

AOS Research Project - Avian deformities

Start date: October 2005

End date: Ongoing

A variety of deformities (injuries, loss of leg etc) in the birds on Ascension were discovered during routine capture, handling and ringing of adults and chicks. Sooty Terns with their tongue protruding through their lower mandible were discovered in 2005 ([Reynolds *et al.* 2009](#), Fig. 1).



Figure 1: Lateral view of a Sooty Tern *Onychoprion fuscatus* with an oral fistula. Note that the tongue protrudes permanently through the oral fistula in the floor of the oral cavity

The deformity referred to as a sublingual fistula is an opening between the buccal cavity and the skin through which the tongue protrudes. The condition has been reported in just three avian species to date (two on Ascension Island) and the cause is unknown. We argue that ectoparasite infestation of hatchlings may be an initial cause. In 2009 a juvenile Masked Booby was discovered with a sublingual fistula (Fig. 2).



Figure 2: A juvenile Masked Booby *Sula dactylata* of c.100 days of age captured on the Letterbox Peninsula on Ascension Island clearly showing an oral fistula through which the tongue protrudes on the lower mandible

Current research is focused on searches for “yellow headed” Common Myna *Acridotheres tristis* and the causes of leg injuries in Myna.

References:

Reynolds, S.J., Martin, G.R., Wearn, C.P. and Hughes, B.J. 2009. [Sub-lingual oral fistulas in sooty terns \(*Onychoprion fuscatus*\)](#). *Journal of Ornithology* 150: 691-696.