

## Babel Island, Furneaux Group, Tasmania

**Location:** 39°57'S., 148°20'E.; 2.5 kilometres off Sellars point on the east coast of Flinders Island in the Furneaux Group, Tasmania.

**Status:** Conservation Area; Muttonbird Reserve.

**Description:** 425 ha; 3 km long by 2.8 km at the widest part, the island is pearshaped and is 197 m at its highest point with gentle slopes leading to the waters edge. The island is granitic with two large sandy areas at West Beach and South East Beach. Fine sandy soil is present over the whole island even on top of the ridges. The main vegetation is Poa Tussock *Poa poiformis* with patches of tea tree *Leptospermum* sp. and African Boxthorn *Lycium ferrocissimum*.

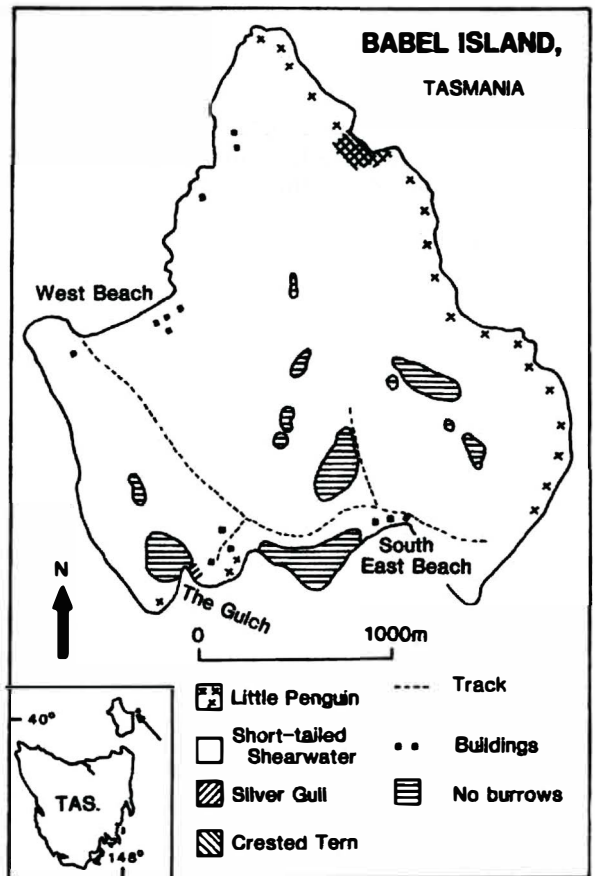
**Landing:** Easy at West Beach or South East Beach depending on wind direction. Boulder-lined shores and reefs restrict access elsewhere.

**Ornithological History:** Members of the Naturalists Club of Victoria visited the island on 20 November 1893<sup>1</sup>. Other ornithologists have visited since then but there is no published account of the seabirds. G. Towney and I. J. Skira visited Babel Island from 7-11 February 1983.

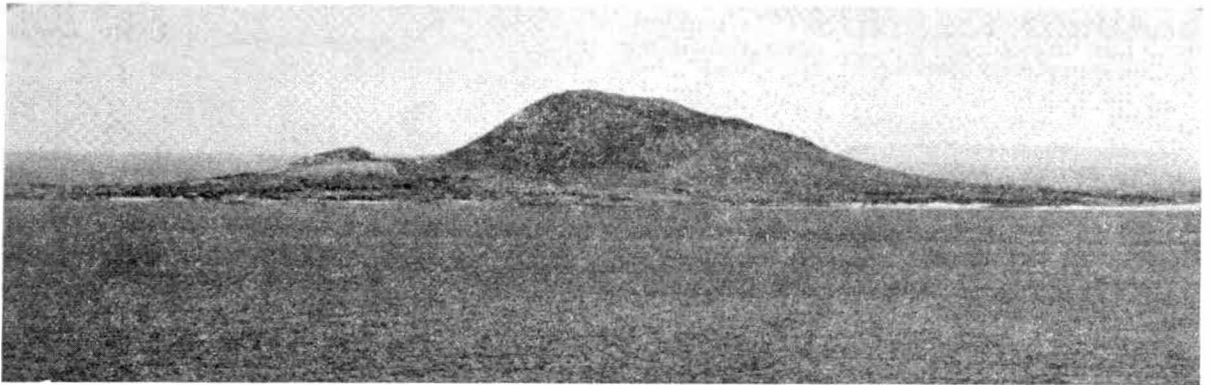
### Breeding Seabirds and Status

*Eudyptula minor* Little Penguin -- Uncommon. Burrows are scattered among those of Short-tailed Shearwaters, mainly on the eastern coast. Estimated 500-1000 burrows.

*Puffinus tenuirostris* Short-tailed Shearwater — Abundant over some 380 ha. Burrow density, calculated from 23 transects, each 100 m by 2 m and placed at random, was  $0.75 \pm 0.12$  burrows/m<sup>2</sup> (at 95% confidence limits  $\pm 2$  S.E.)



Density x area gives an estimated 2.86 million burrows, the largest Short-tailed Shearwater colony in Tasmania. Present to breed from late September, with young departing by early May. *Larus novaehollandiae* Silver Gull — On 9 February 1983, 20 chicks were counted on the north-eastern coast. N. P. Brothers (pers.



• Babel Island (looking west).

Photo: I. J. Skira

comm.), on 6 December 1974, found 30 nests at "The Gulch"; some were empty and the others contained from one to three eggs.

*Sterna bergii* Crested Tern — About 300 chicks of all sizes were present on 9 February 1983, in the same vicinity as the Silver Gulls.

#### Factors Affecting Status

Babel Island is one of seven commercial Short-tailed Shearwater colonies in Bass Strait. Harvesting of chicks has occurred there for well over 100 years. Since the 1950's less than 100 000 chicks have been taken annually by two operators compared with over 400 000 taken annually in the 1930's when there were 25 operators. Harvesting is under the control of the National Parks and Wildlife Service (Tas.) and there is no danger of over-exploitation. Feral cats *Felis catus* occur.

#### OTHER VERTEBRATES

*Notechis ater serventyi* Tiger Snake (numerous) and *Thylagole billardieri* Tasmanian Pademelon (common).

#### Other Seabirds Recorded

<i>Phalacrocorax fuscescens</i>	Black-faced Shag
<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>	Great Cormorant
<i>Cereopsis novaehollandiae</i>	Cape Barren Goose
<i>Haematopus longirostris</i>	Pied Oystercatcher
<i>Haematopus fuliginosus</i>	Sooty Oystercatcher
<i>Larus pacificus</i>	Pacific Gull



• West Beach, Babel Island (looking south-east).

Photo: I. J. Skira

#### Banding

Period March 1948 to March 1971.

*Puffinus tenuirostris* — 617 adults; 8679 fledglings. No figures on recoveries are available (The banding programme was to estimate the number of chicks harvested using the Lincoln Index Method.)

#### Bibliography

1. Gabriel, J. (1894), 'Report of expedition to Furneaux Group', *Victorian Nat.* 10: 167-168.

Date compiled: 25 June 1984.

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