

## SEABIRD ISLANDS

No. 243

## Hope Islands, Great Barrier Reef, Queensland

**Location:** 15°45'S, 145°27'E; 33 kilometres south-east of Cooktown, Queensland (GBRMPA Reef Codes 15-064 and 15-065).

**Status:** Queensland National Park. Hope Islands were gazetted in 1939 and the waters and reefs surrounding the islands are protected as part of the Cairns Section of the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park.

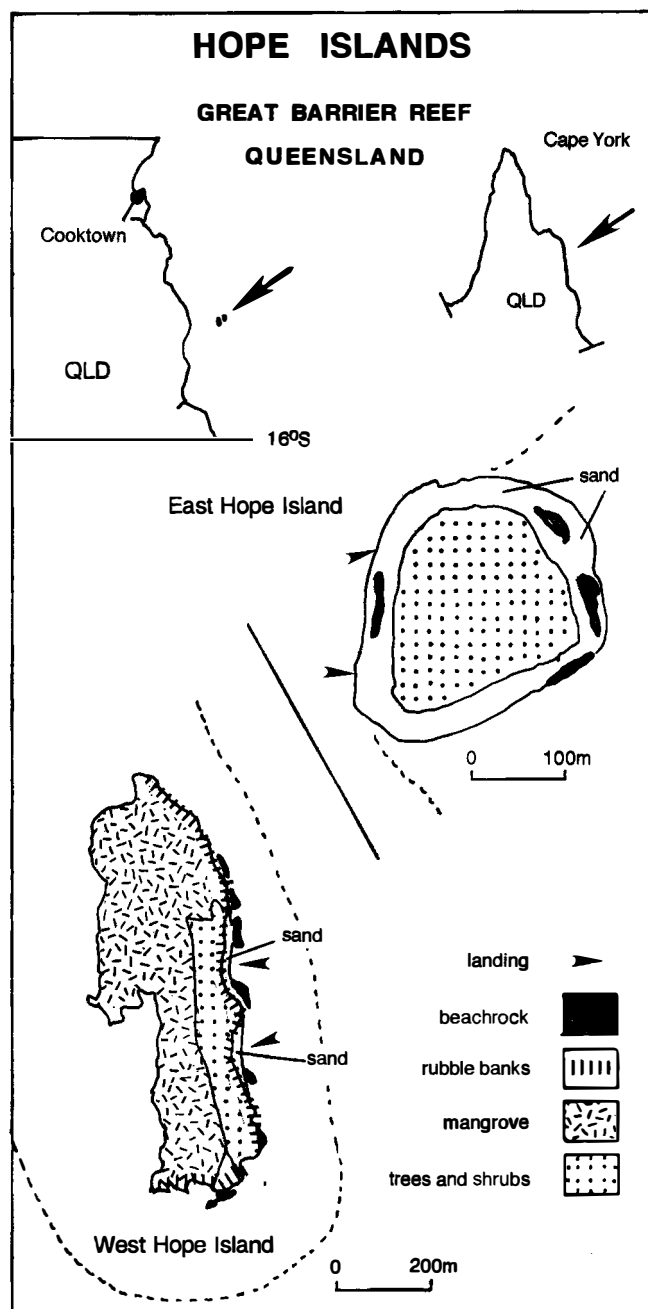
**Description:** The two low wooded cays which comprise the Hope Islands are about two kilometres apart and each has its own reef; these are separated by a deep channel. The larger western cay complex and platform reef is elliptical with the main axis running approximately north-south. Considerable coral rubble banks extend over much of the cay; areas of flat calcareous beach rock lie mainly at the south-eastern end of the cay. A drying reef flat surrounds much of the cay and extends northward for about one kilometre.

The smaller eastern cay is composed of almost all coral sand and lies on a roughly circular platform reef which dries mainly to the south at low tide. A prominent narrow rubble bank about 100 m long, runs north-south and lies to the south of the cay.

**Western Cay:** about 19 ha; 750 m × 250 m; overall, the mangrove forest complex stands about 9 m above high water mark. At least eleven mangrove species occur on the cay, *Rhizophoraceae* being the dominant family. Other minor vegetation comprises trees, shrubs and herbage.

**Eastern Cay:** about 4 ha; 200 m × 200 m; overall, the higher canopy trees are about 12 m above high water mark. Canopy trees on this cay principally of *Terminalia* sp., *Minusops elengi* and *Planchonia* sp.; thickets of *Cordia subcordata* are found on the northern and eastern sections, with scattered *Scaevola sericea*, *Thespesia populnea*, *Caesalpinia bonduc* and *Sophora tomentosa* throughout the interior. Various runners, notably *Ipomoea pes-caprae*, *Canavalia rosea*, *Vigna* sp. and the succulent *Sesuvium portulacastrum* are a feature of the island's periphery.

**Landing:** From a dinghy on to the beach on the western quarter of the eastern cay. From a dinghy on to rubble banks on the eastern side of the western cay. Care should be exercised here navigating among patch coral and wave swell.



**Ornithological History:** The first birds were recorded on the islands by J. MacGillvray<sup>4</sup>, naturalist aboard HMS *Rattlesnake* in July 1848. Le Souef<sup>2,3</sup> was the next naturalist to call at Hope Islands, during October 1893 and again in the spring of 1896. Among the seabirds noted were Australian Pelican *Pelecanus conspicillatus* (suspected breeding), numerous Bridled Terns *Sterna anaethetus* (breeding) and Silver Gulls *Larus novaehollandiae*. There are no other records until J. A. McLean's seven visits to both cays as follows: 21–28 May 1983, 4–7 July 1985, 14–16 August 1986, 28–31 October 1987, 14–15 January 1992, 27 February–2 March 1993 and 24–26 December 1994.

**Breeding Seabirds and Status**

*Pelecanus conspicillatus* Australian Pelican — Le Souef<sup>2</sup> in October 1893 mentioned that 'Pelicans are said to breed on the Hope Islands'. Local breeding of this species occurs during winter.<sup>2</sup> Le Souef mentioned seeing Pelicans at the eastern cay on his 1896<sup>3</sup> visit. If Pelicans had bred there during that winter he surely would have seen plenty of evidence of it. Between 1983 and 1994 no evidence of breeding was noted by McLean.<sup>5</sup> There is no evidence of breeding by Pelicans on Hope Islands in over 100 years, and only 'hearsay' evidence in the 19th century.

*Egretta sacra* Eastern Reef Egret — Regularly seen on both reef flats. Counts at low tide from the western side of western cay in February 1993 were of 150 light and 20 dark morph birds. In December 1994, 109 light and 8 dark morph birds were counted at the eastern cay reef flat. Nests with eggs, chicks and fledgelings were found on both cays in February–March 1993; there were a few fledgelings in May 1983 and two chicks in July 1985.

*Sterna sumatrana* Black-naped Tern — In December 1994, a single flock of 65 adults were at the western cay; three nests (each with two eggs) and a downy chick were on a sand ridge at the edge of vegetation at the eastern side of the western cay. In both October 1987 and January 1992 there were only 1–2 adults present. The birds were absent in summer 1993.



• Eastern Cay, Hope Island from the air.  
 Photo: Qld N.P.W.S, Cairns



• Western Cay, Hope Island from the air.  
 Photo: Qld N.P.W.S, Cairns

*Sterna anaethetus* Bridled Tern — Recorded breeding by Le Souef. McLean recorded the following: Flocks of 55 and 18 adults present on the western and eastern cays respectively, on 24 December 1994. Otherwise only small flocks of up to 10 birds were seen during summer 1993. A small colony of seven nesting birds (six single egg nests and one downy chick) were found at the southern end of the western cay, on or near a low shingle ridge. A single nest with one downy chick was found at the southern end of the eastern cay in December 1994. Nests were found under low shrubs of *Vitex* sp., *Morinda citrifolia* and *Aegiceras corniculatum*, under a dead log, and in the base roots of a *Pandanus* sp.

#### Factors Affecting Status

The lee of the eastern cay provides anchorage for most types of smaller craft. As a result, a moderate level of visitation occurs from charter boats, yachts and small runabouts. The latter, and occasionally larger vessels also, visit the western cay.

Since Le Souef's visits in 1893 and 1896, there have been no records of Australian Pelicans breeding on the islands. Likewise, his mention of numerous Bridled Terns breeding, is now not the case. This is probably due to the increase in human disturbance to both cays, which are located on a main shipping lane. Some illegal shooting of the prolific Pied Imperial Pigeon *Ducula bicolor* also occurs on Hope Islands and no doubt this also disturbs breeding seabirds.

#### Other Seabirds Recorded

<i>Sula leucogaster</i>	Brown Booby
<i>Phalacrocorax melanoleucos</i>	Little Pied Cormorant
<i>Phalacrocorax sulcirostris</i>	Little Black Cormorant
<i>Fregata ariel</i>	Lesser Frigatebird
<i>Haematopus longirostris</i>	Pied Oystercatcher
<i>Haematopus fuliginosus</i>	Sooty Oystercatcher
<i>Larus novaehollandiae</i>	Silver Gull
<i>Sterna bengalensis</i>	Lesser Crested Tern
<i>Sterna bergii</i>	Crested Tern
<i>Sterna hirundo</i>	Common Tern
<i>Sterna albifrons</i>	Little Tern
<i>Anous stolidus</i>	Common Noddy
<i>Anous minutus</i>	Black Noddy

#### Banding

Nil.

#### Bibliography

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2. Le Souef, D. (1894). A Trip to North Queensland. *Vict. Nat.* **11**: 3-31.
3. Le Souef, D. (1897). A Trip to the Bloomfield River District, North Queensland. *Vict. Nat.* **14**: 19-34.
4. MacGillivray, J. (1852). Narrative of the Voyage of HMS Rattlesnake, Vol. 1. (London: Boone.)
5. McLean, J. A. (1996). The birds of the Hope Islands, North Queensland. *Sunbird* **26**(3): 66-75.

Date compiled: March 1998.

Revised: July 1998.

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