

## SEABIRD ISLANDS

No. 61

## Saint Alouarn Island, Western Australia

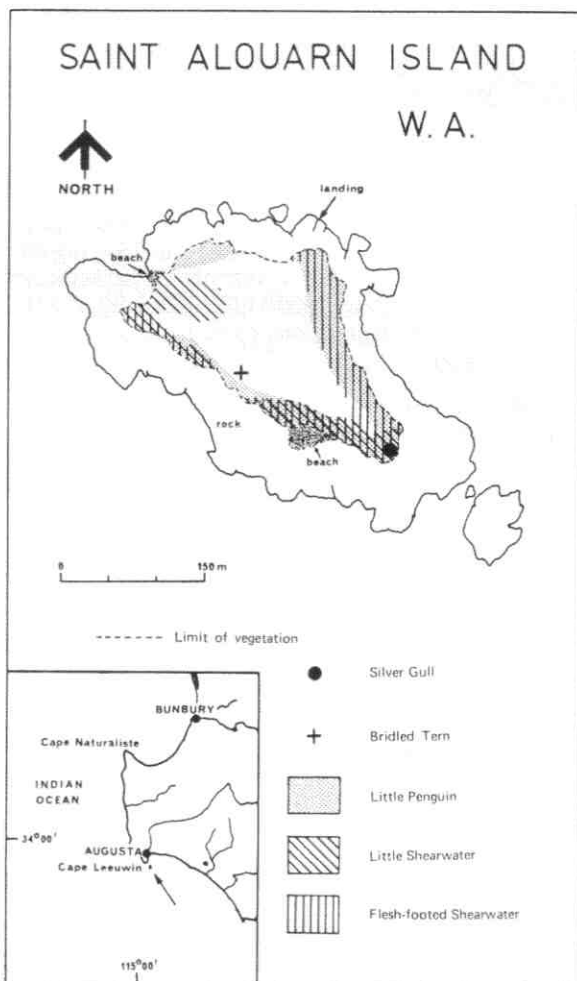
**Location:** 34°24' S., 115°12' E.; 6 km south-east of Cape Leeuwin, W.A.

**Status:** Class A Reserve for the Conservation of Fauna, vested in the Western Australian Wildlife Authority.

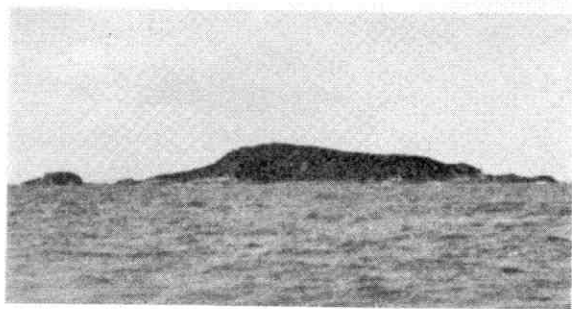
**Description:** 8.5 ha; 550 m by 250 m. The island has a granitic-gneiss base with an aeolian limestone cap rising to 26.5 m. Differential weathering has caused the softer aeolinite to recede from the coast so that the entire shoreline consists of a 20-70 m wide expanse of the more resistant gneiss. There is a small sandy beach at the north-west end of the island and another beach of shell fragments at the south end. Average annual precipitation is 995 mm, falling mainly from May to September. The vegetation is predominantly shrubby. Two succulent-leaved species are dominant; *Rhagodia baccata* throughout the inland part and *Nitraria schoberi* on the cliffs. *Olearia axillaris* and *Calocephalus brownii* also occur, though the latter is rare and confined to the coast. Herb species, principally *Lavatera plebeia*, *Carpobrotus rossii*, *Apium prostratum* and *Threlkeldia diffusa*, are dominant around the base of the aeolianite cliffs where sand has accumulated.

**Landing:** Possible using an inflatable dinghy. Strong swells from the south-west sweep around the island for most of the year and landing by boat would be dangerous.

**Ornithological History:** Few ornithological visits appear to have been made to Saint Alouarn Island. John Gilbert visited "one or more of the islands off Cape Leeuwin" in December 1842 and collected specimens and eggs of the Flesh-footed Shearwater and the White-faced Storm-petrel<sup>3</sup>. It is not known, however, whether St Alouarn I. was included in this visit. Gillham<sup>1</sup> visited the island in the first week of November 1959. She reported that "the majority of the St Alouarn burrows appeared to belong to Little Shearwaters". One living specimen was seen emerging from a burrow and several fresh carcasses were found. Little Shearwater burrows were found "in both the rocky and sandy areas, and among



*Rhagodia baccata*/*Nitraria schoberi* scrub or in mats of coastal succulents . . ." Gillham found "no trace" of the Flesh-footed Shearwater, "although birds were very much in evidence on Seal I. (4.5 km north-west) where they were crowing noisily underground in newly cleaned-out burrows or crouched beneath the inadequate cover of boulders." Gillham did not sight any White-faced Storm-petrels although she reported that



● *St Alouarn Island (looking south).*

"burrows which almost certainly belonged to this species were found on the north-east side of St Alouarn I.". However, no subsequent substantiation has been found of this species breeding on the island. The only other nesting species which Gillham reported for St Alouarn Island was the Fairy Penguin. "... adults and almost fully fledged young were commonly seen in burrows and crevices on Seal I. and St Alouarn I. in all types of vegetation".

Brief visits were made to the island during 1976 as follows:

17 September: S. G. Lane, L. F. Lane, G. B. Pearson, J. A. K. Lane.

1 November: J. A. K. Lane.

18 December: G. B. Pearson, J. A. K. Lane.

#### Breeding Seabirds and Status

*Eudyptula minor* Little Penguin — A small number of adults and young were found during the September and November (1976) visits. Of the burrows checked in December, only one contained chicks and some contained eggs. Several dead chicks were found near burrow entrances at this time. Though some breeding occurs in crevices on the cliff faces, most birds appear to breed in *Carpobrotus* covered sand deposits at the foot of the cliffs. Estimated 50 breeding pairs.

*Puffinus carneipes* Flesh-footed Shearwater — Seven burrows containing Flesh-footed Shearwaters were found during the November 1976 visit. Each burrow contained two adults and no eggs or chicks. Burrows which were occupied in December each contained one adult and one egg. As is the case with the Little Penguin, most breeding occurs in *Carpobrotus* patches at the foot of the cliffs. Estimated 100 breeding pairs.

*Puffinus assimilis* Little Shearwater — Two adults were found in a single burrow near the island summit in September 1976<sup>2</sup>. Of 5 juveniles found in

November 1976, 3 had a thick covering of down over their contour feathers and 2 had only traces of down remaining. Their burrows were situated in *Carpobrotus* mats and in *Nitraria/Rhagodia* scrub. The species was not recorded in December 1976. Estimated 50 breeding pairs.

*Larus novaehollandiae* Silver Gull — Not abundant. One nest containing a single chick was found in November 1976. Estimated less than 5 breeding pairs.

*Sterna anaetheta* Bridled Tern — Abundant in December 1976 when 100-200 birds of this species were seen in the near vicinity of the island. One nest with adult and eggs was found in a small cave high up on the southern cliff-face at this time. Estimated less than 15 breeding pairs.

#### Factors Affecting Status

King's Skinks *Egernia kingii* are abundant and apparently prey upon Little Penguin eggs. (One was found in a burrow with a half-consumed egg). They presumably take eggs from chicks of other seabird species as well. Peregrine Falcons *Falco peregrinus* may also be responsible for some predation. The island is visited by fishermen on rare occasions; however there is no evidence of interference.

#### OTHER VERTEBRATES

None recorded.

#### Other Seabirds Recorded

*Haematopus fuliginosus* Sooty Oystercatcher.

#### Banding

*P. assimilis*—2 banded 17 September 1976.

#### Bibliography

- Gillham, M. E. (1963), 'Association of nesting seabirds and vegetation types on islands off Cape Leeuwin, south-western Australia', *West. Aust. Nat.* 9: 29-46.
- Lane, S. G. (1978) 'The Little Shearwater on St Alouarn Island, Western Australia', *West. Aust. Nat.* 14: 55.
- Whittell, H. M. (1942), 'A review of the work of John Gilbert in Western Australia. Part II', *Emu* 41: 216-242.

#### Acknowledgements

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