

DRY TORTUGAS BANDING  
 A Photographic Report  
 By Anderson J. Martin

From the best estimates the Dry Tortugas tern colony now numbers in the hundreds of thousands of birds. In the mid 1930's the Florida Audubon Society first investigated this colony and reported a total of 30,000 Sooty and 2,000 Brown Noddy Terns. Since 1959, when the banding project was resumed by C. Russell Mason, of the Florida Audubon Society, Dr. William B. Robertson, Jr., biologist of the National Park Service, stationed at the Everglades National Park, and assisted by Dr. Oliver L. Austin, representing the Florida State Museum, the total number of birds banded has increased from (5,500 Sooty Tern "chicks" and 1,953 Adult Sooty Terns<sup>1</sup>) banded to 23,300 Sooty Tern "chicks" and 7,000 Adult Sooty Terns in 1965<sup>2</sup>.

Of the 12,000 terns banded from 1937 to 1940 more than a hundred have been recaptured at the Dry Tortugas, indicating that the maximum longevity may be from 18 to 29 years. It was originally thought that 10 to 15 years was the maximum age.

Besides the banding, other studies connected with this project have to do with population, predation, food, plumages and the variation in the time of nesting.

The travels of the Sooty Terns after the nesting season is still a mystery, as it is for this species throughout the world. There are colonies of Sooty Terns in many tropical isles in the Atlantic including Jamaica, Trinidad, and Ascension, and similar colonies in the Pacific. It is hoped that through recovered banded birds this puzzle to their travels may be solved.

(Photographs by the author appear on the succeeding pages.)

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<sup>1</sup> James Richardson, "A Tern-Banding Project at the Dry Tortugas," ERBA News, 27 (Jan-Feb 1964), p. 7.

<sup>2</sup> Florida Audubon Society (News Release), Tortugas Tern Colony Continues to Thrive (Maitland, June 21, 1965), p. 1-3.





Top Left - Sooty Tern "chicks" are flightless at this age but are fast runners.

Center Left - Noddy Terns nesting on Bush Key.

Center Right - A Noddy Tern "chick" on the nest.



Bottom Right - An immature Blue-faced Booby spent several days on Bush Key.



Top Right - Dr. William B. Robertson, Jr. banding one of the 23,000 Sooty Tern "chicks".

Center Left - Clark Olson checks temperatures of Sooty "chicks" assisted by his wife Barbara.



Center Right - Dr. Oliver L. Austin approaches one of the banding corrals.

Bottom Left - Cooperative "chick" banding by (L-R) Mrs. Ted Below, R. Connor Tedards, Clark Olson and Mrs. Tedards.



-- Photos by the author.