

+Colorado Field Ornithologists Sight Record Form

2001-181

(This is a two-page report. Please print or type. Attach photographs and additional pages if necessary.)

Each table cell will automatically enlarge as you type!

CFO-RC FILE X:

RESULTS:

Species:(Common Name): **ARCTIC TERN**

(Scientific Name) ***Sterna paradisaea***

Date(s) of occurrence: **July 1, 2001**

Number of birds seen: **One**

Sex: **Unknown**

Plumage: **Alternate**

Exact Location: **West end of Bonny Reservoir**

County: **Yuma**

Nearest town: **Hale**

Elevation: **XX msl**

Length of observation: **Approximately 15 minutes**

Time(s) of observation: **Roughly 2:00 PM MDST**

Other observers who saw the bird(s) with you: **Joanne Stewart**

Other Observers who independently saw the bird(s): **None known**

Light Conditions (quality; direction relative to bird(s); position: **Excellent. Sun was above and slightly to west and bird was to north.**

Optical equipment used: **20x60 Leica Televid 77 Scope and 7x42 Zeiss Bins**

Distance from bird(s) (estimated unless otherwise noted): **Varied. Initially the bird was distant at roughly 200 yards. I was able to approach the bird later to within approximately 50 yards.**

Was bird(s) photographed? **Yes (Minolta SLR with 500mm lens)** If so, have you submitted photos? **Yes, two distant shots**

Who took the photographs? **Myself**

Describe the general and specific habitat in which the bird(s) occurred: **Muddy bar projecting out into open water lake.**

Describe the bird's behavior (flying, feeding, habits, behaviors used in identifying the Species or in supporting the identification): **Observed loafing on mud bar with Forster's Terns and also in flight.**

Describe the bird in detail. This is the most important part of this report. Include the overall size and shape and how you placed the bird in the general group that you did. Give complete details of plumage, including head, throat, undersides, nape, back, wings and tail. Give particular emphasis to marks you used to identify the bird(s). Describe other important details, such as color and shape of bill, legs, eye, (etc.) that were important in making the identification. (Fill out this portion even if photographs are submitted; you may attach additional sheets, drawings, field sketches or copy field notes):

While scoping the western end of Bonny Reservoir, I noticed a group of roughly six small terns, mainly Forster's Terns, loafing on a muddy bar extending offshore. A short, squatty tern that was smaller in height and darker gray overall than other nearby terns caught my eye. The initial distance was quite extensive, probably near 200 yards. Because of the interesting pattern of the subject bird, I opted to try and get a closer look, and also go back to the vehicle and bring a camera. After getting the camera, my wife Joanne and I were able to approach within approximately 150 feet of the tern group. The birds were nervous and capturing a few photographs was my first task. After taking a few photos, I was able to get a few minutes of extensive views of all the terns present.

As indicated above, more detailed views of the subject bird confirmed that the bird was shorter in height when standing. I scrutinized as best I could the bill coloration and at all times, the bill appeared dark red, with no hint of a dark terminal tip. The bill coloration of the nearby Forster's Terns appeared more orange with dark tips. The bill shape of the subject bird also appeared to differ slightly from the Forster's Terns, being shorter, thicker, and a more straight appearance compared to the relatively longer, thinner, and more drooped look of the Forster's Terns bills. The head was quite rounded and short; the Forster's Terns head shape seemed more flattened on the crown and more elongated. The crown was black and extended as a mask from the lores ventrally through the eyes rearward to the hindneck. Diagnostic was a bright whitish facial swath across the mid-head that contrasted greatly with the black upper head and dark gray lower face. The dark gray lower face extended across the breast and belly. The mantle and closed wings were also a similar shade of dark gray as the breast, which was distinct from that of the Forster's Terns, which had noticeably dark gray upperparts contrasting with whitish underparts. The overall gray coloration of the upperparts of the subject bird was also darker than



Bonny Reservoir Arctic Tern - Second from Left

Forster's Terns as evidenced by a contrast between the white tertial crescent and inner tertials of the Arctic Tern; the light gray inner tertials of the Forster's Terns did not differ greatly with that species whitish tertial crescent.

When resting, the folded wings of the Arctic Tern wingtips were a medium gray, with little color differentiation across its length. The tail tips terminated at or only slightly posterior to the folded wings. On nearby Forster's Terns, it appeared that the tail tips extended noticeably beyond the folded wingtips.

The shortened height of the subject bird was due to the seemingly short legs. With some views, it appeared that the bird virtually had no legs, except when the bird was agitated and stood to its' fullest height. The legs seemed to be dark red throughout.

After roughly seven or eight minutes of observing the birds resting on the shore, all the birds took flight and flew eastward. Because of the fast flight, it was difficult to ascertain the wing pattern of the subject bird. What I did notice was that the upper wings were mainly a moderate gray except for a thin dark trailing edge to the primaries. I did not notice any dark along the leading edge of the wings, which would also be indicative of Arctic Tern; however the rapid flight could have prohibited me from seeing such a subtle feature.

The presence of an Arctic Tern in Colorado during that summer season was not without precedence, as at least one or two birds were seen earlier in the season near Fort Collins. Additionally, summering adult Arctic Terns were reported in the Midwest (namely Illinois) during the same period.

Describe bird's call or song: None heard

Discuss similar species and how you eliminated them: Separation from Forster's Tern was presented above. Common Terns should have dark-tipped bills, a not so dark red bill, a flatter crowned profile, a whitish face and breast similar in coloration (lacking the contrast between white facial swath and dark gray lower face and breast), a lighter mantle and wings, whiter lower parts, longer legs, and darker primaries. Whiskered Tern, though considerably more unlikely to occur in Colorado, has dark gray underparts contrasting significantly with the white face similar to definitive alternate Arctic Terns, but has an extensively whiter face, darker upper and underparts, longer legs (relatively), and a shorter tail. What is your prior experience with this and similarly appearing species? Have observed hundreds of others in Alaska. Have also observed birds in California.

List books, guides, recordings or other sources consulted and how this influenced your identification (during and after observation): None

This report is from notes made during XX or after observation or later from memory

Date of written report: 05/02/02

Reporting observer: Larry Semo

Signature:



**Reporting Observer's Address: 9054 Dover Street
City: Westminster**

State: Colorado Zip: 80021

**Send report to:
Colorado Birds Record Committee
c/o Tony Leukering
Rocky Mountain Bird Observatory**



Bonny Reservoir Arctic Tern, Leftmost Bird