

SEABIRD ISLANDS

No. 101

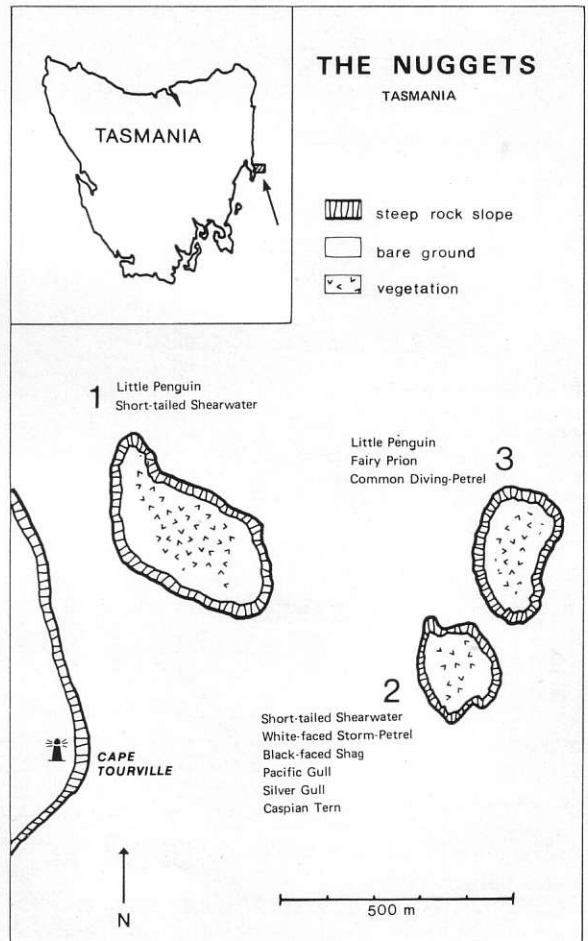
The Nuggets, Tasmania

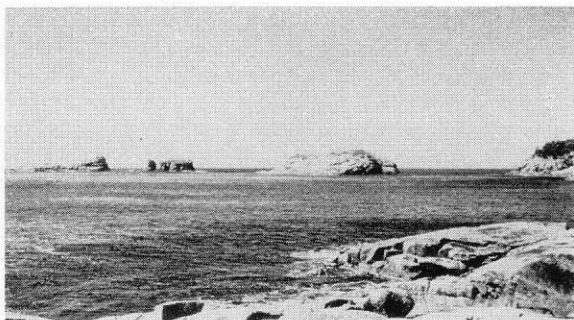
Location: 42° 07' S., 148° 22' E.; 0.2 km to 1 km offshore from Freycinet Peninsula on the east coast of Tasmania.

Status: Crown land.

Description: The Nuggets are a group of four un-named granite islets. Here they are referred to by number for convenience, from west to east. Islet No. 1, the largest of the group, is some 300 m long by 150 m wide and 30 m high. The remaining three are similar in size to one another and are about 150 m long, 100 m wide and 30 m high. Islet No. 2 has a flat top circled by cliffs on all sides. The other islets have cliffs only on their southern and south-western faces with steep slopes on their remaining sides. Vegetation covers about half the surface areas of the islets except No. 4 which supports no vegetation or breeding seabirds; its surface is composed entirely of bare rock. Islet No. 1 supports *Carpobrotus rossii*, *Tetragonia implexicoma*, *Poa poiiformis*, *Leucopogon parviflorus* and *Casuarina stricta* as dominants and 25 other species of plants. Islet No. 2 supports *C. rossii*, *T. implexicoma* and *P. poiiformis* as dominants and six other species. On Islet No. 3 the same species of plants are dominant as on Islet No. 1 except that *Acacia sophorae* replaces *C. stricta* and only 12 other species occur.

Landing: Calm seas are required for landing on any of the islets as access is via small rock platforms or steep rock slopes at sealevel. There is





• *The Nuggets* — from right to left, Islets Nos. 1, 2 and 3 (looking south-east).

no suitable boat launching site on the adjacent coastline, and a rubber dinghy or canoe is probably the most convenient means of transport; these can be carried up the sides of the islets on landing.

Ornithological History: There are no known records of visits to these islets except landings made by N. P. Brothers on 6 January 1974 and 2-3 January 1975 on Islet No. 2, and landings on all islets made on 28 October 1978.

Breeding Seabirds and Status

Eudyptula minor Little Penguin — about 50 pairs breed on each of Islets Nos. 1 and 3. On Islet No. 1 breeding occurs mainly in burrows less than 1 m long but occasionally under *Poa* tussocks. The soil is shallow and burrows often twist to avoid rocks. Two nests were located in rock crevices. All nests contained two eggs or two small chicks on 28 October 1978. On Islet No. 3 another 50 pairs were found breeding mainly in rock crevices and the nests were visible from above. One bird was incubating eggs beside a large boulder. All nests were constructed of *Poa* and again contained two eggs or two small chicks (on 28 October 1978). Fresh plant material was observed in the nests and was probably added during incubation. There was no evidence of breeding on Islet No. 2 where only a single dead bird was found. Estimated 100 breeding pairs.

Pachyptila turtur Fairy Prion — This species breeds only on Islet No. 3 where 10 nests were located in rock crevices on the western side of the island. Several of these nests were clearly

visible when viewed from above. On 28 October 1978 all nests contained a bird incubating an egg. This species was not found breeding in burrows.

Puffinus tenuirostris Short-tailed Shearwater — Remains of individuals of this species were found on Islets No. 1, 2 and 3. In January 1974 birds incubating eggs were found in three burrows on Islet No. 2. Burrows on Islet No. 1 were examined only in October 1978 before eggs were laid but after the burrows had been cleaned by birds in preparation for breeding. Some 60 burrows had been prepared. Several pairs breed on Islet No. 3. Probably 50-60 pairs breed on the islets.

Pelagodroma marina White-faced Storm-Petrel — Breeds only on Islet No. 2 where burrows are mainly under *Poa* but some also occur in areas covered by *C. rossii*. In late October all burrows had been freshly excavated and a few contained single birds incubating their egg. In January burrows contained small chicks, and adult birds visited the nests abruptly at 22:30 hours. Estimated 250 breeding pairs.

Pelecanoides urinatrix Common Diving-Petrel — During the first visit to the Nuggets the remains of only one bird was found on Islet No. 2; no evidence of breeding or presence of live birds was found on any of the islets. The specimen collected was identified as a recently fledged bird belonging to the subspecies *chathamensis* (F. C. Kinsky, pers. comm.). On the second visit 12 decapitated carcasses of *P. urinatrix* were found on Islet No. 2 but no live birds were seen despite intensive searching at night. In October 1978 a pair was removed from a burrow on Islet No. 3. The burrow was a shallow winding tunnel 1.5 m long with three entrances and did not contain an egg. Six other empty burrows were found nearby. Four carcasses were found on Islet No. 3 and three carcasses were found on Islet No. 2. No live birds were found on Islet No. 2.

Leucocarbo fuscescens Black-faced Shag — In 1974 a colony of eight nests surrounded by 15 birds, including several immatures, was observed on the south-western cliff of Islet No. 2. The nests were located on a ledge 3 m below the top of the cliff; one contained 2 eggs. The nests were about 0.3 m apart and were constructed from seaweed and twigs to a height of 20 cm. In 1975 a similar number of birds was observed,

some carrying seaweed, on a different cliff ledge 15 m above the sea on the eastern side of Islet No. 3. No birds occupied the 1974 breeding site and breeding had not commenced at the new site. In 1978, 14 birds were perched on the ledge where breeding was thought to have taken place in 1975. The nesting sites of 1974 did not appear to have been used recently. Probably a few breed irregularly on the islets. Estimated 5-10 breeding pairs.

Larus novaehollandiae Silver Gull — In 1974, 25 pairs of birds were incubating eggs in a colony on grass-covered ledges at the north-western side of Islet No. 2. No breeding birds were located in 1975 or 1978 and no more than six birds (of this species) were seen on either of these later visits.

Larus pacificus Pacific Gull — This species was breeding on Islet No. 2 during each visit. In 1974, four pairs of chicks and a single chick were found hiding under *Poa* tussocks; all were capable of flight. In 1975, then fully-fledged chicks were present and the carcasses of several very young chicks were found. In 1978, 14 nests constructed from *Poa* were found amongst tussocks. Five contained three eggs, seven contained two eggs and two were empty. Estimated 5-15 breeding pairs.

Hydroprogne caspia Caspian Tern — Islet No. 2 supports a colony of this species. In 1974, seven nests were found; three contained two eggs, three contained one egg and one small chick, and one contained one egg. In addition a single small chick was found hiding among vegetation along with four fully-fledged young that were capable of flight. The carcasses of two very small chicks were found among the vegetation. In 1975, eight nests contained eggs and about 15 chicks were found scattered over the island. At least eight fully-fledged chicks were seen either on the islet or flying with adult birds. Four of these fledged young were continuously active from 05:15 to 21:30 hours and calling continued throughout the night. Breeding had not commenced during the visit on 28 October 1978. Estimated 10-15 breeding pairs.

Factors Affecting Status

Pacific Gull castings found on Islet No. 2 contained remains of *P. marina* and *P. urinatrix*. The gulls may kill many storm-petrels and may also limit the possibility of successful breeding by the diving-petrels.

The White-bellied Sea-Eagle *Haliaeetus leucogaster*, Marsh Harrier *Circus aeruginosus*, Peregrine Falcon *Falco peregrinus* and Forest Raven *Corvus tasmanicus* have been observed on or over the islets and may prey on the breeding seabirds.

OTHER VERTEBRATES

Metallic Skinks *Leiopisma metallica* occur in small numbers on Islets Nos. 1 and 3. No rats or mice occur.

Other Seabirds Recorded

<i>Fulmarus glacialis</i>	Southern Fulmar (derelict)
<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>	Great Cormorant
<i>Larus dominicanus</i>	Kelp Gull
<i>Sterna bergii</i>	Crested Tern

Banding

H. caspia — 5 banded in 1975 (CSIRO bands). No recoveries reported.

Acknowledgements

I thank Messrs R. Westcott and S. Howard who assisted in 1975, and Mr A. C. Boden who assisted in 1978. Mr M. J. Brown identified the plants and Mr D. E. Rounsevell completed the writing of this paper in my absence.

Date compiled: 17 November 1978.

N. P. Brothers, National Parks and Wildlife Service, Sandy Bay, Tas. 7005.