

## SEABIRD ISLANDS

No. 194

## Bacchi Cay, Great Barrier Reef, Queensland

**Location:** 21°38'S., 152°23'E.; centrally situated in the Swain Reefs complex at the southern end of the Great Barrier Reef. The Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority reef identification code is 21-495. The nearest mainland is 190 km west-south-west at Perforated Point and the nearest town is 235 km south-west at Yeppoon, Queensland.

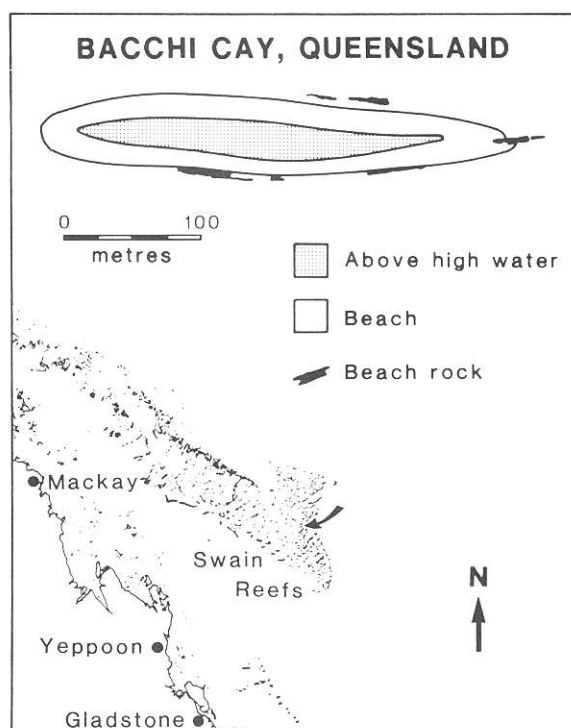
**Status:** Crown Land; Queensland Fauna Sanctuary.

**Other Names:** East Riversong Cay, Twin Cay.

**Description:** 0.5 ha; 270 m by 30 m, with an elevation of less than 2 m (measurements at high water). This sand cay is sited at the western end of an elongate platform reef 2.2 km in length. Beachrock is exposed in areas previously covered by the cay. Changes in the size and shape of the cay over 20 years are described by Flood and Heatwole<sup>2</sup>. Only about 35% of the island (above high water, 1984) still covers an area on the reef that was previously covered in 1964. Changes in vegetation have been discussed by Flood and Heatwole<sup>2</sup>. The cay is vegetated with *Boerhavia tetrandra*, *Thuarea involuta*, *Lepturus repens* and *Coronopus integrifolius*.

**Landing:** Across the reef flat usually on the northern side.

**Ornithological History:** Gillett and McNeill<sup>3</sup> described the cay on 1 November 1960, at the same time recording the presence of two species of breeding and three species of non-breeding seabirds. On 7 November 1976 Limpus and Lyon<sup>4</sup> reported eight species of seabirds one of which was breeding. Costello<sup>1</sup> observed small numbers of nesting Brown and Masked Boobies on 6 April 1977. Moverley<sup>5</sup> described winter bird populations in July 1983 and July 1984 including three species of breeding and five species of non-breeding seabirds. P. Reid visited on 21 January 1984 and S. Domm visited on 20 November 1988. The



present authors surveyed the birds on 26 January 1985 (MJ), 19 July 1985 (MJ), 17 February 1986 (MJ & TW), 6 April 1986 (TW), 23 July 1987 (MJ & FS) and 27 January 1988 (MJ & FS).

## Breeding Seabirds and Status

*Sula dactylatra* Masked Booby — A few pairs were nesting in November 1960, November 1976, April 1977, July 1983, July 1987 and January 1988. No other breeding is recorded.

*Sula leucogaster* Brown Booby — Breeding occurs throughout the year and was recorded on all visits except those in November 1976, July 1985 and July 1987. Most breeding occurs in summer months with the maximum number of breeding pairs being 76 in February and April 1986.

*Larus novaehollandiae* Silver Gull — A few pairs were nesting in July 1984 and in April 1986. From three to 20 gulls frequent the cay throughout the year.

*Sterna sumatrana* Black-naped Tern — The only breeding record is for 24 pairs with eggs (1-2) in January 1988. The highest number of roosting birds was 1 500 in July 1985.

*Sterna bergii* Crested Tern — Nesting occurred in February 1986. There were 200 runners on the beach in the company of 300 juveniles and 700 adults. In July 1987 nine pairs were breeding.

*Sterna bengalensis* Lesser Crested Tern — A single runner attended by two adults was present amongst the Crested Tern runners on the beach in February 1986. In July 1987 four pairs were nesting.

*Anous stolidus* Common Noddy — A pair with an egg were present in February 1986 and again in January 1988. Four nests with eggs were present in January 1984. Five nests and 300 roosting adults were present in April 1986.

#### Factors Affecting Status

The surface of the cay is less than 2 m above high water and is susceptible to overwash and erosion by the sea during storms. It was completely inundated just prior to the July 1985 visit. There were no nests or live young present but there were 19 recently killed Masked Boobies and 20 recently killed Brown Boobies, most of which were juveniles or chicks.



● Brown Boobies nesting on Bacchi Cay, 6 April 1986.

Photo: T. A. Walker.

Gulls predate unattended eggs of the other species and this activity increases when people visit the island. Human visitation is low but is becoming more frequent. Breeding birds also suffer disturbance from nesting turtles in summer.

#### OTHER VERTEBRATES

Loggerhead Turtles *Caretta caretta* and a few Green Turtles *Chelonia mydas* nest.

#### Other Seabirds Recorded

<i>Sterna hirundo</i> <sup>5</sup>	Common Tern
<i>Sterna dougallii</i>	Roscate Tern (max. 2 500, 17 Feb. 86)
<i>Sterna anaethetus</i>	Bridled Tern

#### Banding

*Sula leucogaster* — 8.

#### Bibliography

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3. Gillett, K. and F. McNeill. (1962). The Great Barrier Reef and Adjacent Isles. Coral Press, Sydney.
4. Limpus, C. J. and B. J. Lyon. (1981). Seabirds breeding on the Swain Reefs, Queensland. *Corella* 5: 101-105.
5. Moverley, J. H. (1985). Winter bird observations for cays in the southern section of the Swain Reefs, Queensland. *Sunbird*. 15: 73-79.

#### Acknowledgements

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T. A. Walker, Department of Environment and Conservation, P.O. Box 5391, Townsville Mail Centre, Qld 4810.

M. E. Jones, Department of Ecosystem Management, University of New England, Armidale, NSW 2351.

F. Savage, Department of Environment and Conservation, P.O. Box 74, Cardwell, Qld 4816.