



**CONVENTION ON
MIGRATORY
SPECIES**

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Agenda Item 25.1

**PROPOSAL FOR THE INCLUSION OF
THE BLACK NODDY (*Anous minutus*) SUBSPECIES *worcesteri*
ON APPENDIX II OF THE CONVENTION**

Summary:

The Government of the Philippines has submitted the attached proposal* for the inclusion of the Black Noddy (*Anous minutus*) subspecies *worcesteri* on Appendix II of CMS.

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**PROPOSAL FOR THE INCLUSION OF
THE BLACK NODDY (*Anous minutus*) SUBSPECIES *worcesteri*
ON APPENDIX II OF THE CONVENTION ON THE CONSERVATION OF
MIGRATORY SPECIES OF WILD ANIMALS**

A. PROPOSAL

This proposal is for the inclusion of Black Noddy (*Anous minutus*) subspecies *worcesteri* in Appendix II. The species is classified as Endangered on account of a very small population which breeds within a tiny area of occupancy on just two islets, and is projected to decline by more than 70 per cent over the next 10 to 15 years.

B. PROPONENT: Government of the Republic of the Philippines

C. SUPPORTING STATEMENT

1. Taxonomy

- 1.1 Class: Aves
- 1.2 Order: Charadriiformes
- 1.3 Family: Laridae
- 1.4 Genus, species or subspecies, including author and year:
Anous minutus worcesteri (McGregor, 1911)
- 1.5 Scientific synonyms: No known synonyms
- 1.6 Common name(s), in all applicable languages used by the Convention:
 - English - Black Noddy
 - French - Noddi noir
 - Spanish - Tiñosa menuda

2. Overview

Anous minutus subspecies *worcesteri* breeds only on two islets totaling 1.6 hectares in the Tubbataha Reefs Natural Park, the Philippines where a small population has been in continuous decline since 2013 due to massive loss in breeding habitat. When not breeding, it covers a relative small oceanic area which mainly includes Indonesia and Malaysia. The species would benefit from enhanced protection and concerted management actions plans.

3. Migrations

3.1 Kinds of movement, distance, the cyclical and predicable nature of the migration

The Black Noddy subspecies *worcesteri* leaves its breeding ground at the Central Sulu Sea (Tubbataha Reefs Natural Park, the Philippines) in November and returns mainly in March (Jensen and Songco 2016). It is also known from the Java Sea, Indonesia (Gochfeld et al.). A juvenile bird banded on Bird Islet, Tubbataha Reef Natural Park was documented from Lankayan Island, Sabah, Malaysia three years after it was banded. There is only one recent record of the subspecies from within the Philippines outside of the Sulu Sea suggesting that migration takes place to nearby Indonesian and Malaysian waters and occasionally west to Sri Lanka (Dickinson 1991).

3.2 Proportion of the population migrating, and why that is a significant proportion

The entire adult population of the subspecies is migratory and is absent from the breeding grounds and the Philippines for about four months annually.

4. Biological data (other than migration)

4.1 Distribution (current and historical)

Breeding: Philippines (Bird Islet and South Islet, Tubbataha Reefs Natural Park, Sulu Sea, Palawan). The subspecies may also breed on Ashmore Reef off NW Australia (Gochfeld et al 2017).

Migrant/ wintering range: Malaysia and Indonesia

Vagrant: Occasionally west to Sri Lanka (Dickinson 1991).

Historical: Described from Philippines Cavili Island, Cagayancillo in 1911 (Worcester 1911). It abandoned Cavili around 1987, apparently due to increased anthropogenic disturbances and conversion of its breeding habitat. Rediscovered in October 1991 as breeding on Bird Islet, Tubbataha Reefs Natural Park (Jensen and Songco 2016). Extensive search for breeding seabirds in the Philippine part of the Sulu Sea and in the Balabac Strait 2007 revealed absence of the subspecies from all reefs and atolls (Jensen 2007, Matillano et al 2006). Also absent from Lawak Island, Kalayan (Spratleys) where other seabird species are breeding (Bim Quemado pers. comm. 2016).

4.2 Population (estimates and trends)

The first population estimate is from South Islet, Tubbataha Reefs Natural Park in 1981 where 147 adults were counted (Kennedy 1982). In October 1991 more than 3,000 birds and in 1995 about 7,128 adults were found breeding. The population on Bird Islet fluctuated between 3,250 and 4,552 in the period 1997 to 2000. Before, about 7,000 were recorded in 2001, although it then collapsed to about 800 in 2004. In 2005 most of the breeding population, 6,400 adults, were still on Bird Islet but thereafter the Bird Islet breeding population declined due to loss of breeding habitat – only 795 adults were present in 2016 (Jensen et al 2016). On South Islet a corresponding increase was noted: 215 in 2005, 3,300 in 2006 and 8,250 in 2013, when a record number of 10,656 adults were counted on both islets (Jensen and Songco 2016). Since then a continued decline to only 3,716 adults with 920 nests could be found in May 2017 (Tubbataha Management Office, pers. comm. 2017). The proportion of nesting adults has fallen from about 50 per cent (2014) to 19 per cent (2016).

The only other known breeding site was found on Cavili Island, Cagayancillo (Kennedy et al 2000). The species, however, abruptly disappeared from the island in 1987 presumably due to increased anthropogenic disturbances and substantial reduction in its breeding habitat (W. Dosong pers. comm. 2007).

4.3 Habitat (short description and trends)

The two breeding islets of Tubbataha Reef Natural Park have undergone progressive development from barren to fully vegetated habitats. The breeding habitat for the Black Noddy subspecies is dominantly composed of tropical almond *Terminalia catappa*, lettuce tree *Pisonia alba*, and octopus bush *Argusia argentea*. In 1911 Bird Islet was barren and remained so at least until 1981 (Kennedy 1982). By 1991 more than 100 trees were noted and bush and tree numbers increased to about 500 by 2004. Since then a massive influx of breeding Red-footed Booby *Sula sula* has destroyed most of the breeding habitat on Bird islet. It caused most of the Noddy population to move to South Islet which was thickly forested until 2011 (Jensen and Songco 2016). In 2017 only about 36 trees in a severely deteriorating condition remained on South Islet (Tubbataha Management Office, pers. comm.2017).

Outside of the breeding period the subspecies is strictly pelagic.

4.4 Biological characteristics

The subspecies breeds mainly from April to August and in some years also from September to October (1991, 1997, 2008, and 2009) The October breeding population is smaller with peak counts of 3,500 individuals (1997) (Jensen and Songco 2016). It lays normally one egg and

nests are re-used in subsequent years. Survival rate is unknown although there are several cases of dead adult birds found entangled in fishing lines used as breeding material. Predation by migratory individuals of Peregrine *Falco peregrinus* takes place regularly. The scarcity of breeding habitat has caused the subspecies to breed in two annual cycles as a reproductive strategy.

4.5 Role of the taxon in its ecosystem

The guano produced by the subspecies adds large quantities of nutrients to the soil which is of great importance to the plant communities on the two breeding islets. This again contributes to protecting the islets from velocity of waves and reduces impacts from storms and sea level rise.

5. Conservation status and threats

5.1 IUCN Red List Assessment (if available)

Not applicable. The proposal is for the geographically separate endemic subspecies *Anous minutus worcesteri*

5.2 Equivalent information relevant to conservation status assessment

The subspecies has a very restricted breeding range of 1.6 hectares. Combined with a rapidly deteriorating breeding habitat enabling less than 10 per cent of the adult population to reproduce and increasingly a declining breeding population, its conservation status is proposed as Endangered based on the following:

- a. A projected population size reduction of ≥ 50 per cent over the next 10 years or three generation period following i) area of occupancy, ii) quality of breeding habitat, and iii) declining number of mature individuals due to lack of replenishment of adult individuals;
- b. Projected extreme fluctuations caused by i) reduction in area of occupancy and locations of population, and ii) number of mature individuals.
- c. Lack of alternate breeding sites free of predators making the subspecies extremely vulnerable to loss of breeding habitats and breeding areas.

5.3 Threats to the population (factors, intensity)

The main threat to the population at the two breeding sites is a continued loss of breeding habitats, e.g. in 2016 and 2017 only 19 per cent and 25 per cent of the present adult population respectively, could breed due to lack of breeding trees and foliage for nesting materials. In 2017 only 39 per cent of the peak population (10,656 in 2013) were present. As remaining trees are projected to die within less than five years, it will leave a fragment of the adult population with just a few bushes for continued reproduction (A.E. Jensen pers. comm. 2017).

A longer-term threat is reduction in the land area of Bird Islet suspected to be caused by sea level rise and increased wave velocity due to increase in storms and their intensity. In 2016 the land area was reduced by 17 per cent (Jensen et al 2016).

5.4 Threats connected especially with migrations

No known threats

5.5 National and international utilization

National: Prior to management and protection of Tubbataha Reefs Natural Park, fishermen were known to collect the subspecies and its eggs for subsistence (Jensen and Songco 2016). Many fisherfolk also kept the subspecies as a pet on board their fishing boats (A.E. Jensen pers. comm. 2017).

International: Unknown

6. Protection status and species management

6.1 National protection status

Protected in the Philippines against hunting under Republic Act 9147, otherwise known as the Wildlife Resources Protection and Conservation Act which provides general prohibition of hunting wildlife.

The subspecies is indirectly protected under the Republic Act No. 10067 - Tubbataha Reefs Natural Park (TRNP) Act of 2009.

It is listed with status as Endangered in the Philippine Red List of Threatened Species (DENR 2017).

6.2 International protection status

None

6.3 Management measures

Under the Philippines Republic Act NO. 10067 the subspecies is protected in its breeding area, e.g. a zoning plan prevents visits to the breeding islet and utilization of the subspecies. Hence, the measures take into consideration effective protection of the species, its habitats, and ecosystems it is dependent on.

6.4 Habitat conservation

Within the subspecies' breeding area in the Philippines, the management of the protected area where it exists, is entitled to implement activities to manage the population. In 2017 consideration is being given to start building artificial nesting platforms and provide the subspecies with nesting materials as a temporary substitute for loss of most of its breeding habitat.

As the subspecies only occur pelagic outside of the breeding season, there are no known joint programmes between the range states Philippines, Malaysia and Indonesia.

6.5 Population monitoring

The breeding population in the Philippines is monitored monthly by the park rangers of the Tubbataha Reefs Natural Park. In addition, quarterly breeding inventories are undertaken (Jensen and Songco 2016).

7. Effects of the proposed amendment

7.1 Anticipated benefits of the amendment

Increase in management action plans, funding of these and increased collaboration within range states

7.2 Potential risks of the amendment

None

7.3 Intention of the proponent concerning development of an Agreement or Concerted Action

The intention is to seek full legal protection of the subspecies in Indonesia and Malaysia and further develop a concerted action plan with focus on a) satellite tracking of the subspecies during migration to determine main non-breeding areas, and b) based on results from satellite-tracking further determine appropriate conservation actions.

8. Range States

Breeding: Philippines

Migration: Malaysia and Indonesia

9. Consultations

Preliminary consultations have been undertaken with Narelle Montgomery, Government of Australia, and with Wetlands International, BirdLife International and BirdLife Philippines. Other consultations will be undertaken with the EAAFP Seabird Working Group.

10. Additional remarks

11. References

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