

Seabirds

Manu-o-Ku or White (Fairy) Tern

Gygis alba

Photo of White Tern



SPECIES STATUS:

State Listed as Threatened
State recognized as indigenous

SPECIES INFORMATION: Breeding adults remain close to colonies and forage in inshore areas such as shoals and banks with occasional forays into offshore waters. Breed year-round, however eggs are usually laid from February through June. Mate and site fidelity are high. Breeding maturation (based on figures from studies conducted on Tern Island) is at 5 years old. Feed mostly by dipping and surface diving. Diet in Hawai'i includes mostly juvenile goatfish and flying fish with other prey including squid, needlefishes, halfbeaks, dolphinfishes, and blennies.

DISTRIBUTION: Currently, breeding pairs are found in the NWHI and on O'ahu.

Map of White Tern distribution



ABUNDANCE: Estimated breeding pairs in the U.S. Pacific Island Region are 17,000 with a majority (15,000) located in the NWHI.

LOCATION AND CONDITION OF KEY HABITAT: Nests are not built but instead eggs are laid on whatever suitable depression is found. Examples of nest sites occur on volcanic pinnacles, cliffs, rocky slopes, large bushes or trees, and on artificial substrates. Marine habitat is near shore.

THREATS: Predation by rats and cats are the major threat; however, given the remote nature of nesting sites on areas such as sheer cliffs, this species is less vulnerable to predation than many other seabirds. In the NWHI, threats come in the form of ants as well as scale insects that

are degrading habitat by attacking native vegetation (e.g. Rose, Kure, and Palmyra).
Overfishing of large predatory fish may also affect White Tern by limiting food sources.

CONSERVATION ACTIONS: The goals of conservation actions are to not only protect current populations, but to also establish further populations to reduce the risk of extinction. In addition to common state-wide and island conservation actions, specific actions include:

- Eradicate mammalian predators

MONITORING:

- Continue surveys of population and distribution in known and likely habitats;
- Survey for presence of mammalian predators and ungulates;

RESEARCH PRIORITIES:

- Determine affects of introduced invertebrates on nesting habitat and their potential for limiting populations;

References:

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.