

UNUSUAL SIGHTING ON 9 MILE BEACH: A CONSERVATION MESSENGER?



Photo by BWSP Rangers 12mar23.

Three things had us curious. One, what bird is it?

I asked Milly Formby², Birdlife Australia bird nerd (expert on shorebirds) and ultralight pilot flying solo around Australia to raise awareness of many species becoming extinct. She identified it as a juvenile Australasian Gannet³ *Morus serrator*.

Two, if it's a juvenile, a term used for birds able to fly but still dependent on parents, what's it doing here well away from a rookery, Broughton Island?

An internet search revealed this species transitions to adult plumage (shape and colour) over several years. I remember watching with binoculars groups of adult birds gliding along below Dudley Bluff at sea level. So, maybe this bird just needed a rest along the way. The beach (foredune) can be a temporary respite - if it doesn't have to escape bird predators, off-leash dogs, kids or 4WDs.

Third, what to do - if it's still there the next day? Well, BWSP Rangers contacted WIRES⁴, who soon arrived and attempted to cage, feed and rest it off site. By this stage, the bird had recovered enough and flew out to sea. It's great to see how a team effort can result in a successful conservation story.

Grahame Feletti (gfeletti@hotmail.com) for Belmont Wetlands State Park Rangers, 7th March 2023

¹ 9-Mile Beach. <https://www.belmontwetlands.com.au/maps-and-downloads.html>

² Milly Formby. <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2022-02-19/milly-formby-flying-plane-shorebird-awareness/100832530>

³ Australasian Gannet. <https://www.birdsinbackyards.net/species/Morus-serrator>

⁴ WIRES (NSW) <https://www.wires.org.au/>