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Cover: A bag worm with its beautiful heap of junk. Acrylics on 300 GSM paper by Dupati Poojitha based on a picture by Sanjay Molur.



First confirmed breeding of Brown Noddy *Anous stolidus* in southeastern India: a new record from Adam's Bridge

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The genus *Anous*, belonging to the family Laridae, includes three noddy species—Brown Noddy *Anous stolidus*, Black Noddy *Anous minutus*, and Lesser Noddy *Anous tenuirostris*—which form a significant group of tropical and subtropical seabirds worldwide (Mondreti et al. 2013). Among these, Brown and Lesser Noddies are breeding residents in the Indian Ocean (Gochfeld & Burger 1996; Rasmussen & Anderton 2012). Brown Noddy, the largest one of the three species, is categorized as ‘Least Concern’ by the IUCN Red List due to its widespread distribution and stable global population. It exhibits darker chocolate-brown plumage and contrasting pale forehead & crown, black lores that contrast with its pale grey forehead, and a relatively shorter bill which make the Brown Noddy easily identifiable (Harrison 1985; Gochfeld & Burger 1996; Rasmussen & Anderton 2012).

Brown Noddies were previously considered as rare visitors to Sri Lanka (De Silva 1979; Rasmussen & Anderton 2012; Warakagoda et al. 2012). However, recent studies have established them as breeding residents (Seneviratne et al. 2015). In India, their closest

known breeding colonies are found on Cherbaniani and Pitti islands of Lakshadweep (Pande et al. 2007), as well as in the Maldives, the nearest country (Rasmussen & Anderton 2012). We documented the first confirmed nesting of the Brown Noddy along the southeastern coast of India, near Rameswaram Island.

Adam's Bridge, or Ram Setu, is a chain of sandbanks linking Rameswaram Island, Tamil Nadu, India, to Sri Lanka, within the Gulf of Mannar Marine Biosphere Reserve. Recent studies have recorded rare migratory birds such as Arctic Skua *Stercorarius parasiticus* (Byju & Raveendran 2022a) and vagrants like Light-mantled Albatross *Phoebastria palpebrata* (Byju & Raveendran 2022b). The sandbars (I–VII) remain largely undisturbed by human activity due to restricted access. Breeding behaviour of Brown Noddy was observed on sandbank VII (9.116° N, 79.5109° E) (Image 1), located about 8 km south-east of Arichalmunai point, Rameswaram. This sandbar spans approximately 2.5 km in length and up to 1.5 km at its widest point.

During observations on Sandbar VII in early July

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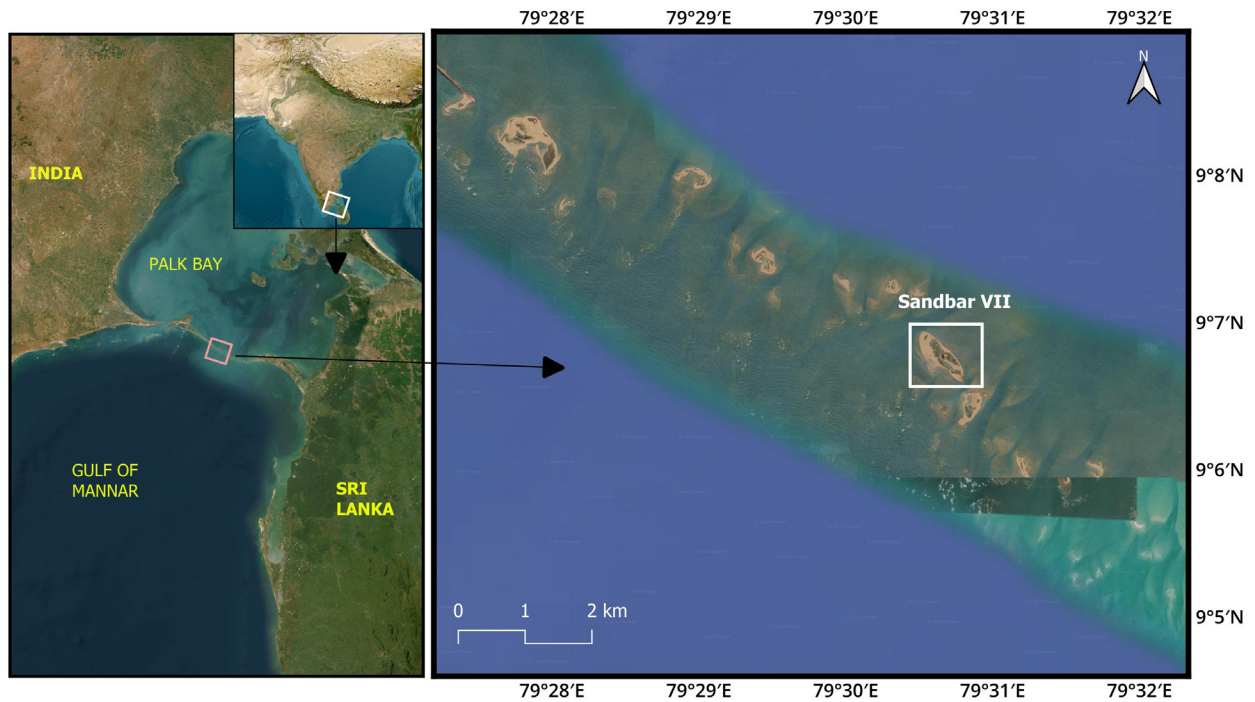


Image 1. Breeding location of Brown Noddy *Anous stolidus* on the sandbar VII of Indian side of Adam's Bridge



Image 2. Brown Noddy roosting with other tern species at sandbar VII of Adam's Bridge.



Image 3. Incubating Brown Noddy adults in Sandbar VII of Adam's Bridge.



Image 4. Brown Noddy egg in the nest at Sandbar VII of Adam's Bridge.

2024, 18–21 Brown Noddies were recorded roosting on vegetation like *Ipomea pescaprae* and *Sesuvium* sp. (Image 2). Courtship behaviour like low-flight displays and aerial chases with no conclusive evidence of breeding were noted. However, on 27 July, active breeding was confirmed, with individuals incubating eggs (Image 3). Six nests were identified with individuals incubating eggs, and some additional pairs were observed in courtship activities. The nests were located on the sand-dune slopes covered with *Ipomea pescaprae* and *Sesuvium* sp. amidst small grasses, forming a loose cluster with inter-nest distances of 1–5 m. The nests co-occurred with a few Bridled Terns *Onychoprion anaethetus* and thousands of Greater Crested Terns *Thalasseus bergii* breeding on the sandbar.

The nests of Brown Noddy were observed as shallow ground depressions created by clearing debris. Across its broader distribution, the species is known to nest on the ground, cliffs, trees, and shrubs (Gochfeld & Burger 1996). Each nest contained a single egg (Image 4). The eggs were slightly elliptical, predominantly white, and marked with blotches in various shades of brown. We found few adults incubating the eggs.

This study presents the first confirmed record of Brown Noddy breeding from the southeastern coast of India, apart from the record of Sri Lanka (Seneviratne et al. 2015) on the other side of Indian Mannar. Hence these sandbars connecting India and Sri Lanka (Adam's Bridge) requires high priority conservation measures as numerous important pelagic birds are breeding in this region.

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