

SEABIRD ISLANDS

No. 113

Middle Island, Archipelago of the Recherche Western Australia



Location: 34°06'S., 123°11'E.; 130 km east of Esperance, WA and 9 km south of Cape Arid, the nearest mainland.

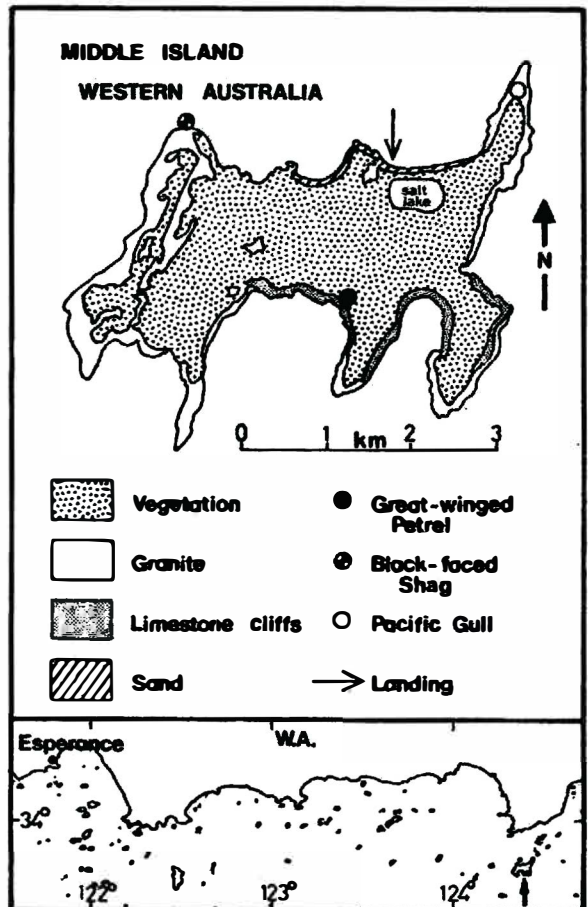
Status: Class A Reserve vested in the W.A. Wildlife Authority; entry permit required.

Description: 1 080 ha; the largest island in the archipelago. The island slopes down from high cliffs on the south coast to a long beach and low granite coastline to the north. The western end is dominated by Flinders Peak, a large granite hill (174 m). Behind the beach is a shallow saline lake about one kilometre across (Pink Lake).

Until 1977 much of the island supported a complex mixture of vegetation associations ranging from low scrubs to melaleuca and eucalypt forests. Most of this vegetation was completely destroyed by a fire which burnt uncontrolled from 10 January to 7 February 1977. It is now regenerating. A brief description of the vegetation before the fire was recorded by Willis⁵ and some additional details by Hopkins².

Landing: The beach offers an excellent landing place.

Ornithological History: J. T. Tunney camped on Middle Island in 1904¹ and D. L. Serventy visited in June 1948 but apparently neither recorded any seabirds. V. N. Serventy³ landed



for one day, 22 November 1950, during the Australian Geographical Society Expedition. A. and S. R. Tingay carried out a vertebrate fauna survey from 5 to 16 November 1976.

Breeding Seabirds and Status

Pterodroma macroptera Great-winged Petrel — In 1976 four dead specimens were found among deserted burrows in shallow sandy soils above the limestone cliffs of the south coast. A 150 metre transect intercepted 52 such burrows.

Leucocarbo fuscescens Black-faced Shag — A breeding colony of this species is located at the northern base of Flinders Peak. It was first recorded in 1890¹.

Larus novaehollandiae Silver Gull — Recorded in 1950 by V. N. Serventy³ as a probable breeding species. "Several at the cormorant rookery, two being young and apparently the gulls had nested there".

Larus pacificus Pacific Gull — Single nests were found in 1950 and in 1976; they were among low vegetation on a granite headland in 1976.

Factors Affecting Status

The island's remoteness probably ensures few visitors. However, unauthorised visits from passing boats are suspected and the long sandy beach provides easy landing. The fire in 1977 may have originated from such a visit or from lightning. The effects of the holocaust on breeding seabirds is not known. Potential avian predators of seabirds on the island are the Brown Goshawk *Accipiter fasciatus*, White-bellied Sea-Eagle *Haliaeetus leucogaster* which nests on the island, and the Marsh Harrier *Circus aeruginosus*.

OTHER VERTEBRATES

One amphibian and six reptiles including Gould's Goanna *Varanus gouldii*, King's Skink *Egernia kingii*, *E. napoleonis*, Shingle-back Skink *Tiliqua rugosa* and Crowned Snake *Drysdalia coronata* have been recorded. The Tammar Wallaby *Macropus eugenii* is abundant where vegetation remains.



● View of the north coast of Middle Island (looking east) from Flinders Peak. Pink Lake is in the background near the centre.

Other Seabirds Recorded

<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>	Great Cormorant
<i>Egretta sacra</i>	Eastern Reef Egret
<i>Haematopus juliginosus</i>	Sooty Oystercatcher
<i>Hydroprogne caspia</i>	Caspian Tern
<i>Sterna nereis</i>	Fairy Tern

Banding

Nil.

Bibliography

1. Andrews, T. C. (1959), Three letters between Athol Thomas and Thomas C. Andrews, unpublished. Battye Library, Perth.
2. Hopkins, A. J. M. (1981), 'Studies on Middle Island in the Recherche Archipelago', *State Wildlife Authority News Service* 11(2): 6-10.
3. Serventy, V. N. (1952), The Archipelago of the Recherche, Part 2: Birds. *Aust. Geog. Soc. Rept.* 1(2): 1-24.
4. Whittell, H. M. (1938), 'Notes on field-trips of J. T. Tunney', *Emu* 38: 322-326.
5. Willis, J. H. (1953), The Archipelago of the Recherche, Part 3a: Land Flora. *Aust. Geog. Soc. Rept.* 1(3): 1-35.

Date compiled: 21 October 1981

A. Tingay and S. R. Tingay, 13 Kensitt Street, Stoneville, W.A. 6554.