

## SEABIRD ISLANDS

No. 230

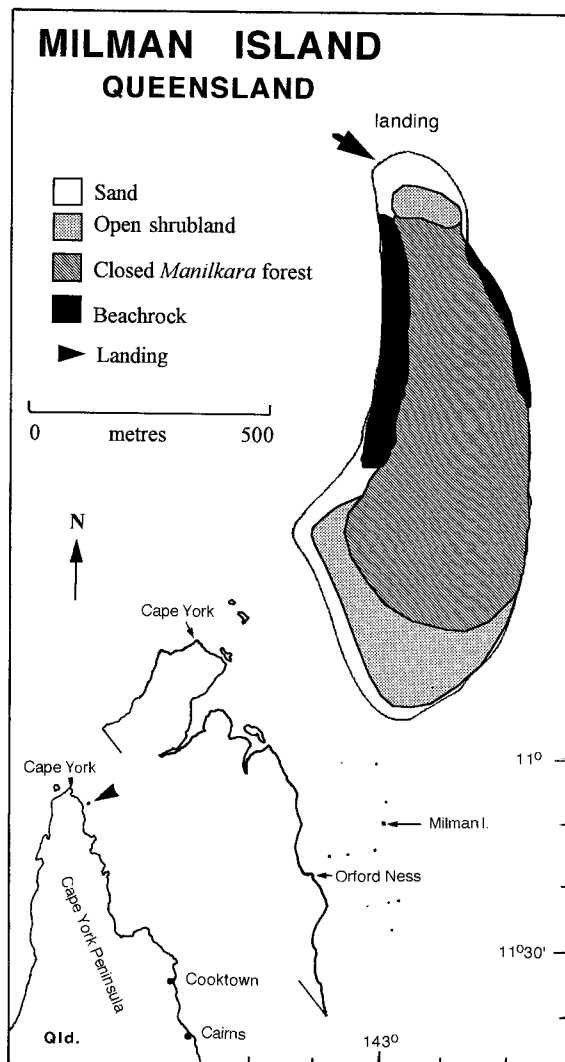
## Milman Island, Great Barrier Reef, Queensland

**Location:** 11°10.3'S, 143°0.8'E, Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority Reef Code 11-007; about 112 km south-east from Thursday Island, Torres Strait, 45 km north-east from Orford Ness, and approximately 28 km east of the mainland<sup>2</sup>.

**Status:** National Park, Marine Park "B" Zone.

**Description:** 22.7 ha, 2 396 m in circumference and 5 m high. A densely wooded sand cay located on the north-western end of the same reef as Aplin Islet<sup>1</sup>. There is beach rock along most of the western side of the cay and scattered outcrops along the northern end of the eastern side<sup>3</sup> but the remainder of the shoreline is sand. A mobile sand spit at the northern end of the island moves from a predominantly northeasterly orientation depending on the prevailing winds. The majority of the island is vegetated with a closed forest (10–12 m) dominated by *Manilkara kauki*, *Erythrina vespertilio* and *Terminalia muelleri*. This forest extends to the edge of the vegetated area around most of the island, although the littoral fringe contains dense areas of *Premna serratifolia*, *Guetarda speciosa* and *Pemphis acidula*. The sand spit is not vegetated with low grasses and herbs as on many other coral cays.

**Landing:** Access to the beach is from the north-west corner of the island where the edge of the cay meets the outer edge of the reef at all tide heights<sup>3</sup>. Large, jagged, reef blocks and coral bommies surround the northern end of the island and are covered at high tide. During low tide, the reef flat completely drains and the island is inaccessible except by direct approach on to the northern beach in winter months and by way of a sand spit on the north-western corner in summer months.



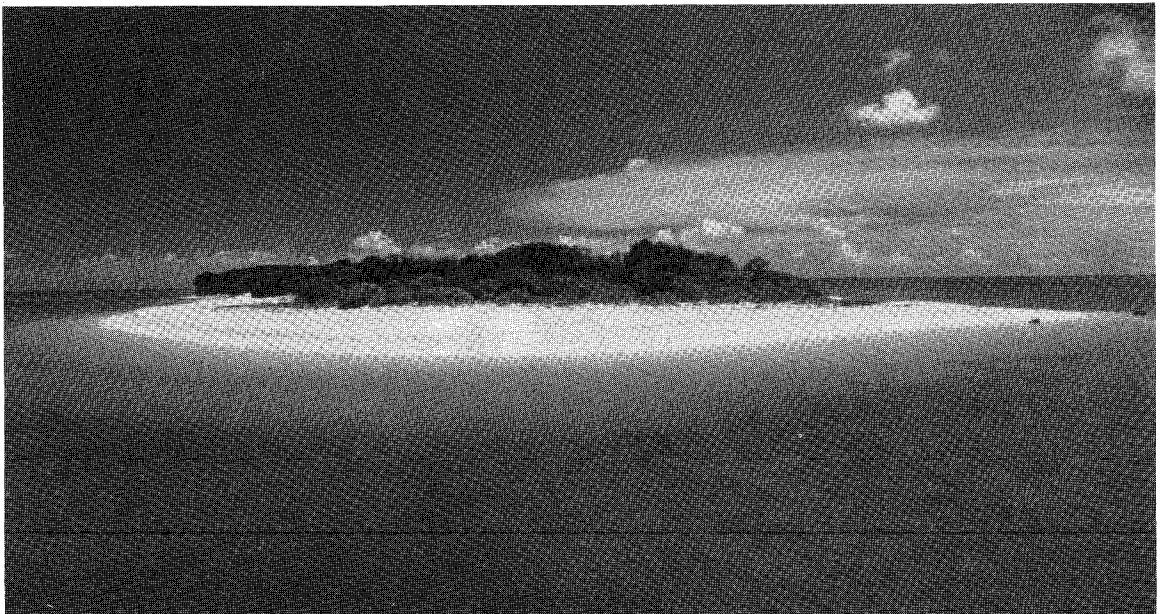
**Ornithological History:** B. R. King recorded seabirds on the island on 7 December 1985 for four hours. The following Queensland National Parks and Wildlife (QNPWS) officers have also recorded seabirds on the island: J. Cornelius on 4 December 1987 and 18 July 1988, J. Hicks on 14 December 1988, F. Muir on 3 December 1989, J. MacFarlane on 10 June 1990 and 19 June 1991 and J. Alder 12 December 1991. As part of ongoing sea turtle studies on the island, M. Mather, J. Miller, J. Haselmayer and K. Loop recorded seabirds on the following dates: 11 January–25 March 1991 (Mather), 3–18 February 1992 (Miller), 12 February–28 March 1993 (Haselmayer), and 14 January–23 March 1994 and 25 November 1994–14 February 1995 (Loop)<sup>4</sup>. M. Card recorded observations in June 1994.

The island is now being visited regularly by Queensland Department of Environment (QDE) officers to monitor nesting sea turtle populations. Bird observations are made on each trip.

### Breeding Seabirds and Status

*Haematopus ostralegus* Pied Oystercatcher — One pair observed in June 1994. Nest was a shallow depression in the sand under a low, overhanging *Manilkara kauki* tree. Two eggs were counted.

*Sterna sumatrana* Black-naped Tern — An estimated 130 were seen on 7 December 1985; 30 nests were counted, 25 with downy chicks and five with eggs. Also observed nesting on a large sand spit on the north-western edge of the island on 25 November 1994. Forty nests containing a total of 57 eggs were counted; 16 of the nests contained two eggs. Hatching occurred from 24–30 December 1994. Eighteen fluffy chicks were counted on 30 December 1994; 15 fledglings were observed three weeks later. Recorded as non-breeding on six other occasions.



• *Milman Island (looking south-west).*

Photo: Queensland Department of Environment

### Factors Affecting Status

Human disturbance to nesting birds is low, although people from pleasure crafts and trawlers do land on the island occasionally. Over-flights by aircraft are few and may affect nesting and roosting seabirds if the planes are too low. Long-term field studies focused on the nesting biology of sea turtles (Loop *et al.* 1995) have a low impact on nesting birds because the primary human activity occurs on the beach at night and typically away from areas used by the birds. Nesting by Hawksbill *Eretmochelys imbricata*, Green *Chelonia mydas* and Flatback *Natator depressus*, Sea Turtles does not disturb roosting or ground nesting birds; however, some Hawksbill and Green Turtles emerging to nest during December 1994 and January 1995 were turned back by aggressive swooping and pecking by Black-naped Terns protecting their eggs and chicks. Amethyst Pythons *Morelia amethystina*, may predate eggs and/or chicks of ground nesting birds, although consumption has not been observed. The stomach of a 1.2 m Estuarine Crocodile *Crocodylus porosus*, found dead on the beach on 4 February 1992 contained tern feathers.

### Other Seabirds Recorded

<i>Sula leucogaster</i>	Brown Booby (dead in forest)
<i>Pelecanus conspicillatus</i>	Australian Pelican
<i>Fregata minor</i>	Great Frigatebird
<i>Fregata ariel</i>	Lesser Frigatebird
<i>Egretta sacra</i>	Eastern Reef Egret
<i>Haematopus fuliginosus</i>	Sooty Oystercatcher
<i>Larus novaehollandiae</i>	Silver Gull
<i>Sterna bengalensis</i>	Lesser Crested Tern (in breeding plummage)
<i>Sterna bergii</i>	Crested Tern (in breeding plummage)
<i>Sterna dougalli</i>	Roseate Tern
<i>Sterna hirundo</i>	Common Tern
<i>Sterna albifrons</i>	Little Tern
<i>Sterna anaethetus</i>	Bridled Tern
<i>Sterna fuscata</i>	Sooty Tern
<i>Anous minutus</i>	Black Noddy

### Banding

Nil.

### Acknowledgments

Far Northern Regional Office of QDE made available their database of surveys of Milman Island. Volunteers assisted with bird observations while conducting sea turtle research on Milman Island as part of the Queensland Turtle Research Program. U.S. Army Corps of Engineers provided a grant to Dr. André M. Landry Jr. of Texas A&M University — Galveston, which assisted K. A. L. with the turtle research. All this help is gratefully acknowledged.

### Bibliography

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2. Australia Pilot. (1973). Australia Pilot vol. III. 6th ed. Hydrographer of the Navy. (Somerset: England).
3. Loop, K. A., Miller, J. D. and Limpus, C. J. (1995). Nesting by the hawksbill turtle (*Eretmochelys imbricata*) on Milman Island, Great Barrier Reef, Australia. *Wildl. Res.* 22: 241–52.
4. Loop, K. A., Miller, J. D., Card, M. A., Mather, M. and Haselmayer, J. Birds of Milman Island *Corella* (in press).

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