



SPREP
Secretariat of the Pacific Regional
Environment Programme



**Pacific
BioScares**

Palau Seabird Keys for Identification

These simplified decision trees are intended to help identify seabirds that have been found or are likely to be found in Palau.

Participants can use them with photos, colony observations, drone imagery, or birds seen from boats.

There are three sets of “keys”:

1. Beginner Key to identify the major seabird groups of Palau
2. Palau Breeding Seabird Key to identify species most likely to be encountered during colony monitoring in Palau
3. Advanced Pelagic Key for boat-based surveys and analysis of photos or videos taken offshore

The keys consist of pairs of questions that are answered until the species has been identified.

1. Beginner Key: Major Seabird Groups of Palau

Use this first when participants are unsure of the bird group. Based on species covered in the Seabirds of Palau section of the [website](#).

- 1a. Bird has very long tail streamers Go to 2
- 1b. No long tail streamers Go to 3
- 2a. White bird with white streamers and yellow bill . White-tailed Tropicbird
- 2b. White bird with red streamers and red bill Red-tailed Tropicbird
- 3a. Bill strongly hooked; soars effortlessly Frigatebird
- 3b. Bill not strongly hooked Go to 4
- 4a. Large heavy-bodied seabird with stout bill Booby
- 4b. Slender-bodied seabird Go to 5
- 5a. Tiny oceanic bird, fluttering flight Storm-petrel
- 5b. Larger than storm-petrel Go to 6
- 6a. Bird mostly white Go to 7
- 6b. Bird mostly dark Go to 10
- 7a. Black stripe across rear of head Black-naped Tern
- 7b. No black stripe Go to 8
- 8a. Blue-black bill White Tern
- 8b. Yellow/red/orange bill Go to 9
- 9a. Huge yellow bill Greater Crested Tern
- 9b. Small-medium tern Other Tern
- 10a. Brown bird with pale cap Brown Noddy
- 10b. Blackish bird with white cap Black Noddy

- 10c. Black-and-white tern Sooty Tern
- 10d. Dark grey tern with white eyebrow Bridled Tern
- 10e. Long-winged oceanic bird Petrel or Shearwater

2. Palau Breeding Seabird Key

This key focuses on species most likely to be encountered during colony monitoring in Palau.

Terns and Noddies

- 1a. Entirely white bird Go to 2
- 1b. Not entirely white Go to 3
- 2a. Black stripe on nape Black-naped Tern
- 2b. Blue-black bill, no nape stripe White Tern
- 3a. Bird black and white Go to 4
- 3b. Bird brown or dark grey Go to 5
- 4a. Sharp black upperparts and white forehead Sooty Tern
- 4b. Large yellow bill Greater Crested Tern
- 5a. White eyebrow extending behind eye Bridled Tern
- 5b. No white eyebrow Go to 6
- 6a. Body chocolate-brown, pale crown Brown Noddy
- 6b. Body blackish, white crown Black Noddy

Frigatebirds

- 1a. Adult male Go to 2
 - 1b. Female or juvenile Go to 3
 - 2a. Entirely black underwing Great Frigatebird
 - 2b. Narrow white underwing bar Lesser Frigatebird
 - 3a. Female with white breast Great Frigatebird
 - 3b. Female with more extensive pale markings Lesser Frigatebird
- Show more lines

Boobies

- 1a. Bright red feet Red-footed Booby
- 1b. Feet not red Go to 2
- 2a. Chocolate brown above, white below Brown Booby
- 2b. Mostly white with black facial mask Masked Booby

Tropicbirds

- 1a. Tail streamers white, bill yellow White-tailed Tropicbird
- 1b. Tail streamers red, bill red Red-tailed Tropicbird

3. Advanced Pelagic Key

This key is intended for boat-based surveys and analysis of photos or videos taken offshore. The key emphasizes flight style and underwing pattern because these are often the only useful field marks.

Step 1: Assign to Major Group

- 1a. Tiny, fluttering, bat-like flight Storm-petrel
- 1b. Larger bird Go to 2
- 2a. Long narrow wings, gliding low over waves Shearwater
- 2b. Broader wings Petrel
- 2c. Huge bird (>2 m wingspan) Albatross

Storm-petrels

- 1a. White rump obvious Go to 2
- 1b. No white rump Matsudaira's Storm-petrel
- 2a. White rump, pale wing bars Wilson's Storm-petrel
- 2b. White rump and white underparts Polynesian Storm-petrel

Albatrosses

- 1a. Mostly dark bird with pale face Black-footed Albatross
- 1b. Mostly white bird with dark wings Laysan Albatross

Shearwaters

- 1a. Pale and dark morphs occur Wedge-tailed Shearwater
- 1b. No pale morph Go to 2
- 2a. Streaked head and body Streaked Shearwater
- 2b. Not streaked Go to 3
- 3a. Uniformly dark Short-tailed Shearwater
- 3b. Dark with silver underwing flash Sooty Shearwater
- 3c. Large black-brown bird with pale bill Flesh-footed Shearwater
- 3d. Clean black-and-white pattern Buller's Shearwater

Petrels

- 1a. White neck obvious White-necked Petrel
- 1b. No white neck Go to 2
- 2a. Uniform dark brown Bulwer's Petrel
- 2b. Mottled appearance Mottled Petrel
- 2c. Contrasting black wing pattern Black-winged Petrel
- 2d. Grey-and-white petrel with dark eye patch Cook's Petrel
- 2e. Large pale-faced petrel Juan Fernandez Petrel