

SEABIRD ISLANDS

No. 146

The Brothers Islands, Port Douglas, Eyre Peninsula, South Australia

Location: 34°36'S., 135°24'E.; within Port Douglas, Eyre Peninsula, 8 kilometres south-south-east from Point Longnose, S.A.

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

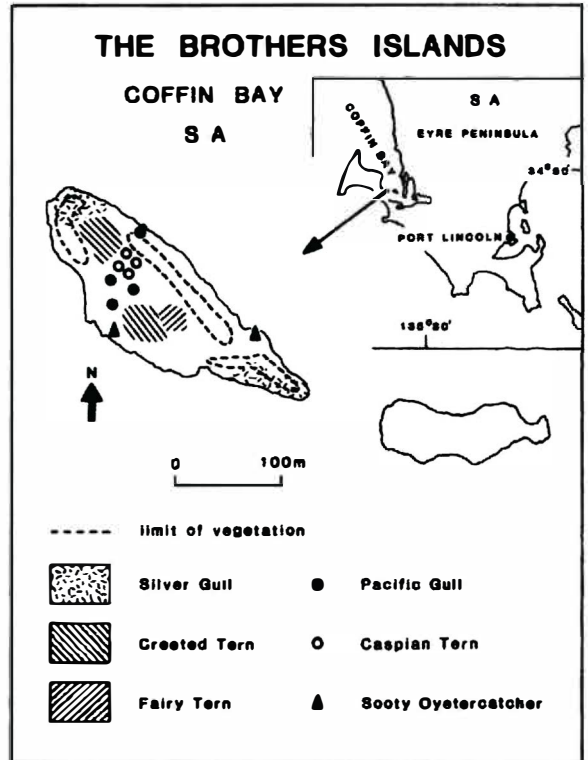
Description: 0.25 ha; the islands consist of two flat limestone islets about 50 m apart. The eastern one (Little Brother) is some 150 m long, 50 m wide and 4 m high. The western islet (Big Brother) is 300 m long and 100 m wide, sloping from the western end to 5 m on the north-eastern side. The surface is very rough as the top was scraped clean of guano at the beginning of the century. Vegetation consists mainly of African Boxthorn *Lycium ferocissimum*, Tree Mallow *Lavatera arborea*, Nitrebush *Nitraria billardiera*, Barley Grass *Hordeum glaucum*, Sow Thistle *Sonchus oleraceus*, Cape Weed *Arctotheca calendula* and Stinging Nettle *Urtica incisa*. The smaller islet (Little Brother) is bare of vegetation.

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

Ornithological History: Visits have been made to the islands since 1958 to band the breeding seabirds. Seasonal movements of Silver Gulls banded up to July 1963 were described by Murray and Carrick². 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 ornithologists. C. L. Gill visited the islands each spring from 1968 to 1975 to photograph the seabirds.

Breeding Seabirds and Status

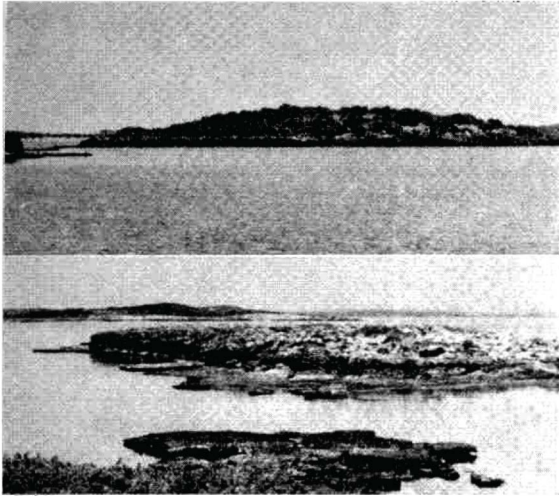
Egretta sacra Eastern Reef Egret — Three pairs usually nest on the islet.



Haematopus longirostris Pied Oystercatcher — One or two pairs breed each year on the top of the larger islet during October/November.

Haematopus fuliginosus Sooty Oystercatcher — Four or five pairs breed each year in October, in caves around the cliffs.

Larus novaehollandiae Silver Gull — Up to 100 pairs breed each year from September to Dec-



- Upper — *Big Brother*.
- Lower — *Little Brother* (looking east-south-east).

ember, mostly on the ends of Big Brother. Usually only one or two pairs nest on Little Brother.

Larus pacificus Pacific Gull — About ten pairs breed each year during October/November on the western end of the larger islet.

Hydroprogne caspia Caspian Tern — Up to 20 pairs nest annually in November on the western end of the larger islet.

Sterna nereis Fairy Tern — Formerly up to 20 pairs nested in the centre of the larger islet in January/February. None appears to have used the island since 1970. They now nest on smaller islets in Port Douglas area.

Sterna bergii Crested Tern — Prior to 1975, about 1000 pairs bred each December in the centre of the larger islet. Since that time the numbers have decreased; in 1981 the figure was 500 pairs.

NOTE: A local report indicated that "all the birds nested on Little Brother in 1982/1983", but details are not available and the reason is not known. A Feral Cat *Felis catus* was suspected on Big Brother but trapping was unsuccessful.

Factors Affecting Status

Occasionally small boats bring sightseers to the islets; these cause disturbance to the breeding

birds. Silver and Pacific Gulls quickly rob unguarded nests of the terns. The Osprey *Pandion haliaetus* and the White-bellied Sea-Eagle *Haliaeetus leucogaster* visit the islets and cause some predation to the breeding seabirds. Buff-banded Rails *Rallus philippensis* occur and no doubt take some eggs. Guano was mined from 1884 to 1905 and again from 1930 to 1932; the effect of this on the breeding seabirds is not known.

Other Seabirds Recorded

<i>Eudyptula minor</i>	Little Penguin
<i>Phalacrocorax varius</i>	Pied Cormorant
<i>Phalacrocorax sulcirostris</i>	Little Black Cormorant
<i>Sterna fuscata</i>	Sooty Tern (derelict)

Banding

First banding — 4 Jan. 58.

Egretta sacra — 4 chicks.

Haematopus longirostris — 1 chick.

Larus novaehollandiae — 28 chicks.

Larus pacificus — 28 chicks; four recoveries, all away from the banding place, the longest being 260 km ENE.

Hydroprogne caspia — 59 chicks.

Sterna nereis — 227 chicks.

Sterna bergii — 5 734 chicks, 3 adults; there have been 67 recoveries of which 32 were at banding place and 35 from the coasts of N.S.W., Vic. and S.A., and one from Eucla, W.A.

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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