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CFO-ORC FILE # 23-91-37

COLORADO FIELD ORNITHOLOGISTS - SIGHT RECORD FORM

NEW STATE RECORD : : UNUSUAL RECORD : x:

Please print or type. Attach photographs and additional pages if necessary.

Species: Arctic Tern : Sterna paradisaea  
(Scientific name)

Date(s): June 12, 1991

Number of birds seen: 1 Sex: Male Plumage: Breeding

Locality: Blue Lake (Adobe Creek Reservoir) Elevation: 4100'

Nearest town: Ft. Lyon County: Kiowa/Bent

Time(s) observed: 1400-1500

Duration of observation: About 1/2 hour

Others who saw the bird with you (names and addresses): None

Others who saw the bird independently: None

Light conditions in relationship to bird: Bright afternoon sun

Optical equipment used: Bushnell 10 x 40 Custom Binoculars

If photographed, type of equipment and film: Pentax K1000 camera body with Sigma 5.6 400 mm lens. Fujichrome 100 film.

Who else photographed the bird? None

Describe the bird's behavior: It flew in while I was studying Least Terns. I did not see it fly in, as I was trying to find Least Tern nests at the time. It stood motionless and I was able to paddle to within 15 feet of it. After I docked the canoe in an effort to flush it, it flushed and flew 50 feet down the beach while I tried to regain my balance. After 15 minutes, it flew across the lake, and I could not find it again.

Describe in detail the bird's relative size, overall shape, plumage and color pattern. Include details of bill, wing and tail shape. Give particular emphasis to marks you used to identify the bird. Reference to its resemblance to field guide descriptions and illustrations is not enough. Describe only what you actually saw in the field.

The bird was considerably larger than the Least Terns nearby. It's legs were so short that the Least Terns stood

higher above the ground than it did (leg length is evident in all photos, especially #4). The bill was dark red to the tip, although there was a dark smudge on the tip of the upper mandible (Kauffman states that many breeding Arctic's have this smudge). The lower mandible was red to the tip. Because of the relatively long bill, this bird was probably a male. Perched, the primaries were a uniform pale gray (lacking the dark inner primaries of a Common Tern) about the same shade as the back and breast. The body shape was thin and elongated compared to Common and Forster's Terns (photo 1). The tail extended noticeably beyond the wingtips (see especially photos 2 and 3). From some angles, the throat and most of the face looked gray, but when it faced me the throat looked more white. There was a conspicuous white area just below the black cap that stood out from the grayer area just below it (evident in photos 2 & 3). The head looks delicate and rounded from all angles, and the angle between the bill and the forehead is deep (the very similar Common Tern has a more flattened looking forehead and a longer, flatter head). A key field mark visible in all slides is the extent of the black cap. Arctic Terns have the most extensive black caps of all similar terns (including Common, Forster's and Roseate). This is most pronounced in the area just above the base of the bill. There is less white in this area than in any any other similar tern.

In flight, the upper surface of the wings was a uniform pale gray. I could not see the underwing surface well, because it flew low. I noticed a dark trailing edge on the primaries, but did not memorize this as an important field mark and can't honestly say whether it was sharply or diffusely defined. My field guide was not with me in the canoe.

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

Describe the general and specific habitat in which you observed the bird: On the sandy lakeshore on the south side of the island in Blue Lake.

How did you eliminate similarly appearing species? Could eliminate Roseate Tern because it has an all dark bill, never an all red bill. Forster's Tern is never gray-breasted, and has a different shape, longer legs, and a thick orange bill with a black tip. Common Tern is by far the most similar species, but it almost always has an orange or reddish bill with a dark tip. It's legs are longer, it is a bulkier bird, and it's tail never extends beyond it's wings when at rest. Other differences are noted above.

What is your prior experience with this and similarly appearing species? I was able to study and photograph several Common Terns in the Arkansas River Valley earlier in the summer. This is my first Arctic Tern.

List books, illustrations, recordings, other birders, etc.

consulted and how this influenced your identification:

a) at time of observation: None. but had studied several guidebooks previous to seeing the bird.

b) after observation: National Geographic. "Advanced Birding" by Kenn Kauffman. "Pelagic Birds of Monterey Bay, California" by Rich Stallcup. Peterson Eastern and Western. Golden Guide. "The Audubon Society Master Guide to Birding" Vol. 2. "The Audubon Society Field Guide to North American Birds" Eastern and Western Regions. "A Field Guide to the Birds of Hawaii and the Tropical Pacific" by Douglas Pratt. and other reference books. Curiously, National Geographic is the weakest in terms of bill and body shapes. I found considerable variation in the photos I observed from book to book. Not all Arctic Terns are nearly as gray-breasted as NGS depicts. and bill shapes are extremely variable; check especially the Old Audubon photographic guidebooks.

I sent a copy of one photo to Nick Watmough in Norfolk, England for his opinion. He agreed with the ID. I also showed slides (which showed truer colors) to two ORC committee members when I first got them developed.

This report was written from reports made during ( x ), after observation ( ). from memory ( ). I waited to get photographs before being certain of my identification.

Date and time report was written: 7 pm. Jan. 14. 1992

Reporting observer: Duane Nelson

Signature: *Duane Nelson*

Address: 1619 Ford St. Golden. CO 80401

All reports will be maintained with the Curator of Zoology, Denver Museum of Natural History, Denver, CO 80205.



3.

Arctic Tern

23-91-37 Photo 3



Photo 3



Photo 4

1.

Arctic tern  
23-91-37 Photo 1