

SEABIRD ISLANDS

No. 214

Distant Cay, Great Barrier Reef, Queensland

Location: 21°06'S, 152°29'E; situated at the northern end of the Swain Reefs complex, at the southern end of the Great Barrier Reef. The Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority reef identification code is 21-206. It is about 280 kilometres north-east of Yeppoon, Queensland.

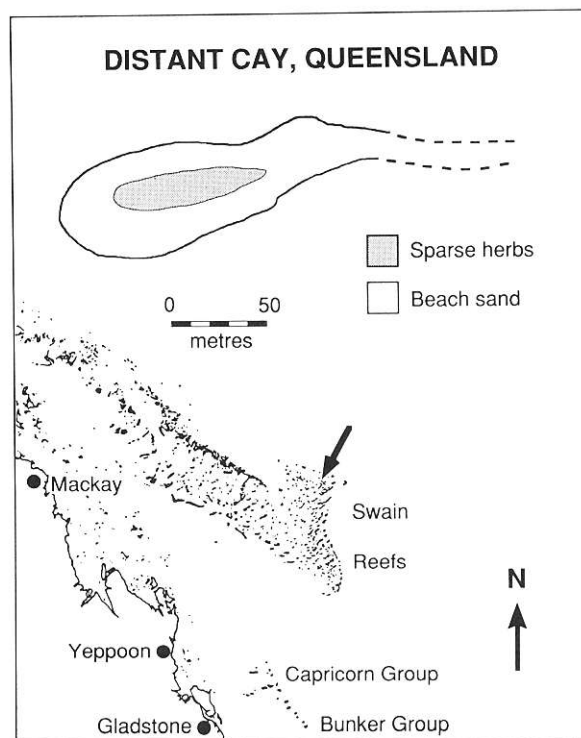
Status: Vacant Crown Land; Queensland Fauna Sanctuary.

Description: 0.25 ha; 100 m × 35 m at the widest (measurements above high water), it is roughly tear-drop shaped with a long sandspit 'tail' pointing eastward. The vegetated area (c 0.1 ha) is 80 m × 18 m. There is a central channelled depression flanked by storm ridges marking heads of beaches. The highest point is about 4 m above the level of the reef platform at the foot of the beaches. The cay lies at the south-western side of a small dumbbell-shaped reef about 1.4 km long with a maximum width of 0.7 km (area roughly 90 ha).

The substrate is of coarse shingle with pieces of coral ranging from particles less than 1 cm to slabs about 30 cm in diameter. The shingle was heaped up into storm ridges separated by shallow gullies. The central part, less than 0.1 ha, had about 15% cover of scattered clumps of *Boerhavia repens*. There were accumulations of guano more than 20 cm below the loose shingle and finely divided humus under the plants, overlain by 0.5 to 1 cm of litter.

Landing: Across the reef flat at the western end.

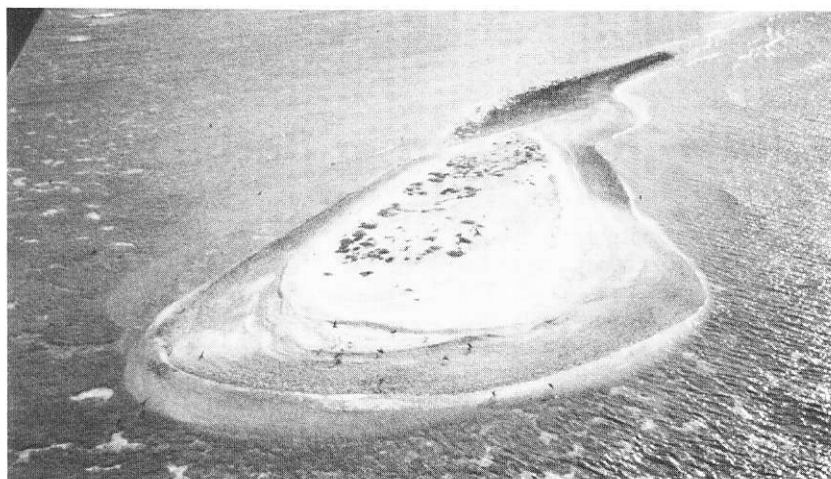
Ornithological History: T. A. Walker¹ flew over the cay on 6 March 1987 and saw Brown and Masked Boobies sitting on the cay, some apparently nesting. There are no previous published records. S. G. Lane, H. Heatwole and others visited the cay for 30 minutes on 24 January 1989 and for one hour on 25 January 1989¹. D. Lee visited for about 25 minutes on 14 April 1989.



Breeding Seabirds and Status

Sula leucogaster Brown Booby — Ten pairs were nesting in January 1989. One bird was incubating two eggs, five downy chicks and four juveniles, still with ample down, were attended, in most cases, by one or two adults.

Sterna sumatrana Black-naped Tern — Five nests were located among coral rubble near the top of the cay, adjacent to patches of *Boerhavia*; four nests contained two eggs and one contained one egg. One downy chick was found hiding under a *Boerhavia* plant. A second, seen moving across the rubble some distance away, was quickly swooped up by a Silver Gull.



- *Distant Cay from the air (looking north-east).*

Photo: T. A. Walker

Anous stolidus Common Noddy — Forty-five were present in April 1989; four eggs and one chick were found (D. Lee, pers. comm.).

Factors Affecting Status

Silver gulls present are predatory on unattended eggs or chicks. The cay is remote and human visitation is likely to be very rare.

Other Seabirds Recorded

<i>Sula dactylatra</i>	Masked Booby
<i>Larus novaehollandiae</i>	Silver Gull
<i>Sterna dougallii</i>	Roseate Tern (one remained among the birds still on the island ¹).
<i>Sterna albifrons</i>	Little Tern

Banding

One visit — 23/24 January 1989.

Sula leucogaster — 1 adult; 5 chicks; 4 juveniles.
Sterna sumatrana — 1 chick.

Bibliography

1. Lane, S. G. (1989). A visit to Distant Cay, Swain Reefs, Great Barrier Reef, Queensland. *Corella* 13(4): 122.

Acknowledgments

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S. G. Lane, Lot 6 Fairview Road, Moonee, via Coffs Harbour, New South Wales 2450.
H. Heatwole, Department of Zoology, University of New England, Armidale, New South Wales 2351.