

## SEABIRD ISLANDS

## No. 45

## Gabo Island, Victoria

**Location:** 37°34' S., 149°55' E.; 13 km east of Mallacoota, Vic. and 7 km south-west of Cape Howe.

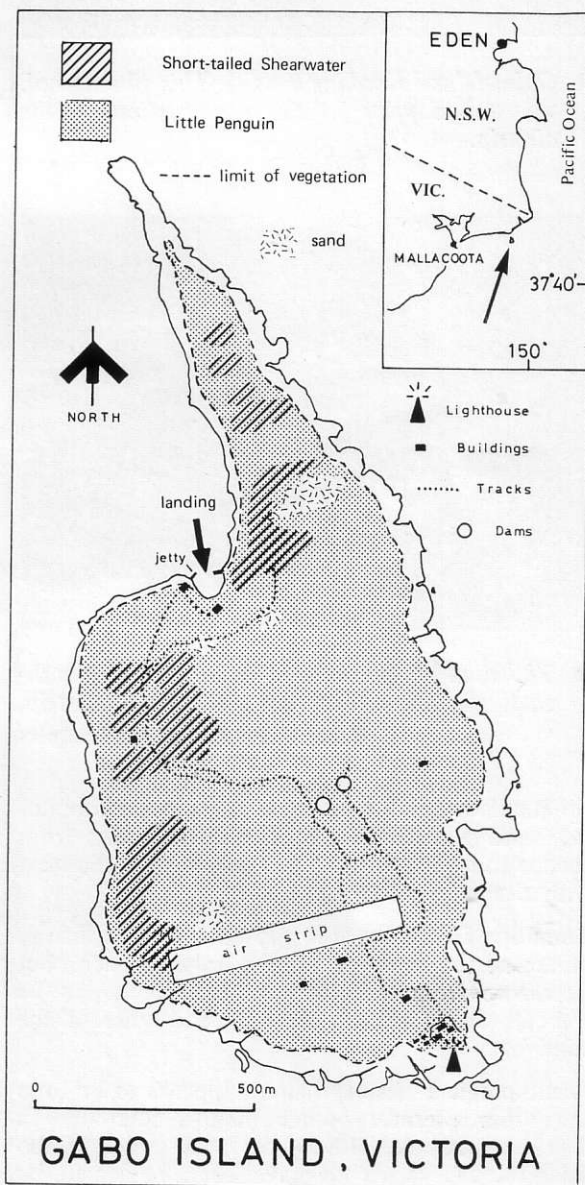
**Status:** Under the control of the Australian Department of Transport, Surface Transport Group, Victorian Region.

**Description:** 150 ha; 2 400 m long by 800 m at the widest; roughly pear-shaped, with a 'tail' extending north-west, this island rises gently to an undulating plateau with a maximum height of 52 m. Some 320 m of water separates it from the mainland to which it was joined less than a century ago. The island is formed of red biotite granits which is mostly covered by quarternary sand dune, possibly up to 25 m deep; in some places there are clay pockets (Dr J. G. Douglas, pers. comm.).

There are four main vegetation types; coastal fringe complex; thickets dominated by *Leptospermum laevigatum* with limited patches of heathland, gully heads with ferns, and heathland swamps; small areas of sand dunes sparsely vegetated with grass, herbs and low shrubs on the northern and south-western sides; and man-made grassland on the northern neck and near the inhabited area. In many places, blackberries *Rubus vulgaris* are abundant. Dr J. H. Willis (pers. comm.) has provided a comprehensive list of plants on the island. Some of the more common or interesting of these follow:

*Asplenium obtusatum*, *Poa poiiformis*, *Banksia integrifolia*, *Muehlenbeckia adpressa*, *Rhagodia baccata*, *Disphyma blackii*, *Tetragonia tetragonoides*, *Acacia longifolia*, *Pelargonium australe*, *Zieria cytisoides*, *Correa alba*, *Leptospermum laevigatum*, *Melaleuca armillaris*, *Apium prostratum*, *Monotoca elliptica*, *Myoporum insulare*, *Olearia ramulosa*, *Senecio lautus* and *S. hispidulus*.

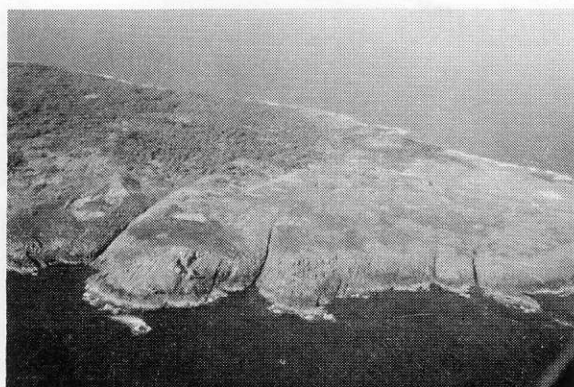
An airstrip running roughly east-west across the southern part is surrounded by a wire-mesh fence set into the ground. On the south-eastern





- *Gabo Island (looking north). This photograph was taken prior to the construction of the airstrip.*

Photo: Department of Transport



- *The south-west corner of the island prior to the construction of the airstrip.*

Photo: Department of Transport



- *The southern end of the island (looking south-east) showing the partly constructed airstrip.*

Photo: Department of Transport

tip stands a lighthouse, three dwellings, outbuildings and equipment. An earth road runs from thence to a jetty in the sheltered bay on the west with a nearby pump house.

**Landing:** Generally this presents little difficulty either at the jetty or on the sandy beach, but departure from the inlet at Mallacoota can be difficult depending on the tide and state of the sand bar.

**Ornithological History:** There appears to be little in earlier literature other than a reference in 1948 by K. A. Hindwood<sup>1</sup> who said "Gabo Island . . . seems to have been neglected by

ornithologists, but specimens of the shearwater colony occurring there have recently been received by D. L. Serventy. They prove to be the Short-tailed Shearwater *Puffinus tenuirostris*."

In December 1972, at the request of the Fisheries and Wildlife Division, members of the Penguin Study Group (within the Victorian Ornithological Research Group) spent four days removing Little Penguins and Short-tailed Shearwaters from the site of an airstrip under construction by the Department of Public Works<sup>2</sup>. Members of the same group spent ten days in December 1975 and six days in January 1977 making an ornithological survey of the island with particular reference to penguins. Dr D. G. W. Hollands banded penguins and shearwaters during visits in February 1972, January 1974 and March 1975.

### Breeding Seabirds and Status

*Eudyptula minor* Little Penguin — These birds are able to land round the entire shoreline and their burrows are scattered over most of the island except in sown pastures, bogs and rocky areas devoid of vegetation. Estimated 20 000 to 50 000 breeding pairs, depending on the season.

*Puffinus tenuirostris* Short-tailed Shearwater — Breeds in densely-packed colonies on sandy slopes mainly on the western side and throughout most of the 'tail' at the northern end. Estimated 30 000 to 40 000 breeding pairs.



- Little Penguin and Short-tailed Shearwater breeding habitat near the north-west corner of the airstrip. The airstrip fence is at the right of the picture.

#### Factors Affecting Status

The White-breasted Sea-eagle *Haliaeetus leucogaster* is a natural predator of both breeding species. Introduced predators are Feral Cats *Felis catus*; occasionally a domestic dog; rats (species unidentified) have been reported. A herd of cattle, roaming freely, trample some burrows while the airstrip fence causes the death of shearwaters unable to clear it during take-off. The fence was erected to exclude penguins which had previously nested in the area now occupied by the airstrip.

Snakes are unknown from the island and during the recent visits, no sign was seen either of Rabbits *Oryctolagus cuniculatus* or other introduced pests.

#### Other Seabirds Recorded

*Phalacrocorax varius* Pied Cormorant.  
*Phalacrocorax carbo* Black Cormorant.  
*Haematopus ostralegus* Pied Oystercatcher.  
*Haematopus fuliginosus* Sooty Oystercatcher.  
*Larus novaehollandiae* Silver Gull.  
*Sterna bergii* Crested Tern.

#### Banding

Period covered — February 1972 to 31 January 1977.

*E. minor* — 620 nestlings, 58 adults. Three recoveries, 16 km NNE, 418 km SSW; and 410 km WSW.

*P. tenuirostris* — 22 nestlings, 13 adults on eggs. No recoveries to date.

#### Bibliography

1. Hindwood, K. A. (1948), 'Notes on the Sea-birds Breeding on the Coastal Islands of New South Wales', *Emu* 48: 73-81.
2. Reilly, P. N. (1973), 'Report on the Effect of Burrowing Birds on the Proposed Airstrip on Gabo Island, Victoria', *VORG Notes* 9: (10) 7-11.

#### Acknowledgements

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