

NUMBERS OF NON-BURROWING BREEDING SEABIRDS OF THE HOUTMAN ABROLHOS: 1991–1993 AND 1999

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Counts of non-burrowing seabirds were conducted on 146 islands, islets and rocks in the Houtman Abrolhos, Western Australia over 14 days in early summer 1999, using a jet boat. Comparisons with similar counts made in 1991–1993 showed that numbers of breeding pairs increased from 450 000 to 701 000. This difference was due largely to the Sooty Tern *Sterna fuscata* (272 700 to 455 200) and Common Noddy *Anous stolidus* (132 000 to 161 400), although numbers of Crested *Sterna bergii*, Roseate *Sterna dougallii* and Fairy Terns *Sterna nereis* and Lesser Noddy *Anous tenuirostris* also increased. Fluctuations between 1991–93 and 1999 may be explained by increased numbers of pairs breeding in years when food is abundant, with years with a strong Leeuwin Current having lower participation rates and delayed breeding in many species. Interpretation of data collected during rapid monitoring of seabirds at the Houtman Abrolhos, such as reported here, must take account of oceanic conditions.