

## SEABIRD ISLANDS

No. 65

## South Fisherman Island, Western Australia

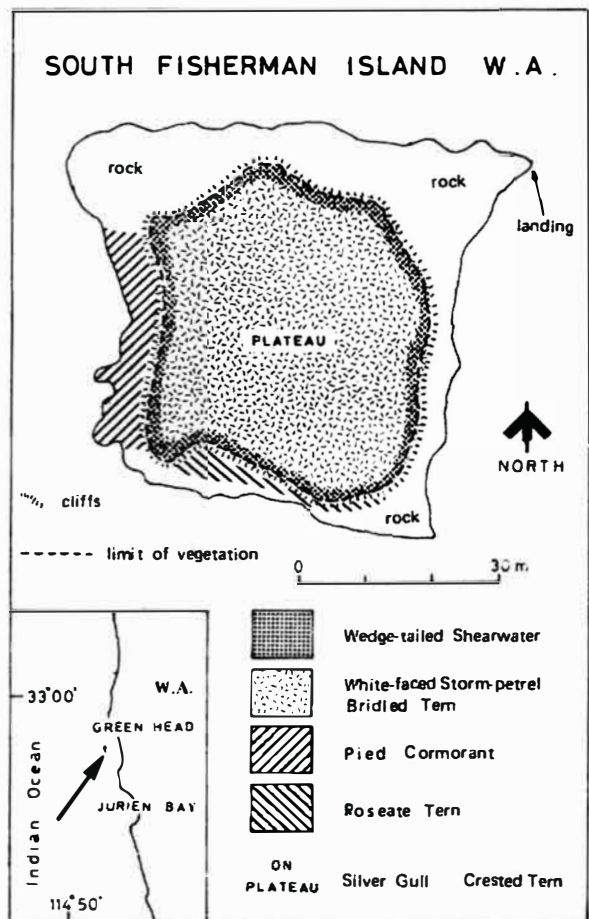
**Location:** 30°08' S., 114°57' E.; 5 km off lower west coast of Western Australia and 21 km north-north-west of Jurien Bay.

**Status:** Class C Reserve for the conservation of flora and fauna vested in the Western Australian Wildlife Authority.

**Description:** 0.4 ha; the smaller of the two Fisherman Islands. It is an aeolian limestone island rising to about 10 m above sea level. About 280 m of shallow reef almost joins the south to the north island. There is a small eroded limestone islet 40 m to the north of the south island. South Fisherman Island consists of a central plateau with fairly gentle slopes on the eastern and southern sides and low cliffs on the northern and western sides. The island is sparsely vegetated with *Nitraria schoberi*. Pigface *Carpobrotus aequilaterus* and Ice-plant *Cryophytum crystallinum* grow on the southern and western slopes.

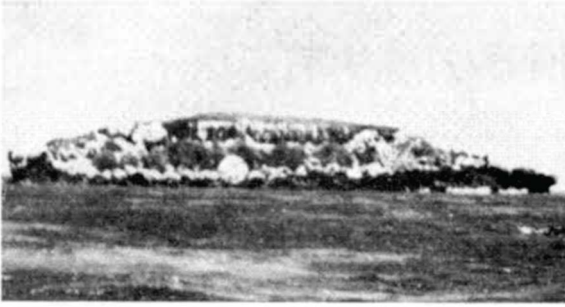
**Landing:** Difficult, and only possible by anchoring offshore and swimming to the rocks on the north-east corner.

**Ornithological History:** As with North Fisherman Island the early history is rather vague and again White-faced Storm-petrels and Bridled Terns were the only species recorded breeding prior to 1948<sup>2</sup>. However, P. T. Sandland<sup>1</sup> found Little Shearwaters nesting about 1930. J. R. Ford<sup>1</sup> visited the Fisherman Islands in 1961 on 24 May, 5 September and 12 December and recorded empty burrows of the Little Shearwater on the December visit. During his September (1961) visit he also recorded empty Wedge-tailed Shearwater burrows and a nearly-fledged Silver Gull runner. The other breeding species were not recorded prior to the visits by R. E. Johnstone which commenced in 1971.



## Breeding Seabirds and Status

*Puffinus pacificus* Wedge-tailed Shearwater—  
Adults are present from September to late April.



● *South Fisherman Island (looking west).*

Burrows are in caves and rock crevices around the edges of the plateau. About 20 breeding pairs.

*Puffinus assimilis* Little Shearwater—A former breeding species of uncertain status. P. T. Sandland<sup>1</sup> told J. R. Ford that he had found young in burrows in October\*. On 12 December 1961 Ford found shallow burrows under *Nitraria* bushes on the plateau which he attributed to this species<sup>1</sup>. These are the only records of this species for the island. Since 1971 Johnstone has found no evidence of their presence on either North or South Fisherman Island.

\* The year is not available but it was probably about 1930.

*Pelagodroma marina* White-faced Storm-petrel—Common visitor breeding in summer. Burrows occur on the plateau and in sandy crevices around the edge of the island. About 50-100 breeding pairs.

*Phalacrocorax varius* Pied Cormorant—Common; present throughout the year. Breeds in April-May, on the western slope. Most nests are made of seaweed and cemented with excreta. About 150 breeding pairs.

*Larus novaehollandiae* Silver Gull — Common; about 30 present throughout the year. Probably breeds regularly on the island, breeding birds favouring the exposed capstone areas of the plateau. Runners have been observed in September<sup>1</sup> and flying juveniles in October. About 5-10 breeding pairs.

*Sterna dougallii* Roseate Tern—A common visitor. Present from March to June and from October to early February. Only autumn-winter breeding has been recorded from this island. On 23 April 1972,

24 pairs nested on the southern slope amongst ice-plants and pigface.

*Sterna anaethetus* Bridled Tern—Common visitor, arriving mid October and departing in late March and early April. Nests all over the island, mainly under bushes and in rock crevices. In December 1962 Ford<sup>1</sup> recorded 'about 100-200 were breeding . . . , several nests with eggs being found'. About 500 breeding pairs.

*Sterna bergii* Crested Tern—Common; up to 80 present throughout the year. Breeds on exposed parts of the plateau. On 15 December 1971, 40 downy chicks were sheltering under low *Nitraria* bushes. About 25-50 breeding pairs.

### Factors Affecting Status

Pied Cormorants were once taken by fishermen for bait but this practice has long ceased. The lack of a suitable landing has saved the island from much human interference.

### OTHER VERTEBRATES

Australian Sea-lions *Neophoca cinerea* occur on the north-east side of the island but they have no access to the plateau.

### Other Seabirds Recorded

*Sterna fuscata* Sooty Tern.

### Banding

*S. anaethetus*—4 nestlings banded 1 January 1973.

### Bibliography

1. Ford, J. R. (1965), 'The Avifauna of the Islands between Dongara and Lancelin, Western Australia', *Emu* 64: 129-144, 181-203.
2. Gillham, M. E. (1961), 'Alteration of the Breeding Habitat by Sea-birds and Seals in Western Australia', *J. Ecol.* 49: 289-300.
3. Serventy, D. L. and H. M. Whittell (1948), *A Handbook of the Birds of Western Australia*. Patersons Press, Perth, W.A.

### Acknowledgements

I am grateful to Dr G. M. Storr of the Western Australian Museum for identifying plant specimens.

R. E. Johnstone,  
Date compiled: *Western Australian Museum,*  
25 February 1976. *Perth, W.A.*