

## BLUE-GRAY NODDY

## *Procelsterna cerulea*

Other: Blue Noddy, Gray Noddy, Blue-gray Ternlet,  
Necker Island Tern

*P.c. saxatilis*

### breeding visitor, indigenous

The Blue-gray Noddy occurs locally in the c. and se. Pacific, from San Ambrosio and Easter Is through Polynesia, and N to the Marshall Is, Johnston Atoll, and the Hawaiian Islands (King 1967, Harrison 1983, AOU 1998). A similar taxon, treated as a species, Gray Noddy (*P. albivitta*), by many, breeds in the s. Pacific from Chile to Kermadec I off Australia (Higgins and Davies 1996). Populations of Blue-gray Noddy, breeding in the Marshall, Johnston, Marcus, and Northwestern Hawaiian Islands, are currently treated as subspecies *P.c. saxatilis*. The taxonomy of Gray and Blue-gray noddies is currently in need of revision.

Although reported near Nihoa, within sight of Kaua'i, and probably at La Perouse Pinnacle, French Frigate, during the Rothschild Expedition in 1891 (Rothschild 1900, Munro 1944), Blue-gray Noddy was not established as a breeding species in the *Northwestern Hawaiian Islands* until Fisher (1903c; see also Fisher 1903a, Rauzon 2001) described it as a new species, the Necker Island Tern, *P. saxatilis*. Populations have since been estimated as high as 1,000-1,500 breeding pairs on *Necker* (Clapp and Kridler 1977, Harrison 1990) and 2,000-2,500 pairs on *Nihoa* (Clapp et al. 1977, Harrison 1990; [HRBP 6645-6647](#)), together comprising over 99% of the breeding population in Hawaii ([Table](#)). Two additional small breeding colonies (usually < 20 pairs each) are also present at *Gardner Pinnacles* (Clapp and Woodward 1968, Clapp 1972) and La Perouse Pinnacle, *French Frigate* (Amerson 1971). In 2008 a [Peregrine Falcon](#) had reduced numbers on La Perouse to just one adult, either predated all other adults or chasing them from the colony. Preliminary information indicates peak colony attendance and breeding in Dec-Mar (Berger 1972, 1981; Rauzon et al. 1984), although it appears that breeding can occur at reduced rates year-round, in at least some years.

There are very few records of Blue-gray Noddy away from the immediate vicinity of breeding colonies (*cf.* King 1967); e.g., there are few records *at sea* among the Northwestern Islands and there are only about 7 records (1967-2011; e.g., [HRBP 6641](#); [BPBM 185561](#)) from Tern Island, only 12 km from the colony on La Perouse Pinnacle at French Frigate. Blue-gray Noddies are occasionally observed between Kaua'i and Nihoa, as close as 50 km from Kaua'i (3 Sep 2011), and one was collected 132 km S of Nihoa 15 Jan 1937 (MCZ 172950; [HRBP 6640](#)). The only other records from the Northwest Islands are from *Laysan*, where they had been noted "once in a while" prior to 1923 (Wetmore in Olson 1996b) and on 19 Sep 1964, 11 Jun 1967, 16 Jun-10 Jul 1994, 17 Jul 1998 (found dead; [BPBM 184343](#)), 14 Apr-21 Jul 2009, 3 Sep 2011 ([HRBP 6706](#)), 24 Mar 2012, and 29 Apr 2012. The observations in 1994 were of 4-17 individuals at the rocky ledges at the S end of the island, suggesting that they were prospecting for breeding that summer.

In the *Southeastern Hawaiian Islands*, Wetmore collected an adult male Blue-gray Noddy at Kaula Rock near *Ni'ihau* 1 Jul 1923 (USNM 300430) and a small breeding colony was reported there in 1932 (Caum 1936). However, only small numbers

have been reported there since: an individual near the islet 1 Mar 1961 (*E* 22:2), a record of 1-3 in the vicinity 11 Apr 1965 (King 1970), and singles reported in Nov 1998 and Jun 2010 (USNC 2016), suggesting that breeding no longer occurs. There are also records of at least 8 Blue-gray Noddies near Lehua Iset off Ni'ihau from 2004 to 2016, including a pair possibly prospecting for breeding 15-19 Jul 2015. The only other records of Blue-gray Noddies around the Southeastern Islands are of one observed off Kona, **Hawai'i I** 11 Dec 2010 ([HRBP](#) 6642-6644; thought to be a Blue-gray Noddy of the *saxatilis* subspecies but taxon not confirmed) and individuals observed near **Kaua'i** off Kalalau Valley 24 Feb 2014 and off Makahuena Pt 27 Jul 2016. Several other records from the Southeastern Islands either lack description or with details suggesting other tern species; these include individuals off Lihue, Kaua'i 24 Mar 1998; in Honolulu, O'ahu 8 Aug 2000; at Kealia Pond NWR, Maui 4 Jul 1988; and over Nu'upia Pond on Mokuapu Peninsula, O'ahu 11 Nov 1996 (3 individuals). We consider these records unsubstantiated.

### [Acronyms and Abbreviations](#)

### [Literature cited](#)

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