

## SHORT NOTE

### Notes on Ladys Rocks, South West Africa

by

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Received: 3 October 1979

American sealers from the schooner *Antarctic* under the command of Captain Benjamin Morrell visited most of the islands along the west coast of southern Africa between September 1828 and May 1829 to collect skins of the Cape fur seal *Arctocephalus pusillus*. Morrell's (1832) description of that journey is one of the few published accounts by early visitors to the coast of SWA. The journal of a member of Morrell's crew provides more detail of the 1828/29 cruise than Morrell's version. Portions of it have been reproduced by Best and Shaughnessy (1979), who attributed it to John Keeler and compared it with the account by Morrell. Keeler recorded three groups of islands between Lüderitz and Possession Island, namely Shag Rock, South Rocks and Ladys Rocks. Best and Shaughnessy deduced that the first two refer to Halifax and Long Islands, respectively. Judging from the time that Keeler recorded for a return journey from Possession Island in a small sailing boat, and by the absence of other possible islets, they deduced that the Ladys Rocks group was in Abenteuer Bay.

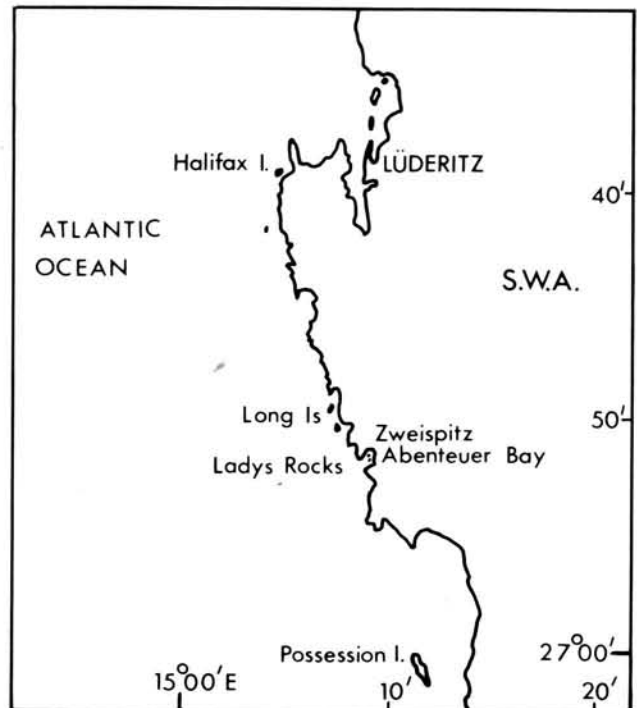


FIGURE 1: Map showing the location of Ladys Rocks.

There is a group of three small islands situated at  $26^{\circ}51,5'S$ ,  $15^{\circ}09'E$  in a small bay between Lüderitz and Possession Island (Fig. 1). The bay is named Abenteuer on the 1:50 000 topographic map 2615 CC published in 1976, but Bain's Bay on the South African Navy chart SAN 110 and in the South African Sailing Directions (Tripp 1975). The latter includes an aerial photograph of the islands. The northern headland of the bay is consistently known as Zweispietz. As the islands are not named in any of the aforementioned sources, and as there are no other islands in the bay, it may be inferred that it is these islands that Keeler named Ladys Rocks.

Landings were made at Ladys Rocks on 24 January 1979 from the Sea Fisheries patrol boat *Nautilus II*. They are 0,5 km from the coast of Diamond Area No. 1. The northern rock was bare except for small numbers of roosting bank cormorants (*Phalacrocorax neglectus*) and kelp gulls (*Larus dominicanus*). Although it is 6 m high, its size (10 × 5 m) appeared insufficient to prevent large waves washing over it.

The middle rock is 0,1 km south of the northern one. It is the largest (30 × 10 m), is 3 m high on the western (bare) side but is lower on the eastern side. A colony of 56 bank cormorants and one white-breasted cormorant (*P. carbo*) was nesting on a guano deposit on the eastern side of the rock. The bank cormorants were sitting on eggs and chicks; the white-breasted cormorant was guarding a single chick half its size. Kelp gulls were also nesting on the island: five chicks were found and two nests (c/2 and c/3). Forty kelp gulls, 34 Hartlaub's gulls (*L. hartlaubii*), six swift terns (*Sterna bergii*) and 20 turnstones (*Arenaria interpres*) flew off the rock as it was approached. Adjacent to the guano patch was another guano-encrusted area which was bare of birds. The presence of Hartlaub's gulls and swift terns on the rock suggests that they may have deposited the guano while nesting there in recent years. The swift terns and turnstones have been referred to by Cooper *et al* (in press).

The southern rock (8 × 4 m) supported only roosting cormorants: 42 bank, two white-breasted, two Cape (*P. capensis*) and one crowned (*P. coronatus*). The close proximity of this rock to the middle one (10 m distant) probably explains why Tripp (1975) only recognised two rocks in the bay.

A second visit to Ladys Rocks was made on 10 July 1979. Cormorants and gulls were roosting there, but none was nesting.

Despite the fact that no seals were seen on Ladys Rocks during either visit (of which the former occurred when large numbers were ashore at nearby breeding colonies), the topography of the rocks (particularly the middle one) suggests that a small colony of seals could have existed there in the past. According to Rand (1972) there are five islands off the coast of SWA where

Cape fur seals formerly occurred (Mercury, Ichaboe, Seal, Penguin and Possession), but were apparently exterminated. Best and Shaughnessy (1979) added Ladys Rocks to that list (on the basis of the visit reported here), as well as Plumpudding Island.

The status of the bank cormorant is listed as uncommon and vulnerable by Siegfried *et al* (1976). As Ladys Rocks contains a small breeding colony of that species, access to them should be prohibited and the birds there protected.

#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am grateful to P. B. Best, G. L. Shaughnessy and A. J. Williams for commenting on an earlier draft of this note, and to Sea Fisheries Inspector E. J. Mulder for making observations at the rocks.

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