

SEABIRD ISLANDS

No. 47

Benison Island, Corner Inlet, Victoria

Location: 38°51' S., 146°22' E.; north of Wilsons Promontory, within Corner Inlet, 1.8 km to nearest mainland.

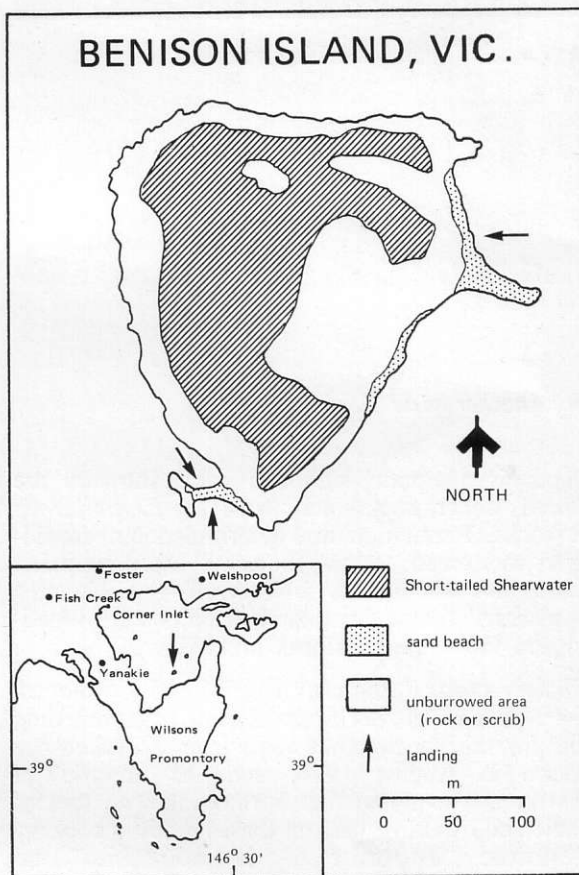
Status: Included in Wilsons Promontory National Park in 1916; now controlled by the National Parks Service (Vic.); camping is not allowed.

Description: 7.7 ha; this granite island, some 300 m long by about 250 m near the northern end rises to an unpronounced, almost flat summit at about 46 m. The less exposed eastern and southern sides of the island have a well developed scrub cover dominated by *Melaleuca ericifolia*, which also contains tall *Banksia integrifolia* (to 5 m) and *Acacia melanoxylon*. An often dense understorey, which includes *Clematis microphylla* and *Correa alba*, exists, particularly on the southern side. The scrub is shorter and less extensive on the more exposed western and northern sides, and is often replaced by pure stands of *Poa poiformis* which dominates much of the island, particularly the shearwater colonies. Alien grasses (e.g. *Bromus diandrus*) are also common and with other species (e.g. *Carpobrotus rossii*, *Pelargonium australe*) are locally dominant. *Pteridium esculentum* covers large areas on the southern side. *Correa alba* and *B. integrifolia* are found in small clumps throughout the island, and *Lavatera plebeia* is common on the northern side. Further botanical details are given elsewhere^{2, 3, 4}.

Sand beaches are present along the eastern and south-eastern sides; on the latter side, the heavy soil is often undercut by wave action which also forms slight terracing. The island is connected to Wilsons Promontory by a sand bar which is uncovered at low water.

Landing: Onto the sand beaches under most conditions but elsewhere onto rocks depending on prevailing winds. At low tide, access is possible across the sand bar.

Ornithological History: J. W. Barrett¹ and, much later, M. E. Gillham^{3, 4} are the only previous



authors to have discussed the island's avifauna; they recorded breeding shearwaters, and non-breeding Silver Gulls and Black-faced Cormorants. F. I. Norman⁶ made a number of visits to the island from 1965 to 1976 and recorded a number of species other than the seabirds mentioned.

Breeding Seabirds and Status

Puffinus tenuirostris Short-tailed Shearwater — Breeds extensively over most of the island with larger, more dense colonies on the northern and



● *Benison Island (looking south-west).*

Photo: W. B. Emison.

western sides under *P. poiiformis*. A few burrows are located in other areas. Population not determined but considered to exceed several thousand breeding pairs.

Factors Affecting Status

Illegal harvesting (of unknown proportion) of young shearwaters occurs in most summers and several offenders have been apprehended in recent years. Foxes *Vulpes vulpes* occur on the island and kill birds of all age groups, predominantly post-juvenile (non-breeding) shearwaters while they are on the island at night; numerous corpses are found throughout the colonies, particularly at take-off points. These predation rates were measured between 1965 and 1968 and Norman⁵ suggested that the population might decline if the rates were maintained. Gillham³ further considered that the dense vegetation present on some parts of the island may limit the number of nest sites available. Rabbits formerly occurred¹ but are now extinct.

Other Seabirds Recorded

Ardea novaehollandiae White-faced Heron.
Haematopus ostralegus Pied Oystercatcher.
Larus novaehollandiae Silver Gull.
Larus pacificus Pacific Gull.

Banding

Period December 1966 to June 1976.
P. tenuirostris — 106 adults, 50 nestlings; no recoveries away from the island to date.

Bibliography

1. Barrett, J. W. (1918), *The Twin Ideals* (:) an Educated Commonwealth. Lewis and Co., London.



● *Part of the northern side (looking east).*



● *Another view showing the south-west corner.*

2. Gillham, M. E. (1960), 'Destruction of Indigenous Heath Vegetation in Victorian Sea-bird Colonies', *Aust. J. Bot.* 8: 277-317.
3. Gillham, M. E. (1961), 'Plants and Seabirds of Granite Islands in south-eastern Victoria', *Proc. R. Soc. Vict.* 74:21-35.
4. Gillham, M. E. (1962), 'Granite Islands of south-east Victoria as a Sea-bird Habitat', *Proc. R. Soc. Vict.* 75: 45-63.
5. Norman, F. I. (1971a), 'Predation by the Fox (*Vulpes vulpes* L.) on Colonies of the Short-tailed Shearwater (*Puffinus tenuirostris* [Temminck]) in Victoria, Australia', *J. appl. Ecol.* 8: 21-32.
6. Norman, F. I. (1971b), 'Problems affecting the Ecology of Islands in the West Gippsland region', *Proc. R. Soc. Vict.* 84: 7-18.

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