

SEABIRD ISLANDS

No. 8

Brush Island, New South Wales

Brush Island, New South Wales

Location: 35° 32' S., 150° 25' E.; 23 km south of Ulladulla, N.S.W. and 0.3 km offshore from Murramurrang Headland.

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

Description: 35 ha; some 1000 m long by 700 m wide at the eastern end, with a rocky shoreline except for some small 'beaches' of large shingles at the south-west and west. A ridge runs roughly along the centre of the Island rising to a grassy knoll 43 m high at the south-east end, now the site of a navigation beacon. The vegetation on the exposed eastern side commences some 30 m above the tideline. On the western side the vegetation is more dense and commences closer to the shoreline. Coastal *Banksia integrifolia* and Swamp Oak *Casuarina glauca* grow together, thickly in parts, along the centre ridge, especially in the depressions. On the western end a thick growth of *Phragmites* sp. extends around the lower slopes, at some places almost to the water. Some of the higher northern parts are swampy, but most of the southern side consists of a thick cover of grasses, Pigface *Carpobrotus glaucescens* and Irongrass *Lomandra longifolia* extending to the top of the ridge.

Landing: Landing is relatively easy along the western side, the exact location depending on prevailing conditions.

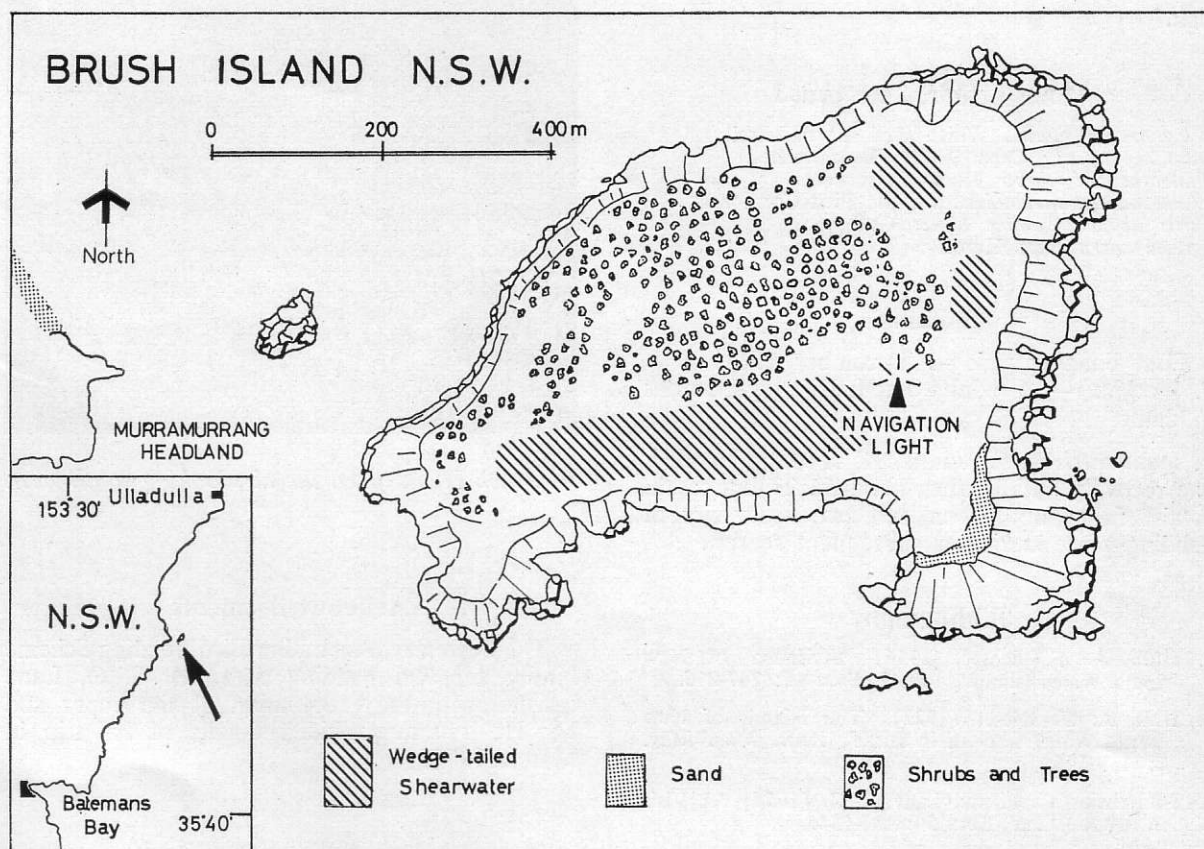
Ornithological History: Period summarised—December 1915 to December 1973.

A. F. Basset Hull¹ made the first recorded visit on 5 December 1915. He found Little Penguins and Wedge-tailed Shearwaters breeding, several beachwashed Short-tailed Shearwaters, and an egg, apparently of the latter species "Just above the thick scrub, on a patch of sand, . . .".

C. P. Humphries³ visited the Island on 23 September 1953 and again on 8 November the same year with S. G. Lane and others. Only Little Penguins were noted on the former visit, while on the latter a Wedge-tailed Shearwater was found in one burrow, although the visit was still prior to egg laying. The next visit was by Lane⁴, Humphries and F. K. Hersey on 3 December 1961 when some 150 burrows were examined and 26 Short-tailed Shearwaters and 12 Wedge-tailed Shearwaters were found. H. Battam, A. K. Morris⁵ and others made an overnight stay on 1 December 1967 and 45 Short-tailed Shearwaters were found brooding their egg but no nesting Wedge-tailed Shearwaters were located although some were seen that night with several White-faced Storm-Petrels, flying in the lantern light. An extensive search for burrows of the latter species was unsuccessful. In January 1969 Morris made a further visit and located 14 Short-tailed Shearwaters mostly incubating the single egg. Then on 14 March 1970, H. Battam and others stayed overnight and banded 48 adult and 22 nestling Short-tailed Shearwaters. Finally Lane and Morris managed a two hour stay in very wet conditions on 30 November 1971; they found one Wedge-tailed Shearwater and 12 Short-tailed Shearwaters brooding their egg. This was the first occasion for ten years that a Wedge-tailed Shearwater had been found breeding on the Island, although it is very likely that some had done so.

Breeding Seabirds and Status

Eudyptula minor Little Penguin—Nests extensively over the Island including the centre ridge. Well defined tracks connect the burrows to the shore line. These tracks and burrows are particularly numerous in parts of the northern side. Eggs recorded from September to December and probably present to breed from July or August to January, with some birds present at any other time. Estimated 2000-3000 pairs*.



Puffinus pacificus Wedge-tailed Shearwater—Recorded by Hull¹, and Humphries and Lane as the only shearwater nesting on the Island until Lane found *P. tenuirostris* outnumbering it in December 1961. Despite three further visits, no *P. pacificus* were found breeding until November 1971 when one was found brooding its egg. The shearwater burrows are confined mainly to the southern and eastern sections of the Island to the top of the ridge, in deep sandy soil covered mostly with Irongrass. Most burrows are very deep, preventing determination of the contents without destruction. Probably present to breed from August to May. Estimated 300-500 pairs*.

Puffinus tenuirostris Short-tailed Shearwater—First recorded breeding in December 1961⁴ and

* Very approximate only.

currently appears to be the dominant breeding shearwater. The great depth of the burrows, usually in excess of two metres makes accurate assessment of the breeding population almost impossible. Probably present to breed from September to May. Estimated 500-1000 pairs*.

Haematopus fuliginosus Sooty Oystercatcher—At least two pairs breed on the shingle and sandy spits. Nine birds were recorded in December 1967. Eggs recorded November and December.

Factors Affecting Status

No apparent unusual predation evident.

OTHER VERTEBRATES—No mammals recorded and no record made of other vertebrates prior to a brief visit by Morris on 29 July 1974. Evidence of seals, probably the Tasmanian Fur Seal *Arctocephalus pusillus* and a recently dead

Brown Rat *Rattus rattus* were found during that visit.

Other Seabirds Recorded

Pelagodroma marina White-faced Storm-Petrel
Daption capense Cape Petrel (beachwashed)
Phalacrocorax carbo Black Cormorant.
Phalacrocorax melanoleucos Little Pied Cormorant
Larus novaehollandiae Silver Gull
Egretta sacra Reef Heron

Banding

First banding visit—3 December 1961.

P. pacificus—14 adults banded; no recoveries to date.

P. tenuirostris—152 adults, 22 nestlings banded; one recovery (adult when banded) 29 km south, in the following season and two recoveries at banding place during a subsequent season.

Bibliography

1. Hull, A. F. Basset (1916), 'Avifauna of New South Wales Islands', Part 3, *Emu* 15: 207-216.
2. Hull, A. F. Basset (1922), 'The Islands of New South Wales and their Birds', *Aust. Mus. Mag.* 1: 139-146.
3. Humphries, C. P. and Lane, S. G. (1954), 'A Visit to Brush Island', *Emu* 54: 131-134.
4. Lane, S. G. (1962), 'Nesting of the Short-tailed Shearwater on Brush Island, and other Coastal Islands of N.S.W.', *Emu* 62: 181-183.
5. Morris, A. K. (1973), 'Brush Island Re-visited', *Aust. Bird Watcher* 5: 5-7.
6. Rogers, A. E. F. ed. (1972), 'N.S.W. Annual Bird Report', *Birds* 6: 79.

Acknowledgements

The Secretary, Australian Bird-banding Scheme kindly supplied banding data, Mr S. G. Lane assisted with the preparation of the paper and Mr H. Battam provided details of his trip in March 1970.

Date compiled:
 26 December 1973

A. K. Morris,
 20 Harrison Street,
 Old Toongabbie, N.S.W.



• Brush Island from the air, looking south-west.

New Members

Full Members:

GIBBS, Dr A., Dept. of Science, Mitchell College, Bathurst, N.S.W.
 GOLDNEY, Dr D., Dept. of Science, Mitchell College, Bathurst, N.S.W.
 MUELLER, O., 86 Marlow Street, Wembley, W.A.

Associate Members:

GURR, J., Felton Farm, Oxford Falls, N.S.W.
 HUNTER, Dr M. J., Box 311, P.O., Albury, N.S.W.

Junior Member:

JOHNSON, G. B., 42 Dunoon Avenue, West Pymble, N.S.W.

Change of Status:

The following members having been granted banding permits, have become Full Members.

LEISHMAN, A. J., 7 Belford Street, Ingleburn, N.S.W.

SMITH, Br. A. J., Christian Brothers College, 385 Queensberry Street, Melbourne, Vic.