

Orford Fairy Tern breeding colony 2020



This is a brief report of our observations of the Fairy Tern breeding colony on the Orford sandspit. We visited the colony 7 times during January and February, 2020 to photographically document the progress of the Fairy Terns' breeding season.

At all times we remained outside of the fenced areas. We did not visit the Fairy Tern colony for 16 days during their critical nesting time. Long telephoto lenses, teleconverters and a 20x spotting scope were used for our photos and observations. Most photos have been heavily cropped.

Summary

We are pleased to report that the 2020 Fairy Tern breeding colony on the Raspins Beach sandspit was an outstanding success. Our observations showed that in the 2020 colony there were....

- at least 40 individual adult Fairy Terns
- at least 27 individual Fairy Tern chicks
- 1 immature Fairy Tern (year old)
- 1 Little Tern, *Sterna albifrons*

Throughout our visits to Raspins Beach, we saw the Fairy Terns using the sandspit, backwater and sanctuary areas and we hope that these areas will continue to be protected.

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Thursday 2nd January, 2020

We saw in excess of 30 adult Fairy Terns at the Orford sandspit this morning and a few were already displaying courtship and nesting behaviour.



Orford, 2nd January 2020

Monday 6th January, 2020

Fairy Tern mating and nesting activity was continuing at the Orford sandspit today - we counted 17 nesting birds and saw 2 mating pairs.



Orford, 6th January 2020

Wednesday 22nd January, 2020

It's just over 2 weeks since we last visited the Fairy Tern colony at Orford and now there are some chicks - a dozen or more chicks and several birds still nesting or brooding young. Most parents are feeding and guarding 2 chicks - one parent guards and the other feeds. Later today an immature Fairy Tern (year old) joined the colony.



Orford, 22nd January 2020

Wednesday 29th January, 2020

We counted 40 adult birds in the air at one time today when something alarmed them. Several adults remained on the ground to guard the chicks. There were a couple of dozen chicks hatched, we estimated. We couldn't see all of the chicks from our position outside the fencing, as some were being fed behind a large log and others were close to the back of the temporary fencing and in the abutting permanently fenced area. An immature Fairy Tern (year old) joined the colony again.



Orford, 29th January 2020

Wednesday 5th February, 2020

We counted 26 chicks and estimated about 38 adults present, of which 5 were unpaired and 1 was immature (year old). Many of the chicks were in creches of up to 7 chicks with just one adult guarding the group. Quite a bit of fishing was going on in the sanctuary's lagoon and adult birds were flying in from the lagoon with fish to feed the chicks. Later when we walked around the track in front of the residences, there were 4 adult Fairy terns bathing and resting in the backwater.



Orford, 5th February 2020



Immature Fairy Tern, Orford, 5th February 2020

Wednesday 12th February, 2020

Overall numbers of adult Fairy Terns and chicks were roughly the same as last week. Many of the chicks were mobile and some were flying with the adults, so we were unable to count accurately. There was one new chick, a couple of days old and still in a brood nest. After a high tide in the middle of the day, there seemed to be a few more adults around and one **Little Tern, *Sterna albifrons*** was present in the colony within the temporarily fenced area. We estimated 40 adult Fairy Terns. In a photo taken of some adults resting on the sandbags today, 26 adult Fairy Terns can be counted which by no means represented all of the adults, as others were still guarding chicks and fishing. A couple of adult birds flew in from the direction of the backwater and some of the airborne chicks were using the sandbag channel to practice skimming and dipping manoeuvres.



Orford, 12th February 2020



Little Tern, *Sterna albifrons*, Orford, 12th February 2020

Tuesday 18th February, 2020

Most of the Fairy Tern chicks were flying competently today and were so mobile that we found it impossible to count or even estimate numbers. Some younger chicks were still being fed by their parents towards the back of the temporarily fenced and within the permanently fenced area, but the majority of chicks were spread out along the beach from where they were flying and practicing dipping and fishing. We saw 3 of the fledged juveniles catching fish to feed themselves.



Fledgling Fairy Tern, Orford, 18th February 2020



Fledgling Fairy Tern, Orford, 18th February 2020

Tuesday 25th February, 2020

Our last visit to the Raspins Beach sandspit was early in the morning, Tuesday 25th February. We saw no Fairy Terns and the temporary fencing had been removed. There would have been at least 2 chicks that, if they had survived until then, would have been too young to fly. The timing of our last visit was unfortunate, as there was a drone flying over the beach when we arrived. As we approached, the male operator recovered his drone and disappeared quickly. If any Fairy Terns were there, they would have been too alarmed by the drone to be out in the open at that time. On previous visits we had seen chicks being fed in the abutting permanent sanctuary area, so it's possible that a few Fairy Tern families were still within the sanctuary.

