

## Seabirds



Photo: USFWS

# Noio or Black Noddy

*Anous minutus*

### SPECIES STATUS:

State recognized as Indigenous  
NatureServe Heritage Rank G5 - Secure  
North American Waterbird Conservation Plan -  
Moderate concern  
Regional Seabird Conservation Plan - USFWS 2005

**SPECIES INFORMATION:** The noio or black noddy is a medium-sized, abundant, and gregarious tern (Family: Laridae) with a pantropical distribution. Seven noio (black noddy) subspecies are generally recognized, and two are resident in Hawai'i: *A. s. melanogenys* (MHI) and *A. s. marcusii* (NWHI). Individuals have slender wings, a wedge-shaped tail, and black bill which is slightly decurved. Adult males and females are sooty black with a white cap and have reddish brown legs and feet; bill droops slightly. Flight is swift with rapid wing beats and usually direct and low over the ocean; this species almost never soars high. Often forages in large, mixed species flocks associated with schools of large predatory fishes which drive prey species to the surface. Noio (black noddy) generally forage in nearshore waters and feeds mainly by dipping the surface from the wing or by making shallow dives. Opportunistic, in Hawai'i, noio (black noddy) primarily takes juvenile goatfish, lizardfish, herring, flyingfish, and gobies. Nests in large, dense colonies that include non-breeding juvenile birds. Established pairs return to the same nest site year after year. Breeding is highly variable and egg laying occurs year-round. Both parents incubate single egg, and brood and feed chick. Birds first breed at two to three years of age, and the oldest known individual was 25 years old.

**DISTRIBUTION:** Noio (black noddy) breed throughout the Hawaiian Archipelago, including all islands of NWHI and the coastal cliffs and offshore islets of MHI. Outside of Hawai'i, noio (black noddy) breed on islands throughout the world's tropical oceans. Noio (black noddy) typically remain near (within 80 kilometers [50 miles]) their breeding colonies year-round.

**ABUNDANCE:** In Hawai'i, population estimated at 12,000 breeding pairs with the largest populations occurring on Midway Atoll (6,000 pairs) and Nihoa (5,000 pairs). Worldwide population is estimated at 1,000,000 to 1,500,000 breeding pairs.

**LOCATION AND CONDITION OF KEY HABITAT:** **Terrestrial:** Noio (black noddy) breed on oceanic and offshore islands, both on low-lying coralline sand islands and high volcanic islands. In Hawai'i, noio (black noddy) place their nests on ledges and in crevices of coastal cliffs, in sea caves, and in ironwood (*Casuarina* spp.) trees. **Marine:** Nearshore waters.

### THREATS:

- **Introduced predators.** Like all seabirds, adults and nests are susceptible to predation by rats (*Rattus* spp.), and feral cats (*Felis silvestris*). All sites in NWHI are free of rats and cats, however the MHI support large populations of non-native mammalian predators.

- Native predators. 'Iwa or great frigatebirds (*Fregata minor*), Laysan Finches (*Telespiza cantans*), and shorebirds will depredate eggs and chicks.
- Habitat degradation. Non-native vegetation such as golden crown-beard (*Verbesina encelioides*) can alter potential nesting habitat and the removal of non-native ironwood trees from Midway could result in a reduction in nest sites.
- Human disturbance. Kayak and zodiac tours of sea caves used for nest sites can result in adults flushing from nests, resulting in predation by native birds.
- Nearshore pollution. Because noio (black noddy) forage close to shore, oil spills and dumping of waste may be more important to this species than those that forage far offshore. Oiled individuals are regularly seen in the NWHI.
- Overfishing. Because noio (black noddy) rely on predatory fish to drive prey to the surface, overfishing may eventually affect Hawaiian populations.

**CONSERVATION ACTIONS:** The following management goals are important to Pacific seabird conservation: maintain, protect, and enhance habitat; eradicate or control non-natives; minimize bycatch and other negative effects of fishing; improve the effectiveness of oil spill response efforts; identify contaminants and hazardous substances; and minimize the effects of powerlines, towers, wind turbines and lights (USFWS 2005). The goal of these management actions is not only to protect seabird populations and their breeding colonies, but also to re-establish former breeding colonies thereby reducing the risk of extinction. In addition to these efforts, future management specific to Hawaiian populations of noio (black noddy) should include the following:

- Eradicate golden crown-beard and other exotic species on all islands used for breeding, especially those that can change the structure of the existing vegetation (e.g., scale insects).
- Eradication and control of introduced predators at current and potential breeding colonies.
- Continue protection and management of wildlife sanctuaries and refuges.

**MONITORING:** Continue surveys of population and distribution in known and likely habitats.

**RESEARCH PRIORITIES:** Most research priorities for seabirds are related to determining the most appropriate methods for achieving the above goals. Research priorities specific to noio (black noddy) include the following:

- Conduct long-term banding and demographic studies to determine dispersal dynamics and demographic parameters.
- Determine the source of oil affecting birds in the NWHI.
- Determine the significance of recreational activities (e.g., kayaking), and if appropriate determine protocols to reduce disturbance.
- Model interactions and importance of predatory fish, seabirds, and their prey to determine the long-term effects of overfishing on noio (black noddy) populations.

**References:**

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