

# SEABIRD ISLANDS

# No. 28

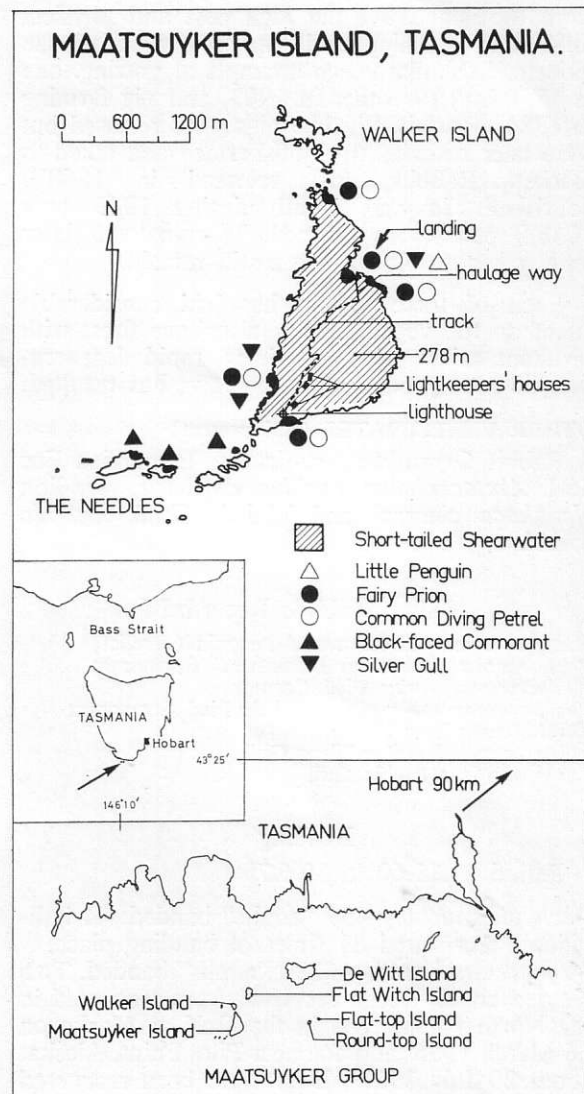
## Maatsuyker Island, Tasmania

**Location:** 43°40' S., 146°19' E.; in the Maatsuyker Group of six islands in the Southern Ocean off south-western Tasmania, 13 km due south of the Tasmanian mainland.

**Status:** Under the control of the Lighthouse Service, Australian Department of Transport. The Maatsuyker Group and other offshore islands in south-western Tasmania are currently proposed additions to the South West National Park administered by the Tasmanian National Parks and Wildlife Service.

**Description:** 180 ha; roughly triangular in plan, 2400 m x 1200 m, with The Needles rocks at the south-western end and Walker Island off the northern tip, it is the second largest island in the group. In shape an off-centred pyramid with the summit at 278 m, precipitous cliffs encircle the island with few breaks and the shoreline is a jumbled mass of Pre-Cambrian boulders. Mean annual rainfall is 1168 mm.

The vegetation is typical of the coastal communities of south-western Tasmania, although stunted and in places severely wind-pruned. Trees, in the form of *Eucalyptus simmondsii*, are confined to a small area on the summit. Elsewhere, except on the cliffs, very steep slopes, and at the extreme south-western end, a tall shrub complex of *Leptospermum scoparium*, *Melaleuca squarrosa* and *Banksia marginata* is dominant, forming a dense canopy which reaches about 6 metres in sheltered situations. Associated with this complex are such woody shrubs as *Drimys lanceolata*, *Acacia verticillata*, *Exocarpus strictus*, *Pittosporum bicolor*, *Cenarrhenes nitida*, *Cyathodes juniperina* and *Pomaderris apetala*. Ground cover beneath the canopy is sparse, consisting mostly of the ferns *Phymatodes diversifolium* and *Blechnum procerum*. However, along the edges of tracks and in small clearings a dense and luxuriant low cover of shrubs, herbs, grasses and ferns comprising *Epacris impressa*, *Sprengelia incarnata*, *Olearia phlogopappa*, *O. viscosa*, *Heli-*



*chrysum paraliun*, *Blandfordia marginata*, *Stylidium graminifolium*, *Billadiera longifolia*, *Gahnia* sp., *Dianella* sp., *Pteridium esculentum* and *Pteris tremula* occurs. On the cliffs, ridges and



● Maatsuyker Island from the air (looking north-east). The Needles Rocks are in the foreground and De Witt Island is in the background at left.

Photo: J. England

along the shoreline, many of the previously listed shrubs appear as dwarfs with grasses *Poa sp.*, *Stipa sp.* and succulents *Tetragonia sp.* and *Mesembryanthemum sp.*

**Landing:** The only landing is at a small jetty in a relatively sheltered cove on the north-eastern side. From here a haulage way leads 137 m up a steep slope to one end of the island's main track. Because of its exposed position in the path of prevailing westerly winds, storms and big seas may often delay a landing for several days.

**Ornithological History:** The only two recorded visits by ornithologists were from 4-15 February 1971 (Milledge)<sup>2</sup> and from 16-30 January 1975 (Brothers)<sup>1</sup>.

#### Breeding Seabirds and Status

*Eudyptula minor* Little Penguin—A breeding colony is located among boulders near the landing

jetty. In February 1971 and January 1975 burrows mostly contained two well-developed chicks. One burrow in 1975 contained a small downy chick and an adult. Probably breeds elsewhere on the island. Estimated 30 breeding pairs in the "landing" colony.

*Pachyptila turtur* Fairy Prion—Four breeding colonies exist as mixed colonies with the Common Diving-petrel. These are located at the northern end of the island, about the landing jetty, along the shore west of the lightkeepers' houses and close to the lighthouse (see map). None of these four colonies is very extensive and they consist of groups of rather widely-spaced burrows. In all except the "lighthouse" colony, Fairy Prion burrows outnumber those of the Diving-petrel in the ratio of 2 to 1. Only a few prions nest in the "lighthouse" colony. These colonies do not overlap with Short-tailed Shearwater breeding areas, being placed on steeper slopes between those areas. The entrances to the Prion burrows are often concealed by *Poa*