

TORTUGAS TERN BANDING RECORDS BROKEN

(A follow-up to the fine article
by James Richardson, "A Tern Band-
ing Project in the Dry Tortugas"
(EBBA News 27(1):5-11).

16,000 Sooty Tern chicks and 4,500 Sooty adults were banded in late June on Bush Key, Dry Tortugas, to establish a new record for terns banded on one expedition to these remote islands 70 miles west of Key West. The banding of Sooty and Noddy Terns is a 15 year project cooperative between the National Park Service, the Florida Audubon Society, and the Florida State Museum. There are two trips each year, one in May to band adults, one in June to band both adults and young. Fourteen people participated on invitation in each trip in 1964.

This tern nesting colony is nationally and internationally known as it is the only one for the Sooty and Brown Noddy Terns in North America. As a part of the Fort Jefferson National Monument it is provided adequate protection and supervision by the National Park Service. Banding was started in a limited way in 1936 by Jack C. Russell of Orlando, then a student at the University of Florida and a summer Parks' employee. It was continued on a larger scale from 1937 to 1941 by Florida Audubon personnel, who banded some 13,000 birds during that period. War and other activities brought discontinuance of this work until 1959.

Much that has been unknown about these terns, especially the Sooty Tern, it is anticipated will gradually be revealed as a result of the banding. New longevity records for the species have already been established with the capture of more than 100 birds banded between 1937 and 1940. These, the band numbers disclose, were from 18 to 26 years of age when recaptured. Practically all had been banded as chicks.

The colony, which at one time had declined to a few thousand birds, now harbors at least 100,000 Sooty Terns and more than 2,000 Noddies. The birds survived this year's oil spill from a beached vessel thanks to quick and effective measures of the Park Service.

It is still not known where the birds spend the winter. They disappear in September to appear over the Tortugas again late in the winter, or early spring. Meanwhile banded birds may have been carried by storm to Long Island, N.Y., to Massachusetts, Virginia, or Texas. Others have been found in the West Indies, in Central America and South America. Half a dozen have been picked up in four countries in Africa. Gradually these wanderings are being charted. The background of the tern colony and its population and problems concerning it over the years appeared this year in booklet form, "The Tern of the Dry Tortugas," by William B. Robertson, Jr., published by the Florida State Museum.

EBBA members included in the June tern banding project were William B. Robertson, Dr. Oliver L. Austin, Jr., and R. Connor Tedards.