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Abeline and other Wanderers

A homing pigeon released from Devonport, Tasmania, in August 1997, should have flown home to the Tasman Peninsula. Instead she set out on an epic journey on sea winds that took her 1500km from her destination.

Abeline the pigeon is not the only member of an exotic species to be blown to Macquarie Island.

An intrepid adventurer



Abeline: a pigeon that flew from Devonport, Tasmania to Macquarie Island. Photo courtesy the Mercury.

The presence of a homing pigeon astonished scientists on Macquarie Island when they found her amidst a colony of penguins in August 1997. They checked her identification tag and contacted her racing club. Her owner, Ken Gore was quickly notified. He rang the station and gave instructions on what to feed the pigeon. As the adventurous pigeon had no name, Mr Gore decided to name her 'Abeline' after another intrepid explorer, the Dutch navigator, Abel Tasman.

Abeline was brought back to Hobart aboard the Antarctic supply ship, *Aurora Australis*. Although the pigeon looked plump and healthy when she arrived back in Hobart, she was not released immediately. A veterinary officer working for the Australian Quarantine Inspection Service (AQIS) carefully examined her and tested for bird diseases such as avian influenza and Newcastle disease. The Quarantine Service did not want to release Abeline earlier. This is because little is known about what diseases, if any, the Macquarie Island penguins and other sea birds might carry, and which the pigeon might have contracted. Luckily, Abeline was given a clean bill of health and handed back to her owner three weeks later.



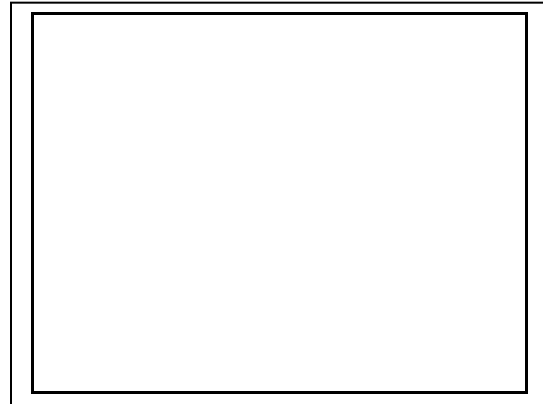
A native resident of Macquarie Island – the Skua.
Photo Geof Copson.

Abeline is not the only foreign bird to have turned up unexpectedly on Macquarie Island, but she is probably the first racing pigeon to have been found there. Her arrival was of great interest to Dr Clive Crossley, a scientist who has spent years studying the arrivals of animals on Macquarie Island. Dr

Crossley says that winds carry large numbers of insects, mites, spiders and other small species from areas in southern Australia.

Winds can reach speeds of up to 100 km/h, which means that it takes only 18-24 hours, to transport these 'biota' or living organisms, from Australia to Macquarie Island.

Humans can also spread these invertebrates around Macquarie Island. Dr Crossley and his research team use wind and light traps to catch tiny invertebrates and they then map the locations of invertebrate animals around the island.



Researcher, Tavis Potts with Royal penguins on Macquarie Island.
Photo courtesy Tavis Potts

Tavis Potts, a postgraduate researcher with the Institute of Antarctic and Southern Ocean Studies (IASOS) at the University of Tasmania, visited Macquarie Island in December 1999. While he was there he collected and identified the insects caught in the wind traps. Tavis Potts and Dr Clive Crossley are interested in where these wind-borne

life forms come from and whether any insects and spiders that arrive on Macquarie Island are able to survive in the harsh, subantarctic island climate. They are also trying to assess whether rising temperatures resulting from the Greenhouse Effect, could increase the survival chances of foreign

They are also researching whether insects and spiders might carry viruses that could affect mammals, birds and other species on Macquarie Island.



Insect trap on Macquarie Island. Photo Tavis Potts.

References

Articles in the Mercury 24 Sept 1997, p5 (Libby Sutherland and Jane Gillard) and 16 October 1997, p5.

ASAC Project No 999: 'Insect migration and monitoring studies on Macquarie Island', Australian Antarctic Division website, <http://www.antdiv.gov.au/search/index.html>

Further **R**eadings

You can read other stories about animals introduced to Macquarie Island in:

[The Sealers Legacy](#)

&

['Scobie Pye – Rat Scientist.](#)