

BLACK NODDY

Anous minutus

Other: Hawaiian Noddy, *Noio*, 'Eki'eki

A.m. marcusii

A.m. melanogenys

non-breeding visitor, indigenous; native resident, endemic subspecies

Black Noddies are most abundant among islands of the central and southwestern Pacific, with smaller populations occurring in the eastern Pacific and Atlantic (King 1967, Harrison 1983, Higgins and Davies 1996, AOU 1998, Wiles 2005). The very similar Lesser Noddy (*A. tenuirostris*) of the Indian Ocean is sometimes considered conspecific, and many older specimens collected in Hawaii (e.g., at USNM) bear this name (see also [Synonymies](#)). Before it was officially described in 1844, this species was collected in Hilo Bay in 1825 by Bloxam (1827b; specimen BMNH OVC 43 88a) aboard the *Blonde*, who named it "*Sterna Owhyheensis Stolidus*", distinguishing it from [Brown Noddy](#) by its darker color and smaller size, but this name was never formally published (Wilson and Evans 1899, Olson 1996a). Bloxam's (1827a) reference to noddies as "common" could have referred to either or both species. Dole (1869, 1879) collected one NE of Hawai'i I and referred to as the "sperm whale bird"; he considered it the same species as [Brown Noddy](#).

In the Hawaiian Islands this species breeds commonly in trees and shrubs among the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands and less-commonly along rocky cliffs and islets of the Southeastern Hawaiian Islands. These two populations, which differ in morphology, leg color, and plumage, were originally considered separate species (Rothschild 1893b, 1900; Bryan 1905a), then morphs (King 1967, Harrison 1990), but are now considered subspecies (Gauger 1999). The dark-legged *A. m. marcusii* (cf. [HRBP](#) 1073) breeds on Johnston and Wake atolls (Amerson and Shelton 1976, Rauzon et al. 2008), Micronesia, and the Northwest Islands at least as far SE as French Frigate, and the orange-legged *melanogenys* (formerly "*hawaiiensis*", Rothschild 1893b; cf. [HRBP](#) 0184-0185, 1189-1192), also known as "Hawaiian Noddy", breeds in the Southeastern Islands ([Synonymies](#)). Populations breeding on Necker and Nihoa have as yet to be fully determined to subspecies, although three specimens collected in 1923 on Necker (USNM 300456, 300459-460) are of *marcusii* (PP examination). Populations on Lehua Islet off Ni'ihau appear to be primarily of *melanogenys* but some may be of *marcusii* (cf. [HRBP](#) 5374) and the same mixture might be expected of populations on Kaula Rock. Both subspecies breed year-round, with Hawaiian populations of *marcusii* generally showing peak activity during Nov-Jun but with timing varying somewhat between colonies. Leucistic individuals have been noted on Laysan (Clapp 1974b; [HRBP](#) 1028-1029 published *AB* 48:159) and Hawai'i I (*E* 42:41-42). See Gauger (1999) for more information on the natural history and biology of this species.

Black Noddies breed on every island group within the *Northwestern Hawaiian Islands*, with a total population size of about 15,000 pairs ([Table](#)), although population estimates are difficult to obtain due to asynchronous and variable breeding habits (Fefer et al. 1987). The largest colonies are found on *Midway* and *French Frigate* (estimated 4,000 pairs) followed by *Nihoa* (3,500) *Laysan* (2,000), and *Lisiansky*, *Necker*, *Gardner Pinnacles*, *Pearl and Hermes*, and *Kure* (50-750 pairs; [Table](#)). Populations increased on most islands between the 1960s and 1980s due, at least in part, to an increase in vegetation (e.g., *Casuarina* trees) for nesting (Harrison et al. 1984, Harrison 1990), and perhaps also following elimination of rats from Kure (in 1994) and Midway (1997), but

breeding of this tree-nesting species appears not to be as affected by rats as that of ground-nesting species. Information on the history of the species and data on breeding phenology for each Northwestern Island, compiled as part of the POBSP, can be found in the Atoll Research Bulletins for each breeding locality (see [Seabird Page](#)). There is one confirmed record of *melanogenys* for the Northwestern Islands, from Spit Island, Midway 8 April 1998 ([HRBP](#) 1189-1192).

Black (Hawaiian) Noddies (*melanogenys*) also breed on each of the *Southeastern Hawaiian Islands* and/or offshore islets, with approximately 2,000 breeding pairs, ranging from 75 around Lana'i to 350 on or around Moloka'i ([Table](#)). Colonies are restricted to rocky cliffs, with notable breeding areas being found on Kaula and Lehua Islets off *Ni'ihau* (e.g., Caum 1936, Fisher 1951, Richardson 1963; USNM 113455-113458); along the Napali Coast of *Kaua'i* (e.g., Richardson and Bowles 1964, *E* 28:44); various islets off the E coast of *O'ahu* (e.g., Perkins *in* Evenhuis 2007:380, Northwood 1940b; *E* 1[9]:1-4, 4:30; Richardson and Fisher 1950; *E* 19:10, 23:21, 37:46; [Table](#)); along the N coast of *Moloka'i* (e.g., Bryan 1908, *E* 24:47, 35:4); near Kaunolu and Manele Bays and possibly along the NE coast of *Lana'i* (Hirai 1978b, Munro 2007); probably all around *Kaho'olawe* (Environment Study Impact Corp 1979, Morin et al. 1998; Harrison 1990 estimated 100-300 pairs); on Moku Mana Islet near Keanae Peninsula, in Wai'anapanapa SP and at the base of Kipahulu Gulch near Hana, and at Honokahou Bay (1 nest in Jun-Jul 1993) in w. *Maui* (e.g., *E* 35:20); and along the Puna and Kalapana Coasts, near Lapahoehoe, and east of Hawi, *Hawai'i I* (e.g., *E* 31:38, 39:147-148, 42:41; Conant 1980b). Although no nesting has been confirmed on O'ahu proper, up to 200 birds have been seen in appropriate habitat along the coast between Makua and Kaena Point, suggesting that breeding occurs here. Few data are available on trends in the Southeastern Island; on the Honolulu [Christmas Bird Count](#) Black Noddies were recorded on slightly more than half of the years during 1944-2007, with the highest counts being of 73 in Dec 1985 and 70 in Dec 1999, and showing no discernable trend. The only individuals confirmed to be of *A.m. marcusii* recorded from the Southeastern Islands (juvenile *melanogenys* have dark legs and tails, making subspecies identification challenging) have been on Lehua Islet ([HRBP](#) 5374, 5946), but other observations of probable *marcusii* exist and there is no reason to believe that they do not show up on Kaula Rock and elsewhere in the Southeastern Islands from time to time.

Black Noddies are frequently seen from shore and offshore of all islands. High counts have included 1,000 off Kaua'i and Ni'ihau 25 Oct 1995; 600 off Keanae Peninsula, Maui 23 Aug 1993; and 200 off South Point, Hawai'i I 24 Jun 1994. Unlike [Brown Noddy](#), Black Noddies are regularly seen foraging over coastal ponds, in particular Nu'upia Ponds on Mokapu Peninsula, O'ahu, where up to 100 have been observed. Because they typically forage in coastal waters including lagoons, they are not commonly observed *at sea* far from the Hawaiian Islands (*cf.* Pitman 1986, Spear et al. 1999, Rowlett 2002); King (1970) observed only one bird (in Dec 1964) farther than 90 km from shore during monthly surveys between Mar 1964 and Jun 1965.

[Acronyms and Abbreviations](#)

[Literature cited](#)

Citation: Pyle, R.L., and P. Pyle. 2009. The Birds of the Hawaiian Islands: Occurrence, History, Distribution, and Status. B.P. Bishop Museum, Honolulu, HI, U.S.A. Version 1 (31 December 2009) <http://hbs.bishopmuseum.org/birds/rlp-monograph/>