

Species: Least Tern
(Vernacular name)Sterna albifrons
(Scientific 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): May 11 / May 17 / May 20, 1980 Time Bird Seen: 9:10 a.m. to 9:45 a.m.
(on May 11 when notes were made)

Locality: Hart's Basin (Fruitgrower's Reservoir)
Eckert, Colorado Delta County
Nearest town, county and state:

Optical equipment: Bushnell Sportsview 9X35 binoculars; Bushnell Sentry II 20X spotting scope

If photographed, please enclose copy. Equipment used:

Number of birds seen: 1 Sex: _____ Plumage: Adult breeding

Light conditions: Thin high clouds; clearing to bright sun from my left shoulder.

Distance from bird, and how measured: 150 yards to 1/2 mile and more. Estimated

Describe the bird's overall behavior: The Least Tern was perched on a small half-submerged log at the edge of Hart's Basin in shallow water. At one time 3 Forster's and 3 Black Terns were also perched with it allowing direct comparison. All birds got along together. The Least Tern perched less in general than the Forster's, often leaving for several minutes to hunt fish. Least Tern had more rapid wing-beats than other two terns; its general flight was more fluttery with a more erratic motion compared to Forster's. It hunted at medium height (not low like the Black Terns and not high like the Forster's), over shorelines and marshy shallow areas and generally avoided open water. It seemed to hover at times at long distances.

Describe the habitat in which you observed the bird: Hart's Basin is a large irrigation impoundment which at this time of year is at full size. The Least Tern tended to stay at the more shallow western and northern parts of the lake. The lake is mainly open water but there are small areas of shallows with sedges, rushes, reeds and other semi-submerged vegetation.

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

Vicky Janos 855 Meeker St. Delta Colo.

Describe in great detail the bird which you saw. Emphasize particularly the field marks used to identify the bird, but include a complete description of the bird. 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.

The Least Tern was about 1/2 length and 1/3 the bulk of the Forster's Tern, markedly smaller than adjacent Black Terns also. Bill was slender, sharp and yellow. Bird was all white below; above light gray. Tail slightly forked, was white. Bird had a black cap and nape with a white forehead; a broad black line connected the black cap to the commissural point, through the eye:



Wings appeared darker gray in flight than the back. Bird was about 10" long.

Describe the bird's calls or sounds, if heard; including method of delivery-- i.e., from perch, in flight, etc.: None

List similar species and how you eliminated them: 1) Forster's Terns were much larger, has more deeply forked tail, solid black cap, and orange, not yellow, bill. 2) Common Tern is larger, has more deeply forked tail, solid black cap, orange bill. 3) Black Tern in breeding plumage is darker gray below, black above, has black bill, is larger; Black Tern in imm. plumage does not have solid black cap with white forehead, is larger, has black bill. Adult Franklin's and Bonaparte's Gulls have black heads, larger size, rounded tails, white or black wing-tips. Imm. plumages have "gull flight", no black cap, rounded tails with black tail bands.

Prior experience with this and similar species: Least Tern: 1974-Clearwater Beach Fla. Miami Fla. 1974. Common Tern- Dec. 1974 Cosat Rica, 3 times in May 1978 in E. Colo. Forster's Tern- Numerous occasions in last several years in E. Colo. Bonapartes' and Franklin's Gulls- Numerous occasions in last few years. Black Tern-Seen every summer in E. Colo. for last 4 years.

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

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Signature: Mark Janos

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