

Part VIII

Insects, reptiles, birds and seagrasses

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Abstract

A chironomid midge, five species of sea snakes, one species of marine turtle, twelve species of birds and three species of seagrasses were recorded.

Annotated list

Insects

Adult midges of the genus *Pontomyia* (Diptera: Chironomidae) were recorded in September 1981 at the Rowley Shoals in a mass emergence, as well as larvae and pupae on floating seagrass debris.

Reptiles

Sea snakes have never been recorded at the Rowley Shoals, which is surprising because they are abundant in apparently similar habitats at Scott and Seringapatam Reefs where the following five species were recorded: *Aipysurus laevis*, *A. duboisii*, *A. fuscus*, *Hydrophis 'melanocephalus'* and *Emydocephalus annulatus*.

Very large serranids such as the Potato Cod (*Epinephelus tukula*) are abundant at Rowley Shoals, but only one was seen at Scott Reef. It seems possible that these fish may prey on sea snakes, thus accounting for their absence there. An alternative explanation may be in the fact that sea snakes at Scott Reef were found to be aggressive towards large fish (and divers). One specimen of *A. laevis* was observed to persistently chase three large Trevally (*Charanx ignobilis*) for about five minutes before driving them away. This could explain the rarity of large fish at Scott Reef, but not the absence of sea snakes at Rowley Shoals.

Green Turtles (*Chelonia mydas*) were observed mating and nesting at Sandy Islet, Scott Reef in September 1984. No turtle breeding was observed on the Museum's expeditions to Rowley Shoals, but dead *C. mydas* hatchlings were obtained from a nest on Bedwell I. on 9 April 1982 by the CSIRO.

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Birds

No specific study was made of birds, but the following positively identified species were recorded.

Wedge-tailed Shearwater (*Puffinus pacificus*). Common in the vicinity of Rowley Shoals and Scott and Seringapatam Reefs.

Red-tailed Tropic-bird (*Phaethon rubricauda*). A single chick in a nest on Bedwell I. and parent bird in September 1981, July 1982 and August 1983. Breeding also occurred in 1984 and 1985 (Sartori, pers. comm.).

White-tailed Tropic-bird (*Phaethon lepturus*). One specimen over Bedwell I., Clerke Reef in July 1982.

Brown Booby (*Sula leucogaster*). One specimen between Mermaid and Scott Reefs, July 1982. Several hundred on Sandy Islet, Scott Reef on automatic weather station tower, which had many inactive nests, apparently of this species. Common around Seringapatam Reef.

Lesser Frigate-bird (*Fregata ariel*). Feeding around Seringapatam Reef, September 1984.

Eastern Reef Heron (*Egretta sacra*). One (dark phase); Bedwell I., 1981.

White-breasted Sea Eagle (*Haliaeetus leucogaster*). One; Clerke Reef, July 1982.

Ruddy Turnstone (*Arenaria interpres*). Two; Bedwell I., September 1981.

Sanderling (*Calidris alba*). Five; Bedwell I., September 1981.

Common Noddy (*Anous stolidus*). About 70 breeding with eggs and fully fledged chicks; Sandy Islet, Scott Reef, September 1984.

Crested Tern (*Sterna bergii*). Abundant; Clerke Reef, September 1981 and July 1982.

Sooty Tern (*Sterna fuscata*). Five; Scott Reef, September 1984.

The absence of breeding records for Bedwell Island, apart from the Red-tailed Tropic-bird, may be due to the timing of visits. Sand cays, particularly the permanently exposed ones, are probably important resting places for northern migrants *en route* to and from Australia and large flocks of unidentified waders were seen on them at the Rowley Shoals and Scott Reef on all visits.

Flowering plants

The seagrass, *Thalassia hemprichii*, a new record for Western Australia, was found at both Mermaid and Clerke Reefs, Rowley Shoals and at Scott Reef. *Thalassodendron ciliatum* and *Halophila ovalis* were also recorded at Scott Reef.

Acknowledgements

Dr T.E. Houston identified the chironomid midges, Mr L.A. Smith the sea snakes and Dr D. Walker the seagrasses.