



Seabirds Fact Sheet

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INTRODUCTION TO SEABIRDS



Seabirds are the most threatened of all bird species



They are biological indicators of ocean health



Most of their energy is spent finding food



Seabirds drink salt water



Their webbed feet allow them to swim and take off from the sea



Their tapered heads and beaks are designed for plunge diving for fish



They only return to land – oceanic islets, islands, or rock outcroppings – to breed and feed their young

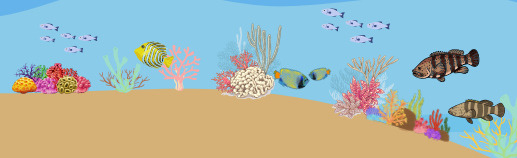
Seabirds spend most of their lives in the open ocean



seabird guano fertilizes the soil



Their droppings enrich the coral reefs



THREATS



Egg collection and disturbance of habitats



Cats, rats, and dogs prey on eggs and birds



Marine litter mistaken for food can cause death

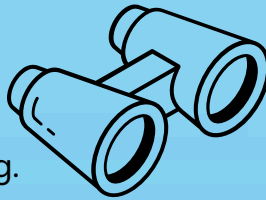


Accidental capture in nets and fishing lines



Seabirds are difficult to study due to their remote nesting and foraging areas, long-distance travel, and breeding in harsh conditions.

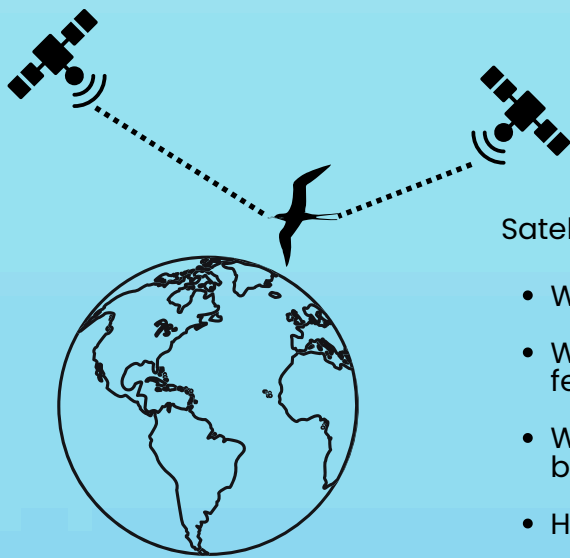
Monitoring is challenging because they nest in isolated locations in large colonies, and research activities can disturb their breeding.



Tracking their movements and collecting meaningful data while minimizing disturbance is a constant challenge.

In 2025, with the support of the Foundation for the Philippine Environment (FPE) and the technical expertise of the East Asian-Australasian Flyway Partnership (EAAFP), we will conduct satellite tagging of three species of seabirds in Tubbataha.

This milestone initiative promises to significantly enhance our understanding of seabirds while advancing conservation efforts for these remarkable and little-understood species.



WHY SATELLITE TRACKING ?

Satellite tagging will help us answer these questions:

- Where do they go when they are not in Tubbataha?
- Where are their dispersal routes, overwintering, and feeding areas?
- What environmental factors influence their breeding and feeding?
- How can we conserve them better?

WHY THESE BIRDS ?

The Black Noddy is Critically Endangered in the Philippines. It is one of seven subspecies of Black Noddy in the world. It was formerly found in the islands and islets of the Sulu Sea but is now known to breed only in Tubbataha. Its population is dwindling.

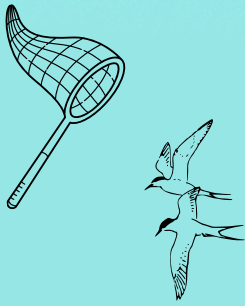


Listed as Vulnerable in the Philippine Red List, the Great Crested Tern is one of the most abundant species in TRNP, the only site in the Philippines where they are known to breed. They are absent from the park for four months each year, and we want to know where they go.

The Sooty Tern is Vulnerable in the Philippines. It breeds solely in Tubbataha and Lawak Island in the West Philippine Sea. They are absent from the park for four months annually, and juveniles return only after six years.

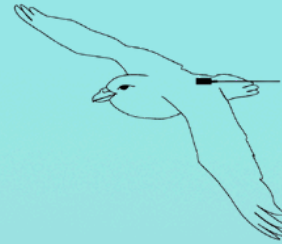


HOW IS SATELLITE TRACKING DONE ?



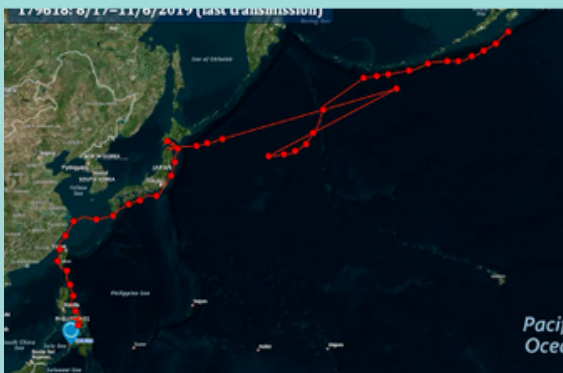
The birds are captured using fine nets. They are measured, and leg flags and metal bands are attached to identify each bird later. Satellite trackers are secured using a lightweight harness, with the tracker resting on the bird's back above the tail feathers.

Once the tracker is on, the bird is released and the tracker sends location data to researchers via the Argos Satellite system using satellites to relay information back to ground stations.



Aleutian Tern tagged in the Kodiak Archipelago, Alaska

Source: Tengeres and Corcoran, 2019



This map shows the migration route of the Aleutian Tern from Alaska to the Philippines, based on data transmitted by the satellite tracker attached to it. This helps us understand migration patterns, identify threats, and collaborate with other sites to enhance conservation efforts.

Source: Tengeres and Corcoran, 2019

FUN FACTS ABOUT THE TUBBATAHA SEABIRDS



Brown Noddy (*Anous stolidus*) has a unique feeding strategy. They often follow predatory fish, such as tuna, which drives smaller fish to the surface, making it easier for them to catch their prey.



Black Noddy (*Anous minutus worcesteri*) often build their nests in the same location, adding new material to the old nest each breeding season. They get their name from constantly nodding their heads during mating displays.





Great Crested Tern (*Thalasseus bergii*) is a highly social bird, often seen in large flocks. They may forage up to 10 km away from land. During courtship, their catch is often used as an offering to the female.



Sooty Tern (*Onychoprion fuscatus*) is also known as the "wide-awake tern" because of the continuous high-pitched noise they make in their breeding colonies. They can take short naps lasting 1-2 seconds while flying. They spend most of their lives in the air, staying out to sea for three to 10 years.





Masked Booby (*Sula dactylatra*) are known for their elaborate courtship rituals, which include mutual preening, synchronized dances, and presenting small gifts of pebbles or sticks to their potential mate.



Red-footed Booby (*Sula sula*) has distinctive bright red feet, which it uses during courtship displays. Males show off their red feet by lifting them up and down while simultaneously stretching their wings and calling to attract a mate.





Brown Booby (*Sula leucogaster*) performs spectacular plunge dives from heights of up to 20 meters to catch fish, often hitting the water at speeds as high as 60 kilometers per hour to snatch their prey.

