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Brown Noddy *Anous stolidus*

The Brown Noddy does not resemble any other tern except the rare Black Noddy (*A. tenuirostris*), which has never bred in North America (although 1 to 3 individuals occur nearly annually in the summer on Bush Key in the Dry Tortugas). Brown Noddies breed on subtropical and tropical islands throughout the world.

Habitat. Brown Noddies often breed in colonies with Sooty Terns, but they do not nest on the ground. This species exhibits breeding-site fidelity to an extraordinary degree. Apparently a pair returns to exactly the same nest year after year.

Fish and squid plucked from the surface of the sea comprise the Brown Noddy's diet.

The nest is a mass of dead vegetation placed from 1 to 4 m (3 to 12 ft) high in a bush or tree and usually lined with pebbles, shells, and bits of coral. Because a pair returns to the same nest each year, and continually adds to it, some nests are quite large. In the Dry Tortugas the species prefers to nest in bay cedars, but prickly-pear cactus and red mangrove are also used.



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The incubation period of the Brown Noddy has been reported as 35 to 36 days, but this has been questioned because it is much longer than the incubation period of other terns (Terres 1980). There is no doubt that the breeding season is prolonged. Brown Noddies lay a single white egg, which is sometimes tinted buff or pink. The egg is sparsely marked, mostly at the larger end, with reddish-brown and lilac spots (Harrison 1978). The birds sit very tightly while incubating and can be picked up off the nest by hand. This may explain the name noddy, which means stupid. The young leave the nest at about 20 days of age and first fly about 30 days after hatching. One Brown Noddy in Florida lived to the age of 21 years (Brown and Robertson 1975).

Seasonal Occurrence. Brown Noddies lay their single eggs anytime from February to early July. They leave the Dry Tortugas in fall and return in spring, sometimes as early as mid-January.

Status. The Brown Noddy breeds in North America only on Bush Key in the Dry Tortugas (AOU 1983). In 1919 this colony was estimated at 35,000 nests, but this was not based on an actual count (Robertson 1964). Feral rats that accidentally escaped from ships visiting the islands have sometimes proven to be a severe problem to the birds. By 1938 the colony had been reduced to only 400 pairs. Hurricanes helped to control the rat population, and by 1964 the Brown Noddies had increased to about 2,000 pairs (Robertson 1964). During the Atlas period the colony was stable at between 2,500 and 3,000 pairs (Robertson and Woolfenden 1992). Because of its restricted breeding range in Florida, it is listed as a Species of Special Concern by the Florida Committee on Rare and Endangered Plants and Animals (Robertson 1978f).

Robert W. Loftin

Brown Noddy

