

SEABIRD ISLANDS

No. 88

Wattle Island, Wilsons Promontory, Victoria

Location: 39°08'S., 146°23'E.; 0.5 km to the south of Wilsons Promontory, Victoria and 5 km to the west of the Promontory lighthouse.

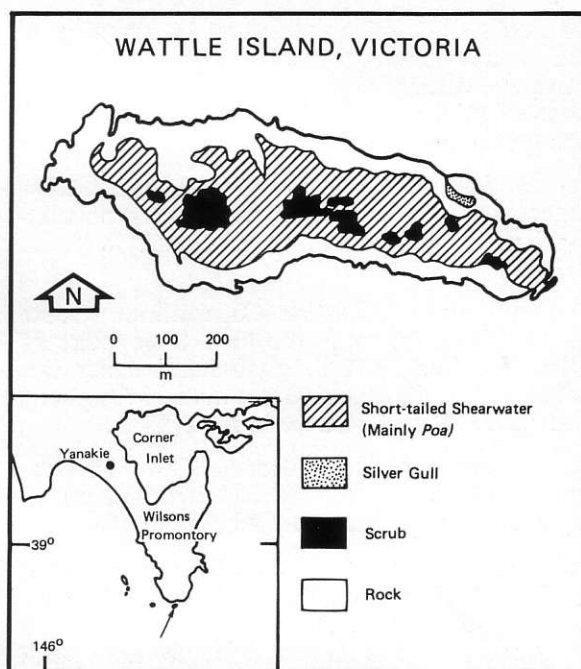
Status: Included within Wilsons Promontory National Park and controlled by the National Parks Service (Vic.); camping is not allowed.

Description: About 21.7 ha; this granite island lies generally east-west and is about 1 050 m long by some 350 m wide. The steep-sided island rises to a summit of 82 m towards the western end. The less-exposed northern slopes are dominated by *Poa poiformis* with occasional dense stands of shrub species including *Leptospermum laevigatum*, *Albizia lophantha*, *Alyxia buxifolia* and *Correa alba*. Infrequently interspersed in the tussock grassland are *Sonchus oleraceus* and *Muehlenbeckia adpressa*.

The southern side of the island is steep, often sheer, with the vegetation being restricted to the deeper soil on the gentler slopes, to sheltered areas and to occasional communities of *Disphyma australe* which extended over bare rock⁴. The coastline is entirely of rock which enters the water as boulders or sheets.

Landing: Onto rocks as permitted by the prevailing wind, tide and swell.

Ornithological History: Apart from Dorward's comments on the presence of Cape Barren Geese on the island in 1964², the earlier recognition that they were 'always to be seen on the fall' of the north coast, and a passing reference to penguins, muttonbirds and oystercatchers on the island¹, little has been known of the island's avifauna. S. G. Lane and H. Battam³ visited the island on 11 November 1979, and we were there on 12 December 1979 for some seven hours.

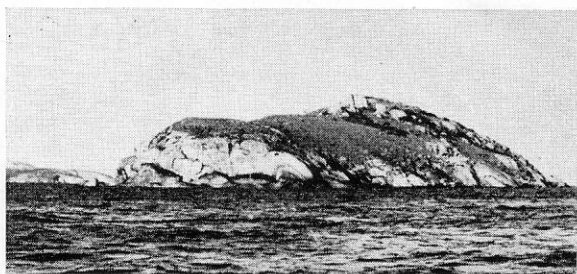


Breeding Seabirds and Status

Eudyptula minor Little Penguin — Mostly found along the northern edge of the island, generally nesting under rocks; nevertheless nests were found scattered throughout the island and the population may be of the order of a thousand pairs.

Pachyptila turtur Fairy Prion — Corpses were found during both visits in 1979 but no nests sites were located.

Puffinus tenuirostris Short-tailed Shearwater — The species breeds extensively over most of the island, with the majority of burrows being under



- Wattle Island (looking west) with part of Kanowna Island in background at left.

the *Poa* tussock. The product of burrow density and area of *Poa* suggests a figure of 83 450 burrows which includes about 5 700 in *Disphyma*. At the time of our visit about 70 per cent of burrows were occupied.

Pelecanoides urinatrix Common Diving-Petrel — Carcasses were found in November³, but no nesting burrows or cavities were located in either visit.

Cereopsis novaehollandiae Cape Barren Goose — In 1964 Dorward² recorded three pairs of geese on Wattle Island. A similar number was found in November³ and December 1979; young birds were recorded on both these visits.

Larus novaehollandiae Silver Gull — In December 1979 68 nests were found though breeding was not recorded in the November visit.

Larus pacificus Pacific Gull — Nesting, recorded in November³, was continuing in December; we recorded 30 nests which ranged from newly constructed ones with no eggs, to nests with young. Old nests were also found.

Haematopus fuliginosus Sooty Oystercatcher — About six pairs held territories in December 1979 and two nests were found.

Factors Affecting Status

Whilst Pacific Gulls apparently take diving-petrels and prions (remains were found in nests), the seabird populations appear secure. The vagaries of the weather probably restrict any illegal harvesting of shearwaters.

OTHER VERTEBRATES

One Australian Fur Seal *Arctocephalus pusillus* was seen in November 1979³.



- Part of the southern side (looking west); *Disphyma* containing shearwater burrows.

Other Seabirds Recorded

Leucocarbo fuscescens Black-faced Shag

Banding

- E. minor* — 1 nestling (11 Nov. 79).
L. pacificus — 4 young (12 Dec. 79).

Bibliography

1. Bureau of Census and Statistics (1912), 'Islands off the coast of the Commonwealth', *Commonwealth Year Book* 5:51-59.
2. Dorward, D. F. (1967), 'The Status of the Cape Barren Goose *Cereopsis novae-hollandiae*', *Bull. int. Comm. Bird. Preserv.* 10:56-71.
3. Lane, S. G. and H. Battam (1980), 'Seabirds of Norman and Wattle Islands, Wilsons Promontory, Victoria', *Corella* 4:37-38.
4. Norman, F. I., R. S. Brown and D. M. Deerson (1980), 'The flora and avifauna of Dannevig, Norman and Wattle Islands, Wilsons Promontory', *Victorian Nat.* (in press).

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