

FIRST SEABIRD CENSUSES AT SEAL ROCK

P.A. SHELTON & R.K. BROOKE

Seal Rock (Fig. 1) is situated less than half a kilometre from the mainland in Frikkiesbaai, Caledon District, at 34 37S, 19 24E. It rises to a height of *ca.* 8 m above sea level and covers an area of *ca.* 500 m². Although there are deposits of guano on the leeward or northern side, they are not of such extent or volume as to be worth commercial exploitation. There is no soil on the island and the rocks support no vegetation, not even lichens. Seal Rock may be approached from the land during spring low tides through waist-deep water, passing a smaller rocky islet, with a short swim across a deep channel at the end. Alternatively, a landing may be made from a boat in calm conditions.

Seal Rock was visited on 2 April 1979 by PAS and on 31 December 1979 by RKB, apparently the first landings by biologists since Rand (1963) implies that he had not landed there. Additional observations have been made from the mainland by R.W. Summers on 17 January 1976 and by J. Cooper on 7 August 1976 and 17 December 1977. Counts of occupied and unoccupied nests as well as of birds not attending nests on these occasions are given in Table 1. In addition to the counts made at Seal Rock, JC observed 11 occupied nests of Crowned Cormorant *Phalacrocorax coronatus* on the unnamed rocky islet between Seal Rock and the mainland (Fig. 1) on 30 December 1979.

From a census of all Cape islands and most offshore rocks conducted in the winter of 1979 (Sea Fisheries Institute unpubl. data), it is evident that in the winter of that year the Bank Cormorant *P. neglectus* colony at Seal Rock was the second largest after those at Dassen Island and represented 22 % of the breeding pairs counted south of the Olifants River. The Bank Cormorant population in South Africa is estimated at 3 000 birds and this species is listed in the South African Red Data Book - Aves as uncommon and vulnerable (Siegfried *et al.*, 1976). A recent census has shown that some Bank Cormorant colonies off South West Africa/Namibia are large and the species as such would not appear to be endangered (SFI unpubl. data). The South African population is certainly vulnerable, as may be seen by the fact that there were no occupied nests in December 1979 due, apparently, to the effects of humans visiting the island (Table 1).

While 22 Whitebreasted Cormorant *P. carbo* nests were recorded in August 1976, only seven were counted in April 1979. This difference may also be an indicator of increased human disturbance since this species is easily disturbed from the nest if approached and the parents are slow to return to the nest (pers.obs.). This greatly increases the chance that eggs and small chicks will be taken by Kelp Gulls *Larus dominicanus* before their parents return.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We are obliged to J. Cooper for the use of his and Dr Summer's counts.

REFERENCES

- RAND, R.W. 1963. The biology of guano-producing seabirds.
 4. Composition of colonies on the Cape Islands. *Investl Rep. Div. Fish. Un. S. Afr.* 43: 1-32.
- SIEGFRIED, W.R., FROST, P.G.H., COOPER, J. & KEMP, A.C. 1976.
 South African Red Data Book - Aves. *Sth Afr. Natn. Sci. Progr. Rpt* 7: 1-108.

P.A. Shelton, Sea Fisheries Institute, Pvt Bag, Sea Point 8060, South Africa
 R.K. Brooke, Percy FitzPatrick Institute of African Ornithology, University of Cape Town, Rondebosch 7700, South Africa

TABLE 1

COUNTS OF OCCUPIED NESTS (ON), UNOCCUPIED NESTS (UN) AND NUMBERS OF INDIVIDUAL BIRDS PRESENT (P) AT SEAL ROCK, 1976 TO 1979

Species	17 Jan 1976	7 Aug 1976	17 Dec 1977	2 Apl 1979	Dec 1979
Cape Cormorant <i>Phalacrocorax capensis</i>				200 P	Few P
Bank Cormorant <i>P. neglectus</i>	7 ON	26 P	25 ON	113 ON	40 UN
Whitebreasted Cormorant <i>P. carbo</i>		22 UN		7 UN	1 P
Crowned Cormorant <i>P. coronatus</i>			27 ON		*
Black Oystercatcher <i>Haematopus moquini</i>					1 P
Ruddy Turnstone <i>Arenaria interpres</i>					6 P
Kelp Gull <i>Larus dominicanus</i>					4 P
Hartlaub's Gull <i>L. hartlaubii</i>					2 P
Speckled Rock Pigeon <i>Columba guinea</i>					5 P

* Two eggs had rolled into cracks and fragments of an adult were found

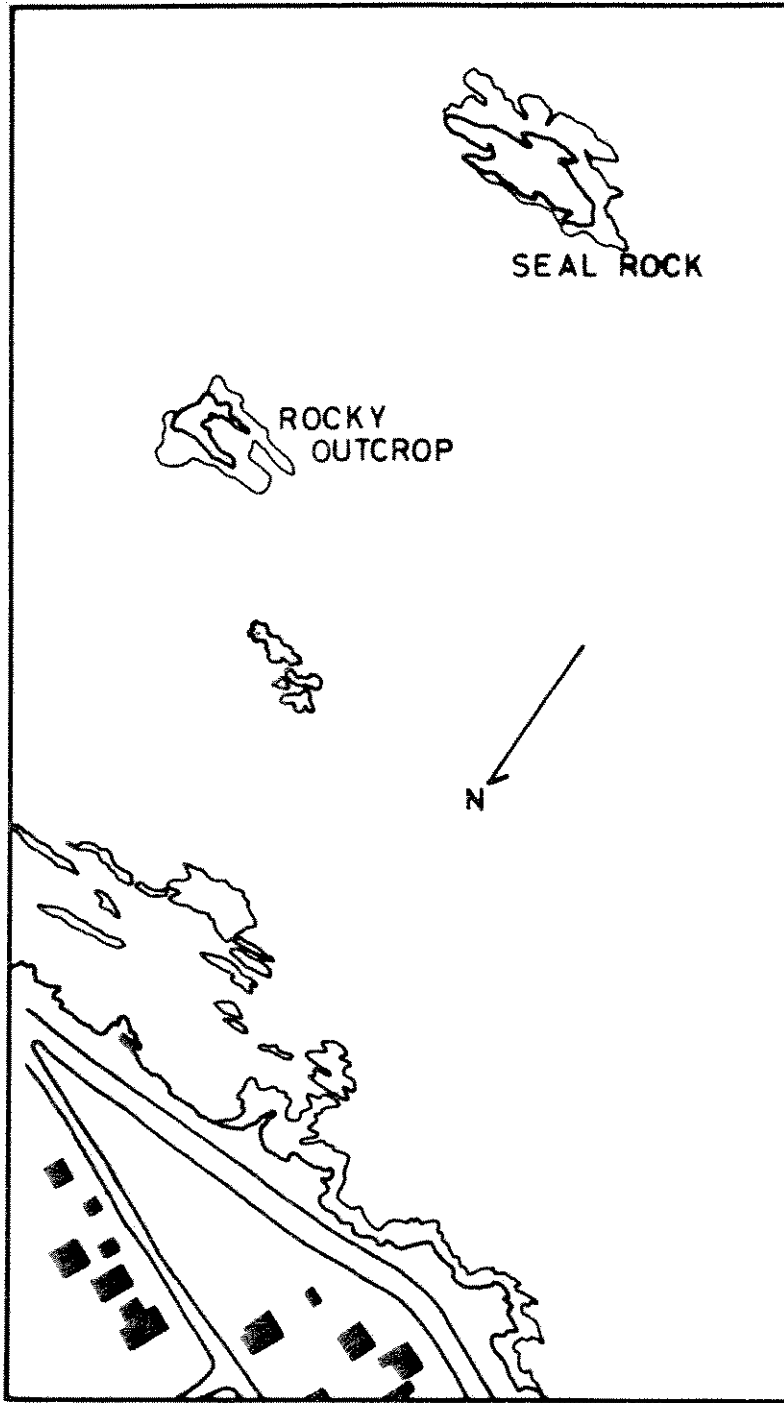


FIGURE 1

SEAL ROCK AND SMALLER ROCKY OUTCROP IN FRIKKIESBAAI