

## WHITE TERN (FAIRY TERN)

*Gygis alba*

Hawaiian name: Manu-o-Ku

### Physical Traits

**Size:** 28-33 cm (11-13 in), wingspan 70-78 cm (27-34 in), Males and Females look the same

**Life Span:** 16 to 18 years

**Habitat:** Subtropical islands in the Pacific and Indian oceans. Frequently found on the southern coast of Oahu, Hawaii. They nest on coral islands, usually on trees with thin branches but also on rocky ledges and on man-made structures.

**Status:** This species is listed as vulnerable due to the fact that white tern populations tend to congregate in areas of less than 10,000 hectares, and because the white tern populations have been reduced to critical but stable levels.



White Terns are often called “Fairy Terns” due to their fairy-like appearance as well as the way they fly. Fairy Terns have featureless white plumage and a black eye ring around a dark eye that gives the appearance of large eyes. Their bill is mostly black with a blue base.

Fairy Terns mate for life, and breeding begins at age 3-5. Only one speckled egg is laid and both parents take turn incubating it in shifts that last between 48 and 72 hours. For up to 2 months after fledging, chicks move farther away from the nest site, returning only to feed. Both parents contribute to feeding the chick, and unlike other birds, chicks are not fed regurgitated food, but rather whole fish or squid. These terns usually feed alone, and during dive down to the surface to catch prey, but do not submerge. The bird carries prey crosswise in its bill.

An interesting fact about the nesting of the White Terns is that they do not build a nest. The egg is laid on a small depression on a branch, roof or other surface. The chicks have sharp clawed feet that help them hang on in strong winds. Another interesting fact about the White Tern is that the Honolulu population of White Terns has the highest fledgling success rate of any White Tern population.