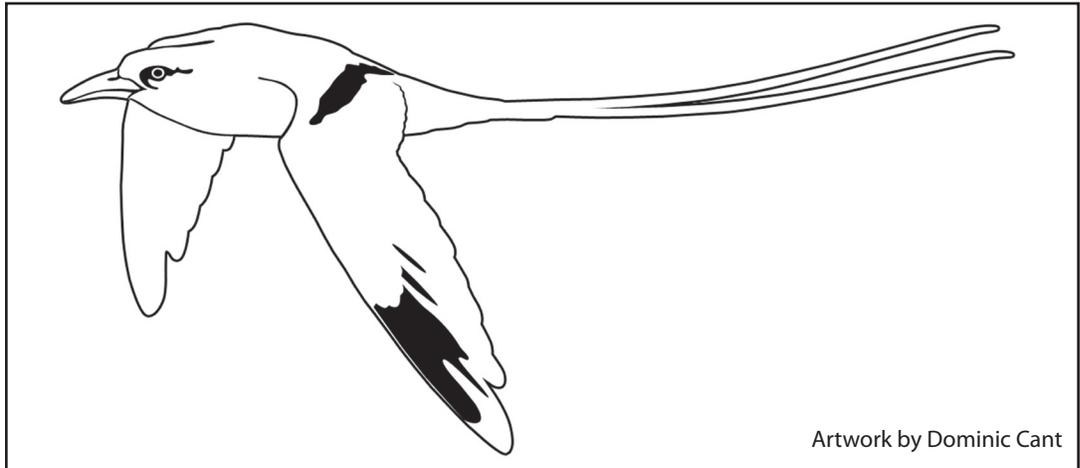




Birds of the Bahamas



Artwork by Dominic Cant

White-tailed Tropicbird

SCIENTIFIC NAME

Phaethon lepturus

DESCRIPTION

The White-tailed tropicbird is smaller, more slender and more graceful than the other two species of tropicbirds. These medium sized birds are mostly white in colour with black markings on the upper wings, and a black eye-stripe. The males and females look similar, reaching up to 29 inches long from bill to the base of tail, and about half that length is the tail. They have a slight down curved bill that is yellow or orange, short legs and webbed feet.

DIET

White-Tailed Tropicbirds are carnivores, feeding mostly on fish, squid and crustaceans. These birds are plunge divers, making a deep, vertical dive in the water and swallow their prey whole. Tropicbirds can catch and eat rather large fish for their size, up to 18 percent of their body weight.

REPRODUCTION

In the Bahamas Tropic birds breeds from March to July. These usually ocean dwelling, solitary birds come to land together in often large groups to mate. Mates are established after an elaborate display of courtship. They usually nest in rugged, rocky environments and in the Bahamas they are typically found nesting on offshore islands. They do not usually construct their own nests, instead, they make use of crevices and holes in the rock. The female bird lays one tan egg with brown splotches and both parents take turns keeping the egg warm during the 40 to 42 days incubation period.

HABITAT

White-Tailed Tropicbirds spend their entire lives over the open ocean, venturing to land only during mating and nesting seasons. When they are not nesting, they are rarely seen near land.

DISTRIBUTION

The White-tailed Tropicbird is found in the tropical and subtropical regions of the Pacific, Atlantic and Indian Oceans.

STATUS

The White-Tailed Tropicbird's population is small, but is considered to be generally stable and is listed as a species of Least Concern by the IUCN. They are still the most common of the three kinds of tropicbirds, and they are not endangered or threatened.

THREATS

Predation is a serious threat to the White-Tailed Tropicbird. Nest predators include feral cats, black rats, dogs and American Crows. Destruction of habitat is also a serious threat to the White-Tailed Tropicbird population. Nesting grounds are sometimes destroyed by construction on waterfronts.

CONSERVATION

Artificial nest burrows are sometimes made of the destruction of natural nesting burrows. These artificial burrows also have the advantage of being predator-free.

INTERESTING FACTS

Five sub species of White-tailed Tropicbirds are currently recognised, however, some authorities believe that these should be considered colour varieties. Nonetheless, the sub species found in the Bahamas and Caribbean region is known as the *P. lepturus catesbyi*.

The White-tailed Tropicbird is the most common of the Tropic birds in the Bahamas, Greater Antilles and the Cayman Islands. In the Lesser Antilles, the Red-tailed Tropicbird is more dominant.

The call is a high screamed keee-keee-krrrt-krrt-krrt.

White-tailed Tropicbirds are excellent fliers and can stay in the air for a long time. Since the tropicbird's legs are set far back on its body, it is a good swimmer, but cannot walk upright on land. Instead they will lie on their chest and drag themselves around using their feet, wings and occasionally their beak.