

SEABIRD ISLANDS

No. 63

Lancelin Island, Western Australia

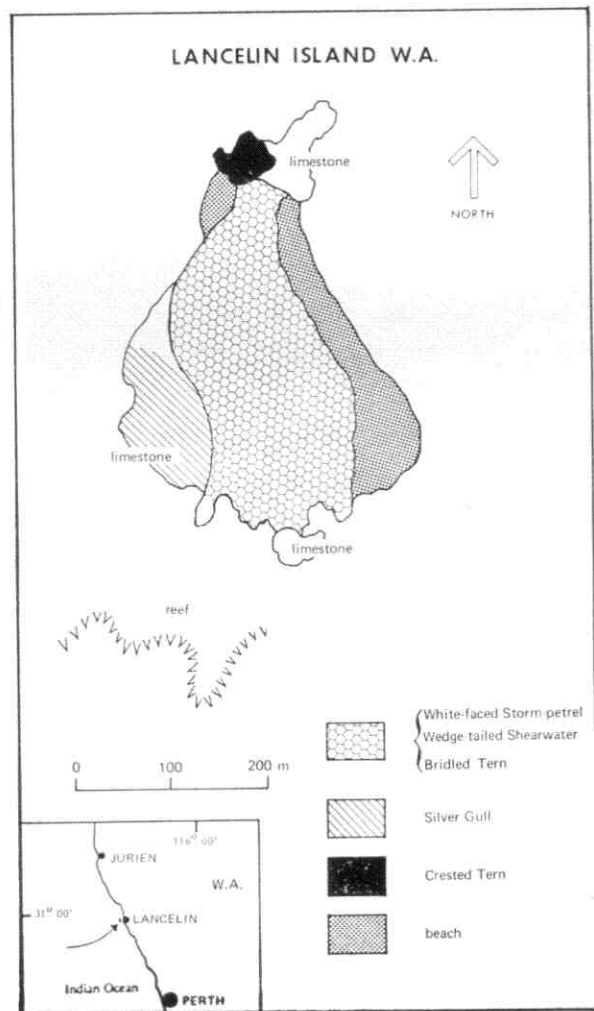
Location: 31°01' S., 115°19' E.; 500 m offshore in Jurien Bay, about 115 km north-north-west of Fremantle, W.A.

Status: Class A Reserve vested in the W.A. Wildlife Authority.

Description: 7.6 ha; roughly pear-shaped, the island is some 500 m long by about 300 m at the widest and rises to a height of 17 m. The underlying rock is limestone but most of the island is capped with deep dune sand. However, only a thin mantle of sand covers the limestone on the west side, the north peninsula and various points at the south end. Forty plant species were found during the visit in December 1976. Dominant species on deep sand are *Carpobrotus virescens*, *Zygophyllum aurantiacum*, *Threlkeldia diffusa*, *Atriplex cinerea* and *Rhagodia baccata*. Areas of limestone pavements are dominated by *Gasoul crystallinum*, *Lavatera plebeia*, *Frankenia pauciflora* and various introduced grasses. *Nitraria schoberi* is common on the limestone cliffs and talus. Photographs of the island's environment may be found in Gillham³ (plates 16 and 17) and Serventy *et al.*⁴ (p. 12).

Landing: The large sand beach on the east side and the numerous small ones around the rest of the island make landing no problem in reasonable weather conditions.

Ornithological History: The first recorded ornithological visit to Lancelin Island was by V. N. Serventy in December 1940⁶. In 1954 J. Warham⁷ studied the Rock Parrot *Neophema petrophila* there from 22 October to 1 November, while J. R. Ford² made visits on 19-21 August 1957, 1





● Lancelin Island from the mainland (looking west).

September 1957, 3 October 1959, 6-7 October 1961, 18 November 1962 and 30 December the same year. More recently, N. Kolichis (pers. comm.) visited the island on 26 October 1974 and I. Abbott on 6-8 December 1976.

Breeding Seabirds and Status

Puffinus pacificus Wedge-tailed Shearwater — V. N. Serventy⁶ recorded that the "island was honeycombed with burrows, probably of this bird. The breeding colony must have been many thousands strong, but only a few rather decayed birds were found." Ford² found no activity on 19 August 1957 but three weeks later many fresh burrows were scattered over the whole island. Eggs were found on 18 November 1962 but not in the October visits in 1959 and 1961. During the visit by Abbott on 6-8 December 1976 burrows were most common under *Nitraria* on the upper west slopes but were rare elsewhere; a few burrows were found in caves. Although some hundred burrows were searched, only one bird was located—sitting on an egg under a *Nitraria* bush; 12 were captured on the surface at night.

Pelagodroma marina White-faced Storm-petrel—This species was not mentioned by Serventy⁶, but Ford² found "a few thousand birds" constructing burrows in August and September 1957. No eggs were found then or on 3 October 1959. However burrows were abundant on 7 October 1961, "and virtually honeycombed the entire island except the north end where the soil was hard and shallow"; about half the burrows examined contained a bird on the single egg. On 26 October 1974, Kolichis (pers. comm.) found burrows "plentiful where suitable ground was available"; the burrows contained eggs. In December 1976, Abbott found

burrows over the whole island excluding the cliffs and pavement limestone areas. However birds were scarce: two were seen on the night of 7 December and three recently dead specimens were found. Some 12 burrows examined were empty.

Haematopus ostralegus Pied Oystercatcher — Recorded breeding during visits in 1957, 1959 and 1961². One or two pairs probably breed regularly on the island from about August to October.

Larus novaehollandiae Silver Gull—Serventy⁶ recorded 50 birds with many immatures in December 1940. In August 1957 Ford² found several nests with eggs on the northern peninsula, and in October 1959 he saw about 20 immatures on the eastern beach. However, in October 1961 some 100 adults, 20-30 flying young and about 20 nests were noted. Ford² also found 35 birds in November 1962 and about 50 in December 1962. Abbott noted about 100 birds near the west end, with few runners; several immatures were seen on the east beach. Probably small numbers breed regularly on the island.

Larus pacificus Pacific Gull—Lancelin Island is recorded as a breeding island for this species⁴. However, the bird was not noted on any of the visits listed.

Hydroprogne caspia Caspian Tern—One pair with a runner was noted by V. N. Serventy⁶ in December 1940. Ford² found a nest with two eggs in August 1957, two adults with a large fledgeling on the eastern beach in October 1959 and 1961, and a pair in November 1962. Kolichis (pers. comm.) found two small young in October 1974 and Abbott recorded one pair with a large chick on the east beach in December 1976. One pair probably breeds regularly on the island from about August to December.

Sterna anaethetus Bridled Tern—In December 1940 V. N. Serventy⁶ recorded 200 birds just starting to nest; only one egg was found. Ford² recorded about 400 in October 1959 and 1961 but no eggs had been laid. He found "hundreds" nesting all over the island in November 1962 and even more some twelve months later. Abbott found the species nesting over the whole island in December 1976, both under bushes and on rock ledges in the cliffs. However, no nests were located



● Part of the eastern side (looking south-west) from the northern peninsula.

on *Gasoul* or *Carpobrotus* herbfields. Estimated 200 to 500 breeding pairs.

Sterna bergii Crested Tern—V. N. Serventy⁶ recorded, without details, 20 birds in December 1940. Ford² found 70 birds on the eastern beach in October 1961, three nests each with one egg in the north-west corner in November 1962, and some 40 adults flying over the same area in December 1962 "probably attending chicks hiding among the vegetation". Kolichis (pers. comm.) recorded 20 pairs on eggs on 26 October 1974. In December 1976 Abbott counted 50 adults and 80 runners in the north-west corner. Probably up to about 50 or so pairs breed most years on the island from about October to January.

Factors Affecting Status

P. Prideaux (pers. comm.) reported that the island was used by the RAAF as a bombing target in the 1940s. Currently, the closeness of the island to the fishing and holiday village of Lancelin results in large numbers of people visiting the island, no doubt causing significant damage to burrows and disturbing surface-nesting species.

OTHER VERTEBRATES

The large lizard *Egernia bos* is present and probably takes some eggs. Four smaller lizard species have been recorded¹.

Other Seabirds Recorded

<i>Phalacrocorax varius</i>	Pied Cormorant
<i>Sterna dougallii</i>	Roseate Tern
<i>Sterna nereis</i>	Fairy Tern

Banding

P. pacificus—12 adults banded on night of 7 December 1976.

Bibliography

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5. Serventy, D. L., V. N. Serventy and J. Warham (1971), *The Handbook of Australian Sea-birds*, A. H. and A. W. Reed, Sydney.
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Acknowledgement

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