

SEABIRD ISLANDS

No. 233

Creek Rock, Great Barrier Reef, Queensland

Location: 23°12'S, 150°48'E; situated 1 km off the coast of Central Queensland, about 10 km south-east of Yeppoon. The Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority reef identification code is 23–013.

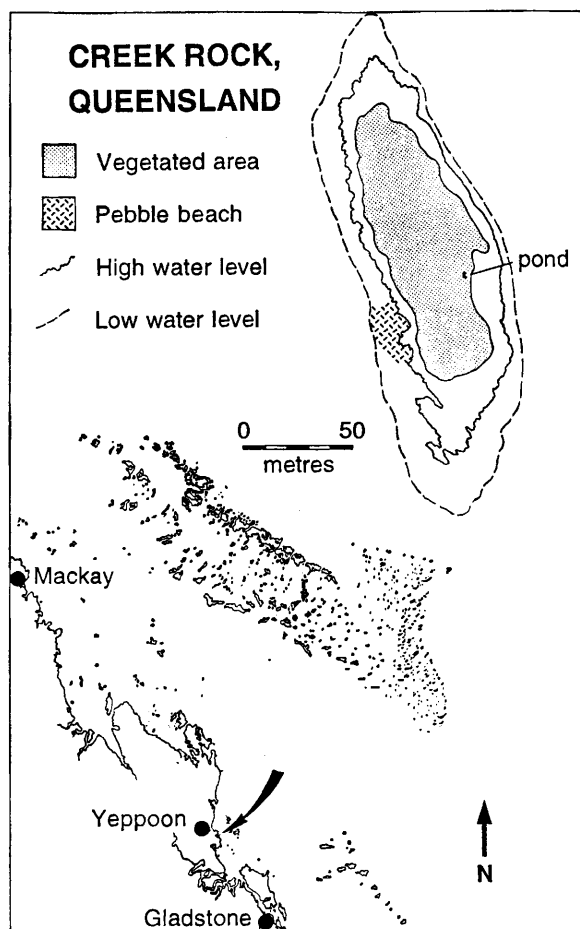
Status: Unallocated State Land.

Other Names: Commonly used local names include 'Bird Rock' and 'Bird Island'.

Description: About 0.7 ha of this sugarloaf-shaped rock island is above highest spring tide. It is about 11 m above high water mark at its highest point. Vegetation consists mostly of low herbs and grasses, with *Sarcostemma viminale* subsp. *brunonianum* the dominant species. In July 1996 the vegetation consisted of *Enchylaena tomentosa*, *Sporobolus virginicus*, *Sarcostemma viminale* subsp. *brunonianum*, *Portulaca oleracea*, **Chloris inflata*, **Senna* sp., **Passiflora suberosa*, **Melinis repens*, *Cupaniopsis anacardioides*, *Ficus* sp., **Sonchus oleraceus*, *Canavalia rosea*, **Solanum* sp., and *Philydrum* sp. (asterisks identify introduced species). A small rock pond on the eastern side appears always to contain fresh water.

Landing: Landing is directly on to rock boulders at high tide. Best location in most conditions is the north-west corner of the island. The pebble beach on the south-west side is best used for landing at low tide. Landing during the nesting season needs to be prevented, as it is particularly disturbing to Caspian Terns.

Ornithological History: There are no published records of visits to Creek Rock. The island was visited periodically during the breeding season between 1975 and 1985 by R. Channells and others for photography purposes. Hides were used on these occasions to allow close approach to nesting seabirds with minimal disturbance. More recently, the island was visited by R. Fisher on 18.2.94, J. Messersmith on 22.7.95 and P. O'Neill on 25.5.93, 27.7.93, 22.10.93, 15.11.93, 19.1.95, 4.7.95, 16.7.96, and 6.8.96.



Breeding Seabirds and Status

Larus novaehollandiae Silver Gull — Nesting occurs between April and October. From 1975 to 1985 R. Channells observed about 200 nests annually. During 1993, 132 nests and 150 adults were counted in May; 128 adults with many nests and 18 juveniles in July; 66 adults, some chicks and eggs, and 13 juveniles in November; and seven adults and one juvenile in November. In July 1995, 222 adults, 180 nests and 78 juveniles

were present. In July 1996, about 220 nests and 90 juveniles were counted, with nesting occurring at all stages from eggs to juveniles. By August 1996, only 118 nests were observed, with mostly juveniles but some downy chicks. No adults or nests were present in February 1993 or January 1995.

Sterna caspia Caspian Tern — R. Channells estimated about 50 nests were present each season from 1975 to 1985. By 1985, the nest numbers began to decline, and the photographic visits ceased. In 1993, two adults and two nests were present in May, and although none was observed from the boat in June, five adults on nests were present in August. In July 1995, nine adults with nine nests and downy chicks were observed. Two juveniles and ten nests (seven with two eggs, one with a single egg, and two with two small downy chicks) were observed on 22 July 1996. On 27 July 1996, 15 adults were observed with three nests (one with three eggs) and three juveniles. In August 1996, six adults, three nests and one juvenile were observed. Nests were spread along the top of the island. No adults or nests were observed in November 1993, February 1994 or January 1995.

Factors Affecting Status

Human visitation may have had a negative impact on the Caspian Tern breeding population. During the early 1980s an increase in human visitation was noticed, with sometimes up to three visitations per day from the adjacent mainland. By 1985, the numbers of Caspian Terns had begun to decline. Human disturbance causes the terns to rise from their nests, leaving eggs and small chicks exposed to predation by gulls.



• Caspian Terns breeding on Creek Rock, June 1978.
Photo: R. Channells

The Silver Gull population is believed to be elevated above natural levels because of increased food availability. The size of the breeding population does not appear to have changed markedly since at least the mid-1970s, but it is not known how long gulls have had access to artificial food sources. Large numbers of gulls feed at the Yeppoon rubbish tip, and at Rosslyn Bay Harbour.

White-bellied Sea-Eagles *Haliaeetus leucogaster* have been observed preying on Silver Gulls on Creek Rock on a number of occasions by R. Channells.

Other Seabirds Recorded

Phalacrocorax varius
Sterna bergii

Pied Cormorant (common)
Crested Tern (common)

Banding

Nil.

Acknowledgments

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• Silver Gulls on Creek Rock, July 1996.

Photo: P. O'Neill