

SEABIRD ISLANDS

No. 103

Ile du Golfe, Tasmania

Location: 43° 34'S., 146° 31'E.; 3.7 km off the southern coast of Tasmania and 16 km north-west of South Cape.

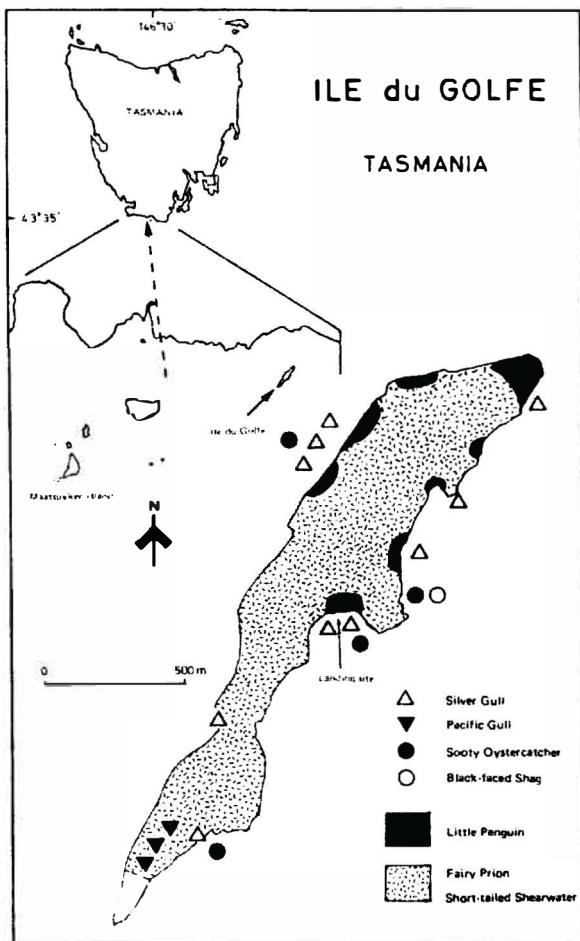
Status: Part of the South-west National Park administered by the National Parks and Wildlife Service (Tas.).

Other Name: Wedge Island.

Description: 70 ha; about 2.6 km long and varying from 130 m to 600 m in width. The east and west slopes rise sharply from the shoreline meeting at a narrow central ridge running in a general north-east to south-west direction along the top of the island. This ridge rises steeply at first from the north-eastern end before ascending much more gradually to the summit at an altitude of about 150 m above sea level. Beyond the summit the ridge eventually drops away to a saddle, then rises quickly again to a second peak some 120 m high. It then descends once more, dropping away sharply in the final stages to a bare, rocky outcrop at the island's south-western tip.

Vegetation in the more sheltered parts of the island is dominated by *Leptospermum scoparium* which forms a canopy about 5-6 m high and covers the higher slopes on the eastern side from about the centre of the island until nearing the north-eastern end. Other important species to occur in these parts include the woody shrubs *Drimys lanceolata*, *Pittosporum bicolor*, *Olearia phlogopappa* (var.) and *Cyathodes juniperina*, while ferns in the form of *Asplenium obtusatum*, *Polystichum proliferum*, *Microsorium diversifolium* and *Histiopteris incisa* provide the main ground cover beneath the canopy.

Dwarf forms of most of these species occur on the exposed slopes, particularly on the western side, with *Correa backhousiana*, *Acacia verticillata*, *Solanum vesicum*, *Exocarpos synticola*, *Dianella tasmanica*, *Pelargonium australe* and *Helichrysum paraliu* also being found in these areas. *Pteridium esculentum* grows densely in



places along the northern half of the ridge top but is only occasionally encountered elsewhere. The most abundant and widespread species on the island are *Poa poiformis* and *Senecio lautus* which are very common on the numerous open slopes while *Rhagodia haccata* is also very plentiful. Other species found near the shores and on the cliffs include *Apium prostratum*, *Carpobrotus rossii*, *Tetragonia implexicoma*, *Scirpus cernuus*,

Hydrocotyle aff. *javanica*, *Plantago triantha*, *Sarcocornia quinqueflora*, *Stipa stipoides* and *Lepidium foliosum*. Some of these species, typical of the open and shoreline slopes, also occur beneath the canopy of the higher and most sheltered parts of the island. Soil cover is extensive but not deep.

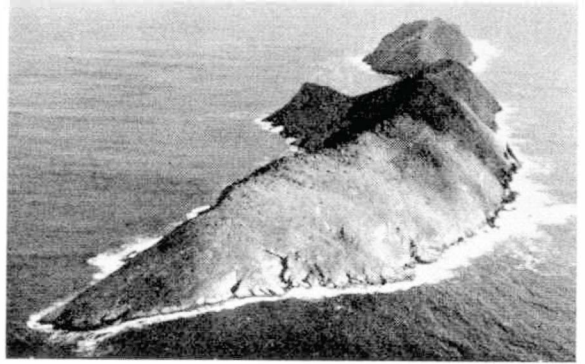
Landing: A small cove near the centre of the island on the eastern side is the usual site. Wind storms and big seas may prevent a landing for days at a time during summer and for much longer periods at other times of the year.

Ornithological History: Clive Lord¹ recorded Fairy Prions and Short-tailed Shearwaters breeding on the island following visits he made to south-western Tasmania in January of both 1926 and 1927. Time and weather conditions did not allow him to go ashore but he obtained the information from fishermen and others who knew the coast. G. White made observations from a fishing vessel offshore on 20 December 1976 and then returned four years later to conduct the only detailed ornithological study carried out on the island. The following information was obtained during the period he camped there from 28 December 1980 to 2 January 1981.

Breeding Seabirds and Status

Eudyptula minor Little Penguin — Nesting occurs on the slopes around the main landing cove up to about 50 m above sea level, at a site to the north of the cove's protruding arm, and at the north-eastern end of the island. Only a few pairs were found elsewhere. Most nests were in burrows but a few were in rocky clefts near the shoreline. The majority of chicks were down-covered at the time of the visit but a few had almost completely fledged. Some adults were still incubating eggs while one burrow contained a nest without eggs and both partners in attendance, presumably with egg-laying about to take place. Estimated 125 breeding pairs.

Pachyptila turtur Fairy Prion — Nesting occurred over the entire island from the shoreline to the ridge top with the greatest density on the steeper slopes. A few were found in rocky clefts along the shores. Most burrows contained a small downy chick, while in a very few cases



• Ile du Golfe (looking southwards).

Photo: J. England

a parent was in attendance during the day. Estimated 25 000 breeding pairs.

Puffinus tenuirostris Short-tailed Shearwater — Burrows were found over the entire island but were more numerous on the gentler slopes. However, the extremely limited extent of such ground has resulted in noticeably greater use of the steep areas by this species than is the case with other islands in south-western Tasmania. Some empty burrows were found but most contained an adult incubating an egg. Estimated 250 000 breeding pairs.

Leucocarbo fuscescens Black-faced Shag — About 15 pairs were breeding at an inaccessible site immediately north-east of the main landing cove on the other side of the protruding arm. Nests were on the ledges high above the shoreline cliffs and were clearly seen from a short distance away; some birds apparently had their nests among nearby shrubs with only their heads visible above the vegetation.

Haematopus fuliginosus Sooty Oystercatcher — Breeds on the rocks and small ledges that occur both directly above the sea and at the edge of the soil cover along the shores. They were found below the Pacific Gull's and Black-faced Shag's breeding sites, at the main landing cove, and in northern parts on the western side of the island, with one pair present at each of these locations. Only one chick was located at each of the accessible sites, being well concealed under the rocks and crevices. They were fully covered in down but had feathering commencing underneath. The four pairs observed were considered to be the entire breeding population for the island.



- *The southern part of the island (looking south-west).*

Larus novaehollandiae Silver Gull! — A colony of about 55 pairs was breeding among tussock grass and boulders at the main landing cove while small groups of up to about 20 pairs were nesting at various locations along the slopes and cliffs over the shores on both the western and eastern sides of the island. A few chicks were almost fully fledged but most were very small and down-covered. Many nests contained from one to three eggs to a clutch. Estimated 200 breeding pairs.

Larus pacificus Pacific Gull — The remnants of four nests were found on the top of the ridge beyond the second peak just prior to where it drops away sharply to the south-western tip of the island. Only three chicks were found nearby in the spear grass, two of which were together. They were in the early stages of fledging and still covered in down. Eight adults swooped and dived constantly overhead while White was in the area. Estimated 4 breeding pairs.

Factors Affecting Status

The Forest Raven *Corvus tasmanicus* is very common along the island's ridge top, taking the eggs of shearwaters and apparently being responsible for the deaths of a few prions. However, Pacific Gulls are the main predator of the prions; numerous desiccated carcasses were found around the gull colony. The nature of the vegetation indicates that there have been very few fires but undoubtedly they would have taken toll of the birds if they had occurred in the breeding season.

OTHER VERTEBRATES

The Swamp Antechinus *Antechinus minimus* and the Small-scaled Skink *Leiopisma pretiosa* were recorded but neither seemed to be common. Seal excreta was found on rocks along the shores but no seals were seen during the visit.

Banding

Nil.

Bibliography

1. Lord, C. (1927). 'The south-west coast of Tasmania'. *Emu* 26: 264-269.
2. Lord, C. (1927). 'Southern Outposts'. *Emu* 27: 16-19.
3. White, G. (1980). Islands of South-west Tasmania. The Author, Sydney.

Acknowledgements

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