

SEABIRD ISLANDS

No. 87

Rabbit Rock, Wilsons Promontory, Victoria

Location: 38°55'S., 146°29'E.; about 200 m offshore from the northern part of the east coast of Wilsons Promontory, Vic.

Status: Part of the Wilsons Promontory National Park, controlled by the National Parks Service, Vic.: access restricted.

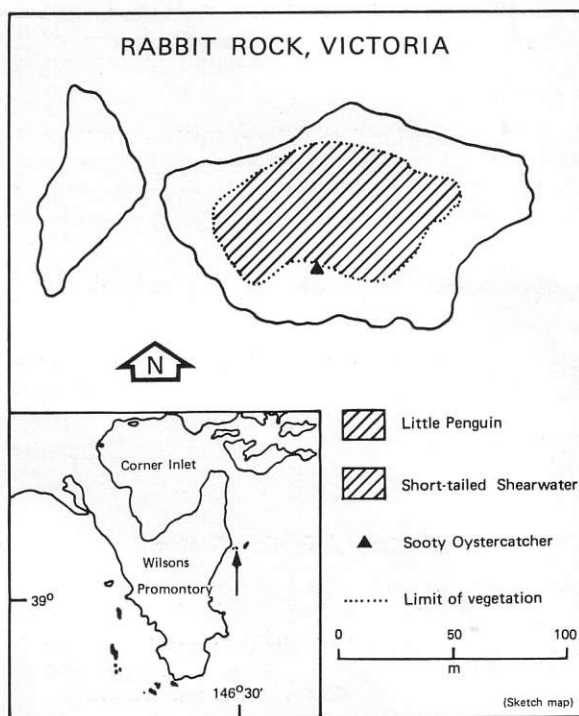
Description: 1.3 ha; this small granite island is 160 m long by 100 m wide and 15 m high. There is much exposed rock but no cliffs; severe soil erosion has occurred in some patches. The vegetated area is covered with *Poa poiformis* edged with *Disphyma australe*; *Senecio lautus*, *Pelargonium australe* and a few *Correa alba* are associated with the *Poa*. The small satellite island off the western end, about 100 m in length, is almost devoid of soil and vegetation.

Landing: Onto the rocks on the northern side, probably not possible in rough weather.

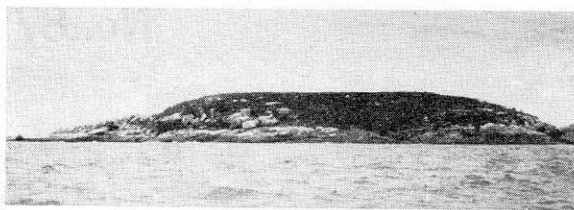
Ornithological History: M. E. Gillham² in 1959 said that Silver Gulls and Crested Terns nested on the rock, otherwise it appears to have been ornithologically unknown until our visit on 21 December 1978. S. G. Lane and H. Battam (pers. comm.) visited the island for an hour on 6 November 1979.

Breeding Seabirds and Status

Eudyptula minor Little Penguin — The breeding population at the time of our visit was estimated



to be about 100 pairs. In November 1979, some adults were incubating fresh eggs, others had small nestlings and some large nestlings were also present; on the satellite rock, two adults were each incubating eggs in crevices.



• Rabbit Rock (looking south)

Photo: S. G. Lane.

Puffinus tenuirostris Short-tailed Shearwater — Birds were incubating fresh eggs at the time of our visit. The breeding colony occupied an area of 0.6 ha, in which the mean burrow density in twenty-five 20 m² quadrats was 0.68/m² and the total number of burrows was estimated as 3 800 (95% confidence interval 3 200-4 300). Though egg laying had not commenced, some birds were found in burrows on 6 November 1979.

Haematopus fuliginosus Sooty Oystercatcher — A nest with one egg was found on the edge of the bare rock on the south side in November 1979.

Larus novaehollandiae Silver Gull — Gillham² recorded the species breeding in 1959 but gave no indication of numbers. We saw no sign of nesting during our visit although 30 birds were noted.

Larus pacificus Pacific Gull — Two pairs were breeding in 1978 with a total of three young.

Sterna bergii Crested Tern — Gillham² also recorded these birds breeding on the island but likewise gave no indication of numbers. A roost of about 100 birds was seen on 21 December 1978.

Factors Affecting Status

There appears to be no threat to the status of the breeding seabirds other than the soil erosion caused by the birds themselves, though illegal poaching may take place. The rabbits recorded in 1912¹ are no longer present.

Other Seabirds Recorded

<i>Leucocarbo fuscescens</i>	Black-faced Shag
<i>Phalacrocorax sulcirostris</i>	Little Black Cormorant
<i>Cereopsis novaehollandiae</i>	Cape Barren Goose (one pair in December, 1978 and November, 1979).

Banding

P. tenuirostris — 7 adults (6 Nov. 79).

Bibliography

1. Bureau of Census and Statistics (1912), 'Islands off the coast of the Commonwealth', *Commonwealth Year Book*. 5:51-80.
2. Gillham, M. E. (1961), 'Plants and seabirds of granite islands in south-east Victoria', *Proc. R. Soc. Vict.* 74:21-35.

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