

SEABIRD ISLANDS

No. 49

Fisher Island, Tasmania

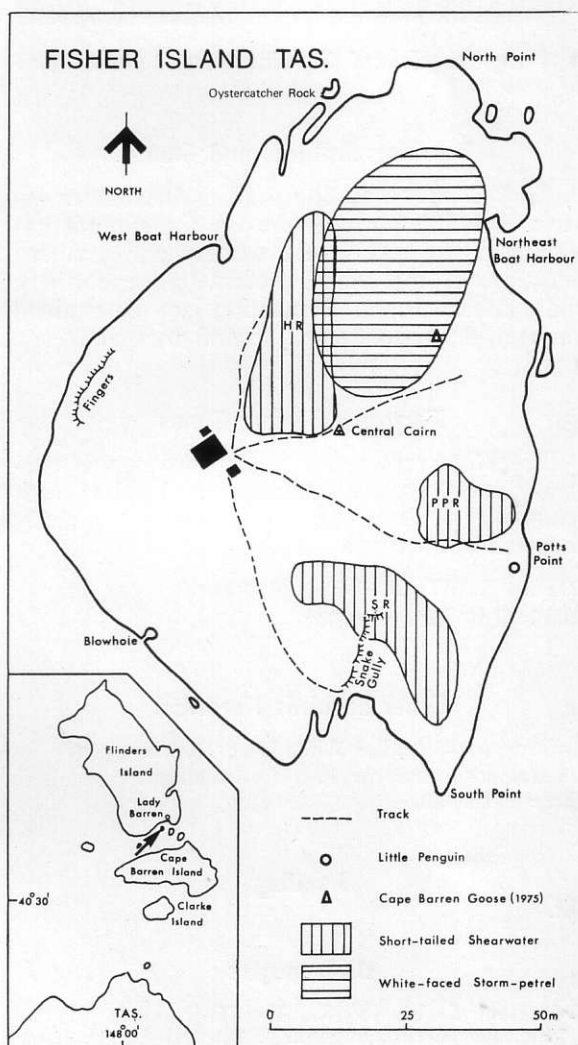
Location: 40°10' S., 148°16' E.; 250 m south-west of Lady Barron jetty, in Adelaide Bay, at the south of Flinders Island, Tasmania.

Status: Fauna Reserve controlled by the National Parks and Wildlife Service (Tas.): entry permit required.

Description: 0.8 ha; roughly oval in shape and about 140 m from north to south by about 85 m at the widest point. A granite islet of low relief, it rises to 5.8 m at a knoll south-west of the buildings. Much of the island is bare rock but thin patches of friable soil occur to a maximum depth of 0.6 m. Shearwater burrows cut out where the soil covering thins to between 20 cm and 30 cm. Almost treeless, there are patches of dwarf scrub of *Acacia sophorae*, *Leucopogon parviflorus* and *Olearia stellulata*. Latterly *Coprosma repens* has become established (one artificial planting near the hut; others bird-introduced) and is now a conspicuous element in the island flora. The principal vegetation is tussock grass, *Poa poiformis*, the preferred habitat of the shearwaters, with expanses of *Disphyma australe* and *Tetragonia implexicoma*. Rainfall is predominantly in winter, the annual average at Lady Barron being 750-1150 mm. Occasionally abnormal late spring, summer and autumn downpours cause disastrous flooding of the shearwater burrows. Prevailing winds are from the north-west to south-west and are strongest from the west. November has the highest frequency of strong westerlies (accounting for the local term "muttonbird gales" at the egg-laying season). On calm nights mists may envelope the islands reducing visibility to a few metres. Temperatures are mild.

Landing: Easy, excepting in hard westerly weather.

Facilities: A two-roomed hut, with ablutions block and two rain-water tanks, was erected by the CSIRO in 1948, providing accommodation for up to five persons. This is now controlled by the National Parks and Wildlife Service (Tas.)



who will consider applications for use by wildlife students.

Ornithological History: Between 1926 and 1934, when he was stationed at Lady Barron, Police Sergeant George A. Fisher (after whom the island was named) undertook investigations on



● *Fisher Island.*

Photo: Douglas Baglin.

the homing of muttonbirds on the island. He was aided by H. J. Holloway, a local resident, but the results were inconclusive. In March 1947 the islet was selected by D. L. Serventy as the site for a field station to investigate the muttonbird biology in a joint program by the CSIRO and the then Animals and Birds Protection Board (popularly, the Fauna Board) of Tasmania. The investigations have continued to date, but are now under the sole control of the Tasmanian NPWS, successor to the Fauna Board. Teams of professional biologists from the CSIRO, government departments, universities and museums have co-operated in the field work, supplemented by volunteer amateur naturalists and overseas visitors. These last-named have included:

Sir Peter and Lady Scott (UK), General Sir Gerald Lathbury (UK), Professor Donald S. Farner (USA), Keith Hindwood, Arnold McGill, Roy Wheeler, Vincent Serventy, Eric Sedgwick, Lexie Nicholls, Dr Mary Gillham (UK), Dorothy Rook (of the RSPB, England), Dr Peter Bull (NZ), Dr Allen Keast, Leonard Wall, Peter Slater, Dr Eric Lindgren, Arthur Legge, Dr John Warham (now NZ), Sir Russell Drysdale, Clifton Pugh,

Rica Erickson, Eric Worrell, Ronald Lockley (UK & NZ), Dr Kurt Kolar (Austria), G. W. Cottrell (USA), Alan Moorehead, Stephen Walker, Douglass Baglin, George Davis, Alan Tubbs, Pauline Reilly, Stephen Marchant, Ronald Templeton (Scotland), Jan Blinzler (USA), Doug Gibson, H. V. Thompson (UK), Duncan Macdonald, J. C. Serventy, Kenneth G. Gamble (USA), Kenneth H. Miers (NZ), and Tom Spence (Scotland).

Breeding Seabirds and Status

Eudyptula minor Little Penguin — Occasionally a single pair nests at the shore end of the 'Potts Point Rookery' (PPR), usurping a shearwater burrow, whose rightful occupants have to move to another burrow. The species nests at Little Green Island and Spence's Reefs, south-east of Fisher Island.

Puffinus tenuirostris Short-tailed Shearwater (Tasmanian Muttonbird) — This is the most numerous species regularly breeding on the island. In the 1975-76 season there were 73 occupied burrows, distributed in three colonies (see map), the 'Home Rookery' (HR), the 'South Rookery' (SR) and the 'Potts Point Rookery'. Of the birds in burrows, 70 per cent were originally banded as fledglings on the island. One of the birds, No. 12262, which was a male breeding when banded in November 1947, was still breeding in 1975-76 and its chick was successfully fledged.

Pelagodroma marina White-faced Storm-petrel — This species first nested on the island in the 1974-75 season, when about 50 burrows were discovered west of North East Boat Harbour. In the following season the burrow area had expanded notably and over 80 burrows were found. Although these birds have been known to visit Fisher Island for many years, this is the first instance of their nesting on the same island as Short-tailed Shearwaters in the Furneaux Group². Probably they are an overflow population from the colony on Spence's Reef, 1.2 km to the south.

Cereopsis novaehollandiae Cape Barren Goose — A pair occasionally breeds on the island.

Haematopus fuliginosus Sooty Oystercatcher — One pair occasionally nests on the island.

Haematopus ostralegus Pied Oystercatcher — A pair nested in 1947, but has not done so since investigators have been regularly visiting the island.

Larus novaehollandiae Silver Gull — Periodically these birds nest on the island during the shifts of breeding stations in Adelaide Bay⁶. The locations vary.

Hydroprogne caspia Caspian Tern — A pair nests each year on Fisher Reef, a rocky outlier some 35 m west of Fisher Island.

Factors Affecting Status

Predation is minimal. The Pacific Gull may take some fledgling shearwaters at dawn when they are making their exodus from the breeding colony.

OTHER VERTEBRATES

There is no resident mammal. However, occasionally Water Rats *Hydromys chrysogaster* swim over from the adjoining mainland and cause some havoc among both shearwaters and storm-petrels. In 1971, Black Rats *Rattus rattus* became established on the island, by means unknown, and did damage to storm-petrels alighting at night. Continuous trapping and poisoning extirpated them in 1974. The only resident reptile is the skink, *Leiopisma entrecasteauxii*, which is plentiful in the *Poa* tussocks. Specimens of two snakes, the White-lipped Whip Snake *Drysdalia coronoides*, and the Copperhead *Denisonia superba*, have been taken on the island on very rare occasions. They may have swum across or been "brought in the wood" when this was transported from Lady Barron.

Other Seabirds Recorded

Phalacrocorax fuscescens Black-faced Cormorant.
Phalacrocorax melanoleucos Little Pied Cormorant.
Larus pacificus Pacific Gull.
Sterna nereis Fairy Tern.
Sterna bergii Crested Tern.

Banding

Period November 1947 to 31 March 1976.
P. tenuirostris — 1 237 fledglings, 1 151 adults banded. A number of recoveries have been made on beaches along the eastern coast of Australia and one in the Aleutian Islands (a fledgling banded on 8 April 1954, it was recovered dead on St Lawrence Island, Alaska, on 23 August 1957).

Acknowledgement

The bands used were provided by the Division of Wildlife Research but were inscribed "Notify Fauna Board/Hobart, Tas. Australia".

Bibliography

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