

SEABIRD ISLANDS

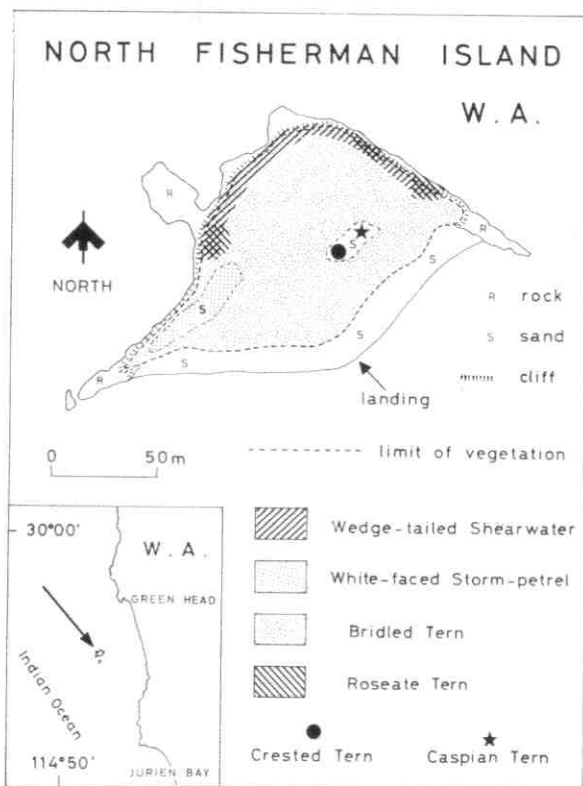
No. 64

North Fisherman Island, Western Australia

Location: 30° 08' S., 114° 57' E.; 5 km off the lower west coast of Western Australia and 21 km north-north-west of Jurien Bay.

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

Description: 1.5 ha; 110 m by 104 m; the larger of the two Fisherman Islands. It is a low-lying aeolian limestone island, wedge-shaped in elevation and rising to about 10 m above sea level. There are low, steep cliffs on the west and north sides and a broad sandy beach on the eastern, leeward shore. The south-west corner has a broken, much-eroded limestone ridge running south-south-west to the edge of a wide reef platform. About 280 m of shallow reef almost joins the north and south islands. A relatively deep layer of calcareous sandy soil covers most of North Fisherman Island. There is a small area of talus slope on the northern end. A small sandy area in the middle of the island is devoid of vegetation, and there is a larger bare area on the south-western side. Dense *Nitraria schoberi* to 2 m dominates the vegetation. There are scattered bushes of *Myoporum insulare* throughout the island, a small community of *Atriplex cinerea* near the beach on the south-east corner, an area of *Spinifex longifolius* on the south-west corner and patches of *Carpobrotus aequilaterus* along the exposed western and northern sides. Most of the *Nitraria* bushes are large domes separated by pathways formed by the movement of Sea-lions



up and down the island. Other plants include *Threlkeldia diffusa*, *Sporobolus virginicus*, *Pelargonium australe* and *Cryophytum crystallinum*.



● North Fisherman Island (looking west).

Landing: Small boats can reach the eastern sandy beach via two small channels through the reef.

Ornithological History: The early ornithological history of the island is rather vague. White-faced Storm-petrels and Bridled Terns were recorded breeding on the island prior to 1948. J. R. Ford visited the Fisherman Islands in 1961, on 24 May, 5 September and 12 December². R. E. Johnstone made 51 visits from 1971 to 1976.

Breeding Seabirds and Status

Puffinus pacificus Wedge-tailed Shearwater — Adults are present from September to late April. Most burrows are in sandy soil on the north end of the island and under cliffs and ledges. Birds also nest on the surface under dense bushes of *Nitraria* and to a lesser extent *Myoporum*. Birds return in September to re-excavate their burrows; eggs are laid in mid October (earliest egg date 14 October) and hatch in late January; juveniles leave the nest in April. About 15-20 breeding pairs.

Pelagodroma marina White-faced Storm-petrel—Common visitor, breeding in summer; arriving in October and leaving in February. Burrows scattered all over the island mostly under vegetation. On 14 October 1972, 26 burrows were counted in an open sandy area on the south-western end of the island; one burrow examined contained an adult bird incubating a fresh egg. About 100-500 breeding pairs.

Phalacrocorax varius Pied Cormorant—Common, present throughout the year. Remains of a rookery were found on the north end of the island in 1971. (See also South Fisherman Island).

Egretta sacra Reef Heron—Uncommon and probably resident; only the grey phase is present. On

2 March 1975 a flat nest of sticks in dense *Nitraria schoberi* on the north side of the island was attributed to this species.

Larus novaehollandiae Silver Gull — Common throughout the year. On 14 October 1972, 24 runners found on the rocky, northern end of the island swam out to sea when approached; it is uncertain from which island they originally came. A few pairs may breed on the island.

Hydroprogne caspia Caspian Tern—Uncommon; a few are present on and about the island throughout the year. Breeding occurs from September to December, mostly in the open sandy area in the centre of the island. In November 1973 a pair was attending a downy chick, and on 16 October 1974 a pair was brooding 2 eggs.

Sterna dougallii Roseate Tern—Common; present from March to June and from October to early February. Breeding in April-May (earliest egg date from autumn-winter breeders 1 April; eggs and downy chicks observed in late April) and in November-January (earliest egg date for summer breeders 30 November; eggs observed as late as 4 January). They prefer the open areas of pigface on the south-western side of the island and the scree slope on the northern end. Since 1971, the number of breeding birds has increased. (This follows the recent expansion into south-western Australia of this tern since 1962⁵. In November 1974, 62 pairs nested on the south-west side of the island. A pair unable to obtain space in the main colony nested on the southern beach.

Sterna anaethetus Bridled Tern — Common visitor, arriving in mid October (earliest date 13 October) and departing in late March and early April. About 2 000 pairs nest all over the island, under bushes, in rock crevices and under limestone ledges. In recent years several pairs have nested in the open and have reared young successfully. In December 1962 Ford found some 100-150 breeding pairs on this island². By 1971 the population had increased to about 2 000 pairs, providing further demonstration of expansion of this tropical tern in southern Western Australia (see Storr and Ford⁵).

Sterna bergii Crested Tern — Common; present throughout the year, largest flock 50. Few breeding records, the birds preferring the more exposed plateau of the south island. On 30 November 1974 two pairs had a nest and single egg in coarse shell



● Part of the storm-petrel breeding area.

grit and pigface in the centre of the island. By 25 January 1975 the eggs had hatched, and a runner was found. On 27 January 1975 a third pair began sitting on a single egg.

Factors Affecting Status

Most breeding species are subject to human interference; many burrows of petrels and shearwaters are trampled by visitors. Some eggs laid on the beach or in open areas are broken by Sea-lions.

OTHER VERTEBRATES

Two small skinks, *Morethia obscura* and *Lerista elegans*, and Australian Sea-lions *Neophoca cinerea* are present.

Other Seabirds Recorded

<i>Eudyptula minor</i>	Little Penguin
<i>Phaethon rubricauda</i>	Red-tailed Tropicbird
<i>Haematopus ostralegus</i>	Pied Oystercatcher
<i>Larus pacificus</i>	Pacific Gull
<i>Sterna fuscata</i>	Sooty Tern
<i>Sterna nereis</i>	Fairy Tern

Banding

Period 10 December 1971 to 14 February 1976.

S. anaethetus—228 nestlings, 263 adults banded; 11 retrapped at banding place; one recovered at Biduk-Biduk, Berau, Kalimantan-Timur, Indonesia (3°52' N., 117°40' E.)¹.

Bibliography

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