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LONGEVITY OF SOOTY TERN STERNA FUSCATA ON ASCENSION ISLAND

On 25 June 2002, while carrying out fieldwork on Ascension Island in the South Atlantic (07° 57' S, 14° 22' W), we captured a ringed Sooty Tern *Sterna fuscata*. The bird was incubating an egg on Waterside Fair and was captured using a hand net. The number on the American ring was 1013 13651. The following season, on 22 April 2003, we captured another Sooty Tern with an American ring number 1013 13584. The ring was worn rendering the last three digits somewhat illegible and this was our best guess at the ring number. The bird was re-ringed with a British Trust for Ornithology (BTO) ring. In 2005, the original ring was examined in a laboratory and the number confirmed. This bird was incubating an egg on our Mars Bay study site. Both birds were returned to their nest to continue incubating.



Sooty Tern Ascension Island. Bonte Stern Ascension (B.J. Hughes)

The Bird Banding Laboratory at Patuxent was contacted and their records revealed that Dr N.B. Gale ringed 200 Sooty Tern pulli on Ascension with this banding sequence during the early part of November 1975. The first tern we captured was therefore 26½ years old and the second was 27½ years old.

Terns are long lived birds and the oldest tern recorded is a Sooty Tern aged 36 years (Schreiber & Burger 2002). The oldest known breeder on the Seychelles is 34 years old, on Dry Tortugas 32 years, and in the Pacific 26½ years (Schreiber *et al.* 2002). The previous longevity records for Sooty Terns on Ascension were 16½ years on 7 July 1942 and 18 years in March 1944 (Thacher Cooke 1945). Our ring recoveries suggest that despite feral cat predation on Ascension, Sooty Terns in the South Atlantic live as long as other Sooty Terns in the Pacific, Indian and North Atlantic Oceans.

Schreiber E.A. & Burger J. 2002. *Biology of Marine Birds*. Boca Raton, London, New York, Washington D.C.: CRC Press.

Schreiber E.A., Feare C.J., Harrington B.A., Murray B., Robertson W.B., Robertson M.J. & Woolfenden G.E. 2002 Sooty Tern (*Sterna Fuscata*). In A. Poole and F. Gill (eds.) *Birds of North America* No 665, Philadelphia, PA.

Thacher Cooke M. 1945. Longevity of the Sooty Tern. *Bird-Banding* 16: 106.

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