

SEABIRD ISLANDS

No. 235

Beagle Island, Furneaux Group, Tasmania

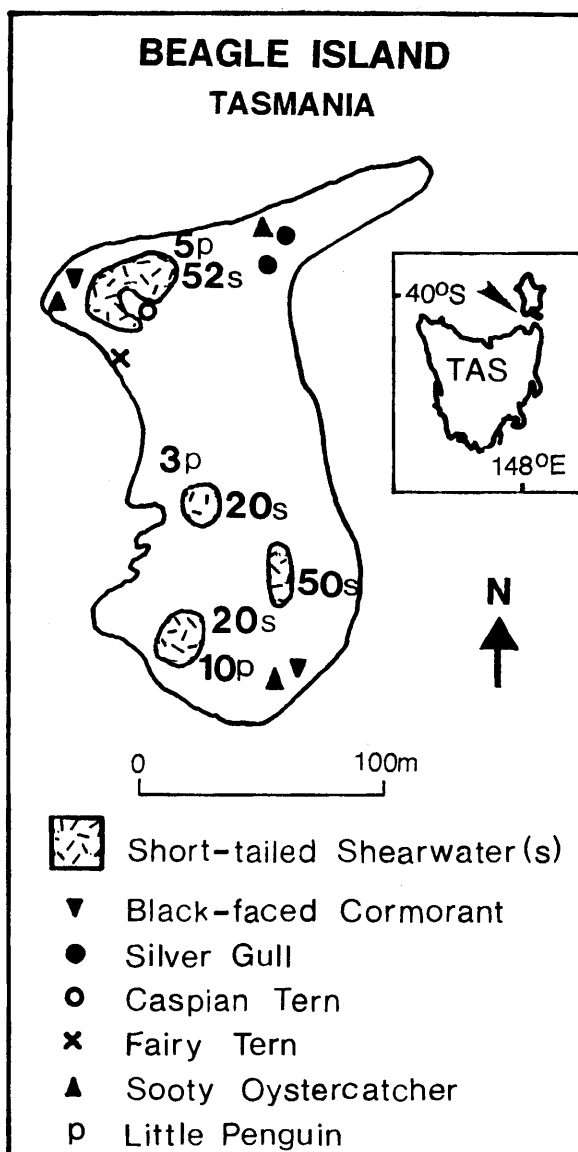
Location: 40°20'S, 147°55'E; 10 km north-west in a direct line from Cape Barren Island and 2.5 km south-east of Badger Island, in the Furneaux Group, Tasmania.

Status: Part of the Chappell Islands Nature Reserve.

Description: 1.33 ha. A low and rectangular island with a curved northern tip that encompasses a bay. There is a high point of bare granite at the southern end and a beach on the western side. Beagle Island is grassy with a few shrubs of saltbush *Atriplex cineria* and *Senecio capillifolius* dominating the burrow-nesting bird colonies. Some succulent herbs such as ice plant *Tetragonia implexicoma* and *Rhagodia candolleana* occur.

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

Ornithological History: The island is named after *HMS Beagle* which was commanded by Captain Stokes who surveyed the area in 1840⁴. However, the first description of the island is by Matthew Flinders who on 19 October 1798 'passed a rocky islet and observed a circular reef which seemed to connect the two together . . . after killing a few seals upon the granitic rocks, we weighed the anchor . . .'³. Due to its remote location and the immediate presence of boat-piercing rocks, Beagle Island has been irregularly visited. The first known description of its wildlife was by W. J. T. Armstrong on 15 November 1907¹. It made quite an impression on him being 'one of the most cheerful we had touched at', possibly because it increased his egg collection greatly. John Whinray⁵ visited on 6 February and 15 December 1979, I. J. Skira on 11 December 1983, and N. P. Brothers on 28 November 1986.



Breeding Seabirds and Status

Eudyptula minor Little Penguin — Noted by Whinray (February 1979) who found one downy chick, Skira (December 1983) who found one patch of 10 burrows mixed with those of shearwaters on the east coast, and Brothers (November 1986) who estimated the population at 18 burrows concentrated in small patches.

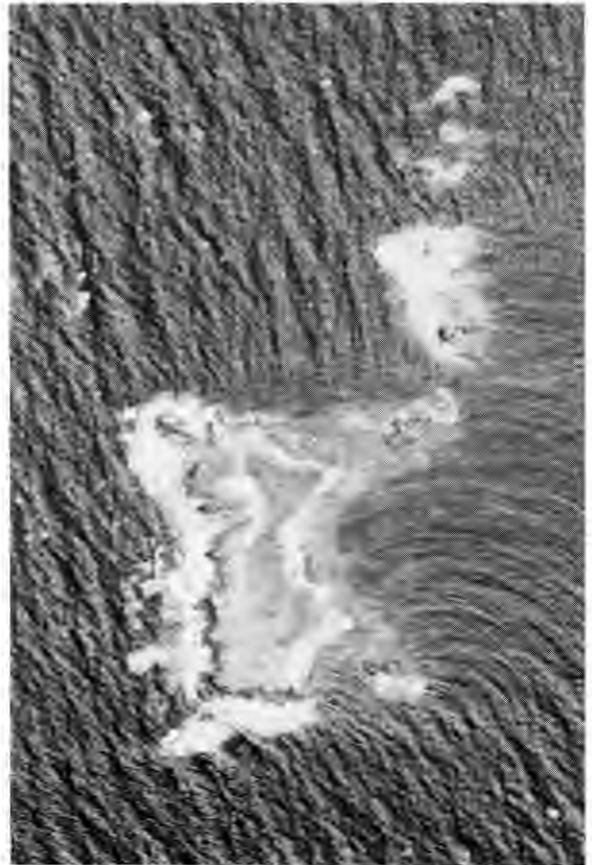
Puffinus tenuirostris Short-tailed Shearwater — Noted as a breeding species with either eggs or chicks by Whinray (February 1979, about 100 burrows), Skira (December 1983, about 150 burrows, and Brothers (November 1986, 142 burrows). Whether shearwaters were present during Armstrong's visit is not known, as he does not mention the occurrence of shearwater burrows on any of the islands he visited although they were known to occur on some. Brothers noted that the shearwater burrows were short and shallow with most having insufficient soil for burrowing.

Pelagodroma marina White-faced Storm Petrel — Armstrong (November 1907) found this species on eggs commonly distributed in the sandy ground amongst tussocks. Since his visit, it seems to have disappeared as a breeding species. Whinray (February 1979) found 'only one burrow which could have been made by this species'; the burrow was 'not in use in December'⁵. Brothers (November 1986) recorded the carcass of one bird. Their disappearance may be due to the presence of Short-tailed Shearwaters. Both species rarely co-exist where suitable habitat for both is present, and it is possible that since Armstrong's visit, the shearwater has become a recent breeding species displacing the storm-petrel.

Phalacrocorax fuscescens Black-faced Cormorant — In 1907 Armstrong came across a large colony 'in progress on the rocks' which he estimated to contain about 200 nests. On 6 February 1979 Whinray located about 200 nests on the western part of the north coast and the adjacent part of the north-west point. On 15 December 1979 he

estimated about 350 nests to be present in the south-east end of the island. Skira (December 1983) estimated between 150–200 nests on the south coast of Beagle Island containing many dead chicks. There were a further eight nests on the south-east side, and a deserted site at the north-western end of the island. Brothers (November 1986) counted 158 pairs on newly constructed nests in the south-east stretching for 40 m along the coast, and also noted the presence of old nests in the north-west.

Haematopus fuliginosus Sooty Oystercatcher — Brothers recorded three pairs, of which two (runners) were on the west coast and one pair (two eggs) on the east coast.



• Aerial view of Beagle Island.

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

Larus pacificus Pacific Gull — Armstrong (November 1907) recorded Pacific Gulls 'all flying about'. Whinray (December 1979) found seven nests, Skira (December 1983) eight nests with eggs or chicks, and Brothers (November 1986) 24 pairs with eggs, chicks or runners nesting all around the island.

Larus novaehollandiae Silver Gull — Brothers (November 1986) found two colonies at the north end with evidence of breeding in the form of dead chicks, old nests and dead adults. He estimated the population to number 30 pairs.

Sterna caspia Caspian Tern — All visitors have recorded one pair on eggs, either at the north or south end of the island.

Sterna bergii Crested Tern — The only breeding record is cited in Campbell² (1901) where he was informed that they breed on 'Bramble' Rock. Whinray⁵ surmises that this refers to Beagle Island. There are no other records for breeding. Crested Terns have a habit of regularly changing breeding sites in the Furneaux Group, so it is not unlikely that breeding has occurred on the island in the past.

Sterna nereis Fairy Tern — Whinray (December 1979) recorded eight nests with eggs or chicks in sand amongst driftwood near the northern end on the western beach.

Factors Affecting Status

Nothing is known of how many people land on Beagle Island but its remote location points to it having few visitors. There are no feral vertebrate species on the island.

Other Seabirds Recorded

<i>Pelecanoides urinatrix</i>	Diving-Petrel (dead)
<i>Pelecanus conspicillatus</i>	Australian Pelican

Banding

Nil.

Bibliography

1. Armstrong, W. J. T. (1908). A visit to the Furneaux Group, Bass Strait. *Emu* 7: 181–184.
2. Campbell, A. J. (1901). 'Nests and Eggs of Australian Birds'. (Pawson and Brailsford: Sheffield, England.)
3. Flinders, M. (1814). 'A Voyage to Terra Australis'. (G. and W. Nicol: London.)
4. Stokes, J. L. (1846). 'Discoveries in Australia: with an Account of the Coasts and Rivers Explored and Surveyed during the Voyage of HMS Beagle, in the Years 1837–38–39–40–41–42–43'. (T and W. Boone: London.)
5. Whinray, J. S. (1982). Some bird records for Beagle Reef, Tasmania. *Vic. Nat.* 99: 180–185.

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