Records Committee, Iowa Ornithologists' Union Printed: 11/28/00

Arctic Tern Record Number: 99-20
19 Aug 1999 Classification: A-D
Saylorville Reservoir, Polk Co., IA
*S. Dinsmore, *J. Dinsmore, *T. Kent
IBL 70:38, 145, Dinsmore 1999

DOCUMENTATIONS

Stephen J. Dinsmore, 612 1/2 West Magnolia St., Fort Collins, CO 80521

Jim Dinsmore, 4024 Arkansas Dr., Ames 50014

Thomas H. Kent, 211 Richards St., Iowa City 52246

REFERENCES

Field Reports: IBL 70:38

Records Committee: IBL 70:145

Dinsmore, S.J. 1999. Arctic Terns at Saylorville Reservoir: A first for Iowa. Iowa Bird Life 69:133-135.

VOTE: 7 A-D

A-D, Detailed descriptions of a meticulously studied bird.

A-D, I saw this bird.

A-D, Description eliminates Common Tern.

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DOCUMENTATION FORM

Species: Arctic Tern
Number: 1 juvenile
Location: Saylorville Reservoir, Polk County, Iowa
Habitat: large reservoir
Date: 19 August 1999
Time: 6:15-7:40 p.m.
Observer: Stephen J. Dinsmore 612 ½ West Magnolia St. Fort Collins, CO 80521
Others who saw bird(s): James J. Dinsmore, Jim Sinclair, Tom Kent, Dick Tetrault

Description of bird(s): We were all sitting at Sandpiper Beach when I noticed at least one *Sterna* tern flying near the Cherry Glen boat launch. We drove to the area and quickly found 2 *Sterna* terns resting on the beach south of the jetty. One of the birds was clearly a juvenile Forster's Tern because of the head and wing patterns. The second bird had a darker cap, but I initially thought the bird was a molting Forster's Tern. Both birds soon took flight. As I watched them forage over the lake, I became convinced that the second bird was smaller and was not a Forster's Tern. Both birds eventually returned to the beach and we were able to study them at length while they were perched together.

In the following description, all comparisons are to the juvenile Forster's Tern. I estimated the second bird was at least 10% smaller than the Forster's Tern. The bill was at least 25% shorter and a bit thinner. Bill color was black with a hint of orange color near the base of the lower mandible. The head was very rounded with a steeper forehead. The eye was dark and appeared larger relative to the size of the head. The bird had a sharply defined black "cap"-the crown, nape, and auricular area were solid black, except for some white flecks on the anterior portion of the crown. The forehead was white. The area around the eye was black. The underparts, including the throat, breast, belly, and vent, were white. When perched, the mantle and upperwings appeared uniformly dark gray (noticeably darker than the Forster's) with an indistinct dark shoulder bar and a black outer web to the outermost primary. The wing coverts and tertials were prominently edged with white. In flight, the upperwing was dark gray with a darker leading edge (especially on the secondaries). The underwing was pale with a thin dark trailing edge to the primaries, created by the dark tips to these feathers. The flight behavior was also different from that of a Forster's Tern; the wingbeats were shallower and the inner part of the wing seemed shorter. I also noted that this bird had a more short-necked or hunchbacked appearance in flight compared to the Forster's Tern. When perched, the legs were about half the length of the legs of the Forster's Tern and noticeably thinner. Leg color was dark reddish orange, not bright orange. The bird did not vocalize. On the basis of the plumage, I concluded this bird was an Arctic Tern in juvenal plumage.

Similar species and how eliminated: The combination of smaller size, bill size, leg length, and wing pattern eliminates other *Sterna*, especially Common and Forster's Terns.

Previous experience with species: I have seen numerous Arctic Terns at sea in the Atlantic, mostly off North Carolina. I have also seen 2-3 in each of the last two years at a nesting site in Montana. I saw an adult at Saylorville Reservoir on 18 August 1999.

Viewing conditions and equipment: Viewing conditions were generally good to excellent with mostly clear skies. Estimated viewing distance was initially >300m, but later 75-100m. I used 10x42 binoculars and a 20-60x spotting scope.

References consulted: NGS (1999) Field Guide to the Birds of North America
Olsen and Larsson (1995) Terns of Europe and North America
Kaufman (1990) Advanced Birding

How long before field notes written? written less than 1 hour after observation
How long before this form completed? written 19 August 1999

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DOCUMENTATION FORM

Species Arctic Tern **How many?** one

Location? Saylorville Reservoir, south of Cherry Glen

Type of habitat? lakeshore beach

When? date(s): 19 August 1999 **Time:** 6:20-7:40 p.m.

Who? Jim Dinsmore

Others with you Stephen Dinsmore, Jim Sinclair, Tom Kent, Dick Tetrault

Others before or after you None that I know of

Describe the bird(s) Black capped tern, seen flying with and perched next to a Forster's Tern which provided good comparison. Bird in juvenal plumage. Overall appeared about 10% smaller than nearby Forster's Tern. Tail/wing extension about equal. Head appeared rounder than Forster's Tern. Most obvious were the much shorter legs than those of the Forster's Tern. Arctic Tern legs appeared about half the length of those of Forster's. Overall body color was much duskier than that of Forster's. Cap on top of head black, extending down and including the eye. A distinct area of white extended up from the base of the bill across the forehead indicating molt to basic plumage had started. Underparts somewhat darker than those of Forster's but not as dark as those on Arctic Tern seen previous day. Most obvious was the fairly dark gray appearance of the wings with a somewhat indistinct dark carpal apparent but not as complete as that normally seen on a Common Tern. Although I watched the bird in flight for some time, it was at a great distance and I got my best views of the wings when it came in to land and a few times when it flew short distances. The undersides of the wings appeared white but once I got a brief but distinct view of a narrow band of black on the tips of the primaries on the undersides. The uppersides of the wings were somewhat grayish and were distinctly darker near the tips of the primaries. However, the tips of these feathers were dark gray but not black. The bill was black and the legs were a dark red, distinctly different from the more orange color of the legs of the Forster's Tern.

Similar species and how eliminated: Leg length eliminates all of the other possible Sterna species. In addition, in this plumage, only the Common Tern somewhat resembles this bird. The full black cap eliminates Forster's Tern and the red legs eliminates the unlikely Roseate Tern. The overall darker appearance to the wings and back

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and the lack of black at the tips of the primaries separate this bird from the somewhat similar appearing juvenal Common Tern. Also, Common Terns tend to have a more distinct carpal bar.

Did any one disagree or have reservations about identification? not that I know of
If yes, explain:

Viewing conditions: good light, seen from about 100 yards with 20 plus spotting scope
Previous Experience: saw one the previous day, also in Maine, Montana, and Massachusetts
References & persons consulted before writing description: looked at Natl. Geographic Guide and Advanced Birding after viewing bird

How long before field notes made? Bird viewed carefully in field, notes typed up next morning

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DOCUMENTATION OF EXTRAORDINARY BIRD SIGHTING

Species: Arctic Tern; ***Number:*** 1 juvenile

Location: Saylorville Reservoir, Polk Co., IA

Date: 19 August 1999; ***Time:*** 6:20 to 7:40 p.m.

Name and address: Thomas H. Kent, 211 Richards St., Iowa City, IA 52246.

Others before/with/after: Steve Dinsmore, Jim Dinsmore, Jim Sinclair, Dick Tetrault. Steve and Jim Dinsmore reported an adult Arctic Tern in breeding plumage at Sandpiper Beach with Forster's Terns on the evening of the 18th.

Habitat and circumstances: Wide part of reservoir above dam with sand spits. Dick Tetrault and I arrived at 9:00 a.m. and spent the day, along with others, looking for the adult tern, but had not seen one white tern all day.

Description of bird: While we were at Sandpiper Beach, Steve Dinsmore spotted at white tern near Cherry Glen access and we drove there to get a better look. Two white terns were flying at a great distance near the dam. One appeared to have a black cap, but Steve saw a white forehead and indicated that it was not the bird seen the night before. After sometime I was able to see the dark leading edge to the inner upper wing and upper wing that was overall darker than that of the Forster's. Steve reported a dark trailing edge to the outer wing, but I could not see that. The bird landed on the far side of a spit about half way from Cherry Glen to the dam. We parked our cars and hiked down there, fording a small stream on the way. Steve arrived first and saw the bird on the spit, but by the time the rest of us got there, it had flown. We watch the two white terns flying together for about 10 or 15 minutes. The Arctic Tern was slightly smaller—shorter wings, less bulky body, and shorter tail. Finally, both birds flew in and landed next to the flock of Ring-billed Gulls and a close range for viewing with telescopes. The bird had a black cap with a rectangular white area on the forehead (compared to black eye line of Forster's). The beady black eye was within the black area. The head was rounded—the forehead was steep compared the more flat-headed appearance to the Forster's. The bill was thin, straight, pointed, and black except for a red lining on the inner aspect of the base of the lower mandible (appeared yellow with some light angles). The bill was slightly shorter than the Forster's. The underparts were white. The legs were very short (half the length of the Forster's) and orange-red (compared to dull orange of the Forster's). There was a dark gray mark at the bend of the wing which shaded into the gray of the wing (much darker than the Forster's and slightly lighter than Ring-billed Gull mantel). The tips of the outer primaries were edged dark at the tips. The wing coverts and flight feathers had a slightly lighter pale edging (also present on the Forster's, indicating that both were juveniles). The tail was white. I did not observe the shape to the tip. The primaries extended to almost the end of the tail in both birds.

Voice: not heard.

Similar species: A juvenile Forster's Tern was present for direct comparison, both sitting and flying. It had an overall pale upper wing, only a line of black on the head, and much longer legs. Juvenile Common Tern has more contrast between the black leading edge of the wing and the rest of the inner wing (confirmed by looking at my photos taken in North Carolina), black outer primaries, more brownish coloration, longer legs, and longer bill. Juvenile Roseate Tern has a barred back, and black legs, and would be highly unlikely in Iowa.

Any one have reservations?: no.

Light: side to back lighting while flying; side lighting with sun on front of bird while sitting; ***Distance:*** 1 mile to about 50 yards; ***Optics:*** 10x binocular and zoom scopes.

Previous experience: I have never studied a juvenile before but have seen lots of adults in the arctic and migrants off both coasts.

References before/after viewing: We looked at the National Geographic Guide during the day and after viewing.

Time of notes: 13 hours; ***Final typing:*** 20 hours