

## SEABIRD ISLANDS

No. 193

## Magra Island, Great Barrier Reef, Queensland

**Location:** 11°51'S., 143°17'E.; 15 kilometres north-east from Cape Grenville, Queensland.

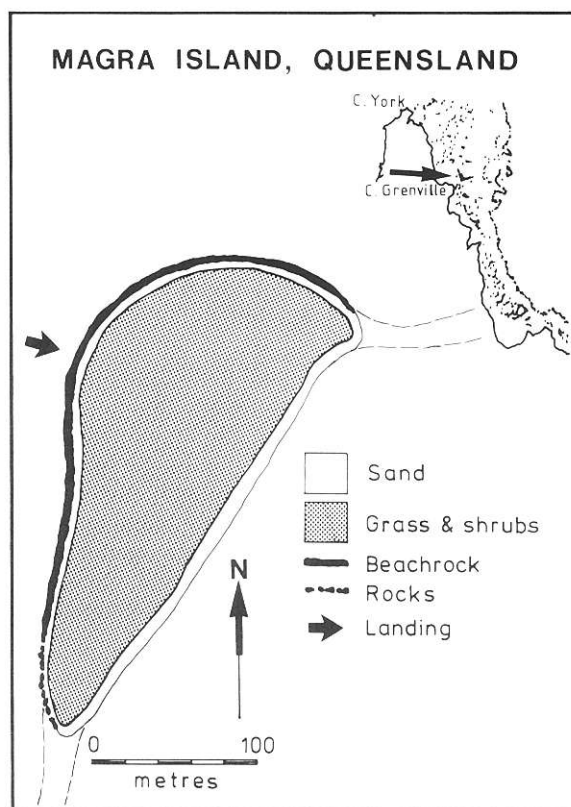
**Status:** Queensland National Park (declared April 1989).

**Description:** 2.7 ha; 310 m long by 128 m wide and 3 m high. A vegetated sand cay situated on a small coral reef one kilometre west from Cockburn Reef, in a section of the inner reefs of the far northern Great Barrier Reef. The cay is roughly triangular in shape, with long sandspits running out from two apices, and a line of intertidal coralline beachrock running along the western and north-western sides.

The upper surface of the cay is almost entirely covered with grass/herb mat, interspersed with some tall shrubs. The outer edges of the vegetated area have sand-binding species, including the vine *Ipomea pes-caprae* and a grass *Spinifex hirsuta*. The grassflat is composed of a number of species, few exceeding 0.5 m in height. They include grasses *Lepturus repens* and *Spinifex hirsuta*, and herbs *Sesuvium portulacastrum*, *Boerhavia tetrandra* and *Portulaca oleracea*, the vine *Ipomea pes-caprae*, and shrubs including *Abutilon indicum*, *Suriana maritima*, *Scaevola sericea*, *Euphorbia atoto*, *E. tannensis* and *Argusia argentea*.

**Landing:** By dinghy onto the north-western beach from a vessel anchored at the reef edge in the lee of the cay and reef. Local knowledge is needed for navigating among the reefs of this area.

**Ornithological History:** D. L. Stoddart<sup>1</sup> visited the island in October 1973 with the Royal Society and Universities of Queensland Great Barrier Reef Expedition. He mapped the cay and recorded vegetation and birds (unpublished). R. C. Buckley recorded vegetation and birds in 1978. B. R. King landed for three hours on 22 June 1981 to map the cay and record vegetation and



seabirds. A. Taplin landed for 1.5 hours each on 19 July and 11 December 1985 to record vegetation and seabirds for B. R. King. Other Queensland National Parks and Wildlife Service Officers recorded seabirds on 5 September 1986, 30 November 1987 and 11 July 1988.

#### Breeding Seabirds and Status

*Larus novaehollandiae* Silver Gull — Breeding mid-year. In June 1981, 30 adults and at least four nests were recorded. Nests were solitary and concealed on the ground among grasses and shrubs.



• *Magra Island from the air (looking east).*

*Sterna dougallii* Roseate Tern — In June 1981 there were over 400 adults present, with at least 100 juveniles. In addition there were over 200 recently-dead chicks and juveniles on the strand and in open areas of the grassflat. Nests are simple scrapes in the sand, and one or two eggs are laid.

*Sterna bergii* Crested Tern — Breeds possibly all year. In June 1981, there were about 20 adults present, but no breeding. In July 1985, 28 adults were present with some pairs courting. In December 1985 courtship was again observed in a mixed flock of 200 *S. bergii* and *S. bengalensis*.

*Sterna bengalensis* Lesser Crested Tern — The only record is when courting was observed in December 1985.

#### Factors Affecting Status

Prolonged periods of bad weather and cyclones may kill numbers of tern chicks through exposure and starvation. Human disturbance occurs occasionally. Hawksbill Turtles *Eretmochelys imbricata* nest in small numbers mostly in summer and may disturb some ground-nesting terns.

#### Other Seabirds Recorded

<i>Sula leucogaster</i>	Brown Booby
<i>Egretta sacra</i>	Eastern Reef Egret
<i>Anous stolidus</i>	Common Noddy
<i>Anous minutus</i>	Black Noddy

#### Banding

Nil.

#### Bibliography

1. Stoddart, D. L. (1978). The Great Barrier Reef and Great Barrier Reef Expedition 1973. *Phil Trans. R. Soc. Lond. A.* 291: 5-22.

#### Acknowledgements

Support was provided by the Raine Island Corporation and the Queensland National Parks and Wildlife Service. A. Taplin and others assisted with the field observations. F. Muir and J. Cornelius made their records available.

Date compiled: 25 March 1986.

Revised: November 1988.

*B. R. King, CI- Queensland Museum, Flinders Street, Townsville, Qld 4810.*