

## BIRDS OF KIRIBATI

A Pocket Guide to the Birds of Kiribati




**REFERENCE CHECKLIST**

**INDIGENOUS SPECIES**

- Phoenix Petrel
- Bulwer's Petrel
- Wedge-tailed Shearwater
- Christmas Shearwater
- Audubon's Shearwater
- White-throated Storm-petrel
- Red-tailed Tropicbird
- White-tailed Tropicbird
- Masked Booby
- Brown Booby
- Red-footed Booby
- Great Frigatebird

**ENDemic SPECIES**

- Kiritimati Reed-warbler

**INTRODUCED SPECIES**

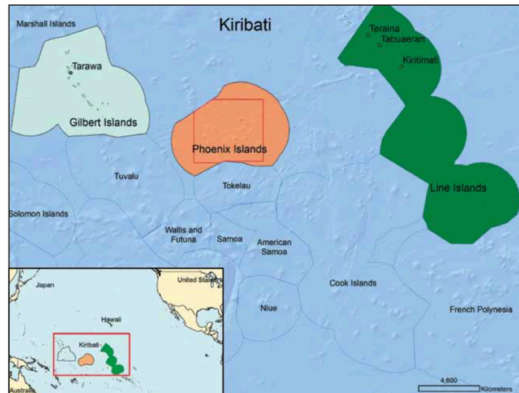
- Red Jungle Fowl
- Feral Pigeon
- Kuhli's Lorikeet
- Common Myna
- Jungle Myna

**INDIGENOUS SPECIES**

- Lesser Frigatebird
- Pacific Reef Heron
- Great Crested Tern
- Black-naped Tern
- Grey-backed Tern
- Sooty Tern
- Brown Noddy
- Black Noddy
- Blue Noddy
- White Tern
- Pacific Pigeon

**MIGRANTS**

- Pacific Golden Plover
- Wandering Tattler
- Bristle-thighed Curlew
- Bar-tailed Godwit
- Buddy Turnstone
- Long-tailed Keel



**The Birds of Kiribati**

The islands of the Republic of Kiribati span over 1,500,000 km<sup>2</sup> of ocean but together account for only 811 km<sup>2</sup> of land. The islands are divided into three groups – the Gilbert Islands, Phoenix Islands and Line Islands (which includes Kiritimati Atoll). The Kiribati islands are host to a number of bird species many of which are found on only a few islands. Many sensitive species are restricted to predator-free islands or motu. Several introduced species are found mostly around towns and harbours.

**Identifying Birds**

Many birds are most active in the morning, and some seabirds arrive and depart from their nests at dawn and dusk. Useful features in identifying birds include the colouration and presence of any distinctive markings; the length, shape, and colour of the bill; the length and colour of the legs; bird's size and wingspan; foraging habitat (ocean, shoreline, vegetation); nesting habits (on the ground, in a tree, in a burrow); and calls. All the birds except the migrants breed on the islands.

**CODE KEY**

**I** = Indigenous  
**E** = Endemic  
**IN** = Introduced

**IUCN Redlist Status**

**LC** = Least Concern  
**NT** = Near Threatened  
**VU** = Vulnerable  
**EN** = Endangered

**Distribution**

**LI** = Line Islands  
**PI** = Phoenix Islands  
**GI** = Gilbert Islands

**Size**

**L** = length of bird (bill to tail)  
**W** = wingspan



**Audubon's Shearwater**  
*Puffinus lherminieri*  
Te N'na

**I LC**  
**NT**

Nests on ground in burrow, sometimes under vegetation.  
**L** = 31 cm **W** = 69 cm  
Smaller than other shearwaters. White below extending onto face and flanks. High, laughing calls at night.





**Red-tailed Tropicbird**  
*Phaethon rubricauda*  
Te Taake

**I LC**  
**NT** **LI**

Nests on ground, under trees, shrubs or coral overhangs.  
**L** = 78 cm **W** = 107 cm  
Almost entirely white, red bill, long red tail streamers. Loud screeching call when disturbed.





**Masked Booby**  
*Sula dactylatra*  
Te Mouakena

**I LC**  
**NT** **LI**

Nests on ground in the open.  
**L** = 86 cm **W** = 152 cm  
Very large. White with black wings and black tail, yellow bill with bluish base. Plunges head first into water from high in the air to catch fish.





**Red-footed Booby**  
*Sula sula*  
Te Koota

**I LC**  
**NT** **LI**

Nests in trees, usually in groups, rarely on the ground.  
**L** = 71 cm **W** = 152 cm  
Bright red feet. Dark phase (more common) brown with white head, neck, and tail. White phase white with black wings. Immature mottled brown and white with indistinct border on belly. Plunges head first into water from high in the air to catch fish.





**Lesser Frigatebird**  
*Fregata ariel*  
Te Eteit Are e Aki Rangit Ni Bubura

**I LC**  
**NT** **LI**

Nests on ground or in bushes, sometimes in dense colonies.  
**L** = 76 cm **W** = 184 cm  
Slightly smaller than the Great Frigatebird. Males have a white mark at base of wing, females have black throat. Immature Lesser Frigatebirds have variable rufous head. Chases other seabirds and steals food from them.





**White-throated Storm-petrel**  
*Nesofregatta fuliginosa*  
Te Bwebwe Ni Marawa

**I EN**  
**LI** **NT**

Nests on ground in dense grass or in crevices. Only on predator-free islands.  
**L** = 24 cm **W** = 51 cm  
Small, white collar, long legs. At sea may patter with feet on water surface.





**White-tailed Tropicbird**  
*Phaethon lepturus*  
Te Ngutu

**I LC**  
**NT** **LI**

Nests in tree cavity or among coconut palm fronds.  
**L** = 78 cm **W** = 92 cm  
White with black marks on the wings, yellow bill, long white tail streamers.



**Brown Booby**  
*Sula leucogaster*  
Te Kibwi or Te Korobwaro

**I LC**  
**NT** **LI**

Nests on ground in the open.  
**L** = 69 cm **W** = 141 cm  
Large. Brown back, head, and neck, sharp border with white belly except juvenile. Bill bluish in males, yellow in females. Plunges head first into water from high in the air to catch fish.



**Great Frigatebird**  
*Fregata minor*  
Te Eteit Are e Bubura

**I LC**  
**NT** **LI**

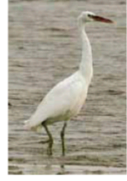
Nests in bushes, sometimes in loose colonies.  
**L** = 93 cm **W** = 218 cm  
Very large with long slender wings. Males black with inflatable red throat pouch. Females have white belly and throat. Immature Great Frigatebirds have white head. Chases other seabirds and steals food from them.



**Pacific Reef Heron**  
*Egretta sacra*  
Te Kaai

**I LC**  
**NT** **LI**

Breeds GI. Forages along shoreline especially exposed reefs.  
**L** = 66 cm **W** = 110 cm  
Only heron in the region. Long thin neck, long green legs, long yellow bill. Three colour morphs; dark, white, and pied or intermediate.





### Pacific Golden Plover

*Pluvialis fulva*  
Te Kun

**I** **LC**  
**GI** **PL** **LT**

Migrant. Forages for invertebrates on shoreline, lagoon edge and in forested areas. Nests in Alaska and Siberia.

L = 25 cm W = 50 cm

Long greyish legs, short black bill. Non-breeding plumage (usual in Kiribati) brownish above, greyish-white below. Breeding plumage black below, white stripe on side and head, gold spots above.



### Wandering Tattler

*Tinga imans*  
Te Kirikiri

**I** **LC**  
**GI** **PL** **LT**

Migrant. Forages for invertebrates on shoreline, coral, lagoon edge. Nests in Alaska and Siberia.

L = 28 cm W = 53 cm

Long yellow legs, long greyish bill. Dark grey above with white stripe above eye. Non-breeding plumage (usual in Kiribati) pale grey below. Breeding plumage barred underneath. Named for its trilling call usually given in flight.



### Bristle-thighed Curlew

*Numenius tahitiensis*  
Te Kewe

**I** **LC**  
**GI** **PL** **LT**

Migrant. Forages for invertebrates on shoreline, lagoon edge and in forested areas. Nests in Alaska.

L = 42 cm W = 82 cm

Long curved bill, long legs, stripes on head. Kiribati name reflects its loud call, often given in flight.



### Ruddy Turnstone

*Arenaria interpres*  
Te Kiribwa

**I** **LC**  
**GI** **PL** **LT**

Migrant. Forages for invertebrates on shoreline, lagoon edge and in inland grassy areas. Nests in northern Eurasia, Alaska, and Canada.

L = 24 cm W = 55 cm

Short orange legs, short black bill. Non-breeding plumage (usual in Kiribati) mottled brown above with black stripe on breast. Breeding plumage (on arrival in Kiribati and prior to departure) boldly patterned with black, white, and red.



### Black-naped Tern

*Sterna sumatrana*  
Te Kiakia

**I** **LC**  
**GI**

Nests on ground on sandy beach or coral. May feed close to shore, typically in the lagoons, and a very short distance out to sea.

L = 31 cm W = 61 cm

Small, white below, pale grey above, black line through eye, forked tail.



### Sooty Tern

*Onychoprion fuscatus*  
Te Keew/ Te Taraanki

**I** **LC**  
**GI** **PL** **LT**

Nests on ground in huge dense colonies. Feeds at sea often in large flocks far from shore.

L = 43 cm W = 90 cm

White below, black above, white patch on forehead smaller than in Grey-backed Tern, forked tail.



### Black Noddy

*Anous minutus*  
Te Maangikiri

**I** **LC**  
**GI** **PL** **LT**

Nests in trees, often in loose colonies. Feeds at sea, typically close to shore.

L = 34 cm W = 76 cm

Similar to Brown Noddy but smaller, darker black, thinner bill, more contrasting white cap.



### Grey-backed Tern

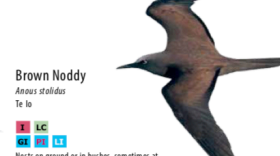
*Sterna lunata*  
Te Tarangongo

**I** **LC**  
**GI** **PL** **LT**

Nests on ground in open, usually in small colonies. Feeds at sea.

L = 36 cm W = 74 cm

White below, dark grey above, black cap, white stripe on forehead extending behind eye, forked tail.



### Brown Noddy

*Anous stolidus*  
Te Io

**I** **LC**  
**GI** **PL** **LT**

Nests on ground or in bushes, sometimes at base of fronds of coconut trees above cat-climbing bright, often in loose colonies. Feeds at sea.

L = 42 cm W = 82 cm

Similar to Black Noddy but larger, lighter brown, longer tail, thicker bill.



### Blue Noddy

*Procelsterna cerulea*  
Te Raarau

**I** **LC**  
**GI** **PL** **LT**

Nests on bare ground. Only on predator-free islands. Feeds at sea.

L = 27 cm W = 60 cm

Small, pale bluish-grey bird with buoyant flight.



### White Tern

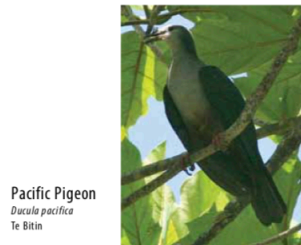
*Gygis alba*  
Te Matawa

**I** **LC**  
**GI** **PL** **LT**

Egg laid on bare branch or coral rock, no nest. Feeds at sea often far from land.

L = 30 cm W = 78 cm

White with black eye, bill black with blue base.



### Pacific Pigeon

*Ducula pacifica*  
Te Bitin

**I** **LC**  
**GI**

Forest, nests in large trees.

L = 41 cm

Larger than Feral Pigeon, head and breast paler than rest of body.

Common at South Tarawa.



### Kuhl's Lorikeet

*Vini kuhlii*  
Te Kura

**I** **EN**  
**LT**

Feeds and nests in coconut trees.

Endangered in its native range on Rimatara.

L = 18 cm

Only parrot in the Kiribati island group.

Small and brightly coloured. High pitched calls.



### Kiritimati Reed-warbler

*Acrocephalus aequinoctialis*  
Bokikokiko

**I** **EN**  
**LT**

Larger trees

L = 15 cm

Small, greyish-brown, pointed bill.

Endemic to Kiritimati and recently confirmed on Washington.



### Jungle Myna

*Acridotheres fuscus*  
Mwaina

**I** **LC**  
**GI**

Threatens to establish at Betio in the port area and spreading to other islands.

L = 25 cm

Invasive species and potential pest of fruit trees. Smaller than Common Myna, grey-black with orange bill and legs and white wing-bar.



### Red Jungle-fowl

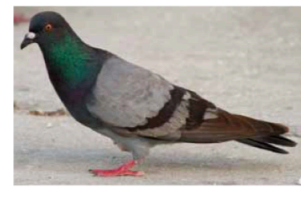
*Gallus gallus*  
Te Moa Uira

**I** **LC**  
**GI**

Towns, forests.

L = 76 cm (male), 43 cm (female)

Male larger and more brightly coloured.



### Feral Pigeon

*Columba livia*  
Te Bitin

**I** **LC**  
**LT**

Towns, harbours.

L = 30 cm

Most individuals have grey wings, dark head and neck, white rump, but colouration variable.



### Long-tailed Koel

*Eudynamis taitensis*  
Te Kabanee

**I** **LC**  
**GI** **PL**

Migrant. Forests, coconut groves. Nests in New Zealand.

L = 41 cm

Large brown bird with long, barred tail, thick bill. Call is a loud screech but mainly silent in Kiribati.



### Common Myna

*Acridotheres tristis*  
Mwaina

**I** **LC**  
**GI**

Threatens to establish at Betio in the port area and spreading to other islands.

L = 25 cm

Invasive species and potential pest on fruit trees.

Brown with yellow bill and legs and conspicuous white wing-bar.

### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Photo credits: Eric VanderWerf; NZ DOC (LKoel); Phil Binder (K.Lorikeet).

Layout and design: Joanne Aitken.

Text and information contributors: Eric VanderWerf, Ratita Bebe, Katamti Taabu and Wildlife Conservation Unit, Kiritimati Island, Alan Tye, Ray Pierce, Gillian Key, Posa Skelton, Seema Deo.

Produced and coordinated by the Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme with funding from the Critical Ecosystems Partnership Fund.

ISBN Print: 978-982-04-0456-4

Online: 978-982-04-0457-1

