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Kale, H. W., II, B. Pranty, B. M. Stith, and C. W. Biggs. 1992. The atlas of the breeding birds of Florida. Final Report. Florida Game and Fresh Water Fish Commission, Tallahassee, Florida.

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Masked Booby

Sula dactylatra

Found throughout the world in tropical and subtropical seas, the Masked Booby is a black and white seabird the size of a small goose. It nests on remote oceanic islands from about 25° N to 30° S (Palmer 1962; Clapp et al. 1982). In Florida, it is a rare to uncommon visitor around the entire coastline but usually stays well offshore. Masked Boobies breed in very small numbers on the Dry Tortugas.

Habitat. Masked Boobies usually feed far offshore. Fish and squid are their chief prey, and these are obtained primarily by vertical plunge-diving from heights up to 30.5 m (100 ft) (Clapp et al. 1982).

Masked Boobies nest on the ground on small oceanic islands or on barren sand banks. The nests contain 1 or 2 large, chalky-white eggs laid in shallow scrapes. Incubation requires 40 to 48 days, and the young are capable of flight at about 4 months of age (Clapp et al. 1982).

Seasonal Occurrence. Although Masked Boobies occur throughout the year in Florida, they are most numerous from April through October and more frequent in the Gulf than in the Atlantic (Robertson and Woolfenden 1992).

Status. Since the mid-1970s, usually 10 to 20, but sometimes as many as 50 Masked Boobies, have frequented the outer sand islets of the Dry Tortugas. Annually, from 1 to 6 pairs have nested there in winter since at least the winter of 1983-84. At the Dry Tortugas, the species' only known nesting site in the contiguous United States nesting has been attempted on East, Middle, and particularly, Hospital Keys. Nesting attempts at the Dry Tortugas have often failed because of erosion or flooding of nest sites by winter storms; and, as of 1991, no more than 5 young in total have fledged from there (Clapp and Robertson 1986; W. B. Robertson, Jr., unpubl. data).

The Masked Boobies that colonized the Dry Tortugas probably came from colonies on the Campeche Bank off the Yucatan Peninsula of Mexico, where about 2,000 individuals nested as recently as 1986 (Tunnell and Chapman 1988).

William B. Robertson, Jr.

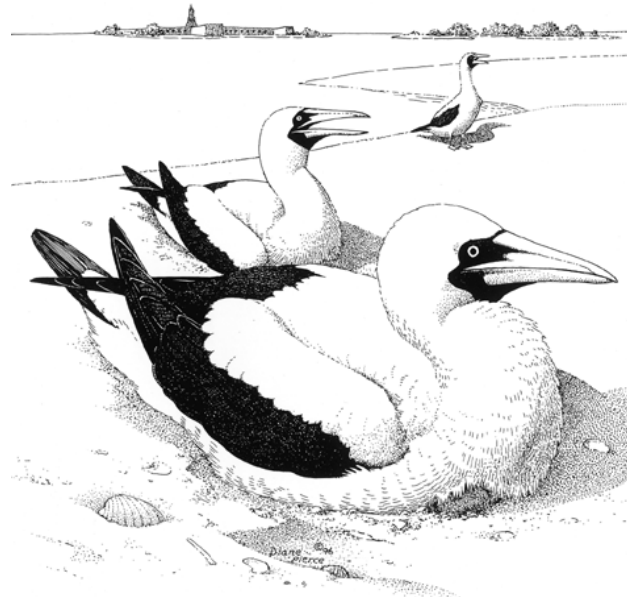


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