

SEABIRD ISLANDS

No. 192

Saunders Island, Great Barrier Reef, Queensland

Location: 11°42'S., 143°11'E.; 30 kilometres north from Cape Grenville, Queensland.

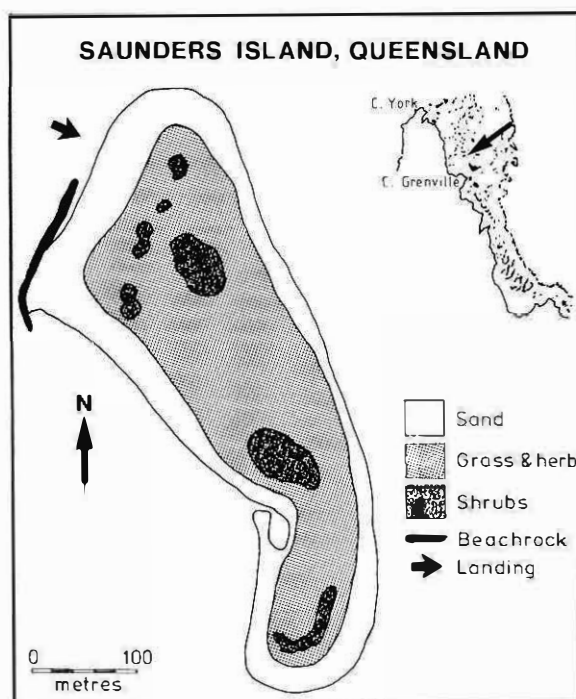
Status: Queensland National Park (declared April 1989).

Description: 9.4 ha; 590 m long by 270 m wide and up to 3 m high. A vegetated sand cay on the north-west end of a small coral reef, one of the inner reefs of the far northern Great Barrier Reef. The cay is elongate, with a broad sandspit running out from the southern end and a small area of intertidal coralline beachrock along part of the western side. It is composed of coral sand and reef debris. Most of the surface is covered with a grass/herb flat, interspersed with a number of emergent shrubs and trees. There are a few introduced coconut trees *Cocos nucifera*.

Plants recorded include grasses *Lepturus repens* and *Spinifex hirsuta*, herbs *Boerhavia* sp. and *Sesuvium portulacastrum*, vines *Tribulus cistoides* and *Ipomea pes-caprae*, and shrubs *Abutilon indicum*, *Achyranthes aspera*, *Argusia* sp., *Suriana* sp., *Scaevola* sp., and the tree *Casuarina equisetifolia*.

Landing: By dinghy, onto the north-western beach, from a vessel anchored in the lee of the cay and reef. Local knowledge is necessary for navigating among the reefs of this area.

Ornithological History: D. L. Stoddart¹ visited the cay in October 1973 with the Royal Society and Universities of Queensland Great Barrier Reef Expedition. He mapped the cay, and recorded vegetation and birds (unpublished). C. J. Limpus and P. Ogilvie landed for two hours on 5 March 1975 to map the cay and recorded turtles and seabirds. R. C. Buckley recorded vegetation and birds in November 1978 (unpublished). B. R. King landed for three hours on 22 June 1981 and for two hours on 3 August 1982, to map the cay and record vegetation and seabirds. Queensland



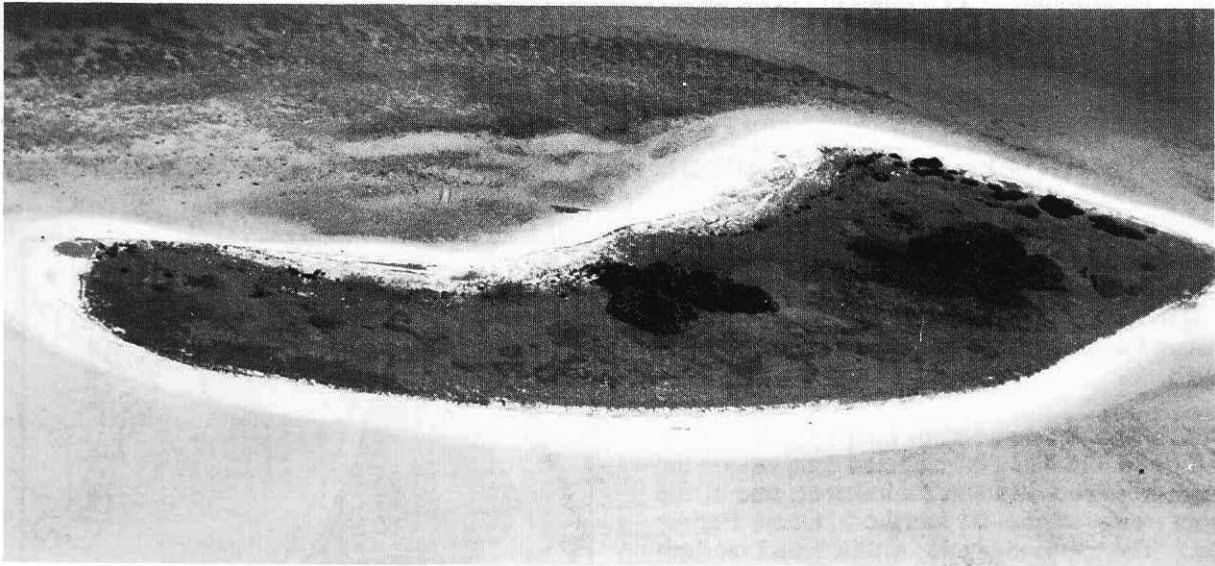
National Parks and Wildlife Service Officers J. Cornelius and F. Muir recorded seabirds on 4 April 1986 and 15 July 1988.

Breeding Seabirds and Status

Egretta sacra Eastern Reef Egret — Breeding in summer. Old nests were present in tall shrubs on all visits, and about 20 nests were active in March 1975.

Larus novaehollandiae Silver Gull — Present on all visits. Breeding in August 1982, when 30 adults with an uncounted number of runners, hidden in the vegetation, were recorded. On other occasions, up to 70 adults have been recorded.

Sterna dougallii Roscate Tern — Present on all visits. Breeding in June 1981, when 50-100 adults were on the strand and in the vegetation.



● *Saunders Island from the air (looking west).*

Photo: Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority.

Sterna bergii Crested Tern — Present on all visits and breeding in mid-year. In June 1981, 150 adults with 13 runners and over 50 dead young were recorded. In August 1982 there were 24 adults and eight recently-dead chicks, but no live young, present. In April 1986, J. Cornelius recorded 200 adults, one egg, 155 runners and 75 juveniles.

Factors Affecting Status

There are no records of human interference, but the cay is occasionally visited by fishing vessels. The nesting activities of small numbers of Green Turtles *Chelonia mydas* in summer and Hawksbill Turtles *Eretmochelys imbricata* all year round may disturb some ground-nesting terns. A major cause of mortality is believed to be the combined effects of starvation and exposure caused by prolonged periods of rough weather and cyclones.

OTHER VERTEBRATES

Estuarine Crocodile *Crocodylus porosus*.

Other Seabirds Recorded

<i>Fregata ariel</i>	Least Frigatebird
<i>Sterna fuscata</i>	Sooty Tern
<i>Sterna anaethetus</i>	Bridled Tern
<i>Anous stolidus</i>	Common Noddy

Banding

Nil.

Bibliography

1. Stoddart, D. L. (1978). The Great Barrier Reef and the Great Barrier Reef Expedition 1973. *Phil. Trans. R. Soc. London. A.* 291: 5-22.

Acknowledgements

Support was provided by the Raine Island Corporation and the Queensland National Parks and Wildlife Service. J. Cornelius and F. Muir made their records available.

Date Compiled: 28 March 1986.

Revised: November 1988.

B. R. King, CI- Queensland Museum, Flinders Street, Townsville Qld 4810.

C. J. Limpus, Queensland National Parks and Wildlife Service, Northern Regional Centre, Pallarenda, Qld 4810.