

SHORT NOTES

The Birds of Omaui and Pig Islands, Foveaux Strait

Omaui Island lies 300 m offshore in Foveaux Strait, 15 km southwest of Invercargill, at $46^{\circ}30' 32''\text{S}$, $168^{\circ}13' 14''\text{E}$, and Pig Island lies in Foveaux Strait 1.5 km south of the South Island, 4.5 km south-southwest of Riverton and 27.5 km west-northwest of Invercargill, at $46^{\circ}24' 20''\text{S}$, $167^{\circ}59' 27''\text{E}$ (Figure 1).

Omaui Island, of about 6 ha, is roughly oblong and has a rocky coastline apart from two stony beaches, one at the eastern end and the other at the western end. The steep-sided east-west central ridge rises to about 35 m near the western end and a secondary ridge to the northwest rises to about 20 m. The beaches and much of the lower slopes are free of soil and vegetation. *Crassula moshata* dominates where peat occurs on lower slopes. The central ridge is covered in dense low (1.5 - 2 m) shrubland dominated by *Hebe elliptica* and taupata (*Coprosma repens*). Some flax (*Phormium colensoi*), *Asplenium obtusatum*, and cow thistle (*Sonchus* sp.) are scattered among the shrubs, as are some open grassy areas. The northern slopes of a small peat-covered saddle towards the western end is free of vegetation at lower levels, but *Carex trifida* dominates the upper portion before merging into the shrubland.

Pig Island, of about 12 ha, is oblong with steep stony beaches on the north and south and low rocky outcrops at the eastern and western ends. A reef with rocks up to about 2-3 m high extends for about 0.5 km to the west of the island. The island, which rises to about 10 m, is covered in low

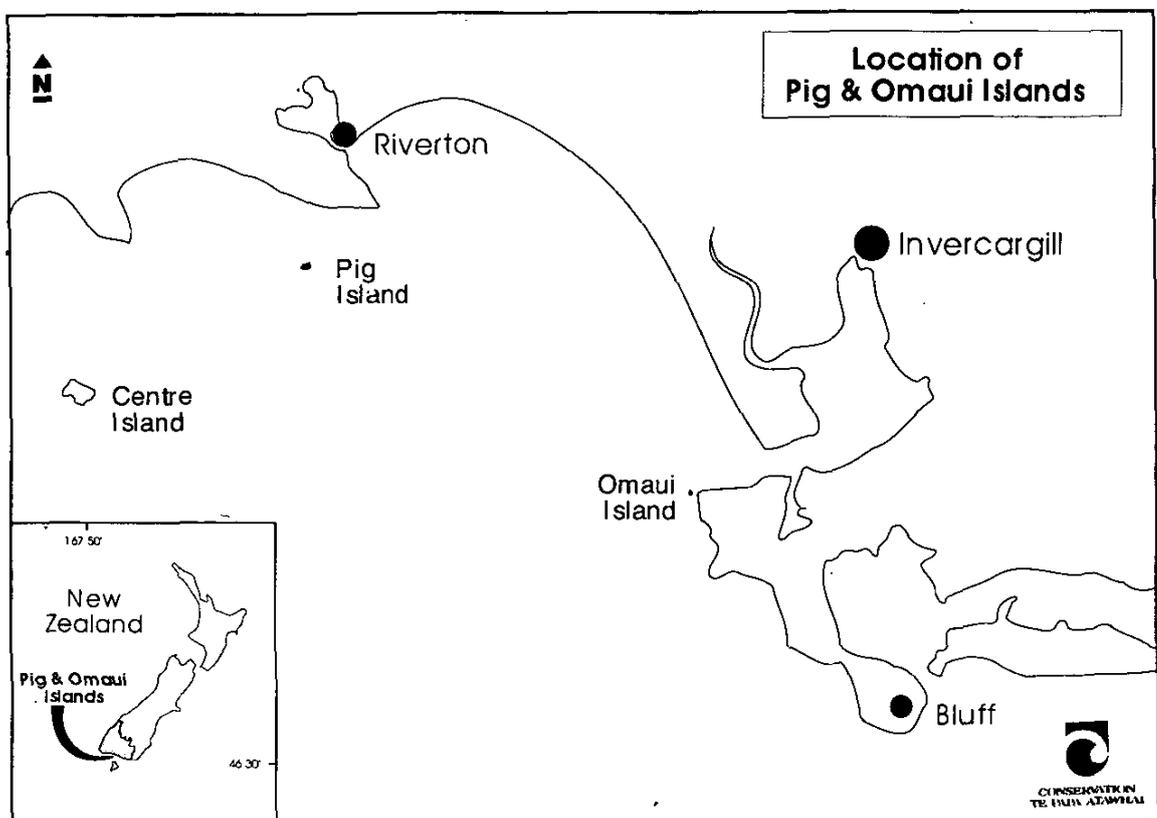


FIGURE 1 — Location of Pig and Omaui Islands

vegetation with flax (*Phormium colensoi*), *Carex triffida*, marram (*Ammophila arenaria*), angelica (*Angelica* sp.), and introduced grasses dominating at various locations. The native nettle (*Urtica australe*) and iceplant (*Disphyma australe*) are present, as are several tree mallow (*Lavatera arborea*).

There have been no known scientific visits to Omaui Island but a NZ Wildlife Service party stayed overnight on Pig Island in February 1969 (C.R. Veitch 1969: Pig Island, unpubl. report, NZ Wildlife Service) and P.N. Johnson visited it briefly on 15 May 1981 (Southland: botanical survey of reserves series no.19, Department of Conservation, 1989).

We visited both islands on 5 November 1991. During our time ashore we traversed the northwestern slopes and western half of the central ridge of Omaui Island and almost the total shoreline and much of the central ridge of Pig Island.

SOOTY SHEARWATER *Puffinus griseus*

About 30 burrows were found among *Carex triffida* on the small saddle and extending back into the adjoining shrubland on Omaui Island, and others were seen elsewhere among shrubs on the lower, less steep slopes. It is likely that no more than about 50 burrows are on the island. We saw none on or about Pig Island.

STEWART ISLAND SHAG *Leucocarbo chalconotos*

About 70 adults (about 30 bronze phase) on 65 nests with 19 large chicks and 7 still on the nest were on the northwestern ridge of Omaui Island. Although Veitch saw a few on the rocks and flying past, we saw none on or about Pig Island.

SPOTTED SHAG *Stictocarbo punctatus*

Two groups were on the western cliffs of Omaui Island, one of 80 adults with 12 large and 11 small chicks, and the other of 29 adults with 5 large and 7 small chicks.

We counted 176 adults, c.130 nests, and 32 chicks of varying sizes on the rocks at the eastern end of Pig Island. A further 6 adults were on the northern beach. Veitch saw a few of this species or the Blue Shag on the rocks or flying past Pig Island.

BLUE SHAG *S. p. punctatus*

Veitch recorded a few of this species or the Spotted Shag as being on or about Pig Island. We saw no birds clearly of this subspecies.

WHITE-FACED HERON *Ardea novaehollandiae*

Veitch saw one fly past Pig Island. We saw none on either island.

PARADISE SHELDUCK *Tadorna variegata*

Two males and one female were seen flying about Omaui Island.

WESTERN WEKA *Gallirallus australis australis*

Veitch estimated that there were 25 birds on Pig Island and reported that Mr Ernie Hogg of Riverton had taken some birds of this species there from Coal Island in Preservation Inlet in 1934. We saw none but suspect that unidentified movements among the vegetation may have been caused by this species.

VARIABLE OYSTERCATCHER *Haematopus unicolor*

We saw three birds about the northern shore of Omaui Island and eight pairs on the beaches around Pig Island. Veitch saw 15 + around the rocky shores of Pig Island.

TURNSTONE *Arenaria interpres*

Eight birds were seen at the western end of Pig Island during our visit. Veitch recorded flocks of up to 20 on the rocks and flying past.

GODWIT *Limosa* sp.

The single bird Veitch saw flying past Pig Island is the only record.

SOUTHERN BLACK-BACKED GULL *Larus dominicanus*

About 300 adults were seen on Omaui Island. Numerous nests were scattered about the beaches, lower slopes and among the grassy areas in the shrubland. About 75% of the nests contained eggs. There were about 1000 adult birds on Pig Island and nests were widespread on the beaches.

Veitch found the remains of hundreds of nests, c.20 juveniles ranging from partly fledged to almost flying, and recorded c.800 birds of all ages using Pig island as a roost at night.

RED-BILLED GULL *L. novaehollandiae*

We saw three birds but no sign of breeding on Omaui Island. Veitch's report of a few birds on rocks offshore and flying past Pig Island is the only record.

BLACK-BILLED GULL *L. bulleri*

The few birds Veitch saw flying past and on rocks off Pig Island remain the only record.

WHITE-FRONTED TERN *Sterna striata*

About 30 were seen on a rock in the reef to the west of Pig Island. Three were seen flying past during Veitch's visit and more "terns" were heard after dark.

HEDGE SPARROW *Prunella modularis*

Several were seen by us on Pig Island. This is the only record.

BLACKBIRD *Turdus merula*

The several seen by us on Pig Island is a new record.

REDPOLL *Carduela flammea*

Several were present on Pig Island. This is the only record.

STARLING *Sturnus vulgaris*

We saw several birds and nest sites about Omaui Island.

Discussion

Omaui Island is of ornithological significance because of the nesting Stewart Island Shags, which are a much diminished species on some islands in Foveaux Strait (Cooper, W.J.1991, Birds of Centre Island, *Notornis* 38:103-109).

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