

# White-tailed Tropicbird (Bermuda Longtail)

Bermuda is home to the largest breeding population of the White Tailed Tropicbird in the Atlantic, with approximately 2000 nesting pairs. This population is therefore of global importance to the survival of this seabird.



## Project Objectives

To research the breeding success of Bermuda's only common nesting seabird and investigate methods of reducing threats to and assisting the island's globally important population of this species.

Photos by: Jeremy Madeiros

## Summary

The **White-tailed Tropicbird** or **Longtail** (*Phaethon lepturus catsbyii*) is native to Bermuda and has been listed as a globally near threatened species by the International Union for Conservation of Natural Resources (IUCN). The Bermuda population is scattered around the entire coastline of Bermuda in rocky cliff areas and offshore islands. Tropicbirds nest in rock crevices, cavities and ledges on these cliff areas, and cannot dig out their own nests. As a result, they have to use existing cavities caused by erosion.

The largest numbers of nesting Tropicbirds are found in the **Castle Harbour Islands** (500-600 pairs) and along Southampton Parish's south coastline (about 400 pairs). Both areas have been severely affected by an increasing number of hurricanes affecting Bermuda over the last 20 years. These have caused extensive erosion to coastal cliffs, destroying up to half the nest sites in the Castle Harbour Islands alone.

The Project's main goals are to understand their nesting biology and breeding success, and to reduce threats to the species.

Conservation measures currently in place for the Tropicbird include **elimination of rats**, which can eat eggs and young chicks, from some nesting islands. A program to install **artificial "Igloo" nest boxes** in coastal areas is being carried out in co-operation with the Bermuda Audubon Society (BAS). These boxes have been very successful and help to offset the loss of natural nests from hurricanes. They are also available for sale to the public from the BAS.

**Tropicbirds** arrive on Bermuda in March and April after spending the winter months on the open ocean well to the south of Bermuda. Eggs are laid in May and June, with chicks hatching during June and July. Chicks fledge to sea at about 65 days of age.



Artificial tropicbird nests installed on Nonsuch Island by the terrestrial conservation crew.



Adult tropicbird with chick in an artificial nest. Each pair only produces 1 chick each year.



Research work carried out on tropicbirds includes study of chick growth rates (above), and checks of breeding success at ten locations around Bermuda.

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