

RECOVERY OUTLINE

Lesser Noddy (Australian)

1	Family	Laridae
2	Scientific name	<i>Anous tenuirostris melanops</i> (Gould, 1845)
3	Common name	Lesser Noddy (Australian)
4	Conservation status	Vulnerable: D2

5 Reasons for listing

This subspecies breeds in a tiny area that could be badly affected by catastrophes (Vulnerable: D2).

	Estimate	Reliability
Extent of occurrence	50 km ²	high
trend	stable	high
Area of occupancy	3 km ²	high
trend	stable	medium
No. of breeding birds	100,000	high
trend	stable	high
No. of sub-populations	1	medium
Generation time	10 years	low

6 Intraspecific taxa

The nominate subspecies is found in the western Indian Ocean. It has not been recorded in Australian territory, although subspecific status of birds on Ashmore Reefs is unknown (Stokes and Hinchey, 1990). Globally, the species is Least Concern.

7 Past range and abundance

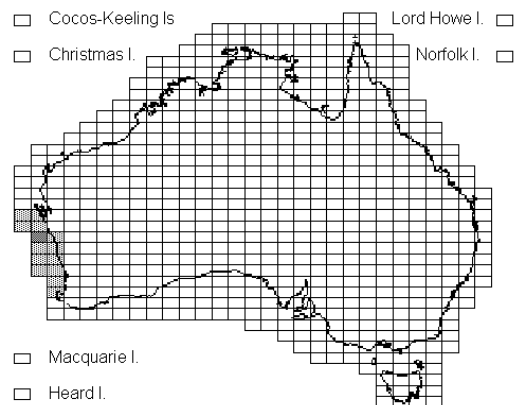
Breeding in Houtman Abrolhos, where colonies on Pelsaert I., Wooded I. and Morley I., W. A. occupy a total of 5 ha. Population appears to remain near the breeding islands all year, though beach-washed birds recovered over 250 km south of colonies (Burbidge and Fuller, 1996, Johnstone and Storr, 1998).

Numbers vary considerably between years and colonies. Pelsaert I.: colony deserted between 1907 and 1913, and possibly between 1899 and 1936; in 1984, ten colonies present. Wooded I.: colony possibly established on desertion of Pelsaert I., but persisted after Pelsaert I. recolonised. Morley I.: in 1940/1941 ca 1,000 birds, in 1945, none, re-established by 1970. Total numbers early in 20th century possibly as low as 20,000 pairs (Burbidge and Fuller, 1989, Johnstone and Storr, 1998).

8 Present range and abundance

Range as above. Population estimates: Pelsaert I., 31,450 pairs in 1986, 56,300 pairs in 1989, and 34,870 pairs in 1993; Morley I., 16,375 pairs in 1989, and 7,665 pairs in 1993; Wooded I., 6,875 pairs in 1989, 5,325 pairs in 1991 and 6,323 pairs in 1993. Total in 1993 estimated at 48,885 pairs (Fuller *et al.* 1994, Burbidge and Fuller, 1996). Apparent decline from

1989 to 1993, but population fluctuates and is still larger than earlier in century.



9 Ecology

The Australian subspecies of Lesser Noddy build nests in White Mangroves *Avicennia marina*, which occur in small scattered patches on a few of the islands of the Houtman Abrolhos. They lay one egg. Nesting colonies move periodically because nesting birds retard tree growth and sometimes kill trees. The noddy feeds on small fish and squid in nearby waters (Higgins and Davies, 1996, Johnstone and Storr, 1998). Fluctuations in size of the fish population may explain the variation in breeding numbers.

10 Threats

In the past, Lesser Noddies were probably disturbed on Pelsaert I. during guano extraction (Alexander, 1922). However, recent estimates put breeding success there at 47%, with the main determinant of breeding success being site selection: sites protected from strong WNW winds being more likely to succeed than exposed nests (Surman and Wooller, 1995). Currently, the main potential threat to breeding colonies is catastrophic destruction by cyclones or pollution from oil spills that could damage birds and mangroves (Burbidge and Fuller, 1991). Sea level rises associated with global warming could have a significant effect on the mangroves required for breeding. Food supplies could also be affected by commercial fishing (A. A. Burbidge).

11 Information required

- 11.1 Understand relationship between Lesser Noddy, its prey and commercial fishing.

