

# CORELLA

## Journal of the Australian Bird Study Association

VOLUME 17

DECEMBER, 1993

NUMBER 5

Ornithological studies of the Great Barrier Reef have suffered two major losses in the last two years. The death of Brian King, to whom we dedicated *Corella* 17(3), and then within six months the loss of Terry Walker.

We were all aware that Terry Walker had collected and assembled an immense amount of information on the status of seabirds of the Great Barrier Reef. This was reflected in his contributions to the Seabird Island Series, of which he was a loyal and productive supporter. He contributed as sole or joint author 24 descriptions. These contributions were always a pleasure for Bill Lane, the Editor of the Series, to receive as so little editorial attention was required. Only now is it being appreciated just how much data Terry had assembled. His loss is great.

In this issue are published the last descriptions of Seabird Islands received from Terry, an invited editorial by Dr Geoffrey Smith, a colleague, suggesting that profitable directions for future research would be studies of the diet of seabirds of the Great Barrier Reef, and an account of the oceanography of the Coral Sea, the physical attributes of which influence greatly this tropical ecosystem.

This issue of *Corella* is dedicated to:

### **TERRISS (TERRY) ADRIAN WALKER (1950–1992)**

During the late afternoon of Sunday, 17 May 1992, Terry Walker left Burketown in a 5 metre boat to carry out a job which was dear to his heart, and for which he was becoming well known amongst seabird researchers and enthusiasts. In company with Darryl Reimer, a research ranger and colleague in the Department of Environment and Heritage, he planned to survey seabird colonies on several islands in the Wellesley Group in the Gulf of Carpentaria. That was the last day on which Terry and Darryl were seen.

What happened on the night of 17 May, or later, is not known. On Thursday, 21 May, the crew of the barge that services the Wellesley Group, during the regular run from Mornington to Sweers Island, found their swamped boat north of Bentinck Island. A full scale air and sea search commenced that day. At the height of the search, 11 fixed wing aircraft and two helicopters were deployed each day. Wellesley Group residents and Department of Environment and Heritage

personnel searched the coastline in several boats. Computer-aided analyses, based on known and anticipated current patterns in the region, were used to determine search locations. That technique successfully predicted where a large number of items were eventually washed ashore — a beach on Mornington Island. Amongst these was Terry's field notebook. It contained no entry subsequent to their departure, strongly suggesting they had not reached any island before their boat was swamped.

Terriss Walker, 41, completed his B.Sc.(Hons) at Queensland University and was carrying out reef-related postgraduate research at James Cook University when he decided to apply for one of the first five graduate marine park officer positions advertised by the Queensland National Parks and Wildlife Service to manage the Capricornia Section of the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park. His application was successful, and he commenced work at Rockhampton in 1982.

The next few years were not easy ones for Terry and his marine park colleagues. There were no existing models anywhere in the world for the multiple use management of a vast area of sea with extensive coral reefs and several national park islands. They were pioneering a new aspect of conservation management.

While his research interests and the bulk of his duties related to the underwater world, Terry quickly developed a healthy respect and fascination for the several seabird species that breed on the Capricornia islands from North Reef to Lady Elliot. Here, on 13 islands, was the most important accumulation of seabird nesting sites on the Reef. In concert with his colleagues, he developed a regular monitoring and data recording programme for these colonies. His transfer to the Townsville office of the National Parks and Wildlife Service in 1987 saw him extend his seabird studies to the central and northern parts of the Great Barrier Reef, plus the Gulf of Carpentaria.

This enabled him to develop a unique understanding, supported by relevant data, of seabird nesting across the Great Barrier Reef. The study became more of a quest than a job. He voraciously extracted and consumed data and anecdotal evidence from all available published and unpublished accounts on the Reef and, in combination with his own data, developed a comprehensive computer database which was to be the foundation for one of his cherished goals — a seabird atlas of the Great Barrier Reef. His interests extended from Lady Elliot Island in the south, where he and I were studying the colonization of that island by Red-tailed Tropic Birds, to the Wellesley Group where, exactly a year before his disappearance, he had recorded a massive colony of some 13 000 pairs of nesting crested terns on Bountiful Island. He had also visited islands in the Coral Sea as far east as Chesterfield Reef.

Terry's quest for knowledge was not all plain sailing, and much of his own time and money was devoted to ensuring regular data collection and to reaching new seabird breeding locations. In the tradition of a true scientist, he not only recorded data, he also published the results. His regular contributions to the Seabird Island Series significantly expanded the prevailing knowledge of seabirds along the Queensland coastline. With 65 papers in 16 journals, 25 of them in *Corella*, and several symposia to his name since 1980, Terry made an impressive contribution to seabird

research as well as to oceanography, environmental management and island biology. He was reaching a point where sufficient data were available to make a start on the seabird atlas, and was securing Departmental support and funding for such a publication.

While this may be small consolation to his colleagues and friends, Terry's efforts have significantly advanced the cause of seabird conservation. Neither is his work finished. The Department of Environment and Heritage has made a commitment to complete the atlas using his database. That project is well under way. In addition, the Department has established a research fund, known as the Walker/Reimer Memorial Fund, to assist and encourage others in avian research.

There is a disturbing and saddening lack of finality to Terry and Darryl's disappearance. The cause of the tragedy will probably never be known. I, at least, am partly consoled in the knowledge that Terry died while doing something he loved, and his work will be acknowledged for as long as there are people studying seabirds along the Queensland coastline.

Peter Ogilvie

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**Terry Walker**, during the last decade of his life, compiled a truly impressive database on seabirds that breed on Queensland islands. Terry read the literature and historical records thoroughly to obtain as much information as possible about where seabirds bred, when they bred and their numbers. He obtained data from other researchers as well as from his own fieldwork. The end product is a database consisting of more than 21 000 records: over 9 000 on seabirds, the remainder on shorebirds and terrestrial birds.

This database is, in my opinion, the most significant piece of research ever done on the avifauna of Queensland Islands. It is providing the basis for a Seabird Atlas (The biogeography of Queensland seabirds) and may well provide the basis for the biogeography of shorebirds and terrestrial birds of the Great Barrier Reef.

Terry's dedication to ornithological research and passion for detail and accuracy has left a formidable legacy. The full significance of Terry's work may take some time to be appreciated.

Kees Hulsman