

## SEABIRD ISLANDS

No. 180

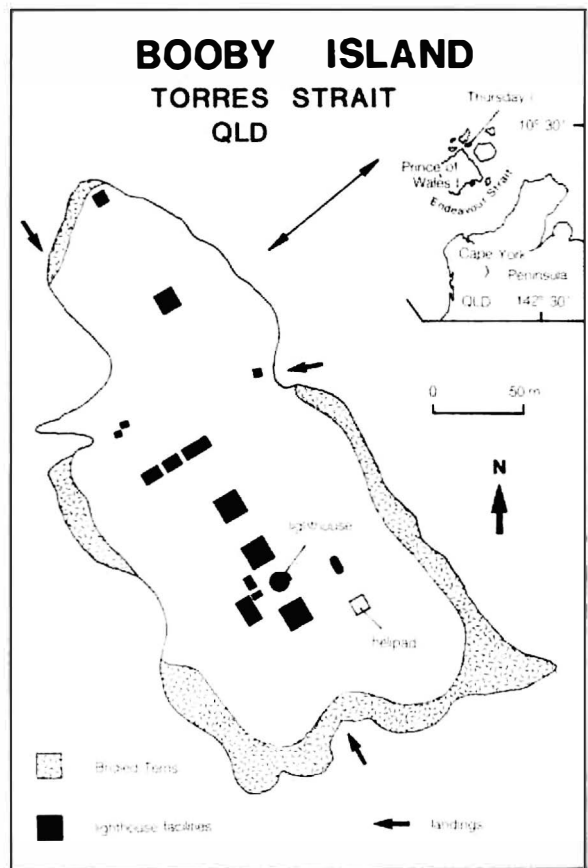
## Booby Island, Torres Strait, Queensland

**Location:** 10°36'S., 141°55'E.; 33 kilometres west of Thursday Island, Qld.

**Status:** Light station, property of Commonwealth Department of Transport and Communications.

**Description:** 6 ha; about 375 m by 160 m; a largely bare, rocky outcrop of mixed igneous and sedimentary rock<sup>5,12</sup> rising steeply to a cliff 10-15 m above sea level. The island is almost divided by a central gulch in which figs *Ficus virens*, Coconut Palms *Cocos nucifera*, Beach Almonds *Terminalia catappa* and *Capparis sepiaria* are common. *Guettarda speciosa*, *Morinda citrifolia* and *Scaevola sericea* grow near the water at one end of the gulch and at the entrance of some of the numerous caves around the periphery of the island. The plateau has a sparse covering of common tropical weeds and grasses including *Boerhavia tetrandra*, *Vinca major*, *Tridax procumbens*, *Chloris virgata*, *Thuarea involucreta*, *Eleusine indica*, *Cenchrus echinatus*, *Canavalia maritima*, *Portulacca samoensis*, *Passiflora foetida* and *Ipomoea pes-caprae*. The physiognomy of the island has changed within the last century, beaches reported by early visitors<sup>7,11</sup> are no longer present and early photographs suggest that the vegetation cover is increasing. A lighthouse, radio beacon and associated housing occupy much of the top of the island; figs, palms and almonds are now established near the houses.

**Landing:** Landing is usually possible onto rocks at the north-western end of the island or at a boat ramp on the eastern shore from April to November; from December to March landing is



usually possible only at the southern end. A helipad is present in front of the lighthouse.

**Ornithological History:** Cook and Bligh<sup>1</sup> independently named the island Booby Island because of the large numbers of breeding Brown

Boobies. Later visitors also noticed boobies<sup>6,7,11</sup> and Moseley<sup>8</sup>, who visited on 9 September 1874 also recorded large numbers of Bridled Terns. Information on birds at Booby Island has been provided sporadically by lightkeepers<sup>1</sup> and recent ornithological accounts of Booby Island have included references to seabirds<sup>3,4,10</sup> while a House of Representatives report<sup>2</sup> has mentioned (incorrectly) the number of seabirds breeding there. R. D. W. Draffan visited the Island in March 1979 while S. T. Garnett spent time there in February 1983, August 1984, November 1986 and February 1987, and lightkeepers R. Hindmarsh and A. Williams, stationed at Booby Island, have been banding actively since February 1987. An Australian National Parks and Wildlife Service consultancy was conducted at the Island by A. Taplin and associates during March/April and August/September 1987.

### Breeding Seabirds and Status

*Sula leucogaster* Brown Booby — These birds were present seasonally until at least 1874<sup>8</sup> but were no longer breeding by 1923<sup>9</sup>. They still roost on the island during periods of bad weather or when the Carpentaria Light Ship, used as a roost site, 100 km to the west, is removed.

*Sterna sumatrana* Black-naped Tern — This tern was reported breeding in September/October 1975<sup>1</sup> but there are no recent records.

*Sterna anaethetus* Bridled Tern — At least 50 breeding pairs nest on rock ledges or in rock clefts up to 1.5 m deep around the edges of the island. Egg size (mm; n=6)  $45.7 \pm 2.1 \times 33.2 \pm 1.1$  Clutch size: six nests had one egg; all 22 chicks were alone. These terns return to the island in August. An adult caught on 2 September 1984 had an egg in the abdomen. The same adult was caught on 27 November 1986 feeding an almost-fledged chick. In December chicks ranged from fully fledged to downy but no eggs were present. The last unfledged chick was caught on 24 January 1988. Presence of Bridled Terns is unusual after January; those banded in February 1987 were sheltering from a storm and were significantly lighter ( $108 \pm 9.7$  g; n=27) than breeding birds caught in September 1984 ( $157 \pm 8.3$  g; n=4) or



• Booby Island from the air (looking north-east)

December 1986 ( $129 \pm 8.0$  g; n=15). Measurements of adults (mm; n=42); bill and head  $80.8 \pm 3.4$ ; wing  $267 \pm 7.2$ ; tarsus  $21.8 \pm 1.0$ .

*Anous minutus* Black Noddy — These birds were reported breeding in September/October 1975<sup>1</sup> but there are no recent records. Up to 50 were roosting in trees in August 1984 and up to 25 in August/September 1987; they may have bred later in 1984 but certainly did not do so in 1986 or 1987.

### Factors Affecting Status

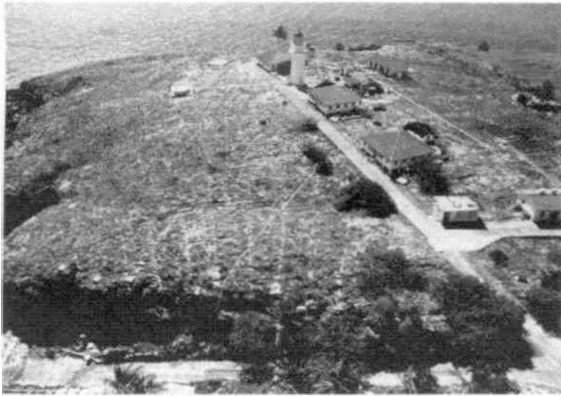
The presence of lightkeepers ensures that the breeding Bridled Terns are not predated by humans as they are elsewhere in Torres Strait. Disturbance will vary with the activity of the lightkeepers and visiting ornithologists but is unlikely to increase greatly. The number of seabirds striking the tower is minimal.

### OTHER VERTEBRATES

The Green Tree Frog *Litoria caerulea* and a gecko, probably *Gehyra nana*, have been introduced. The skink *Cryptoblepharus litoria* is probably indigenous. Little Red Flying Foxes *Pteropus scapulatus* occasionally visit the firs.

### Other Seabirds Recorded

<i>Puffinus huttoni</i>	Hutton's Shearwater
<i>Pelecanus conspicillatus</i>	Australian Pelican
<i>Sula sula</i>	Red-footed Booby



● View from the top of the Radar Beacon.

Photos: S. T. Garnett.

<i>Phalacrocorax sulcirostris</i>	Little Black Cormorant
<i>Phalacrocorax melanoleucos</i>	Little Pied Cormorant
<i>Fregata minor</i>	Great Frigatebird
<i>Fregata ariel</i>	Least Frigatebird
<i>Egretta sacra</i>	Eastern Reef Egret
<i>Haematopus longirostris</i>	Pied Oystercatcher
<i>Stercorarius pomarinus</i>	Pomarine Jaeger
<i>Larus novaehollandiae</i>	Silver Gull
<i>Sterna hirundo</i>	Common Tern
<i>Sterna dougallii</i>	Roseate Tern
<i>Sterna sumatrana</i>	Black-naped Tern
<i>Sterna fuscata</i>	Sooty Tern
<i>Sterna albifrons</i>	Little Tern
<i>Sterna bergii</i>	Crested Tern
<i>Sterna bengalensis</i>	Lesser Crested Tern
<i>Anous stolidus</i>	Common Noddy

### Banding

Period December 1978 to February 1988.

*Sula leucogaster* — 12 adults, 8 immatures.

*Sterna hirundo* — 8 adults.

*Sterna dougallii* — 13 adults.

*Sterna sumatrana* — 2 adults.

*Sterna anaethetus* — 93 adults, 54 juveniles; one, juvenile when banded, was recaptured at banding place nearly 14 months later.

*Sterna bergii* — 4 adults, 1 immature.

*Sterna bengalensis* — 3 adults.

*Anous stolidus* — 7 adults, 1 juvenile.

*Anous minutus* — 38 adults, 8 juveniles.

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