

SEABIRD ISLANDS

No. 175

Walker Island. Maatsuyker Group. Tasmania

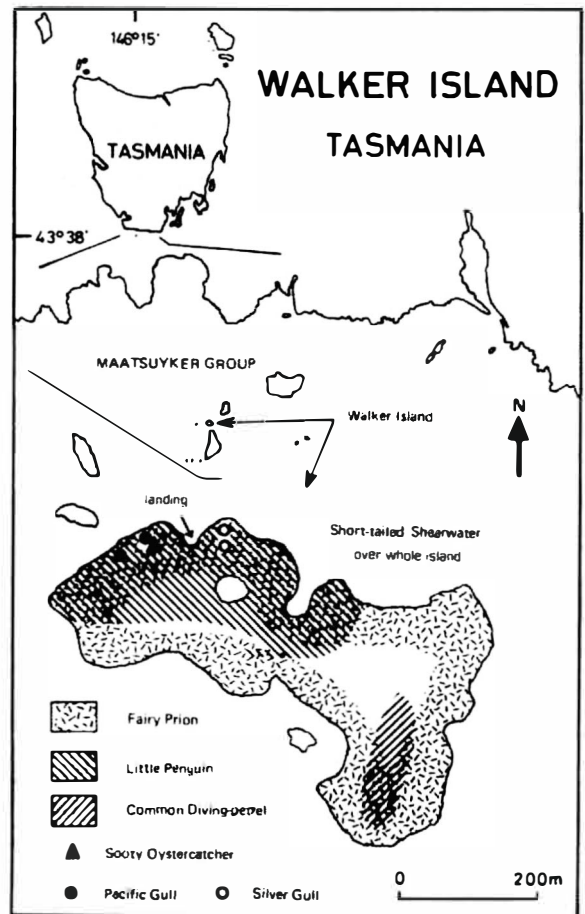
Location: 43°38'S., 146°16'E.: one of six islands of the Maatsuyker Group situated about 10 km south-south-west of Red Point, on the south-western tip of Tasmania, and 200 m off the northern tip of Maatsuyker Island.

Status: Part of the South-west National Park administered by the National Parks and Wildlife Service (Tas.).

Description: 11 ha; about 650 m long by 400 m at the widest and some 60 m high. Slopes lining the shores are mostly steep although there are a few breaks on the northern side, particularly near the north-western corner. Away from the shores the grading is more gentle, with the summit near the eastern end. There are several deep gulches and a blowhole near the western end is probably too elevated to be active except, perhaps, during unusually heavy swells. A tunnel penetrates the island in the narrowest part.

The vegetation is severely stunted and wind-pruned. Woody shrubs are found mostly over the eastern half of the island but other species, including succulents, are more widespread and abundant. Species recorded were *Leptospermum scoparium*, *Olearia phlogopappa*, *O. persoonioides*, *Correa backhousiana*, *Cyathodes abietina*, *Westringia brevifolia*, *Helichrysum paraliium*, *Pelargonium australe*, *Asplenium obtusatum*, *Apium prostratum*, *Lepidium foliosum*, *Plantago triantha*, *Rhagodia baccata*, *Senecio lautus*, *Tetragonia implexicoma*, *Salicornia quinqueflora*, *Carpobrotus rossii*, *Poa poiformis* and *Stipa stipoides*. Soil cover is extensive but not deep.

Landing: An inlet on the northern side is the usual site. Wind storms and big seas will often prevent a landing for days at a time during summer and for much longer periods at other times of the year.



Ornithological History: Apparently there have been no reports published on Walker Island prior to the visits made by N. P. Brothers and G. White. Brothers spent some 45 minutes ashore on 12 January 1978 while White was on the island from 14:20 hrs to 16:15 hrs on 8 January 1979. The following account has been compiled from information obtained during these brief visits.

Breeding Seabirds and Status

Eudyptula minor Little Penguin — Nests around the northern landing inlet and in the vicinity of the north-western corner of the island, extending across to the higher slopes. Chicks in various stages of fledging were found in January 1979. Estimated between 500 and 1 500 breeding pairs.

Pachyptila turtur Fairy Prion — Burrows are mostly located on the steep slopes lining the shores on all sides of the island. Small downy chicks were found in January 1979, often with early signs of feathering evident on the wings and tail. Estimated 1 500 (+) breeding pairs.

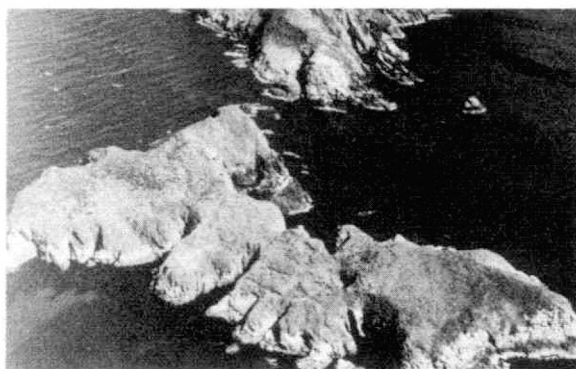
Puffinus tenuirostris Short-tailed Shearwater — Nesting over the whole island except the cliffs and very steep slopes. All birds checked during the 1979 visit were incubating an egg. Estimated some 75 000 breeding pairs.

Pelecanoides urinatrix Common Diving-Petrel — Recorded breeding at the southern end of the island in 1978 where a "few hundred burrows" were estimated (Brothers, pers. comm.). However, two desiccated carcasses outside burrows on steep slopes of the north-western parts were the only evidence of the species found during the 1979 visit.

Haematopus fuliginosus Sooty Oystercatcher — One pair was present on a ridge in the north-western part of the island in January 1979. While White searched through scrub on the ridge for a nest or young, the birds became extremely agitated, flapping frantically about overhead; in the brief time available, neither could be found. Both birds returned to the ridge immediately the searcher left, and remained there during the rest of the visit. The species breeds in similar situations on the neighbouring Maatsuyker and Flat Witch Islands, and undoubtedly breeds on this island also.

Larus novaehollandiae Silver Gull — Nesting high on the slopes over the northern side of the island during the 1979 visit. Chicks observed were fledging but still partly covered in down. Estimated 20 breeding pairs.

Larus pacificus Pacific Gull — Two pairs were found breeding on separate ridges near the north-western corner of the island in January 1979. Two



• Walker Island from the air (looking south) with the northern end of Maatsuyker Island in the background.

Photo: D. Stephens

chicks were found at one site and one at the other. All three chicks were fully fledged and nearly ready for flight.

Factors Affecting Status

Black Currawongs *Strepera fuliginosa* and Forest Ravens *Corvus tasmanicus* almost certainly pilfer small numbers of eggs but the island apparently suffers little from human interference. Undoubtedly the presence of the lightkeepers on nearby Maatsuyker Island is an important restraining influence in this regard; plans to eventually remove them would be detrimental to wildlife in the area.

OTHER VERTEBRATES

Small-scaled Skink *Leiopisma pretiosa* was identified.

Other Seabirds Recorded

Nil.

Banding

Nil.

Bibliography

1. White, G. (1980). Islands of South-west Tasmania. The Author, Sydney.

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G. White, P.O. Box N308, Grosvenor Street, Sydney 2000.