

Masked Booby (*Sula dactylatra fullageri*)

Description

Large (to 87cm) white bird with black tips to flight feathers; black mask on face and around eyes. Yellow bill with base black; legs and feet flesh grey or yellow.

Conservation Status

Listed as Vulnerable under the NSW TSC Act 1995.

Listed Migratory species under the Commonwealth EPBC Act 1999.

Distribution

Widely distributed throughout the tropical and subtropical seas of the world. In Australia, it breeds on Islands off north-east and north-west Australia.

On Lord Howe Island, the breeding colonies are on Ball's Pyramid, Muttonbird Island, the Admiralty Islands and at King and Muttonbird Points on the main island. Lord Howe Island supports the southern-most breeding colony of this species.

Ecology

Breeding: On Lord Howe Island, the Masked Booby remains year round. It breeds from June to February and usually lays two white eggs about six days apart. Although both hatch, usually only the first chick survives. Adults share incubation and care of young. Incubation 43 days, fledging four months.

Nest: No nest is built. Eggs are laid in a rough scrape in the soil; scraps of debris and local vegetation may accumulate as incubation proceeds.

Diet: Squid and fish.

Foraging Behaviour: Mainly sedentary. Generally solitary, forages in deep water far out to sea. Forages by spectacular plunge-dives from c. 20 m or more.

Population Data/Health

Population estimated at 100 – 1000 pairs (Hutton 1990).

Habitat

Marine, pelagic, mainly in tropical and subtropical waters. Feeds at sea during the day. The Masked Booby breeds on high open areas so they can take off directly into the wind (Hutton 1990).

Threats

Juveniles occasionally dive on lures towed by fishing boats, sometimes getting hooked.

Impacts Upon Other Species

Not known.



Photo: Ian Hutton

Masked Booby (*Sula dactylatra fullageri*)

References

Fullagar, P.J., McKean, J.L. and Van Tets, G. F. 1974. Appendix F. Report on the birds, p. 55-72. In Recher, H. F. and Clark, S.S. *Environmental Survey of Lord Howe Island*. A report to the Lord Howe Island Board. N.S.W. Govt. Printer.

Hindwood, K.A. 1940. The Birds of Lord Howe Island. *Emu* 40:1-86.

Hutton, I. 1991. *Birds of Lord Howe Island: Past and Present*. Hutton, Coffs Harbour.

Lindsey, T.R. 1986. *The Seabirds Of Australia*. The National Photographic Index Of Australian Wildlife. Angus & Robertson, UK.

Marchant, S. Higgins, P.J. (eds.) 1990. *The Handbook of Australian, New Zealand & Antarctic Birds*. Oxford University Press, Melbourne.

Ross, G.J.B., Weaver, K. & Greig, J.C. (eds) 1996. *The Status of Australia's Seabirds: Proceedings of the National Seabird Workshop*, Canberra, 1-2 November 1993. Biodiversity Group, Environment Australia: Canberra vii + 237 pp.



Photo: Ian Hutton

Masked Booby (*Sula dactylatra fullageri*)