

## SEABIRD ISLANDS

No. 130

## Sandbank No. 8, Great Barrier Reef, Queensland

**Location:** 13°22'S., 143°58'E.; 35 km east of Cape Sidmouth, Qld. and 7 km north-north-west of Sandbank No. 7.

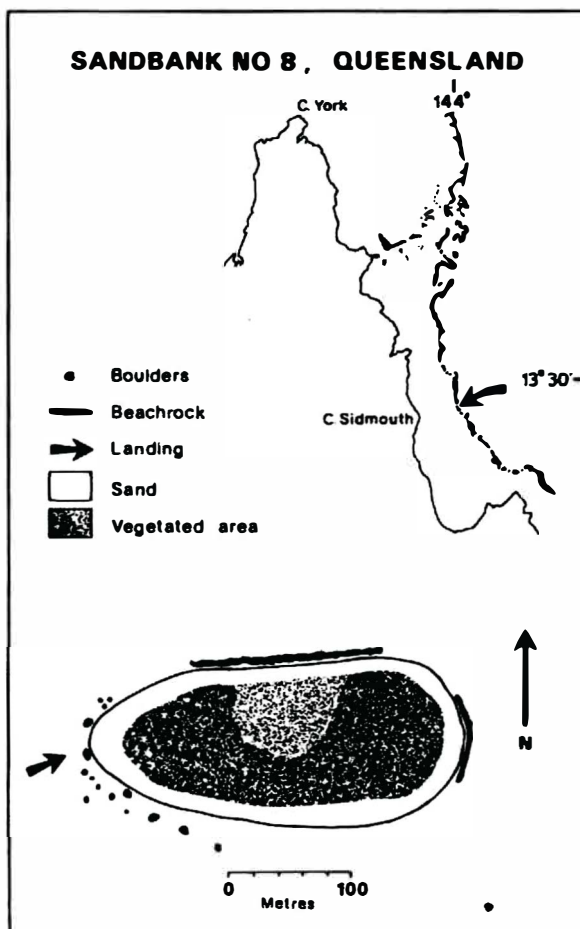
**Status:** Vacant Crown Land; Fauna Sanctuary.

**Other Name:** No. 8 Sandbank.

**Description:** 3.2 ha; some 300 m long by 120 m wide and rising to 1.36 m. A coral cay of the outer barrier reefs, it may be classified as a "grass cay" according to Hindwood *et al.*<sup>2</sup> and a "vegetated cay" according to Fairbridge<sup>1</sup>. The cay is composed entirely of uncemented, coarse coral sand. There is some intertidal coralline beachrock and a number of conspicuous coralline boulders lying on the reef flat to the west and south of the cay. Above high water, low mixed vegetation provides variable cover, nowhere higher than 0.5 m, over most of it. One species of grass and five dicotyledonous plants occur. The vegetation consists mostly of the grass *Lepturus repens* with shrubs *Achyranthes aspera* and *Boerhavia diffusa*, and the herb *Tribulus cistoides*. Creepers *Ipomea pes-caprae* occasionally occur towards the edge of the vegetated area. The herb *Portulaca oleracea* is present in any open areas of vegetation and, in a fairly pure stand, interspersed with sand in a sparsely-vegetated area in the central part of the cay. All of the cay, but mainly the vegetated area, is used for nesting.

**Landing:** Onto the beach on the south-western quarter, where a calm anchorage is available in the lee of the cay and reef. Landings are not recommended during rough weather because of the isolation of the area and the presence of numerous coral reefs in the vicinity. Local knowledge of the area is essential.

**Ornithological History:** From fishermen's reports J. Warham<sup>3</sup> recorded No. 8 Sandbank as an important breeding station for oceanic birds and as a possible locality for the Herald Petrel *Pterodroma arminjoniana* on the Great Barrier Reef.



The cay was visited by C. J. Limpus for the afternoon and night of 29 November 1976, by B. R. King for three hours on 10 December 1979 and by a group with D. H. C. Seton for the afternoon, night and morning of 5-6 June 1980. Visits were made by B. R. King in June and December of 1981, and in July and December 1982. The cay was mapped, vegetation surveyed, and birds observed and banded on these occasions.



• Part of the beach and vegetated area, with *Lepturus* grass in the foreground and mostly Common Noddies overhead.

#### Breeding Seabirds and Status

*Sula leucogaster* Brown Booby — Breeding occurs throughout the year with the greatest number of nests in the summer months. The maximum number of nests recorded ranged from 56 in June to 1 080 in November. Nests are built on the sand among clumps of vegetation.

*Sterna fuscata* Sooty Tern — Breeds in mid-year. At other times there may be only a few or thousands of birds present. The number of nests recorded in June and July range from about 1 000 to over 10 000. At night thousands of birds roost on the cay.

*Sterna anaethetus* Bridled Tern — Breeding in variable numbers during most visits. Nests are difficult to find and count because they are usually concealed under the shelter of the vegetation; generally there are more nests present in summer. In November 1976 there were an estimated 100 nests and some 500 roosting birds.

*Sterna bergii* Crested Tern — Recorded breeding during most visits with the greatest numbers in summer (up to 70 nests in December 1981). Breeding is in closely-packed colonies at the eastern end of the cay, not far above high water mark and in a sparsely-vegetated area.

*Sterna bengalensis* Lesser Crested Tern — Two nests were present in the midst of 70 Crested Tern nests in December 1981.

*Anous stolidus* Common Noddy — Breeding in the winter months when up to 4 000 nests have

been recorded (June 1980). In November and December visits only roosting birds were present in much smaller numbers (up to 500 estimated roosting in December 1979). Nests are built on clumps of vegetation, mostly on tussocks of *Lepturus* grass and lined with chips of bleached coral and other material.

#### Factors Affecting Status

Erosion and accretion of sand by wave action could alter the position and size of the cay and hence the area available for nesting each breeding season. Excavation of nesting cavities by Green Turtles *Chelonia mydas* during the period October to April occurs all over the cay, though mostly at the edges; this could adversely affect the success of some ground-nesting seabirds. Nesting birds are occasionally disturbed by aeroplane over-flights and the few human visitors. Silver Gulls predate some unattended eggs and chicks.

#### Other Seabirds Recorded

<i>Fregata ariel</i>	Least Frigatebird
<i>Larus novaehollandiae</i>	Silver Gull
<i>Sterna sumatrana</i>	Black-naped Tern

#### Banding

Period 10 Dec. 79 to Dec. 82.

*Sula leucogaster* — 15 adults, 13 juveniles and 143 chicks banded; five recoveries, all from Papua New Guinea (Gulf of New Guinea, Woodlark Island and New Britain) up to 1 200 km distant.

#### Bibliography

1. Fairbridge, R. W. (1950), 'Recent and Pleistocene coral reefs of Australia', *J. Geol.* 58: 330-401.
2. Hindwood, K. A., K. Keith and D. L. Serventy (1963), 'Birds of the south-west Coral Sea', *Tech. Pap. Div. Wildl. Res. CSIRO, Aust.* No. 3 (44pp.).
3. Warham, J. (1959), 'The Trinidad Petrel, *Pterodroma arminjoniana*, a new bird for Australia', *Emu* 59: 154-158.

#### Acknowledgements

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