

SEABIRD ISLANDS

No. 52

Wright Island, South Australia

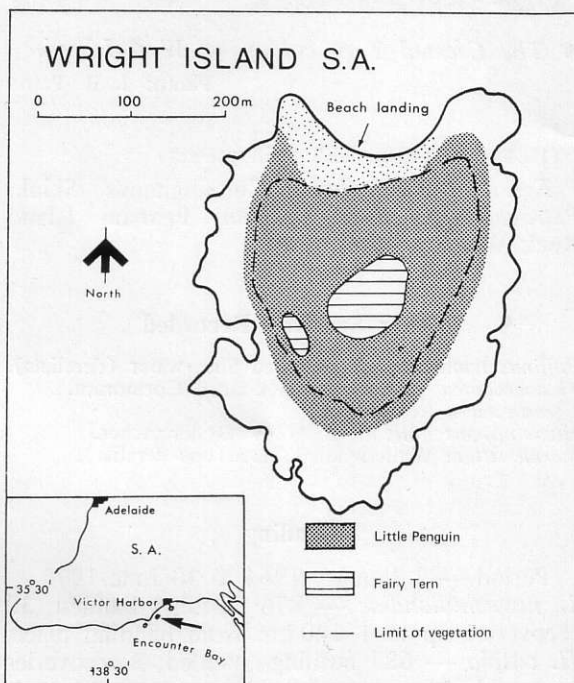
Location: 35°35' S., 138°36' E.; 800 m offshore and 700 m north-north-east of Rosetta Head near Victor Harbour, S.A.

Status: Flora and Fauna Reserve under the control of the District Council of Victor Harbour. Camping is not permitted.

Description: 2 ha; 250 m by 200 m. This island is a granite knoll rising to about 24 m with steep, exposed cliffs on the seaward side. These cliffs merge into boulder-strewn slopes and exposed metamorphic rocks which surround a small sandy beach at the northern end. The island is well vegetated with both introduced and native plants, a list of which was published by N. Lothian⁴. In January 1976 the dominant vegetation comprised African Boxthorn *Lyceum ferocissimum*, Tree Mallow *Lavatera arborea* and *Leucopogon parviflorus*.

Landing: There is easy landing for small craft onto the sandy beach in all but rough weather.

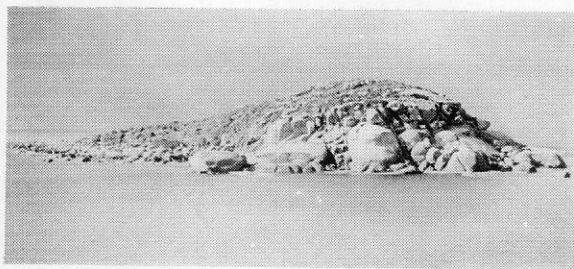
Ornithological History: About 1928 Mrs J. B. Paton first visited the island and made occasional visits from time to time until 1954. Thereafter visits were made more regularly. However, no written notes were kept of the birds seen, but Little Penguins were invariably present, usually with eggs and chicks during spring and summer. In 1951 J. B. Cleland², while at Encounter Bay, recorded hearing Little Penguins calling from Wright Island. Silver Gulls were first found nesting on the island in January 1963, and Fairy Terns about 1935. Lothian³, referring to Wright Island, reported that "Mutton Birds (*Puffinus tenuirostris*) nested there frequently" but he has been unable to recall the name of his informant. We have failed to confirm this information and consider it erroneous.



Breeding Seabirds and Status

Eudyptula minor Little Penguin — Nests regularly in burrows or under rocks over most of the island in spring and summer. Some eggs and/or chicks are usually present from September to January. Probably a few birds would be ashore at night throughout the remaining months. Estimated 150 breeding pairs.

Haematopus fuliginosus Sooty Oystercatcher — A pair usually is seen on the island and probably nests there regularly, but this has only been



● Wright Island (looking north-east).

Photo: E. N. Paton

recorded in November 1966 and December/January 1974-75.

Larus novaehollandiae Silver Gull — These birds do not appear to have bred on the island before 1962 but now nest over most of it from September to January. Estimated 500 breeding pairs.

Sterna nereis Fairy Tern — Some birds nest irregularly on the top of the island among granite rubble by the side of exposed flat granite rocks, usually during December and January. In the seasons from 1961 to 1964 about 50-80 pairs nested each season but they were not present between 1965 and 1975. In December 1975 there were nine nests with eggs but these were subsequently deserted.

Factors Affecting Status

In earlier years Rabbits *Oryctolagus cuniculus* and occasional fires denuded the island of vegetation from time to time. The Rabbits are no longer present. About 1965 the District Council of Encounter Bay poisoned and burnt the African Boxthorn which had spread over the whole vegetated area. The resultant extensive loss of vegetation probably caused erosion and damage to penguin burrows not supported by rocks; undoubtedly it discouraged the gulls from breeding, but was unlikely to have affected the Fairy Terns.

The island is readily accessible to small craft and in summer is visited frequently. Penguins appear to be unaffected by such visits but in January 1976 the Fairy Tern colony had obviously been disturbed and eggs broken, probably unwittingly; the colony was deserted almost certainly due to the disturbance.

Other Seabirds Recorded

Phalacrocorax fuscescens Black-faced Cormorant.
Phalacrocorax varius Pied Cormorant.
Phalacrocorax melanoleucos Little Pied Cormorant.
Phalacrocorax carbo Black Cormorant.
Phalacrocorax sulcirostris Little Black Cormorant.
Ardea novaehollandiae White-faced Heron.
Larus pacificus Pacific Gull.
Hydroprogne caspia Caspian Tern.
Sterna bergii Crested Tern.

Banding

Period covered — 23 December 1962 to 30 June 1975.

P. fuscescens — 1 "adult".

L. novaehollandiae — 564 nestlings banded; 34 recoveries up to 670 km from banding place.

S. nereis — 10 adults, 2 juveniles, 18 nestlings banded. One banded as a breeding adult was recovered breeding on West Island, 3 km SW.

Bibliography

1. Cleland, J. B. (1924), 'Birds of the Encounter Bay District', *S. Aust. Orn.* 7: 170.
2. Cleland, J.B. (1951), Bird Notes, *S. Aust. Orn.* 20: 23.
3. Lothian, N. (1959), 'New Records of Naturalised Plants together with a list of plants from Wright Island, Encounter Bay', *S. Aust. Nat.* 33: 39.
4. Lothian N. (1960), 'Plants from Wright Island and Encounter Bay', *S. Aust. Nat.* 34: 53.

Acknowledgements

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