

SEABIRD ISLANDS

No. 79

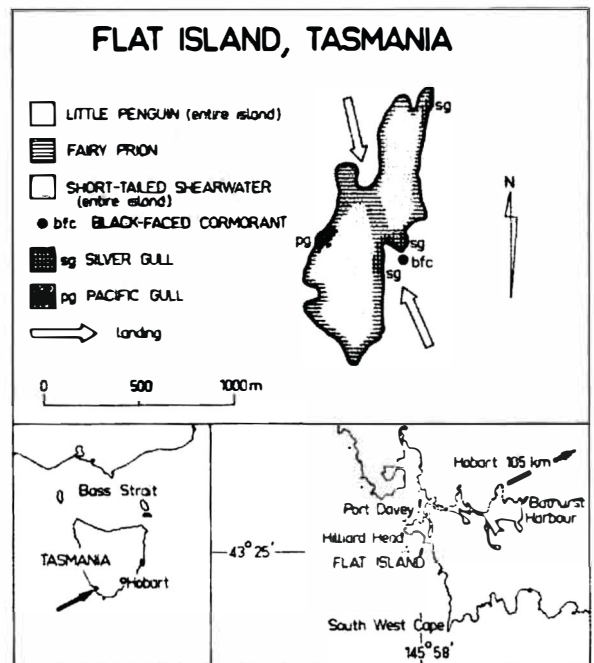
Flat Island, Tasmania

Location: 43° 25' S., 145° 58' E.; 800 m south-south-west of Noyhener Beach, the nearest approach from the mainland and 5 km south-east of Hilliard Head, Port Davey, Tas.

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

Other Name: Mutton Bird Island; formerly Stephens Island.

Description: 53.25 ha; about 1 500 m long and varying from about 200 m to 450 m in width. Most of the island is relatively flat with the highest slopes occurring on the eastern side where the summit reaches just over 40 m. The vegetation is dominated by the perennial herb *Senecio spathulatus* which covers most of the island while other well-spread species include the fern *Histiopteris incisa*, tussock grass *Poa poiformis* and Pigface *Carpobrotus rossii*. Woody shrubs occur only in small areas and are most common around the higher slopes. Even in these parts the vegetation is usually less than 4 m in height. Species here include *Monotoca glauca*, *Drimys lanceolata*, *Correa backhousiana*, *Leptospermum scoparium*, *Westringia brevifolia*, *Cyathodes abietina*, *Helichrysum paraliium*, *Olearia phlogopappa*, *Prionotes cerinthoides* and *Pittosporum bicolor*. Ferns in the form of *Asplenium obtusatum* and *Pteridium esculentum* also occur in several spots as does the sedge



Carex appressa. Soil cover is extensive but not deep.

Landing: Two rather long and narrow inlets, one on either side near the centre of the island, are normally used for landing. Weather conditions may determine which can be used, while



• Flat Island (looking west).

frequent wind storms will often prevent any landing at all.

Ornithological History: Clive Lord, writing on the Short-tailed Shearwater ("Mutton-Bird") following cruises made past the islands in the area in January of both 1926 and 1927 said "... we were given to understand by fishermen and others who know the coast that rookeries occur on Ile du Golfe, Maetsuicker Group, and the islands to the south of Port Davey and the islands at the entrance. A cruise in the vicinity of Maetsuicker, Breaksea, and Stephen[sic] Islands gave the impression that the rookeries were of large dimensions." The first recorded visit was by R. H. Green in November 1959¹, while G. White camped on the island from 7-20 January 1977¹.

Breeding Seabirds and Status

Eudyptula minor Little Penguin — Nests over most of the island with the concentration greatest in the vicinity of the western landing inlet. The burrows are mostly scattered among those of the shearwaters but some also breed in rocky clefts near the shoreline. In January 1977 the majority of chicks were well developed but small downy ones were not uncommon. A few adults were still incubating eggs. Estimated 3 000 breeding pairs.

Pachyptila turtur Fairy Prion — Burrows are located mainly at the edge of the soil cover in the immediate vicinity of the shore, but they also extend right across the island in the area between the western and eastern landing inlets. Incubation had only just commenced at the time of the visit in November 1959 and Green¹ estimated that egg-laying would have been about 20 November. In January 1977 only down-covered chicks were found in the burrows un-

attended by adults during daytime. Some chicks developed wing and tail feathers during the visit, while the age difference between them appeared to be no greater than two weeks. Estimated 2 500 breeding pairs.

Puffinus griseus Sooty Shearwater — Flat Island is recorded as a breeding location³ on the basis of an early report which was probably a mis-identification. Its occurrence off the west coast of Tasmania has not been substantiated.

Puffinus tenuirostris Short-tailed Shearwater — Breeds extensively over almost the entire island. In November 1959 the incubation period had only just commenced and many eggs were found on the surface, apparently belonging to birds unable to find a burrow¹. Hatching occurred during the last week of the visit in January 1977 (13 to 20 January); nearly all eggs had hatched by the latter date. During this visit many vacant burrows were found despite the apparent overcrowding; probably the empty burrows were due to flooding in wet weather which occurred in December 1976.

Green¹, from a brief day visit, estimated 1 000 000 burrows. However, in 1977, White, with much more time available on the island, was able to make a more accurate estimate having found that most "burrows" had two or three entrances. Estimated 500 000 breeding pairs (in 1977).

Leucocarbo fuscescens Black-faced Shag — Breeds on rocky ledges on a small islet about 70 metres offshore from the eastern landing inlet. Only three pairs were observed using the site in January 1977 and these were shot from a passing fishing vessel during the visit. In November 1959¹ about 25 pairs were observed nesting on ledges of what was probably the same rock.

Haematopus fuliginosus Sooty Oystercatcher — Recorded breeding on this and other islands in November 1959¹, the nests mostly containing two eggs. In January 1977 no evidence of breeding was found but two pairs were often present around the eastern landing inlet.

Larus novaehollandiae Silver Gull — Two colonies were found in January 1977, one near the north-eastern corner and the other at the eastern landing inlet. These colonies were not establish-



• A view over the vegetation (looking south).

ed in November 1959, as only a few birds were seen about the island on that occasion'. In January 1977 most young had started fledging, some being well advanced and commencing to fly. Several nests were found, each containing two eggs; these hatched during the visit. Estimated 250 breeding pairs.

Larus pacificus Pacific Gull — In November 1959 some 50 breeding pairs were recorded'. However, in January 1977 only four breeding pairs were found south of the western landing inlet. Chicks were fledging but still unable to fly. Others, probably three pairs, were breeding on rocks and islets immediately offshore. Estimated 7 breeding pairs (1977).

Factors Affecting Status

Fires are occasionally lit in the rookeries during the breeding season, but this practice is more common on other islands in the area. Apparently the Black-faced Shags are having difficulty maintaining their colony on the offshore islet as they are regularly shot. Little Penguins are sometimes taken for crayfish bait. Once ashore all parts of the island are readily accessible and the breeding birds are thus vulnerable to human interference.

OTHER VERTEBRATES

Skinks *Leiopisma metallica* and *L. pretiosa* occur on the island but neither is very common. No mammals have been recorded.

Other Seabirds Recorded

Phalacrocorax carbo Great Cormorant
Ardea novaehollandiae White-faced Heron

Banding

Nil.

Bibliography

1. Green, R. H. and B. C. Mollison (1961), 'Birds of Port Davey and South Coast of Tasmania', *Emu* 61: 223-236.
2. Lord, C. (1927), 'The South-West Coast of Tasmania', *Emu* 26: 264-269.
3. Serventy, D. L., V. N. Serventy and J. Warham (1971), *The Handbook of Australian Sea-birds*. A. H. and A. W. Reed, Sydney.
4. White, G. (in prep.), 'Islands of South-west Tasmania'.

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