

SEABIRD ISLANDS

No. 40

Bass Islet, Five Islands, New South Wales

Location: 34°28' S., 150°57' E.; 4 km north-east of Port Kembla, N.S.W., and 3 km offshore.

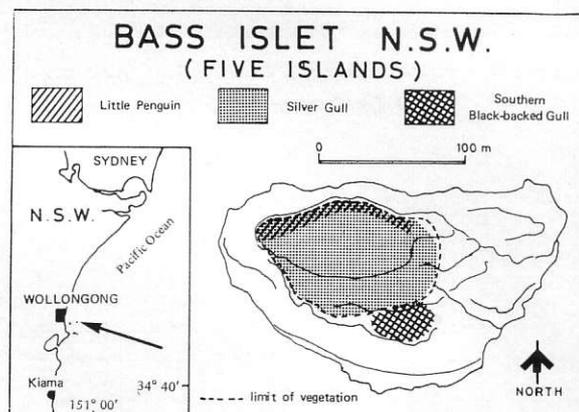
Status: Nature Reserve controlled by the National Parks and Wildlife Service (N.S.W.): Entry permit required.

Other Names: Five Islands, No. 5; together with Flinders Islet, forms the Tom Thumb Island Group; locally known as Pig Island.

Description: 2.3 ha; 225 m by 150 m, the outer-most of the Five Islands, it is some 16 m high and is very exposed to prevailing southerlies. Only small areas of soil occur, and these are on the north-western side. The vegetation is predominantly Pigweed *Portulaca oleracea* with some New Zealand Spinach *Tetragonia tetragonioides* and Saltbush *Atriplex cinerea*. Buffalo Grass *Stenotaphrum secundatum*, Summer Grass *Digitaria marginatum* and a couch *Paspalum distichum* flourish after prolonged spells of wet weather. The island is composed of heavily jointed Dapto dolerite, a hard rock of volcanic origin which has eroded more readily along some prominent joints, leaving small ridges which offer useful shelter for breeding seabirds.

Landing: Extremely difficult. Almost flat seas are essential even for swimming on and off the island, hence visits are rare.

Ornithological History: Hull³ recorded Silver Gulls and Crested Terns breeding on Bass Islet in 1914, though he did not land. The island was visited irregularly by Davis² over the decade from 1932-41 and he recorded Silver Gulls breeding some seasons. Keast⁴ visited the island on 28 January 1940, 14 December 1940 and 6 June 1941, recording Silver Gulls and Little Penguins breeding. Apparently no further visits were made



until 14 December 1968 when H. Battam, J. Elliott and B. Jones landed on the island; in addition to the Silver Gulls and Little Penguins, they found three nests of the Southern Black-backed Gull, one recently used and two which "appeared to have been constructed in a previous season indicating that the birds may have bred there for at least one other season". Two large, downy young were found among the rocks¹.

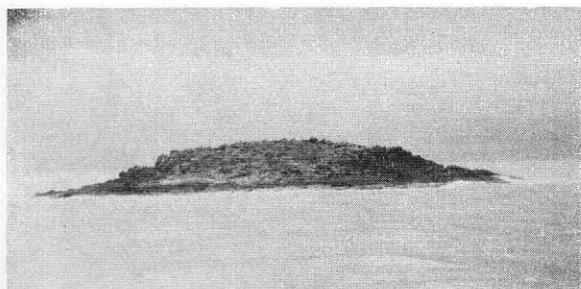
Subsequent visits were as follows:

- 9.12.69 H. Battam and B. Jones.
- 3. 1.70 H. Battam and B. Jones.
- 29.12.72 H. Battam, B. Jones and S. G. Lane.

Breeding Seabirds and Status

Eudyptula minor Little Penguin — A few pairs breed in suitable crevasses, probably from August to January.

Larus novaehollandiae Silver Gull — Bred irregularly in increasing numbers until 1968; since then breeding has occurred each year except 1971. Breeding season usually from September to February. Estimated 2 000(+) breeding pairs.



● The 'inverted saucer' shape of the island is evident in this picture (looking east).

Larus dominicanus Southern Black-backed Gull
First recorded breeding on 14 December 1968 and has bred on the island each year since. Numbers are gradually increasing¹; runners and juveniles present in December visits. Estimated 6 breeding pairs.

Sterna bergii Crested Tern — Recorded breeding by Hull³ in December 1914 but there are no subsequent records.

Factors Affecting Status

There is little interference from humans due to the difficulties of landing. No doubt *L. dominicanus* would take eggs and young of other breeding species, except probably penguins.

Proposals to build breakwaters between some of the Five Islands as an extension of the Port Kembla harbour facilities may well affect the status of the breeding seabirds (see also Big Island, No. 37).

OTHER VERTEBRATES

None recorded.

Other Seabirds Recorded

Phalacrocorax carbo Black Cormorant
Phalacrocorax sulcirostris Little Black Cormorant

Banding

Period covered — 14 December 1968 to 31 December 1975.

L. dominicanus — 8 runners.

● see location map of Five Islands, page 114.



● Bass Islet (looking west-south-west).

Photo: M. D. Murray

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', *Proc. Linn. Soc. N.S.W.* 63: 358-388.
3. Hull, A. F. Basset (1916). 'Avifauna of the New South Wales Islands', Part 3, *Emu* 15: 207-216.
4. Keast, J. A. (1942). 'Birds of the Five Islands', *Emu* 42: 133-140.

Acknowledgements

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Date compiled:
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● Little Muttonbird Island (looking east).

Photo: S. G. Lane

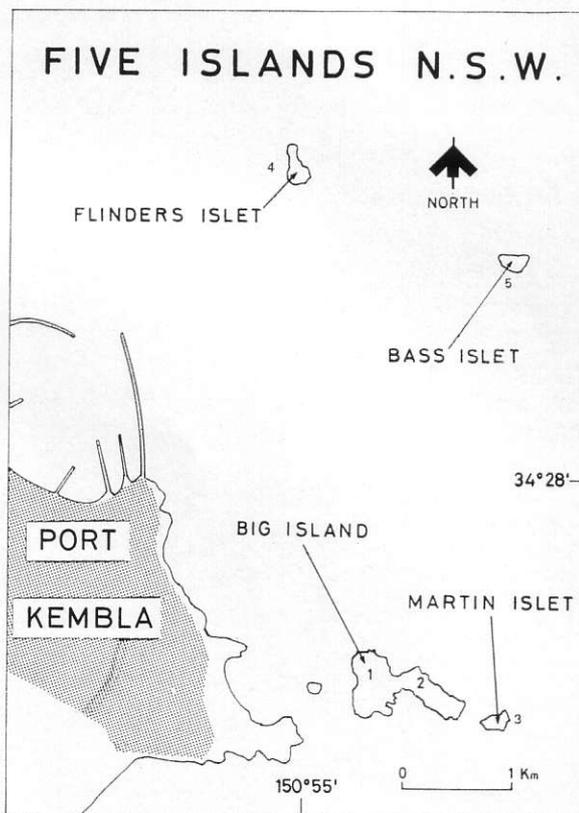
(see item no. 31, page 87)



● 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).