

## SEABIRD ISLANDS

No. 47

## Benison Island, Corner Inlet, Victoria

**Location:** 38°51' S., 146°22' E.; north of Wilsons Promontory, within Corner Inlet, 1.8 km to nearest mainland.

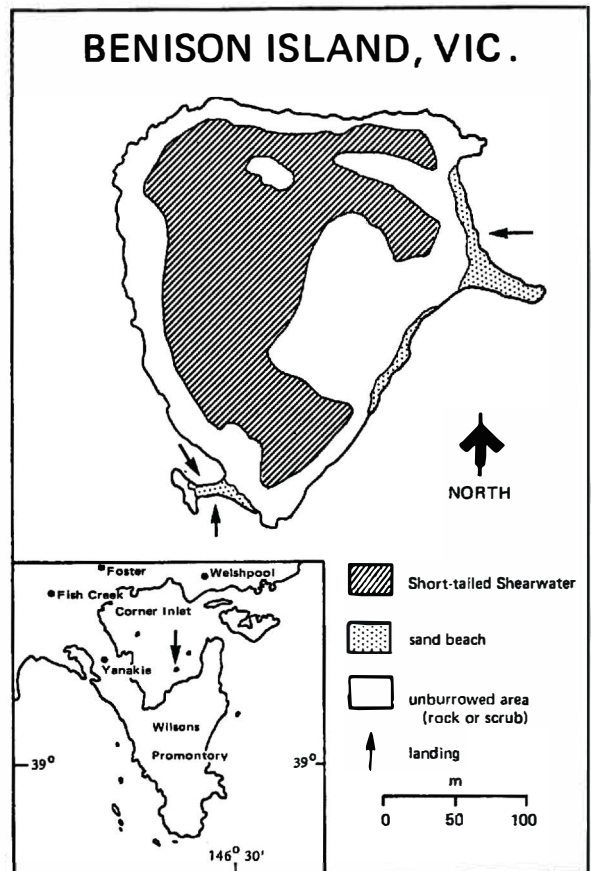
**Status:** Included in Wilsons Promontory National Park in 1916; now controlled by the National Parks Service (Vic.); camping is not allowed.

**Description:** 7.7 ha; this granite island, some 300 m long by about 250 m near the northern end rises to an unpronounced, almost flat summit at about 46 m. The less exposed eastern and southern sides of the island have a well developed scrub cover dominated by *Melaleuca ericifolia*, which also contains tall *Banksia integrifolia* (to 5 m) and *Acacia melanoxylon*. An often dense understorey, which includes *Clematis microphylla* and *Correa alba*, exists, particularly on the southern side. The scrub is shorter and less extensive on the more exposed western and northern sides, and is often replaced by pure stands of *Poa poiformis* which dominates much of the island, particularly the shearwater colonies. Alien grasses (e.g. *Bromus diandrus*) are also common and with other species (e.g. *Carpobrotus rossii*, *Pelargonium australe*) are locally dominant. *Pteridium esculentum* covers large areas on the southern side. *Correa alba* and *B. integrifolia* are found in small clumps throughout the island, and *Lavatera plebeia* is common on the northern side. Further botanical details are given elsewhere<sup>2, 3, 4</sup>.

Sand beaches are present along the eastern and south-eastern sides; on the latter side, the heavy soil is often undercut by wave action which also forms slight terracing. The island is connected to Wilsons Promontory by a sand bar which is uncovered at low water.

**Landing:** Onto the sand beaches under most conditions but elsewhere onto rocks depending on prevailing winds. At low tide, access is possible across the sand bar.

**Ornithological History:** J. W. Barrett<sup>1</sup> and, much later, M. E. Gillham<sup>3, 4</sup> are the only previous



authors to have discussed the island's avifauna; they recorded breeding shearwaters, and non-breeding Silver Gulls and Black-faced Cormorants. F. I. Norman<sup>6</sup> made a number of visits to the island from 1965 to 1976 and recorded a number of species other than the seabirds mentioned.

#### Breeding Seabirds and Status

*Puffinus tenuirostris* Short-tailed Shearwater — Breeds extensively over most of the island with larger, more dense colonies on the northern and



● *Benison Island (looking south-west).*

Photo: W. B. Emison.



● *Part of the northern side (looking east).*

western sides under *P. poiiformis*. A few burrows are located in other areas. Population not determined but considered to exceed several thousand breeding pairs.

#### Factors Affecting Status

Illegal harvesting (of unknown proportion) of young shearwaters occurs in most summers and several offenders have been apprehended in recent years. Foxes *Vulpes vulpes* occur on the island and kill birds of all age groups, predominantly post-juvenile (non-breeding) shearwaters while they are on the island at night; numerous corpses are found throughout the colonies, particularly at take-off points. These predation rates were measured between 1965 and 1968 and Norman<sup>5</sup> suggested that the population might decline if the rates were maintained. Gillham<sup>3</sup> further considered that the dense vegetation present on some parts of the island may limit the number of nest sites available. Rabbits formerly occurred<sup>1</sup> but are now extinct.

#### Other Seabirds Recorded

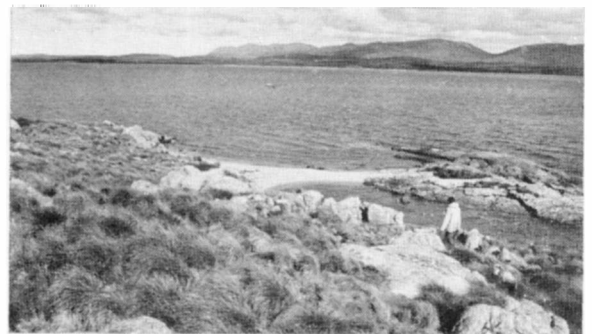
*Ardea novaehollandiae* White-faced Heron.  
*Haematopus ostralegus* Pied Oystercatcher.  
*Larus novaehollandiae* Silver Gull.  
*Larus pacificus* Pacific Gull.

#### Banding

Period December 1966 to June 1976.  
*P. tenuirostris* — 106 adults, 50 nestlings; no recoveries away from the island to date.

#### Bibliography

1. Barrett, J. W. (1918), *The Twin Ideals* (: ) an Educated Commonwealth. Lewis and Co., London.



● *Another view showing the south-west corner.*

2. Gillham, M. E. (1960), 'Destruction of Indigenous Heath Vegetation in Victorian Sea-bird Colonies', *Aust. J. Bot.* 8: 277-317.
3. Gillham, M. E. (1961), 'Plants and Seabirds of Granite Islands in south-eastern Victoria', *Proc. R. Soc. Vict.* 74:21-35.
4. Gillham, M. E. (1962), 'Granite Islands of south-east Victoria as a Sea-bird Habitat', *Proc. R. Soc. Vict.* 75: 45-63.
5. Norman, F. I. (1971a), 'Predation by the Fox (*Vulpes vulpes* L.) on Colonies of the Short-tailed Shearwater (*Puffinus tenuirostris* [Temminck]) in Victoria, Australia', *J. appl. Ecol.* 8: 21-32.
6. Norman, F. I. (1971b), 'Problems affecting the Ecology of Islands in the West Gippsland region', *Proc. R. Soc. Vict.* 84: 7-18.

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