

SEABIRD ISLANDS

No. 172

Briggs Islet, Furneaux Group, Tasmania

Location: 40°15'S., 148°17'E.; six kilometres south-east of Lady Barron on Flinders Island and 1200 metres east of Great Dog Island, Tas.

Status: Conservation Area; Wildlife Sanctuary.

Other Name: Rabbit Island.

Description: 3 ha; about 300 m long and 200 m at the widest part. The island is low with a thick *Poa poiformis* mat occupying most of it. Other plants are locally abundant such as *Stipa teretifolia*, *Dichondra repens*, Salt Marsh Grass *Distichlis distichophylla* and *Tetragonia implexicoma*.

Landing: Moderately easy along a rocky fore-shore depending on wind direction and tide rips.

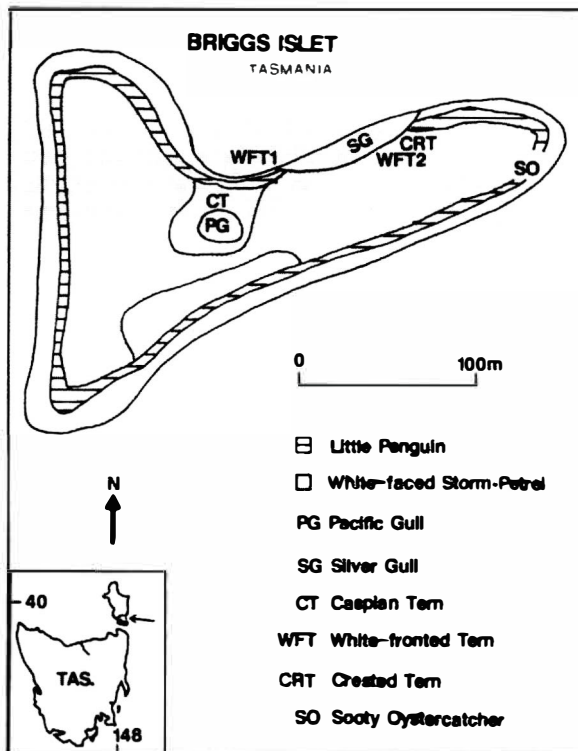
Ornithological History: Mary Gillham visited Briggs Islet in December 1958¹. She found Little

Penguins, White-faced Storm-Petrels, Silver Gulls, Pacific Gulls and Caspian Terns breeding. I. J. Skira, S. G. Lane and L. F. Lane visited on 5 December 1985 and found, in addition, White-fronted Terns nesting, while N. P. Brothers, on 5 December 1986, further recorded the Sooty Oystercatcher breeding.

Breeding Seabirds and Status

Eudyptula minor Little Penguin — Nesting confined largely to a 5 m strip around the perimeter of the islet, especially on the south side with burrows in *Poa poiformis* and a few under rocks. Burrow density calculated from four transects each 30 m x 1 m was 0.06 ± 0.02 burrows/m² (at 95% confidence limits ± 2 S.E.). Density times area (880 m x 5 m) gives an estimated 260 burrows.

Pelagodroma marina White-faced Storm-Petrel — Found throughout the island over 2.18 ha with about 90% of petrel habitat in *Poa poiformis*. In



areas where vegetation is too thick and matted the density of burrows is low. Mean density of burrows calculated from 15 transects each 30 m x 1 m was 0.44 ± 0.12 burrows/m² (at 95% confidence limits ± 2 S.E.) Density x area gives an estimated 9 560 burrows.

Haematopus fuliginosus Sooty Oystercatcher — One pair was found with an egg in December 1986.

Larus novaehollandiae Silver Gull — Gillham counted six nests¹. In 1985 there were two used nests, two with one egg each, 18 with 2 eggs and

one with 3 eggs. In 1986 the gull population increased to 80 used nests, 36 with 1 egg each, 72 with 2 eggs, 21 with 3 eggs and two with 4 eggs. Twenty-three nests contained one chick each, 26 had 2 chicks and four had 3 chicks.

Larus pacificus Pacific Gull — A "large colony" was recorded by Gillham¹. In 1985 one nest contained 2 eggs, one had 3 eggs, and two were used. In 1986, one nest had one egg, one had 2 eggs two were used and there was one half-grown runner. The same area was occupied in both years and many remains of storm-petrels were scattered nearby.

Hydroprogne caspia Caspian Tern — Gillham¹ recorded one nest. In 1985 there was one nest with one egg, about 5 m from the nest of the White-fronted Terns. In 1986 one nest with one egg was recorded also.

Sterna striata White-fronted Tern — In 1985 one nest was found with one chick estimated to be one week old; a cracked egg was below the nest. Four adult terns were present. In 1986 there were two separate colonies. One colony contained one nest with one egg, three with 2 eggs, and one abandoned egg. Seven adults were present. In the second colony there were five nests with one egg each, two with 2 eggs, five with one small chick each, and four with two small chicks each. Twelve adults were present. The colonies were at the edge of *Poa poiformis* with small leads of *Carpoprotus* sp.

Sterna bergii Crested Tern — Eight nests, each with one egg, were recorded in 1986, in a tight group on bare, dark soil alongside the larger colony of White-fronted Terns.

Factors Affecting Status

Stock were probably pastured on Briggs Islet many years ago as an old rock wall is present near the eastern side. The island is not often visited and human disturbance to breeding seabirds is minimal. Pacific Gulls and Black-faced Shags roost near the centre of the island and have trampled and destroyed vegetation. Burrows of White-faced Storm-Petrels have probably also been destroyed in the process. Pacific Gulls also predate breeding storm-petrels.



• Surveying part of the storm-petrel colony on Briggs Islet.

Photo: S. G. Lane

OTHER VERTEBRATES

One lizard species seen (not collected).

Other Seabirds Recorded

<i>Puffinus tenuirostris</i>	Short-tailed Shearwater (carcase)
<i>Cereopsis novaehollandiae</i>	Cape Barren Goose
<i>Sterna nereis</i>	Fairy Tern

Banding

One visit—5 Dec. 85.

Eudyptula minor—4 adults

Pelagodroma marina—6 adults

Sterna striata—1 chick

Bibliography

- Gillham, M. E. (1963). Breeding habitats of the White-faced Storm Petrel (*Pelagodroma marina*) in eastern Bass Strait. *Pap. Proc. Roy. Soc. Tasm.* 97: 33-41.

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