

## Nymph Island, Great Barrier Reef, Queensland

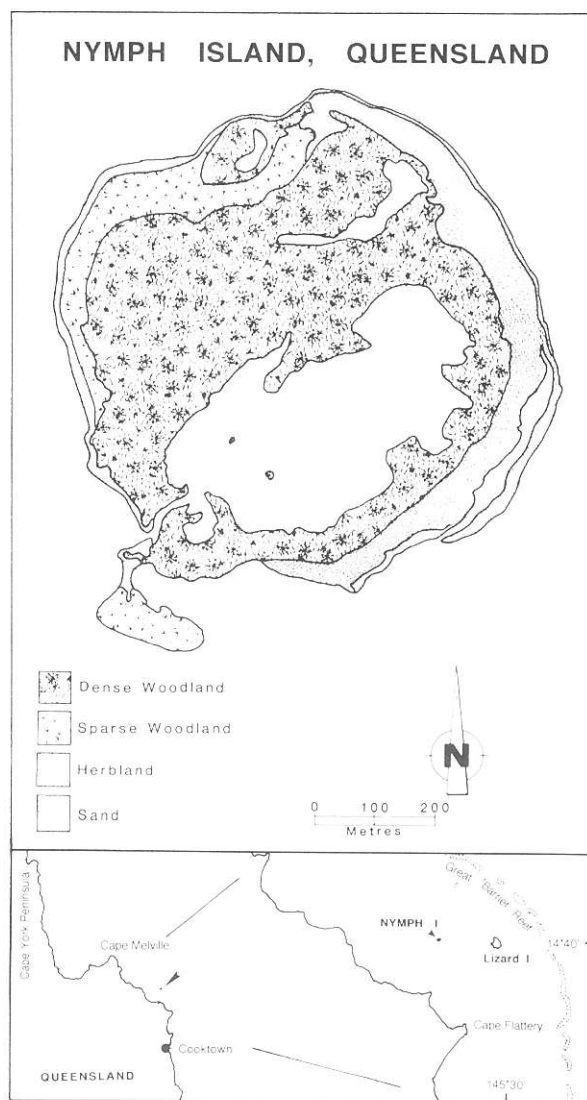
**Location:** 14°39'S, 145°15'E; 12 kilometres west of Lizard Island, Queensland.

**Status:** National Park.

**Description:** 56 ha; about 850 m diameter, it is a roughly round cay of coral rubble and shingle with an elevation of ten metres. A much smaller island is joined to the main island by a sand spit at the southern end. There are three lagoons surrounded by permanently dry coral shingle banks. It is possible to enter the southern and largest lagoon from the sea in a boat with a shallow draft, such as a dinghy or canoe. Dense mangroves surround the lagoons. Low herb vegetation on the periphery is interspersed with *Casuarina* and *Argusia* woodland. Coconut Palms *Cocos nucifera* have apparently been planted.

**Landing:** Landing is best on the western side. Care should be taken among the submerged coral boulders. Landing can also occur at high tide on to the southern beach to the west of the lagoon entrance, in a shallow draft boat; however, as the tide recedes the boat may be stranded.

**Ornithological History:** Named on the early charts as 'En Cay'<sup>9</sup> but there appear to have been no ornithological visits prior to those of Domm<sup>1</sup> from 1973 to 1976. The cay has not been mentioned by any earlier naturalist who stopped at Lizard Island and islands in the vicinity e.g. King<sup>4</sup>; Stokes<sup>8</sup>; Jukes<sup>2</sup>; or Lavery and Grimes<sup>5</sup>. Nor was it mentioned by Kikkawa<sup>3</sup> in his analysis of avifaunal assemblages on the Great Barrier Reef.



The presence of a stone-lined well, nearby Coconut Palms and the foundations of a house are testimony to earlier settlement. The compiler has been unable to find written documentation of habitation. The lagoon has been (and probably still is) rich with mud and sand crabs, which could have supported inhabitants of European and Aboriginal descent (pers. obs.).

G. C. Smith visited the cay 11 times: 16–17 February 1982 (overnight stay aboard a dinghy moored in the lagoon), 24 April 1983, 5 November 1983, 18 November 1983, 29 November 1983, 20 December 1983, 5 January 1984, 9 February 1984, 10 February 1985, 28 February 1985 and 16 January 1992. T. A. Walker (in litt.) visited the cay on 19 December 1989.

#### Breeding Seabirds and Status

*Egretta sacra* Eastern Reef Egret — One nest containing three nestlings was seen on 16 January 1992, in mangroves fringing the northern lagoon.

*Sterna dougallii* Roseate Tern — Two adults were noted on 18 November 1983; 11 nests containing one or two eggs (mean = 1.4, S.D. = 0.6) were recorded on 29 November 1983; four adults and four nests containing single eggs were recorded on 20 December 1983; four adults and one juvenile were seen on 9 February 1984; and two adults were noted on 10 February 1985.

*Sterna sumatrana* Black-naped Tern — Present on all visits by Smith except for the one on 24 April 1982. Nests containing eggs and young were also noted by Walker on 19 December 1989. Observations at other islands in the Lizard Island area suggest that the Black-naped Terns are usually absent from this area during the tropical winter

(Domm<sup>1</sup>; Smith and Buckley<sup>6</sup>; Smith and Ogilvie<sup>7</sup>, unpublished data). Breeding was observed 16–17 February 1982, and on all visits after and including 18 November 1983. Thirty adults, two eggs and remnants of hatched eggs were seen on 16–17 February 1982. Sixty-seven adults were seen on 5 November 1983. One hundred and ninety-five adults and 36 nests containing one to two eggs (mean = 1.5, S.D. = 0.5) were noted on 18 November 1983. One hundred and four nests containing one to three eggs (mean = 1.5, S.D. = 0.5) were recorded on 29 November 1983. On 20 December 1983 there were 96 adults and 30 nests (mean clutch size = 1.6, S.D. = 0.5). On 5 January 1984 there were 78 adults, 39 nests containing eggs, two flying young and two pulli. On 9 February 1984, 99 adults, two nests (one to two eggs), two pulli and two flying young were recorded. Six adults and one nest with two eggs were seen on 10 February 1985. On 28 November 1985 there were 86 adults and two nests each with an egg. Walker recorded 94 adults, 18 nests containing one or two eggs (mean = 1.4, S.D. = 0.5) and five nests containing one or two chicks, in five separate colonies on 19 December 1989. On 16 January 1992, about 300 adults were seen; however, only seven nests containing either one or two eggs, or a single chick were observed.

*Sterna anaethetus* Bridled Tern — Present on surveys on 18 November 1983 (106 adults), 20 December 1983 (nesting prolifically on the outer margin of the cay; eggs present), 5 January 1984 (74 adults; breeding), 9 February 1984 (70 adults; breeding), 10 February 1985 (18 adults) and 28 November 1985. Walker counted about 200 adults on 19 December 1989, but only one egg was found. Less than 50 birds were noted nesting on 16 January 1992; chicks were present.



● Nymph Island from the air (looking south-east).

Photo: P. Isdale

*Sterna bergii* Crested Tern — Seen on all visits. Adult numbers ranged from eight on 24 April 1983 to 927 on 16–17 February 1982 when breeding was recorded. On this occasion breeding was in three distinct sub-colonies (west beach 134 eggs, south-eastern point 325 eggs, and south-eastern point 447 eggs). Only single egg clutches were recorded. (Two egg clutches occur in very low numbers.) Nesting was not noted on any other visit, although carrying displays by bachelor males were evident on 16 January 1992.

*Sterna bengalensis* Lesser Crested Tern — Seen on most trips in low numbers: one on 5 November 1983, one on 20 December 1983, two on 10 February 1985 and 22 on 28 November 1985. There were 87 adults with chicks on 16–17 February 1982 and 51 adults were seen on 9 February 1984, but no eggs or young were found.

#### Factors Affecting Status

Past human habitation almost certainly would have meant that eggs were taken for food. These days, the birds and their eggs are protected by the island's National Park status, but occasional egg poaching, inadvertent trampling of nest sites and harassment of young would occur by casual visitors to the island. Boats were anchored at Nymph Cay on two out of 11 visits by Smith. Seine netting of fish was observed on one visit. Terns commonly feed in the shallows about Nymph Cay and depletion of fish through netting could adversely affect populations of seabirds.

#### Other Seabirds Recorded

|                                 |                     |
|---------------------------------|---------------------|
| <i>Pelecanus conspicillatus</i> | Australian Pelican  |
| <i>Sula leucogaster</i>         | Brown Booby         |
| <i>Haematopus longirostris</i>  | Pied Oystercatcher  |
| <i>Haematopus fuliginosus</i>   | Sooty Oystercatcher |
| <i>Larus novaehollandiae</i>    | Silver Gull         |
| <i>Hydroprogne caspia</i>       | Caspian Tern        |
| <i>Sterna albifrons</i>         | Little Tern         |

#### Banding

Nil.

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