

SEABIRD ISLANDS

No. 190

Cholmondeley Island, Great Barrier Reef, Queensland

Location: 11°23'S., 143°04'E.; 20 kilometres east from Cape False Oxford Ness and 65 kilometres north-north-west from Cape Grenville, Queensland.

Status: Queensland National Park (declared April 1989).

Description: 0.5 ha; 173 m long by 43 m wide; height about 2 m. A small, sparsely-vegetated sand cay on the northern end of one of the inner reefs of the far northern Great Barrier Reef. There is some intertidal coralline beachrock at the eastern end. The cay is composed of coral sand and reef debris. The upper surface is sand sparsely covered with the grass *Spinifex hirsuta*, and occasional vines *Ipomea pes-caprae* and the herb *Boerhavia tetrandra*.

Landing: By dinghy, onto the northern or western portions of the beach, from a boat anchored at the reef edge, in the lee of the cay and reef. Local knowledge is necessary for vessels navigating in the reefs of this area.

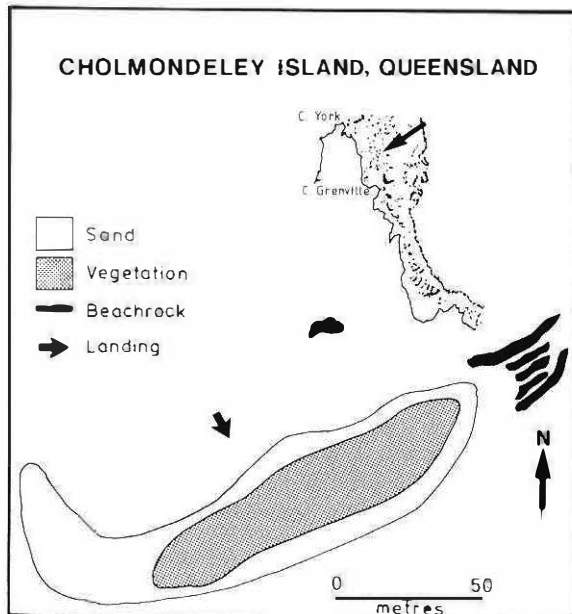
Ornithological History: There are no published accounts of this cay. Queensland National Parks and Wildlife Service Officers have made three visits, one by B. R. King with G. M. Dunnett for two hours on 2 August 1982, one by A. Taplin (for B. R. King) for two hours on 9 December 1985, and one by J. Hicks and A. Oldroyd for one hour on 30 March 1986. Other Queensland N.P.W.S. officers recorded seabirds on 3 December 1987 and 17 August 1988.

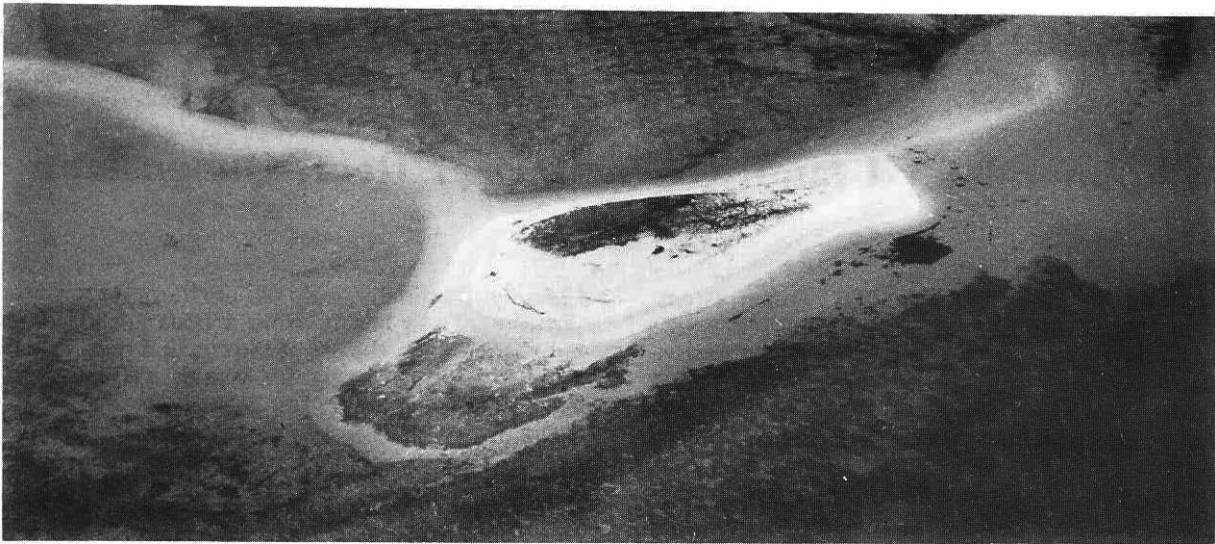
Breeding Seabirds and Status

Sterna dougallii Roseate Tern — One breeding record, in August 1982 when no live birds were present, but the surface of the cay was covered with recently-dead chicks, some partly fledged. A total of 831 carcasses were counted. In March 1986 there were over 600 adults present, but none breeding.

Sterna bergii Crested Tern — Breeding in December 1985 (590 nests with eggs and 15 runners) and in December 1987 (55 nests with eggs). In both instances the colonies were mixed with *S. bengalensis*. Nests were scrapes in the sand, placed close together (0.5 m apart), in dense colonies.

Sterna bengalensis Lesser Crested Tern — Breeding in December of 1985 and 1987, in mixed colonies with *S. bergii*. In 1985 there were 162 pairs of adults present, 6 with runners and the rest incubating eggs, and three pairs with eggs in 1987. The nesting is identical to *S. bergii*.





• Cholmondeley Island (looking south-east).

Photo: Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority.

Factors Affecting Status

The cay is rarely visited, so human disturbance is considered rare. Hawksbill Turtles *Eretmochelys imbricata* nest in small numbers all year and may disturb some nesting terns. The cause of the massive nesting failure recorded in 1982 was attributed to the combined effects of starvation and exposure during a period of rough weather that preceded the visit. Queensland N.P.W.S. officers now operate occasional visits to the area.

OTHER VERTEBRATES

Estuarine Crocodile *Crocodylus porosus*.

Other Seabirds Recorded

<i>Pelecanus conspicillatus</i>	Australian Pelican
<i>Sula leucogaster</i>	Brown Booby
<i>Fregata ariel</i>	Least Frigatebird
<i>Egretta sacra</i>	Eastern Reef Egret
<i>Larus novaehollandiae</i>	Silver Gull
<i>Sterna sumatrana</i>	Black-naped Tern
<i>Sterna albifrons</i>	Little Tern
<i>Anous stolidus</i>	Common Noddy

Banding

Nil.

Acknowledgements

Support was provided by the Raine Island Corporation and the Queensland National Parks and Wildlife Service. A. Taplin, G. M. Dunnett and others assisted in field operations. F. Muir, J. Cornelius and N. Hedgcock made records available from their December 1987 and July 1988 visits.

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