

VERIFICATION OF UNUSUAL SIGHT RECORD FOR UTAH

Bird name (common & scientific): Least tern (*Sterna antillarum*)

Date & time of sighting: 12 June 1993, 11:50 - 12:00, 12:19 - 12:20

Length of time observed: 10 minutes

Number of birds observed: 1

Age & Sex: adult

Lat/Long, and Location: Lat. 39° 52' 30" N, Long. 113° 22' 30" W., Fish Springs N.W.R., Curlew & Shoveler Units

Elevation: ?

Distance to bird: Less than 50 feet

Light conditions: Very good, clear sunlight.

Optical equipment: 10 x 40 Bausch & Lomb Custom binoculars

Weather: Sunny. Unseasonably chilly, with cold wind from north

Description of bird:

- Tiny tern (very noticeable even before Forster's terns showed up for size comparisons)
- Light ashy gray above, all the way to tail, though outer tail retrices white (a subtle but notable contrast). No black on body except on wings (see below) and cap
- Yellow bill (I did not notice black tip, but nor did I look for it)
- Black cap coming down far down face (as other terns)
- Tail very slightly forked for a tern. When spread, as it usually was during hovering flight, the outer retrices only barely extended beyond rest of tail. This gave the tern a very "short" appearance.
- White forehead turning into white streak/wedge above eye (as in book)
- Wings strongly marked as follows: Long, dark wedge on the outermost primaries on upper surface; from below the outer edges of the wings were outlined with a thinner black line near the tip, extending 1/3 of the way up to the wrist (and symmetrically along the tips of the primaries). See my sketch, as drawn in the field:



Voice or call notes and method of delivery: Silent

Behavior: Hovering about 15-20' off the water, and plunging repeatedly (though never deep) into the water after prey. While hovering the tern was arched over very strongly, perhaps into an acute angle, so that tail was about vertical. The wingbeats were noticeably faster than other terns. For the first ten minutes it was alone. Later, I briefly saw it amid a flock of Forster's terns swooping upon a raptor on their nesting island.

Habitat: Open fresh water with grassy edges (flooded in part). Sometimes it dove into very shallow water near the bank.

Similar species and how these were eliminated:

- Black tern: Yellow bill, small size, no dark on flanks of the torso in front of the wings, dark pattern on

wings, white forehead & eyebrow stripe, flight, incessant diving behavior. Besides, all the black terns I have seen this time of year are in their black breeding plumage.

-- Forster's & common tern: Small size (there were Forster's tern's about for direct comparison), yellow bill, white wedge in the black cap, shortness of outer retrices, rapid & unlanguid wingbeats, slightly darker above than nearby Forster's terns, silent compared to raucous Forster's terns (obviously not a decisive "fieldmark", but something I noticed).

-- Sooty, bridled, and Aleutian terns: small size, pale color of back.

-- Small gull: Shape of dark cap, eyebrow stripe, tip of bill pointed rather than rounded as in gull.

Previous experience with this and similar species:

I have seen the white-winged black terns and black terns in Europe and Africa (plus black terns here often) in all plumages. Also I once saw the (formerly conspecific) little tern in Africa, during which sighting the rapid wingbeats were also noted.

Books, illustrations, and advice consulted, and how these influenced this description:

Peterson's *A field Guide to Western Birds*, 3rd ed.--in the field after I had made my field notes & opinion. *Seabirds: An Identification Guide*--A couple of days later, to check alternate plumages and species options, and to check the conspecificity to the little tern of Africa and Europe. This did not affect this description at all, only confirming what I had already decided about the tern.

Significance of record in this area or the state: This puppy is not on the list!

Additional material (drawing, photograph, tape, DNA sample, corpse, etc.): --

Description from: 1. Notes taken at time of sighting ✓
 2. Notes made later (if so, when) —
 3. From memory —

Date this form was prepared: 15 June 1993

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Other observers who independently identified this bird: --

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