

SEABIRD ISLANDS

No. 96

Shellback Island, Wilsons Promontory, Victoria

Location: 38°58'S., 146°14'E.; the most northerly island on the western side of Wilsons Promontory; 2.2 km to nearest mainland.

Status: Part of Wilsons Promontory National Park; access is controlled by the National Parks Service, Victoria.

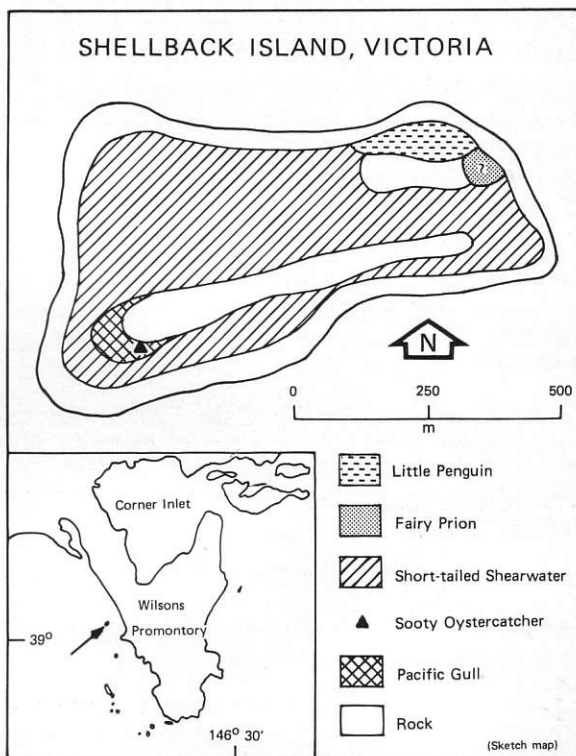
Description: 37 ha; a steep-sided granite island about 1.0 km long, 0.6 km wide and of maximum height 109 m. The dominant vegetation is *Poa poiiformis* tussocks and a few scattered bushes including *Melaleuca ericifolia*, *Correa alba* and one plant of the genus *Casuarina*. The island has much exposed smooth granite, and some areas of overlying tussock grass are being eroded.

Landing: Onto the rocky coastline of northern side of island.

Ornithological History: Apart from passing reference to Cape Barren Geese^{1,2}, formerly the island was unknown ornithologically. We visited the island for about 45 minutes in torrential rain on 13 December 1978. S. G. Lane and H. Battam (pers. comm.) spent about two hours ashore on 10 November 1979 while B. Robertson and P. Thomas made a further visit of 2.5 hours on 20 December 1979.

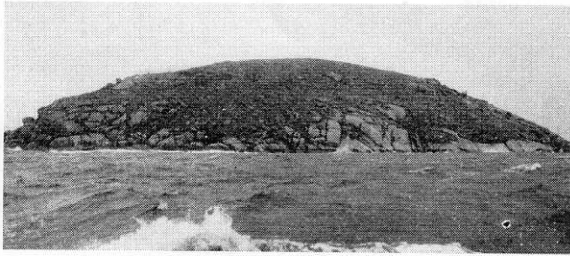
Breeding Seabirds and Status

Eudyptula minor Little Penguin — Their numbers were not counted but we found many breed-



ing birds. The island's population may possibly be several hundred pairs.

Pachyptila turtur Fairy Prion — Two dead birds were found in December 1978. In November 1979, Lane and Battam found a num-



• *Shellback Island (looking west).*

ber of cavities and remains of an egg on the north-eastern end (Lane pers. comm.).

Puffinus tenuirostris Short-tailed Shearwater — On the sloping sides (estimated area 24.5 ha), where there is much exposed granite, we determined mean burrow density in twenty-one 20 m² quadrats as 0.21 burrows/m²; on the flatter top (12.3 ha), the mean burrow density in 30 quadrats was 0.48/m². The total number of burrows on the island was estimated as 109 500 (95% confidence interval 87 400-131 600).

Pelecanoides urinatrix Common Diving-Petrel — We found one dead bird and a few remains were found by Lane and Battam. The species possibly breeds on the island.

Cereopsis novaehollandiae Cape Barren Goose — Possibly breeding. We recorded 15-18 birds including flying young. On 10 November 1979, some 50 were counted including three groups of non-flying young (Lane pers. comm.).

Haematopus fuliginosus Sooty Oystercatcher — A nest with two eggs was found on 10 November 1979 (Lane pers. comm.).

Larus pacificus Pacific Gull — About 100 pairs were present in December 1978, most of which were probably breeding. In November 1979, almost the same number was present and 31 nests were counted. Most nests contained eggs but some were still being constructed (Lane pers. comm.).

Factors Affecting Status

Erosion of *Poa* areas was causing slight loss of shearwater breeding habitat.

Other Seabirds Recorded

<i>Leucocarbo fuscescens</i>	Black-faced Shag
<i>Larus novaehollandiae</i>	Silver Gull

Banding

C. novaehollandiae — 3 "runners" (10 Nov. 79).

L. pacificus — 21 "runners"; (20 Dec. 79); one was found dead on nearby Norman Beach on 3 Feb. 80.

Bibliography

1. Ports and Harbours (1959), Sailing Directions Victoria including Bass Strait. Dept. of Public Works, Melbourne. 6th edition:433.
2. Dorward, D. F. (1967), 'The status of Cape Barren Goose *Cereopsis novae-hollandiae*', *Bull. int. Comm. Bird Preserv.* 10:56-71.

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