

SEABIRD ISLANDS

No. 46/1

Granite Island, Corner Inlet, Victoria

Location: 38°48'25"S, 146°24'37"E; within Corner Inlet, part of Wilsons Promontory National Park; Victoria, 2.3 km to nearest mainland.

Status: Originally reserved under the Land Act, the island was incorporated into the Wilsons Promontory National Park in 1916 and is now managed by Parks Victoria¹. The island is part of the Corner Inlet Important Bird Area² and the Corner Inlet Ramsar site³. The surrounding waters are within the Corner Inlet Marine National Park and the Corner Inlet Marine and Coastal Park³. Camping is not allowed on the island.

Description: 1.63 ha: a dome-shaped, granitic island 110m at the widest point, 180m long and 23m high (Figure 1). Much of the surface is grey granite and coarse-grained soil (Figure 2) which incorporates organic material, particularly guano and fish remains. Soil is shallow except in crevices and on the higher side of rock. Most of the island is dominated by Blue Tussock-grass *Poa poiformis*, particularly on and around the summit, and Karkalla *Carpobrotus rossii*, Austral Stork's Bill *Pelargonium australe*, Coastal Saltbush *Rhagodia baccata* and Leafy Peppergrass *Lepidium foliosum* occur in small areas^{1,4,5}. For a complete flora see^{1,4,5}.

Landing: Landing is onto rocks and governed by prevailing winds and tides.

Ornithological History: Published information is given by M. E. Gillham,⁴ who recorded breeding Silver Gulls *Chroicocephalus novaehollandiae* and Short-tailed Shearwaters *Ardenna tenuirostris*, as well as Black-faced Cormorants *Phalacrocorax fuscescens* using the island as a roost, and by F. I. Norman¹ in 1966 and 1976, who added Pacific Gull *Larus pacificus* and White-faced Heron *Egretta novaehollandiae* to the species list and Black-faced Cormorant to the list of breeding species. M. P. Harris⁷ and D. M. Deerson visited the island in November 1978 and estimated shearwater burrow numbers. Later visits by P. Dann (PD) in February 1981 and PD and D. Sutherland in December 2013 (four-hour visit) added Sooty Oystercatcher *Haematopus fuliginosus*, Great Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo*, Little Pied Cormorant *Microcarbo melanoleucos*, Pied Cormorant *Phalacrocorax varius*, breeding Cape Barren Geese *Cereopsis novaehollandiae*, breeding Pacific Gulls and probable breeding Little Penguins *Eudyptula minor*. B. Robertson in December 2014 (two-hour visit) extended the species list (adding Crested Tern *Thalasseus bergii*) and breeding data (Pacific Gull).

Breeding Seabirds and Status

Ardenna tenuirostris Short-tailed Shearwater – Norman¹ noted that this species 'breeds extensively on the island' and considered the population to exceed several thousand breeding

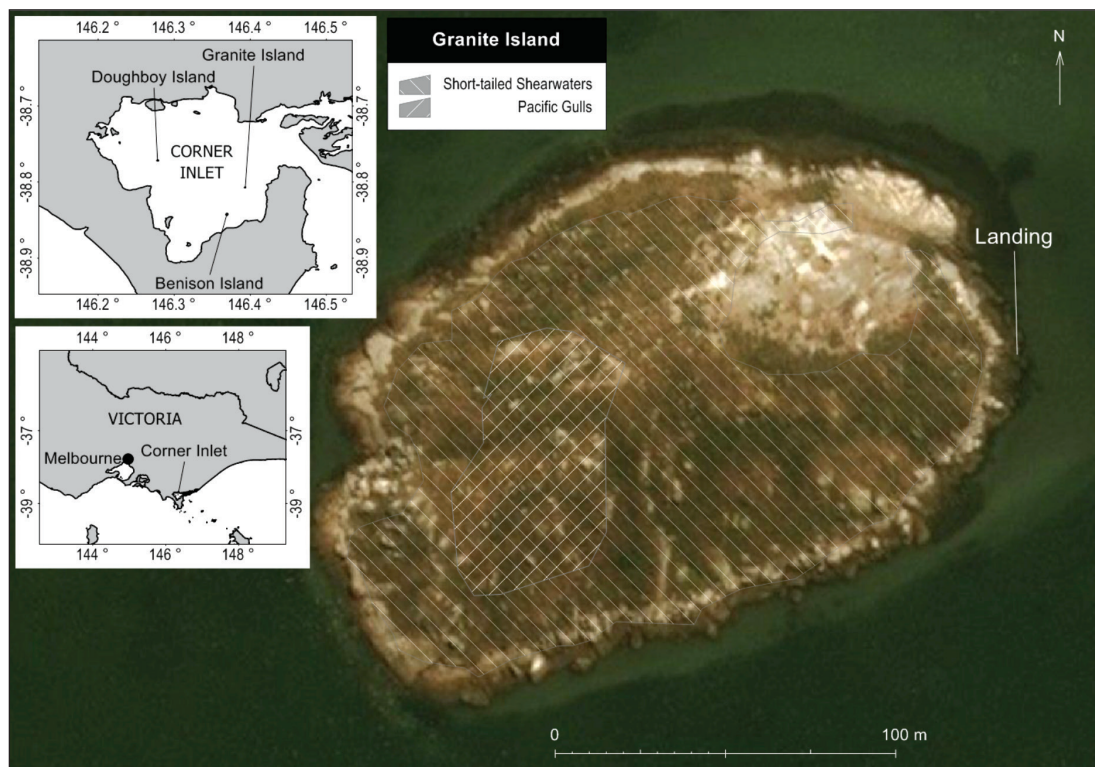


Figure 1. Granite Island, Victoria.



Figure 2. Granite Island facing south showing expanse of exposed granite and tussock grasses.
Photo: Duncan Sutherland

pairs. Harris⁷ gave a mean burrow density of 0.269 per m² (s.e. 0.028, $n = 50$ randomly placed quadrats) and calculated a total for the 0.75 ha *Poa* area of 2020 burrows (95% C.I. 1610–2430). An additional 100 burrows were counted in the cormorant roosting area⁷.

In December 2013, a population estimate was made using a distance sampling method¹⁰. The distance to all active burrows within one metre perpendicular to each of three systematic parallel transects 50 m apart in a N-S direction was estimated from a random origin. A simple model was used to estimate density, with no covariates and a half normal detection function¹⁰. Burrow density was estimated at 0.436 (95% C.I. 0.247 – 0.769) burrows per m² in the colony area of 9489 m² giving an estimated number of burrows of 4136 (95% C.I. 2344–7300).

Eudyptula minor Little Penguin – Barrett⁸ noted “a few penguins are said to build on the island.” Not recorded by Gillham^{4,5}, Norman¹ or Harris⁷. Two unoccupied burrows (identified from burrow characteristics and presence of feathers) were found in December 2013.

Larus pacificus Pacific Gull – 70 adults were seen, with breeding recorded mainly at the western and south-western parts of the island (Figures 1 and 3). In December 2013, 70 adults were present and nine occupied nests were found (four with one egg, two with two eggs, one with one chick and two with two chicks), as well as five recently used nests. The search for nests was not comprehensive and there may have been more. Most nests were found on the higher slopes on the western side of the island (Figure 3) amongst a mosaic of tussock-grass and granite outcrops. Many dead toadfish *Torquiner* sp. were noted in the colony, in keeping with observations made at other Pacific Gull colonies (pers. obs.). In December 2014, 12 empty nests were found, all with faecal material, suggesting that chicks had hatched from them successfully. Two of the nests each had one addled egg present. Three large chicks (approx. 1 kg bodyweight) were found nearby.

Haematopus fuliginosus Sooty Oystercatcher - 6 to 14 seen, mostly in pairs, dispersed around the island. One chick found (about a quarter grown) on the southern slope in December 2014. Three adult pairs were observed in December 2013, including a coloured-banded bird which was banded by the Victorian Wader Study Group on Clonmel Island (25km east) 13 years earlier.

Chroicocephalus novaehollandiae Silver Gull – 50 seen in February 1981 and 34 in December 2013. Gillham^{4,5} considered that more than 100 pairs were breeding on the southern slopes in November 1959. Breeding or used nest sites not recorded on other visits.

Cereopsis novaehollandiae Cape Barren Goose - 1 adult plus 2 chicks in December 2013. This species commonly breeds on other islands around Wilsons Promontory.

Phalacrocorax fuscescens Black-faced Cormorant – up to 160 seen roosting on rocks at the eastern end of the island in December 2013 (Figure 4). Breeding is likely to have finished by December, as this species is a winter breeder in this region¹². The island was listed by Norman⁹ as a breeding site for this species based on the presence of an egg, and perhaps by Barrett⁸ who reported “cormorants (no species given) used to nest on the island”.

Factors Affecting Status

Mirror bush *Coprosma repens*, a weed, has not been reported on the island, but its introduction from nearby islands e.g. Benison Island¹³ (4.3 km distant) by Pacific Gulls is likely. *Coprosma* fruits are an important food of Pacific Gulls at certain times of the year and the seeds are regurgitated in large volumes around breeding sites¹¹. *Coprosma* has the capacity to completely dominate other vegetation and reduce the available breeding habitat for surface-nesting and burrowing seabirds substantially (pers. obs.). Illegal harvest of young shearwaters used to occur,^{1,7} but there is no evidence that it continues today.



Figure 3. South face of Granite Island looking towards the peak where Pacific Gulls nest. Photo: Duncan Sutherland



Figure 4. Black-faced cormorants (~160) roosting on east end of Granite Island. Photo: Duncan Sutherland

Other Seabirds Recorded

(maximum number)

<i>Microcarbo melanoleucos</i>	Little Pied Cormorant (11)
<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>	Great Cormorant (2), seen on rocks at the eastern end of the island.
<i>Phalacrocorax varius</i>	Pied Cormorant (9)
<i>Egretta novaehollandiae</i>	White-faced Heron
<i>Thalasseus bergii</i>	Crested Tern (10)

Banding

No records of banding on the island.

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