

SEABIRD ISLANDS

No. 120

Sandy Hook Island, Archipelago of the Recherche, Western Australia

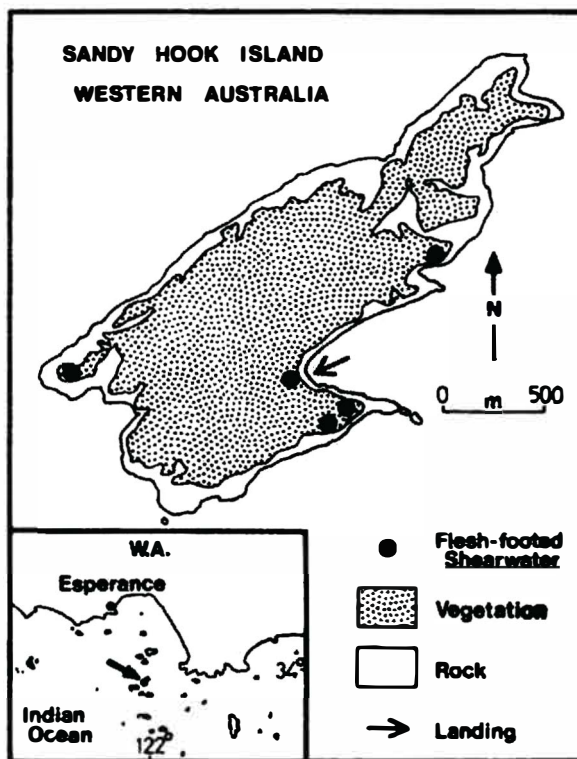
Location: 34°02'S., 122°00'E.; 21 km south of Esperance, WA and 7.9 km from the mainland at Cape Le Grande.

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

Description: 285 ha; 2.8 km long and varying in width from about 360 m towards the north-eastern end, to about 1.8 km at the south-western end. A ridge reaching a height of 140 metres extends along the length of the island with a second, lower ridge to the south of it. A valley runs down towards the east between these two ridges to a small sandy beach, an unusual feature on the granite islands of this archipelago.

Much of the coastline consist of steep granite slopes particularly along the northern and western sides. Above these slopes are shallow soils which support dense vegetation interspersed with areas of open granite and granite boulders. Deeper soils occur in the main valley and also on the northern coast. The vegetation grows to 4-5 m high in places and is generally dense making walking difficult. Small areas of *Poa caespitosa* grassland and *Chenopodiaceous* closed heath, principally on the south and east coasts, are the main areas used by the burrowing seabirds. There are small disturbed areas with introduced plants behind the beach and on the south coast. These resulted from early attempts to graze sheep on the island.

Landing: The beach offers an excellent landing place.



Ornithological History: J. T. Tunney camped on the island from 13 to 19 November 1904 and recorded Little Penguins and Flesh-footed Shearwaters¹. V. N. Serventy visited Sandy Hook on 10 November 1950 as part of the Australian Geographical Society Expedition². A. Tingay and S. R. Tingay carried out a flora and fauna survey on the island from 18 to 28 May 1977.



● *Sandy Hook Island (looking north).*

Photo: S. G. Lane



● *Part of the north-western coast.*

Breeding Seabirds and Status

Eudyptula minor Little Penguin — Recorded breeding² but no details available.

Puffinus carneipes Flesh-footed Shearwater — Recorded nesting in the valley behind the beach on 10 November 1950³. No live birds were found during the visit in May 1977, but many remains were found among the burrows. Burrows were common in sandy areas near the beach, along the south coast and in the north-western part of the island. The size of the breeding population is not known.

Factors Affecting Status

The sandy beach and proximity to Esperance make this one of the most accessible islands in the archipelago. Although permits are required, unauthorised landings probably occur. The greatest threat to the island at present is the risk of fire caused by visitors who may also inadvertently damage shearwater burrows near the beach. This problem could increase if large numbers of visitors are allowed to land. The White-bellied Sea-Eagle *Haliaeetus leucogaster* visits the island and may predate some breeding seabirds.

OTHER VERTEBRATES

Marbled Gecko *Phyllodactylus marmoratus*, Thick-tailed Gecko *Underwoodisaurus milii*, Grey's Skink *Ctenotus labillardieri*, King's Skink *Egernia kingii*, *E. napoleonis*, Four-toed Skink *Hemiergis peronii* and Death Adder *Acanthopsis antarcticus* were recorded by Glauert¹ and during the visit in 1977. The abundance of Death Adders is considered to have made the island unsuitable for grazing.

Other Seabirds Recorded

<i>Diomedea chlororhynchus</i>	Yellow-nosed Albatross (skull)
<i>Pterodroma macroptera</i>	Great-winged Petrel (skull)
<i>Leucocarbo fuscescens</i>	Black-faced Shag
<i>Cereopsis novaehollandiae</i>	Cape Barren Goose
<i>Haematopus juliginosus</i>	Sooty Oystercatcher
<i>Larus novaehollandiae</i>	Silver Gull
<i>Larus pacificus</i>	Pacific Gull
<i>Sterna bergii</i>	Crested Tern

Banding

Puffinus carneipes — a "few" on 10 Nov. 50³.

Bibliography

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4. Whittell, H. M. (1938), 'Notes on field-trips of J. T. Tunney', *Emu* 38: 322-326.
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A. Tingay and S. R. Tingay, 13 Kensitt Street, Stoneville, W.A. 6554.