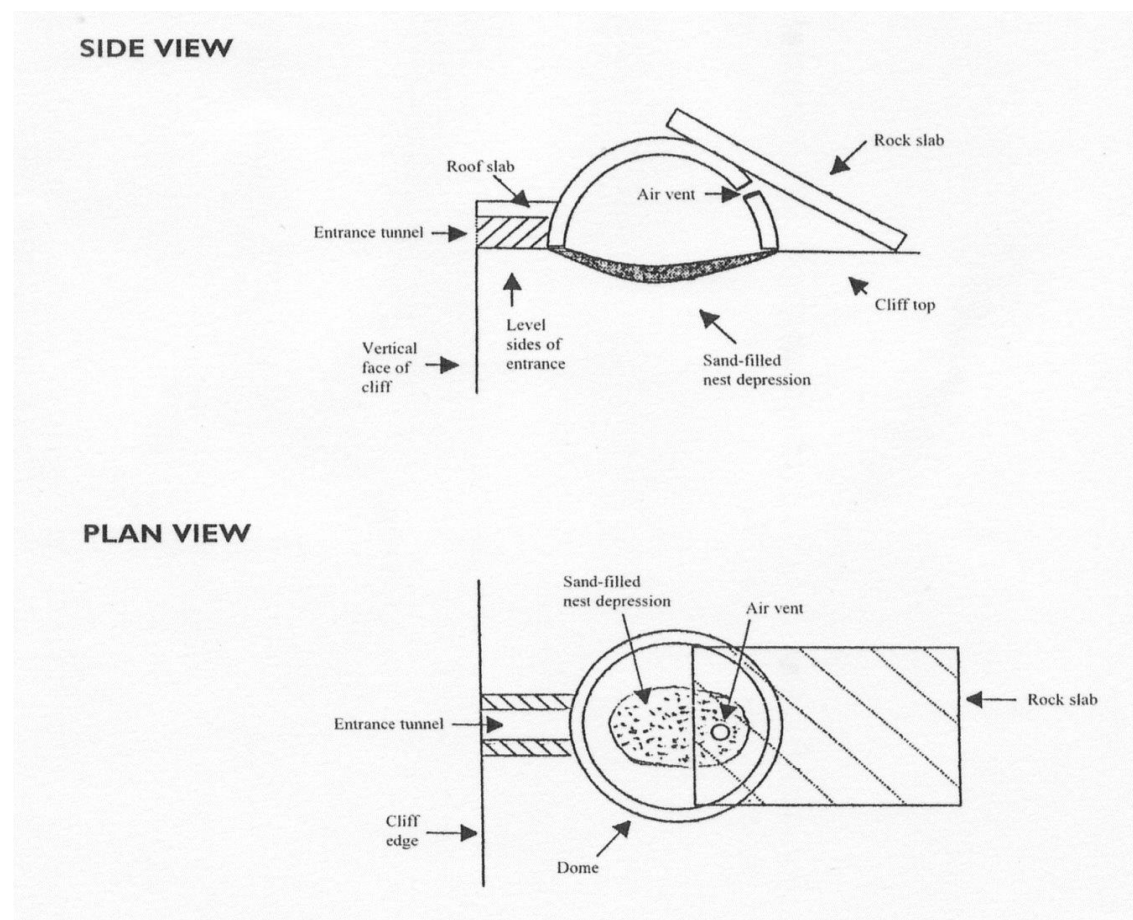


## Artificial Igloo Nests for Longtails

The White-tailed Tropicbird *Phaethon lepturus* is commonly called 'Longtail'. Bermuda's traditional harbingers of spring, Longtails return to the island in March and remain conspicuous throughout the summer as they search the coastline for nest-holes and perform their "tail-touching" aerial courtship. The Bermuda population of Longtails is believed to be the largest in the Atlantic, making it vitally important for the continued survival of the species.

Threats to the breeding success of the Longtail in Bermuda include predation from dogs and cats; nest site competition from feral pigeons; destruction of nest sites by human housing development on the coastline; blockage of nest sites by rubble, trash and horticultural waste dumped over cliffs; overgrowth of nest sites by invasive plants. Recent hurricanes have caused major erosion of the south shore coastal cliffs, destroying 40% of the Longtail nests there. Artificial nests have been shown to be readily acceptable replacements for natural cliff holes lost to erosion or habitat destruction. Longtails are happy nesting close to human habitation, as long as they are safe from predators.

Cement re-enforced styrofoam dome nest boxes, nicknamed 'igloos' are sold by the Bermuda Audubon Society to private property owners who have coastal cliff sites suitable for Longtails. Lightweight and portable, the Longtail igloo is fitted to an appropriate site with cement and shaded with natural rock. They can be located on level cliff tops or cliff ledges beyond reach of sea flooding, or on man-made terraces and sea-walls. In such situations they are easy and inexpensive to install, requiring only a mattock to dig a shallow depression, backfilled with sand for the nest, and about a bucket of cement to secure the dome over this depression and to camouflage it with a few natural slabs of limestone cemented onto the sides and top. The following diagrams illustrate the optimum installation scenario and design:



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## Some Longtail Facts

The proper name for a Longtail is White-tailed Tropicbird, *Phaethon lepturus*.

Longtails are found within the tropics in the Pacific, Atlantic and Indian Oceans. Bermuda is their most northerly breeding location.

The Bermuda population of Longtails, estimated at 2,000 to 3,000 breeding birds, is believed to be the largest in the Atlantic, making it vitally important for the survival of the species.

Longtails are Bermuda's traditional harbingers of spring, returning to the island in late February or early March to breed.

Longtails perform an elaborate aerial courtship in the summer months with the male and female birds flying together and touching their tails.

Longtails nest in cliff holes and crevices. They lay a single egg in April, which hatches in early June. The young birds are ready to leave the nest in August, flying out to sea.

The adult birds will stay with the chick overnight, but return to sea in the afternoons to feed on squid and ocean fish, bringing back food for the baby.

From September through to March, outside breeding season, Bermuda's Longtails spend their time on the ocean, ranging in the Sargasso Sea.