

SEABIRD ISLANDS

No. 50

Wright & Egg Islands, Horseshoe Reef, Tasmania

Location: 41°08' S., 146°27' E.; 1.2 km north of Devonport Airport and 0.8 km offshore.

Other Name: Wright Island used for Egg Island.

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

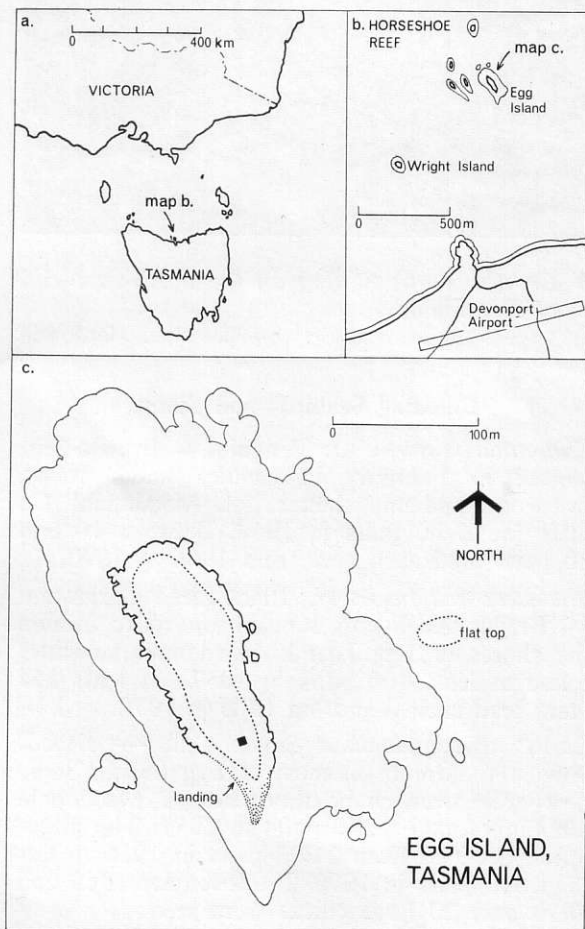
Description: 10 ha above low water mark and less than 1 ha above high water mark. In addition to Wright and Egg Islands, Horseshoe Reef consists of mainly jagged intertidal rocks, some of them reaching 1 m above high water mark. Wright Island is a rocky ridge 1 m above high water mark. At Egg Island there is an overburden of shingle 0.8 m deep covered by 0.6 m of top soil forming a flat-topped bank 165 m long and 46 m wide, about 3 m above high water mark.

Prior to 1968 most of Egg Island was covered by a dense stand of Australian Mallow *Lavatera plebeia*. There were also some large African Boxthorn *Lycium ferocissimum* and a few straggling bushes of Boobialla *Myoporum acuminatum*.

A shelter hut was built on the south-eastern end of Egg Island in 1967.

Landing: Difficult when wind and sea are northerly. The landing is on the western side of a shingle spit at the south-eastern end of Egg Island.

Ornithological History: According to local farmers and fishermen Egg Island was covered before the late 1940s by tussock grasses and ducks nested there. During 1950s and early 1960s D. Macdonald witnessed the expansion of a Silver Gull nesting colony on Egg Island. The gulls changed the vegetation from tussocks to mallow and thus because of improved shelter raised the survival rate of their chicks (Macdonald pers. comm.). In 1965 juvenile Silver Gulls from Egg Island started to become a serious hazard to aircraft at Devonport Airport. From 1966 to 1970 means were sought to reduce the nesting



of Silver Gulls on Egg Island without undue disturbance to the other species of nesting seabirds. Wires strung less than 1 m apart prevented roosting but not breeding by Silver Gulls. The removal of all vegetation and debris including wires caused a decline in chick survival from more than a thousand to about twenty.

In order to study the breeding behaviour of the Silver Gull and Black-faced Cormorant G. F. van Tets made 17 visits to Egg Island between March 1966 and November 1970.



- *Crested Terns* nesting on the north-west end of Egg Island.

Photo: D. Macdonald

Breeding Seabirds and Status

Eudyptula minor Little Penguin — Breeds September to February in cavities under rocks, driftwood and the shelter hut. Macdonald (in litt.) found 30 pairs in 1957. Between 10 and 30 pairs bred each year from 1966 to 1970.

Phalacrocorax fuscescens Black-faced Cormorant — Breeds August to January on rocks around the shores of Egg Island. Macdonald (in litt.) found at least 100 pairs in 1957. At least 174 pairs bred each year from 1966 to 1970.

Larus novaehollandiae Silver Gull — Breeds August to March on most of Egg Island. Some nests were even on boxthorn bushes. Macdonald (in litt.) found 1 250 pairs in 1957. The population declined from 2 000 pairs in 1966 to less than 600 pairs in 1970. In November 1969 and 1970 only 20 large chicks were seen.

Larus pacificus Pacific Gull — Macdonald (in litt.) found one pair in 1957. One pair was also present each year from 1966 to 1970. There was a nest with one egg 8 November 1966.

Hydroprogne caspia Caspian Tern — Macdonald (in litt.) found four pairs in 1957. Only one pair was seen each year from 1966 to 1970. Courting and nest-building was observed in November.

Sterna bergii Crested Tern — Breeds October to January on a small flat rocky area at the north-western end of Egg Island. Macdonald (in litt.)

found at least 50 pairs in the summer of 1957/58. About the same number bred in the summer of 1969/70. At least one chick was reared during the summer of 1967/68. They did not breed during the summers of 1966/67, 1968/69 and 1970/71. This suggests breeding at Egg Island in alternate years.

Factors Affecting Status

Occasionally when the sea is calm parties in small boats land on the island for sight-seeing, and fishermen sometimes seek shelter on the island. The White-breasted Sea-eagle *Haliaeetus leucogaster* is the main avian predator that visits the reef.

OTHER VERTEBRATES

None recorded.

Other Seabirds Recorded

Puffinus tenuirostris Short-tailed Shearwater (sick).
Phalacrocorax melanoleucos Little Pied Cormorant.
Phalacrocorax carbo Black Cormorant.
Ardea novaehollandiae White-faced Heron.
Haematopus fuliginosus Sooty Oystercatcher.
Sterna striata White-fronted Tern.

Banding

Period — 2 December 1956 to 30 June 1975.

P. fuscescens — 284 nestlings banded; 19 recoveries away from the island up to 166 km.

L. novaehollandiae — 5 adults and 4 608 nestlings banded; 112 recoveries away from the island up to 1 350 km¹.

H. caspia — 2 adults and 20 nestlings banded; 3 recoveries away from the island up to 624 km.

S. bergii — 99 adults and 333 nestlings banded; 6 recoveries away from the island up to 1 550 km.

Bibliography

1. Murray, M. D. and Carrick, R. (1964), 'Seasonal Movements and Habitats of the Silver Gull, *Larus novaehollandiae* Stephens', *CSIRO Wildl. Res.* 9: 160-188.
2. van Tets, G. F. (1968), 'White-breasted Cormorant swallows pebbles on land', *Emu* 67: 224.

Acknowledgements

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