

## SEABIRD ISLANDS

No. 153

## Stainer Island, Great Barrier Reef, Queensland

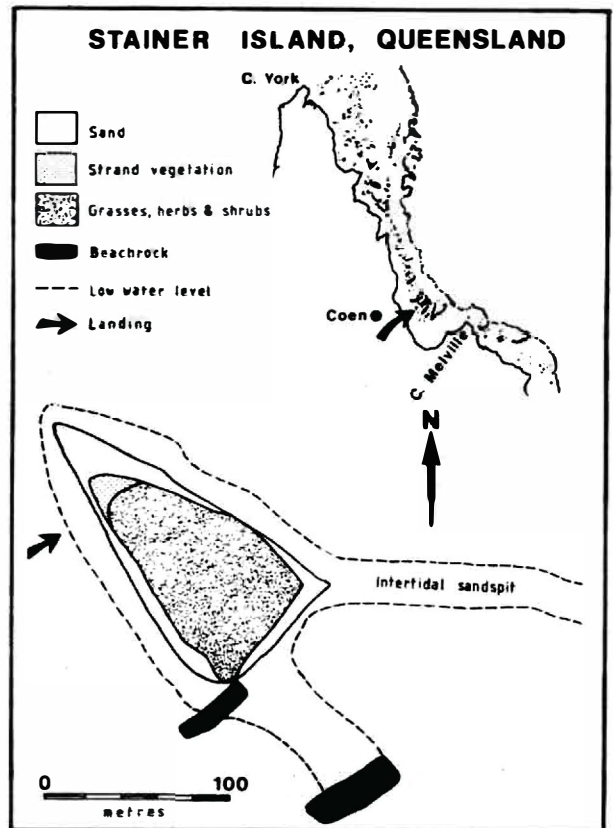
**Location:** 13° 57' S., 143° 50' E.; on the north-western end of Iris Reef, five kilometres south from Pelican Island and 75 kilometres west-north-west from Cape Melville. Cape York Peninsula, Qld.

**Status:** Vacant Crown Land: Queensland Fauna Sanctuary.

**Description:** 1.0 ha; 16 m x 80 m, a sand cay on a small inner coral reef of the far northern Great Barrier Reef. The cay is elongated and triangular in shape, with intertidal sandspits at two apices. One sandspit is elongated and narrow, the other is short and terminating at two lines of beachrock lying at right angles to the cay's axis. The cay itself has no adjacent beachrock and rises to about five metres above high water level. It is composed of coral sand and has two bones of vegetation. The outer strand zone, above high water level, contains sand-binding species including *Salsola kali* and *Ipomea pes-capre*. The central portion of the cay has a low mat of grasses, herbs and shrubs. *Lepturus repens* and other grass species are present. A number of low *Sesbania cannabina* shrubs are also present and two *Casuarina* spp. up to 3 m high, one of which contains a large nest of an Osprey *Pandion haliaetus* or White-bellied Sea-Eagle *Haliaeetus leucogaster*.

**Landing:** By dinghy onto the beach from a vessel anchored in the lee of the cay at the reef edge.

**Ornithological History:** On 24 June, 1821, P. P. King<sup>1</sup> recorded passing "a large sandbank to the south" of Pelican Island where he observed a flock of 200-300 young pelicans. This was almost certainly Stainer Island, the only other cay nearby being Wharton Reef Cay, a further 22 km away to the south-east. In October, 1958, J.



Warham<sup>2</sup> passed the cay and recorded many pelicans sitting, "and may have been on nests". R. C. Buckley visited Stainer Island in June and December of 1979, recording vegetation and seabirds. A group with B. R. King visited the cay for two hours on 11 July, 1984, to map the cay and observe the seabirds. A group with D. Reimer landed for three hours on 12 November, 1984, to collect vegetation and record seabirds.

### Breeding Seabirds and Status

*Pelecanus conspicillatus* Australian Pelican — Nesting in June, 1979 (R. C. Buckley, pers. comm.). In July, 1984, there were two adults and a creche of nine mostly-feathered juveniles; two colonies, one of 20 and the other of about 30 adults with large chicks, were present in the grassy area. In November, 1984, there was a small colony containing five nests each with one egg.

*Larus novaehollandiae* Silver Gull — Breeding in mid-year. In July, 1984, there were about 30 adults with a number of runner chicks in the vegetation.

*Hydroprogne caspia* Caspian Tern — Breeding in isolated pairs in mid-year and possibly all year. In July, 1984, two pairs were nesting in the strand vegetation of the southern end. In November, 1984, a pair was present and defending a site but no egg or chick could be found.

*Sterna anaethetus* Bridled Tern — Breeding in November, 1984. A number of pairs (at least 20) were present throughout the vegetated area. Nests were scrapes in the sand, well concealed under the cover of overhanging grass. All nests found contained one egg. No attempt was made to locate and count all nests.

*Sterna bergii* Crested Tern — Breeding all year. In December, 1979 a colony contained 12 nests with eggs. In July, 1984, there was a colony of at least 250 adults situated in the vegetation of the centre of the island. Over 100 nests with eggs were estimated and 15-20 runners were seen. In November, 1984, over 100 nests were located in the same area, each with one egg.

*Sterna bengalensis* Lesser Crested Tern — Breeding in December, 1979, when a colony, estimated at 200-300 nests with eggs, was present (R. C. Buckley, pers. comm.).

### Factors Affecting Status

Silver Gulls predate some eggs and young chicks. Turtles (possibly Hawksbill *Eretmochelys imbricata*) nest on the cay in small numbers in



• Part of the beach and vegetation on Stainer Island.

summer and possibly all year and may disturb or destroy some nests. Human visitors are probably infrequent as the cay is not a favoured anchorage, but when visits occur they would cause disturbance to ground-nesting seabirds.

### Other Seabirds Recorded

<i>Sula leucogaster</i>	Brown Booby
<i>Phalacrocorax varius</i>	Pied Cormorant
<i>Egretta sacra</i>	Eastern Reef Egret

### Banding

Nil.

### Bibliography

1. King, P. P. (1827). Narrative of a survey of the intertropical and western coasts of Australia, 1818-1822 (two volumes, 451 and 673 pages). J. Murray. London.
2. Warham, J. (1962), 'Bird islands within the Great Barrier Reef and Torres Strait', *Emu* 62: 99-111.

### Acknowledgements

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