

FEATURE ARTICLES

LAYING DATE, CHICK PROVISIONING, AND BREEDING SUCCESS OF LESSER NODDIES ON ARIDE ISLAND, SEYCHELLES

JAIME A. RAMOS^{1,5}, ANNA MARIA MAUL², JOHN BOWLER³, DAVID MONTICELLI⁴
AND CARLOS PACHECO¹

¹*Institute of Marine Research (IMAR), Departamento de Zoologia, Universidade de Coimbra, 3004-517 Coimbra, Portugal*

²*Amundsengasse 5, 8010 Graz, Austria*

³*Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, Shepherd's Cottage, Heylipol, Tiree, Inner Hebrides PA77 6TY, UK*

⁴*Royal Belgian Institute for Natural Sciences, Department of Conservation Biology, 1040 Brussels, Belgium*

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⁵E-mail: jramos@ci.uc.pt

Abstract. We describe the main reproductive characteristics (laying date, egg size, hatchling mass, and breeding success), chick growth, and patterns of provisioning in Lesser Noddies (*Anous tenuirostris*) on Aride Island, Seychelles, 1995–2002. The bulk of the population laid eggs between late May and late June in most years. Both hatching and fledging success varied significantly between years, with fledging success (2–92%) more variable than hatching success (28–91%). Productivity of less than 0.10 chicks per breeding pair occurred in 25% of the years. In 2001, egg volume did not differ significantly between hatched and unhatched eggs. Chick mass at hatching was significantly correlated with an egg volume index, but there were no correlations between egg size and either hatching date or linear growth rate. Around 40% of the Lesser Noddy chicks were fed at dusk. Chicks aged 0–5 and 6–10 days received significantly less food than older chicks. There was evidence of daily and stochastic variation in the foraging success of individual birds. Comparing similar studies, chicks of Lesser Noddies and Sooty Terns (*Sterna fuscata*) appeared more resistant to fluctuating food supplies than those of Roseate Terns (*Sterna dougallii*), indicating that, in tropical seas, slow growth and foraging farther offshore are more advantageous than faster growth and inshore feeding.

Key words: *Anous tenuirostris*, *breeding parameters*, *chick growth*, *chick provisioning*, *Lesser Noddy*, *tropical terns*.