

## SEABIRD ISLANDS

No. 184

## Great Dog Island, Furneaux Group, Tasmania

**Location:** 40°15'S., 148°15'E.; 3 kilometres off the little fishing port of Lady Barron on the south coast of Flinders Island in the Furneaux Group, Tasmania.

**Status:** Conservation Area; Muttonbird Reserve.

**Description:** 377 ha; 3.7 km long and up to 1.6 km wide. The island is relatively flat with the highest point, Great Dog Hill, 65 m above sea level. The island is granite and has several fine sandy beaches. The main vegetation is *Poa tussock Poa poiformis* and there is an extensive mixed forest on the north-eastern side of She-oak *Casuarina stricta*, Oyster Bay Pine *Callitris rhomboidea*, *Eucalyptus viminalis*, *Bursaria spinosa*, *Acacia verticillata*, *Melaleuca ericifolia*, *Leptospermum scoparium* and *L. laevigatum*. This forest is one of the few remaining on the Outer Furneaux Islands as most of the others have been cleared. A homestead built about 70 years ago and sheep paddocks are on the north side of the island. Seven of the original 12 muttonbird processing sheds are scattered around the foreshores and are used during March and April each year. There is a small satellite islet near the south-eastern end.

**Landing:** Easy anywhere around the island.

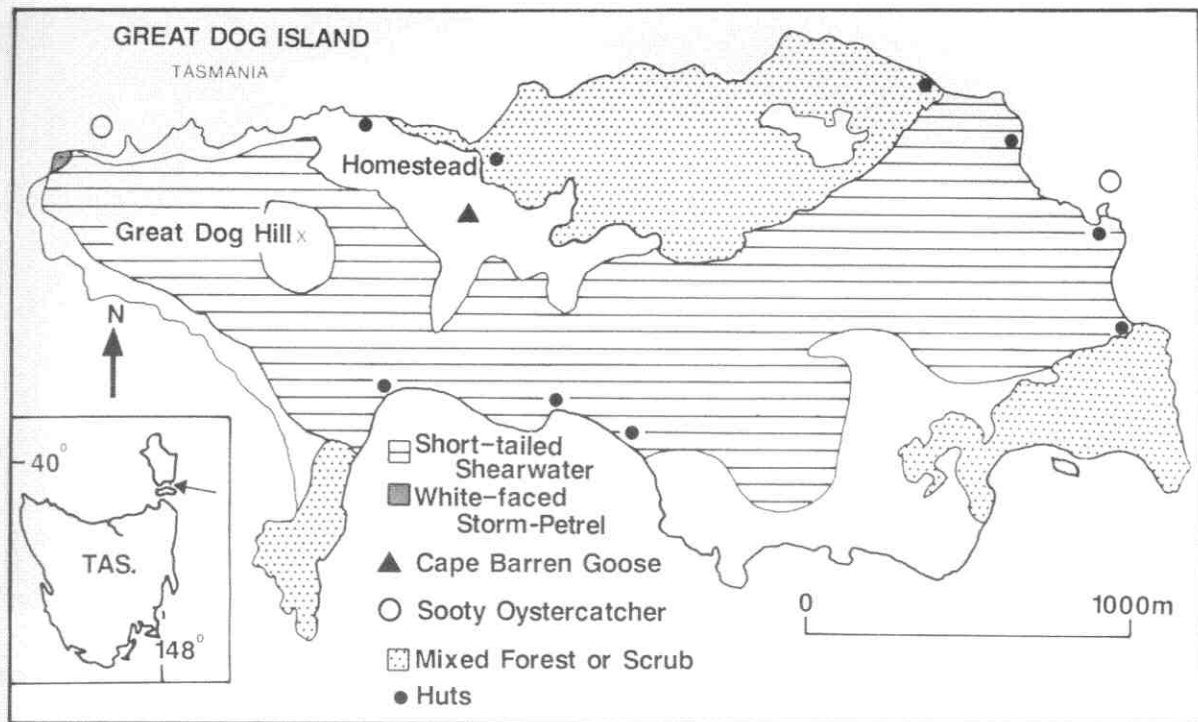
**Ornithological History:** Thomas Scott<sup>4</sup> described Great Dog Island as "high, and well wooded, good grass is to be found in many places interspersed with thickets of brushwood, the small species of kangaroo called wallaby are numerous here, there is also a very large 'rookery' of muttonbirds, . . .". Bishop Montgomery, The

Anglican Bishop of Tasmania 1899-1900, visited the Furneaux Group annually. He wrote several articles on the Short-tailed Shearwaters, in particular an account of a night among the shearwaters on Great Dog Island<sup>2,3</sup>. Mary Gillham<sup>1</sup> described the nesting habitats of the White-faced Storm-Petrel on the small satellite islet and named it Penguin Islet. The Tasmanian National Parks and Wildlife Service monitored the extent of commercial harvesting of shearwaters between 1977-1980<sup>5</sup>. Frequent visits by Service personnel have been made to Great Dog Island since 1969, and on 8 December 1986 the island was surveyed for seabirds by N. P. Brothers as part of an overall survey of the Furneaux Group.

## Breeding Seabirds and Status

*Eudyptula minor* Little Penguin — Burrows were recorded on Penguin Islet by Gillham<sup>1</sup>. In December 1986 Brothers found 30 pairs breeding, mainly on the centre of the eastern slope of the eastern section of the islet.

*Puffinus tenuirostris* Short-tailed Shearwater — Abundant over 170 ha; there are burrows over much of the island except for the forest, Great Dog Hill, sheep paddocks, and patches of 'hard ground' that are scattered throughout the island. Burrow density calculated from 46 transects each 100 m by 2 m and placed at random was  $0.56 \pm 0.08$  burrows/m<sup>2</sup> (at 95% confidence limits  $\pm 2$  S.E.). Density by area gives an estimated 952 000 burrows (range 816 000-1 080 800), making it Tasmania's third largest Short-tailed Shearwater colony after Babel and Trefoil Islands<sup>6,7</sup>.



*Pelagodroma marina* White-faced Storm-Petrel — One empty burrow was located at the north-western tip of Great Dog Island on 8 December 1986. Carcasses of 10 storm-petrels found nearby were probably cat-kills. This may have been an unsuccessful attempt at colonization. Burrows are abundant over 0.5 ha of Penguin Islet. Burrow density calculated from nine transects each 30 m by 1 m and placed at random was  $0.68 \pm 0.74$  burrows/m<sup>2</sup> (at 95% confidence limits  $\pm 2$  S.E.). Density by area gives an estimated 3 400 burrows.

*Cereopsis novaehollandiae* Cape Barren Goose — Less than six pairs breed each year in the sheep paddocks near the old homestead.

*Haematopus fuliginosus* Sooty Oystercatcher — Two nests, one with 1 egg, and the other with 2 eggs were found on 8 December 1986.

*Hydroprogne caspia* Caspian Tern — On 5 December 1985 S. G. Lane and I. J. Skira found a large runner on Penguin Islet with two adults in attendance.

*Sterna striata* White-fronted Tern — Also on 5 December 1985, Lane and Skira found a pair of these birds with a chick on the islet.

#### Factors Affecting Status

Great Dog Island is one of seven colonies of Short-tailed Shearwaters in Bass Strait that is harvested annually. Harvesting has been going on for over 100 years and in recent years about 100 000 chicks are taken each year. The island has been farmed since the 1870's and was permanently settled until the early 1950's. At present between 200 and 300 sheep are pastured on the island. Frequent burning of *Poa* tussock has caused fewer areas to be colonized by shearwaters. However, burning is now less frequent than in previous years due to stricter management control of the island by NPWS.

#### OTHER VERTEBRATES

The House Mouse *Mus musculus* and Black Rat *Rattus rattus* are common. Feral cats *Felis*



● Part of Great Dog Island (looking south-east); muttonbirders' huts are at left.

Photo: I. J. Skira

*catus* are present. The Copperhead Snake *Austrelaps superbis* is occasionally seen and there have been reliable sightings of the Tiger Snake *Notechis ater humphreysi*. Blue-tongued Lizards *Tiliqua nigrolutea*, Metallic Skink *Leiopisma metallica* and Ocellated Skink *L. ocellata* are present. The Red-bellied Pademelon *Thylogale billardierii*, mentioned by Scott<sup>3</sup>, is absent.

#### Other Seabirds Recorded

<i>Leucocarbo fuscescens</i>	Black-faced Shag
<i>Haematopus longirostris</i>	Pied Oystercatcher
<i>Larus novaehollandiae</i>	Silver Gull
<i>Larus pacificus</i>	Pacific Gull

#### Banding

Commenced 1947.

*Puffinus tenuirostris* — 84 adults; 16 665 fledglings banded between 1947 and 1976. No figures are available on recoveries. The banding programme was to estimate the number of chicks harvested using the Lincoln Index Method. A further 26 adults were banded on 7 December 1985.

*Hydroprogne caspia* — 1 "runner" banded 5 December 1985.

*Sterna striata* — 1 "runner" banded 5 December 1985.

#### Bibliography

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