

SEABIRD ISLANDS

No. 259

Sugarloaf Island, Lord Howe Group, New South Wales

Location: 31°30'15"S, 159°04'05"E; one kilometre to the north of Lord Howe Island, 580 kilometres east of Port Macquarie, New South Wales, in the South Pacific Ocean; 230 metres south of Roach Island, the largest of the Admiralty Islands.

Status: The entire Lord Howe Group is inscribed on the World Heritage List. Sugarloaf Island is part of the Permanent Park Preserve administered by the Lord Howe Island Board. Permission from the Board is required to land on the island.

Other Name: Sugarloaf.

Description: Sugarloaf Island (1.1 ha) is a dome-shaped island of volcanic tuff, with 0.56 hectares of elevated land surrounded by a wide rock platform. The plateau (0.30 ha) rises 31 metres above sea-level and contains pockets of soil dominated by Coast Tussock-grass *Poa poiformis* and dense patches of Saltwater Couch *Sporobolus virginicus*. Other plants include Leafy Flat Sedge *Cyperus lucidus* and two introduced species: Pigweed *Portulaca oleracea* and Prairie Grass *Bromus catharticus*.

Landing: A shallow landing site onto rocks on the northwest perimeter is possible only in calm seas. The plateau is accessible from the north-west point, up a steep basalt dyke.

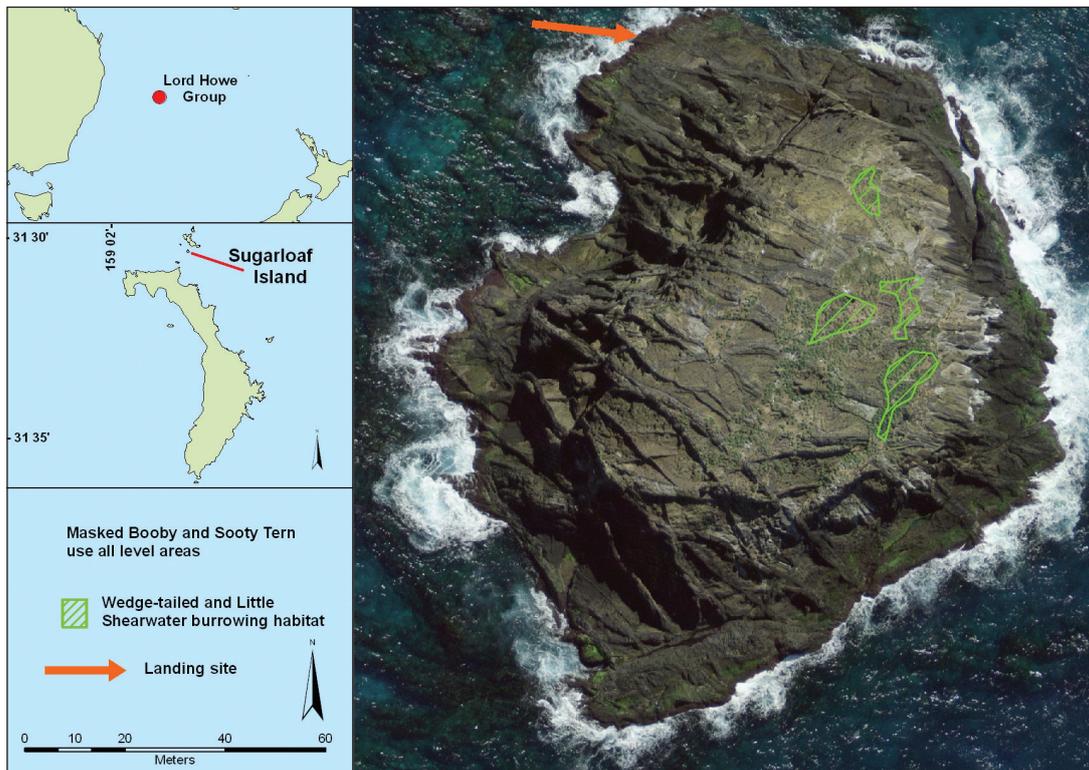
Ornithological History: There are no recorded visits to this island until Carlile and two others visited for approximately one hour on 22 February 2010. The island was also observed from nearby islands: Soldiers Cap on 13 December 2009 and 20 May 2010, and Roach Island on 18–20 May 2010.

Breeding Seabirds and Status

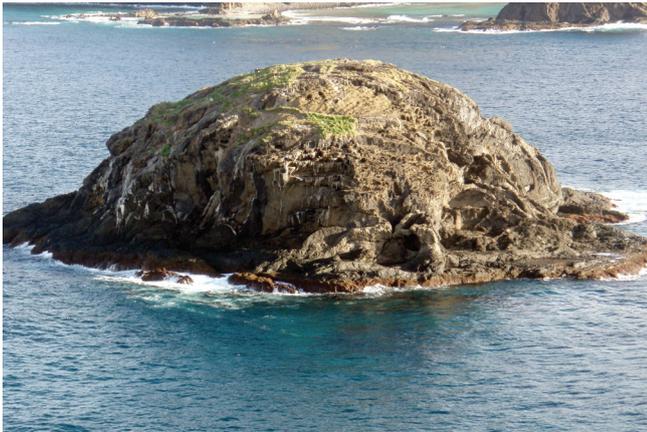
Ardeanna pacifica Wedge-tailed Shearwater—In February 2010, 335 burrows and nesting cavities were counted, many containing chicks. Assuming an occupancy rate similar to that in other colonies (typically 45–55%)^{1,2,3} we estimate a population of approximately 168 pairs on the island.

Puffinus assimilis Little Shearwater—In May 2010, Little Shearwaters were observed flying above Sugarloaf Island at night, suggesting that they probably nest there. This species is generally restricted to burrows with rocky entrances that are too small to be accessed by Wedge-tailed Shearwaters. The extent of such habitat on the island is approximately 990 square metres.

Sula dactylatra Masked Booby—Nests of this species were dispersed across the vegetated areas of the island. In December 2009, we observed 12 active nests. The Masked Booby has a



• Sugarloaf Island, Lord Howe Group, NSW.



• Sugarloaf Island from the north with the landing site in the foreground on the right. Viewed from Roach Island.



• Sugarloaf Island from the south-west. Viewed from Lord Howe Island.

protracted breeding season with laying documented from May⁴ to January⁵. Weekly data on the number of active nests from a previous study of Masked Booby on Lord Howe Island⁴ was used to determine the proportion of the total nests present during the breeding season. The number of nests found in mid-December represent 11.5% of the total nests for the season. Using this figure, we estimated that approximately 100 pairs may have bred on Sugarloaf Island in 2009/10.

Onychoprion fuscata Sooty Tern—This species was observed breeding on Sugarloaf Island in December 2009, but sea conditions prevented us landing. Consequently, there is no assessment of population size.

Factors Affecting Status

Sugarloaf Island is rarely, if ever, visited. It is likely that the Buff-banded Rail *Gallirallus philippensis* frequents this island from Roach Island but its predation would probably be limited to abandoned eggs.

Other Seabirds Recorded

No other seabirds were recorded.

Other Vertebrates Recorded

The Lord Howe Island Skink *Oligosoma lichenigera* was the only other vertebrate recorded on the island.

Banding

No banding has been attempted on Sugarloaf Island.

Bibliography

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Acknowledgements

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