

ADELE ISLAND REPORT

On June 18, 1972 a party of biologists from the Department of Fisheries and Fauna, the W.A. Museum and the W.A. Herbarium visited Adèle Island while taking part in a survey of the fauna and flora of islands off the Kimberley coast. The party was transported in the Department's patrol vessel "Dampier".

Adèle Island is situated about 50 miles north west of Cockatoc and Koolan Islands which are north of Derby. It is a low, flat, sandy island of about 500 acres, the highest point being only a few feet above high water mark. A lighthouse and radio beacon have been constructed to assist shipping and an automatic weather station has recently been built for the Bureau of Meteorology.



Brown Booby with chick

The vegetation is simple, only eleven species being collected. Most of the island is covered with the well known beach plant, *Spinifex longifolius*, up to two or three feet high with creepers and other plants scattered here and there. Parts of the island which are subject to occasional inundation by the sea are covered with salt water couch (*Sporobolus virginicus*). Other species collected were—

Amaranthus sp.
Boerhavia diffusa
Canavalia maritima
Cyperus conicus
Euphorbia chrysochaeta
Ipomoea biloba
Portulaca oligosperma
Salsola kali and
Sesuvium portulacastrum

Much of the island appeared to have been burned, possibly two or three years ago.

The outstanding feature of the wildlife is the sea bird breeding colonies. When the party visited the island three species were nesting; these were the Brown Booby, the Masked Booby and the Lesser Frigate Bird. "The Handbook of



Lesser Frigate Bird nesting colony. Vegetation is *Spinifex longifolius*

Australian Sea-Birds" by Serventy, Serventy and Warham also lists the Pied Cormorant and the Lesser Crested Tern as breeding on Adèle but no evidence of breeding was seen during this visit.

The most numerous of the breeding birds was the Lesser Frigate Bird, about 2,500 breeding pairs being present. This bird nests in dense colonies of up to three or four hundred nests only two or three feet apart. The nest is a platform a few inches off the ground built in and made of *Spinifex*. All stages from the single egg to birds almost capable of flying were present in the one colony.



Lesser Frigate Bird—female

The Brown Booby was nesting almost all over the island and it was estimated that 1,500 to 2,000 pairs were present. The nest is constructed on prostrate vegetation or even seaweed on the beaches and consists of a few twigs or stems from the *Spinifex*. Two eggs are laid although only one young bird is raised. Again, all stages from the eggs to sub-adults were present.

The Masked Booby was much less common than the other two species, only about 100 pairs being present. The nest of this species is a depression in the sand, most nests being on the beaches with a few in inland, open areas. The Masked Booby is a fairly rare bird in W.A. only one other island, Bedout Island near Port Hedland, is recorded as a breeding site.



Masked Booby

One interesting find on Adèle Island was the presence of a small land bird. This was the Tawny Grassbird (*Megalurus timoriensis*), an unusual find on an island so far from the mainland. Other birds seen on or near Adèle included the following: Kestrel, Pied Cormorant, Caspian Tern, Lesser Crested Tern, Common Noddy, Silver Gull, Reef Heron, Pied Oystercatcher, Red-capped Dotterel, and Pelican. A few frigate birds seen were completely dark underneath and were probably the Greater Frigate Bird.

No mammals were seen although tracks indicated that a small rodent exists there. This is probably the introduced House Mouse (*Mus musculus*) as this species was collected on Browse Island, 60 miles north-north-east of Adèle, which the party visited the previous day. No sign was seen of any reptile.