LBRC Report Form

1. English and Scientific names: Brown Noddy (Anous stolidus)

2. Number of individuals, sexes, ages, general plumage (e.g., 2 in alternate plumage):
1

3. Parish:
Plaquemines

4. Specific Locality:
26.224885,-87.986631 (177 nautical miles SSE of South Pass). This is ~242 nautical miles from Isla Perez where, in 2009, an estimated 11,130 Brown Noddies were nesting. It is also 293 nautical miles from the Dry Tortugas where estimates suggest 5,000 Brown Noddies nest.

5. Date(s) when observed: August 10, 2025

6. Time(s) of day when observed: ~8:45am

7. Reporting observer: James F Holmes (Jim)

8. Other observers accompanying reporter who also identified the bird(s):
none

9. Other observers who independently identified the bird(s):
none

10. Light conditions (position of bird in relation to shade and to direction and amount of light): Excellent conditions. It was partly cloudy, but the sun remained unobstructed. A feeding flock of six Tropical Terns was observed on the starboard side as the ship traveled south. I was positioned on the bow, 6th deck, using a scope and facing west with the sun behind me.

11. Optical equipment (type, power, condition): Kowa scope TSN-883 with 25-60x Zoom (excellent condition)

12. Distance to bird(s): closest 1,000 feet (but much of the observation further)

13. Duration of observation: 4-5 minutes

14. Habitat: open ocean (water depth 2,860 meters)

15. Behavior of bird / circumstances of observation (flying, feeding, resting; include and stress habits used in identification; relate events surrounding observation): The Brown Noddy was observed within a feeding flock of six adult tropical terns (Sooty/Bridled). At least one tern was confirmed as an adult Sooty Tern, and it is probable that all were Sooty Terns. Unlike the other tropical terns, which were engaged in repeated plunge-diving, the Brown Noddy consistently maintained low flight, only several feet above the water, and was never observed to elevate or dive-feed during the observation period.

16. Description (include only what was actually seen, not what "should" have been seen; include if possible: total length/relative size compared to other familiar species, body bulk, shape, proportions, bill, eye, leg, and plumage characteristics. Stress features that separate it from similar species):
Observation: A tropical tern was observed feeding within a mixed flock of six adult tropical terns, all likely Sooty Terns. The bird was viewed exclusively through a scope; it was not seen with binoculars or photographed.

Size: The individual appeared at least as large as, and possibly slightly larger than, nearby Sooty Terns, with similar overall robustness.

Plumage: The bird was uniformly dark chocolate-brown across the face, back, wings, throat, chest, abdomen, underwings, and tail. No contrasts were discernible among body regions, likely due to distance. A bright pale cap, light grayish-white in color, was clearly visible multiple times during feeding. No eye crescents could not be assessed at this range.

Bill: Due to distance, bill structure (size, length, curvature) could not be determined, though it was clearly not pale.

Tail: The tail appeared somewhat rounded when the bird banked once; otherwise, no additional tail structure details were observed.

17. Voice: not heard

18. Similar species (include how they were eliminated by your observation):
Jaeger - Although jaegers can appear entirely dark brown, all jaeger species are excluded based on the bird's bright pale cap and its feeding behavior, which differed markedly from that of jaegers.

Sooty Tern (juvenile plumage) - The bird was similar in size and robustness to the adult

Sooty Tern(s) present. Juvenile Sooty Terns are sooty brown to black and can resemble noddy terns at a distance. However, juvenile Sooty Terns typically show paler underwings that may appear whitish in good light (similar to the white flash seen in Sooty Shearwaters). In contrast, this bird's underwings were consistently and uniformly dark chocolate-brown. The presence of a bright pale cap further rules out juvenile Sooty Tern. Earlier in the day, I observed two distant, all-dark (black) juvenile Sooty Terns; those individuals appeared clearly different from the bird in question. In addition, feeding behavior excluded juvenile Sooty Tern: while Sooty Terns typically feed by plunge-diving (though they may occasionally skim low over the water), this bird fed exclusively just above the water's surface without plunge-diving.

The bird was clearly a dark noddy tern, limiting identification to Brown Noddy, Black Noddy, or Lesser Noddy.

Black Noddy - Black Noddy is exceedingly rare in the Gulf of Mexico, with only one or two reported annually from the Dry Tortugas (among ~5,000 nesting Brown Noddies) and five accepted records from Texas. Structurally, Black Noddy is smaller and more slender than Brown Noddy, whereas the observed bird was equal to or slightly larger than the accompanying Sooty Tern(s). As Sooty Terns are larger than Black Noddies (see data below), this size comparison excludes Black Noddy. Plumage also differs as Black Noddy is uniformly black with a pale cap, not rich chocolate-brown as observed here.

Lesser Noddy is an Indian Ocean species not recorded in the Atlantic Ocean and is even smaller than Black Noddy, ruling it out.

According to Birds of the World, Brown Noddy has measurements that are similar to and overlap with those of Sooty Tern (see below). In my observations, the noddy appeared equal in length and bulk to the accompanying Sooty Terns, supporting identification as Brown Noddy and excluding the smaller/slimmer Black Noddy.

Brown Noddy: Length 38-40cm, wingspan 77-85cm, body mass 170-190g
Black Noddy: Length 35-40cm, wingspan 65-72cm, body mass 110g
Lesser Noddy: Length 30-34cm, wingspan 58-63cm, body mass 97-120g
Sooty Tern: Length 36-45cm, wingspan 82-94cm, body mass 200g

Finally, it should be noted that 2025 has seen an unprecedented number of Brown Noddy records in Texas, with approximately eight distinct birds/events documented. See map at:
https://ebird.org/map/brnnod?neg=true&env.minX=-111.3927614448075&env.minY=18.168781785719435&env.maxX=-70.1500856635575&env.maxY=37.772421345157&zh=true&gp=true&ev=Z&excludeEx

X=false&excludeExAll=false&mr=1-12&bmo=1&emo=12&yr=cur

19. Photographs or tape recordings obtained? (by whom? attached?):
Photos were unsuccessful as I was never able to find the birds in the camera viewfinder.

20. Previous experience with this species: I have seen Brown Noddy on numerous occasions (mostly from boats but also on islands where they nest). I also have substantial experience with Black Noddy both from boats and on islands.

I have extensive experience at sea on a wide range of vessels, including expedition ships, cruise ships, ferries, and small boats. Over this time, I have substantial experience in observing and identifying pelagic species, including Black and Brown Noddies. My background includes experience distinguishing these two species at sea where both occur together (mostly in the South Pacific). For example, I was on the Western Pacific Odyssey, a ~30-day seabird cruise from New Zealand to Tokyo, and I spent six months living in Fiji, where I frequently took ferries for pelagic birding in areas with both species present.

21. Identification aids: (list books, illustrations, other birders, etc. used in identification):
None

22. Identification aids used when?
None used

23. Are you positive of your identification? If not, explain:
Yes.

24. Date report completed:
August 20, 2025

25. May the LBRC have permission to display in whole or in part this report and accompanying photos on the LOS-LBRC website and LBRC Facebook page?
Yes

26. If yes, may we include your name with the report?
Yes