

DID YOU KNOW?

Red-Billed Tropicbird

Effortlessly graceful in the air, red-billed tropicbirds (*Phaethon aethereus*) distinguish themselves from other pelagic seabirds with their elongated tail streamers and red bills. Their genus name comes from Ancient Greek, meaning “the shining one,” while their Latin species name means “heavenly” or “of the sky.”

Like all tropicbirds, they spend much of their time gliding over open seas and can reach speeds upwards of 40 kilometers per hour in flight, but their evolution that has made them so at home in the sky and on the water has made them completely ungainly on land due to feeble, awkwardly positioned feet. However, they can also be seen plunge-diving for small fish and squid and performing elaborate courtship displays of aerial acrobatics that showcase their natural elegance.

Like all pelagic seabirds, they face threats from climate change due to changes in habitat and availability of food. Red-billed tropicbirds can be found primarily in the tropical latitudes, as their name suggests, of the Atlantic, eastern Pacific, and northern Indian Oceans.

— Danielle Phillippi

