

A MASKED BOOBY AT ISLAS LOS CORONADOS, BAJA CALIFORNIA, MEXICO

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On 23 April 1988 we observed a juvenile Masked Booby (*Sula dactylatra*) roosting on a small rock off the north end of Isla Coronado Sur, Baja California, Mexico. Islas Los Coronados are situated 6 nautical miles (nm) off the west coast of northern Baja California and 4 nm south of the United States/Mexico boundary.

We first noticed the bird at 1250 as we cruised around the north end of the island. We slowly approached and observed it for 25 minutes at distances as close as 6 meters (photographs on file at the San Diego Natural History Museum). Throughout our observation the bird seemed oblivious to our presence, despite several attempts to flush it by sounding our air horn. It remained in the same spot, at times tucking its bill under its wing. Using 10 × 50 and 10 × 40 binoculars, we had excellent views of both front and back.

The bird was immediately identifiable as a sulid by the shape of its bill and head and its overall size. A Western Gull (*Larus occidentalis*) and Double-crested Cormorant (*Phalacrocorax auritus*) were on the same rock, allowing close comparison. The dorsal surface, including the wings, back, rump, and tail were a uniform light brown, approximating the Army Brown (Color 219B) of Smithe (1975). The head, neck, chin, and upper throat were a darker shade of brown, close to Dark Grayish Brown (Color 20). This contrasted sharply at the nape with the color of the back. There was no white flecking in the plumage of the head, whitish feather tips on the mantle, or white on the rump or back of the neck, which would suggest an immature Blue-footed Booby (*S. nebouxii*). The underparts, including the vent, abdomen, breast, and sides were an immaculate white. This pure white extended up to the throat, where it met the dark brown of the head and chin in a sharply contrasting shallow inverted V. According to Nelson (1978), this pattern on the throat is diagnostic of juvenile *S. dactylatra*. In all plumages, Brown Boobies (*S. leucogaster*) show brownish coloration extending down to the central breast. The legs, feet, bill, and facial skin were a dingy, nondescript grayish color. When flying, juvenile Masked Boobies are often recognized by a whitish collar around the hindneck. This characteristic was not noted on the bird at Los Coronados, perhaps because the neck was drawn close to the body throughout our observation. According to Nelson (1978), juvenile plumage is retained until the bird is at least seven months old. By the age of nine months the feathers of the head are mostly white, and white flecking is apparent over most of the mantle.

Masked Boobies, along with Red-footed Boobies (*S. sula*), are the most pelagic of the four sulid species occurring in the tropical and subtropical eastern Pacific Ocean (Pitman 1986). They breed off southern Baja California at San Benedicto Island (Jehl and Parkes 1982), Clarion Island (Everett 1988), and Alijos Rocks (Pitman 1985). North of Alijos Rocks they are extremely rare. They are unrecorded from Isla Guadalupe (Jehl and Everett 1985) and not previously known from Islas Los Coronados (Jehl 1977). Off Alta California there is one record of an adult observed on 10 January 1977 at Cortes Banks, 35 km southwest of the south end of San Clemente Island (Lewis and Tyler 1978). Details of a sighting of an adult *S. dactylatra* on 14 November 1987 at San Elijo Lagoon in San Diego County (L. Santaella, pers. comm., McCaskie 1988) have been sent to but have not yet been evaluated by the California Bird Records Committee.

NOTES

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Adult Masked Booby, Isla Clarión, Mexico

Photo by William T. Everett

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Sabine's Gull

Photo by Bruce Webb

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