

SEABIRD ISLANDS

No. 140

East Pyramids, Tasmania

Location: 43°25'S., 145°56'E., about 4 kilometres south of Hilliard Head at the southern side of the entrance to Port Davey on the south-west coast of Tasmania.

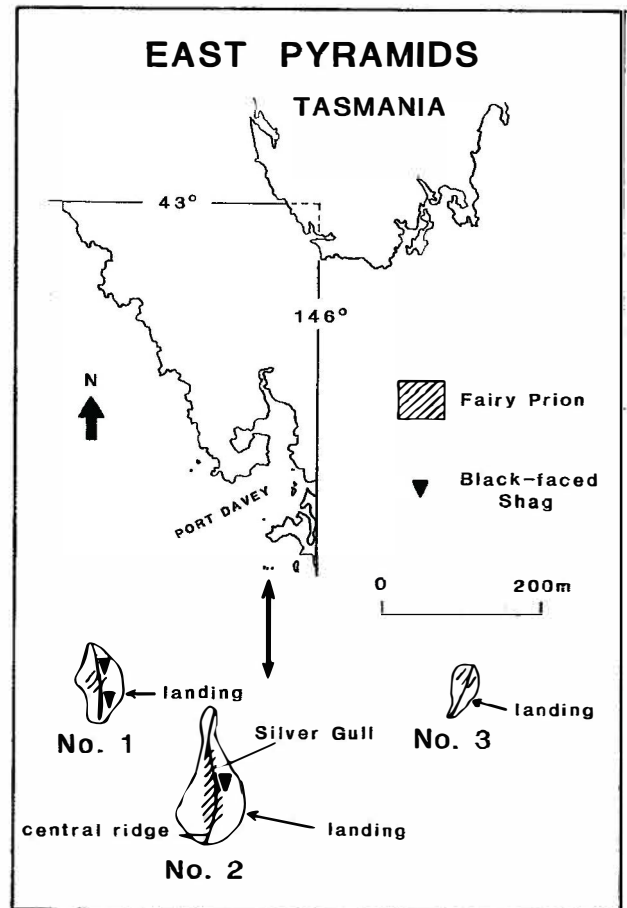
Status: Part of the South-west National Park.

Other Name: The Pyramids.

Description: East Pyramids consist of three rocks from 100 m to 300 m apart which will be referred to as Rocks No. 1, No. 2 and No. 3, numbered from west to east. No. 1 is 96 m long (axis NW/SE), 78 m wide and 28 m high and is very steep sided with a sharp central ridge. Vegetation is confined to the western side extending no more than 15 m below the summit. *Carpobrotus rossii* and *Poa poiiformis* are dominant with 12 other species present. No. 2 is 175 m long (axis NW/SE), 70 m wide and 52 m high. It is a similar shape to No. 1, also with a sharp central ridge from which all sides drop steeply or vertically to the sea. The southern end slopes more gently along the ridge from the summit. Vegetation is far more sparse than on No. 1 and mainly confined to the eastern slope. No. 3 is 70 m long (axis NW/SE), 60 m wide and 36 m high. It is similar in shape to others with all sides very steep to sheer. Vegetation is concentrated around the summit and extends down along the ridge to the north. This central ridge slopes more gently in places than on No. 1 and No. 2. There is insufficient soil depth for the larger burrow-nesting seabirds.

Landing: Possible on the eastern side of all three rocks in calm conditions and the breeding areas are accessible by climbing along the ridges.

Ornithological History: There is no known previous ornithological history. N. P. Brothers, N. Mooney and M. Holdsworth visited the Pyramids on 2 December 1981.



Breeding Seabirds and Status

Pachyptila turtur Fairy Prion — Found breeding on all three rocks. On No. 1 they were concentrated on the western side in an area 10 m by 13 m but extended over about twice that area in reduced density. Several burrows were also found below the ridge on the eastern side and a few were

nesting in rock crevices. In the main area the dominant plant was *Carpobrotus rossii* and some of the burrows were up to one metre long. Few burrows were occupied. On No. 2 rock there is very little habitat for burrows; however, suitable rock crevices are more abundant among the many loose boulders. The nesting cavities were short and mostly inaccessible without causing damage to the "burrow" due to rock obstructions along the tunnels. Because of the shortness of the "burrows" several prions flew from them when approached. No. 3 rock has very few burrows; those found were in small gullies where soil has accumulated, at the northern and eastern ends. Crevices were used and some incubating birds were clearly visible. Estimated less than 250 breeding pairs (No. 1, 100; No. 2, 50-100; No. 3, 50).

Pelecanoides urinatrix Common Diving-Petrel — A number of petrel-size burrows examined contained down, possibly from chicks of this species that had already fledged. A pair of wings was found on No. 1 rock. A number probably breed on the rock.

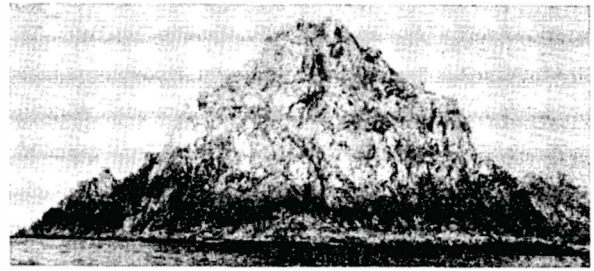
Leucocarbo fuscescens Black-faced Shag — On No. 1 rock five old nests were found on ledges towards the southern end, with evidence of another colony at the northern end of the ridge from the summit. On the eastern side, 20 m from the summit of No. 2 rock, there were 39 newly-constructed nests with many broken eggs scattered about. There was no evidence to suggest that any chicks had been raised; a number of nests, all constructed of poa and pigface, appeared not to have been used at all. Five adult birds were sitting on rocks at sea level. On No. 3 rock one broken egg was found on the summit, presumably carried there by a gull.

Larus novaehollandiae Silver Gull — On No. 2 rock three pairs were defending bare ledges 15-20 m above sea level on the eastern side; a newly-constructed nest was found to the north of the summit 15 m down the eastern side.

Larus pacificus Pacific Gull — One pair was present but only mildly defensive of a midden area on the summit of No. 2 rock; the remains of an old nest was nearby.

Factors Affecting Status

Pacific Gull castings contained Fairy Prion remains and the diving-petrel may also have been



• East Pyramids — Rock No. 3 (looking west), with Rock No. 2 in the background.

killed by these gulls. Burrowing conditions would make location and capture of prions and petrels relatively easy for the gulls. Some fishermen in the area have an aversion to cormorants or shags. The breeding colony on these rocks would be particularly vulnerable by shooting or by destruction of nests and eggs since the main traffic route for fishing vessels passes the rocks.

OTHER VERTEBRATES

Skinks collected on all three rocks have not yet been identified. Australian Fur Seals *Arctocephalus pusillus* have been reported¹.

Other Seabirds Recorded

Haematopus fuliginosus Sooty Oystercatcher

Banding

Nil.

Bibliography

1. White, G. (1981), Islands of South-west Tasmania. Revised Edition. The Author, Sydney.

Acknowledgements

Messrs V. Careless and J. Chesterman were most helpful in transporting equipment to Port Davey, including a 4 m dinghy which was used for all islands surveys in the area. Messrs N. Mooney and M. Holdsworth assisted with the survey. Mr M. J. Brown identified plants collected.

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