

1999 - 78

CFO-ORC

ACCEPT 6-1

COLORADO FIELD ORNITHOLOGISTS - SIGHT RECORD FORM

NEW STATE RECORD _____ UNUSUAL RECORD XSpecies: Arctic Tern (*Sterna paradisaea*)

LCA 1/20/00 wpl

Date: Oct 5, 1999

Number seen: one

Sex: unknown

Plumage: Alternate (adult)

Locality: Union Reservoir

Elevation: 5,000 ft.

Nearest town: Longmont

County: Weld

Time observed: 1830-1900 hrs

Duration of observation: Seen for 30 minutes, in flight the entire time

Description:

Medium-sized white tern: small headed with full black cap, white cheek patch, small dark bill that actually was not definitively seen; body basal color medium gray; upperwings lighter gray (not obviously contrasting with body), with thin, white trailing edge, underwing white with very light gray wing linings contrasting strongly with body; rump and tail bright white, contrasting strongly with body; long tail streamers (~1/4 body length); flight-style was buoyant (slow and shallow) with the body moving up and down.

Separation from similar species:

By October, all other species of N.A. *Sterna* terns are in basic plumage and would show extensive white on the head. Arctic Terns do not go through pre-alternate molt until reaching their wintering grounds.

Forster's Tern (*Sterna forsteri*): by entire description - Forster's body coloration is uniform (except rump which is whiter, but only slightly noticeably contrasting) throughout. Tail is short in all plumages.

Common Tern (*Sterna hirundo*): The bill is longer, thus would have been more obvious (a Common/Forster's Tern, in the same area and at the same distance, had a noticeable bill), upperwing pattern did not have any dark outer primaries as is characteristic of Common, and the long tail streamers (shorter in Common) made the wings set toward the front of the body, not in the middle as in Common, which gave the impression of a long body that slowly tapered in the rear.

Describe the bird's song and call, if given, including method of delivery (i.e. from perch, in flight, duration):

None

What is your prior experience with this and similarly-appearing species?

I have observed ~10 adults in Alaska and California within the past 7 years and as recently as Oct. 1998.

Light conditions: Sun setting to the right of both bird and observers (soft, but still good)

Optical equipment used: Zeiss 7x42, Kowa 30x

Distance, and how estimated: 400 meters

Other observers who saw the bird with you: Tony Leukering (primary observer)

Other observers who saw the bird independently: None known

If photographed, type of equipment and film: None

List books, illustrations, recordings, other birders, etc. consulted and how this influenced your identification:

a) at time of observation: none

b) after observation: Seabirds: an identification guide by Peter Harrison

Reporting observer: Doug Faulkner

Signature: *Douglas W Faulkner*

Address: Colorado Bird Observatory, 13401 Picadilly Road, Brighton, CO 80601

Date report was written: This report was written on Jan 16, 2000 from notes taken the evening of the observation

COLORADO FIELD ORNITHOLOGISTS - SIGHT RECORD FORM

NEW STATE RECORD UNUSUAL RECORD XRed 10/9/99
hplACCEPT 67**Species:** Arctic Tern (*Sterna paradisaea*)**Date:** 5 October 1999
Alternate**Number seen:** one**Sex:** unknown**Plumage:** Definitive**Locality:** Union Res.**Elevation:** 4665'**Nearest town:** Longmont**County:** Weld**Time observed:** about 18:30 - 18:45 MDT**Duration of observation:** 15 minutes

Description: While looking for the juvenile Little Gull that Steve Dinsmore had found earlier that day, I found an adult tern in Alternate plumage that was obviously gray-bellied and white-rumped. Immediately, my heart started racing, as the bird was obviously an Arctic Tern (ARTE). For the next 15 minutes, Doug Faulkner and I took turns watching the bird through my scope. We watched it foraging over the middle of the reservoir from the north side. At about 18:40, the bird started gaining altitude slowly, but consistently. It then headed ESE, losing altitude. We weren't sure if it was leaving or not, but lost it. Since it was close to dark, we headed for home.

Note: The bird was a long way away, probably over the middle of the reservoir, thus Doug and I could not discern some features. However, with prolonged viewing and despite the distance, we were able to see most of the important features to separate it from all other North Hemisphere terns.

The bird was obviously a *Sterna* tern (gray-and-white coloration; long tail streamers; fairly long, thin wings; black cap) that occasionally dove into the water head first while foraging. The entire crown was black, contrasting sharply with the white of the face, which showed as a wide stripe of white bordered on the top by the black crown and below by the gray throat. The bill was fairly short, much shorter than that of a Forster's Tern (FOTE) or Common Tern (COTE), and appeared dark at that distance. The upper wing surface and the back were of the same color gray, slightly paler than the gray of the underparts; there was a thin, white trailing edge that could be seen sporadically with the correct light. I could not discern the wingtip pattern due to the distance. The rump and tail were bright white and contrasted strongly with the gray of the back and wings. I could not have seen the dark outer webs to the outer rects, though I did see that the bird had very long outer rects forming a very forked tail (outer rects were at least as long as the rest of the tail; I could not discern the precise length). Except for the vent and undertail coverts (which were bright white), the entire underparts were an even medium gray which, except for the cap, was the darkest part of the bird (that we could see). At one point, when the light relative to the bird was perfect, I could see that the wing linings were a very pale gray - or, at least not as white as were the secondaries from underneath. I could tell this because the wing linings contrasted a bit with the white secondaries (which were white from below, but when the light came through them from behind, they glowed). I noted that the bird had legs, but I didn't really see them, as I saw the bird only in flight.

The bird flew with a fairly bouyant flight, with the body bouncing up and down in opposition to the flapping of the wings. The bird looked bull-necked - there was relatively little projection of head in front of the wings. I had seen another *Sterna* tern before I found this bird, but, despite about five

minutes of watching it, I could never tell whether it was a COTE or a FOTE (it was at the same distance as the ARTE); however, it was not an ARTE. The ARTE flew in a noticeably different manner than the other tern, which I really wanted to be a COTE (but, who knows?!)

Similar species eliminated: The only regularly-occurring CO species with which it could be confused are COTE and FOTE. Both of those are ruled out by numerous points, not the least of which was that the bird was still in full Alternate plumage -- FOTE adults molt very early and it is hard to find an Alternate-plumaged individual after early August; impossible (?) in October. Though COTE molts later than does FOTE, it too is usually well along in its Pre-basic molt by October, if not nearing completion! Additional features that rule out both COTE and FOTE are: belly darker than back and wings, small head and bill, and white cheek contrasting with medium gray throat. Additional features that rule out COTE include the contrasting white rump and tail. The subspecies *longipennis* of COTE is a grayer-bellied bird than is the race that occurs in North America. However, that form is ruled out by most of the same features as is nominate *hirundo*: head shape and size, bill size, molt timing, rump and tail color, flight style. I don't know that I can rule out Antarctic Tern, though, as far as I'm aware, that species has never been recorded outside the Southern Ocean.

Describe the bird's song and call, if given, including method of delivery (i.e. from perch, in flight, duration): The bird was not heard.

What is your prior experience with this and similarly-appearing species? I have seen >30 ARTE, including 20+ on a trip to Alaska in August/September 1999). I have seen 1000s of both COTE and FOTE. All other North American terns are eliminated by one or more of the following: plumage pattern, size, and various shape features (head and bill size and shape, tail length and shape, wing shape).

Light conditions: sun was setting to my right

Optical equipment used: Zeiss 7x42; Kowa 30x wide angle

Distance, and how estimated: estimated at 400 meters distance

Other observers who saw the bird with you: Doug Faulkner

Other observers who saw the bird independently: none

If photographed, type of equipment and film: not

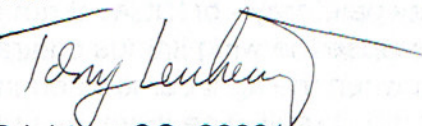
List books, illustrations, recordings, other birders, etc. consulted and how this influenced your identification:

a) at time of observation: none

b) after observation: Doug and I referred to *Seabirds* to confirm identification and hoping to confirm my knowledge about molt timing - but to no avail on the latter. This did not affect our identification of the bird.

Reporting observer: Tony Leukering

Signature:



Address: Colorado Bird Observatory, 13401 Picadilly Road, Brighton, CO 80601

Date report was written: This report was written (from field notes that were written about four hours post-sighting) on 5 October 1999.