SEABIRD ISLANDS **No. 173**

Chappell Island, Furneaux Group, Tasmania

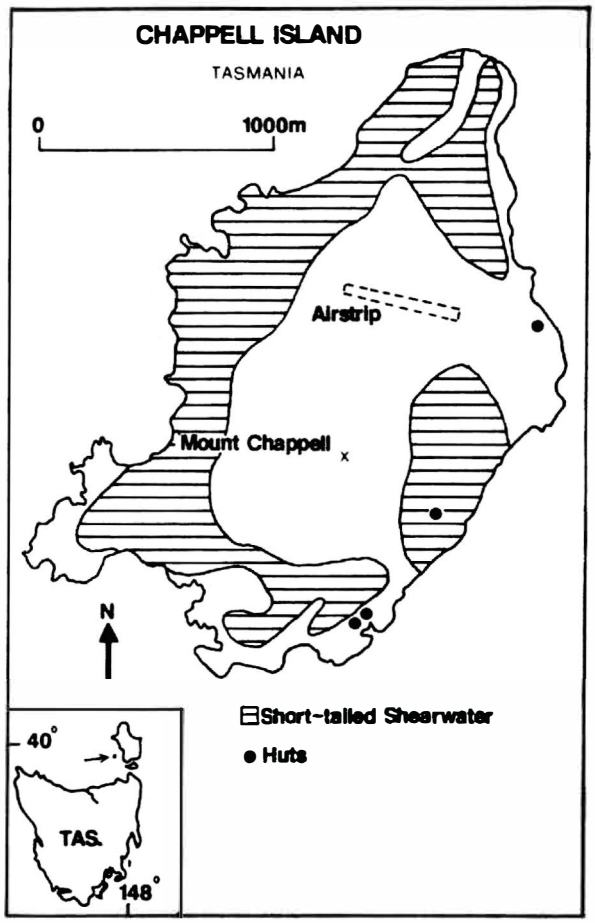
Location: 40°18'S., 147°51'E.; 17 kilometres south-west offshore from Whitemark, Flinders Island in the Furneaux Group, Tas.

Status: Nature Reserve.

Description: 349 ha; 3 km long by up to 1.7 km wide. The island is roughly circular and is dominated by a cone-shaped hill that rises to 198 m high and slopes gently to the sea. Much of the original vegetation of barilla *Atriplex* sp. has been changed to pasture and weeds which surround Mount Chappell. Hore-hound *Marrubium vulgare* now infests much of the pasture and on the south side of the mountain is an extensive area of African Boxthorn *Lycium ferocissimum*. A large area of barilla occurs on the northern part of the island and along the western side. Boobyalla *Acacia sophorae* occurs in scattered clumps, particularly near the top and on the south-western coast.

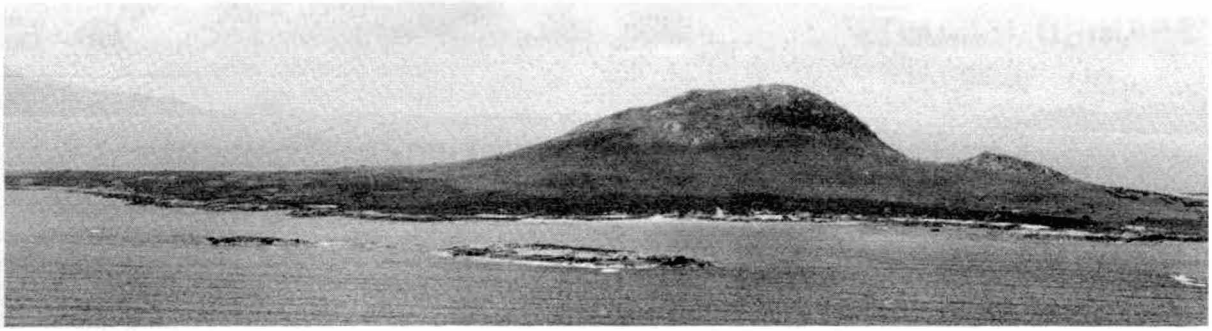
Landing: Easy anywhere depending on wind direction.

Ornithological History: Thomas Scott[5] described the island as "covered with low shrubby thickets of brushwood, none of the trees being of any magnitude, mutton birds and penguins build here in great numbers, and seal abound upon its rocky shores." Bishop Montgomery, the Anglican Bishop of Tasmania 1899-1900 often visited Chappell Island in his annual visits to the Furneaux Group. He estimated the Short-tailed Shearwater population at almost one million[6,7]. The Field Naturalist Club of Victoria visited in November 1893[3]. Guiler[4] and Eberhard and Pearse[2] have described the importance of the island as a breeding site for Cape Barren Geese. Periodic visits have been made to the island by both I. J. Skira and N. P. Brothers while Brothers visited on 29 November 1986 specifically to document the seabirds.



Breeding Seabirds and Status

Puffinus tenuirostris Short-tailed Shearwater — Abundant over 160 ha with an estimated 80% of birds nesting under barilla in either burrows or "surface nesting" in trenches dug and covered by vegetation. Burrow density, calculated from 38 transects each 30 m x 1 m and placed at random was 0.4 ± 0.08 burrows/m² (at 95% confidence limits ± 2 S.E.). Density by area gives an estimated 640 000 burrows.



• *Chappell Island (looking east).* Photo: I. J. Skira

Cereopsis novaehollandiae Cape Barren Goose — Chappell Island is one of the principal breeding sites in the Furneaux Group. Geese breed all around the island. The number of breeding pairs in the last three years has been 92 pairs (1984), 127 pairs (1985) and 154 pairs (1986).

Factors Affecting Status

Chappell Island was once the main island for gathering of shearwaters in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Annual catches of up to 300 000 chicks were reported[5]. Commercial harvesting ceased in 1975. The island has been progressively degraded by stock, burning and ploughing of native vegetation for over 100 years. In particular, large areas of barilla have disappeared. These factors have reduced considerably the distribution and number of shearwater burrows while the spread of hore-hound has also caused a decrease in the number of Cape Barren Geese breeding on the island.

About 300 sheep are pastured. A fence across the northern part of the island protects a large area of barilla from the sheep. Feral cats *Felis catus* occur.

OTHER VERTEBRATES

Tiger Snake *Notechis ater serventyi* (very abundant)[1] The lizard *Lerista bougainvillii*, House Mouse *Mus musculus* and Black Rat *Rattus rattus* are common.

Other Seabirds Recorded

Pelecanus conspicillatus	Australian Pelican
Leucocarbo fuscescens	Black-faced Shag
Haematopus longirostris	Pied Oystercatcher
Haematopus fuliginosus	Sooty Oystercatcher
Larus novaehollandiae	Silver Gull
Larus pacificus	Pacific Gull
Hydroprogne caspia	Caspian Tern

Banding

Commenced March 1947.

Puffinus tenuirostris—Period March 1947 to March 1955.—1 278 fledlings. No figures on recoveries are available. The banding program was to estimate the number of chicks harvested using the Lincoln Index Method.

Cereopsis novaehollandiae—Period October 1960 to October 1986.—32 adults; 1 716 goslings; 115 dead recoveries, mostly in the Furneaux Group.

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N. P. Brothers and I. J. Skira, National Parks and Wildlife Service, Sandy Bay, Tas. 7005.