

SEABIRD ISLANDS

No. 99

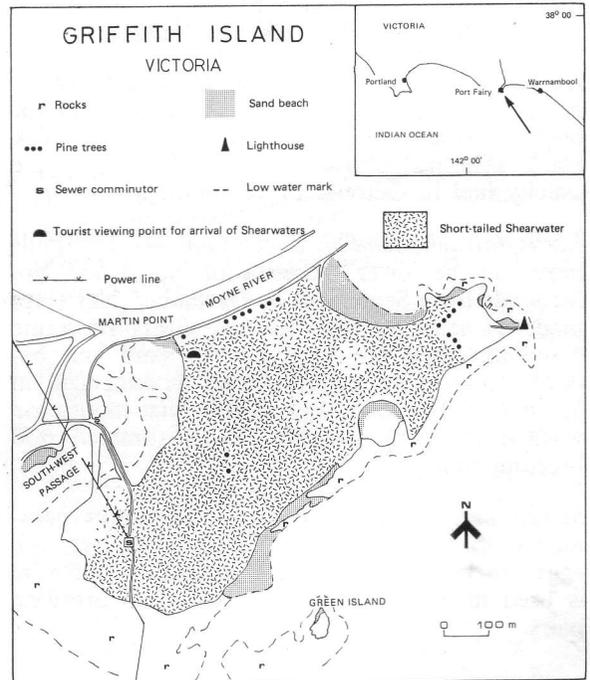
Griffiths Island, Victoria

Location: 38°24'S., 142°15'E.; off the south-west passage at the entrance to the Moyne River at Port Fairy, Vic.

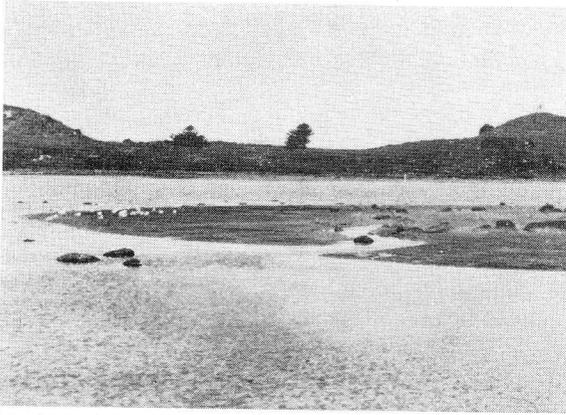
Status: Under the control of the Borough Council.

Description: 33 ha; 1 100 m long by 640 m at the widest, the island was originally divided into two parts — Griffiths I. and Rabbit I. The gap between the two was filled with dredgings from the river in the late part of the last century and early in this one. The island is mostly sand on a limestone base with high dunes on the south-east (ocean) side sloping to lesser dunes on the river and town side. There is a level area where a whaling try-works and boiling down industry operated in 1836.

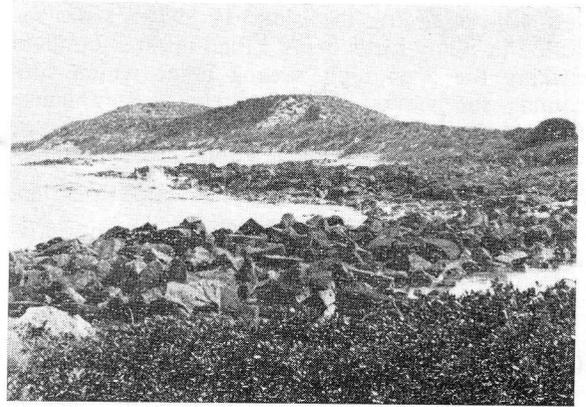
The main vegetation is Marram Grass *Amophila arenaria* with introduced Norfolk Island Pines *Araucaria hetrophylla* growing mainly along the river bank and at the eastern end. There are patches of *Leucopogon parviflorus*, *Coprosma repens*, *Lycium ferocissimum* and *Clematis microphylla*, with expanses of *Scirpus nodosus* and *Lepidosperma gladiatum* in some parts. Ground cover is mainly *Tetragonia implexicoma*, *Rhagodia baccata*, *Cryptostemma calendula*, *Carpobrotus rossii* and *Senecio lautus*. On the beach *Cakile maritima* and *Apium australe* occur. A lighthouse is situated on the east-



ern end; *Narcissus* (Jonquill) and *Albizia lothantha* have spread from this area. Kikuyu *Penisetum clandestinum* and Buffalo Grass *Stenotaphrum secundatum* have spread extensively from the area of the disused rifle range where they



• Part of Griffiths Island, from the vicinity of Martin Point (looking east).



• The south-eastern side of the island (looking south-west).

were initially planted. A list of 82 species, 42 native and 40 alien, was recorded by Gillham³.

Access: A 50 m causeway joins the island to the mainland at the north-western side.

Ornithological History: In December 1903, C. W. Maclean⁴ recorded that "within the last few years a rookery of Short-tailed Shearwaters has been formed on Griffiths Island, near Port Fairy". No details were given of the number present at that time, but in 1971⁵ the number of these birds breeding on the island was reported to be 30 000. In March 1960, a banding programme was commenced by Miss G. M. Bowker. Subsequently members of the Geelong Naturalists' Club, the Bird Observers' Club, the Field Naturalists' Club of Victoria and the Warrnambool Field Naturalists' Club assisted and/or conducted other programmes.

Breeding Seabirds and Status

Eudyptula minor Little Penguin — In 1971⁵ some 50 birds were reported breeding on the island. However, predation for crayfish bait has resulted in desertion of the island as a breeding station. A few breed on a smaller outer island.

Puffinus tenuirostris Short-tailed Shearwater — Breeds extensively over the island, arriving about the last week of September to clean out burrows or make new ones. The pre-egg-laying exodus is about 12 or 13 days (and nights) and peak egg-laying occurs about the last week of November with the young hatching about mid-January. The

adults depart in mid-April and the young birds leave early in May. Estimated 15 000 breeding pairs.

Haematopus longirostris Pied Oystercatcher — Three pairs usually nest on the island from August to December but mostly during September and October.

Haematopus fuliginosus Sooty Oystercatcher — One pair regularly breeds on the island during November and December.

Factors Affecting Status

Formerly, lighthouse personnel and graziers from the mainland ran cattle on the island, but this practice ceased apparently about the 1930's. Rabbits *Oryctolagus cuniculus* are present in varying density but have not caused undue damage. In the 1950's³ Foxes *Vulpes vulpes* were reported as the main predator, particularly of young birds; these animals were reported to swim the river to join those living on the island and estimates of 2 000 birds a night were killed. The fox population was drastically reduced by gassing in 1955³. No foxes have been reported on the island since 1965.

Both the Black Rat *Rattus rattus*, and the Brown Rat *R. norvegicus* were also present in large numbers in the 1950's and poisoning considerably reduced their numbers³. Rats still cause heavy casualties.

Many nestlings are killed illegally by fishermen for crayfish pots, while the erection of the

sewerage works on the island in 1970-71 has resulted in many birds being killed annually due to striking the 3 m high netting fence which surrounds the works. Also holiday visitors cause burrow collapses killing numerous nestlings, while the easy access has led to increased predation by domestic cats and dogs.

The spread of the Kikuyu Grass is very detrimental to the burrowing shearwaters.

OTHER VERTEBRATES

Australian Fur Seals *Arctocephalus pusillus* and Leopard Seals *Hydrurga leptonyx* occasionally visit the island and a Beaked Whale *Mesoplodon grayi* was washed up on one occasion. White's Skinks *Egernia whitii* and Tiger Snakes *Notechis scutatus* occur.

Other Seabirds Recorded

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|--------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| <i>Aptenodytes patagonicus</i> | King Penguin (one record) |
| <i>Macronectes</i> sp. | Giant Petrel (one sick, died later) |
| <i>Diomedea melanophrys</i> | Black-browed Albatross (derelict) |
| <i>Pachyptula turtur</i> | Fairy Prion (derelict) |
| <i>Pelagodroma marina</i> | White-faced Storm-Petrel (derelict) |
| <i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i> | Great Cormorant |
| <i>Larus novaehollandiae</i> | Silver Gull |
| <i>Larus pacificus</i> | Pacific Gull |
| <i>Larus dominicanus</i> | Kelp Gull |
| <i>Hydroprogne caspia</i> | Caspian Tern |
| <i>Sterna bergii</i> | Crested Tern |
| <i>Sterna striata</i> | White-fronted Tern |

Banding

Period — 11 March 1960 to 30 June 1978.

P. tenuirostris — 28 114 nestlings; 10 893 adults. Of these, 376 individuals have been recaptured at banding place 399 times, while 150 have been recovered away from the island within Australia. There have been 22 recoveries reported from overseas from the following places:

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|---------------------------------|-------------------|
| New Zealand — 2 | North Pacific — 1 |
| Japan (and adjoining seas) — 16 | Bering Sea — 2 |
| | Alaska — 1 |

Bibliography

1. Bowker, G. (1966), 'Predators of mutton-birds', *Emu* 65:290.
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3. Gillham, M. E. (1958), West Victorian bird islands (Portland to Westernport Bay). Unpublished reports held by the Division of Wildlife Research, CSIRO, Canberra.
4. Maclean, C. W. (1904), 'New mutton-bird rookery', *Emu* 3:235-236.
5. Reid, A. J., N. J. Shaw and W. R. Wheeler (1971), Birds of Victoria 3 — Oceans, Bays and Beaches. Gould League Victoria.

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