

# Birds of BIOT

The majority of birds in BIOT depend on the ocean, and many of the islands have globally important populations, some housing tens of thousands of birds, during the breeding season

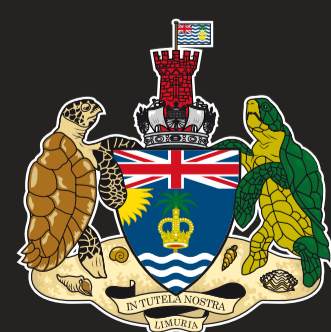
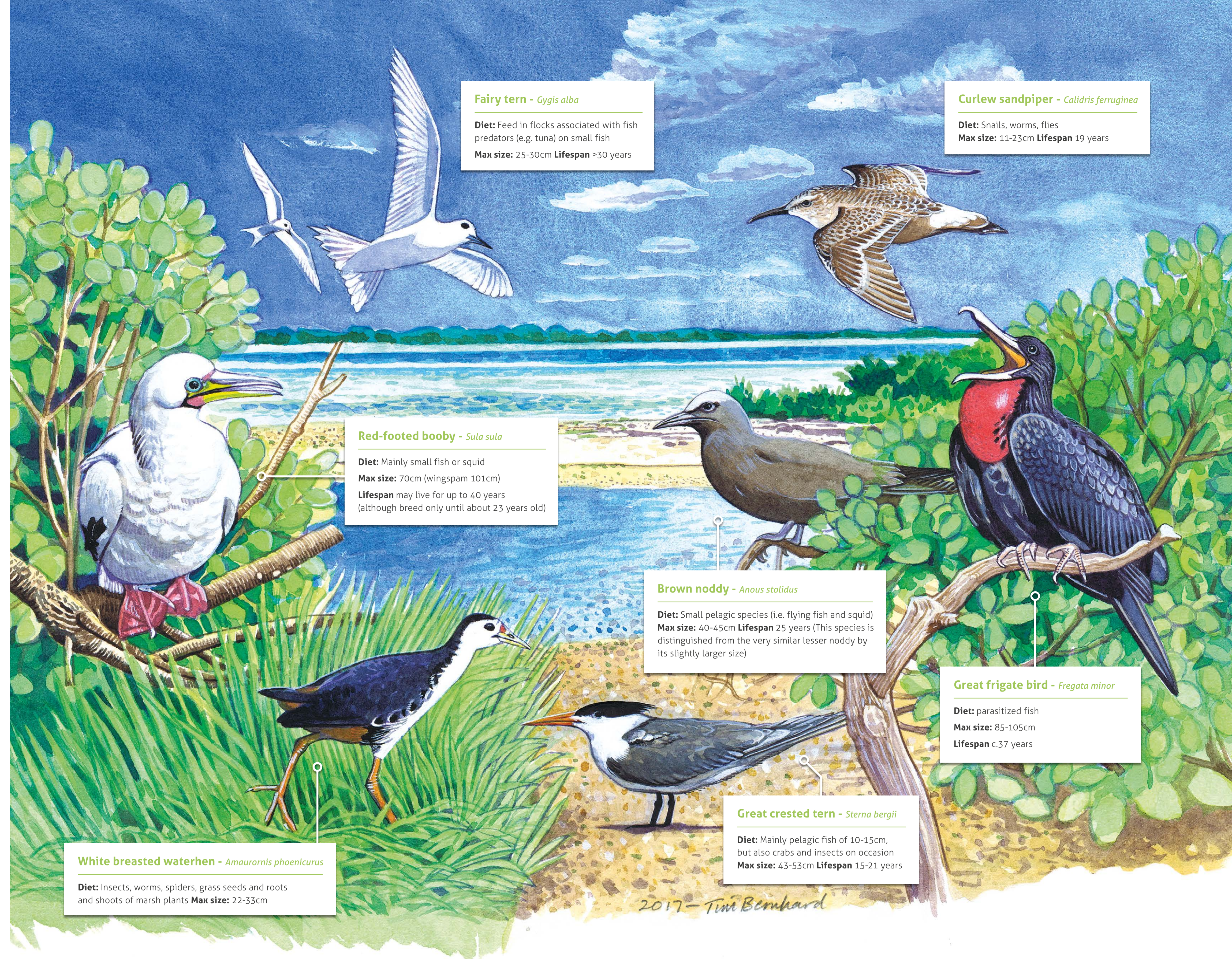
The diminutive **fairly terns** and their heavier dark cousins, the common and lesser **noddies** are found throughout BIOT, and are often seen downtown in Diego Garcia. In Diego, single or pairs of brown noddies can mostly be seen protecting their nests in the trees around the accommodation blocks. In the outer atolls however, lesser noddies nest colonially, with several thousand often breeding on just a few trees, bunched together below an interwoven canopy of usually *Pisonia* trees. **Fairy terns** are loyal partners, so are generally seen in pairs but may nest anywhere, although “nest” is a slightly misleading term as these birds simply lay an egg on a convenient branch.

Small waders, such as plovers, are often seen on BIOT’s beaches, nervously scurrying across sand and rocks and wading into shallow water to pick at any small creatures they can find.

One of the most dramatic seabirds is the **red-footed booby**. These beautiful birds fly effortlessly over the open ocean, gliding just a few feet above the surface in search of fish, and diving into the water, and even swimming underwater with their large webbed feet, to catch their quarry. They are less adept on land, clumsily landing on tree branches and struggling hard to take off again. Red-footed boobies are colonial and highly social, and during the mating season display the intensified colours of their bills and feet to one another. Once a pair are mated, they will often return to the same nest site, year-on-year.

**Frigate birds** are another spectacular bird. Two species are found in BIOT. They can soar effortlessly, using thermals to climb to altitudes of 2000m or more, and sometimes staying aloft, day and night, for up to 2 months. They cannot land on the sea, and usually feed by ‘surface-dipping’, taking flying-fish, or squid in flight. Frigate birds are also sometimes called “pirates” as they are occasionally ‘kleptoparasitic’, mobbing other birds such as boobies in flight to force them to regurgitate their own catch, which the frigate birds swoop down and catch in mid-air.

One of the biggest threats to BIOT’s seabirds are rats, which have invaded most islands and eat eggs and chicks. Efforts to remove rats from islands can lead to dramatic recoveries of seabird colonies.



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