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## AN ALBINO BLACK NODDY SIGHTING

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The Black Noddy (*Anous tenuirostris*) is a common seabird found in most island groups in the tropical Pacific Ocean. The species has two color phases. Light phase birds have white caps gradually fading into dark gray, brown mantle and abdomen, pale gray rump and tail, and are restricted in range to the Hawaiian Islands. Dark phase birds are sooty black throughout, with the exception of a prominent white cap (therefore the common name *Black Noddy*). Immatures have either white restricted to their foreheads, or extensive white caps with brown flecks (King 1967). Albinism of varying degrees in this species has been reported in 2% of birds examined on Laysan Island, Lisianski Island, and from the U.S. National Museum of Natural History (Clapp 1974).

On 15 July 1980, Amotz Zahavi and I were watching Black Noddies 10 km southwest of Wahaula Visitor Center in Hawaii Volcanoes National Park. We saw a pair of noddies perched on a cliff, so we walked over and stood above them for a better view. The birds were immatures, as they lacked white on their heads and tails. This is evidently the first probable breeding record of Black Noddies in this area of Hawaii Island (Conant 1980, C. van Riper pers. comm.)

While we were peering over the edge of the cliff, adult noddies started flying into the area, diving within 3 m of our heads constantly chattering. After one minute had passed, 15 adult noddies were flying around us. Mixed in with the group was one solid white bird (Fig. 1), which at first glance, I thought was a White Tern (*Gygis alba*). Closer inspection of the bird revealed a long (5 cm), pointed black bill, black eyes, almost completely white plumage with the exception of a tinge of brown on the upper coverts and on the face. This individual was

the same size and body shape as adjacent Black Noddies, and its vocalizations were identical to the other noddies. We then realized that the bird was an imperfect albinistic Black Noddy. The identification of this aberrant bird was greatly aided by the fact that there were other noddies in the immediate vicinity. If the albino had been seen alone, it might have passed as a White Tern.

Albinism has been classified into four categories by geneticists (Terres 1980): (1) total--the rarest form, melanin pigment is totally lacking from the eyes, soft parts (skin), and plumage; (2) incomplete--melanin is totally lacking from either the eyes, soft parts, or plumage, but not all three; (3) imperfect--pigment is partially reduced in the eyes, soft parts, or plumage, but not completely in any; and (4) partial--the most common form, albinism within local parts of the body involving certain feathers and is often symmetrical; each side of the bird may have white feathers in the same pattern. Of the albinistic noddies recorded by Clapp (1974) all were partial albinos. Albinism in the birds ranged from one adult with one white secondary to an immature female with white spotting on the coverts, outer edges of the remiges and rectices, and breast in a symmetrical pattern. Therefore, the bird I saw on 15 July apparently had the highest degree of white plumage reported for this species.

Albinism can be caused by a genetic change that prevents an enzyme from forming pigment (Terres 1980). It can also be caused by an inadequate diet (Short and Layborne 1967). Albino birds may often have poor vision and weak flight feathers which may diminish their ability to fly. They may also be more vulnerable to predators than normally colored birds. Falcons reportedly will single out a

