

SEABIRD ISLANDS

No. 251

Nicolas Baudin Island, Eyre Peninsula, South Australia

Location: 33° 01'S, 134° 08'E; 500 m west of the vertical limestone cliffs of Cape Blanche at the southern end of Sceale Bay on the west coast of Eyre Peninsula and 25 km south-south-west of Streaky Bay town. The island has been referred to briefly and unofficially as Cape Blanche Island⁴.

Status: The island was incorporated into the South Australian reserves system as the Nicolas Baudin Island Conservation Park in January 2003, with the intertidal and marine parts of the reserve declared a Prohibited Area to provide greater sanctity for breeding areas of the Australian Sea-lion colony (SA Government Gazette 16 January 2003). During 2002, it was surveyed and named after the 19th century French explorer, Nicolas Baudin.

A notice board has been erected by the Department for Environment and Heritage at the nearest boat ramp (at Sceale Bay) advising boaters that entry into waters surrounding Nicolas Baudin Island is prohibited.

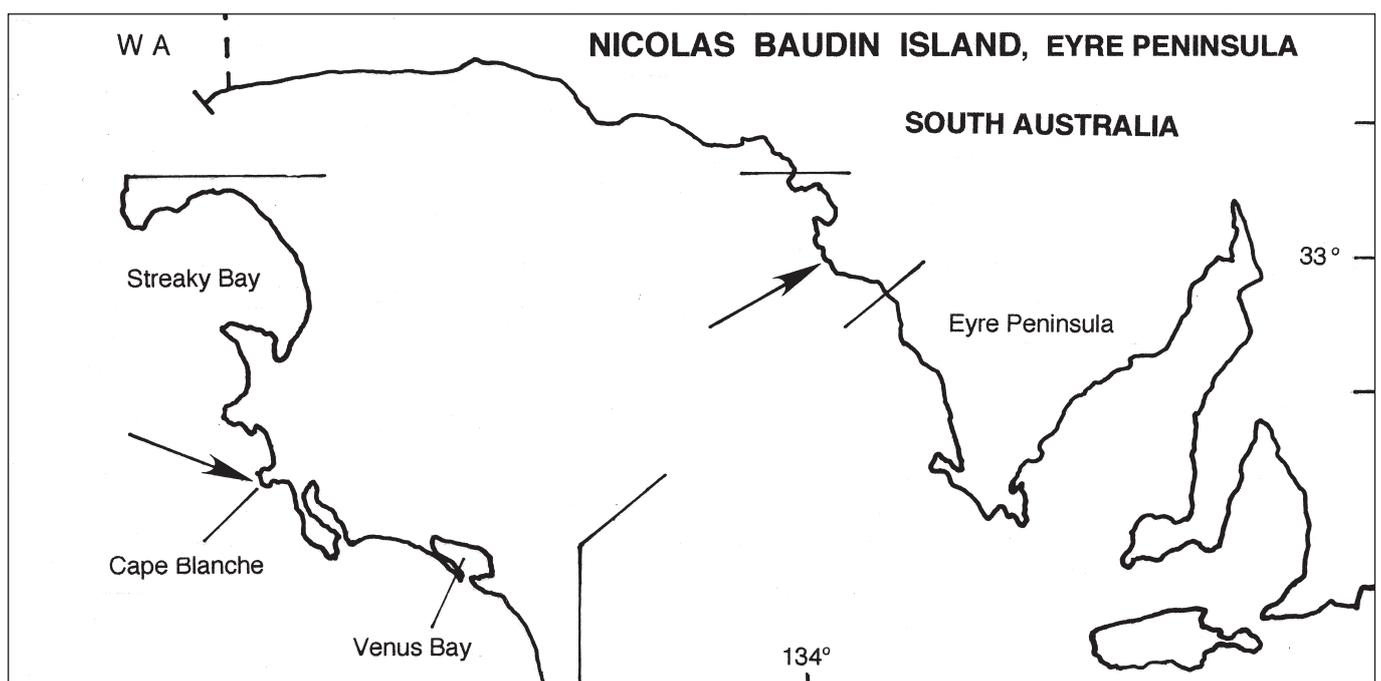
Description: The island is about 10 ha in area and is surrounded by reefs on all but the landward (eastern) side. It is composed of large boulders and slabs of red-brown granite, as well as sandy areas and intertidal pools. Most of the island is low and partly inundated each high tide, with several elevated boulders forming the highest points. Guano accumulated on two boulders provided useful landmarks during each visit between February of 2001 and May 2006. The presence of the guano indicates that the boulders are rarely wave-washed. There is no terrestrial vegetation on the island.

Reefs on the south, west and north sides of the island break the swells and waves, and prevent the island from being wave-washed most of the year. Nevertheless, on a visit during the winter of 2002 with a high tide, pools in the middle of the island were much larger than on other visits, suggesting it would be dangerous to venture to the western end of the island on a big flood tide.

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. Small numbers of New Zealand Fur-seals *Arctocephalus forsteri* have also been recorded⁵.

Landing: From the north-east, close under Cape Blanche after a journey of 20 minutes from Sceale Bay. Local knowledge is essential to find a passage through a narrow winding channel that is accessible to boats of up to about 5 m. The landing place depends on the tide level and it is usually necessary to wade through water or swim to get ashore.

Ornithological History: S. Fowler of CSIRO recorded about six unidentified seals on the island from an aerial survey in May 1945⁶, but did not refer to birds (R. M. Warneke, pers. comm.). The island was not visited during the biological survey of South Australia's offshore islands in the 1970s and early 1980s³.



P. Shaughnessy and colleagues visited the island 11 times between February 2001 and May 2006 to count Australian Sea-lions and New Zealand Fur-seals. Each visit lasted for two to three hours while the observers walked around the island counting pups and other seals. The visits were in February (six visits, annually), May (twice), July, August and September (once each). Surveys of bird species present on and near the island were conducted by one of us (TD) on four occasions (5 February 2002, 7 May and 2 July 2003, and 11 February 2005) and the data submitted to the Birds Australia Atlas Survey Scheme. Incidental bird observations were made on other occasions.

In a review of the status of seabirds of South Australia¹, Copley noted the need for several improvements to the South Australian seabird database, including surveys of islands off the west coast of Eyre Peninsula. This note contributes information to that database.

Breeding Seabirds and Status

Larus pacificus Pacific Gull – Small numbers of birds were seen on most visits; three juveniles were seen on 4 February 2003 and chicks were seen on 12 February 2004.

Haematopus fuliginosus Sooty Oystercatcher – resident; small numbers were seen on each visit with a maximum of ten on 4 February 2003; one chick was seen on 11 February 2005.

Factors Affecting Status

Due to the difficulty of landing on the island and the fact that landing is prohibited, there is not likely to be human interference to the seabirds. There is a White-bellied Sea-Eagle breeding site nearby on Cape Blanche² and an adult was seen low over the island on 7 May 2003.

Other Seabirds Recorded

<i>Eudyptula minor</i>	Little Penguin – small numbers were seen ashore on 5 February 2002 and offshore on 4 February 2003.
<i>Puffinus tenuirostris</i>	Short-tailed Shearwater – many were seen offshore during visits in February. On 12 February 2004, shearwater feathers were part of the vomitus of a fur seal.
<i>Morus serrator</i>	Australasian Gannet – seen offshore on several visits.
<i>Phalacrocorax melanoleucos</i>	Little Pied Cormorant – seen on one visit.
<i>Phalacrocorax fuscescens</i>	Black-faced Cormorant – resident, several were seen on each visit, with a maximum count of 23 on 28 February 2001. There were no signs of breeding. The nearest breeding colony is on reefs that extend north-east from Olive Island, 40 km north-west of Nicolas Baudin Island (unpublished observations).
<i>Phalacrocorax varius</i>	Pied Cormorant – seen on three visits.
<i>Phalacrocorax sulcirostris</i>	Little Black Cormorant – seen on one visit.

<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>	Great Cormorant – seen on four visits.
<i>Pelecanus conspicillatus</i>	Australian Pelican – one or two were seen ashore on most visits.
<i>Egretta novaehollandiae</i>	White-faced Heron
<i>Larus novaehollandiae</i>	Silver Gull – resident, several seen on each visit.
<i>Sterna caspia</i>	Caspian Tern – small numbers were seen on most visits.
<i>Sterna bergii</i>	Crested Tern – seen on each visit to the island; by far the most numerous bird with a maximum estimate of 300 birds on 12 September 2004.

Banding

Nil

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