

SEABIRD ISLANDS

No. 252

West Waldegrave Island, Eyre Peninsula, South Australia

Location: 33° 36'S, 134° 47'E. There are two islands in the Waldegrave Group which extend offshore in a westerly direction from 3 km north-west of Cape Finniss. West Waldegrave Island is 13 km north-west of the town of Elliston. It is also referred to as Outer Waldegrave Island or as Little Waldegrave Island, and is known locally as Seal Island. Development of aquaculture in the form of a sub-tidal abalone farm 2–3 km north-east of West Waldegrave Island began in 2005.

Status: Part of the Waldegrave Islands Conservation Park which was declared in 1967.

Description: The island has an area of 32 ha. The coastline comprises granite boulders and slabs, with a steep rise of about 5 m to a flat calcarenite plateau covered with sandy soil which supports Nitre bushes (*Nitraria billardierei*) and African boxthorn bushes (*Lycium ferocissimum*). There are small caves and overhangs among limestone cliffs immediately inland of the granite boulders.

The island is an important breeding colony for the Australian Sea-lion *Neophoca cinerea*⁵, which was classified in 2005 as a *Threatened* species in the *Vulnerable* category under the Commonwealth *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act* 1999. New Zealand Fur-seals *Arctocephalus forsteri* have also been recorded there⁵.

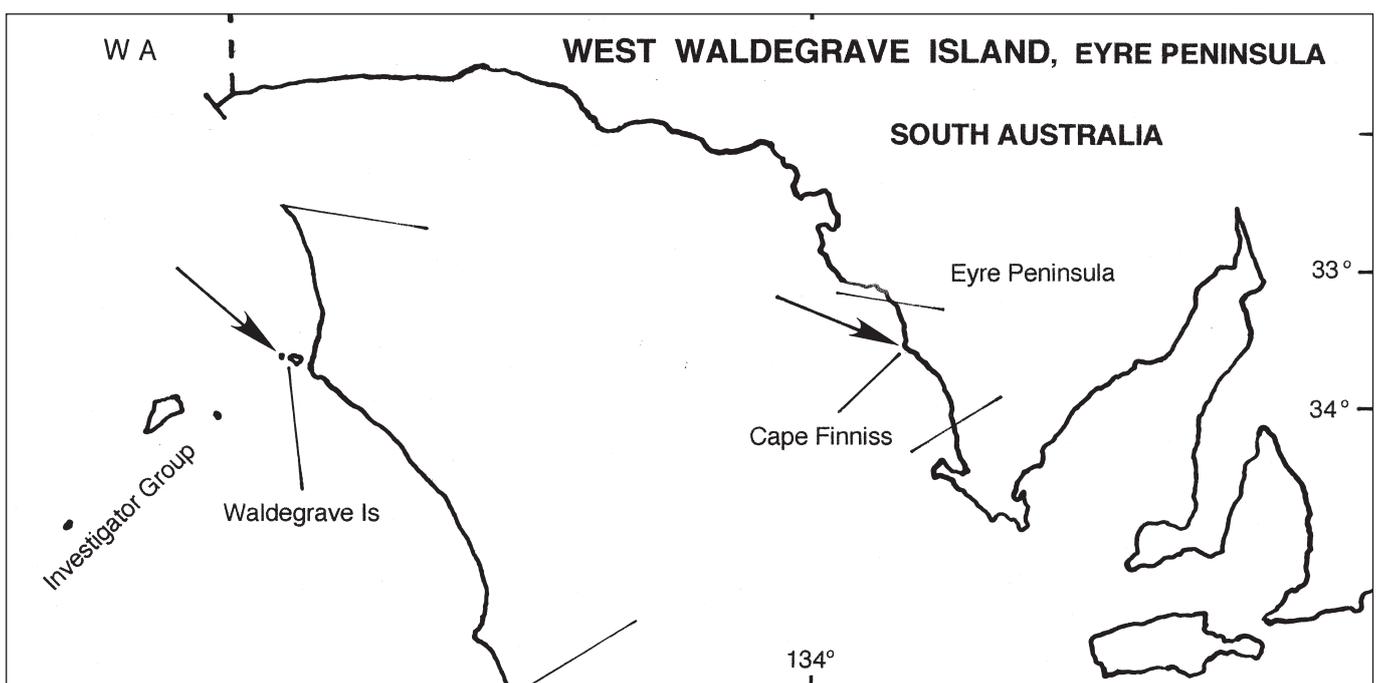
Landing: By inflatable dinghy, after a boat journey of about 30 minutes from a launching ramp at the southern end of

Anxious Bay, 5 km north-west of Elliston. There are no beaches or protected landing sites on the island. Landing is made on rocks on the northern side of the island, where there is some protection from southerly swells, but it is particularly difficult when the wind has a northerly component and raises waves.

Ornithological History: We visited the island nine times between February 2001 and May 2006 to count Australian Sea-lions and New Zealand Fur-seals. Each visit lasted three to four hours while the observers walked around the island counting pups and other seals. The visits were in February (four visits), May (twice), July, August and November (once each), when surveys of bird species present on and near the island were conducted. Data from three of those occasions (6 February 2002, 5 May 2003 and 4 July 2003) have been submitted to the Birds Australia Atlas Survey Scheme by TD.

The island was visited briefly by helicopter in May 1980 during the biological survey of South Australia's offshore islands, when six bird species were recorded⁴. That list was included in the 'Island Parks of Western Eyre Peninsula Management Plan'³.

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

Eudyptula minor Little Penguin – Utilise limestone caves, crevices and overhangs for nesting and resting. They are widely and sparsely distributed around the island, and were seen on most visits to the island. Breeding was underway on 3 July 2003. Breeding has been reported previously⁴.

Puffinus tenuirostris Short-tailed Shearwater – Presumably breeding because burrows were found in sandy soil on the southern side of the island's plateau. Many birds were flying offshore on 6 February 2003. Rafts of birds were seen on the southern side of the island on 9 November 2004 when many dead birds were seen ashore. Many breed on nearby East Waldegrave Island⁴.

Larus pacificus Pacific Gull – Small numbers of birds were seen on most visits and 15 nests with hatchlings were observed on 9 November 2004 on the northern side of the plateau on bare ground. They were also breeding during our visit on 6 February 2002, when at least two pre-fledged chicks were seen. On 5 February 2003, there were ten adults, a juvenile and seven small chicks (runners). They have been recorded on the island⁴.

Sterna caspia Caspian Tern – Four nests were seen on 9 November 2004 among the Pacific Gull colony. One nest had a chick and an egg. Caspian Terns not sitting on nests were chasing Pacific Gulls from their immediate nesting area.

Factors Affecting Status

Due to the difficulty of landing on the island, there is not likely to be much human interference to the seabirds, especially as it is much easier to land on nearby East Waldegrave Island, which has two sandy beaches and is closer to shore. A sub-tidal abalone farm situated 2 – 3 km north-east of West Waldegrave Island may impact on seabirds from the island, primarily because of small fish associated with the cages and boat traffic associated with the farm. The farm had a lease of 20 ha in 2006 and there are plans to increase its size several fold. Predation from Pacific Gulls, Silver Gulls and birds of prey are the factors most likely to affect other birds. A pair of White-bellied Sea-eagles nest on nearby East Waldegrave Island² and an adult was sighted over West Waldegrave on 5 May 2003.

Other Seabirds Recorded

<i>Cereopsis novaehollandiae</i>	Cape Barren Goose – Breeding in 2001, 2003, and 2006. Has previously been recorded breeding ⁴ .
<i>Macronectes</i> sp.	Giant-Petrel (species not positively determined) – seen offshore on 4 July 2003.
<i>Morus serrator</i>	Australasian Gannet – seen offshore on 5 February 2003 and 5 May 2003. On 15 May 2006 they were diving within the abalone lease, presumably for small fish among the marine life attracted to the abalone culture pontoons.
<i>Phalacrocorax fuscescens</i>	Black-faced Cormorant – seen on most visits, including 20 birds on 27 February 2001.

<i>Phalacrocorax varius</i>	Pied Cormorant – seen on several visits.
<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>	Great Cormorant – seen on 5 May and 4 July 2003, and on 9 November 2004.
<i>Egretta novaehollandiae</i>	White-faced Heron.
<i>Egretta sacra</i>	Eastern Reef Egret – a single bird was foraging among rocks in the inter-tidal zone 6 February 2002.
<i>Haematopus fuliginosus</i>	Sooty Oystercatcher – resident, several were seen on each visit with a maximum of eight pairs showing nesting behaviour on 9 November 2004.
<i>Larus novaehollandiae</i>	Silver Gull – resident, several seen on each visit.
<i>Sterna bergii</i>	Crested Tern – seen on most visits; on 14 August 2001 there were 500 birds on the western point of the island.
<i>Sterna nereis</i>	Fairy Tern – two birds were seen on 9 November 2004.

Banding

Nil

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