

## SEABIRD ISLANDS

No. 145

## Rabbit Island, Port Douglas, Eyre Peninsula, South Australia

**Location:** 34°36'S., 135°25'E.; within Port Douglas, 3 kilometres west from the township of Coffin Bay, S.A.

**Status:** Conservation Park under the control of the National Parks and Wildlife Service (S.A.).

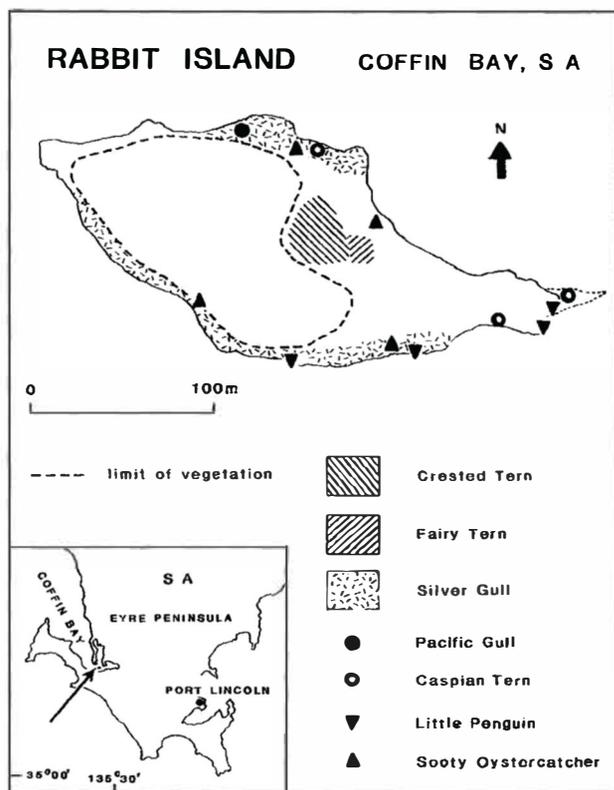
**Other Name:** Garden Island.

**Description:** 0.5 ha; the island consists of a flat limestone plateau, some 300 m long by 150 m wide and 4 m high, with collapsed cliffs on three sides, and sloping to water level on the eastern side. Vegetation includes African Boxthorn *Lycium ferocissimum*, Tree Mallow *Lavatera arborea*, Nitrebush *Nitraria billardiera*, Barley Grass *Hordeum glaucum*, Capweed *Arctotheca calendula*, nettles predominantly *Urtica incisa* and on the south-eastern corner a small stand of Coastal White Mallee *Eucalyptus diversifolia*.

**Landing:** From small craft on the lee side in all but the roughest weather.

**Ornithological History:** Visits have been made to the island since 1957 to band the breeding seabirds. Seasonal movements of Silver Gulls banded up to July 1963 were described by Murray and Carrick<sup>2</sup>. These data were incorporated into their pooled data for Coffin Bay. There appears to be no other published accounts of these or other visits by ornitholo-

gists. C. L. Gill visited the island a number of times between 1968 to 1975 to photograph the seabirds.





• Rabbit Island (looking north-north-west).

### Breeding Seabirds and Status

*Eudyptula minor* Little Penguin — Nests under rocks or in burrows along the southern side in spring. Between 10 and 15 pairs breed on the island in most years.

*Egretta sacra* Eastern Reef Egret — A pair nests most years in caves on the northern side of the island.

*Haematopus longirostris* Pied Oystercatcher — A pair nests occasionally on the cliff top on the northern side.

*Haematopus fuliginosus* Sooty Oystercatcher — Four or five pairs regularly nest in caves and under rocks all round the island in October/November.

*Larus novaehollandiae* Silver Gull — Breeds from September to January. In 1969 about 50 pairs nested on the northern side. In 1982 about the same number nested there, but a further 100 nests were found scattered along the cliff tops on the southern side.

*Larus pacificus* Pacific Gull — One or two pairs nest on the cliff tops in November.

*Hydroprogne caspia* Caspian Tern — One or two pairs nest on the cliff top on the southern side each year in November.

*Sterna nereis* Fairy Tern — A small colony of about 20 pairs formerly nested on the eastern side in December/January. They have not been recorded breeding in recent years probably because the vegetation has become too dense.

*Sterna bergii* Crested Tern — A colony of 100 + nested in past years also on the eastern side. They have not done so since 1968, presumably likewise because of the thicker vegetation.

### Factors Affecting Status

The Osprey *Pandion haliaetus* and the White-bellied Sea-Eagle *Haliaeetus leucogaster* visit the island and, no doubt, predate the breeding seabirds. Sightseers in small boats occasionally visit the island causing disturbance to the breeding birds; gulls quickly rob the unguarded nests of terns during such visits. The Buff-banded Rail *Rallus philippensis* is present and undoubtedly would take some eggs.

### Other Seabirds Recorded

<i>Puffinus tenuirostris</i>	Short-tailed Shearwater
<i>Oceanites oceanicus</i>	Wilson's Storm-Petrel (derelict)
<i>Pelecanus conspicillatus</i>	Australian Pelican
<i>Phalacrocorax varius</i>	Pied Cormorant
<i>Phalacrocorax sulcirostris</i>	Little Black Cormorant
<i>Phalacrocorax melanoleucos</i>	Little Pied Cormorant

### Banding

First banding 7 Dec. 57.

*Egretta sacra* — 1 chick.

*Haematopus fuliginosus* — 1 chick.

*Larus novaehollandiae* — 599 chicks; six have been subsequently recovered on the island, 17 from along the coast of S.A. and one from Loxton, S.A. (480 km E.).

*Larus pacificus* — 6 chicks.

*Hydroprogne caspia* — 2 chicks; one recovered at banding place.

*Sterna nereis* — 29 chicks; 1 recovered 14 km W.

*Sterna bergii* — 299 chicks in 1959; 2 recoveries nearby on Brothers Island.

### Bibliography

- Gill, C. L. (1980), 'Observations on the Eastern Reef Egret in the Eyre Peninsula Region', *S.A. Orn.* 28(4): 107.
- Murray, M. D. and R. Carrick (1964), 'Seasonal movements and habits of the Silver Gull, *Larus novaehollandiae*, in south-eastern Australia', *CSIRO Wildl. Res.* 9(2): 160-188.

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