

SEABIRD ISLANDS

No. 104

Flat Top Island, Maatsuyker Group, Tasmania

Location: 43° 38'S., 146°23'E.; one of the six islands comprising the Maatsuyker Group, lying 11 km off the south coast of Tasmania and 8 km east of Maatsuyker Island.

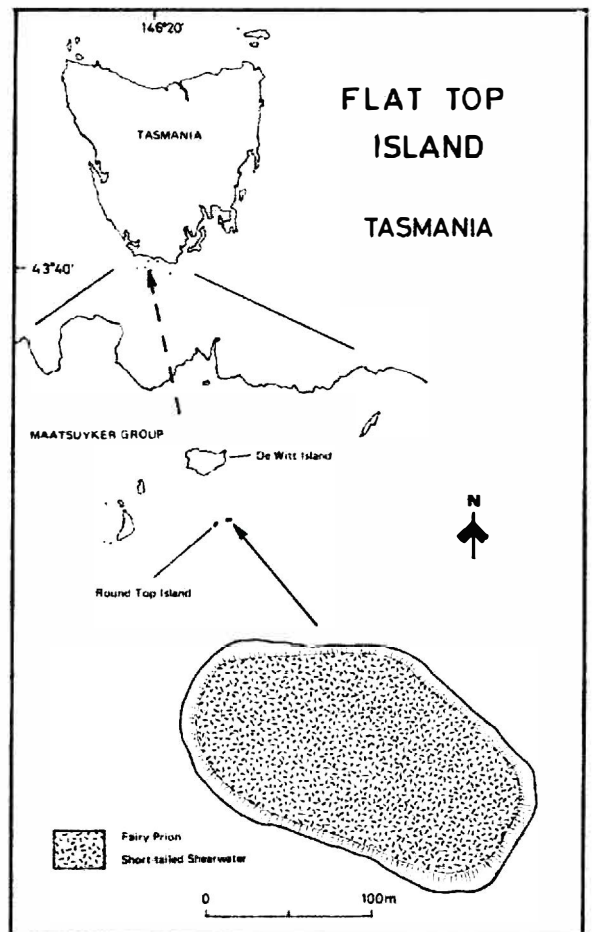
Status: Part of the South-west National Park administered by the National Parks and Wildlife Service (Tas.).

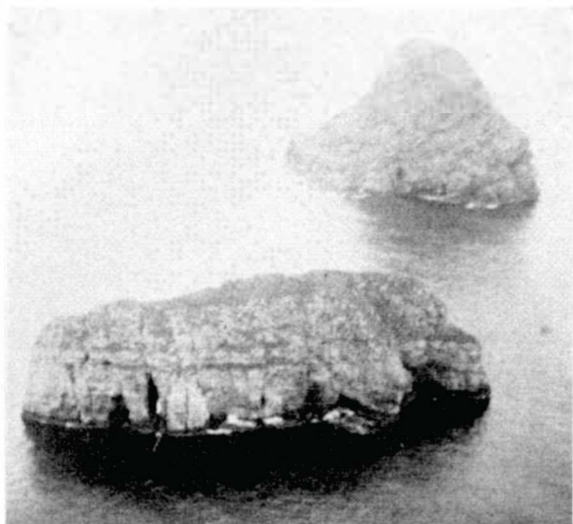
Other Names: East Sister; Seal Rock (formerly).

Description: 2 ha; about 240 m long by 120 m wide, with sheer cliffs rising some 60 m from the sea on all sides to a relatively flat surface across the top. It is the smallest island in the group and has sea caves running through it. Soil cover is mostly confined to the flattish area on top, where it is extensive but not deep. The vegetation is dominated by *Carpobrotus rossii* while other species include *Asplenium obtusatum*, *Rhagodia baccata*, *Poa poiiformis*, *Styidium graminifolium* and *Sarcocornia quinqueflora*.

Landing: The sheer cliffs prevent landing on the island's surface from the sea, so access is only by helicopter and restricted to times when the wind is not strong.

Ornithological History: C. Lord¹ mentioned in 1927 that Black-faced Shags had a small rookery on the island and indicated that other species probably used the island. In 1972, D. Milledge referred to reports by local fishermen that Short-tailed Shearwaters nested on all the islands in





- Flat Top Island from the air (looking south-west) with Round Top Island in the background.

the Maatsuyker Group. In the case of Flat Top Island these claims were based on the birds being seen landing there at dusk. It is believed that no person had ever landed on the surface of the island prior to G. White's visit with K. Upward, the helicopter pilot, from 14:35 to 15:30 hrs on 28 December 1980.

Breeding Seabirds and Status

Pachyptila turtur Fairy Prion — Nesting across the top of the island and in a very small area just down from the top on the northern side, the burrows being interspersed among those of the Short-tailed Shearwaters. Some pairs were believed to have their burrows in the soil covering a number of inaccessible ledges protruding from the cliff sides, but generally the cliffs are too sheer even for prion nesting sites. Burrows examined contained a small, downy chick. Estimated 250 breeding pairs.

Puffinus tenuirostris Short-tailed Shearwater — Breeds extensively across the top of the island with a few pairs occurring just down from the top on the northern side. Nearly all the burrows examined contained a bird incubating an egg; only a very few contained a bird or birds which apparently were not breeding. Estimated 10 000 breeding pairs.

Leucocarbo fuscescens Black-faced Shag — A small number were recorded breeding on the island by Lord¹ but they were not present in December 1980. The nesting sites were likely to have been on the small, inaccessible ledges protruding from the cliffs.

Factors Affecting Status

The island undoubtedly would be visited by the Forest Raven *Corvus tasmanicus* seeking chicks and eggs, while the White-bellied Sea-Eagle *Haliaeetus leucogaster* is another probable predator. The inaccessible nature of the island ensures that non-surface breeding seabirds are free from human interference.

OTHER VERTEBRATES

Australian Fur Seals *Arctocephalus pusillus* occur in the sea caves.

Other Seabirds Recorded

<i>Pelecanoides urinatrix</i>	Common Diving-Petrel (desiccated carcass)
<i>Larus novaehollandiae</i>	Silver Gull

Banding

Nil.

Bibliography

1. Lord, C. (1927), 'Southern Outposts', *Emu* 27: 16-19.
2. Milledge, D. R. (1972), 'The birds of Maatsuyker Island, Tasmania', *Emu* 72: 167-170.
3. White, G. (1980), *Islands of South-west Tasmania*. The Author, Sydney.

Acknowledgements

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