

## SEABIRD ISLANDS

No. 156

## Sandbank No. 1, Great Barrier Reef, Queensland

**Location:** 14° 12' S., 144° 53' E.; 40 kilometres almost due east from Cape Melville, Cape York Peninsula, Qld and on the southern side of Waterwitch Passage.

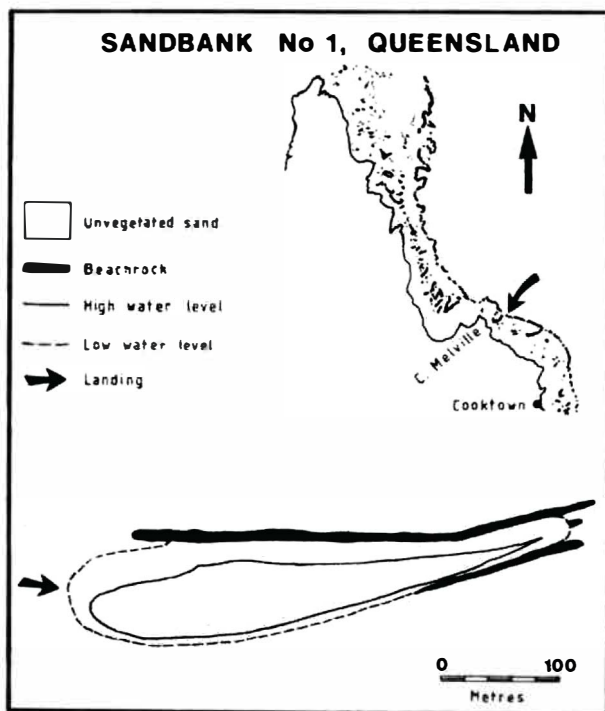
**Status:** Vacant Crown Land: Fauna Sanctuary.

**Other Name:** Waterwitch Cay<sup>1</sup>.

**Description:** 1.0 ha; 360 m x 60 m, a sand cay of the far northern outer Great Barrier Reef. The cay is elongated and tapers eastwards, roughly triangular in shape. A line of intertidal coral-line beachrock runs along the southern side at the eastern end and another along most of the northern side. The cay is unvegetated and the sand surface is pitted with old sea turtle diggings, scattered with pumice, driftwood timber and other flotsam.

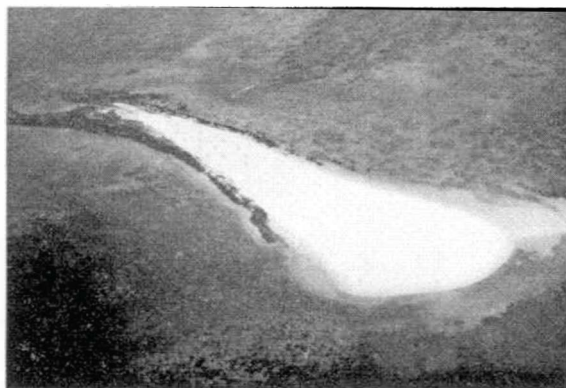
**Landing:** By dinghy onto the beach at the western end, from an anchorage in the lee of the cay and reef (in south-easterly conditions).

**Ornithological History:** No published records of birds exist for this cay. In October, 1973, the cay was visited and mapped by the Royal Society and Queensland Universities Expeditions<sup>1</sup>. The only other recorded visits are those by Queensland National Parks and Wildlife Service officers, B. R. King and A. Taplin for two hours on 23 July, 1983, and a team with D. Reimer for an hour on 15 November, 1984. The cay was mapped and birds noted on both occasions.

**Breeding Seabirds and Status**

*Sula dactylatra* Masked Booby — A pair was incubating in October, 1984 (J. Durso, pers. comm.) and had a downy chick in November, 1984.

*Sula leucogaster* Brown Booby — Breeds for most of the year with the greatest numbers in



• Sandbank No. 1 (looking south-east)

Photo: D. Hopley

summer. Nests are built on the sand, over the whole surface of the cay. No vegetation is available for nest construction so the birds use any available drifted material including sticks, dried marine algae, bones of birds and fish, pieces of plastic and sundry other material including such things as a light bulb and a rubber thong. In July, 1983, there were 104 nests, of which 25 had one or two eggs and the rest were empty; no chicks were present. In November, 1984, there were about 500 pairs breeding; nests contained eggs or young at all stages to large downy chicks.

#### Factors Affecting Status

Human disturbance on this remote island is infrequent but occasional visits can cause losses of chicks and eggs due to exposure to sun or

gull predation. Spring high tides and storm waves sometimes may cover the surface of the cay with resultant loss of nests. In summer (October to April) Green Turtles *Chelonia mydas* crawl and dig nest pits all over the cay; this causes some losses of seabird nests.

#### Other Seabirds Recorded

<i>Fregata ariel</i>	Least Frigatebird
<i>Phaethon rubricauda</i>	Red-tailed Tropicbird (1 on 23-7-84)
<i>Larus novaehollandiae</i>	Silver Gull
<i>Sterna dougallii</i>	Roseate Tern
<i>Sterna sumatrana</i>	Black-naped Tern
<i>Sterna bergii</i>	Crested Tern
<i>Sterna bengalensis</i>	Lesser Crested Tern
<i>Anous stolidus</i>	Common Noddy

#### Banding

Nil.

#### Bibliography

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

#### Acknowledgements

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