A review of the status and biology of an enigmatic pelagic species, the Red-tailed Tropicbird *Phaethon rubricauda*

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The Red-tailed Tropicbird *Phaeton rubricauda* occurs throughout the tropical regions of the Pacific and Indian Oceans. The species' breeding biology is quite well documented, but its population status, at-sea behaviour and ecology are poorly understood. This review summarises information on its status, morphology, behaviour and ecology and identifies aspects of its biology requiring further research that could facilitate its conservation management. The species' global population comprised an estimated 17-21,000 pairs in 2014, most of which bred on remote oceanic islands and atolls. Red-tailed Tropicbirds have short, narrow femurs and a long, straight pygostyle, making them highly efficient at oceanic foraging but cumbersome in their terrestrial locomotion. Courtship involves aerial displays in which the tail streamers possessed by both sexes play a prominent role. Clutch size is one and brood care is biparental, the parents employing a bimodal provisioning strategy involving long and short foraging trips. Breeding occurs on both bare and well vegetated substrates, vegetation cover being a key factor in nest site selection and breeding success in vegetated sites. The diet comprises mainly relatively large epipelagic fish and squid that are caught by solitary plunge-diving. The main threats to the species' survival are nest predation, sea level rises due to climate change, competition for food with commercial fisheries and extreme weather events. The main deficiencies in our knowledge of Red-tailed Tropicbird biology are the at-sea behaviour of the species and its genetic structure.

Keywords: Red-tailed Tropicbird, climate change, population status, behaviour, ecology, conservation, breeding biology