

SEABIRD ISLANDS

No. 213

East Rock, Great Barrier Reef, Queensland

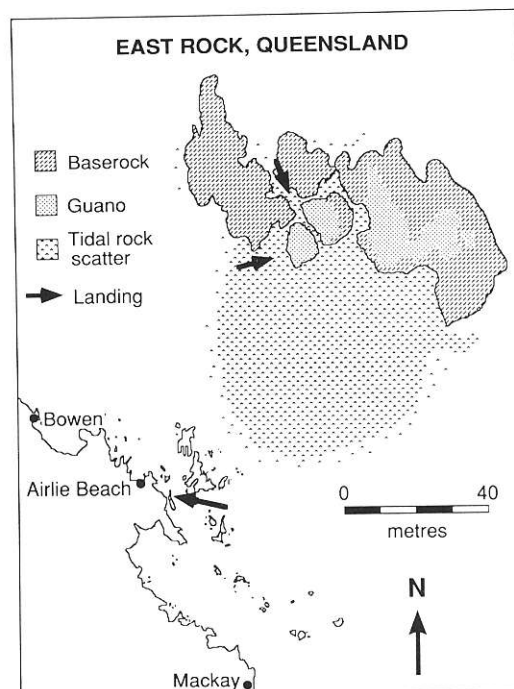
Location: 20°20'S, 148°51'30"E; situated 2.8 kilometres east of the central Queensland coast and 460 m east of Long Island in the Whitsunday Passage.

Status: Crown Land.

Description: Rugged outcrops of rock rising to 10 m, with an area of roughly 0.15 ha above high tide. An extensive intertidal stone and boulder accumulation is present at the southern side of the outcrops. Rock surfaces above wave wash are thickly coated with cormorant guano and support sparse pockets of herbs, grasses and stunted shrubs. The following plant species were identified on most visits: *Sesuvium portulacastrum*, *Portulaca oleracea*, *Enchylaena tomentosa*, *Solanum americanum*, *Amaranthus viridis*, *Achyranthes aspera*, *Cenchrus echinatus*, *Lepturus repens*, *Tephrosia purpurea*, *Ficus platypoda* and *Ficus virens*. In addition *Passiflora foetida*, *Dactyloctenium aegyptium* and *Eleusine indica* were recorded on some visits.

Landing: By dinghy at the western or north-western end depending on the tide height and sea state. Care is required to avoid submerged rocks in the presence of strong tidal currents.

Ornithological History: A census of birds was carried out by T. Walker on 27 December 1985, 12 November 1986, 27 December 1986^{1,2}, 28 August 1987, 10 October 1987, 20 February 1988, 5 July 1988, 15 December 1988, 11 January 1989, 25 December 1989 and 19 July 1990. There do not appear to be any other records for this island in the ornithological literature.



Breeding Seabirds and Status

Phalacrocorax varius Pied Cormorant — The rock is a year-round roosting site for up to 180 birds. Breeding occurs regularly in May–June with as many as 70 nests recorded. Nests are built on rock ledges and on a few stunted bushes on the rock face. Sticks and other nest material presumably are collected from adjacent Long Island. Many chicks died in 1988 from an unknown cause.

Egretta sacra Eastern Reef Egret — Up to six grey coloured birds have been observed. A stick nest in a crevice on the south side of the highest rock is used regularly.



● *East Rock (looking east).*

Photo: T. A. Walker

Larus novaehollandiae Silver Gull — In August 1987 there were 40 gulls, 13 nests with 1–2 eggs, three nests with small chicks, two large runners and 14 empty nests. In July 1988 there were 40 gulls with at least three nests. In July 1990 there were 24 gulls and a nest containing an egg. Nests were mainly at the base of the rocks. Old grass nests and 0–5 gulls were present on other visits.

Sterna sumatrana Black-naped Tern — Three pairs nested each year between November and January on the rock slopes. They were absent at other times. Each pair laid one to two eggs on bare rock.

Sterna bergii Crested Tern — Nesting occurred each year in December with 243, 57 and 10 nests seen in 1985, 1986 and 1988 respectively. Eggs were laid anywhere from the beach to the summits of the rocks or in old cormorant and Osprey *Pandion haliaetus* nests. One pair had an egg and chick unusually early, in August 1987. Birds were present throughout the year in varying numbers.

Factors Affecting Status

The Whitsunday Passage is visited by an increasingly high number of tourists but East Rock is bare and access is difficult so people do not go ashore. The cormorants fly off their nests when boats approach too close. The gull colony is thought to be unnaturally large as a result of gull attraction to the area by a tourist resort less than a kilometre away on Long Island.

Tern and gull nests on the low rock and beach area can be overwashed by storm waves. Storms in December 1988 may have caused desertion and possible relocation of most breeding Crested Terns to White Rock in Shute Harbour.

East Rock has relatively few breeding seabirds but the Pied Cormorant colony is notable in being the largest recorded cormorant colony on a Great Barrier Reef island. East Rock is also the southern-most known inshore nesting site of Black-naped Tern on the east coast; the more southerly Black-naped Tern colonies are on offshore coral cays.

Other Seabirds Recorded

<i>Pelecanus conspicillatus</i>	Australian Pelican (rare)
<i>Anhinga melanogaster</i>	Darter (probably nests)
<i>Haematopus fuliginosus</i>	Sooty Oystercatcher (2)

Bibliography

1. Walker, T. A. (1986). Black-naped Terns *Sterna sumatrana* on the southern Great Barrier Reef, 1985–1986. *Corella* 10: 123–124.
2. Walker, T. A. (1988). Crested Terns *Sterna bergii* on the southern Great Barrier Reef islands, 1985–1986. *Corella* 12: 53–56.

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