

MASKED BOOBY

Sula dactylatra

Other: Blue-faced Booby (<1983), 'A

S.d. personata

breeding visitor, indigenous

The Masked Booby breeds worldwide on tropical and subtropical islands; in the Pacific they are found from Japan and Australia to Mexico and Chile, including Johnston and Wake atolls (Amerson and Shelton 1976, Rauzon et al. 2008). They remain at the breeding islands year-round and range at sea generally in the vicinity of breeding grounds, but can also disperse far to sea when not breeding (King 1967, Harrison 1983, Marchant and Higgins 1990, AOU 1998, CBRC 2007). They are a relatively uncommon breeder in the Hawaiian Islands and are only infrequently encountered in surrounding waters. See Nelson (1978) and Anderson (1993) for information on the natural history of Masked Booby. The [Nazca Booby](#), long considered a subspecies of Masked Booby, was split by the AOU (2000) based on the work of Pitman and Jehl (1998), and has occurred as a vagrant and hybridized with Masked Booby at least once in Hawaii (VanderWerf et al. 2008).

An estimated 2,365 pairs of Masked Boobies bred during the 1980-2010s in the *Northwestern Hawaiian Islands* ([Table](#)). Breeding population sizes range from 700 breeding pairs on *French Frigate* (where populations increased dramatically during the 1980s-2000s; Hatfield et al. 2011, Reynolds et al. 2013b) and 425 pairs on *Laysan*, followed by *Lisianski*, *Necker* and *Nihoa*, *Pearl and Hermes*, *Gardener Pinnacles*, *Kure*, and *Midway* ([Table](#)). Historical information (e.g., Rothschild 1900) indicates that populations were similar in the late 1800s, except perhaps on Lisianski and Laysan, where feather hunting may have reduced populations at that time (Fefer et al. 1987). 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](#)).

In the *Southeastern Hawaiian Islands*, breeding during the 1980-mid 2010s has only been confirmed at two locations, Kaula Rock SW of *Ni'ihau*, where 200-400 pairs have been recorded breeding (Flint 2008, USNC 2016), and Mokumanu islet off NE *O'ahu*, where a small population was increasing during the 2000-mid 2010s, with a high count of 56 breeding pairs in 2011 ([Table](#)), although this increase is not reflected by data from Dec recorded on the Honolulu [Christmas Bird Count](#). Masked Boobies formerly bred on Lehua Islet NW of Ni'ihau (Caum 1936; although no recent breeding has been confirmed (e.g., *E* 23:43-45, VanderWerf et al. 2007), 4-6 including a possible pair observed on the islet 24 Feb 2014 may indicate renewed interest. On Mokumanu no Masked Boobies were found during 14 visits in 1946-1948 (Richardson and Fisher 1950) but a few pairs began nesting there since at least 1958 (*E* 19:10, 29:48-49, 39:61, Harrison 1990); more recently, breeding was recorded 25 Jul 1990 (12 active nests), 3 Aug 2000 (14 nests), 13 Nov 2000 (10 nests), and 28 Feb 2006 (33 nests; HDFW 2006; [Table](#)). Observers viewing Mokumanu from Ulupau Head since 1958 have reported up to 17 roosting birds. In late May 1976 an observer circling the islet in a small boat reported at least 30 Masked Boobies mostly on the seaward side not visible from Ulupau Head (*E*

37:45). An estimate of about 40 pairs there in 1967 (Nelson 1978) may have pertained to Red-footed Boobies.

Masked Boobies are occasionally seen flying around or roosting elsewhere in the Southeastern Islands; e.g., *Kaua'i* (sporadically on Mokuaeae islet off Kilauea Point in 1975-1977 and 1999-2000; e.g., Byrd and Zeillemaker 1981, [HRBP](#) 1249); O'ahu (Manana islet 3 Apr 1989); *Moloka'i* (4 sighted from a helicopter on Okala islet E of Kalaupapa Peninsula 20 Aug 1996); *Maui* (1 at Kanaha Pond 26 Jan 1998); and *Hawai'i I* (a juvenile at South Point in October 1986 and another 20 Oct 1997). Five Masked Boobies have been found stranded on O'ahu in 1991-2002 and turned into the SLP rehabilitation facility.

Masked Boobies are observed uncommonly in offshore waters, most frequently around Kaua'i and O'ahu, with up to 5-6 observed in a day. Since 2000 up to 4 birds have been sighted on trips in Kaulakahi Channel between Kaua'i and Lehua islet (e.g., [HRBP](#) 1309). Around O'ahu they have been seen sporadically from shore near Kahuku, Laie, Makapu'u Point, Hawaii Kai, Honolulu, and Hickam Air Force Base. Birds flying near or over Ka'ena Point 26 Jul 2012 and 14 Feb 2014 may have been prospecting for breeding there. A report of 15 birds flying past Makapu'u Point in April 1958 (*E* 19:5) and other groups of >10 birds reported off se. O'ahu likely pertained to [Red-footed Boobies](#). Around Hawai'i I they have been noted occasionally from Miloli'i (one sitting on a buoy in early October 1994), South Point (3 singles, 2011-2013), and Keahole Point (6 singles, 2013-2015), and at least 10 have been observed during one-day pelagic trips off the Kona coast in 1986-2016. There is one record off the ferry harbor on *Lana'i* 12 Feb 2012, but there are as yet no records on or offshore Kaho'olawe. *At sea*, Rowlett (2002; [HICEAS data](#)) observed them on only 15 of 58 observing days in Northwestern waters and on only one of 35 days in Southeastern Island waters (28 Oct, S of Lana'i) during an extensive survey in Aug-Nov 2002. King (1970) recorded only 40 birds during monthly surveys of waters E and S of the Southeastern Islands in Mar 1964-Jun 1965; most monthly high counts (> 4) were for Mar-May of both years. Spear et al. (1999) recorded none in 144 hrs of transect surveys S and SE of Hawai'i I.

[Acronyms and Abbreviations](#)

[Literature cited](#)

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