

Student

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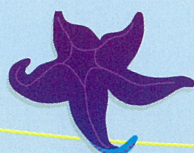
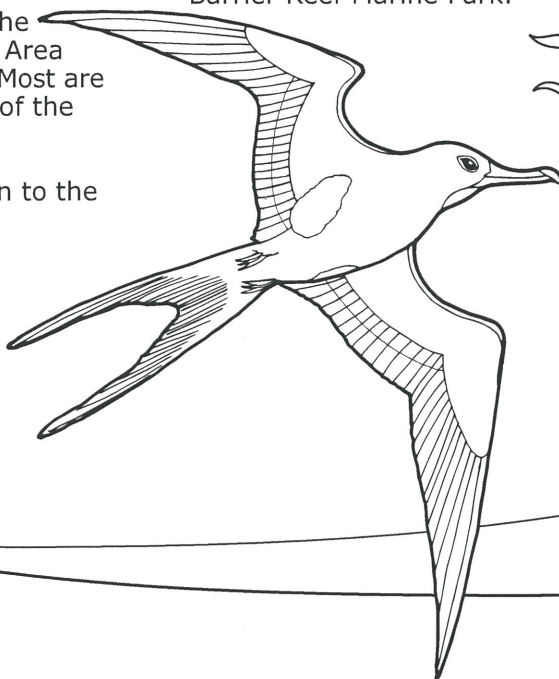
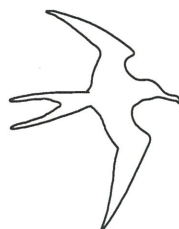
Great Barrier Reef
Marine Park Authority

#13

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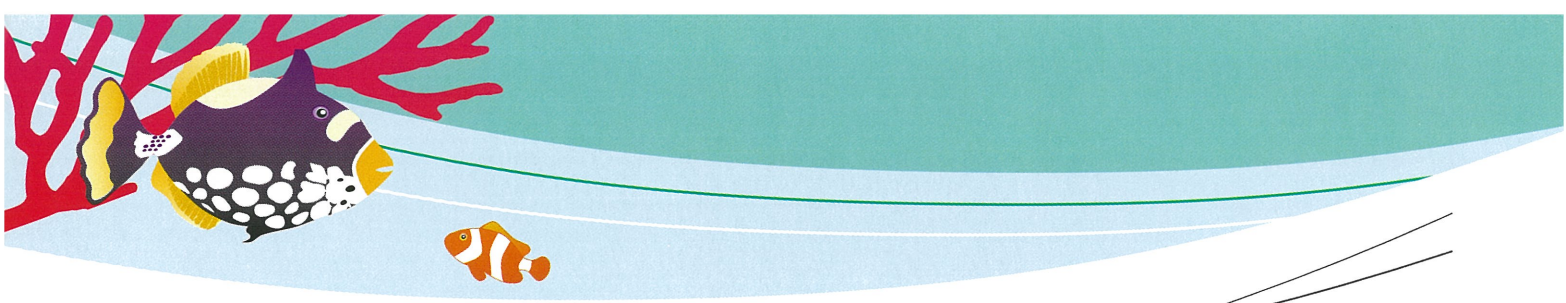
Seabirds

- 23 species of seabirds breed on islands and cays of the Great Barrier Reef.
- Between 1.4 and 1.7 million seabirds breed on the Great Barrier Reef each year and the Reef has another 425 000 non-breeding seabirds, giving a total of more than two million.
- There are 55 islands and cays in the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area that are key seabird nesting sites. Most are in the far north or southern parts of the World Heritage Area.
- Some species of seabird will return to the same island to nest each year.
- Seabirds eat mainly fish, squid and crustaceans.
- Seabird droppings fertilise plants or brings seeds to many of the islands and cays of the Reef.
- All birds are protected species in the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park.



our great barrier reef
let's keep it great





Habitat

The Great Barrier Reef is home to approximately 215 species of birds, of which 23 are seabirds. The birds can be divided into three main types based primarily on their habitat use: land birds, shorebirds and seabirds. Seabirds are attracted to the waters of the Great Barrier Reef by the plentiful supply of food, mainly fish and squid, and suitable nesting locations. In addition to the more common varieties such as gulls, cormorants, pelicans and terns, the Great Barrier Reef is also home to less familiar species of seabirds such as shearwaters, boobies, tropicbirds and frigatebirds. They are an important part of the marine environment.

Breeding

Many seabirds that live and breed in the Great Barrier Reef nest in shallow scrapes with little nesting material, while others prefer to nest on open ground in shrubs, trees or burrows. Some bird species are faithful to specific sites returning each season. Other species move around, nesting on different islands.

Feeding

Most seabirds catch fish by plunging into the water. Gulls however, prey on young chicks of other birds or scavenge for molluscs and worms or eat food scraps left by humans.

Frigatebirds feed by stealing from other seabirds and are known as "pirates" of the bird world. They harass flying terns or boobies so much that the seabird drops or vomits its food up. The frigatebird then catches the food in midair.

How seabirds benefit the Great Barrier Reef

Seabirds play an important role in the Great Barrier Reef ecosystem. They form an integral part of the marine food web as major consumers of marine organisms. Droppings from the birds

(guano) fertilise plants and assist with the dispersal of plants on coral cays. Seeds that attach themselves to the feathers and feet of birds are carried to new locations in the Marine Park.

Threats to survival

Direct human pressures on bird populations in the Great Barrier Reef include disturbance of seabird rookeries, introduced weeds and feral animals, rubbish and the potential effects of oil spills. Indirect human pressures are mainly exerted through clearing of coastal bird habitats. Fishing and climate change also affect some bird communities but these impacts are not well understood.

Trends in seabird populations

Long-term data from four locations on the Great Barrier Reef indicate overall declines in seabird numbers and breeding success. The declines are thought to be caused by a lack of food resulting from poor climate conditions, particularly increased sea temperatures.

All birds are protected species in the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park

A protected species is a plant or animal in the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park that is protected by law and needs special management. The Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority, the Australian Government management agency for the Marine Park, works to conserve protected species by identifying those species that are threatened, iconic or at risk; identifying threats to their survival and developing appropriate management actions.

To learn more about protected species in the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park go to www.gbrmpa.gov.au.

