



Nota breve | Short note

**New breeding sites of the red-billed tropicbird *Phaeton aethereus*
and the brown booby *Sula leucogaster* on São Nicolau Island,
Cabo Verde**

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Red-billed tropicbirds (*Phaethon aethereus*) are distributed throughout the tropical waters of the Eastern Pacific, the Northwest Indian Ocean and the Atlantic Ocean; in the latter, the species is represented by *P. a. mesonauta* (Del Hoyo *et al.* 1992). The brown booby (*Sula leucogaster*) is the species with the largest distribution within the Sulidae (Patterson *et al.* 2011) with breeding sites across the Atlantic, Indian and Pacific oceans (Morris-Pocock *et al.* 2010).

In the Cabo Verde Archipelago, red-billed tropicbirds were known to breed mainly on the

Raso Islet, and the islands of Santiago, Brava and Boavista (Hazevoet 1995), while smaller colonies are known from Santo Antão (Hazevoet 2003), Sal (Hazevoet 1995), Fogo (Barone & Hering 2010), the Rombo Islet (S. Martins, unpublished data), and possibly on the Ilhéu dos Pássaros, off São Vicente (Hazevoet 2010). This last reference could not be confirmed subsequently (L. Palma, pers. obs.) but small colonies were recently observed at two locations on the coast of São Vicente (I. Rodrigues, pers. comm.). The brown booby is

known to breed on Santiago, Raso, Brava and Boavista (Hazevoet 1995). On São Vicente, Sal, and Rombos they are probably now extinct, as we failed to find any colonies despite repeated searches between 2010 and 2013 (S. Martins, pers. obs.). Until now, red-billed tropicbirds and brown boobies had not been reported breeding on the island of São Nicolau, although a significant breeding colony is located on Raso, roughly 16 km away.

From middle January to late March 2016, the entire coast of São Nicolau Island was

thoroughly surveyed by car and on foot, and by boat where access by land was impractical. In early February we found a small colony of at least 14 red-billed tropicbirds and a second colony of at least 4 individuals about two kilometres to the East (Figs. 1 & 2). All birds seen were adults. Further to the West, we encountered a perched male brown booby at Baía da Chacina, and although we saw only one individual, the thick layers of guano indicated a possible breeding site (Fig. 1).

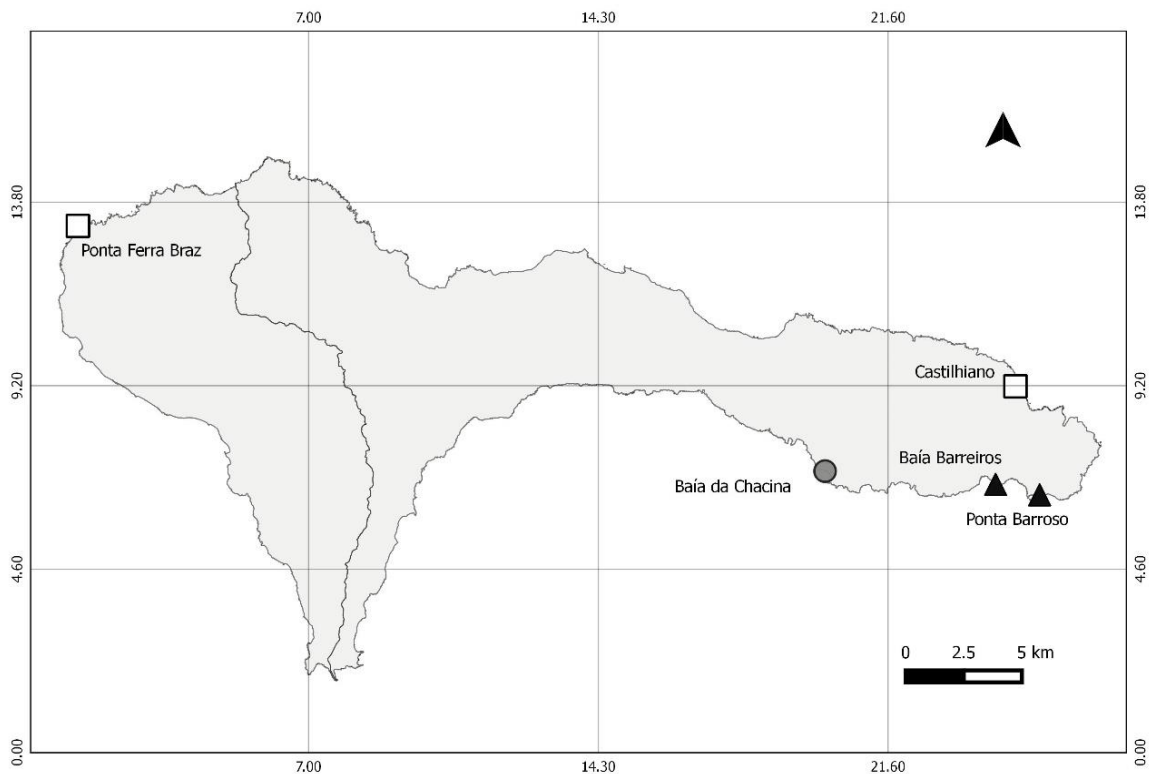


Fig 1. Map of the island of São Nicolau with records of: red-billed tropicbird colonies (black triangles; western colony: N 16° 33' 19.3"/W 24° 02' 59.9", eastern colony: N 16° 33' 04.7"/W 24° 01' 56.1"); putative brown booby colony (grey circle; N 16°34'13"/W 24°07'34"); possible brown booby colonies (open squares; northwest colony: N 16°39' 18.37"/W24°25'11.53", northeast colony: N 16° 35' 25"/W24° 02' 19").

We found two other possible brown booby colonies, as suggested by the abundant whitewash on the sea cliffs, respectively at the northwestern and northeastern ends of the island (Fig. 1). Yet, the distance from our position, the difficult access by land, and the adverse weather

and rough sea conditions precluded a closer look. Further fieldwork is needed to confirm these breeding sites of brown boobies on São Nicolau.



Fig 2. Red-billed tropicbirds at a sea cliff, São Nicolau, 6th February 2016 (photo by S. Martins).

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