.

The tern-like birds had a heavily built body, but not gull like. Their flight was strong and more deliberate than that of terns. After a while it became obvious that the birds were actually attacking the fishing birds and at those times they were very fast aggressive flyers. Colouration: Dark wings, with pale patches above and below area of primaries, dark tail, large rounded wedge shape, central feathers long and pointed. Body: some were uniformly dark, others had white underside; on the pale birds a dark cap could be seen, together with ochre cheek patches. The observer was familiar with Arctic Skua.
Skua Sp

Whilst undertaking an evening sea watch from NE Bay, at about 1800hrs, a large uniformly dark brown Skua was observed. White flashes were seen both above and below the wings. The bird flew in a similar fashion to the Great Skua seen around British waters. No other distinguishing features were seen. The bird was only seen by one observer, mid-distance in the sea- watch area heading north, for about two minutes. No other observers were able to locate the distant bird against a host of other flying shapes.

OBSERVATIONS OF MOVEMENT OF INDIAN MYNAH TO POSSIBLE EVENING ROOST

Travellers Hill Ascension Island. On the evening of the 30 Nov, whilst walking from the lower slopes of Green Mountain down to the Travellers Hill Camp, Dave Osborn and I observed a movement of Indian Mynahs, *Acridotheres tristis*. Between 1830 and 1905 hours local time, small groups of Mynahs (Max group size 20 birds), were seen moving from the lower ground areas around the camp, upwards towards the higher slopes of Green Mountain, to where the tree-line began. A total of 99 birds were recorded during this short period of time, far surpassing any previous days total. A more accurate assessment of the population of this particular species on Ascension Island could probably be made if routes, and the location of evening roost sites on Green Mountain, could be identified. (Steve Heather)

NB. Recorder's Note: Prior to the observations of the 30 Nov Indian Mynah had been seen daily in small flocks of between 2 and 8 birds, always fairly close to areas of human habitation. They were always opportunistic enough to supplement their normal diet of fruit and insects with whatever scraps were readily available. (Similar in habits to the Starling *Sturnus vulgaris*; a species which did not survive life on Ascension Island after its introduction in 1852). The previous maximum daily count was 47 birds.

Further investigation into any behavioural roosting patterns which may lead to the location of a roost site for the Indian Mynah in the Green Mountain area is recommended. The scrub areas around the Travellers Hill Camp would make a good start point, then following either the road or dry water courses upwards towards Green Mountain, passing through the Acacia Groves to where the eucalyptus begin to grow. Similar investigations around the Two Boats, Dampiers Drip, NASA Site and Cricket Valley areas could also prove to be useful. (David Osborn)

RESIDENT BIRD POPULATIONS ASCENSION ISLAND

The problem of assessing bird populations on Ascension were accentuated by the difficulties of the terrain, the inaccessibility of some of the smaller breeding colonies, a continual breeding cycle and being on the island for only a short period of time. The best estimates of populations were based on the numbers of birds recorded by observers during the expedition period.

Madeiran Storm Petrel (*Oceanodroma castro*)

The max daily count was of 25 birds. The birds were seen singly on most days but, without knowing the stage of the breeding cycle, it would be difficult to imagine a colony of more than 50 pairs of birds. An accurate count on BBI would be almost impossible with a normal size Service expedition on Ascension Island for only a relatively short period of time.

Red-billed Tropic Bird (*Phaethon aethereus*)

The max daily count was of 29 birds. The birds were seen on an occasional basis, away from the nesting sites, always as single birds. Again, it would be difficult to imagine a total population of more than 50 pairs of birds.

Yellow-billed Tropic Bird (*Phaethon lepturus*)

The max daily count was 100 plus birds on BBI. These birds, once again, were seen on an occasional basis and away from the nest site, always as single birds. A count on BBI was difficult on such a short visit. However, a total population of around 200/300 pairs of birds was estimated.

Masked Booby (*Sula dactylatra*)

The max daily count was 5, 159 (am) 4,968 (pm) on sea watches, plus circa 4,000 on BBI. Seen daily in large numbers. From the counts made the figures would indicate a possible breeding population of between 5,000 - 10,000 pairs of birds.

Brown Booby (*Sula leucogaster*)

The max daily count was of 1,132 birds. The birds were seen daily in good numbers. The population estimate was around 1,500/2,000 birds.

Ascension Frigate Bird (*Fregata aquila*)

The max daily count of this species was taken during a survey made from the cliffs overlooking BBI. During the survey circa 2,500 were seen in, on, and around the island.

Red-necked Francolin (*Francolinus streptophorus*)

The max daily count was of two birds. A particularly shy and difficult bird to see and as such very hard to assess population figures. Speculation would estimate a max of around 50 pairs.

Sooty Tern (*Sterna fuscata*)

The colonies had just completed their breeding cycle on the Wideawake Fairs and most of the birds, had already left the colony. Therefore, no population estimate could be made.

White Tern (*Gygus alba*)

The max daily count was 200+ BBI: 121 (am) 180 (pm) on sea watch. Birds were seen daily, in good numbers around the main colony on BBI. Estimated population max 500 pairs.

Brown Noddy (*Anous stolidus*)

The max daily count was 100+ birds on Sea Watch. Very difficult to assess population, but not as abundant as the Black Noddy. No impression of population size gained.

Black Noddy (*Anous minutes*)

The max daily count was of 1000+ birds; the birds were seen daily in fairly large numbers. More time could be allocated by future expeditions to counting the noddies on sea watch details if a better estimate of no more than 5,000 pairs is required.

NB: The figures quoted are pure estimates based on sea watch counts and colony surveys. No account could be taken of the numbers of birds that may use the island to breed at other times of the year, but were not present around the colony at the time of the expedition.

Indian Mynah (*Acridotheres tristis*)

The max daily count was of 115 birds and the birds were seen daily. No assessment of population figures was possible in the time allotted.

Common Waxbill (*Estrilda astrild*)

The max daily count was of 200+ birds and birds were seen daily. No assessment of population figures was possible in the time allotted.

Yellow Canary (*Serinus flaviventris*)

The max daily count was of 54 birds and birds were seen daily. No assessment of population figures was possible in the time allotted.

RECORDER'S SYSTEMATIC LIST

1. **Bulwer's Petrel** (*Bulweria bulwerii*)
Exact status unknown, probably passage migrant
One sighted from KK 20 Nov (DO)
2. **Cory's Shearwater** (*Calonectris diomedea*)
Exact status unknown, probably passage migrant three sightings
One bird from KK 18 Nov (DO, RB, SH)
Four birds from NEB 23 Nov (DO, SH)
Two birds from KK 27 Nov (DO, SH)
3. **Sooty Shearwater** (*Puffinus griseus*)
Exact status unknown, probably passage migrant
One Sighting from KK 22 Nov (DO, RB)
4. **Madeiran Storm Petrel** (*Oceanodroma castro*)
Syn: Harcourt's Petrel, Band-rumped Petrel
Resident Breeder (No evidence found)
Seen on the following days:
15, 17, 18, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 26, 27, 29 Nov
Mostly as single birds: Max count 25 sightings on 24 Nov
Seen from BBI, CP, KK, NEB
5. **Petrel Species**
Unidentified Petrels (due to range or attitude) were seen on the following days:
One sighting from KK 16 Nov
Four sightings from KK 19 Nov
Twenty-four sightings from KK 21 Nov
One sighting from MB 24 Nov
6. **Red-billed Tropic Bird** (*Phaethon aethereus*)
Syn: Red-billed Boatswain Bird
Resident Breeder (Breeding observed) Seen on the following days:
When away from the nest site, always as single birds
29 BBI 18 Nov
1 KK, 7 SEB 21 Nov
16 BBI, 1 KK 23 Nov
5 MB 24 Nov
2 SEB 25 Nov
1 CB, 4 PR 27 Nov
1 KK 30 Nov
7. **Yellow-billed Tropic Bird** (*Phaethon lepturus lepturus*)
Syn: White-tailed Tropic Bird
Yellow-billed/White-tailed Boatswain Bird
Resident Breeder (Breeding observed)
Seen on the following days, as singles away from nest:
4 CNZ 16 Nov
100+ BBI 18 Nov
5 SEC 21 Nov
20 SEB 25 Nov

1 KK	26 Nov
14 CB, 1 KK, 13 PB, 7 PRE, 4 PREM	27 Nov
2 KK	29 Nov
6 KK	30 Nov

8. **Tropic Bird Species**

Unidentified Tropic Birds (due to range) were seen on the following days:

7 KK	15 Nov
3 KK	20 Nov
12 KK	23 Nov
6 KK	24 Nov
3 KK	26 Nov
2 KK	27 Nov

9. **Masked Booby (*Sula dactylatra*)**

syn: Blue-faced Booby, White Booby

Resident Breeder (Breeding observed)

Seen daily, max counts on the following days:

5187 KK	17 Nov
3918 KK	21 Nov
5159 am 4968 pm NEB	23 Nov
4000+ Adult Birds pm BBI	23 Nov

Seen from BBI, CC, CP, KK, MB, NEB PRE, PRW

10. **Red Footed Booby (*Sula sula*)**

Resident Breeder (no evidence found, but one Juvenile Bird seen)

Adult White Morph:

1 KK	15 Nov
2 KK, 1 Stack 5	16 Nov
2 + 1 juv KK	17 Nov
2 + 1 Juv BBI, 1 KK, 1 Stack 5	18 Nov
2 + 1 Juv KK	20 Nov
4 KK	21 Nov
2 KK	22 Nov
3 KK	23 Nov
3 KK + 1 MB	24 Nov
2 KK	27 Nov
1 KK	28 Nov
2 KK	29 Nov

Adult White-tailed Brown Morph (HN, DO, RB, SH)

One seen on the following days:

KK	19, 21, 22,23, 25,26 Nov
PBE	27 Nov

11. **Brown Booby (*Sula leucogaster*)**

Resident Breeder (Breeding observed)

Seen daily, max counts on the following days:

516 KK	22 Nov
1132 NEB	23 Nov

Seen from BBI, CB, CP, KK, MB, NEB, PP, PRE, PREM, PRW, SEB

12. **Ascension Frigate bird (*Fregata aquila*)**

Syn: Ascension Man O'War Bird

Resident Breeder (Breeding observed), endemic species

Seen daily, max daily counts on the following days:

397 KK	16 Nov
39 M. 80 F. 31 Juv + 75 Unsexed	23 Nov
@ 1550 BBI	23 Nov

@ 2500 BBI

25 Nov

13. **Red-necked Francolin** (*Francolinus streptophorus*)

Syn: Red-legged/necked partridge
Resident Breeder (no evidence found)
Four sightings:

One bird GM	19 Nov (DH, DO)
Two birds posn 709224	24 Nov (HN)
One bird Nasa Road	25 Nov
One bird posn 715221	26 Nov

14. **Ringed Plover** (*Charadrius hiaticula*)

Exact status unknown, probably passage migrant
One sighting from KK

15 Nov (DO)

15. **Plover Species** (*Charadrius sp*)

Unidentified Plover species (due to range or attitude) were seen on the following days:
1 One bird MB

24 & 29 Nov (HN)

16. **Bar-tailed Godwit** (*Umosa lapponica*)

Exact status unknown, probably vagrant or accidental
A single winter phase bird was present in the Georgetown Turtle ponds on the following dates:
17, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27 Nov

17. **Arctic Skua** (*Stercorarius parasiticus*)

Syn: Parasitic Jaeger
Exact status unknown. probably passage migrant

37 KK	20 Nov (DO, SH, HN)
9 KK	21 Nov (DO, SH)
3 CP, 4 KK	22 Nov (DOSH)
3 NEB	23 Nov (DO, SH)
2 KK	24 Nov (DO SH)

18. **Skua Species**

One sighting from NEB

23 Nov

19. **Sooty Tern** (*Stemafuscata*)

Syn: Wideawake Tern
Resident Breeder (Breeding observed)
Seen in large numbers breeding on the Wideawake Fairs away from the fairs seen most days in small numbers

Max counts on the following days:

177 CP, 25 KK, 1 NEB	24 Nov
68 NEB	23 Nov
75 MB, 17 KK	24 Nov
50 KK, 2 PB	27 Nov

20. **White Tern** (*Gygus alba*)

Resident Breeder (Breeding observed)
Seen daily, max daily counts on the following days:

50 KK	18 Nov
2 KK, 36 NEB	22 Nov
200+ BBI, 121 am 180 pm NEB	23 Nov
58 KK	24 Nov
57 KK	29 Nov

Seen from BBI, GC, OM, KK, LB, MB, NEB, PB, PP, SEB, TH

21. **Brown Noddy** (*Anous stolidus*)

Syn: Common Noddy

Resident Breeder (Breeding observed)

Seen daily, max daily counts on the following days:

35 Stack 5	16 Nov
100+ KK	20 Nov
32 KK	25 Nov
19 KK	30 Nov

Seen from BBI, KK, MB, NEB, SEC, S4, S5

22. **Black Noddy** (*Anous minutes*)

Syn: White-capped Noddy

Resident Breeder (Breeding observed)

Seen daily, max daily counts on the following days:

400+ KK	17 Nov
1000+ BBI	18 Nov
1000+ KK	19 Nov
1000+ SEB	25 Nov
320 PRE, PREM	27 Nov

Seen from BBI, CB, KK, NEB, PRE, PREM, SEB, SEC

23. **Noddy Species**

Unidentified Noddies (due mainly to the difficulty in differentiating between the two resident species at range) were seen on the following days:

1000+ KK	15 Nov
1551 KK	16 Nov
4085 KK	17 Nov
2174 KK	22 Nov
1842 am 2044 pm NEB	23 Nov
1000+ KK	26 Nov

Recorders Note:

It is thought that the above figures probably relate more to the species Black Noddy. due to the numbers involved and the sizes of the individual flocks counted.

24. **Swift** (*Apus apus*)

Syn: European Swift

Exact status unknown, probably vagrant or accidental

One sighting from NZ

26 Nov (IM, JO, DO)

25. **Indian Mynah** (*Acridotheres tristis*)

Resident Breeder (Breeding observed)

Seen daily, max daily counts on the following days:

40	17 Nov
24 GM	19 Nov
42	21 Nov
45	25 Nov
49	27 Nov
115	30 Nov

Seen from APC, CP, CY, GM, GT, KK, LB, MB, NS, PP, SC, TB, TH, WF, WH

26. **Common Wax bill** (*Estrilda astrild*)

Resident Breeder (no evidence found)

Seen daily, max daily counts on the following days:

200+ GT Cemetery	15 Nov
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80+ WF	16 Nov
126 NEB to GT	23 Nov
117	24 Nov

Seen from APC, CP, CY, DA, DD, GM, GT, LB, NS, PB, PP, TB, TH

27. **Yellow Canary** (*Serinus flaviventris*)

Resident Breeder (no evidence found)

Seen daily, max daily counts on the following days:

40 NS	21 Nov
24 NEB to GT	23 Nov
54	24 Nov

Seen from DD, EB, GM, NEB, NS, PP, TB, TH