

SEABIRD ISLANDS

No. 165

Bylund Cay, Great Barrier Reef, Queensland

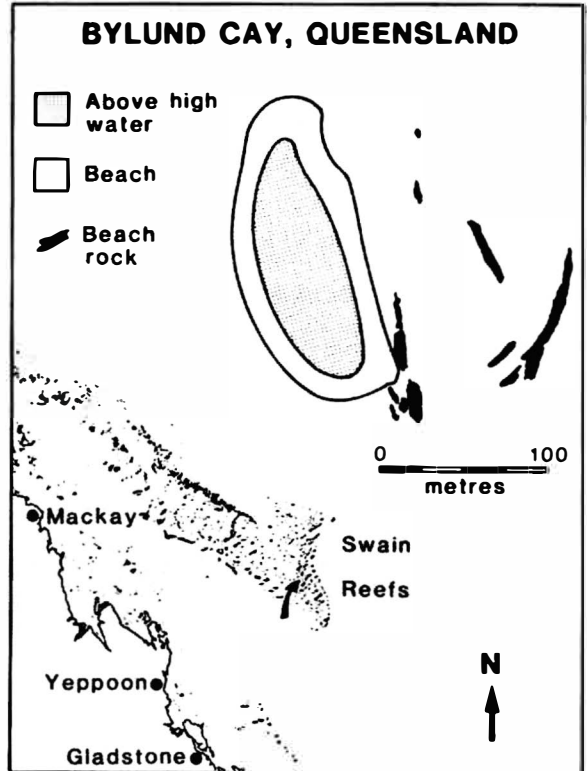
Location: 21°47' S., 152°25' E.; centrally situated in the Swain Reefs complex, at the southern end of the Great Barrier Reef (GBRMPA reef code 21-519). The nearest mainland is about 185 kilometres west-south-west at Perforated Point (Port Clinton) and the nearest town is about 225 kilometres south-west at Yeppoon, Qld.

Status: Vacant Crown Land; Queensland Fauna Sanctuary.

Description: 0.6 ha; 150 m x 50 m, with an elevation of less than 2 m (measurements at high water). This sand cay is sited at the western side of a rounded platform reef of 1.3 km maximum diameter. Extensive beachrock is exposed in areas previously covered by the cay. Changes in the area, position of the cay and vegetation over twenty years are described by Flood and Heatwole¹. Only about 15% of the island (above high water, 1984) still covers an area on the reef that was previously covered in 1964. The cay is vegetated at one end with a few patches of *Thuarea involuta*, *Lepturus repens*, *Boerhavia diffusa* and *Coronopus integrifolius*.

Landing: Across the reef flat on the north-western side.

Ornithological History: Gillett and McNeill² described and named the cay on 31 October 1960 at the same time recording the presence of two species of breeding and three species of non-breeding seabirds. Limpus and Lyon³ visited on 5-6 November 1976 and censused eight species of seabirds of which three were nesting. Moverley⁴ described winter bird populations in July 1983 and July 1984 including four species of breeding and two species of non-breeding seabirds. T. A. Walker and/or M. E. Jones sur-



veyed the birds on 22 January 1985, 19 July 1985, 19 February 1986 and 6 April 1986.

Breeding Seabirds and Status

Sula dactylatra Masked Booby — Breeding occurs throughout the year and was recorded on all visits. Numbers of breeding pairs were less than ten on all occasions except in April 1986 when twenty-nine nests were present.

Sula leucogaster Brown Booby — Breeding occurs throughout the year and was recorded on

all visits except for those in November 1976³ and January 1985. A few pairs were nesting in July visits with a maximum of thirty-nine pairs in February 1986.

Larus novaehollandiae Silver Gull — Gulls were recorded nesting in July 1983, July 1985 (4 pairs) and April 1986 (2 pairs). Nests were hidden in the half dozen tufts of grass present. From two to twelve birds were present on other visits.

Sterna dougallii Roseate Tern — Two nests with eggs and about 200 birds were reported in November 1976³. There are no other breeding reports although large numbers were present on the beach on three occasions. There were 335 in January 1985, about 1500 in February 1986 and about 2000 in April 1986. A very small number of these birds were in full breeding plumage.

Sterna sumatrana Black-naped Tern — About 200 nests with eggs and 500 adults birds were reported in November 1976³. Resting birds were present on most other visits but were not breeding. A large group of almost 1000 was present in April 1986.

Sterna bergii Crested Tern — A small nesting colony was reported in July 1983⁴. Birds were present on most other visits but were not breeding. The highest number of birds was about 600 in January 1985.

Factors Affecting Status

The surface is less than 2 m above high water and is reported to be over-washed by seawater during storms¹. Gulls predate unattended eggs of other species and this is facilitated by human disturbance of nesting birds. There is a low but increasing amount of island visitation by people from fishing and charter vessels. Nesting birds also suffer interference from nesting sea turtles.

Other Species Recorded

<i>Sterna hirundo</i>	Common Tern ¹
<i>Sterna albirostris</i>	Little Tern
<i>Sterna bengalensis</i>	Lesser Crested Tern
<i>Anous stolidus</i>	Common Noddy
<i>Anous minutus</i>	Black Noddy



• Masked and Brown Boobies nesting on Bylund Cay.

Photo: T. A. Walker

Banding

Commenced January 1985.

Sula dactylatra—4 adults, 3 juveniles, 10 chicks.

Sula leucogaster—17 adults, 1 juvenile, 3 chicks.

Bibliography

1. Flood, P. G. and H. Heatwole (in press). Coral cay instability and species-turnover of plants at Swain Reefs, southern Great Barrier Reef, Australia. *J. Coastal Res.*
2. Gillett, K. and F. McNeill (1962). The Great Barrier Reef and Adjacent Isles. Coral Press, Sydney.
3. Limpus, C. J. and B. J. Lyon (1981). Seabirds breeding on the Swain Reefs, Queensland. *Corella* 5: 101-105.
4. 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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