

SEABIRD ISLANDS

No. 69

Goose Island, Tasmania

Location: 40° 18' S., 147° 47' E.; 3.5 km west of Badger Island and 21 km west-south-west of Flinders Island in the Furneaux Group, eastern Bass Strait, Tasmania.

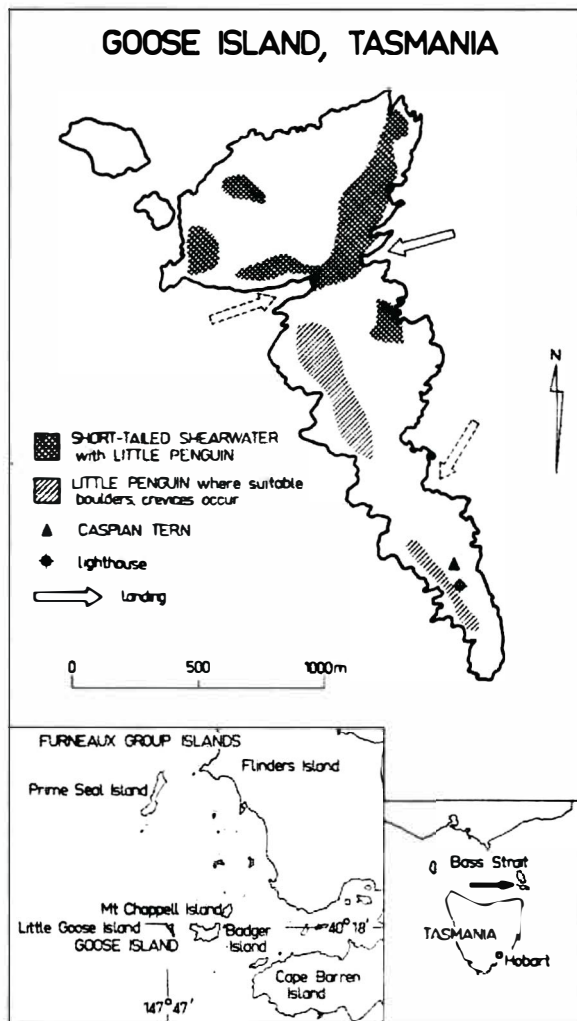
Status: A Conservation Area under the National Parks and Wildlife (Tas.) Act and known officially as Goose Island Wildlife Sanctuary.

Description: 97 ha; 2.4 km long and 1.25 km wide at the northern end tapering to a long narrow point at its southern end. The island is the most westerly of the Chappell Sub-group which consists of three major islands — Mount Chappell, Badger and Goose — and numerous rocky islets. It is low-lying and wind-swept, rising to a height of only about 20 m above sea level. The indented shoreline is jumbled granite boulders interspersed by a few sandy beaches; bare granite slabs extrude in places on the island's southern half. Spectacular groups of piled boulders dominate the northern end. The lighthouse tower, built in 1845 and manned until 1931 is the most prominent feature of the southern half. Little Goose Island and several exposed rocky islets lie off the north-western corner.

The vegetation is predominantly mats of the succulents *Disphyma australe*, *Carpobrotus rossii* and *Tetragonia implexicoma* with communities dominated by the tussocks *Poa poiformis* and *Stipa teretifolia* where the depth of topsoil allows. On the northern end impenetrable thickets of African Boxthorn *Lycium ferocissimum* occur together with other woody plants such as *Acacia longifolia* and *Leucopogon parviflorus*.

Landing: The main landing is onto a sandy beach at the head of a gulch on the eastern side of the island. This affords good protection in almost all weather. Alternate landings exist at a small beach on the western side of the island, almost directly opposite the main site, and in a bay north of the lighthouse. However, both of these are more difficult due to submerged rocks offshore.

Ornithological History: The island was first named on J. L. Stokes' chart of Bass Strait, 1843, due to the numbers of Cape Barren Geese



present (pers. comm.-Lands Department, Tas.). There do not appear to be any published accounts of visits by ornithologists although in 1957 Guiler¹ made an aerial survey of Cape Barren Geese recording 60. D. Milledge visited the island on 30 September 1969, 28 July and 1 September 1970, 1 July and 1 September 1971 and 12 September 1972. N. Brothers made visits on 4 October 1973 and 3 October 1974.

G. Davis camped on the island in May 1977 and has made available his bird observations (unpubl. list).

Breeding Seabirds and Status

Eudyptula minor Little Penguin — Breeds widely over most of the island without being concentrated in any areas; burrows are completely interspersed with those of the shearwaters. In the area of exposed rock slabs and mats of succulents they breed under large convex-based boulders. Because of the mixing with the shearwaters it is very difficult to estimate numbers but probably there are in excess of 1 000 breeding pairs.

Puffinus tenuirostris Short-tailed Shearwater — The extent of the colonies is limited by topsoil depth and hence they are mostly in the tussock communities and under the Boxthorn thickets in the northern part of the island. The bare ground under the Boxthorn, lacking any grass or herb layer, results in burrows readily collapsing. Estimated 60 000 to 70 000 breeding pairs (on an area/subsample basis).

Cereopsis novaehollandiae Cape Barren Goose — Goose Island is of medium importance as a breeding station for this species with nests normally concentrated about the northern part. A few are usually sited among tussocks in the central and southern parts north of the lighthouse but these seldom represent more than 25 per cent of the total. Most nests are built in or under the *Poa* tussocks although in the northern part several have been found on the flat tops of the African Boxthorn bushes up to 4 m above the ground. Breeding birds usually return to the island in March or April with eggs being laid generally in June or July. Most young birds leave the island by December. A few birds may remain during the summer months. In 1970 between 30 and 40 pairs of geese bred, in 1971 about 30 pairs, in 1972 probably 16 to 20 pairs and in 1977 some 30-35 pairs. Overwintering flocks fluctuate considerably in numbers with about 100 the average figure, although up to 600 have been recorded in past years.

Hydroprogne caspia Caspian Tern — A nest containing two eggs was found on the old rail track to the lighthouse on 3 October 1974.

Factors Affecting Status

Occasional poaching of shearwater chicks takes place by local fishermen. Feral Cats *Felis*

catus and Black Rats *Rattus rattus* appear to be absent, though they are a problem on other islands of the Furneaux Group. Should the African Boxthorn spread, it could reduce the numbers of breeding shearwaters through shading out the ground vegetation and causing well-used burrow systems to collapse. Individual adult shearwaters have also been found impaled on the sharp thorn of the bushes. Sheep grazing occurred until 1963, and a few sheep remained until recently.

OTHER VERTEBRATES

None recorded except for some unidentified lizards.

Other Seabirds Recorded

<i>Diomedea melanophrys</i>	Black-browed Albatross (derelict)
<i>Macronectes giganteus</i>	Southern Giant-Petrel (derelict and 2 at a beach in September 1974)
<i>Pelecanus conspicillatus</i>	Australian Pelican
<i>Leucocarbo fuscescens</i>	Black-faced Shag
<i>Ardea novaehollandiae</i>	White-faced Heron
<i>Haematopus fuliginosus</i>	Sooty Oystercatcher
<i>Larus novaehollandiae</i>	Silver Gull
<i>Larus pacificus</i>	Pacific Gull
<i>Larus dominicanus</i>	Kelp Gull
<i>Sterna nereis</i>	Fairy Tern
<i>Sterna bergii</i>	Crested Tern

Banding

Cereopsis novaehollandiae — 394 runners and 88 adults banded (Tas. Fauna Board bands); 8 recoveries at banding place, 2 on Flinders Island and 9 others reported without data. Also, 178 runners banded (CSIRO bands); 6 recoveries on Flinders up to 47 km from banding place.

Bibliography

1. Guiler, E. R. (1961), 'The 1958-60 Cape Barren Goose Aerial Surveys', *Emu* 61: 61-64.

Acknowledgements

Mr George Davis kindly made his observations available and assisted with accurately mapping the Short-tailed Shearwater colonies: Mr Rod Pearse (National Parks and Wildlife Service) provided information on the Cape Barren Goose.

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