

Seabirds 'A or Masked Booby

Sula dactylatra

SPECIES STATUS:

State recognized as indigenous

High Concern – NAWCP

Hawai'i Natural Heritage Ranking G5-Secure

SPECIES INFORMATION:

The Masked Booby is a white seabird, with brownish black wings, black markings on the face and tail, dark webbed feet, and a yellow bill. Four subspecies are generally recognized, of which one, *S. d. personata*, is found in Hawai'i. Most birds return to their natal colony to breed. The Masked Booby is the largest of the three booby species found in the Hawaiian Archipelago. Unlike most seabirds, it typically lays two eggs. However, usually only one chick survives to adulthood. The Masked Booby nest on open ground or on low sandy beaches or rocky ground, and groups of non-breeding birds often form on the fringe of the breeding colony. The Masked Booby's flight pattern is strong and even, and it flies high over the water. The Masked Booby feeds by plunge-diving, eating mainly fish (flying fish and jacks) associated with schooling tuna. Boobies in general have been observed being harassed by Great Frigatebirds to disgorge their catch, which is then caught and eaten by the Great Frigatebird.

DISTRIBUTION:

Breeds in the Hawaiian Archipelago, mainly in the NWHI. Uncommon in the Main Hawaiian Islands, but known to have bred on Moku Manu. Worldwide, the Masked Booby breeds in the tropical waters of the Pacific and Atlantic Oceans. When not breeding, the Masked Booby may visit sites 1,000 to 2,000 kilometers away from the breeding colony.

ABUNDANCE:

The worldwide population is estimated at several hundred thousand birds, but accurate estimates are difficult due to wide distribution. The estimated population of birds in the Hawaiian Archipelago is 2,500 pairs.

LOCATION and CONDITION OF KEY HABITAT:

Terrestrial: Breeds on oceanic islands and atolls. Nests on open ground, low sandy beaches, or rocky ground, often near cliff edge. **Marine:** pelagic

THREATS:

- Habitat destruction;
- Introduced predators (rats, cats);
- Human disturbance;
- Habitat altering invasive species

CONSERVATION ACTIONS (for seabirds, both on land and at sea):

- Eradication and control of introduced predators at current and potential nesting sites;

- Continued protection and management of existing wildlife sanctuaries and refuges;
- Limit human disturbance;
- Address invasive species that alter habitat (golden crown-beard, etc.)

MONITORING:

RESEARCH PRIORITIES:

- At sea data on the birds

References:

Division of Forestry and Wildlife. Undated. Fact Sheet on Masked Booby. Available by request from the Department of Land and Natural Resources Division of Forestry and Wildlife, Honolulu, HI.

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NatureServe. 2003. Downloadable animal data sets. NatureServe Central Databases. Available from <http://www.natureserve.org/getData/vertinvertdata.jsp> (March 10, 2005).

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. 2005. Regional Seabird Conservation Plan, Pacific Region. U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Migratory Birds and Habitat Programs, Pacific Region, Portland, Oregon.