



Short-tailed Shearwater 'Muttonbird'

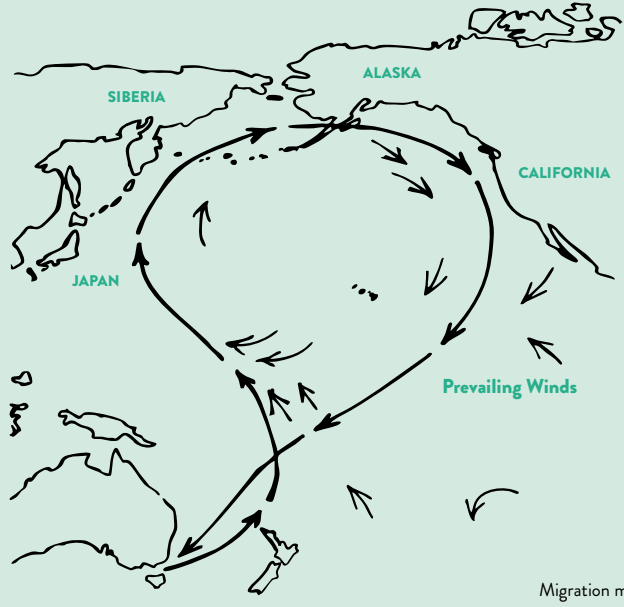
# THE SHORT TAILED SHEARWATER BIRD

Griffiths Island is a sanctuary for birdlife, notably the Short-Tailed Shearwaters, *Ardenna tenuirostris* or “muttonbirds”, which breed in burrows on the island. Adult Short-Tailed Shearwaters on average weigh 550 grams with a wing span of 1 metre. Their beak is slender with a hook at the end to assist in catching their prey. They are excellent swimmers, diving up to ten metres in search of prey such as krill, squid and small fish. The bird may be unspectacular in appearance, having a short tail with blackish brown feathers, but has some remarkable characteristics including an annual migration around the Pacific Ocean. Each year the bulk of the colony (which numbers between 5,000 - 10,000) return to Griffiths Island during the Spring Equinox in September. They arrive exhausted, having flown approximately 15,000 kilometres in only two months during all weather events.

Individuals return to the same burrow each year and generally mate with the same partner throughout their breeding life. Mating occurs in early November, with the entire population then flying out to sea for two weeks. This is known as the “honeymoon” flight. Eggs are laid late November and hatch in mid-January with both parents sharing the incubation duty.

Throughout their time on Griffiths Island, the colony leaves each morning to forage at sea, returning at dusk. From September to April the birds’ returning at dusk provides a spectacular sight which visitors can experience from the viewing platform on the river side of the island. As the birds return at nightfall visitors will hear thousands of birds in flight followed by birdcalls as the hungry chicks welcome home their parents.

In the Autumn Equinox around mid-April the adult birds begin their Pacific migration, leaving their young behind. Hunger begins to bring chicks from their nests at night, and they spend time building wing muscle as they develop full plumage and eventually set off after the adults. Mortality rate is high in the first year, with only about half of those which leave the nest surviving. Friends of Griffiths Island has developed a Light Pollution Management Plan to support the fledglings first flights.



Migration map

## Lifecycle of the Short-tailed Shearwater Bird Colony

From observations of Miss G.Bowker 1963 to 1973

Event	Arrival	Departure after mating	'Honeymoon' at sea usually 13 days (from 11 to 15 days)	Return for egg laying	Chicks hatching	Adults depart	Young depart
Usual Date	22 Sep	12 Nov		25 Nov	15 Jan	16 Apr	30 Apr – 3 May
Range	19-25 Sep	9-13 Nov		22-26 Nov	12-19 Jan	11-20 Apr	2-9 May

\*Switch off for the Shearwater's first flight from April 15 - 10 May



## WALKING THE ISLAND

The complete circuit of the Island is 2.9km and takes about 50 minutes. Alternatively, it takes about 25 minutes to walk 1.25km to the lighthouse, along the formed riverbank, with two optional pathways, along the beach or a limestone track. The pathway along the limestone track to the lighthouse is accessible for mobility aids, bikes or prams. Beyond the lighthouse the track is rough, over sand and rocks in some places, and walking along the southern beach sections depends upon the height of the incoming tide.



Port Fairy Lighthouse

## BEFORE YOU CROSS THE CAUSEWAY TO THE ISLAND PLEASE REMEMBER:

- There are no toilets or shelter on the island, the nearest being at Martins Point.
- Walk only on formed tracks.
- Do not leave litter.
- Do not disturb any birds or other animals.
- Dogs and cats are prohibited at all times on the island. Fines apply.
- **DO NOT cross the causeway if waves are coming over it or if the island is closed for maintenance or wild weather.**

## ACKNOWLEDGMENT

We acknowledge the Traditional Owners of the land and pay our respects to their Elders past, present and emerging, and the Elders from other communities who may reside in Moyne Shire.



Griffiths Island

## MORE WILDLIFE WONDERS

Griffiths Island is home to a small mob of Swamp Wallabies, *Wallabia bicolor*, which will cross the causeway or even swim across the river to the mainland at times. Short-beaked echidnas, Blue-tongue lizards and Tiger snakes may also be spotted.

Pods of dolphins may be seen in the waters around the island, as is the occasional seal. Keep an eye out for giant Stingrays that glide through the river and if you are in the right place at the right time, you may even spot Southern Right Whales, including mothers and their calves, or Humpback Whales as they pass by the island, between May to October. More than 80 bird species have been recorded on the island,

predominantly sea birds and waders including Sandpipers, Pied and Sooty Oystercatchers, Terns and Gulls.

Friends of Griffiths Island undertake a monthly bird survey on behalf of Birdlife Australia. The flora of Griffiths Island is also studied and research is undertaken by various organisations.





# GRIFFITHS ISLAND PORT FAIRY

Griffiths Island is a dune habitat and lies at the mouth of the Moyne River situated close to town of Port Fairy. The island, of remnant coastal scrub and grassland, supports native birds and animals, including Swamp Wallabies and a colony of Short Tailed Shearwaters.

The Indigenous name for Griffiths Island is “Moleen”. The clan living on Peek Whurrong country in Port Fairy were the Pyipgil Gundidj. The Griffiths Island clan were Mallun Gundidj and the Yowen Gundidj and Art Gundidj clans lived around the Moyne River and its wetlands.

European settlement of Port Fairy began on Griffiths Island, where bay whaling and seal hunting was established from the 1830s. In 1836, the Launceston shipbuilder, master mariner and entrepreneur John Griffiths and his partner Connolly & Co, established a whaling station on Griffiths Island. By the early 1840s supply of the Southern Right Whales was almost exhausted. The whaling station closed in 1848.

In 1837, John Griffiths had a prefabricated two-storey residence built on the island, which was colloquially known as ‘Government House’. Whaling crews and tradesmen camped in primitive huts during the winter whaling season and returned to Launceston after the whaling season. By 1840, up to 100 people may have lived on the island at the height of the season while others established dwellings on the ‘mainland’ along the Moyne River.

In the 1840s John Griffiths built a schooner, Brothers, on Griffiths Island which was launched in the South West Passage in 1847. A century later, the Haldane family also built two large fishing boats on the island.

In the early 1850s, Scottish-born widow Flora Rachel Wallace Dunlop bought John Griffiths’ “Government House” and other buildings setting up a mission for local Aborigines with a school room, dormitory, garden and farm. She sold up and left Port Fairy in 1854 and the former whalers’ buildings were demolished at a later date.

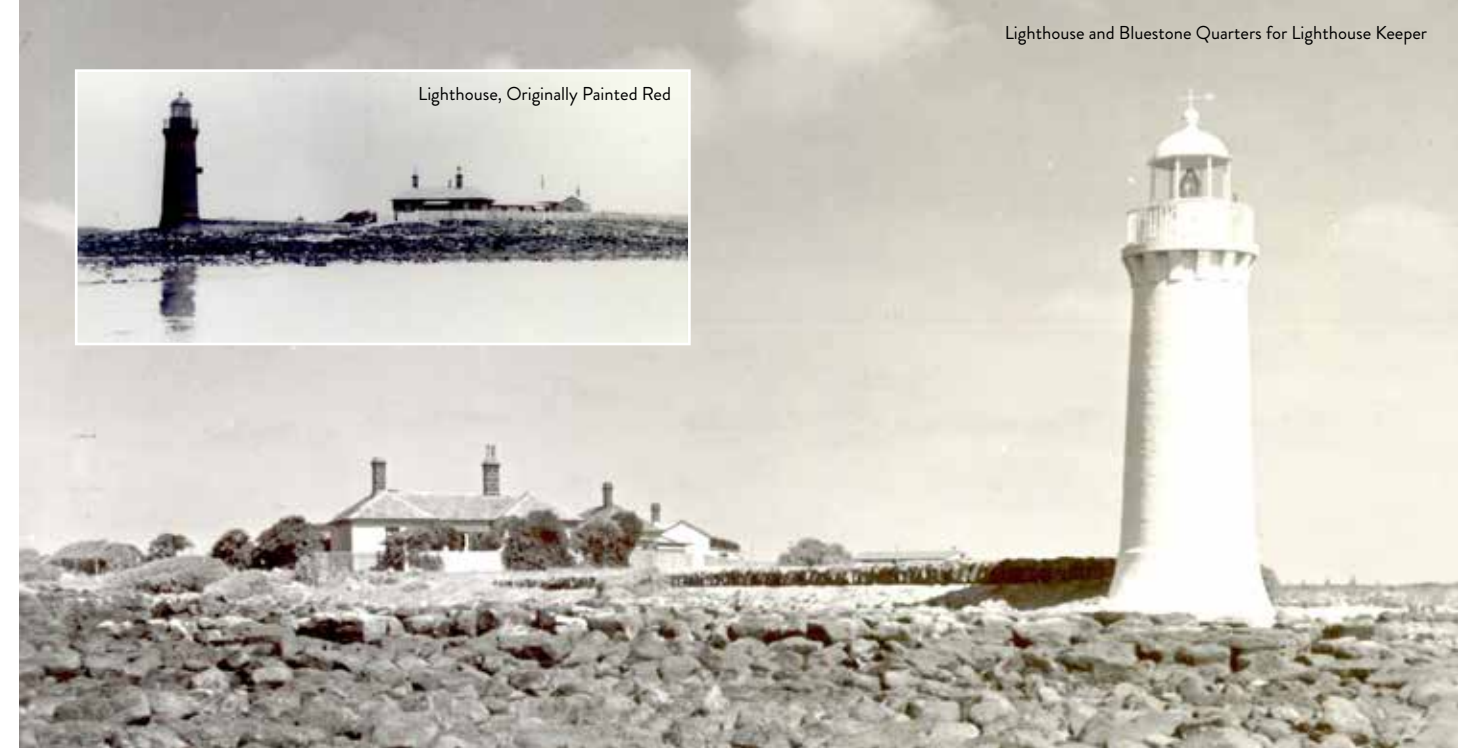
## VOLCANIC ORIGINS

Griffiths Island is an unusual geological landform, consisting of an isolated basalt outcrop overlain with calcareous sand. The basalt dates from 350,000 years ago, from the Mount Rouse volcanic lava flow, originating 60km to the north from Penshurst.

The island is about 1.5km long and 0.8km at its widest point. It is bordered on its northern side by the Moyne River, which has been channeled between stone ‘training walls’ providing easy access by sea to the port of Port Fairy.

At the time of European settlement, the island consisted of three separate islands (Griffiths, Rabbit and Goat Island). Decades of harbour works commenced in the 1860s consolidating the islands into a single landmass.

A timber pedestrian bridge was built across the South West Passage in 1887, but was washed away and replaced with a stone causeway in 1911. Over the years the surface of the causeway has been breached with high seas from the South West Passage, such is the power of the Southern Ocean surging through the South West Passage.



## THE LIGHTHOUSE

The Port Fairy Lighthouse, on the eastern tip of Griffiths Island (then Rabbit Island), has stood sentinel since 1st September 1859 with the addition of the stone causeway in 1864 to counter high tides. The lighthouse is on the Victorian Heritage Register and is classified by the National Trust of Australia and still operates today by a solar powered light.

Built of basalt quarried on the island, it stands almost 12.5 metres above high-water level and is visible for 13km seaward. It is notable for its spiral stone staircase, with each tread inserted into the internal structure of the wall.

Bluestone quarters for the Lighthouse Keeper and the Assistant Keeper were built at the same time as the lighthouse along with a store, workshop and a small jetty so fuel and supplies could be delivered by boat. The fenced cottage and garden, offered quarters for a Keeper and an Assistant.

Keepers were generally placed for five years or less. There were fourteen keepers between 1867 and 1913. James

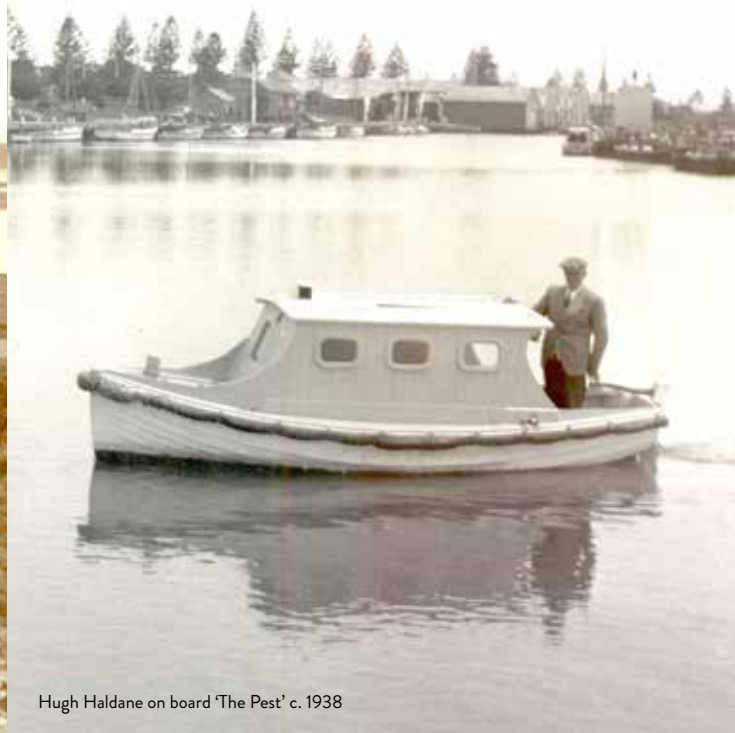
Northey served from 1915 to 1929 and Port Fairy Harbour Master Hugh Haldane from 1929 to 1952 providing the longest continuous service. Harbour Master Fred Rogers and his family were the last tenants on the island, living in the lighthouse keeper’s cottage from 1952 until 1954.

Scottish-born Hugh Haldane lived with his wife and five children on the island and added extra accommodation. Notably, in the 1930s Hugh painted the red lighthouse white and planted the Norfolk Island pines near the compound which still stand today.

The lighthouse keepers’ compound was demolished in 1956. Stone foundations and the fencing of the compound are the only discernible remains today. The stone from the buildings was used to level the training walls along the river.

The lighthouse built in Victoria in 1859 is the only one of four harbour lighthouses to remain at its original site and is unusual for its location at sea-level. It is regularly open to the public during weekends in January and some long weekends.

Bluestone Quarters for Lighthouse Keeper



Hugh Haldane on board ‘The Pest’ c. 1938