

SEABIRD ISLANDS

No. 204

Gulch Island, Archipelago of the Recherche, Western Australia

Location: 34°02'S, 123°14'E; 9 kilometres east-south-east of Cape Arid, Western Australia.

Status: Class A Reserve vested in the Western Australian Wildlife Authority.

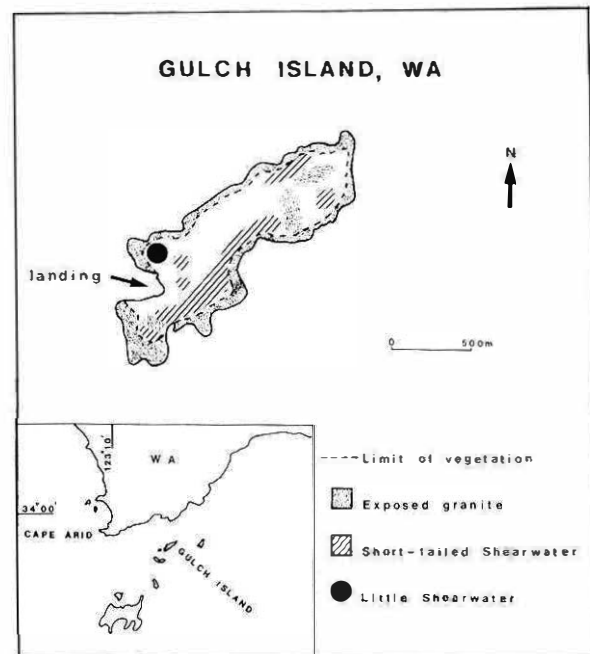
Description: 100 ha; 2 km long by up to 750 m at the widest part and rising to 14 m high. It is a granite island with small rocky outcrops interspersed among the vegetation. *Acacia rostellifera*, *Hakea clavata*, *Albizia lophantha* and *Myoporum insulare* grow around the granite outcrops; *Poa* sp., *Carpobrotus* sp. and *Olearia axillaris* occur in sandy areas. Other plants include *Tirolkeldia diffusa*, *Leucopogon obovatus*, *Dianella revoluta*, *Gonocarpus scordioides*, *Senecio lautus*, *Pelargonium australe*, *Enchylaena tomentosa* and *Muehlenbeckia* sp.

Landing: Onto rocks and sand in the gulch near the south-western end.

Ornithological History: The early ornithological history of the island is rather vague. Serventy and Whittell¹ list Flesh-footed Shearwaters, *Puffinus carneipes* as breeding but the original source of this data cannot be traced. R. E. Johnstone visited the island for two hours on 28 March, 1984. Johnstone, L. A. Smith, N. I. Klomp, M. Burke and A. Byrne spent two hours there on 9 December, 1987.

Breeding Seabirds and Status

Puffinus tenuirostris Short-tailed Shearwater — About 2 000 pairs breed on the island. Most burrows are in grassy areas along the south-eastern side where 20 burrows were counted in an area 10 m square. In December, six burrows were examined. Four contained single adults incubating



an egg, one contained an adult on an empty nest, and one was empty. In March, burrows contained downy young.

Puffinus assimilis Little Shearwater — Fifty to 100 pairs breed on the island. Most burrows are in small sandy areas with mats of *Carpobrotus* near the south-western end. In March birds had just begun to renovate their burrows.

Cereopsis novaehollandiae Cape Barren Goose — Several pairs probably breed on the island. Seven were present in March and 12 in December. Droppings and feathers (including brownish feathers of young birds) were found all over the island.

Factors Affecting Status

Few people visit the island and there was no evidence of human interference. Six Australian Ravens *Corvus coronoides* were present during the December visit and no doubt take eggs and nestlings of breeding seabirds. White-breasted Sea-Eagles *Haliaeetus leucogaster* nest near the south-western end of the island. They undoubtedly would take some breeding seabirds and nestlings.

OTHER VERTEBRATES

One gecko *Phyllodactylus marmoratus*, three skinks, *Egernia kingii*, *E. napoleonis* and *Ctenotus labillardieri* and one snake *Notechis coronatus* were recorded.

Other Seabirds Recorded

<i>Haematopus fuliginosus</i>	Sooty Oystercatcher
<i>Larus pacificus</i>	Pacific Gull
<i>Hydroprogne caspia</i>	Caspian Tern

Banding

Nil.

Bibliography

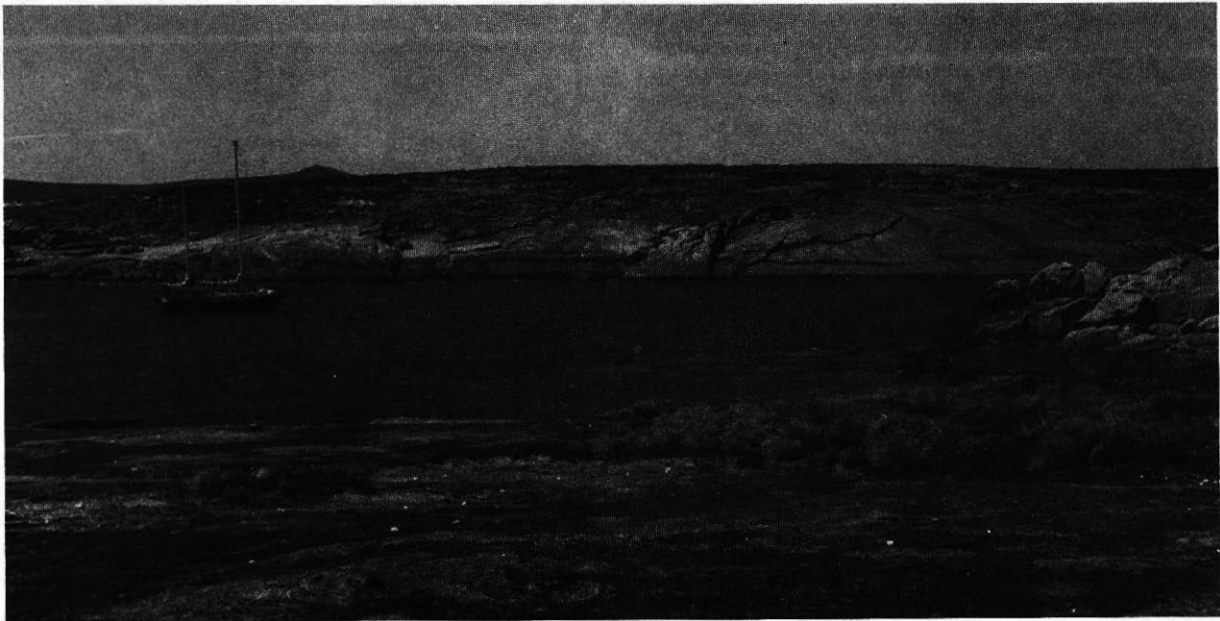
1. Serventy, D. L. and Whittell, H. M. (1976). 'Birds of Western Australia'. (University Press: Perth, Western Australia).

Acknowledgments

We are grateful to Mr S. Smith of Esperance for his hospitality and for taking us to the island, and to Messrs M. Burke and A. Byrne for help in the field. We also thank Mr and Mrs W. H. Butler whose grants to the Western Australian Museum helped defray the cost of some of this field work.

Date compiled: 2 March, 1988.

R. E. Johnstone and L. A. Smith, Western Australian Museum, Francis Street, Perth, Western Australia 6000.
N. I. Klomp, Murdoch University, Western Australia 6150.



• Gulch Island — looking north over the landing bay.

Photo: L. A. Smith