

SEABIRD ISLANDS

No. 142

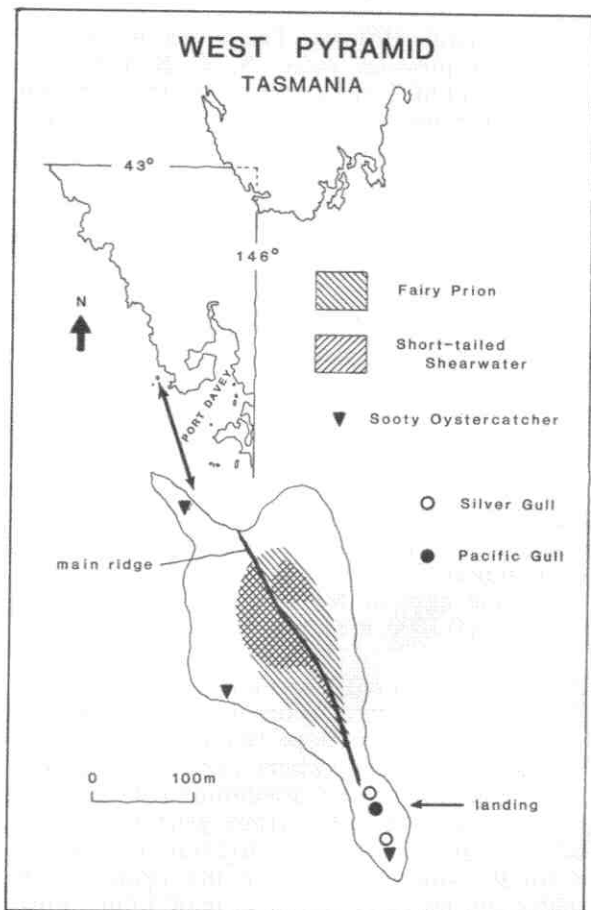
West Pyramid, Tasmania

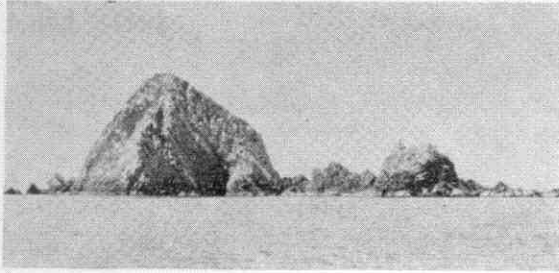
Location: 43°18'S., 145°49'E.; about 4 kilometres north-west of the northern entrance to Port Davey and 2 kilometres from the nearest point of Tasmania's south-western coast.

Status: Part of the South-west National Park.

Description: About 6 ha; 450 m long and up to 200 m wide with a maximum height of 104 m. This rather long narrow island, with the axis north-west/south-east, can be divided, for descriptive purposes, into two sections. The southern section is 100 m long, 70 m wide and up to 27 m high, being mainly an area of jagged bare rocks. From this section it is just possible to negotiate the ridge to the main northern section which is vegetated. The northern section is pyramid-shaped, very steep to vertical and in many places dangerous to negotiate due to unstable rock and soil. With the exception of a small pebble beach at the base of the cliff on the north-western side, all sides drop abruptly to the sea. Scrub, including *Leptospermum scorparium*, *Rhagodia baccata* and *Tetragonia implexicoma* are confined to the summit area and the ridge rising to it from the north. Elsewhere *Carpobrotus rossi* and *Senecio lautus* are the dominant plant species though areas of bare rock are extensive, particularly on the lower slopes. Some 20 plant species occur.

Landing: Restricted to calm seas, the easiest place is onto rock ledges of the south-eastern





• *West Pyramid (looking east).*

end from where it is possible to reach all parts of the island. A descent, with considerable difficulty, can be made down the north-eastern slopes from the summit for departure as was done by Brothers.

Ornithological History: There are no known reports of previous visits. N. P. Brothers, N. Mooney and M. Holdsworth visited the island on 4 December 1981. The following information was obtained during that visit.

Breeding Seabirds and Status

Pachyptila turtur Fairy Prion — Nests were in burrows and rock crevices all over the northern section. Burrows were concentrated on the steepest, lower slopes although the number in these areas contributed to only about half the overall total. Burrows were found among those of the Short-tailed Shearwaters and much interference of the prion burrows by shearwaters was evident especially in areas of high burrow density. Very low burrow occupancy rate was recorded in such areas. Burrows were found to run along or into, then down the slope, often interconnected due to shallow soil. Birds were incubating eggs at the time of the visit. Estimated 1000-2000 breeding pairs.

Puffinus tenuirostris Short-tailed Shearwater — The largest and most concentrated burrow area was on the western slope below the summit of the northern section where *Senecio lautus* was dominant. Elsewhere *Carpobrotus rossi* was the dominant species and burrows generally followed the ridge with a small concentration occurring down the eastern side below the summit. Elsewhere soil was too shallow to permit burrowing.

Some birds were incubating an egg in rock crevices. Estimated 2000-3000 breeding pairs.

Haematopus fuliginosus Sooty Oystercatcher — One pair had two eggs in a gulls' nest at the southern end and another pair had a nest with two eggs near the pebble beach. A third pair was occupying territory at the northern tip of the island; their behaviour suggested that a nest was nearby.

Larus novaehollandiae Silver Gull — There were two small colonies 50 m apart in the southern section. The southern-most was 20 m above high water level and nests of dry *Poa* were placed among bare, jagged rocks (8 x new nests, 11 x 1 egg, 19 x 2 eggs and 2 x 3 eggs). The northern colony was scattered among *Poa* (1 new nest, 2 x 2 eggs and 1 x 3 eggs).

Larus pacificus Pacific Gull — One pair had a nest containing 2 addled eggs and one small downy chick near the northern Silver Gull colony.

Factors Affecting Status

Gulls and oystercatchers breed in areas that may be washed by high seas.

OTHER VERTEBRATES

Three skinks (as yet unidentified) were collected.

Banding

Nil.

Acknowledgements

Messrs V. Careless and J. Chesterman were most helpful in transporting equipment to Port Davey. Messrs N. Mooney and M. Holdsworth assisted with the surveys and Mr M. J. Brown identified plants collected.

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