

## SEABIRD ISLANDS

No. 171

## Kusamet Islands, Torres Strait, Queensland

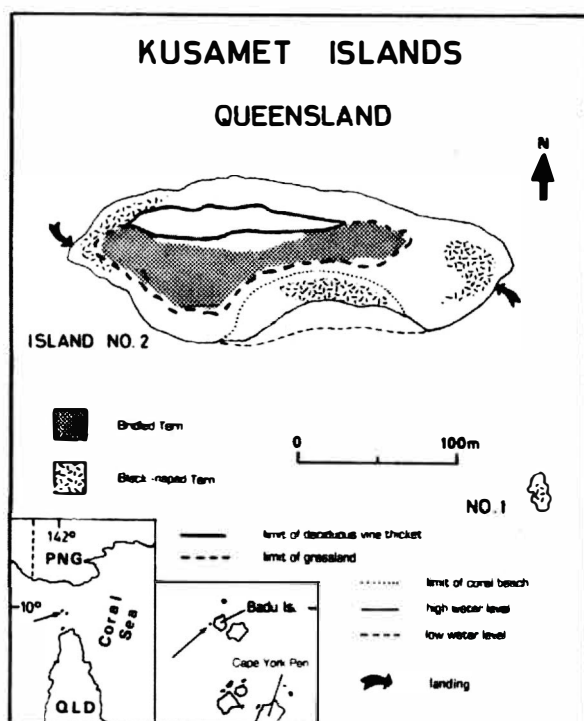
**Location:** 10°11'S., 142°05'E.; 77 kilometres north-west of Cape York, Qld.

**Status:** Deed of Grant in Trust to Badu Islanders.

**Description:** The Kusamet Islands are two granite outcrops adjacent to Badu Island. Island No. 1 is 0.2 ha; it is 10 m by 20 m, rising to 10 m, and consists of a pile of bare boulders; there is no vegetation. Island No. 2 is 2.8 ha; it is 270 m by 80 m. Apart from a shallow bay with a beach of coarse sand and dead coral, the shore is of rock slabs which slope steeply up to a narrow plateau 20 m above sea level. On the northern side grows depauperate deciduous vine thicket dominated by *Bombax ceiba* which gives way to dense grass, principally *Ischaemum australe*, on the plateau. In the cracks and gullies grow *Ocimum sanctum*, *Evolvulus alsinoides* and the fern *Drynaria quercifolia*. The western end and the southern slopes are largely bare of vegetation. At the eastern end of the plateau are two coconut palms *Cocos nucifera*.

**Landing:** Island No. 1 is approachable only in calm weather. Landing is usually possible onto the rocks at the western end of Island No. 2 from April to November or the eastern end from December to March; a coral reef prevents landing in the bay.

**Ornithological History:** There are no recorded visits until those by S. T. Garnett on 10 August, 23 September and 21 October 1979.



## Breeding Seabirds and Status

*Sterna sumatrana* Black-naped Tern — In September 1979, two pairs had eggs on Island No. 1. On Island No. 2 an estimated 60 pairs were nesting on areas of bare rock at the western and

eastern ends of the island and among dead coral on the beach. Eggs were present on both islands in September and October, laid on either flat rock or among dead coral. Nests were depressions among the dead coral; most eggs were laid on bare substrate. Egg size (mm;  $n=38$ )  $39.4 \pm 1.9 \times 28.3 \pm 0.7$ . Clutch size: 5 nests contained 1 egg, 14 nests 2 eggs, 1 nest 3 eggs. Chicks were present only in October. Measurements of adults (mm; 23 Sept. 79;  $n=6$ ): exposed culmen;  $37.8 \pm 9.4$ ; wing  $212 \pm 8.3$ ; tarsus  $20.5 \pm 9.2$ .

*Sterna anaethetus* Bridled Tern — About 300 were found nesting in September and October 1979, under grass tussocks and in rock clefts up to 1.5 m deep, in most areas of Island No. 2, but avoiding open rock and deciduous vine thicket. Egg size (mm;  $n=31$ )  $47.0 \pm 1.5 \times 33.5 \pm 0.8$ . Clutch size: 31 nests each had one egg. Chicks were found only on the October visit. Measurements of adults (mm; 23 Sept. 79;  $n=44$ ): exposed culmen:  $42.0 \pm 1.8$ ; wing:  $265 \pm 8.6$ ; tarsus  $23.5 \pm 1.6$ .

#### Factors Affecting Status

The islands are visited annually during September by Torres Strait Islanders and all eggs found are taken for food. There are stories that containers half the size of a bath were once filled with eggs and taken away but such numbers are no longer available. The grass on the island is often burnt during October or November which is also likely to destroy nests or chicks. Despite human predation there were many downy and feathered young at the time of the final visit (21 October 1979).

#### Other Seabirds Recorded

<i>Fregata ariel</i>	Least Frigatebird
<i>Larus novaehollandiae</i>	Silver Gull
<i>Sterna bergii</i>	Crested Tern



• Kusamet Island No. 2 (looking west) from the eastern end of the plateau.

#### Banding

*Sterna sumatrana*—6 adults (23 Sept. 79).

*Sterna anaethetus*—44 adults (23 Sept. 79).

#### Acknowledgements

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