

SEABIRD ISLANDS

No. 6

North Solitary Island, New South Wales

Location: 29° 55' S., 153° 23' E.; 12 km off-shore and 40 km north-east of Coffs Harbour.

Status: Nature Reserve controlled by the National Parks and Wildlife Service (N.S.W.): entry permit required.

Description: North Solitary is divided into two separate islands by a deep channel some 20 m wide. The two islands are generally rocky, rugged and steeply sloping with rather precipitous eastern and northern sides. The highest point is about 55 m. The northern island consists of a series of irregular outcrops joined by rocky spits over which the sea breaks in rough weather. One of these spits forms the main division of the northern island; it runs roughly north-south and is steep-sided with a gutter at each end. The southern island rises steadily on the western side to a ridge extending the whole length; the eastern side is rather precipitous. There are no trees and the shallow soil supports a minimum of herbaceous vegetation in most places; the following have been identified:

Pigface *Carpobrotus glaucescens*, *Senecio* sp., sedges *Xerotes* and *Juncus* sp., Couch Grass *Cynodon dactylon*, Summer Grass *Digitaria sanguinalis*, Wandering Jew *Commelina cyanea*, Coast Morning Glory *Ipomoea cairica*, Yellow-flowered Oxalis *Oxalis corniculata* and Saltbush *Ragodia hastata*.

Landing: Depending on weather conditions limited protection is provided at two anchorages indicated on the map. Landing is onto rocks.

Ornithological History: The early ornithological history is vague. K. A. Hindwood² was unable to find any trace of specimens said to have been collected by E. S. Rohu in 1914. The first recorded visit was made by J. L. McKean⁶ and D. G. Dent in December 1960. They found only Wedge-tailed Shearwaters breeding and banded 400 adults. During the next recorded visit by H. Battam, S. G. Lane and A. K. Morris from 6-8 December 1971¹, 420 adult Wedge-tailed Shearwaters were banded and a white-phased bird was collected⁵. This is the first record of a white-phased Wedge-tailed Shearwater for eastern Australia.

Two further visits were made by Morris and others on 8 and 14 April 1972 when 82 nestling shearwaters were banded.

Breeding Seabirds and Status

Puffinus pacificus Wedge-tailed Shearwater—A summer breeder probably present from August to early May. Burrows are located extensively over both islands wherever the depth of soil is adequate. In many places the rocky nature and sparse soil prevents burrowing. Some birds were found brooding in crevices between rocks. Estimated 2000 to 3000 breeding pairs.

Larus novaehollandiae Silver Gull—In December 1971¹ a few nests were found, some ready for eggs, some with broken eggs and some recently used. One large runner was seen.

Sterna bergii Crested Tern—On the southern island in December 1971¹ some 7000 to 8000 pairs were breeding. The birds were brooding single eggs in most cases, few two egg clutches being seen. No runners were sighted. McKean (pers. comm.) and Dent did not visit the southern island during their visit; however they saw no sign of any breeding colony which, if present, would have been visible from the northern island.

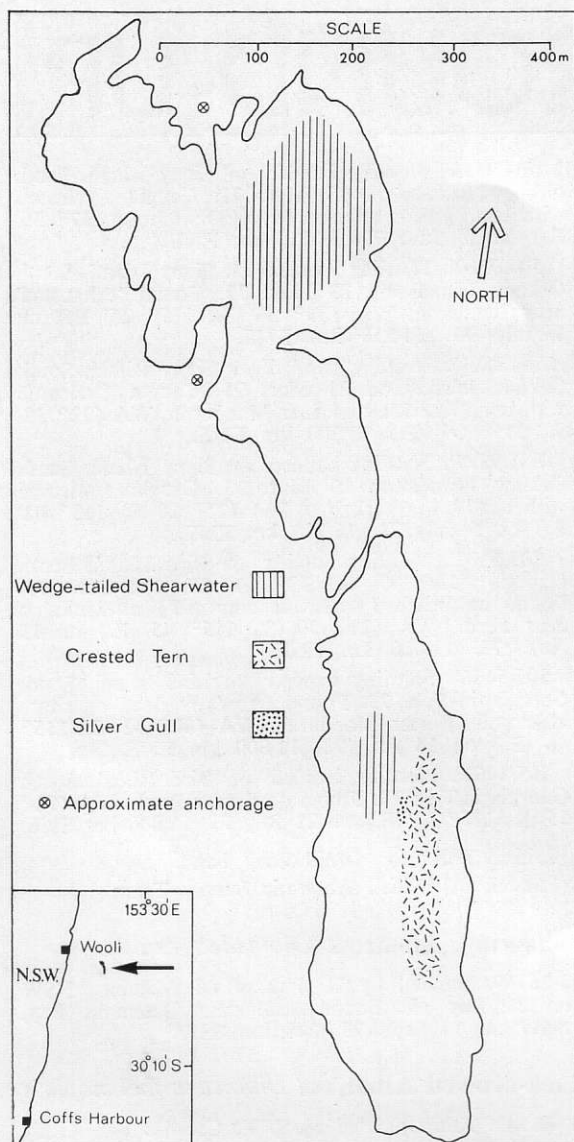
Haematopus fuliginosus Sooty Oystercatcher—Two adults and a large runner were present on the northern island in December 1971.

Factors Affecting Status

No unnatural predation or damage was evident during the visit in 1971. The island is rarely visited; sometimes a fishing trawler will anchor in the lee while waiting for suitable conditions to return across the bar at Wooli and occasionally a fisherman will land. A White-breasted Sea-Eagle *Haliaeetus leucogaster* was observed on one occasion to harry the tern colony before returning to the mainland. No doubt this and other predators cause some damage at times.

Other Seabirds Recorded

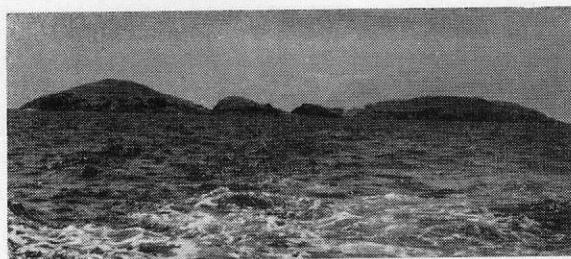
Phalacrocorax carbo Black Cormorant
Ardea novaehollandiae White-faced Heron
Anous stolidus Noddy⁷



Banding

First banding visit—2 December 1960.

P. pacificus—828 adults, 82 nestlings banded. Two adults banded in 2 Dec. 60 were recaptured on 7 Dec. 71. Three recoveries have been recorded away from the island, one 54 km north, the second 145 km north and the third, an adult when banded in December 1960, was found dead in the Philippines in July 1971, over 5200 km NW¹.



• Silhouette of North Solitary Island from the west.



• North Solitary Island looking south. The separated (southern) island is in the background.

Photo: A. M. Fox

Bibliography

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3. Hull, A. F. Basset (1916), 'Avifauna of New South Wales Islands', Part 3, *Emu* 15: 207-216.
4. Lane, S. G. (1972), 'Breeding Seabirds of the Solitary Islands, N.S.W.', *Emu* 72: 182-184.
5. Lane, S. G. (1972), 'White-phased Wedge-tailed Shearwater on North Solitary Island, N.S.W.', *Emu* 72: 184-185.
6. McKean, J. (1961), 'Shearwaters at the Solitary Islands, N.S.W.', *Emu* 61: 190.
7. Rogers, A. E. F. (1973), 'N.S.W. Bird Report for 1972', *Birds* 7: 91-107.

Acknowledgement

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