

Nature Calendar by Ian Hutton Lord Howe Island Flora & Fauna expert

January

It is the height of summer and seabird activity is frenetic. Chicks of the early breeding species, Sooty Terns, Brown Noddies and Masked Boobies are fledging. A colony of Sooty Terns breeds in the spectacular setting of Mt. Eliza's summit. Throughout the lowland forests the endemic cicadas emerge from their buried larval stage.

Black-winged Petrels lay their eggs in the first week of January. The first of the Red-tailed Tropicbirds hatch. Fleshfooted and Wedge-tailed Shearwater eggs hatch. The tiny White-bellied Storm Petrels lay their eggs late in the month. Kermadec Petrels are breeding on Ball's Pyramid.

Peak flowering continues amongst the mountain plants with many blooms on the Island Cedar, Corokia, Fitzgeraldii, Pumpkin Tree and Greenplum. The Mountain Rose, which lines the mountain streams, is also in flower. On the lowlands, the Banyan drops its ripe fruits.

February

Coral Spawning. Muttonbird and black winged petrel chicks are hatching. Common noddies and red tailed tropic birds continue to hatch.

One of the Island's most distinctive trees is flowering – the buttressed scalybark, Black Grape, bloodwood, Mountain Daisy, Brachycome, Moorei Orchid and Blue Plum are also in flower.

March

Breeding cycle of the summer bird colonies is drawing to a close, but a most dramatic event takes place in the southern mountains. Tens of thousands of Providence Petrels arrive for their winter breeding season. Their dramatic courtship flights and calls make the ascent of Mt. Gower a memorable experience. These birds show a curious response to human calls, crashing to the ground and allowing themselves to be picked up.

Spring and summer flowering trees are fruiting...Big Mountain palm, Red Berry Wood, Christmas Bush, Moorei Orchid, Juniper and Bullybush are also in flower.

April

The White Terns lay their single egg on a bare branch. Laying season is spread over a long period from October to April. Autumn is the time when mature visiting shorebirds assume breeding plumage before their long migration north. Four species breed above the Arctic Circle, in Alaska and Siberia: Bar Tailed Godwit, Turnstone, Pacific Golden Plover and Whimbrel. Another regular visitor is the Double banded plover, which breeds in New Zealand in summer.

Plants in bloom include Juniper, Bullybush, Bloodwood, Christmas Bush, Axehandlewood, Big Mountain Palm and Exocarpus.

May

See the departure of the muttonbirds and black winged petrels flying back to the Northern Pacific. Red-tailed Tropicbirds, Brown Noddies and White Terns also leave the area for milder climates. Winter breeding Providence Petrels and Little Shearwaters lay their eggs.

Hopwoods flower May to July.

June

The seabird colonies are mainly quiet now but at Muttonbird Point the Masked Booby can be observed. They have a prolonged breeding cycle June to December.

An endemic tree known as Island Apple produces a floral stalk directly from the trunk, often near ground level.

July

Providence Petrel chick hatch in their burrow on the mountain summits. Little Shearwaters are still sitting on their eggs. Most other seabirds are absent except for the Masked Booby and Grey Ternlet which are not migratory.

Winter flowering plants include Tamana, Island Apple, Leucopogon, Christmas Bush, Coprosma, Rapanea and Westringia. Endemic Hotbark tree also begins to flower.

August

On Roach Island, little Shearwater chicks are hatching in deep burrows. By the end of the month the terns are landing at night on the Admiralty Islands. In the last days of August, the first of the Muttonbirds arrive.

September

The Muttonbirds (Flesh-footed and Wedge-tailed Shearwaters) return. The grey Ternlet is the first of the summer breeders to lay – a single egg in early September.

Lord Howe Island's landbirds start nesting in the spring. The most numerous of these is the tiny Lord Howe White-eye. The English Blackbird and Songthrush are found in most gardens. The local subspecies of Golden Whistler is a conspicuous and confiding bird.

The Kentia Palm (opposite), the island's endemic plant species, is flowering. Other flowering plants include Pimelia, Kava, Stinkwood, Pandorea and the lowland Bush Orchid.

October

The Red-tailed Tropicbird is breeding along the cliffs. Lord Howe Island has the largest breeding colony in the world. Migrant waders returning from Arctic breeding grounds.

By the end of the month the first of the summer flowers are in evidence – Sallywood, Mountain Rose, Pumpkin Tree, Island pine and the Boar Tree. Flowers of the Wedding Lily only last a single day. This plant is endemic, from a genus otherwise found only in Southern Africa.

November

Masked Booby chicks are present in all stages of growth. Grey Ternlets have fledged. Providence Petrel chicks have fledged also. The Black Winged Petrel is one of the last summer birds to arrive. Muttonbird colonies are relatively quiet as many birds leave the island after mating for a short honeymoon period before returning to lay their single egg in the last weeks of the month.

In the mountains the colourful island plants are starting to bloom. The Pumpkin Tree, a relative of the African Violet is in bloom. The Mountain Rose produces deep red 'powder puff' flowers in dense clusters.

December

One of the reasons for Lord Howe's inclusion in the World Heritage list is its unique vegetation. There are about 160 species of native flowering plants and 57 species of ferns.

Many of these plants are best seen in summer while in flower. The Giant Heath known as *Fitzgeraldii* is a spectacular endemic tree common on the mountain summits. In the sheltered forest the extraordinary Pandanus Tree is beginning its flowering period.

Because of the distance from nearby continents, the vertebrate land fauna of Lord Howe is confined to one species of bat and two small lizard species. However there are many species of insects and land snails. In the creeks there are found two tiny freshwater crustaceans – a shrimp and a crab.