

Birds of Maclellan Cay, Great Barrier Reef

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In the course of long-term studies of the sea-turtles of north-eastern Australia, the opportunity has been taken during visits throughout the Great Barrier Reef Province each year since 1969 to observe the occurrences of birds.

On 30 November 1978 during an annual visit to Raine Island (11°36'S, 144°01'E), an unnamed sand cay, first noted in passing on 2 December 1977 to be inhabited by birds, was explored from 18:00-24:00 hours. The cay, at 11°22'S, 143°48'E, is illustrated as a sandbank on an unnamed reef on British Admiralty Chart 2354 (Fig. 1). On the occasion of this visit, a sandbank with long axis at 336° and short axis 236° was present with a circumference at high water spring tide level of 885.2 m (measured with "Truometer" pedometer). A beach platform existed at this tide level, and on it there was a sparse ground cover of grass *Lepturus repens* and the herbaceous *Boerhavia repens*. There was neither the shrub vegetation nor the central rock platform that occurs on Raine Island and Pandora Cay.

Birds were present as follows:

Brown Booby *Sula leucogaster* — 919 nesting pairs plus some 200 roosting birds; the state of examined nests was 5 with no content, 10 with 1 egg, 14 with 2 eggs, 6 with 1 egg and 1 naked chick, 1 with 1 egg and 1 downy young, 29 with 1 naked chick, 158 with 1 downy young, and 3 with 1 juvenile. Timing of breeding was in accordance with nesting of this species on adjacent Raine Island.

Frigatebird *Fregata* sp. — one individual roosting

Ruddy Turnstone *Arenaria interpres* — eight birds feeding

Silver Gull *Larus novaehollandiae* — one individual roosting

Black-naped Tern *Sterna sumatrana* — approximately 50 birds roosting

Bridled Tern *S. anaethetus* — some 200 birds in air over cay in late afternoon and later roosting on the cay.

Crested Tern *S. bergii* — approximately 100 birds roosting at water's edge at night

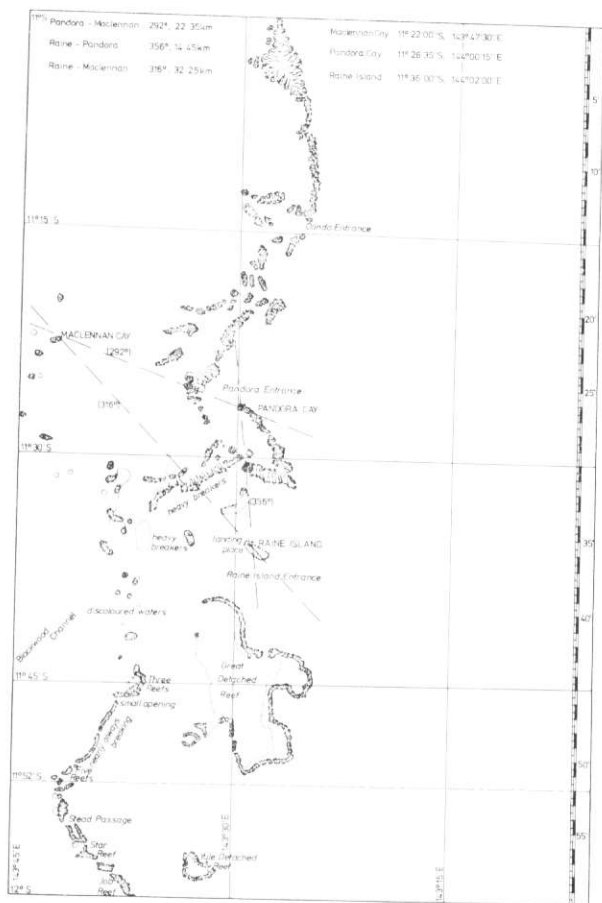
Common Noddy *Anous stolidus* — approximately 200 birds roosting

During daylight some Green Turtles *Chelonia mydas* were observed courting on the reef immediately adjacent to the cay; at night four females made nesting crawls on the cay and two of these laid eggs. From the tracks of these and previous turtle nesting crawls there was little indication of a major disturbance by the turtles of the nesting birds in the central area of the island. The turtles mostly nested and crawled in the peripheral areas.

For future reference, the island has been named Maclellan Cay (after William Maclellan, a naturalist who travelled widely in this region some 50 years ago); the name has been sought to be ratified by the Queensland Place Names Board, the area nomenclature authority, and adopted by the Hydrographic Service of the Royal Australian Navy.

Maclellan Cay is not listed in the inventories of the islands of the Great Barrier Reef Province on which sea-birds breed (Lavery and Grimes 1971, Kikkawa 1976) based on records from occasional visits spanning some 160 years. However many of the islands like Maclellan Cay which are off normal shipping lanes are poorly represented in these lists.

This new record of nesting sea-birds on the Great Barrier Reef illustrates the incomplete record that exists to date of the total resource in this complex system.



• Figure 1. Map showing location of Maclellan Cay relative to Pandora Cay and Raine Island, northern Great Barrier Reef.

Breeding Behaviour of Fairy-Wrens

I am studying White-winged, Variegated and Superb Fairy-wrens and need information on the breeding behaviour of these species during the 1980, 1981 and 1982 breeding seasons.

The more details I can get the better but any would be helpful. Set out below is a series of points. I would be very grateful to obtain information on any of these points.

1. Species of *Malurus*
2. Date
3. Location, as precisely as possible
4. Type of bush in which nest is situated
5. Height of nest above ground
6. Bearing of nest opening
7. Bearing of nest from centre of bush
8. Clutch size. Date of laying. Date of hatching.
9. Number of nestlings. Date of fledging.
10. How many birds fed the nestlings?
11. Do other species of *Malurus* occur in the area? If so, which species?
12. When did the species begin to breed and when did the breeding season end?

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References

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- Lavery, H. J. and R. J. Grimes, (1971), 'Sea-birds of the Great Barrier Reef', *Qd agric. J.* 97: 106-113.

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