

SEABIRD ISLANDS

No. 131

Sandbank No. 7, Great Barrier Reef, Queensland

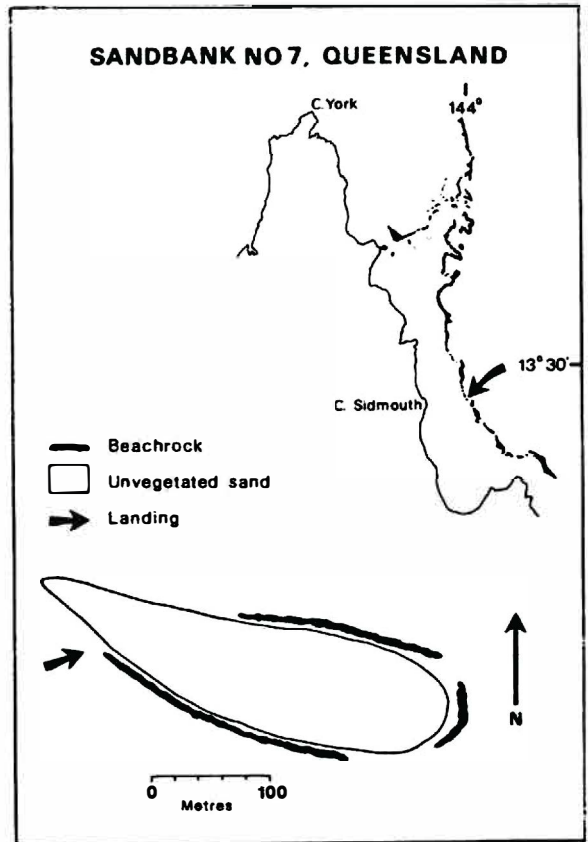
Location: 13°26'S., 143°58'E.; about 37 km east of Cape Sidmouth, Qld. and 7 km south-south-east of Sandbank No. 8.

Status: Vacant Crown Land; Fauna Sanctuary.

Other Name: No. 7 Sandbank.

Description: 2.2 ha; some 350 m long by 90 m wide and rising to 0.76 m. A low, elongate coral cay of the outer barrier reef, situated at the north-western end of an unnamed reef on the northern side of First Three Mile Opening. It may be classified as a "sand cay" according to Hindwood *et al.*² and as an "unvegetated sand cay" according to Fairbridge¹. The cay is composed entirely of uncemented, coarse coral sand. There is intertidal coralline beachrock along the northern, southern and eastern sides. It has no permanent vegetation but a germinating coconut *Cocos nucifera* was present in June 1980 but did not survive to the next visit. Much of the cay's surface would be submerged by the highest tides and storm waves.

Landing: Onto the beach from the western end, where a calm weather anchorage is available. Approaches and landings should not be attempted in rough weather or without local knowledge of the area because of its isolated location and presence of numerous coral reefs.



Ornithological History: There is no previous record in literature. The cay was visited on 29 November 1976 by C. J. Limpus, on 5 June 1980 by D. H. C. Seton, and by B. R. King on 10 December 1979, 4 June 1981 and 10 July 1982. The period of visits ranged from three hours to overnight. The cay was mapped on the 1980, 1981 and 1982 visits, and seabirds were observed on all occasions.

Breeding Seabirds and Status

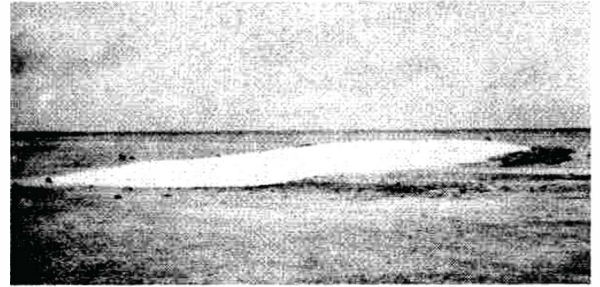
Sula leucogaster Brown Booby — Breeds throughout the year in small numbers. There was no great variation in the number of nests between summer and winter; they ranged from 20 to 47 in June and from 39 to 49 in November and December. The nests, depressions in the bare sand with pieces of beach-washed material placed around them, were scattered over the whole surface of the cay. On each visit the nests contained young at all stages.

Sterna sumatrana Black-naped Tern — In June 1981 a colony of about 150 nests was located at the High Water Spring level on the southern beach. Nests contained one or two eggs each, placed directly on the sand. No breeding was recorded on the other visits.

Sterna bengalensis Lesser Crested Tern — A summer breeder with nesting recorded at the eastern end of the cay in November 1976 and December 1979. There were 339 nests, each with an egg, in 1976. In 1979 the colony contained 232 nests, each with an egg, and seven "scrapes". The nests were closely spaced, about 0.5 m apart, on the sand which in the nesting area was heavily encrusted with guano.

Factors Affecting Status

The Green Turtle *Chelonia mydas* nests over the entire surface of the cay with the resultant disturbance and nest losses to ground-nesting seabirds from October to April. Erosion and accretion of sand by wind and wave action has considerably altered the shape and size of the cay since November 1976. This might affect the success of seabird nesting. Storm waves, coupled with high spring tides, might at times wash over the whole surface of the cay. Occasional overflights by aeroplanes briefly disturb nesting seabirds as do occasional visits by people from boats. The tropical sun caused the death by exposure



• Sandbank No. 7.

of six naked Brown Booby chicks in December 1979 during 30-45 minutes of temporary desertion by disturbed parent. Silver Gulls predate unattended eggs and chicks.

Other Seabirds Recorded

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|------------------------------|-------------------|
| <i>Fregata ariel</i> | Least Frigatebird |
| <i>Larus novaehollandiae</i> | Silver Gull |
| <i>Sterna dougallii</i> | Roseate Tern |
| <i>Sterna fuscata</i> | Sooty Tern |
| <i>Sterna bergii</i> | Crested Tern |
| <i>Anous stolidus</i> | Common Noddy |

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. Serverty (1963), 'Birds of the south-west Coral Sea', *Tech. Pap. Div. Wildl. Res. CSIRO, Aust.* No. 3 (44pp.).

Banding

Sula leucogaster — 45 (33 adults, 6 juveniles, 6 chicks) June, July 1981.

Acknowledgements

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