

# SEABIRD ISLANDS

No. 39

## Flinders Islet, Five Islands, New South Wales

**Location:** 34°27' S., 150°56' E.; 4 km north-east of Port Kembla, N.S.W., and 1.5 km offshore.

**Status:** Nature Reserve controlled by the National Parks and Wildlife Service (N.S.W.): Entry permit required.

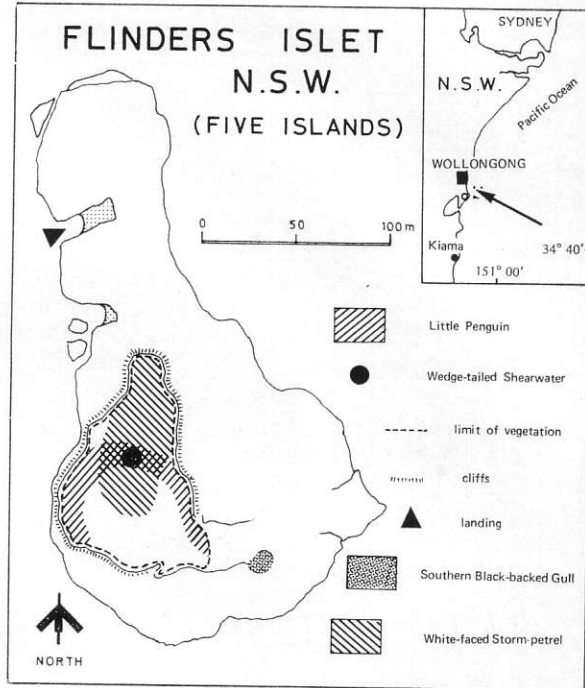
**Other Names:** Five Islands, No. 4; together with Bass Islet, forms the Tom Thumb Island Group; locally known as Toothbrush Island; formerly called Pig Island<sup>5,6</sup> (? in error).

**Description:** 2.8 ha; a rocky, wave-cut platform with a small, vegetated plateau at the south-west corner. The island extends about 300 m by 160 m with a plateau about 125 m by 75 m at the widest. The plateau rises to 13 m and has a number of small caves in its almost vertical sides. There is a small area of sand and gravel near the base on the eastern side.

Vegetation is dominated on the northern end of the plateau by the shrub *Myoporum insulare* but Coast Rosemary *Westringia fruticosa* and Saltbush *Atriplex cinerea* are well established. Pigface *Carpobrotus glaucescens* is dominant on the southern end. Pigweed *Portulaca oleracea*, *Correa alba*, *Dichondra repens*, *Commelina cyanea*, *Tetragonia tetragonioides* and *Kennedia rubicunda* occur in mixed communities on the plateau.

**Landing:** Except in rough seas and large swells, a small boat landing is possible on a gravel beach in the gutter near the north-west corner. There are submerged rocks near the entrance and usually a strong surge, necessitating a cautious approach and exit.

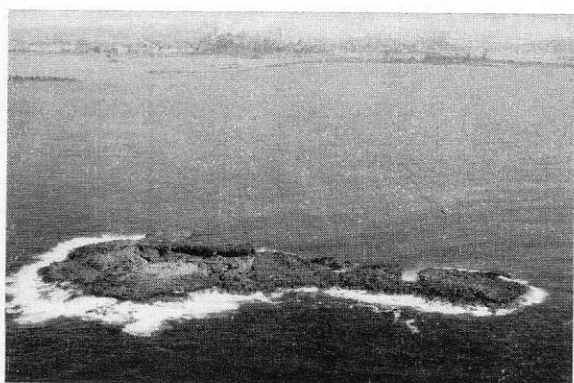
**Ornithological History:** The earliest ornithological visits appear to have been made by Hull in October 1909<sup>3</sup> and December 1914<sup>4</sup> but he apparently spent little time on the island. He recorded finding the Little Penguin and White-faced Storm-petrel in 1909, and in addition, the Wedge-tailed Shearwater in 1914. Keast made visits on 27 January 1940 and 15 December 1940<sup>6</sup>; he found White-faced Storm-petrels and Wedge-tailed Shearwaters breeding. Visits by



Davis<sup>2</sup> during the period 1932-41 were chiefly for geological and botanical studies, although he did record some land birds. Subsequent visits have been as follows:

- 4.12.48 J. D. Gibson.
- 28.11.54 J. D. Gibson, K. A. Hindwood, A. R. McGill and A. Sefton.
- 18. 3.62 J. D. Gibson and D. Walsh.
- 29.12.63 J. D. Gibson and D. Walsh.
- 19. 1.64 J. D. Gibson and D. Walsh.
- 1. 3.64 J. D. Gibson and A. R. Sefton.
- 14.12.68 H. Battam, B. Jones and J. Elliott.
- 9.12.69 H. Battam, P. J. Fullagar, B. Jones and D. Purchase.
- 3. 1.70 H. Battam and B. Jones.
- 29.12.72 H. Battam, B. Jones and S. G. Lane.
- 26.12.75 H. Battam, L. F. Lane, S. G. Lane and A. J. Leishman.
- 31. 1.76 H. Battam, G. C. Lane, L. F. Lane and S. G. Lane.

The Southern Black-backed Gull was first recorded breeding on the island on 9 December 1969.



● Flinders Island (looking south-west), with Port Kembla in the background.

Photo: M. D. Murray

#### Breeding Seabirds and Status

*Eudyptula minor* Little Penguin — A small number probably breed regularly on the island. Breeding season generally from August to December, but some birds may be ashore throughout the year. Estimated 30(+) breeding pairs.

*Puffinus pacificus* Wedge-tailed Shearwater — A few pairs probably breed on the island each year from late August to early May. The shallow soil restricts the number of burrows. Estimated 5-10 breeding pairs.

*Pelagodroma marina* White-faced Storm-petrel — First recorded by Keast in 1940<sup>6</sup> but no indication given of number present. In 1954, some 200 occupied burrows were recorded. Since then, the colony has declined considerably and over the last eight years, occupied burrows have varied from a few to about 50 (estimated). In 1975-76, estimated 20(+) breeding pairs.

*Egretta sacra* Reef Heron — Bred on a shelf in a small cave on the eastern side of the plateau in December 1969.

*Haematopus fuliginosus* Sooty Oystercatcher — Up to three pairs occupy the island and breed annually in the small, sandy-gravel area east of the plateau. Runners and immature birds have been observed during the month of December.

*Larus dominicanus* Southern Black-backed Gull — One pair has bred regularly since 1969 and

● see location map of Five Islands, page 114.

runners have been banded during the month of December.

#### Factors Affecting Status

Remains of White-faced Storm-petrels have been found, indicating predation. Possible predators are the Southern Black-backed Gull and Boobook Owl *Ninox novaeseelandiae*; the latter has been recorded from the island. It is noticeable that the storm-petrel colony decline coincides with the breeding of the gull.

#### OTHER VERTEBRATES

Skinks *Sphenomorphus* sp.

The future status of breeding seabirds on this island may well be affected if a proposal to build breakwaters between some of the Five Islands is carried out (see also paragraph under Big Island, No. 37).

#### Other Seabirds Recorded

*Phalacrocorax carbo* Black Cormorant  
*Phalacrocorax sulcirostris* Little Black Cormorant  
*Larus novaehollandiae* Silver Gull  
*Sterna bergii* Crested Tern

#### Banding

Period covered — 14 December 1968 to 31 January 1976.

*P. pacificus* — 10 adults.

*P. marina* — 54 adults and nestlings.

*H. fuliginosus* — 1 runner.

*L. dominicanus* — 1 runner.

#### Bibliography

1. Battam, H. (1970). 'The Dominican Gull on the Five Islands, New South Wales', *Aust. Bird Bander* 8: 32-33.
2. Davis, C., M. F. Day and D. F. Waterhouse (1938). 'Notes on the Terrestrial Ecology of the Five Islands', Part 1, *Proc. Linn. Soc. N.S.W.* 63: 358-388.
3. Hull, A.F. Basset (1911). 'Avifauna of the New South Wales Islands', Part 1, *Emu* 11: 99-104.
4. Hull, A. F. Basset (1916). 'Avifauna of the New South Wales Islands', Part 3, *Emu* 15: 207-216.
5. Hull, A. F. Basset (1922). 'The Islands of New South Wales and their Birds', *Aust. Mus. Mag.* 1: 139-146.
6. Keast, J. A. (1942). 'Birds of the Five Islands', *Emu* 42: 133-140.

#### Acknowledgements

Messrs J. D. Gibson and A. R. Sefton kindly provided details of their visits and made their records available to me.

Date compiled:  
8 August 1976

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● Little Muttonbird Island (looking east).

Photo: S. G. Lane

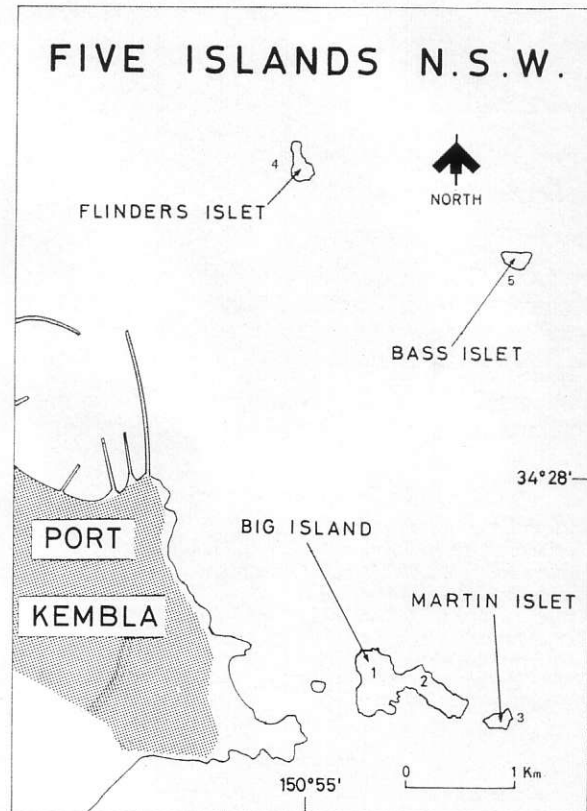
(see item no. 31, page 87)



● Sawtell Islet (looking east).

Photo: S. G. Lane

(see item no. 34, page 93)



● Location map of Five Islands, N.S.W. (see items 38-41).