

SEABIRD ISLANDS

No. 234

Rum Island, Furneaux Group, Tasmania

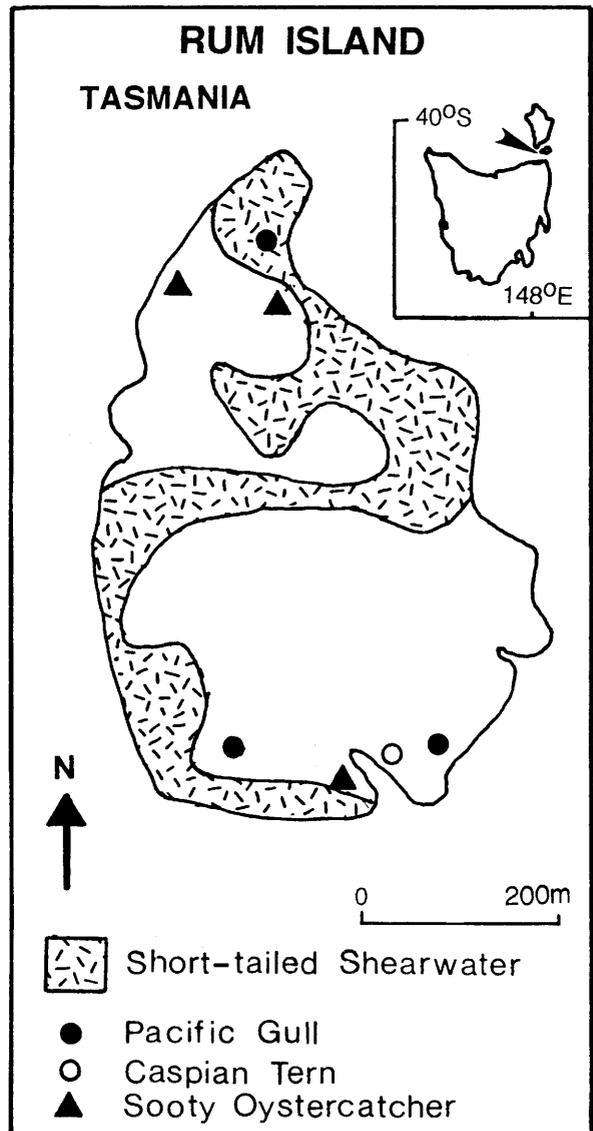
Location: 40°30'S, 148°04'E; 4 km off the south-west corner of Cape Barren Island in the Furneaux Group, Tasmania. It is separated from the nearest land, Preservation Island, by a 100 m wide channel.

Status: Part of the *Sydney Cove* Historic Site.

Description: 13.2 ha. Oval-shaped, 500 m long and up to 300 m at the widest point. The island has an irregular granitic coastline interspersed with several sandy beaches. The largest beach is on the north-east side. Thomas Scott⁵ said it was low, and 'appears at a distance in form of two hillocks, having a hollow running across the centre'. The flat holds water occasionally during winter. The island has retained much of its original vegetation despite several attempts at acquiring the lease of the island over the years. The low shrubby vegetation on Rum Island is dominated by *Atriplex cineria*, *Helichrysum paraliium* and *Lavatera plebeia*. Grassy patches occur which comprise coastal tussock, *Poa poiformis*.

Landing: Easy anywhere around the island, particularly on the beaches.

Ornithological History: The island got its name when a large cargo of casks containing rum washed ashore with the beaching of the *Sydney Cove* in the channel between Preservation and Rum Islands on 9 February 1797. The crew came ashore on Preservation Island and during the next three months they lived largely on muttonbirds (Short-tailed Shearwaters), rice and rum, collecting muttonbirds also from nearby Rum Island³. In the 1820s, Scott described Rum Island as having no trees with muttonbirds and Cape Barren Geese both abundant in season. James Backhouse noticed pelicans and Cape Barren Geese on the island as he sailed by². Some 80 years later W. J. T. Armstrong¹ and J. D. Maclaine⁴, who visited separately, described some of the birdlife. There was no further description of its wildlife until John Whinray⁶ visited on 4 June 1976, 20 April 1978 and 15 December 1979, Irynej Skira on 6 December 1982 and Nigel Brothers on 27 November 1986.



Breeding Seabirds and Status

Eudyptula minor Little Penguin — Distributed widely all over the island with the highest numbers found at the western end amongst the Short-tailed Shearwaters. Estimated 100-150 pairs.

Puffinus tenuirostris Short-tailed Shearwater — Abundant over 4.42 ha. On 6 December 1982 burrow density calculated from 3 transects each 100 × 2 m and placed at random was 0.6 ± 0.1 burrows/m² (at 95% confidence limits ± 2 S.E.). Burrow density estimated on 27 November by Brothers from 15 transects, each 30 × 1 m, was 0.58 ± 0.1 burrows/m². Density (0.6) by area gives an estimated 26 550 burrows (range 22 125–30 975).

Haematopus fuliginosus Sooty Oystercatcher — N. P. Brothers recorded three pairs on nests and eggs on the southern and northern shorelines.

Larus pacificus Pacific Gull — N. P. Brothers (November 1986) found eight nests with eggs and small chicks. Six pairs were at the south-west end on an inland patch of *Disphyma crassifolium*. There was another nest on the shoreline east of them and one on a small stack on the north-east point of the island.

Sterna caspia Caspian Tern — I. J. Skira found one chick at the southern end in December 1982. N. P. Brothers, in November 1986 also located one nest at the south-west end of the island in a depression in *D. crassifolium* surrounded by bare granite slabs and adjacent to the Pacific Gull colony.

Factors Affecting Status

The catching of muttonbirds by amateur muttonbirders ceased in 1978 on proclamation of the Sydney Cove Historic Site. Some illegal poaching still occurs. The oil spill resulting from the grounding of the *Iron Baron* at the mouth of the Tamar River in northern Tasmania in July 1995 is thought to have resulted in the deaths of many penguins in the Furneaux Group. Overall, the low species diversity and the commonality in Tasmania of the breeding species present makes the status of the island adequate.

Other Seabirds Recorded

Pelecanus conspicillatus Australian Pelican²

Banding

Nil.

Bibliography

1. Armstrong, W. J. T. (1908). A visit to the Furneaux Group, Bass Strait. *Emu* 7: 181–184.
2. Backhouse, J. (1843). 'A narrative of a visit to the Australian colonies,' P. 98. (Hamilton, Adams and Co: London.)
3. Cumpston, J. S. (1973). 'First visitors to Bass Strait'. (Roebuck Society Publication Number 7: Canberra.)
4. Maclaine, J. D. (1908). Letter to the editors. *Emu* 8: 48–50.
5. Scott, T. (1828). Furneaux Isles. A short geographical memoir thereof. Mitchell Library. A606.
6. Whinray, J. S. (1982). Some bird records for Rum Island, Tasmania. *Vic. Nat.* 99: 52–56.

Date compiled: 14 November 1996.

N. P. Brothers, D. Pemberton and I. J. Skira, Parks and Wildlife Service, PO Box 44A, Hobart, Tasmania 7001.



- Rum Island from the air, with the southern end of Preservation Island to the north.

Photo: Land Information Services, Department of Environment and Land Management.