

SEABIRD ISLANDS

No. 228

Walcott Island, Pilbara Region, Western Australia

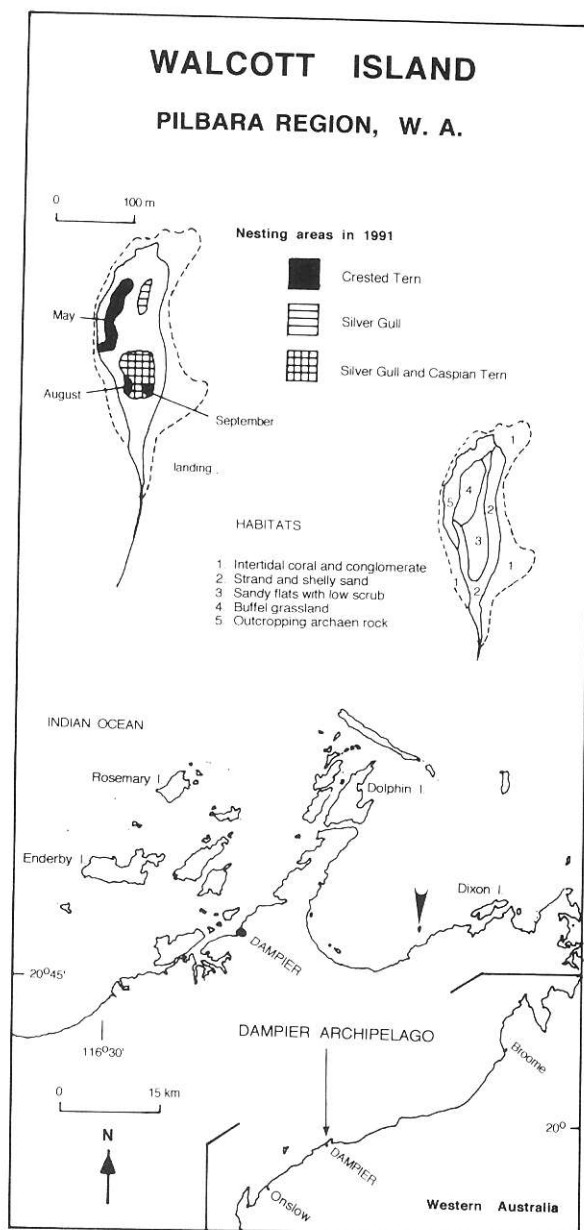
Location: 20°40'S, 116°57'E; within Nickol Bay, about 25 kilometres east of Dampier, off the coastal locality of Cleaverville, 14 kilometres east-north-east of the town of Karratha, Western Australia.

Status: Vacant Crown Land.

Description: 6.5 ha at high water; maximal dimensions 650 m by 150 m; about 6 m maximum height. The island is comprised of outcropping archaean rocks (Cleaverville Formation), partially overlain with recent dune and shelly sands, and surrounded, in the intertidal zone, by lime-cemented beach conglomerate (Geological Survey of Western Australia 1978). The long axis runs north-east to south-west more or less parallel to the adjacent coastline, 1.5 km away. The greatest elevations are along the central western side. This high rocky edge is sparsely vegetated with *Capparis spinosa*, *Cynanchum floribundum*, *Sporobolus virginicus* and Buffel grass *Cenchrus ciliaris*. East of this, there is a sandy slope dominated by Buffel grassland grading into sandy flats vegetated with low scrub of *Acacia coriacea*, *Scaevola spinescens*, *Capparis spinosa*, *Rhagodia eremaea* and *Enchylaena tomentosa*. The strand zone, above the shelly sand, has a sparse cover of *Spinifex longifolius*, *Lepidium linifolium*, *Suaeda arbusculoides* and *Canavalia rosea*.

Landing: Access is best obtained using a dinghy over coral and conglomerate rock on the eastern sheltered side.

Ornithological History: During 1991, Walcott Island was surveyed for breeding seabirds on the following dates: 2 April, 4 May, 26 May, 13 June, 26 August, 29 September, 12 October, 10 November and 29 December. There are no other formal records although a number of people were aware of the colonies of Crested Terns.



Breeding Seabirds and Status

Haematopus longirostris Pied Oystercatcher — The behaviour of 3–4 pairs on 29 September 1991 indicated that nesting was taking place at that time. The nests or young were not located.

Haematopus fuliginosus Sooty Oystercatcher — On 29 September 1991 one pair had a nest with two eggs on the coral clinker at the southern tip of the island. Another pair was frequenting an area of strand on the eastern side. On 10 November a pair was apparently attending chicks at the northern end.

Larus novaehollandiae Silver Gull — On 29 September 1991, 10 Silver Gull nests, all with eggs, were recorded on the sandy flat at the southern end of the island. An estimated 80 pairs were nesting within this area by 10 November, with another, slightly larger, colony on the sandy slopes at the northern end of the island. Breeding activity had waned by 29 December.

Hydroprogne caspia Caspian Tern — On 29 September 1991 about 36 pairs were nesting on the sandy flat at the southern end of the island. Most pairs already had young chicks, the eldest recorded being about 10 days old. A few pairs still had eggs. Laying commenced at the end of August.

Sterna bergii Crested Tern — About 1 200 pairs of Crested Terns laid between 2 April and 4 May 1991 forming one continuous colony. This colony fledged large numbers of young. A smaller colony of less than 200 pairs observed on eggs in August, apparently failed completely. Another colony, at

a different location, was observed on 20 September. This group contained 130 nests with eggs but later visits showed that few, if any, fledglings were produced. A domestic dog was implicated, by its tracks, in the disruption of the latter colony.

Factors Affecting Status

Walcott Island is vacant Crown Land with no restrictions on landing or human activities. The island is readily accessible by small boat from the popular recreation area at Cleaverville. At present, the most serious threat to nesting seabirds is from excited domestic dogs landed from small boats for exercise. Dogs are sometimes left on the local islands for some hours.

Two pairs of Ospreys *Pandion haliaetus* nest on the Island and these are known to prey on nesting Crested Terns.

The proximity of the island to the towns of Karratha and Wickham may lead to an increase in the size of the relatively large (by Pilbara standards) gull colony.

OTHER VERTEBRATES

Gemmatophora gilberti Coastal Water-dragon.

Other Seabirds Recorded

<i>Pelecanus conspicillatus</i>	Australian Pelican
<i>Phalacrocorax varius</i>	Pied Cormorant
<i>Chlidonias hybrida</i>	Whiskered Tern
<i>Gelochelidon nilotica</i>	Gull-billed Tern
<i>Sterna hirundo</i>	Common Tern
<i>Sterna dougalii</i>	Roseate Tern
<i>Sterna albifrons</i>	Little Tern
<i>Sterna nereis</i>	Fairy Tern
<i>Sterna bengalensis</i>	Lesser Crested Tern



• The eastern side of Walcott Island, viewed from an elevated point on the adjacent mainland.

Photo: J. N. Dunlop



- Parts of the south-eastern sector (looking north).

Banding

May 1991.

Sterna bergii — 433 pulli.

Bibliography

1. Geological Survey of Western Australia (1978). Nickol Bay — Legendre Urban Geology 2256I–2257II. Department of Mines of Western Australia.

Acknowledgments

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