

SEABIRD ISLANDS

No. 157

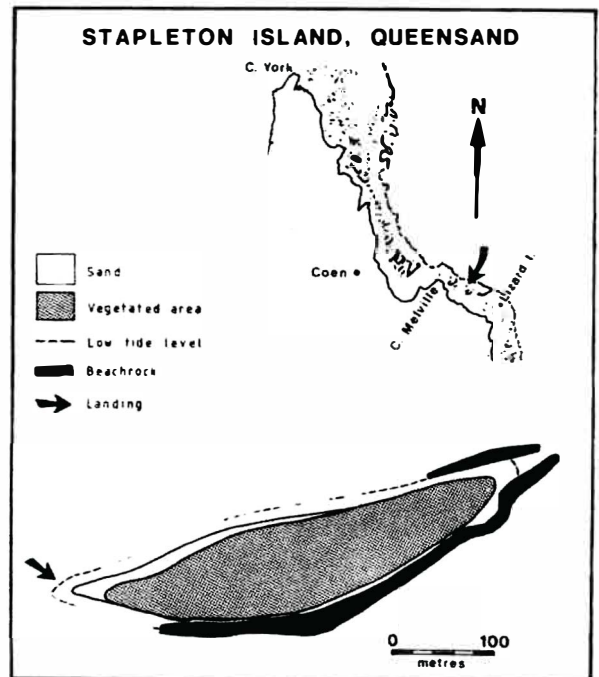
Stapleton Island, Great Barrier Reef, Queensland

Location: 14° 20' S., 144° 52' E.: 40 kilometres east-south-east from Cape Melville, Cape York Peninsula, Queensland and 75 kilometres west-north-west from Lizard Island.

Status: Vacant Crown Land: Fauna Sanctuary.

Description: 3.7 ha: an elongated, narrow cay about 500 m x 100 m at its widest point. The cay is composed of coral sand and reef rubble which rises to form a central sand ridge up to five metres above sea level. A line of coralline beachrock runs below high tide level along the southern side and the eastern end of the northern side. At the eastern end there are three parallel shelves of old beachrock between the two outer shelves. From each end of the cay a short, narrow sandspit runs across the reef flat. The outer fringe of the cay from the spring high tide level to the base of the ridge slope has a strand community containing herbs *Sesuvium portulacastrum*, *Portulaca oleracea*, a vine *Ipomea pes-caprae*, low shrubs *Boerhavia repens* and *Salsola kali*, and several grasses including *Lepturus repens* and *Dactyloctenium aegyptiacum*. The sand ridge bears a different community, a low mat of *Lepturus* grass, the vine *Tribulus cistoides*, and shrubs *Abutilon indicum* and *Achyranthes aspera*. Occasionally drifted Coconuts *Cocos nucifera* germinate on the strand but none has survived.

Landing: By dinghy onto the beach at the western or northern parts. Anchorage is obtained at the edge of the reef in the lee of the cay.



Ornithological History: Bassett Hull¹ referred to Stapleton Island as a place for summer sea-bird breeding. Queensland National Parks and Wildlife officers have made four visits: D. Seton from 16:00 hrs overnight on 26 July, 1980, B. R. King and A. Taplin for three hours on 22 July, 1983, King for three hours on 10 July,



• Part of the Sooty Tern colony on Stapleton Island.

1984 and D. Reimer for two hours on 9 November, 1984. On these occasions the cay was mapped, vegetation collected and seabirds recorded.

Breeding Seabirds and Status

Pelecanus conspicillatus Australian Pelican — Breeds in the summer months, October to April or later. The colony is small with usually less than 30 nests and is located towards the more exposed eastern end of the cay. In July, 1983, there was one large, downy chick on the cay with a pair of adults. In November, 1983, a colony was reported by a charter vessel. In November, 1984, the colony numbered 20 + pairs nesting.

Sula leucogaster Brown Booby — Breeds over most of the cay's surface in the summer. The colony numbered 1 000 + pairs nesting in November, 1984.

Sterna sumatrana Black-naped Tern — Breeding in July, 1984, with 48 nests on the sand at the eastern end of the cay containing eggs or chicks.

Sterna fuscata Sooty Tern — Breeds in winter from about May or June to September. The birds nest on the ground in large numbers over much of the cay, wherever bare, or relatively bare sand is available. Up to 5 000 birds were estimated in the July, 1980, breeding season.

Sterna bergii Crested Tern — Breeding in winter but likely to breed at any time of the year. In

July, 1980 there were over 200 adults present with a large number of runners. In July, 1984 there were about 50 adults with 20 juveniles and one runner.

Anous stolidus Common Noddy — Breeding in mid-year. Nest are built on grass tussocks and rarely on other vegetation, throughout the vegetated area. About 1 000 nests were present in July of 1980, 1983 and 1984 with young at all stages.

Factors Affecting Status

At present the main source of disturbance to breeding seabirds is the occasional visits by fishermen and tourists. The island is remote from the main tourist townships of north Queensland. In July, 1983, the remains of a deserted pelican colony contained 12 unhatched eggs. Silver Gulls and Buff-banded rails *Rallus philippensis* predate unattended eggs and small chicks. In summer small numbers of Green Turtles *Chelonia mydas* nest on the island, destroying some bird nests.

Other Seabirds Recorded

<i>Fregata minor</i>	Great Frigate bird
<i>Fregata ariel</i>	Least Frigatebird
<i>Egretta sacra</i>	Eastern Reef Egret
<i>Larus novaehollandiae</i>	Silver Gull
<i>Sterna anaethetus</i>	Bridled Tern
<i>Anous minutus</i>	Black Noddy

Banding

Nil.

Bibliography

1. Hull, A. F. Bassett (1925), 'A naturalist in north Queensland', *Aust. Zoologist* 4: 9-16.

Acknowledgements

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