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## Segregation in Diet between Black Noddy *Anous minutus* and Brown Noddy *A. stolidus* from the Southern Lagoon of New Caledonia<sup>1</sup>

Pascal Villard,<sup>2</sup> Vincent Bretagnolle<sup>2</sup> and Philippe Borsa<sup>3,4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Centre national de la recherche scientifique, Centre d'études biologiques de Chizé, 79360 Beauvoir-sur-Niort, France

<sup>3</sup> Institut de recherche pour le développement, UR 227, Nouméa, New Caledonia

<sup>4</sup> Corresponding author. Current address: IRD-UR 227 Coreus c/o Indonesian Biodiversity Research Center, Jl Raya Sesetan Gang Markisa no. 6, Denpasar, Indonesia. E-mail: philippe.borsa@ird.fr

**Abstract:** The Black Noddy (*Anous minutus*) and the Brown Noddy (*A. stolidus*) occur sympatrically in the Southern Lagoon of New Caledonia, breeding on islets located at the edge of a wide, productive coral-reef lagoon next to oceanic waters enriched by a seasonal upwelling. The diets of the two species were determined from regurgitations from birds nesting at Kouaré Islet during two consecutive breeding seasons (2002/2003 and 2003/2004), and compared. The average prey load in the Brown Noddy was heavier than that of the Black Noddy, as expected from its larger body size and from a predicted longer foraging distance. Fish prey dominated the diet of both species (100% and 81.8% biomass in Black and Brown Noddies, respectively), the remainder consisting of squid. Black Noddy ate small pelagic fishes inhabiting the reef and the lagoon, mainly round herrings (*Spratelloides* spp.), while Brown Noddy mainly preyed on offshore species including buccaneer anchovy (*Encrasicolona punctifer*) and larger pelagic fishes (Exocoetidae), and squid. The segregation in diet between Black and Brown Noddies in New Caledonia thus indicated spatial segregation in foraging zones, i.e. inshore vs. offshore, respectively, which was more pronounced than previously reported for other sites where the two species co-occur.

RUNNING HEAD: DIET OF SYMPATRIC NODDIES

The Black Noddy (*A. minutus*) and the Brown Noddy (*A. stolidus*) have tropical distributions, the latter being pan-tropical. Much of their ranges overlap, except in the Indian Ocean where the Black Noddy is replaced by its slightly smaller sister-species, the Lesser Noddy (*A. tenuirostris*) (Higgins and Davies 1996, Bridge et al. 2005). Noddies depend for feeding on large marine predators, particularly tunas: tunas prey on schools of small pelagic fish by concentrating them towards the surface before going through the pack to catch them (Ashmole 1962, Hulsman 1988). Noddies catch their prey either by dipping or, though more rarely, by surface plunging (Chardine and Morris 1996, Gauger 1999); Brown Noddy may also catch fish in the air (Ashmole 1971).

Brown and either Black or Lesser Noddies breed in sympatry in a number of localities, although usually one species largely outnumbers the other (Dorward and Ashmole 1963, Ashmole and Ashmole 1967, Harrison et al. 1983, Surman and Wooller 2003, Ramos et al. 2006). In the Southern Lagoon of New Caledonia (South-West Pacific Ocean; Fig. 1), the Black Noddy (*A. minutus minutus*) outnumbers the Brown Noddy (*A. stolidus pileatus*), by c. 60,000 pairs to c. 1,000 pairs (Pandolfi-Benoit and Bretagnolle 2002). Although the Southern Lagoon comprises more than 55 islets, the Black Noddy breeds on only six of them, five of which are also nesting sites for the Brown Noddy (Fig. 1).

We analyzed the diet of Black and Brown Noddies breeding in sympatry and in synchrony, choosing an islet of the Southern Lagoon of New Caledonia as the study site. Several predictions on prey composition can be made on the basis of morphological differences between the two species. Although bill length is similar in Black and Brown Noddies (Higgins and Davies 1996), it is thicker in the Brown Noddy, enabling it to grab bigger prey than the Black Noddy (Ashmole and Ashmole 1967, Harrison 1990). Therefore, one expects prey size to be larger in Brown Noddy. This in turn is expected to have an effect on prey composition. Furthermore, because of its larger size (the Brown Noddy is almost twice heavier than the Black Noddy), the Brown Noddy should be able to carry a heavier load than the Black Noddy. Also, all other things being equal, the larger body of the Brown Noddy implies higher energy needs, making it likely to exploit a wider range (Mace and Harvey 1983) than the Black Noddy. Morphological differences between the two species thus allow us to predict differences in both prey size, prey load, and foraging range.

## METHODS

### *Study area*

Field work was done at Kouaré Islet (22°47'S, 166°48'E), a 7.4-hectare coral cay located in the Southern Lagoon of New Caledonia, 43.2 km from the main island and 6.3 km from the barrier reef (Fig. 1). The Southern Lagoon has the shape of a funnel, is ca. 100 km long and ca. 40 km wide, and is oriented from the South-East to the North-West which is approximately the direction of trade winds; it has a mean depth of 17.5 m (Chevillotte et al. 2005). The barrier reef that surrounds mainland New Caledonia isolates the lagoon from the Coral Sea (Fig. 1). Oceanic waters immediately off the barrier reef are subject to strong cooling (by 5°C) related to an intense wind-driven, seasonal (from October to April) coastal upwelling (Alory et al. 2006, Marchesiello et al. 2010). Enhanced northward wind stress, and saltier and colder waters have been noticed during El Niño years (Alory et al. 2006). This may have consequences on the productivity of the oceanic waters off the Southern Lagoon because the concentration of chlorophyll *a* increases during coastal upwelling events (Alory et al. 2006).

### *Prey sampling and analysis*

Breeding noddies were studied during two successive breeding seasons: 27 days (3 periods of 9

days each) between 30 December 2002 and 18 February 2003 (“2002/2003”), and 28 days (two periods of 12 and 11 days, and five short stays of one day each), between 20 November 2003 and 17 February 2004 (“2003/2004”). The 2002-2003 season was characterized by moderate El Niño whereas the 2003-2004 season was neutral (Singh et al. 2011). Prey samples directly came from adults and fledglings caught in the colony with a fish landing net. Without further manipulation, the individuals regurgitated their meal, after which they were released without being fed in compensation. Regurgitated items were collected directly in a sampling vial or scooped from the nest using a spoon, and preserved in 95% ethanol immediately after. Sixty two regurgitation samples were collected from Black Noddy in 2002/2003 and 23 in 2003/2004; for Brown Noddy, sample sizes were 44 in 2002/2003 and 5 in 2003/2004. The differences in sample size according to year only reflect sampling effort. Regurgitations were subsequently washed with 95% ethanol using a wash bottle and the prey items were sorted by prey type.

Entire prey items were distinguished from body portions or sections and undigested prey items were distinguished from partially digested ones. “Intact” means the prey was regurgitated whole, showed no apparent injury and showed no sign of digestion; “quasi-intact” means the prey was also regurgitated whole and undigested, but showing cuts, bites, punctures or other injuries. We also included in the latter category prey items that consisted of entire undigested fish but whose head was smashed mechanically. Other prey items were partial, for example decapitated fish, or fish lacking their tail. Degraded skin, exposed and chemically degraded muscle, or exposed and chemically degraded bone were considered as evidence of digestion. A higher percentage of digested items in a regurgitation was assumed to reflect a longer foraging trip.

Prey items consisted either of fish or squid. Fishes were identified to family, sometimes to genus, and in some cases to species (Appendix 1) according to the identification keys and descriptions given in Carpenter and Niem (1999, 2001). Fish prey items that lacked key morphological parts were compared to those that were identifiable to species in the same regurgitation, or in samples collected on the same day from other individuals in the colony, or to reference collections of specimens of small pelagic fishes from the Southern Lagoon of New Caledonia, preserved in alcohol at the IRD laboratory in Nouméa. All prey items in a regurgitation were measured individually on sheets of graph paper. Drained prey items in a regurgitation were then grouped by species, or genus, or family (whenever possible), counted and weighed to provide prey biomass. Advanced digested remains forming the liquid phase of a regurgitation, when present, were eliminated by washing prior to sorting, hence not weighed. All regurgitation samples have been deposited at IRD laboratories in Noumea.

Two-tailed Student’s *t*-test for independent distributions was used to compare the distributions of average length and weight of prey item between the two noddy species. Two-way ANOVA was used to test the effect of season and noddy species on the weight of regurgitated prey. The null hypothesis that prey species composition in noddies was the same between seasons was tested by a  $\chi^2$  test of homogeneity.

## RESULTS

Intact or quasi-intact prey represented 6% and 1% prey items in Black and Brown Noddies respectively. A proportion of prey items showed injuries (punctures, bites, cuts, gashes) attributable to predators with sharp cutting beaks, or with small, conical teeth. Partial prey items included decapitated fish, fish lacking their tail, and body sections presenting sharply-cut edges. Some other prey items consisted of entire fish

with mechanically smashed heads. Among the body sections recovered were half-fishes, single heads, and single tails. For example, one regurgitation of Black Noddy contained 6 intact *Spratelloides delicatulus* and a single tail of the same fish species; another one contained 6 decapitated *S. gracilis* and three tails of the same fish species; one regurgitation of Brown Noddy exclusively contained squid including three intact individuals, one mantle, and a portion of the mantle of another individual; another one contained a single Exocoetidae. In total, mechanical injuries prior to ingestion by noddies were inferred for 36.7% and 36.1% of the regurgitated prey in, respectively, Black and Brown Noddies. Up to 19% recovered prey items showed evidence of partial digestion in Black Noddy and this figure reached 47% for Brown Noddy.

Prey items regurgitated by Black Noddy, including both intact prey and prey fragments, did not significantly differ from those of Brown Noddy in average length ( $22.3 \pm 11.5$  mm and  $21.8 \pm 14.5$  mm, respectively;  $t = 0.778$ ;  $df = 1596$ ;  $P = 0.436$ ). However, the average weight of a prey item was significantly less for Black Noddy, as compared to Brown Noddy ( $0.44 \pm 0.37$  g vs.  $1.89 \pm 2.56$  g, respectively;  $t = 5.936$ ;  $df = 190$ ;  $P < 0.001$ ). Upper extremes reached 66 mm and 2.8 g [an intact buccaneer anchovy (*Engrasicholina punctifer*)] in Black Noddy vs. 101 mm and 10.6 g (the posterior part of an Exocoetidae) in Brown Noddy. The average weight of the total prey items in a regurgitation was  $3.9 \pm 3.1$  g in Black Noddy (range 0.3 - 13.3 g), which was significantly less than Brown Noddy ( $6.8 \pm 4.6$  g, range 0.1 - 16.7 g;  $F = 12.8$ ;  $df = 1,128$ ;  $P < 0.001$ ).

Fish prey dominated the diet of both species (100% and 81.8% biomass in Black and Brown Noddies, respectively), the remainder consisting of squid. Six fish families were represented in the prey items of each Black Noddy and Brown Noddy, three of which (Carangidae, Clupeidae and Engraulididae) were found in the regurgitations of both species. Differences in diet were apparent (Fig. 2), with the most abundant prey in regurgitations of Black Noddy being silver-striped round herring (*Spratelloides gracilis*) which accounted for 74.5% of prey items (Appendix 1). This species was totally absent from identifiable regurgitations from Brown Noddy. Conversely, the family Engraulididae (*Engrasicholina*) was poorly represented in the diet of the Black Noddy (7% prey items), but was the most abundant prey in the Brown Noddy (73% prey items). Both species marginally preyed on delicate round herring (*S. delicatulus*) which on the average represented 14% and 15% prey items for Black and Brown Noddies, respectively. Only Black Noddy preyed, albeit marginally, on Atherinidae (2% prey items) while only Brown Noddy preyed on Exocoetidae (5% prey items) and squid (4% prey items).

We checked whether the prey species composition varied between the two seasons. For instance, silver-striped round herring, the main prey of the Black Noddy, represented 65% of its total prey items in 2002/2003 and reached 84% in 2003/2004, while anchovies, which represented 14% of its prey items in 2002/2003 were absent in 2003/2004 (Appendix 1). However, taking into account the number of regurgitations containing a given prey species, these differences were not significant ( $\chi^2 = 3.6$ ;  $df = 3$ ;  $P > 0.30$ ).

## DISCUSSION

Basic knowledge of diet and foraging habitat is relevant to the management of seabirds in a conservation perspective. The present results demonstrated differences in diet composition between Black and Brown Noddies nesting in the Southern Lagoon of New Caledonia. As explained in the following, these differences may in part reflect morphological differences between the two seabirds. They also indicate

different foraging habitats.

The weight of a total regurgitation was on the average higher for the Brown Noddy than it was for the Black Noddy, and reached slightly higher maximum values. Similar observations have been made in Hawaii (Harrison et al. 1983) and in the Central Atlantic (Coelho Naves et al. 2002). These observations agree with the prediction that the Brown Noddy should be able to carry a heavier load than the Black Noddy because of its larger size. In New Caledonia, the maximum prey load in the Black Noddy nevertheless was heavier than the single Exocoetidae or squid items regurgitated by Brown Noddy, suggesting that the absence of Exocoetidae and squid in the diet of the Black Noddy was not due to the smaller body size of the Black Noddy, relative to the Brown Noddy. Still, this difference might be caused by the capacity of Brown Noddy to capture or ingest single larger prey than Black Noddy.

The absence in the diet of the Brown Noddy of silver-striped round herring, the main prey of the Black Noddy, cannot be explained by morphological differences between the two noddy species because of the relative small size of the silver-striped round herring. Therefore, its absence in Brown Noddy's diet likely reflects its absence in the latter's foraging habitat. Both round herring species are considered to be inshore schooling species, characteristic of the reef and lagoon habitats (Conand 1988, Froese and Pauly 2005). Similarly, the rarity or, perhaps, the absence of buccaneer anchovy in the diet of Black Noddy, when this prey species accounted for a substantial part of the diet of the Brown Noddy, is unlikely to be a direct consequence of morphological differences between the two noddy species. The buccaneer anchovy is considered to be an oceanic species (Froese and Pauly 2005) and of all anchovy species present in New Caledonia it is the only one to occur in dense schools far offshore (Conand 1988). Most members of the Exocoetidae family, which were exclusive to the diet of the Brown Noddy, are pelagic fishes inhabiting the open ocean and neritic surface waters (Randall et al. 1997, Parin 2001). Exocoetidae are rarely observed inside the Southern Lagoon of New Caledonia (PB, pers. obs.); they are absent from the extensive collections of pelagic fishes from the coastal lagoons around New Caledonia (Conand 1988). Prey composition thus provides information on the foraging habitats of the two noddy species in New Caledonia. It indicates that the Black Noddy forage inshore or close to the reef front while the Brown Noddy venture farther offshore with little, if any, spatial overlap. These conclusions are indirectly supported by the higher proportion of digested prey items in Brown Noddy relative to Black Noddy, which suggests a longer foraging trip.

The present observations also confirm that Black and Brown Noddies partly if not largely rely on other predators to collect their prey (e.g., Harrison et al. 1983). This may not only include predatory fishes as previously reported, but also other seabirds. The noddies would have picked up these preys on the surface after they had been disabled by seabird or fish predators.

It has been previously reported that Brown Noddy tend to forage in more pelagic waters than Black or Lesser Noddies (Ashmole and Ashmole 1967, Harrison et al. 1983, Tarburton 1987, Seki and Harrison 1989, Surman and Wooller 2003). However, the foraging ranges of Brown and Lesser Noddies largely overlap and they have a similar spectrum of preys (eastern Indian Ocean: Surman and Wooller 2003). So do, reportedly, Black and Brown Noddies (Hawaiian archipelago: Harrison et al. 1983, Keller et al. 2009; Central Atlantic: Coelho Naves et al. 2002). The inshore vs. offshore segregation in diet between Black and Brown Noddies from Kouaré Islet was much more pronounced than previously reported from other sites. The segregation in diet between Black and Brown Noddies in New Caledonia was explained by a segregation of foraging areas. We suggest that pronounced segregation in diet is possible in New Caledonia because of the variety of productive marine habitats immediately accessible to Black and Brown

Noddies. These include a wide, productive inshore lagoon exploited by the Black Noddy, and oceanic waters affected by a seasonal upwelling where the Brown Noddy was inferred to forage preferentially.

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## Legends to figures

FIGURE 1. Map of the Southern Lagoon of New Caledonia showing the location and abundance of the nesting colonies of Black Noddy (open circles) and Brown Noddy (grey-filled circles). The surface of a circle is proportional to the number of nests, counted during the present survey (all islets except Ndié), or to the number of breeding pairs (on Ndié islet; Pandolfi-Benoit and Bretagnolle 2002); *solid black*: land mass; *thin lines* delineate coral reefs; *N*: Nouméa city; *BR*: barrier reef delimiting the Southern Lagoon. *Left inset*: proportionality of circle surface to population size. *Right inset*: location of New Caledonia in the Southwestern Pacific.

FIGURE 2. Prey composition (expressed as percentage of total prey biomass, given inside each portion of the diagram) for two noddy species nesting on Kouaré Islet, New Caledonia, from pooled data from two consecutive breeding seasons (austral summers 2002/2003 and 2003/2004). *Alac*, *Atherinomorus lacunosus*; *Epun*, *Encrasicholina punctifer*; *Esp.*, *Encrasicholina* sp.; *EXO*, Exocoetidae; *Sdel*, *Spratelloides delicatulus*; *Sgra*, *S. gracilis*; *SQU*, squid. The other fish prey species and unidentified fish prey were lumped into the black portion of each pie diagram. (A) Black Noddy ( $N=85$  regurgitation contents); (B) Brown Noddy ( $N=49$ ).

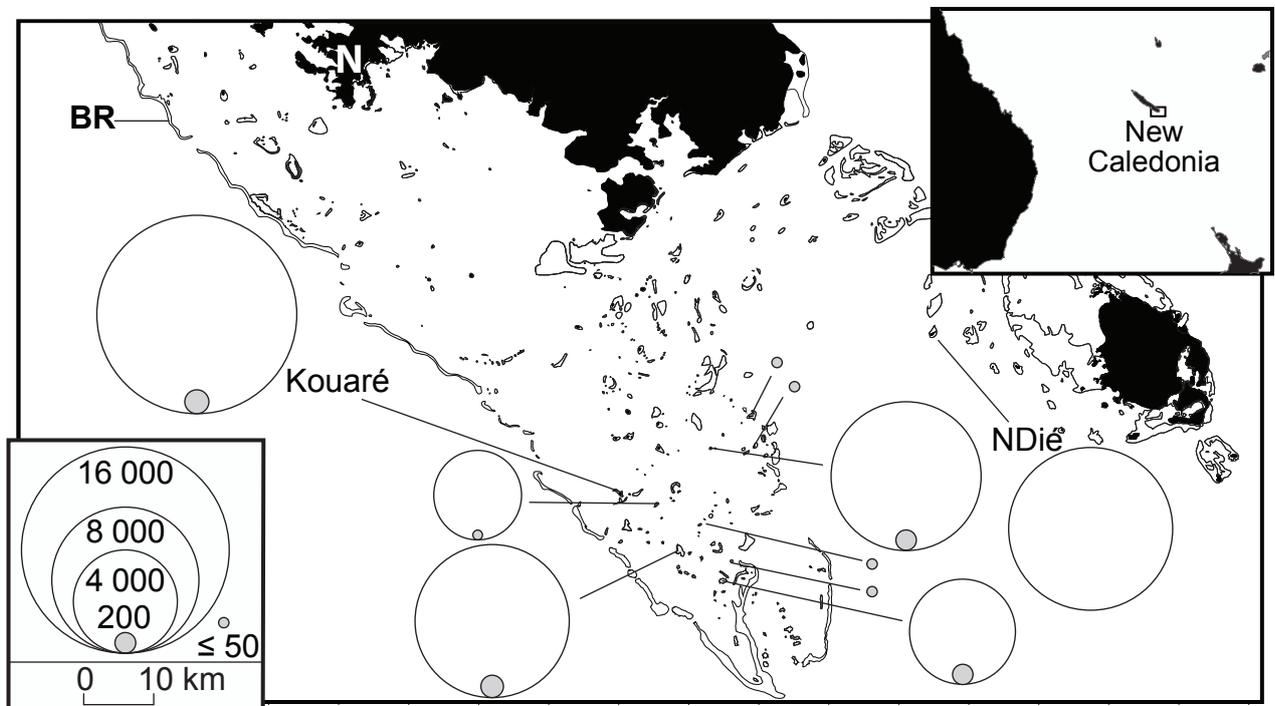


Figure 1 - Villard et al.

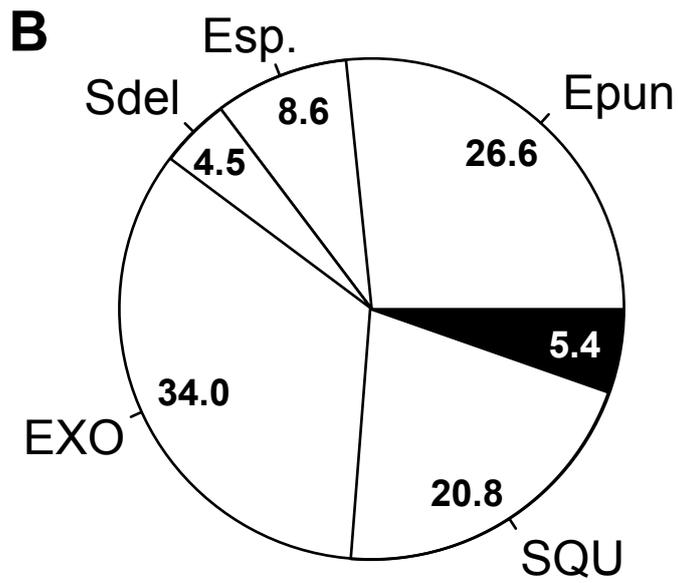
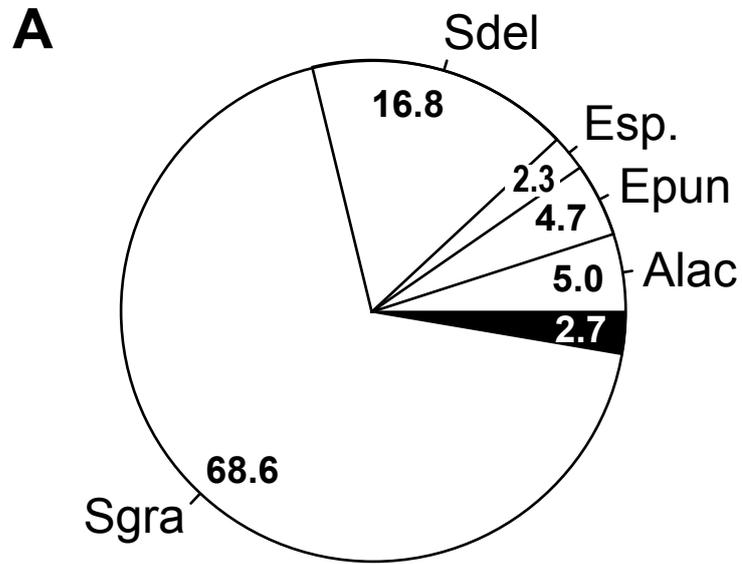


Figure 2 - Villard et al.

## APPENDIX 1

Prey composition [expressed as percentages of the total number of prey items (*%Number*) and total biomass of prey (*%Biomass*)] for Black and Brown Noddies nesting on Kouaré Islet, New Caledonia, for two consecutive reproductive seasons (*2002/2003*: austral summer 2002/2003; *2003/2004*: austral summer 2003/2004). *n*: number of regurgitations containing the prey; *in brackets*: total number of regurgitations

Prey	Black Noddy						Brown Noddy					
	2002/2003			2003/2004			2002/2003			2003/2004		
	n	%Number	%Biomass	n	%Number	%Biomass	n	%Number	%Biomass	n	%Number	%Biomass
Ambassidae												
<i>Ambassis vachelli</i>	1	0.3%	0.9%	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Atherinidae												
<i>Atherinomorus lacunosus</i>	4	4.1%	6.1%	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Undetermined	-	-	-	2	0.5%	0.8%	-	-	-	-	-	-
Carangidae												
<i>Decapterus</i> sp.	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	1.9%	12.4%
Undetermined	3	1.2%	1.3%	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	1.0%	0.2%
Clupeidae												
<i>Spratelloides delicatulus</i>	16	13.4%	17.6%	6	14.9%	13.1%	2	1.8%	1.0%	3	27.6%	28.6%
<i>Spratelloides gracilis</i>	45	65.3%	65.3%	17	84.0%	84.6%	-	-	-	-	-	-
Engraulididae												
<i>Encrasicholina punctifer</i>	4	5.3%	5.7%	-	-	-	19	59.8%	30.4%	-	-	-
<i>Encrasicholina</i> sp.	6	8.9%	2.8%	-	-	-	8	22.3%	9.0%	2	63.8%	5.7%
Exocoetidae	-	-	-	-	-	-	15	8.1%	37.1%	1	1.9%	12.7%
Gempylidae	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	0.7%	1.3%	-	-	-
Hemirhamphidae	-	-	-	1	0.3%	0.3%	-	-	-	-	-	-
Pomacanthidae	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	0.2%	0.6%	-	-	-
Unidentified fish remains	5	1.5%	0.4%	1	0.3%	1.2%	5	1.4%	2.3%	1	1.0%	1.2%
Squid	-	-	-	-	-	-	12	5.6%	18.2%	3	2.9%	39.1%
Total	(62)	662	279.8 g	(23)	388	58.2 g	(44)	443	277.6 g	(5)	105	40.2 g