

SEABIRD ISLANDS

No. 51

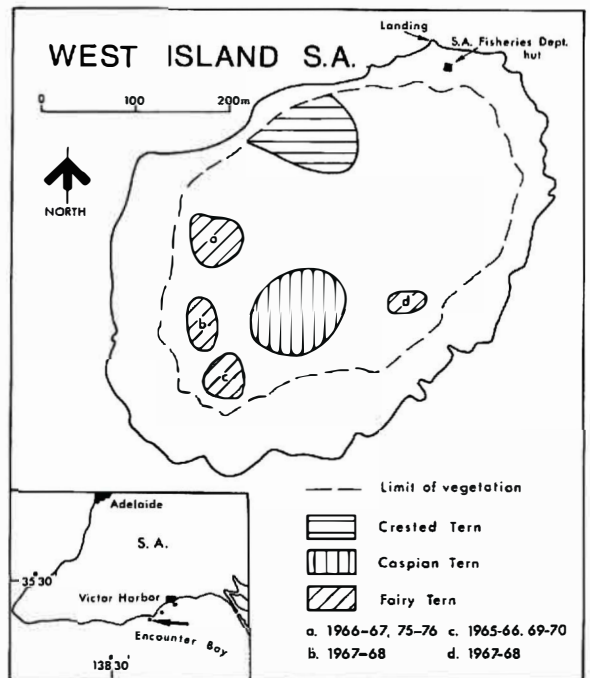
West Island, South Australia

Location: 35°36' S., 138°35' E.; about 800 m offshore and 1 500 m south-west of Rosetta Head near Victor Harbor, S.A.

Status: Conservation Park under the control of the National Parks and Wildlife Service (S.A.) since 1967. The sea within 100 m of the island was declared an Aquatic Reserve in 1971.

Description: 10 ha; 550 m by 400 m at the widest; the island is a granite knoll, roughly oval in shape and rising to 40 m in the south-west corner. Cliffs fall rather abruptly to the sea except at the northern end where the steep slopes are strewn with boulders. The top of the island is relatively flat, the soil is shallow and there are large areas of exposed granite particularly at the south-west end. Several gullies running into the north-eastern shore have deeper soil and provide some protection from rough weather and strong winds. There is a small brackish soak in one of the gullies but no permanent water.

Introduced grasses and weeds such as star-thistles, mallows and Salvation Jane *Echium plantagineum* cover the island on the leeward side and in the gullies. Some African Boxthorn *Lycium ferocissimum* is also present. Seedlings of *Casuarina* sp., *Boobiallas*, *Myoporum* sp., *Leptospermum* sp. and a *Lagunaria patersoni* were planted near the landing and in the north-eastern gullies about 1973 by marine biologists from the Department of Fisheries and Fauna, who also built the granite hut near the landing stage. The hut now belongs to the Department of the Environment. Ice-plant *Cryophurum crystallinum*



flourishes on the more exposed areas and round the edges of rocks.

Landing: A rickety landing stage is situated at the north end but can only be approached in calm weather.

Ornithological History: There does not appear to be any published record of the avifauna of this island. However, in the South Australian Museum there are two specimens, a Crested

Tern and a Richard's Pipit *Anthus novaeseelandiae*, collected by J. B. Cleland in January 1922. Mrs J. B. Paton first visited the island in January 1932 at which time nine pairs of Fairy Terns and a few Silver Gulls had eggs or young. Some Penguins were seen and a specimen of a Rock Parrot *Neophema petrophila* was obtained. On her next visit in January 1964, Caspian Terns were found with eggs or chicks. Since then regular visits have been made each year in the summer months by Mrs Paton and Mr D. C. Paton.

Population studies on Silver Gulls were carried out by Dr R. Carrick from August 1967 to October 1968.

Breeding Seabirds and Status

Eudyptula minor Little Penguin — Many nests are located under rocks or in burrows over most of the island. Eggs and chicks have been found in December and January, but otherwise no data have been collected.

Larus novaehollandiae Silver Gull — Breeding occurs regularly over most of the island from about April to October. A few pairs nest close to the Crested Tern colony in December and January when eggs and chicks are present.

Hydroprogne caspia Caspian Tern — Breeding usually starts in October but eggs may be laid in January. In August 1968 over 100 nests with eggs and/or chicks were present, but it is not known how often such early nesting occurs. An estimated 50 pairs found breeding in January 1964, increased to about 200 pairs in the 1975-76 season.

Sterna nereis Fairy Tern — Irregularly present to breed during December and January. About 40 pairs nested each season from December 1965 to January 1968, but none was present the following season. About 50 pairs nested in January 1970, but they were not found breeding again until December 1975/January 1976 when some 20 pairs were present.

Sterna bergii Crested Tern — These birds did not nest on the island from 1964 to 1969, but about 500 pairs nested in 1970-71 (December/January), increasing to about 1 400 pairs in



● *West Island (looking north-east) with Victor Harbour in the background.*

Photo: A. R. Milne
(supplied by S. A. Shepherd)

1972-73. The number dropped to about 1 000 pairs in 1975-76.

Factors Affecting Status

Rabbits *Oryctolagus cuniculus* were said to have been introduced between 1840 and 1844¹, while until 1964, Army units stationed at Wait-pinga used the island for artillery practice, usually towards the end of January. From time-to-time the vegetation was burnt by fires started by shells or sometimes by fishermen.

In 1960, N. Lothian² recorded that the island was almost completely denuded of natural plants. However, since 1964 no fires have occurred and during 1972-73 officers of the NPWS eradicated the rabbits. Since then there has been considerable increase in the height and extent of grass and weed growth.

Until about 1970 fishermen used both rabbits and penguins as cray bait and in 1973, some Pearson Island Rock Wallabies were introduced by the NPWS.

White-breasted Sea-eagles *Haliaeetus leucogaster* were seen fairly regularly over the island until 1970; only one was seen in 1976. Occasionally a Little Falcon *Falco longipennis* has been seen flying to or from the island. Both species probably take surface-breeding seabirds.



● *The Crested Tern colony on West Island.*

Photo: J. B. Paton

OTHER VERTEBRATES (still present)

Egernia cunninghami Cunningham's Skink,
Petrogale penicillata pearsoni Pearson Island
Rock Wallaby.

Other Seabirds Recorded

Puffinus tenuirostris Short-tailed Shearwater (derelicts).
Phalacrocorax fuscescens Black-faced Cormorant.
Egretta sacra Reef Heron.
Haemantopus fuliginosus Sooty Oystercatcher.
Sterna striata White-fronted Tern (one derelict).

Banding

Period — 1 January 1964 to 30 June 1975.

L. novaehollandiae — 876 nestlings banded; 30 recoveries up to 1 140 km from banding place.
H. caspia — 687 nestlings banded; 4 recoveries up to 7 km from banding place.

S. nereis — 22 adults, 12 immatures, 64 nestlings banded; one recovery 58 km north-east of banding place and one recovery at banding place. Two banded elsewhere were recovered breeding on the island; one had been banded as a breeding adult on Wright Island, 3 km north-east and the other as a nestling on Bluff Island, 110 km south-east.

S. bergii — 328 adults, 3 483 nestlings banded; 26 recoveries up to 1 700 km from banding place (the birds having dispersed along the coasts of S.A., Vic., N.S.W. and Qld.) and 11 recovered at banding place. Twenty-four banded elsewhere

were recovered breeding on the island; most were banded as nestlings on Stonywell Island, S.A.

Bibliography

1. Hodge, C. R. (1935), 'Drs Penny', *Victor Harbour Times*, 11 January 1935.
2. Lcthian, N. (1960), 'Plants from Wright Island, Encounter Bay', *S. Aust. Nat.* 34: 53.

Acknowledgements

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