

## SEABIRD ISLANDS

No. 136

## Actaeon Island, Tasmania

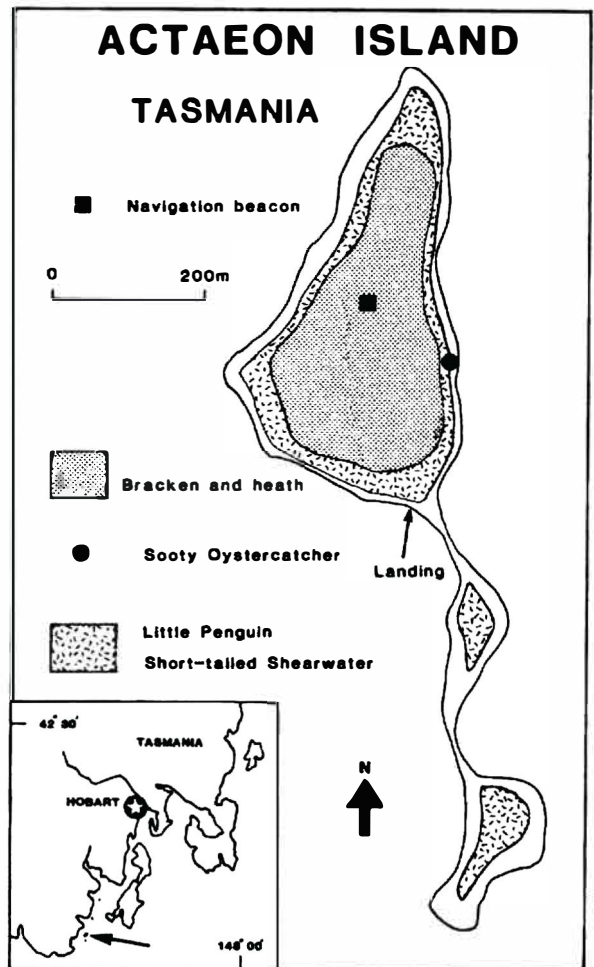
**Location:** 43°31'S., 147°00'E.; 3 km off Eliza Point on the south-east coast of Tasmania and about 12 km south-west of Cape Bruny.

**Status:** Crown Land.

**Description:** 135 ha; 1 150 m long by 300 m at the widest point. There are three sections to the island joined by narrow necks of land built up of round beach rocks. The main, northern section, rises sharply for up to 4 m from a rocky shore then slopes very gently to a navigation beacon at the highest point 14 m above sea level. The two southern sections are flat and only a few metres above sea level. Vegetation includes areas of *Poa poiformis* tussock grassland, extensive patches of *Pteridium esculatum* and of scrubby heath *Melaleuca squarrosa* and *Leptospermum scoparium*. *Carpobrotus rossii* and *Tetragonia implexicoma* are found in the littoral areas.

**Landing:** Possible at any point around the island but location may depend on the sea swell. Shallow rocky conditions extend some distance from the shore in places and even a small sea swell can complicate landing.

**Ornithological History:** W. V. Legge<sup>1</sup> visited the island twice in 1886 to investigate breeding seabirds. During these visits he recorded the Little Penguin, Short-tailed Shearwater, Sooty Oystercatcher, Silver Gull and Pacific Gull breeding. From his description it would appear that both Silver and Pacific Gulls nested in large numbers. Except where indicated otherwise, the following information was obtained during a three-hour visit by N. P. Brothers on 4 December 1980.



### Breeding Seabirds and Status

*Eudyptula minor* Little Penguin — Occupied burrows were scattered throughout the Short-tailed Shearwater colonies but were more common in the colonies along the western and eastern shores of the northern section's southern half. Birds were also on eggs or small chicks in rock cavities on the western coast. Estimated 1 000 breeding pairs.

*Puffinus tenuirostris* Short-tailed Shearwater — Dense burrow concentrations occur in small areas of the two southern sections of the island; lesser concentrations are found over most parts wherever soil depth is sufficient. On the larger northern section, birds were also on fresh eggs in burrows in a strip up to 30 m in width extending around the edge of the vegetation area. In places burrows extended a further 10 m into very dense, chest-high bracken, but generally such areas were avoided by the birds. Burrows were not found elsewhere and the root systems of the vegetation appear to prevent burrowing. Walkways of both penguins and shearwaters lead from colonies to the shoreline; no doubt most, if not all, of the shearwaters walk to the sea to depart as there are no suitable takeoff points. The total area covered by the colony was about 4.6 ha with only 1.6 ha being high burrow density. Estimated 25 000 breeding pairs.

*Haematopus fuliginosus* Sooty Oystercatcher — Only one pair observed; a nest containing two eggs was found on the eastern rocky shoreline of the main part of the island.

*Larus novaehollandiae* Silver Gull — Recorded breeding by Legge<sup>1</sup> on 31 October 1886, with 50 or more on eggs at the southern point of the island.

*Larus pacificus* Pacific Gull — Legge<sup>1</sup> mentioned the taking of large numbers of eggs prior to his visit but found only two nests on 28 November 1886. He did not mention specifically which island their nests were on but the inference is that it was Actaeon Island. Two pairs were present, but not breeding in December 1981.

### Factors Affecting Status

The vegetation on the island has been frequently burned for many years and over the period this may have significantly affected the habitat suitable for burrowing. Short-tailed



• Part of the west side of Actaeon Island (looking south) with the mainland in the background.

Shearwater chicks, probably several thousand, are harvested annually. Rabbits *Oryctolagus cuniculus* have been on the island for many years but their numbers in 1980 appeared to be extremely low. There was no evidence of the destruction of which they are capable on such an island.

### OTHER VERTEBRATES

*Leiopisma metallica* Metallic Skink (numerous) and *Eubalaena glacialis australis* Southern Right Whale (dead on beach).

### Other Seabirds Recorded

<i>Diomedea cauta</i>	Shy Albatross (derelict)
<i>Macronectes giganteus</i>	Southern Giant-Petrel (1)*
<i>Macronectes halli</i>	Northern Giant-Petrel (17)*
<i>Leucocarbo fuscescens</i>	Black-faced Shag
<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>	Great Cormorant
* Feeding on whale carcass.	

### Banding

Nil.

### Bibliography

1. Legge, W. V. (1887), 'On the breeding of some seabirds on the Actaeon and adjacent islets', *Soc. of Tas. Papers and Proceedings*, No. 28.

### Acknowledgements

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