

SEABIRD ISLANDS

No. 55

Breaksea Island, King George Sound, Western Australia

Location: 35°04' S., 118°03' E., 12 km south-east of Albany, W.A. and 5.1 km north-east of Bald Head.

Status: Class C. Reserve vested in the W.A. Wildlife Authority for conservation of flora and fauna.

Description: 102 ha; 2.8 km by 0.6 km at the widest; the southern side is precipitous, and the swell breaks heavily on it at most times; consequently much of it is devoid of vegetation apart from the salt tolerant *Salicornia* and *Calandrinia*. The basic rock is granite-gneissic, with an aeolianite capping. An automatic navigation light stands on the highest point 102 m above m.s.l. Some 60 species of plants occur; dominant ones are Coastal Saltbush *Rhagodia radiata*, *Trachymene saxicola* and Capeweed *Arctotheca calendulacea*.

Landing: Landing can be made onto rocks below a jetty on the north-west side or directly onto a chain ladder suspended from the jetty.

Ornithological History: A. J. Campbell¹ vividly recounted his experiences on the island. He found old eggs of the Flesh-footed Shearwater in January, 1890. According to the lighthouse-keeper at that time, the first birds appear in September and the first eggs are laid on 30 November. Carter² also visited the island (some time prior to 1910 but the date is not available) and collected eggs of the Flesh-footed Shearwater. Dr D. L. Serventy (pers. comm.) spent about an hour ashore on 3 June 1948 and found seabird footprints and burrows but no seabirds. He also found moult feathers of Little Penguins and one corpse each of a Flesh-footed Shearwater and a Great-winged Petrel. On 2 June 1963 T. Allen (pers. comm. from N. Kolichis) found Great-winged Petrels nesting and with N. Kolichis on 12 October 1974 found the Sooty Oystercatcher on eggs. I. Abbott spent from 22 August to 2 September 1975 on the island.

Breeding Seabirds and Status

Eudyptula minor Little Penguin—In 1975, hundreds were noted calling along the northern



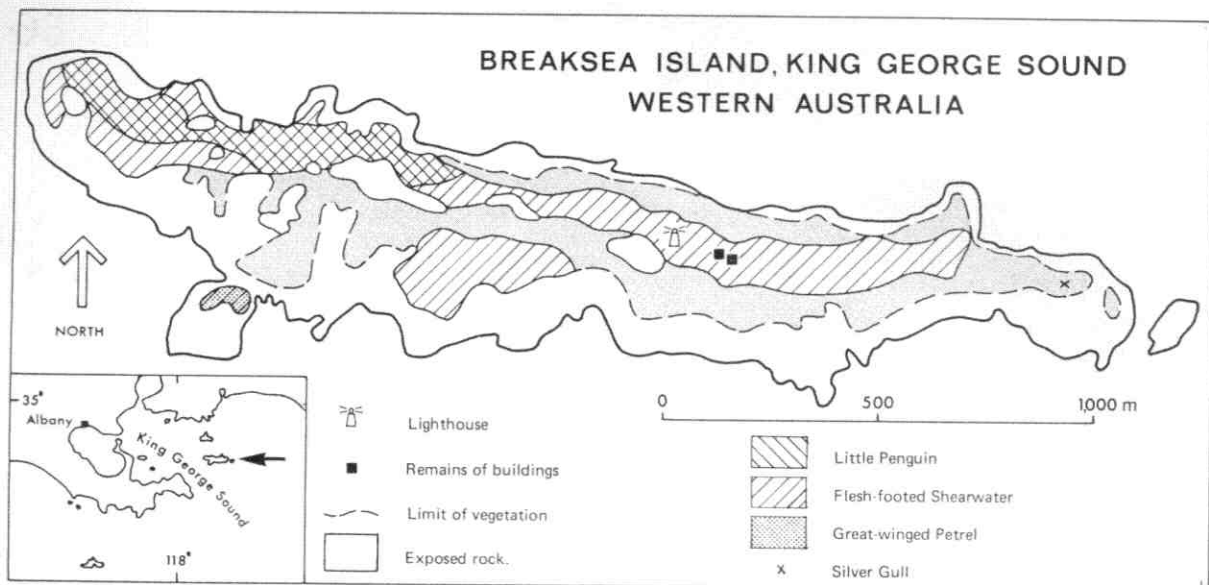
● Breaksea Island, viewed from the summit of Michaelmas Island (looking south-east).



● Part of the northern side near the western end.

side of the island. At night, individuals were met even on the backbone of the island. It took them about 30 minutes to reach the top of the island above the jetty, which is a distance along the ground of nearly 200 m sloping steeply to some 70 m in height. No doubt, they breed regularly on the island, although an accurate estimate of the numbers has not been made. The figure could be from 100 to 1 000 breeding pairs.

Pterodroma macroptera Great-winged Petrel—On 2 June 1963, four birds each incubating an egg in a burrow were found on the southern promontory, and in June 1974, although no specific search was carried out, one bird was found incubating an egg on the floor of the building near the lighthouse.



During the visit in 1975 a few were heard or seen overhead at dusk and a skull was picked up from inside one of the abandoned houses near the summit. Probably breeds regularly on the island although no accurate estimate of the numbers has been made.

Puffinus carneipes Flesh-footed Shearwater — Thousands of burrows occur over the island but their density is greatest on the northern (lee) side. In 1975 many skulls were noticed throughout the *Rhagodia* scrub. Present to breed from September to late April or early May. Although no attempt was made at the time to estimate the breeding numbers, probably something between 1 000 and 5 000 pairs breed on the island.

Larus novaehollandiae Silver Gull — During the visit in 1975 not more than five or six birds were noted; two nests were found far apart, each containing eggs. Probably a few pairs nest irregularly on the island.

Factors Affecting Status

Between 1858 and 1926 lighthouse personnel were resident on the island and domestic pets no doubt interfered with breeding seabirds. Campbell¹ reported a small dog "sending clouds of sand in all directions in his anxiety to withdraw the hidden birds". Rabbits *Oryctolagus cuniculus* are very plentiful, and no doubt cause destruction of vegetation but the effect on the breeding seabirds is not known. Despite these factors, there

has been little apparent effect on the island's ecology except for an area some 500 m by 100 m near the north of the summit which is a Capeweed paddock. King's Skinks *Egernia kingii* are also numerous and would predate some eggs.

Other Seabirds Recorded

<i>Haematopus fuliginosus</i>	Sooty Oystercatcher
<i>Larus pacificus</i>	Pacific Gull
<i>Sterna bergii</i>	Crested Tern
<i>Hydroprogne caspia</i>	Caspian Tern

Banding

Nil

Bibliography

1. Campbell, A. J. (1901), Nests and Eggs of Australian Birds. Priv. Publ. Sheffield.
2. Carter, T. (1910), 'Remarks on some Birds of Western Australia', *Ibis* (9) 4: 647-658.
3. Hull, A. F. Basset, (1922), 'A Visit to the Archipelago of the Recherche S.W. Australia', *Emu* 21: 277-289.

Acknowledgements

I thank Messrs D. Pearson and S. Randall for transport for my visit which was funded by a grant from Australian Research Grants Committee. I also thank Messrs T. Allen and N. Kolichis for providing details of their visits.

I. Abbott,
Department of Zoology,,
University of Western Australia,
Nedlands, W.A.

Date compiled:
17 March 1976