

SEABIRD ISLANDS

No. 242

Low Wooded Island, Great Barrier Reef, Queensland

Location: 15°06'S, 145°23'E; 16 kilometres north-north-east of Cape Bedford, and 44 kilometres north-north-east from Cooktown, Queensland.

Status: Island Sanctuary, State land.

Other Name: Wooded Isle.

Description: The island is a low wooded cay of the inner northern Great Barrier Reef with the main axis running approximately north-west to south-east. Considerable areas of intertidal beach-rock and rubble banks surround the island. A coarse sandspit occupies the most north-westerly end. The island is about 1 200 m long by 500 m wide, and the height about 3 m above high water level. Mangrove *Cerriops tagal* var. *australis* and *Bruguiera exaristata* predominate through the island; closer to the shoreline *Manikara kauki* trees, *Pemphis acidula* shrubs, along with other intermingled vegetation prevail, while *Casuarina equisetifolia* var. *incana* dominate the north-westerly end. Overall, the higher vegetation is about 12 m above high watermark.

Landing: From a dinghy on to the north-western sandspit. Anchorage is only mediocre during south-east trade winds. Care should be exercised navigating among patch coral.

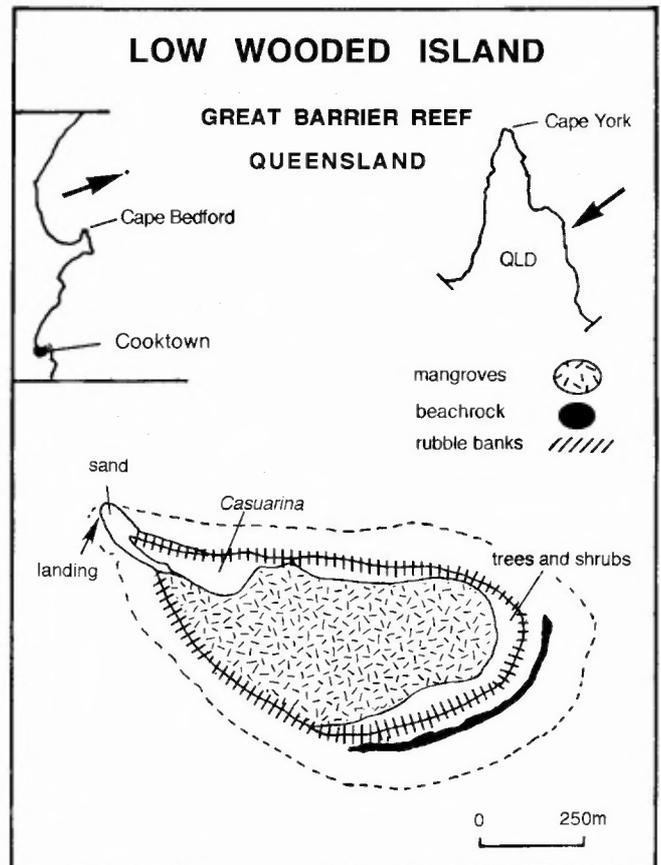
Ornithological History: The first published information on seabirds on this island resulted from six visits by J. A. McLean³ on the following dates: 20 August 1983, 22–23 September 1985, 14 November 1992, 9 February 1993, 30 December 1994 to 1 January 1995 and 19 December 1996.

Breeding Seabirds and Status

Sterna bengalensis Lesser Crested Tern — A maximum of 120 birds were observed on 19 December 1996. Two separate colonies 8 m apart were located on the southern side of the island. These contained 45 and 35 single-egg nests. Only one or two resting birds were noted on other summer visits.

Sterna dougallii Roseate Tern — Breeding was recorded only during the two visits of 30 December 1994 and 19 December 1996. All nests were located on coral rubble ridges. In the first instance (1994) eight nests and a few chicks were located on the northern shore. During both visits a maximum of 25 adult birds were seen. The nests on the northern shore were lined with *Casuarina* 'needles' from nearby trees.

On 19 December 1996, there were two colonies, one at the eastern end of the island, comprising twelve nests mostly with two eggs. Nests were intermixed with those of the



• Low Wooded Island from the air.

Photo: Qld N.P.W.S, Cairns

Black-naped Terns. The second colony of five nests with eggs was on the southern side of the island.

In November 1992, two birds were seen but the species was absent during the visits in August 1983, September 1985 and February 1993.

Sterna sumatrana Black-naped Tern — Six separate breeding colonies were located in the northern, eastern and southern sectors of the island. There were three colonies in December 1994 (47 nests) and three colonies in December 1996 (61 nests), the majority of which contained two eggs. A few chicks were also observed. Almost all nests were on coral rubble ridges 0.5 m to 1.5 m above high water. A few nests were located on top of a large horizontal beachwashed log. Counts of flocks in December 1994 and December 1996 were up to 80 birds. Eleven were recorded in February 1993 but the birds were absent in November 1992 and earlier visits.

Sterna anaethetus Bridled Tern — Only 4–6 single egg nests were found, usually under grasses, herbage and creepers on or near the north-western sandspit or in the western part of the island. Counts of birds in December 1994 and December 1996 were between 60 and 200 birds.

Factors Affecting Status

Occasional human visitation and camping occurs on the island. It is probable that some disruption does occur to

the breeding tern colonies which are located around the walking perimeter of the island. Some illegal shooting of Pied Imperial-Pigeons is apparent; these pigeons breed in thousands within the island's mangrove stand.

Other Seabirds Recorded

<i>Sula leucogaster</i>	Brown Booby
<i>Pelicanus conspicillatus</i>	Australian Pelican
<i>Haematopus longirostris</i>	Pied Oystercatcher
<i>Haematopus fuliginosus</i>	Sooty Oystercatcher
<i>Larus novaehollandiae</i>	Silver Gull
<i>Sterna caspia</i>	Caspian Tern
<i>Sterna bergii</i>	Crested Tern
<i>Sterna albifrons</i>	Little Tern

Banding

Nil.

Bibliography

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2. McLean, J. A. (1993). The birds of Three Isles, North Queensland. *Sunbird* 23: 95–106.
3. McLean, J. A. (1997). The birds of Low Wooded Island, North Queensland. *Sunbird* 27: 98–104.

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FOOD OF SATIN BOWERBIRDS

The Satin Bowerbird *Ptilonorhynchus violaceus* feeds on various fruits of rainforest trees and plants. I have records of them feeding on ten species.

In nearly 16 years I have not recorded any bird species feeding on the fruit of Tall Geebung *Persoonia attenuata*.

On 26 November 1998, about 1530 hours, I saw a Satin Bowerbird (brown/green plumage) fly down to the ground in the back (native) garden near a large Tallowood *Eucalypt microcorys*. The bird was mostly concealed behind the low vegetation but I could see its movements and frequently its head. After about 12 minutes, the bird flew away. I examined the area where the bird had been.

Growing beside the Tallowood there is a Tall Geebung *Persoonia attenuata* and its fruit was scattered around in the leaf-mould on the ground below. I examined the green

fruit and found that most had been chewed at the pointed end and the contents removed. Then I examined the not-so-obvious black fruit and found that in almost every case the fruit examined had been nipped off at the pointed end and left empty.

This is the first time I have observed any bird species feeding on these fruit.

On 28 November 1998, I was away from home early, until about 1230 hours. On return I saw a similar (brown plumaged) Satin Bowerbird fly down to the same spot, but it saw me and stayed only a moment before flying off.

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