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## Introduction to the Birds of King Island

King Island is home and host to a wide range of birds.

Species present on the island varies according to the time of year and the weather conditions.

A number of birds, such as the Flame Robin and Grey Fantail, migrate across Bass Strait in the spring and autumn, but a few will remain to overwinter or breed here and some are residents.

Many birds are residents, spending their lives on the island. Some of these have been isolated from mainland populations for so long they have become significantly different and are now classified as King Island subspecies – unique to this island. These are the King Island Scrubtit (Critically Endangered), Brown Thornbill (Critically Endangered), Green Rosella (Vulnerable), Black Currawong (Vulnerable), Dusky Robin (secure), Yellow Wattlebird (secure), Tasmanian Scrubwren (secure), Tasmanian Thornbill (secure) and Suburb Fairy-wren (secure).

Beach-nesting birds are both resident and migratory, with some such as the Hooded Plover moving around the island when they aren't breeding but as far as we know, they don't leave it altogether, while the Pied Oystercatchers are known to often head to the mainland during the winter.

Migratory waders spend the summer here arriving in mid Spring from their breeding grounds in the far northern hemisphere and departing again in late April.

Water birds come and go throughout the year and vagrants, such as the Pacific Heron, can turn up at anytime.

There are a number of seabird rookeries around the island including Silver Gull and Crested Terns as well as the migratory Short-tailed Shearwater or Muttonbird.

Of course, there are also a number of introduced birds. Some of these do very well here as there are no foxes or rabbits on the island so ground-dwellers such as the Common Pheasant are in their element.

## Finding birds on King Island

Driving around the island and walking any beach provides great opportunities to see birds. Forest Ravens, Australian Magpies (white-backed), Spur-winged Plover, wild American Turkeys, wild Indian Peafowl and Common Pheasant are easy to spot. Sea Eagles can often be seen as they cruise the island as can Swamp Harrier and Nankeen Kestrel. Brush Bronzewing on well vegetated roads have no fear of cars so take care. Pacific and Silver Gull and Crested Tern are common along the coastlines. But there are some Birding Hotspots its worth checking out...

Birds of King Island, c/- KI NRMG, 5 George Str., Currie, Tasmania, 7256

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# Birding Hotspots Around the Island

The following list identifies provides some good birding sites and should be used in conjunction with a comprehensive map of King Island. The list starts in the north of the island and works roughly east, south, west and back to north. If you are short of time, head to the sites with \*\* beside them. They provide the most diverse range of habitats in one area and ergo, a range of different species.

**Cape Wickham Lighthouse:** When there is a good wind and sea running, this spot can be good for seabirds. Nankeen Kestrel breed here and some grassland birds such as Richard's Pipit. Drive to Cape Wickham Lighthouse and walk from there.

**Disappointment Bay:** Shorebirds such as Hooded Plover can be present and KI Black Currawong (Ki subspecies - Vulnerable) breed in the scrub here. Also good in the autumn and spring with the arrival and departure of migrating Tasmanian Silvereye, Flame Robins and Grey Fantail Drive to picnic area and walk from there. Road turns north-east off Cape Wickham Road.

**Penny's Lagoon:** A deep hanging lake, there are often Musk Duck seen here. Also bush birds such as Dusky Robin, Grey Fantail etc. Gas BBQs are available and its a great spot for a picnic or a swim in the summer. Drive to Lavinia Reserve and take turn to Penny's Lagoon.

**Saltwater Creek Walk:** Much of this area is regenerating after the 2007 fires. Part of the Lavinia State Reserve, the track leads down into the Nook Swamp although it gets very rough as you get further along. Bush and grassland birds are seen along it including Olive Whistler, New Holland Honeyeater, Flame and Dusky Robin, Dusky and White-browed Wood-swallow and many others. While in the area take a walk or drive up to Council Hill lookout where there is a good view of the mid-north of the island. Drive from North Road along Reekara Rd to a sharp right (south) turn. Salt-water track is unmarked but you will see a rough track heading east at this sharp corner. Walk along this as far as you want to go.

**Bootlace Private Forest Reserve:** A 2 km return walk wanders through a highly biodiverse, pristine and covenanted mixed eucalypt forest. Several threatened species live or have been recorded here including Swift Parrot. By appointment only \$5 pp. Kate 0417487263

**\*\*Sea Elephant Estuary:** This is a RAMSAR site. Waterbirds include various ducks, Black Swans, Pied Oystercatchers, White-faced Heron, Greenshank in the summer months and many others. A board-walk trail leads down from the car park, along the edge of the estuary and includes a bird hide. Bush birds are also seen here such as Grey Fantail, Silvereyes, King Island Tasmanian Thornbill etc. Past this walk there is salt marsh. You may need gumboots depending on the tides and time of year if you choose to go here. White-fronted chats are common and Orange Bellied Parrots use this site on their migrations. Drive along to the end of Sea Elephant Road to car park. Walk from there. There are picnic and toilet facilities here.

**\*\*Pegarah State Forest:** This is now a closed forest and includes some of the oldest remaining eucalypt forest on King island. Many bush birds can be seen here and it is home to both

the King Island Brown Thornbill, the King Island Scrubtit and the King Island Green Rosella. There are a number of tracks leading through the forest but some are impassable by car. Entry from Pegarah Road.

**Pegarah Private Nature Reserve:** Unique Bird, Fauna & Flora. 100 acres GPS mapped, signage, easy grade tracks. By appointment only. 03 6461 1201

**Grassy Harbour:** One of the largest Little Blue Penguin colonies on King Island is found here. A walk along the breakwater just after dusk is very rewarding. No special lighting is available so you will need to take a torch. Please cover these with red cellophane (available from the Post Office in Currie) so the birds aren't blinded. If you don't feel like walking then just sit on the foreshore and some birds will come waddling past. Nearby, immediately behind Sandblow Beach, is a large Short-tailed Shearwater colony. The shearwaters also return to their burrows around dusk and the whole area can become very 'bird busy' for sometime. Be careful if driving as many birds cross the road and they have no vehicle sense. Why should they have?

**Stokes Point:** The southern most point of King Island, where Bass Strait meets the Southern Ocean, is a barren, wind-swept and beautiful place that is a bit of an adventure to reach - but worth the trip. In a good wind, it is a good place for seabirds such as Australian Gannett, albatross and Short-tailed Shearwater. Double-banded Plover overwinter on King Island, and can often be seen here during the winter months, while during the summer Ruddy Turnstone work the kelp on the beaches. White-fronted Chats are usually present in good numbers. Drive to the end of South Road.

**Calcified Forest Walk:** The track leading to the Calcified Forest is lined by heathland and old growth Banksia scrub and has good numbers of small birds such as Olive Whistler, Silvereye, King Island Tasmanian Scrubwren and Thornbills, all the Honeyeaters and Painted Button-quail have been recorded. Park at the Calcified Forest car park and walk from there.

**Copperhead Walk:** Leaving from Seal Rocks car park this walk wanders along the cliffs and is a great spot for seabirds such as Australian Gannet, Short-tailed Shearwater and albatross when there is a good wind and scrubland birds such as Olive Whistler, Silvereyes, Dusky and Flame Robins, when the wind is still.

**Pearshape Lagoon:** This is a closed Nature Reserve but there is a good viewing spot from South Road. Waterbirds including a variety of ducks includingmBlue-billed and Pink Eared Duck have been recorded here. Others include Australasian and Hoary-headed Grebe, Black Swan, Eurasian Coot and Purple Swamphen. Cape Barren Geese are sometimes present grazing along the northern bank although there are also a significant number of domestic geese present.

**Burgess Bay and Netherby Point:** The rocky foreshore that runs south from the Currie Harbour to British Admiral Beach is a good spot for Ruddy Turnstone, White-fronted chat, Black and Pied Oystercatchers, Crested Turn and other shore birds. There is a road that leads along much of this coast so it is almost all drivable. Access is by driving to the Currie Museum, continuing past it down to the shoreline and turning south.

**Little Porky Beach and Porky Creek Estuary:** The mix of fresh and salt water supports many shorebirds and some waterbirds. Drive down Barnes Road (just beside the Cheese Factory at Loorana), turning south at the beach and parking on the headland. Walk south from there into Little Porky Beach. This is a great beach walk and you can keep going if you wish into Whalebone and further south. Shorebirds and beach-nesting birds such as Hooded and Red-capped Plover, Black-fronted Dotterel, Red-necked Stints, Pacific Golden Plover, Pacific Gull and many others have been recorded here.

**\*\* Shag Lagoon Bird Hide:** This small lagoon is susceptible to water level variation, but can be a great spot for waterbirds including Latham's Snipe, and various visitors passing through as well as some locals. Always worth checking it is found on the Northern side of Heddles Road.

**\*\* Yellow Rock Bush and Beach Walk to Coopers Bluff:** This is a gorgeous walk and includes opportunities to see bush, water and shorebirds. Sea Eagles are often observed here and it is home to a good number of King Island Black Currawong (Ki subspecies - vulnerable). A short walk through the bush along the side of the Yellow Rock River provides opportunities to see small bush-birds such as KI Suburb Fairy Wren( Ki subspecies) KI Tasmanian Thornbill (KI subspecies) and waterbirds such as Black Swan and Musk Duck. The track leads over sand dunes and heathland onto a long Sandy Beach. Fairy Terns quite often set up a breeding colony on the edge of the Dunes near here, so be aware and keep well clear of any colony. If you are swooped you know they are nesting or have young, so take great care and move away.. Fairy Terns are listed as Vulnerable and ideally you should keep at least 50 yards away from any nesting colony. Heading south along the beach, - you may have a shallow wade across the river at this point especially in the winter/spring when water levels are higher - walk, past the wreck of the Shannon to Coopers Bluff. This area is now changing as a result of Sea Level Rise. It used to be a perfect beach-nesting bird site in the higher dry sand, however while this is not always so these days, it is still worth checking for birds such as Hooded and Red-capped Plover, Black and Pied Oystercatcher, Bar-tailed Godwits, Sanderlings, Red-necked Stints, Pacific Golden Plover and other birds of the shore. Park in the car park at the end of North Yellow Rock Road and walk from there. About 2 km each way.

**\*\* The Springs and Lake Flannigan:** We are now back at the northern end of the island. The Springs Road heads to the west from Cape Wickham Road. Travelling over farmland you arrive at the southern end of Lake Flannigan. Just as the road heads up another hill you will see a short track to the right where you can park and take a walk along the lake edge. A great spot for observing lots of waterbirds as well as bush-birds in the mature Leptospernum and Melaleuca forest that runs along its edge. Further along the road there is an interesting historical memorial to early settlers on the left and more open but unfarmed land and sand dune scrub. Many bush and scrubland birds can be seen here. Finally you come to a round-about where you look out into the Southern Ocean, Christmas and New Year Islands. The northern end of Phogues Bay - a very long sandy and good surfing beach – is on the southern side and rocky foreshore on the northern. Birds found here include beach-nesting birds as well as your migratory waders, seabirds and Sea Eagles.