


Common Tern - 2

August 6, 1979

Willow Slough, NE Mills Co., Iowa

Description: 1. Immature or winter plumage. Pale gray back (paler than the other). White head w/ black patch through eye + around back.  Bill dull orange, feet redder.
2. Adult breeding plumage. Gray back, black cap. Primaries a bit darker than the secondaries, darker or equal to the upper wing coverts. Primaries with darker tips above.

Behavior: Stood on pilings a long time, then flew.

Voice: both called as they flew together, a mellow "tic"

Similar species: All the terns I've managed to identify at the Slough before have been Forsters. There were Forsters at the slough that evening, in fact, with white primaries. It tried to land on a piling by the other two, but then left.

The Commons differed from Forster's terns by having dark primaries (adult) and an eye patch that circled the back of the head (other bird).

Books: I took notes in the field, consulted Peterson's field guide later. Wish I'd had it at the time; there were several good field marks I didn't know to look for.

Distance, light: Perched half way across Willow Slough, + I couldn't guess how far away that is. Seen with 40x telescope. When they flew they came within 25 yards of the dike where I was + were seen with 8.5x binoculars. They were east of me + the sun was low in the west. Good light, clear sky.

Identifying Forsters/Common type terns is NOT
my strong point. ~~by~~ I always have to leave many
unnamed. I thought I was getting fairly good
at breeding-plumage Forsters, though, if I see
them well.

The information above was written Aug 9, 1979,
the description taken from notes written in the
field.

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P.S. (Nov. 30) Later in August I found Forster's tern
molting their black caps from the forehead back.
Introduces an additional source of error, but
the forsters were usually messy-looking around
the cap.