

A 28-86-17
Sterna antillarum
(Scientific name)Species: Least Tern
(Vernacular name)

If you watch birds solely for your own enjoyment, a written description of your observations is unnecessary. But, if you have seen something unusual, and would like to share this with others, a written description is essential. Compilers of regional bird lists must insist that their records be scientifically sound; future bird students--those studying occurrences 50 years from now--must have a written record on which to depend. By providing the verifying written description, you are employing a basic rule of the scientific method.

We recognize that experienced field observers can provide important and reliable records, if supported by an adequate verifying description. Thus this request is an effort to perpetuate your record by obtaining concrete evidence which may be permanently preserved for examination by others in the future. This procedure is required for every extraordinary observation, irrespective of the observer.

Date (s): 29 April 1986 Time Bird Seen: 8:20 am to 8:32 amLocality: Sweitzer Lake
Delta, CO
Nearest town, county and state:Optical equipment: B&L discover scope x50^{60x}; Nikon 9x30 binoc.

If photographed, please enclose copy. Equipment used: _____

Number of birds seen: 1 Sex: _____ Plumage: breeding adultLight conditions: Good light; Sunny w/ scattered high cloudsDistance from bird, and how measured: 75-200 yds; estimated.

Describe the bird's overall behavior:

Perched on sandbar projected from edge into lake; was near 2 Forster's Terns which dwarfed this bird in size. Once or twice it stretched its wings back. At end of viewing period it flew up and then back further into reeds where it landed out of sight on the sandbar.

Describe the habitat in which you observed the bird:

Sandbar in open lake.

Other observers who independently identified this bird (Please list name and address):

None that I know of.

Include size, overall shape, plumage and color pattern; details on shape or size of bill, wings, and tail. (Reference to its resemblance to field guide descriptions is not enough.) Describe what you actually saw in the field.

Very small size, about 10" long; seemed about one half the size (bulk) of Forster's Tern. Above light gray, a little lighter than Forster's Tern, and was white below. Black cap and lores framed white forehead. Legs and feet yellow. Bill yellow with tiny black tip. (Bills of Forster's Terns were red-orange in some light.) When long pointed wings were stretched the last 2 or 3 primaries were black, forming a black slash on end of wing. Tail forked.

Describe the bird's calls or sounds, if heard; including method of delivery-- i.e., from perch, in flight, etc.:

Not heard.

List similar species and how you eliminated them:

Long pointed wings, bill and forked tail indicate a tern. Small size and white forehead eliminate most other terns. Imm. Black Tern (wrong time of year though) and White-winged Terns don't have yellow bills or black caps.

Prior experience with this and similar species:

I've seen Least Tern 3 times in Colo. and many times in Florida and Texas coasts. I've had experience with most other terns as well.

This report was written from notes made during X after observation; from memory .

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