

## 1985 Sooty Tern Sightings Along the Mississippi Coast

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Five Sooty Terns (*Sterna fuscata*) were seen along the Mississippi coast during the fall of 1985, associated with hurricanes Danny and Juan.

King saw two on 15 and 16 September 1985. On 15 August in Gulfport, Harrison County, an immature Sooty Tern flew in front of their car so that King and her husband Donald saw it very closely for about 4 seconds. This bird was being chased by a Fish Crow (*Corvus ossifragus*). Its size was about the same as that of the crow; King noted its dark brown plumage from head to tail but for the white vent. The tail was deeply forked. No binoculars were used.

The next day King spotted a similar individual as it flew along the coast at Waveland, Hancock County. This bird was seen through 7 X 35 binoculars at 20 m for about 6 seconds. This time size comparisons were made with Laughing Gulls (*Larus atricilla*) with which the bird flew--the Sooty Tern was large, approaching the Laughing Gulls in size. Both sightings were made under windy cloudy conditions.

Toups and Hodges saw three Sooty Terns on 29 October 1985. Two adults were sighted at around 0900 off Bay St. Louis beach, Hancock County. Observations were made at distances of 30 and 100 m respectively, for 30 and 15 seconds. Hodges saw a juvenile at 1115 off Biloxi beach, Harrison County. It came as close as 80 m, and was seen about 15 seconds. Skies were heavily overcast, with rain and very strong winds; 7 X 35 binoculars were used.

All were large, long-winged terns. The adults had upperparts entirely black, but for white forehead and forecrown; their underparts were entirely white, except the undersides of the flight feathers, which were dark gray. The juvenile was entirely dark brown, but for the white vent and undertail coverts. All flew with deep wing-strokes in a strong, bounding flight.

Bridled Tern (*S. anaethetus*) was ruled out for the two adults because their upperparts were uniformly black from crown to tail, and for the juveniles because their underparts were largely dark brown.

While the species was new for King, Hodges and Toups have both seen Sooty Terns before on the Mississippi coast. Two specimens of Sooty Tern have been collected in the state, in 1956 (Newman 1956), and in 1957 (Gandy and Turcotte 1970). Previous sightings include three adults at Horn Island, Jackson County, on 14 October 1978 (Jackson et al. 1978), and 14 adults and 5 juveniles in Jackson County on 11 July 1979 (Jackson 1979).

#### Literature Cited

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