



COMMONWEALTH of the  
NORTHERN MARIANAS ISLANDS

• Farallon de Pajaros (Uracas)  
• Maug  
• Asuncion

• Agrihan  
• Pagan

• Alamagan  
• Guguan

• Sarigan  
• Anatahan

• Farallon de Medinilla

• Saipan  
• Tinian  
• Aguiguan

• Rota

\* Distribution in the CNMI

PHOTOS BY SCOTT VOGT



## NATIVE SEABIRD WHITE TERN

Chunge Chamorro  
Geeghi Carolinian

### IDENTIFICATION

White terns have completely white bodies except for black rings around their eyes. Their thick bill is black with dark blue at the base. Another name sometimes used for this species is fairy tern.

### HABITAT and FEEDING

White terns can be found on beaches and in forests near coastal areas. They fly over the reef and open water to feed. They dive down to the surface of the water to catch small fish and squid. Fishermen like this bird because it often leads them to schools of tuna and mahi-mahi.

### REPRODUCTION

White terns keep the same mate throughout their lifetimes. They do not build nests, rather females lay a single, speckled egg in the fork of a tree branch. The female sits on the egg while the male hunts for fish. He may even take a turn at incubating the egg. Newly hatched chicks are fuzzy and have sharp-clawed feet for hanging onto the branch. If the chick falls to the ground, the parents will try to feed and protect it.

Unlike many seabirds that feed their young regurgitated food, white tern parents feed whole fish and squid to their chicks. This

helps the chick grow quickly. Parents protect their young for several weeks until they are ready to leave the nesting site. If a person comes too close to the chick, the parents will aggressively flap their wings and squawk loudly.

### THREATS and CONSERVATION

Commercial and recreational fisheries are threats to White terns. Many seabirds are caught while trying to steal bait off long lines of hooks. Others are trapped inside of trawl nets, gillnets and by offshore trollers. Over fishing impacts seabird populations, as they must fly further from shore to search for food.

Predators and habitat alteration are other threats to white terns. Rats and predatory birds sometimes feed on the eggs of terns. Habitats may be altered due to development, pollution, military operations and natural catastrophes such as typhoons.

The commercial fishing industry is developing methods to help reduce seabirds as bycatch (non-target species). Keeping the Brown treesnake (*Boiga irregularis*) out of the CNMI will help preserve this graceful species that is frequently seen in small groups over the forests of the CNMI. The Migratory Bird Treaty Act protects terns and other seabirds of the CNMI.



ARTIST  
DOUGLAS  
PRATT

*Gygis alba*

## RUNNY NOSE?

White terns appear to have dripping noses. They're actually using salt glands located in the base of their eyes to get rid of excess salt.

**FACTOID!**



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