

SEABIRD ISLANDS

No. 250

Lilliput Island (Small North-east Franklin Islet), Eyre Peninsula, South Australia

Location: 32° 26'S, 133° 42'E; in the Nuyts Archipelago, 600 m north-east of the north-eastern end of East Franklin Island and 16 km west of the mainland near the town of Smoky Bay.

Status: Currently unallotted Crown Land but recommended for inclusion in the Nuyts Archipelago Conservation Park "to protect important breeding and haul-out areas for Australian Sea-lions and New Zealand Fur-seals"³.

Description: This island of 9.63 ha has many granite slabs and boulders near the shoreline, and a steep rise to a flat calcarenite plateau of about 2 ha. The name 'Lilliput' was accepted by the South Australian Geographical Names Unit in June 2007; the unofficial name 'Small North-east Franklin Islet' has been used for it previously⁵.

Matthew Flinders did not refer to the island, although he sailed close to West Franklin and East Franklin Islands, which he named after midshipman John Franklin, who later was the governor of Tasmania and an Arctic explorer.

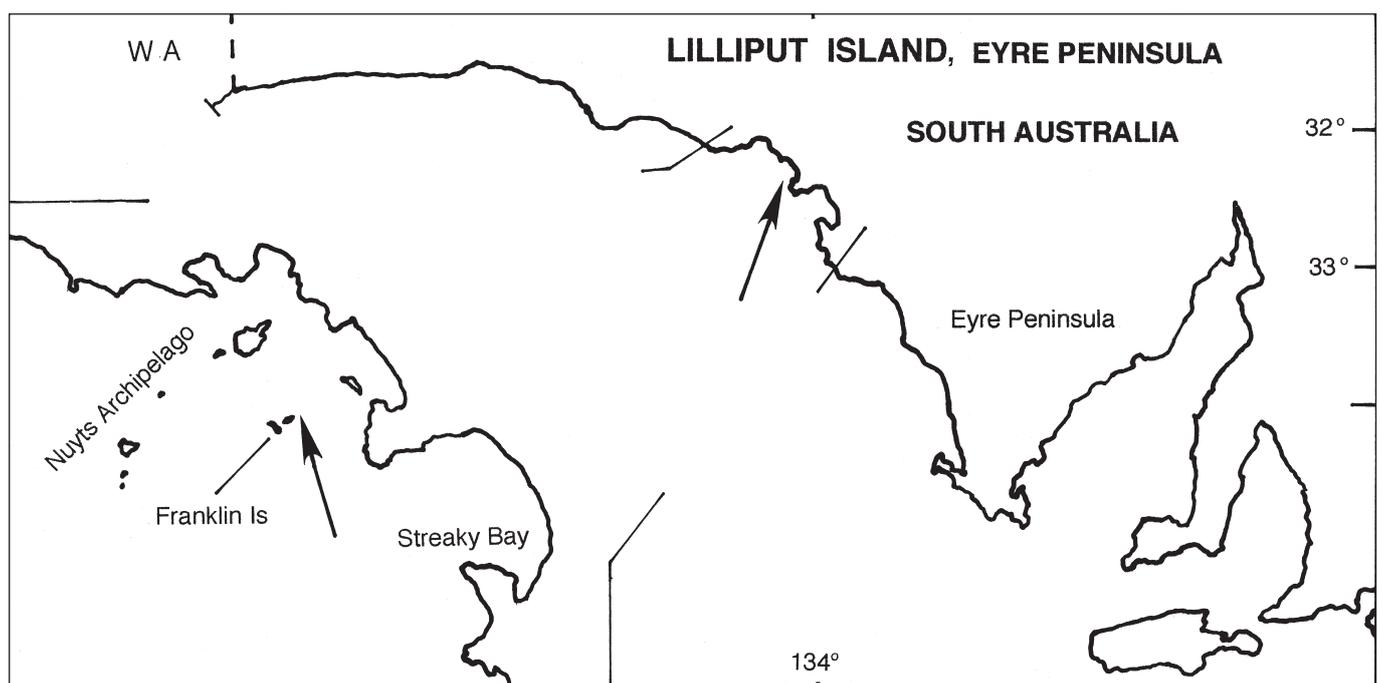
The island is an important breeding colony for the Australian Sea-lion *Neophoca cinerea*⁵, which was classified as a *Threatened* species in the *Vulnerable* category under the Commonwealth *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* in 2005. In addition, small numbers of New Zealand Fur-seals *Arctocephalus forsteri* were seen there.

Landing: By rigid inflatable dinghy, after a journey in a larger boat of about one hour from Ceduna or Smoky Bay. Landing is usually made on rocks on the north-western side of the island, where there is some protection from southerly swells. There is no beach. There is a good anchorage for small boats 4 km away on the southern side of the sand spit joining West Franklin and East Franklin Islands at 32° 27'S, 133° 39.5'E. The anchorage is close to the sand spit and protected from southerly swells by a reef.

Ornithological History: During the biological survey of South Australia's offshore islands in the 1970s and early 1980s, Robinson *et al.* visited West Franklin and East Franklin Islands several times but do not appear to have visited Lilliput Island⁴.

P. Shaughnessy and four colleagues visited the island four times between November 2004 and April 2005 to count Australian Sea-lions during their breeding season. Each visit lasted for two to three hours while the observers walked around the coastline counting pups and other sea lions, and then continued on the plateau. Each inspection included the rocky peninsula at the southern end of the island. The four visits were on 8 November 2004, and 10 January, 10 March and 6 April of 2005.

In a review of the status of seabirds of South Australia, Copley noted the need for several improvements to the South Australian seabird database, including surveys of islands off the west coast of Eyre Peninsula¹. This note contributes information to that database.



Breeding Seabirds and Status

Larus pacificus Pacific Gull – Small numbers of birds were seen on each visit and a large chick was seen on 8 November 2004. They breed on nearby Franklin Islands¹.

Sterna caspia Caspian Tern - On 10 January 2005, 55 birds were sitting on nests among the Crested Terns on the top of the island. The contents of three nests were visible: two contained two eggs each and one contained a single egg. In addition, there were two small runners; they were recognisable from their red beaks. Caspian Terns were not seen on the island during the next two visits, but one was seen on our first visit there. They have been recorded on nearby Franklin Islands, but not as a breeding species¹.

Sterna bergii Crested Tern – On 10 January 2005, an estimated 1,000 birds were sitting tightly on eggs. Thus nesting was within the breeding season of Crested Terns in South Australia as reported by Waterman *et al.*⁶, namely between December and February.

At Lilliput Island in January 2005, nests consisted of a shallow depression lined with gravel. The colony occupied the width of the plateau on the top of the island and was situated towards its north-eastern end. At the next visit, in March 2005, nests contained small chicks and at the final visit, in April 2005, many chicks had fledged. Silver Gulls were in the tern colony and around its periphery during each visit, trying to prey on chicks or steal nest contents. Only small numbers of Crested Terns (about six) were seen on the first visit to the island in November 2004. They have been recorded on the nearby Franklin Islands, but not as a breeding species⁴.

Factors Affecting Status

Due to the difficulty of landing on the island, there is not likely to be human interference to the seabirds, especially as it is much easier to land on other islands in the area (such as Eyre, East Franklin and West Franklin Islands). Predation from Pacific Gulls, Silver Gulls and White-bellied Sea-eagles are the factors most likely to affect the colonies of breeding terns. The latter nest nearby on Franklin Islands² and were sighted from Lilliput Island on 10 March and 6 April of 2005. Trampling by sea lions may also affect them; although sea lions were on top of the island during our first visit, none was using it during the January and March visits when terns occupied most of the plateau.

Other Seabirds Recorded

Cereopsis novaehollandiae Cape Barren Goose
Phalacrocorax fuscescens Black-faced Cormorant – a few resting on boulders near the waters edge on 8 November 2004 and on 10 January 2005. There were no signs of breeding.
Egretta novaehollandiae White-faced Heron

Egretta sacra Eastern Reef Egret – one bird at the waters edge on 8 November 2004.
Ardea pacifica White-necked Heron
Haematopus fuliginosus Sooty Oystercatcher – resident, several were seen on each visit.
Sterna nereis Fairy Tern – Two birds were seen 8 November 2004.

Banding

Nil

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