



Least Tern - 1 August 2, 1979
Willow Slough, NE Mills Co., Iowa

Description: Small white tern, bigger than swallows but smaller than the Black Terns also present. Black line through eye on white head:  Outer primaries black. Secondaries white, upper coverts gray:  Rump and tail white.

Behavior: Flying + feeding. Dives + actually hits the water. (The Black Terns usually just pick things off the surface).

Similar species: There aren't any other birds this small, white, with narrow wings + swooping tern-like flight, I think. Too small for Black Tern + differs from even winter-plumage ones in head pattern, wing pattern, rump + tail color, + behavior. Too small + wrong pattern for Forster's Tern + relatives. Not acting or patterned like a gull.

Distance, light: At first ≈ 40 yards ~~from~~ NW of me, $\pm 11:30$ am. Later seen both further away + closer (30 yds? closer?). Sunny, scattered clouds. Light wind from south. 8.5x binoculars. Saw it only about one minute each time, less on occasions, but saw it several times.

Note: I saw least Terns twice very early in August at the Slough last year, also.

Books: I took notes in the field, knowing what to look for. Checked a book later.

Experience: I've seen least Terns only twice before, but they're hard to mistake for anything else.

Written August 9 from notes written in the field Aug 2.

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