

SEABIRD ISLANDS

No. 203

Wickham Island, Archipelago of the Recherche, Western Australia

Location: 34°01'S, 123°17'E; 13 kilometres east of Cape Arid, Western Australia.

Status: Class A Reserve vested in the Western Australian Wildlife Authority.

Other Name: Stanley Island (formerly).

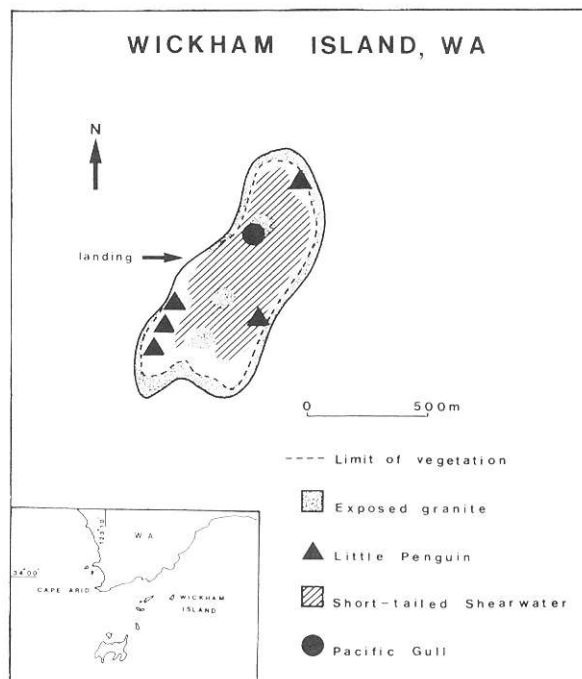
Description: 40 ha; 1 100 m long by 600 m wide and 15 m high near the southern end. It is a flat sandy island with a few small areas of low exposed granite and a granite fringe. A sandy beach on the north-western side is backed by a low dune system vegetated with *Spinifex hirsutus*, *Nitraria billardierei*, *Olearia axillaris* and *Myoporum insulare*. There are two small, dense patches of *Nitraria* (1.5 m high) near the northern end. Other plants recorded were *Pelargonium australe*, *Calocephalus brownii*, *Threlkeldia diffusa*, *Franckenia tetrapetala*, *Lobelia alata*, *Enchylaena tomentosa*, *Sporobolus virginicus*, *Poa* sp. and *Carpobrotus* sp.

Landing: Onto the sandy beach on the north-western side.

Ornithological History: The early ornithological history of the island is rather vague. Fairbridge and Serventy¹ mentioned that muttonbirds occur on the island, and Serventy and Whittell² list Flesh-footed Shearwaters as breeding there; however the prime source of the latter record cannot be traced. R. E. Johnstone visited the island for 3.5 hours on 28 March, 1984. Johnstone, L. A. Smith, S. Smith, N. I. Klomp, M. Burke and A. Byrne visited for 5 hours on 9 December, 1987.

Breeding Seabirds and Status

Eudyptula minor Little Penguin — About 10 pairs breed on the island. Most nests are under granite slabs on the south-western and eastern sides. In



December five nests were found: they contained — a single adult; an adult on two eggs; two eggs (one fresh and one addled); a downy chick; and a chick about six weeks old.

Puffinus tenuirostris Short-tailed Shearwater — About 8 000 pairs breed on the island. Most burrows are in sandy areas with *Spinifex hirsutus*, *Lobelia alata* and *Poa* sp. Near the northern end of the island 34 burrows were counted in an area 10 m square. In December, 15 burrows were examined. Six contained an adult incubating an egg, five contained single adults on empty nests, one contained an egg and three were empty. In March burrows contained downy young (weights of two chicks were 520 g and 860 g).

Cereopsis novaehollandiae Cape Barren Goose — Thirty were present in March and 23 in December including five speckled immatures, some still unable to fly. Droppings and feathers were found throughout the island. Estimated 5–10 breeding pairs.

Larus pacificus Pacific Gull — In December, 11 adults were observed and a nest with one newly hatched chick was found on bare granite on the north-western side of the island. In March, 26 adults and 13 immatures were attracted to dead Short-tailed Shearwater chicks.

Hydroprogne caspia Caspian Tern — Several pairs probably breed on the island. One adult was present in March and 12 in December including two pairs that were attacking Pacific Gulls and dive-bombing observers.

Factors Affecting Status

Few people visit the island and there is no evidence of human interference. Twenty-four Australian Ravens *Corvus coronoides* were present in March and two in December. Judging from their tracks, Ravens venture into burrows of Short-tailed Shearwaters to steal eggs and drag young to the surface.

OTHER VERTEBRATES

In March, 26 Australian Sea Lions *Neophoca cinerea* comprising two bulls, 20 cows and four yearlings were present; in December, 21 were observed including four bulls, 11 cows and four

pups. Three species of skink *Egernia napoleonis*, *Hemiergis peronii* and *Lerista microtis* were collected.

Other Seabirds Recorded

<i>Leucocarbo fuscescens</i>	Black-faced Shag
<i>Haematopus fuliginosus</i>	Sooty Oystercatcher
<i>Sterna bergii</i>	Crested Tern

Banding

Nil.

Bibliography

1. Fairbridge, R. W. and Serventy, V. N. (1954). The Archipelago of the Recherche, Part 1b: Physiography. *Aust. Geog. Soc. Rept.* 1(16): 9–28.
2. Serventy, D. L. and Whittell, H. M. (1976). 'Birds of Western Australia'. (University Press: Perth, Western Australia).

Acknowledgments

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● View over part of Wickham Island (looking south).

Photo: L. A. Smith