

## SITE TENACITY

Common Terns have been shown to have a tendency to return to the same nest site year after year (Austin, 1949). Later sightings of the 182 Sooties I color-banded on my small study plot on Bush Key in 1968, provide some information on the species' site tenacity. I later saw 106 of the 182 (58.2 percent) in the general area of banding, and most of them probably nested in that general part of the colony.

From 28 April to 2 May 1970, O. L. Austin, Jr. sat near the plot for several hours each day to watch for and record color-banded birds. He saw at least 100 birds with color bands on the plot or immediately adjacent to it. I saw three more in June and July, and four others were caught in other parts of Bush Key. Of the 103 birds on the plot, 73 could be identified individually; the others had lost some of the bands and were not caught to read the FWS band. Of the 73 individually recognizable Sooties, 53 (72.6 percent) were among the 106 that had been seen on the plot in 1968 after banding. Thus, of 106 color-marked birds that probably nested on or near the study plot in 1968, at least half of them (53 of 106) were on the same plot 2 years later. The 30 birds that could not be identified individually in 1970 may well have included birds that nested on the plot in 1968. Thus 50 percent is a minimum figure and perhaps 70 percent is a more meaningful estimate of site tenacity. These data suggest that individual birds had a strong tendency to nest in the same parts of Bush Key in 1968 and 1970. As my plot and the ground immediately around it covered much less than 1 percent of the habitat suitable for Sooties on Bush Key, it seems unlikely that so many color-banded birds would return to this same area in 1970 by chance alone.

In early July 1971 I spent a few hours watching for color-banded birds on my plot and saw at least 13 different individuals. Many of these had lost one or more color bands. Of eight that were individually recognizable, seven probably had nested on the plot in 1968, again suggesting that the terns were returning to the same plot to nest.

Site tenacity implies individual attachment to a specific locale in the colony. Group adherence implies that subgroups exist within the colony and these subgroups stay together and individually recognize other members of the group. Austin (1951) describes such subgroups in Common Terns and they may well exist in Sooty Tern colonies. Young Sooties, if not allowed to return to their scrape, establish a spatial arrangement with respect to other chicks similar to the pattern that existed when they were at the home scrape (Burckhalter, 1969). This implies that they recognize other chicks around them and act as a group.

The fly-ups already described also suggest that subgroups exist in Sooty colonies. In these, adjacent birds react to the activities of one bird, seemingly as if they recognized one another.

Subgroups that stay together within the colony could also explain the clustered nesting of color-banded birds seen at the plot in 1970, but